

6
WORLD
8
NATION

- Zelenskyy postpones all upcoming foreign visits
- Pak court adjourns hearing of 190 mn pounds graft case against Imran
- Muslims divided over CAA narrative in Matua bastion
- This election is to punish those who are anti-Ram, anti-national: Nadda



25 YEARS OF DEDICATED JOURNALISM

www.thehillstimes.in

THE HILLS TIMES

PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM GUWAHATI & DIPHU Voice of the hills people

Vol .No. XXV

Issue No. 125

RNI-ASSENG/2000/12862

DIPHU, KARBI ANGLONG

THURSDAY, MAY 16, 2024

PAGES 12

PRICE ₹ 8

CAA gets rolling, 14 people get citizenship

Home Secretary hands over certificates to 14 people ● A historic day, says Shah

NEW DELHI, May 15: The first set of citizenship certificates under the Citizenship (Amendment) Act was issued Wednesday here to 14 people, nearly two months after rules under the contentious law were notified to grant Indian nationality to persecuted non-Muslim migrants from three neighbouring countries.

Union home minister Amit Shah termed it a "historic day", saying the decades-long wait of those who faced religious persecution in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan is over.

Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla handed over the certificates to the 14 people after their applications were processed online through a designated portal, an official spokesperson said.

This comes in the midst of the general elections which started on April 19. The last phase of polling will be held on June 1 while the



counting will take place on June 4.

The CAA was enacted in December 2019 for granting Indian nationality to persecuted Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist, Parsi and Christian migrants from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan who came to India on

or before December 31, 2014.

After the enactment, the CAA got the president's assent but the rules under which the Indian citizenship was granted were issued on March 11 this year after over a delay of four years.

While granting the citizenship

certificates, the home secretary congratulated the

14 applicants and highlighted the salient features of the Citizenship (Amendment) Rules, 2024.

Secretary Posts, director of the Intelligence Bureau, registrar General of India and senior officers were also present during the interactive session when the certificates were issued.

Home Minister Shah said the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian brothers and sisters who fled religious persecution in the three countries have started getting Indian citizenship and Prime Minister Narendra Modi has fulfilled the promise made at the time of the country's independence. "I express my gratitude to Modiji for giving justice and rights to these people who suffered for decades. I also assure all my refugee brothers and sisters that the Modi (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'PoK will be merged with India if BJP gets over 400 seats in LS'

Himanta campaigns in J'khand, hopeful of UCC execution

RANGARH/GIRIDIH, May 15: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday claimed that Pakistan-occupied Kashmir will be "merged with India" if BJP gets more than 400 seats in the Lok Sabha polls. Addressing an election rally in Jharkhand's Ramgarh for Hazaribag candidate Manish Jaiswal, he said the BJP needed to get over 400 seats to implement the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) across the country.

"PoK will be merged with India if BJP gets over 400 seats in Lok Sabha polls. BJP needs over 400 seats to build the 'Shri Krishna Janmabhoomi' temple and 'Gyanvapi temple', and implement the Uniform Civil Code (UCC), just like when it crossed the 300-seat mark in 2019, it built the Ram Temple in Ayodhya. It also ensured the abrogation of Article 370 from Jammu & Kashmir, and implemented the CAA," Sarma said.

"Like Assam, infiltrators from Bangladesh are changing the demography of Jharkhand, while the JMM and Congress are indulging in their appeasement," he alleged.

He said "infiltrators" have occupied land in 12 districts of Assam, and in Jharkhand, they have started the same by marrying local tribal women. "If this continues, they will change Jharkhand's de-



mography too," he claimed.

Sarma said the situation has become such that "infiltrators" were trying to become original inhabitants. He attacked the JMM-led alliance in the state, alleging that corruption had peaked during its rule.

"Over Rs 350 crore in cash has been recovered from premises linked to a Congress MP. Over Rs 35 crore has been seized from the domestic help of a personal secretary attached to a state minister. All leaders here are indulging in corruption," he said. He said such a government was needed that worked for the poor, needy and deprived. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

HT BRIEFS

Four held

SILCHAR: Two police personnel were injured in an attack by a family which was allegedly involved in cattle smuggling in Assam's Cachar district, police said on Wednesday. Acting on a tip-off, a police team went to a village in the Gumrah police station area near the India-Bangladesh border on Tuesday to nab a suspected cattle smuggler when his family members attacked them with sharp weapons. "The team went to the house of Abdul Wahid (Pakhi Miya), a suspected cattle smuggler, where his family members attacked the police personnel with sharp weapons," an officer said. The injured police personnel, Sub Inspector Chandam Patowari and constable Karabi Das, were sent to the Silchar Medical College and Hospital (SMCH) with deep wounds, he said. The duo had to undergo surgery and received multiple stitches.

Heroin seized

BOKAJAN: The police in Karbi Anglong arrested two and recovered heroin after a raid. The police carried out a raid last evening at Dudu Colony under Kharkhati police station and the two arrested persons have been identified as Shamsul Haq alias Bablu and Manish Tanti along with 28.160 gm heroin. The arrested used to run a scrap shop at Dudu Colony on encroached government land that was vacated after the eviction drive by Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council last year.

Section 144

TEZPUR: In view of the construction of a new RCC bridge in connection with the work 'improvement of Tezpur HPO to Dolabari via Lachit Chowk including RCC Br.No.1/1 under Mukhya Mantri Unnato Pakipath Nirman Achari under RIDF-XXIX of NABARD for the year 2023-24 district magistrate of Sonitpur issued prohibitory order in Sonitpur u/s 144 Cr.PC on all vehicular movements from Tezpur HPO to Tezpur College road temporarily w.e.f 15. 5. 2024.

PM Modi works for everyone: BJP

NEW DELHI, May 15: BJP leaders on Wednesday cited Prime Minister Narendra Modi's remarks that he will never do "Hindu-Muslim" politics to assert that he has worked for development of all sections of society without any discrimination.

With the Congress and its allies accusing Modi of communal politics in his campaign, the prime minister had told News 18 on Tuesday that he won't be fit for public life if he starts doing Hindu-Muslim.

The Congress, however, alleged that the "outgoing PM" has had no agenda barring Hindu-Muslim politics as 'Modi ki Guarantee' has "fallen flat" and '400 paar' given a "silent burial".

Former Union minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi said Modi ended communal appeasement with his inclusive governance, asserting that his numerous welfare schemes have

benefitted the poorest people without any caste, religious or regional biases.

Even Modi's critics cannot deny that his schemes have benefitted everyone, the BJP leader said.

BJP spokesperson R P Singh claimed it was leaders of the Congress and its allies which have spoken in favour of reservation for Muslims and strengthening personal laws, inviting a rejoinder from the prime minister.

The Congress manifesto, he said, promises strengthening personal laws, alleging that it implies implementation of parts of sharia. RJD president Lalu Prasad Yadav has favoured reservation for Muslims, he added. "The BJP's agenda is for the country's advancement," Singh said, noting that the his party's manifesto for expanding health insurance, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

If people vote for BJP, I will have to go back to jail: Arvind Kejriwal

NEW DELHI, May 15: AAP national convener and Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday said he will have to go back to jail, if people vote for the BJP, as he urged the electorate to choose INDIA bloc candidates.

INDIA bloc parties AAP and Congress are contesting the Lok Sabha elections in Delhi in an alliance. While holding a roadshow in Model Town in support of Congress' Chandni Chowk Lok Sabha poll candidate JP Agarwal, Kejriwal gave the slogan "Jo kare Kejriwal ko pyaar woh kare Modi ko inkaar (those who love Kejriwal reject Modi)".

"I have come straight from jail to be amongst you. These people (BJP) put me behind bars and I missed you a lot. I love you a lot. I know that even you love me a lot. I am a small person. Ours is a small



party with governments in Delhi and Punjab," Kejriwal said.

"I was wondering why I was put in jail. What is my fault? These people are quite powerful," he said.

The chief minister said his "fault" was providing good education to children, building good schools for them, opening Mohalla Clinics and arranging for free medicines for people.

"Now, they are saying I will have to go jail again. It is in your hands

whether I go to jail. If you choose lotus (the BJP's symbol), I will have to return to jail. If you choose INDIA bloc candidate, I won't have to go to jail," the AAP national convener said.

"When you go to vote, you have to think whether Kejriwal should go to jail. 'Jo kare Kejriwal ko pyaar woh kare Modi ko inkaar'," he said. He sought support for Agarwal and said this time, the AAP and the Congress are contesting in an alliance.

Kejriwal alleged that efforts were made to break him while he was in jail "but because of the blessings of Lord Hanuman, I stayed strong".

The chief minister, who was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate in the Delhi liquor policy case, was released from Tihar Jail on interim bail granted by the Supreme Court. (PTI)

14 cyber criminals held

HT Correspondent

MORIGAOON, May 15: Assam Police intensified their crackdown on cybercrime, resulting in the apprehension of 14 cyber criminals from Morigaon and Guwahati on Wednesday.

The operation, led by Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Samiran Baishya, targeted areas including Laharighat, Bhuragaon, Moirabari, and Guwahati.

Numerous raids were conducted, leading to the confiscation of a substantial amount of incriminating evidence, including 396 SIM cards, 25 ATM cards, 14 cheque-books, three laptops, 34 mobile phones, 11 fake PAN cards, and two printer (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Russia's special envoy for Afghan visits India

NEW DELHI, May 15: Russia's special presidential envoy for Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov on Wednesday held talks with senior Indian diplomat JP Singh focusing on the overall situation in the war-torn country.

Kabulov was on a visit to India. Singh is external affairs ministry's point-person for Afghanistan.

"India and Russia held bilateral consultations on Afghanistan today in New Delhi," external affairs ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said on 'X'.

"Amb. Zamir Kabulov, Special Presidential Envoy for Afghanistan, and JP Singh, Joint Secretary (PAI) discussed the current situation in Afghanistan and emphasized on the need to provide development assistance for the welfare of the Afghan people," he said.

An official at the Russian embassy said Kabulov held talks with Singh under the framework of India-Russia foreign ministerial consultations on Afghanistan.

India has not yet recognised the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and has been (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Manipur violence accounted for 97% of displacements in South Asia in 2023: Report

NEW DELHI, May 15: Conflict and violence triggered 69,000 displacements in South Asia in 2023, with Manipur violence alone accounting for 67,000, according to a new report.

The report by the Geneva-based Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) termed it the highest number of displacements triggered by conflict and violence in India since 2018.

On May 3, 2023, a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in Manipur's hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. The march led to ethnic clashes between the Meitei and the Kuki communities, ultimately claiming more than 200 lives.

The Manipur High Court had in March last year called for recommendations to be sent to the central government to recognise the Meitei

community as a "scheduled tribe," an official status designed to protect minorities from marginalisation.

The call was met with resistance from other local scheduled tribes, including the Kukis.

Land disputes were also an underlying driver of the tensions.

"Protests turned violent in Churachandpur district on May 3, and the violence spread to other districts, including Imphal East, Imphal West, Bishnupur, Tengnupal, and Kangpokipi, triggering around 67,000 displacements," the report said. More than three-quarters of the movements took place within Manipur, but almost a fifth were to the neighbouring state of Mizoram and smaller numbers to Nagaland and Assam. As the violence escalated, the central government imposed curfews, shut down the internet, and dispatched security forces. It also set up relief (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



Activists of AASU (metro district committee) staging a protest demonstration in Guwahati against the price hike of all essential commodities on Wednesday. HT photo

'The crippling heat made it extremely difficult to stand near the gas stove'

Climate crisis made crippling April heatwave in South Asia 45 times more likely: Scientists

NEW DELHI, May 15: Annu Mishra kept her modest food stall shut as temperatures in Odisha's Bhubaneswar remained above 40 degrees Celsius for 17 consecutive days in April. This streak was the longest since 1969, severely impacting health and livelihoods.

"The crippling heat made it extremely difficult to stand near the gas stove," said 51-year-old Mishra, noting that the only time her food stall remained shut for such a long duration was after Cyclone Fani in 2019.

Similar heatwaves could occur once every 30 years and they have already become about 45 times more likely due to climate change, leading climate scientists said on Wednesday, citing historical weather data.



The team of scientists, called the World Weather Attribution (WWA) group, emphasized that heatwaves intensified by climate change are making life much tougher for people living in poverty across Asia.

Amid a prevailing but weakening El Nino and the increasing concentration of heat-trapping greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, millions of people in South Asia endured brutal heat in April.

Record-smashing maximum temperatures were logged in parts of India, prompting health warnings from government agencies and some states to suspend in-person classes in schools.

The oppressive heat also shattered temperature records in the Philippines, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Myanmar.

In West Asia, including Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, and Jordan, April heatwaves with temperatures above 40 degrees Celsius have become more frequent due to climate change.

The world experienced the warmest April ever and the eleventh consecutive month of record-high temperatures, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) said on Friday. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

India asks Iran to release nearly 40 Indian seafarers from custody



NEW DELHI, May 15: India has asked Iran to release nearly 40 Indian seafarers who were detained from four different merchant ships seized by the Persian Gulf country over the past eight months on different charges, sources said on Wednesday.

Ports, Shipping and Waterways minister Sarbananda Sonowal made the request during a meeting with

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian in Tehran on Monday.

Sonowal was in Tehran where India signed a 10-year contract to operate the strategic Iranian port of Chabahar that will help expand the trade with Central Asia.

Following a request of Iranian side, a meeting was held between Sonowal and Abdollahian where bi-

lateral issues were discussed, sources privy to the development said.

During the meeting, Sonowal requested Abdollahian to release all Indian seafarers who are in Iranian custody.

Abdollahian said Tehran is positive on the release of the Indian seafarers but it is getting delayed as legal procedures have to be followed, the sources said.

The sources said the Indian seafarers were working in four ships -- Steven, Global Cherylyn, Margol and MSC Aries -- which were seized by Iran over the past eight months on different charges.

According to the sources, Steven was seized by the Iranian Coast Guard on September 12, 2023, for "smuggling" and the crew were also detained. There were nine Indian crew members on board and it has come down to six now after three of them. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Biden imposes heavy import tariffs on Chinese imports

WASHINGTON, May 15: US President Joe Biden has imposed heavy tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles, batteries, steel, solar cells, and aluminium, saying it would ensure that American workers are not held back by unfair trade practices.

These include a 100 per cent tariff on electric vehicles, a 50 per cent tariff on semiconductors, and a 25 per cent tariff each on electric vehicle batteries from China.

In his address to the nation from the Rose Garden of the White House, Biden said America can continue to buy any kind of car they want, "but we're never going to allow China to unfairly control the market for these cars. Period."

"I want fair competition with China, not conflict. We are in a stronger position to win that economic competition of the 21st century against China than anyone else because we're investing in America again," he said. Biden alleged that for years, the Chinese government has poured state money into Chinese companies across a whole range of industries: steel and aluminium, semiconductors, electric vehicles, solar panels, and even critical health equipment, like gloves and masks.

China heavily subsidised all these products, pushing Chinese companies to produce far more than the rest of the world could absorb. Then dumping the excess products onto the market at unfairly low prices, driving other manufacturers around the world



out of business, he said.

The prices are unfairly low because Chinese companies don't need to worry about profit because the Chinese government subsidised them and subsidised them heavily. The Chinese also rely on other anti-competitive tactics, like forcing American companies to transfer their technology to do business in China, he said.

Biden said the new tariffs announced by him in key sectors of the economy are going to ensure that US workers are not held back by unfair trade practices.

American companies, he said, are investing tens of billions of dollars in electric vehicles and their batteries. "Our partners around the world are making similar investments. They also want a supply chain for electric vehicles that isn't dominated by unfair trade practices from China," he said.

Biden also slammed his predecessor Donald Trump on his China policy. "My predecessor promised to increase American exports and boost manufacturing. But he didn't either. He failed. He signed a trade deal with China. They were supposed to buy USD 200 billion more in American goods. Instead, China imports from America barely budged," he alleged.

"And now, Trump and his MAGA Republicans want across-the-board tariffs on all imports from all countries, if reelected. Well, that would drive up costs for families on an average of USD 1,500 per year each year. He simply doesn't get it," he said.

At a White House news conference, US Trade Representative Katherine Tice said the previous administration's trade deal with China failed to increase American exports or boost manufacturing. In fact, China's exports in some critical sectors like EVs and batteries

actually increased, Tice said. "In response, President Biden signed a memorandum directing me to increase tariffs on critical manufacturing and mining sectors, including steel and aluminium, semiconductors, electric vehicles, batteries, solar cells, and certain critical minerals," she said. The increased tariffs are expected to cover approximately USD 18 billion of trade. The president also directed a process to request excluding certain production machinery from the tariffs to permit solar and clean manufacturers to purchase equipment while diversifying their suppliers.

Next week, she is expecting to issue a public notice that conveys the specific tariff lines, tariff rates, and timing for the proposed increases along with the details of the machinery exclusions process. "This strong action by the president is strategic. As he has said, we do not seek to constrain China's economic development, but we will insist on fair competition and defend American workers from the PRC's unfair practices.

Today's direction by the president defends American workers and businesses from the PRCs artificially cheap products, whether EVs or steel or critical minerals or semiconductors," Tice said.

She also emphasised that the US continues to consult with its partners and allies who face similar threats from the Chinese unfair trade practices and are also voicing their concern with those unfair practices and taking action. (PTI)

Sensex snaps 3-day winning run on selling in HDFC Bank, RIL

MUMBAI, May 15: Snapping its three-day winning run, benchmark Sensex declined by 117 points in a volatile trade on Wednesday due to selling in index heavyweight shares like HDFC Bank, Reliance Industries and TCS. The 30-share BSE Sensex declined by 117.58 points or 0.16 per cent to settle at 72,987.03. During the day, it lost 281.95 points or 0.38 per cent to 72,822.66. The broader Nifty dipped 17.30 points or 0.08 per cent to close at 22,200.55. The index oscillated between a high of 22,297.55 and a low of 22,151.75 in day trade. From the Sensex pack, Tata Motors, Asian Paints, HDFC Bank, JSW Steel, Hindustan Unilever, Nestle and Titan were the major laggards.

In contrast, Bharti Airtel, Power Grid, NTPC, Mahindra & Mahindra, Larsen & Toubro and HCL Technologies were among the major gainers.

"The market witnessed a sideways movement throughout the day as the emotions of investors were impacted by the election-led jitters. FIIs continued to remain in the selling mode; however, domestic investors were largely concentrated on stock-specific picks," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. In the broader market, the smallcap gauge climbed 0.96 per cent and the midcap index

went up by 0.60 per cent. Among the indices, FMCG lost 0.75 per cent. Auto (0.31 per cent), bankex (0.17 per cent) and financial services (0.07 per cent) also declined. Capital goods rallied 2.13 per cent, followed by utilities (1.27 per cent), realty (1.11 per cent), services (1.08 per cent) and energy (0.95 per cent).

"Following three days of rebound, the markets took a pause and closed nearly unchanged. Initially, there was an uptick, but pressure from certain heavyweights pushed the Nifty lower, leading to a range-bound movement until the end of the session," Ajit Mishra SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd. The wholesale inflation rose to a 13-month high of 1.26 per cent in April fuelled by rising prices of food articles, especially vegetables, amid expectations of RBI holding interest rates in the policy review next month. "Nifty snapped a three-day winning streak on Wednesday, giving up early gains and ending marginally in the red. Global equities headed for a fresh record after a tech-led rally in the US, amid optimism that Wednesday's key US inflation report won't weaken the case for Federal Reserve interest-rate cuts," said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

CAA gets rolling, 14 people

government will give citizenship to all of them through the CAA," he said on X in Hindi. "Modi's guarantee...the guarantee of fulfilling promises." The CAA rules envisage the manner of application form, procedure for processing applications by the District Level Committee (DLC), scrutiny and grant of citizenship by State Level Empowered Committee (SLEC). "In pursuance of these rules, applications have been received from persons belonging to Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist, Parsi and Christian communities from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who have entered India up to December 31, 2014 on account of persecution on grounds of religion or fear of such persecution," the spokesperson said. The DLCs chaired by senior superintendents of Post or superintendents of Post as designated officers, on successful verification of documents, have administered the oath of allegiance to the applicants. After processing as per rules, the DLCs have forwarded the applications to SLEC headed by director (Census Operation). Processing of applications is completely done through the online portal. The empowered committee, Delhi, headed by director (Census Operation), Delhi, after due scrutiny, has decided to grant citizenship to 14 applicants. Accordingly, the director (Census operation) granted certificates to these applicants, the spokesperson said. The passing of the CAA in 2019 sparked protests in different parts of the country with agitators terming it "discriminatory". Over a hundred people lost their lives during the anti-CAA protests or police action in various parts of the country. Union home minister Amit Shah has been maintaining that no one can stop the implementation of the CAA as it is the law of the land. He accused the opposition of misleading the people on the issue. (PTI)

Himanta campaigns in J'khand

He said India was prospering under PM Narendra Modi, who will return to power with 400 seats. Later addressing a rally in Jharkhand's Giridih by BJP's Koderma candidate Annapurna Devi, he said, "We have to restore our country's pride and make it a world leader."

"Congress will not even get the number of seats required to play a cricket match," he claimed. Sarma also claimed that Muslim women were supporting the BJP as they did not want their husbands to marry multiple times. "Saving Muslim women is not an atrocity but social justice," he said. He claimed that madrassas were not needed, and instead, such institutions were needed that would produce engineers and doctors. (PTI)

PM Modi works for

housing, water and electricity facilities and boosting infrastructure is meant for all sections of society. Slamming the prime minister, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said the nation knows very well that "the outgoing PM is a pathological liar". "But even by his own pathetic standards, Mr. Modi's latest claim that he does not do Hindu-Muslim politics shows the new depths he reaches daily in lying. Since April 19th 2024, it is a matter of public record that cannot be erased from our collective memory - even if Mr. Modi erases it from his own - that the outgoing PM has blatantly and brazenly used communal language, symbols, and allusions," Ramesh charged on X. Another BJP spokesperson Shah Nawaz Hussain said Modi has always considered over 140 crore population of the country as one, and it is the opposition which has tried to stick "Hindu-Muslim" charge on to him. "Modi has never done politics in the name of Hindu-Muslim," he said.

The issue had taken the centre stage following his speech in Rajasthan last month, in which he had attacked the Congress over its alleged agenda for redistribution of wealth and Muslim reservation. Modi said he was shocked at such an allegation and had cited his government numerous welfare measures aimed at saturation in their reach to make his point. He asserted that he won't be fit for public life if he does "Hindu-Muslim". (PTI)

14 cyber criminals held

machines. Among the arrested individuals is Atabur Rahman, identified as a mastermind of cybercrime with previous involvement in such activities. The other detainees are Nekibur Rahman, Inamul Haque, Motibur Rahman, Kabbal Hussain, Akramul Haque, Ayyub Rihan Siddiqui, Abzular Rahman, Mehdi Alam, Shamim Ahmed, Rekitabul Islam, Zuber Ahmed, and Ashrafullah. The inclusion of Zuber Ahmed's son, a village guard secretary, underscores the concerning infiltration of cybercriminals into various societal segments.

Manipur violence accounted

camp and established a peace committee for Manipur, chaired by the state governor, but the initiative was hampered by disagreements about its composition. All of those displaced by the violence were still living in internal displacement at the end of the year, the IDMC noted. The IDMC said around 5.3 million people were living in internal displacement as a result of conflict and violence across South Asia at the end of 2023, 80 per cent of whom were in Afghanistan. (PTI)

Russia's special envoy for

pitching for the formation of a truly inclusive government in Kabul besides insisting that Afghan soil must not be used for any terrorist activities against any country. New Delhi has been pitching for providing unimpeded humanitarian aid to Afghanistan to address the unfolding humanitarian crisis in the country. In June 2022, India re-established its diplomatic presence in Kabul by deploying a "technical team" in its embassy in the Afghan capital. India had withdrawn its officials from the embassy after the Taliban seized power in August 2021 following concerns over their security. (PTI)

Climate crisis made crippling

Another WMO report published in April said Asia experienced maximum disasters in the world in 2023, with extreme weather, climate, and water-related hazards affecting over nine million people in the region.

As global average temperatures have risen by 1.2 degrees Celsius compared to the cooler pre-industrial climate, scientists predict that West Asia is expected to experience similar heatwaves about once every 10 years. If warming reaches 2 degrees Celsius, similar heatwaves will occur about once every five years.

Heatwaves can be deadly, with the elderly and children particularly at risk of heat exhaustion and heatstroke. According to the World Health Organization, more than 1,66,000 people died as a result of heatwaves between 1998 and 2017. Extreme temperatures can also impact economies. People are less productive during hot weather, even if they work indoors, while children struggle to learn in extreme heat. In a study in 2022 said extreme heat resulted in labour productivity loss of USD 2.1 trillion equivalent in 2017. In Shubaneswar, Mishra suffered a loss of ₹ 20,000 due to keeping her food stall, the only source of income for her family, shut during the prolonged heat wave spell (16 days), the longest since April 2016. "Other street vendors were allowed to sell their produce and articles between 6 am and 10 am in the morning and 6 pm and 10 pm in the evening, resulting in massive losses for them. Many suffered heatstrokes," Mishra, who is also a member of the local street hawkers' association, said. Experts suggest that the population aged above 65 and below 15 needs special attention in terms of preparedness to reduce the impact of extreme heat on health. "Cities in India need to identify vulnerable populations expeditiously and prepare heat action plans accordingly," said Vishwas Chitale, senior program lead at the Council on Energy Environment and Water. The WWA emphasized that some countries, such as India, have comprehensive heat action plans in place. Yet, to protect some of the most vulnerable people, these plans must be expanded with mandatory regulations, such as workplace interventions for all workers to address heat stress. (PTI)

India asks Iran to release

along side two other nationals, were taken away by Iranian authorities on April 24 and their whereabouts are still unknown. Iran is yet to give consular access to the Indian seafarers of the ship and the Indian Embassy in Tehran is in regular touch with Iranian authorities, the sources said.

Another ship, Global Cherylyn, was seized on December 11, 2023 at Bandar Abbas with 20 Indian crew members and one Bangladeshi. Consular access to the crew was given on March 12, 2024. The vessel was seized on charges of "fuel smuggling". The issue was raised with the Iranian Embassy and authorities in Tehran.

According to the latest update, the release orders of the seafarers have been signed by a local court but final release depends on the approval of a court in Tehran. Another vessel, Margol, was seized on January 22, 2024. It has currently one Indian, the vessel's captain Sujet Singh. So far, consular access has not been given. The vessel was seized on charges of "fuel smuggling". The ship's 12 Indian crew were already released and they reached Delhi on February 14, 2024. A penalty of ₹ 20 crore was imposed on the captain by the Iranian authorities. Shipping company RPSL is in touch with the Iranian authorities and they have assured the release of the captain by this month. Merchant ship MSC Aries was seized on April 13, 2024 by Iran for its alleged links with Israel. There were 17 Indian crew. External Affairs minister S Jaishankar spoke to his Iranian counterpart on April 14 for the release of Indian crew members. (PTI)

Harsh Baweja Assumes Director of Finance Role at REC Limited

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 15: REC Limited welcomes Shri Harsh Baweja as its new Director of Finance following the approval of the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) on May 10. Baweja's appointment, recommended by the Public Enterprise Selection Board (PESB), marks a significant milestone after an exhaustive selection process involving 11 candidates. With a distinguished career spanning over 33 years, Baweja, a seasoned Chartered Accountant, brings to the table a wealth of experience in managing financial and business operations across various sectors.

During his tenure as Executive Director of Finance at REC, Shri Baweja demonstrated exceptional leadership in navigating complex financial landscapes and overseeing key business offices across India. His strategic acumen has been instrumental in addressing challenges, particularly in managing stressed assets, and steering REC towards achieving a Net Zero NPA status by the end of the fiscal year. Expressing his vision for the role, Baweja emphasized his commitment to driving REC's growth, securing low-cost borrowing, and positioning the company as a leader in renewable energy financing.

Bandhan Life Appoints Indranil Dutta as CBO

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 15: Bandhan Life strengthens its leadership team with the appointment of Indranil Dutta as Chief Business Officer - Bancassurance, signalling the company's strategic focus on expanding its presence in the life insurance sector. With over 23 years of experience in insurance, banking, and sales, Indranil Dutta brings a wealth of expertise to his new role. His extensive background in bancassurance, particularly highlighted by his contributions to Axis Bank's partnership with Max Life, positions him as a valuable asset in driving Bandhan Life's growth agenda. Satiswar B, MD and CEO of Bandhan Life, expressed confidence in Dutta's ability to propel the company's ambitious growth agenda forward. Under Dutta's leadership, Bandhan Life aims to fortify its bancassurance business, aligning with its mission of "Bharat Ki Udaan, Bandhan Se," to cater to the diverse financial needs of every individual. Indranil Dutta shared his excitement about joining Bandhan Life and emphasized the company's commitment to leveraging digital innovation to provide customized solutions to customers.

LG Commemorates 27 Years of Innovation

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 15: LG Electronics, a household name in India for 27 years, is celebrating its journey of innovation and quality with the launch of the 'Life's Good Offer' campaign. This milestone anniversary initiative underscores LG's commitment to enhancing customer experiences and simplifying lives through cutting-edge technology. The "Life's Good Offer" campaign brings forth a range of enticing deals on home appliances and entertainment products, ensuring customers can elevate their home experiences with LG. Highlights include up to 27% cashback on select debit and credit card transactions, along with exclusive pricing on various products. Hong Ju Jeon, MD of LG Electronics India, expressed gratitude to customers for their trust and support, emphasizing LG's commitment to delivering excellence and enriching experiences in the years to come. As LG marks 27 years of innovation, the brand remains dedicated to making a positive impact through pioneering technologies and customer-centric solutions.

PM's active role, personal monitoring responsible for infrastructure sector turnaround, says FM

NEW DELHI, May 15: Prime Minister Narendra Modi's active role and personal monitoring are responsible for the turnaround of the infrastructure sector, which suffered due to policy paralysis during the UPA regime, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Wednesday.

In a contrast to the previous regime, the current government under the leadership of Modi has spearheaded a shift towards prioritising infrastructure development and capital expenditure with an aim to bolster the Indian economy.

Taking a dig at the Congress-led UPA regime from 2004-2014, she said, "@INCIndia-led UPA (2004-14) wasted India's economic growth potential and left it among the 'Fragile Five' economies without focusing on effective infrastructure development. Under UPA, almost all aspects of India's economic needs were mismanaged or ignored."

The UPA government's noticeable and deliberate neglect of infrastructure creation not only denied India much-needed roads, railways, power, etc, but it also compromised India's long-term economic potential, she said in a post on X.

"The UPA government's term was replete with examples of decision stasis. Cost overruns, stalled projects and lack of timely approvals were common between 2004-14," she said.

However, she said, "Prime Minister Modi's active role has made the infrastructure turnaround possible. The PM has personally monitored the progress of projects, even those launched earlier,

through the PRAGATI platform.

"This led to the successful completion of long-delayed projects. Through 43 PRAGATI meetings, PM Modi has reviewed projects worth Rs 17.36 lakh crore."

Pointing out that infrastructure spending not only boosts GDP growth through its multiplier effects on consumption and investment, but also improves the long-term efficiency of the economy by reducing logistical constraints, she said, adding that an NIPFP study points out that every rupee directed towards capital expenditure in India increases economic output by Rs 4.8.

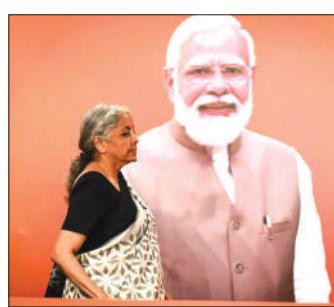
The share of capex in total expenditure dropped sharply under the UPA from 23 per cent in 2003-04 to an average of 12 per cent between 2005 and 2014, she said.

"It is also unwise to expect that @INCIndia would have learnt from their mistakes. INCIndia returns to their neglect of Capex and infrastructure. The 2024 Budget presented by the Congress government in Karnataka slashed the share of capital expenditure in total spending by 28 per cent," she said.

Imagine the opportunity cost lost due to Congress not investing adequately in capital expenditure, Sitharaman said.

"Our government significantly increased the outlay for capex. As a proportion of total expenditure, capex rose to over 21 per cent in 2023-24, compared to just 12 per cent in 2013-14," she said.

Since 2014, the Modi government has allocated a total of Rs 43.53 lakh crore in Gross Budgetary Support (GBS) capital expenditure, an increase of 3.72 times



compared to 2004-14.

Giving details of various segments, Sitharaman said, 3.74 lakh km of rural roads have been built under the PM Gram Sadak Yojana in the last 10 years, almost double of 3.81 lakh km of rural roads built till 2014. Over 99 per cent of rural habitations are now linked with rural roads.

Since 2014, there has been a 500 per cent increase in road transport and highway budget allocation, she added.

National Highway (NH) network has expanded 60 per cent from 91,287 km in 2014 to 1,46,145 km by 2023; compared to only 39 per cent expansion from 65,569 km to 91,287 km between 2004-14.

Under PM Modi, Indian Railways has ushered in an era of modernisation with modern stations, modern trains, modern facilities and modern technology.

In 2023-24, she said, allocation for Railways' capex increased to Rs 2.43 lakh crore. It is a 30-times increase over 2004-05, and 8 times over 2013-14.

On the power sector, she said, India has transformed from being power-deficient to power-sufficient by adding 193 GW of gener-

Workshop on solid waste management held

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, May 15: A day long workshop on solid waste management was organised at Dhing College by Assam Science Technology and Environment in collaboration with Eco Club, Dhing College in special support of Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Govt of India.

The primary aim of the workshop was to educate students and provide them with holistic understanding of Solid Waste Management (SWM) issues, ill effects of wrong practices of SWM, best practices of SWM and importance of proper sanitation as well as sowing awareness of good practices on solid waste management, wastewater treatment, livelihoods, and public-private partnerships to gain knowledge in sustainable waste and environmental management system.

Understand different types of waste, their handling, storage, disposal requirements, and their potential effect on the environment.

The workshop was inaugurated by Dr Biman Hazarika, principal of the college. While addressing the occasion, Dr Hazarika highlighted solid waste and the

need as well as the importance of its management.

A handbook on solid waste management penned by Dr Sanjeeb Kumar Nath was inaugurated by Dr Biman Hazarika as well. Dr Sanjeeb Kumar Nath, co-ordinator of Eco Club, elucidated the workshop's objectives.

Following the inaugural session, technical sessions were initiated in which over 135 participants including students, faculty members, resource persons from 14 High Schools, ME schools, Eco-Club as deputed by IS and BEEO of Nagaon, participated in the workshop here.

Dr Pradeep Baishya, associate professor, Mechanical Engineering Department, AEC Jalukbari, Guwahati, Dr Farista Yasmin, associate professor & HOD, department of Botany, Nowgong College (Autonomous), Nagaon, Dr Ajit Debnath, associate professor & HOD, department of economics, Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardev Vishwavidyalaya, Binita Baishya, proprietor, Eco Waste Management, Guwahati, attended the event as the resource persons in the technical sessions of the workshop, said in a press note here.

AASU protests against price rise across state

Organisation to initiate massive democratic movement against government's move in days to come

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, May 15: As part of statewide agitation of All Assam Students' Union (AASU) against the increasing prices of essential commodities as well as life saving medicines in the state, Nagaon District unit of the students' organization staged 'Bikhubh- Karyasushu' near at the office of the District Commissioner on Wednesday.

The unit of the students' organisation also strongly criticized the BJP led coalition state government for its total failure in controlling the 'price - hike' in the state.

Over hundred of students as well as other district portfolios of district unit of the organisation participated in the stir and reverberated the air of the small town with various slogans against the government.

The district leaders of the organisation alleged that the government exploited the people



with some anti public decisions and urged government to exempt the people of the state from the unexpected 'price-hike' especially in essential commodities as well as life saving drugs in the state at any point.

The organisation also warned the government that if the government would fail to bring the price of the essential

commodities as well as life saving medicines under control, the organisation will initiate massive democratic movement against the government's anti-public move in the days to come.

respectively the president and general secretary of the district unit were also present in the stir.

Our Sivasagar correspondent adds: The AASU protest rally against soaring price of all essential commodities in the state was led by Samiran Phukan, assistant secretary AASU Central committee, Manobjit Hazarika, president, & Dipankar Saikia, secretary, Sivasagar District Students' Union.

With garlands of onion and potatoes round their necks, and plates and dishes in hands, the students raised slogans against the BJP government's failure to curb the price rise of potatoes, onion, medicines, edible oil and all items.

Our Dibrugarh correspondent adds: The All Students' Union (AASU) on Wednesday staged protest outside Dibrugarh DC office against the rising prices of essential commodities.

The members of the students' union raised slogan against the BJP government for failing to curb the skyrocketing price hike of essential commodities.

"The BJP government both in centre and state have turning a blind eye to the increasing prices of essential commodities like rice, pulses, vegetables, petrol and diesel which have greatly impacted the common masses," said AASU Dibrugarh district president Abani Kumar Gogoi.

He said, "Due to the skyrocketing price hike, the people are facing problem to run their family. Their duty to curb price rise in order to give respite to the common people. The present government has failed to do so. We demand that the government led by chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma take necessary step to curb the price hike of essential goods and commodities."

Heroin seized

HT Correspondent
JORHAT, May 15: Police arrested one person and recovered a substance, suspected to be Brown sugar - from a Santro car, which was driven by a person, near the New Sonowal Forest Beat office, Mariani under Titabar civil sub-division of Jorhat district, on Tuesday night

According to a police source, 358.36 gms of suspected narcotics substance kept in 30 soap boxes was found in the car. The person driving the car was identified as Babul Das of Sungi, Titabar, who reportedly was coming from Nagaland bringing the drugs and was going to Arunachal Pradesh.

Das was arrested under NDPS Act and the vehicle seized.

Media persons hail national park officials' efforts



HT Correspondent
MANGALDAI, May 15: The office bearer of Mangaldai Media Circle (MMC) interacted with Orang National Park and Tiger Reserve (ONPTR) officials on Wednesday. (MMC) is organisation of media professionals based at the district headquarters in Mangaldai.

MMC expressed gratitude for their ongoing efforts to protect and con-

serve the park, paying particular attention to the people living in the periphery.

It is worth mentioning that the ONPTR has experienced zero poaching since 2018.

This has only been possible because of the field staff's unwavering diligence and alertness, under the direction of the Field Director of the Park/DFO, Mangaldai Wildlife Divi-

sion. The Park's original 78.88 square kilometers in 2023 have been expanded to 299.14 square kilometers. Mangaldai Media Circle congratulated the DFO, Pradipta Barua of the Mangaldai Wildlife Division, and field personnel Pranjit Deka on their sincere service with a Bihuwan and Rongali Bihu greetings.

During the meeting, Mangaldai Media Circle expressed gratitude to district commissioner Munindra Nath Ngatey and Parliamentarian Dilip Saikia for allocating a suitable plot of land in the district headquarters town in the organization's name.

The gathering also conveyed their sincere gratitude to Mangaldai legislator Basanta Das and chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma for approving the Untied Funds allocation of Rs 10 lakhs for the building of the Mangaldai Media Circle's office complex.

The office bearers of the Journalist Association of Assam's Darrang-Udalguri District Committee were also present in the meeting.

OBITUARY

Prabhat Chandra Bora, 68, president of Jagiroad Branch Sahitya Sabha and advisor Asom Unnati Sabha, Morigaon, passed away at his residence at Natungaon, Jagiroad on Wednesday.

Late Bora was a retired headmaster of Neli Barpayak Secondary School here. He was also the advisor of Jagiroad branch Kabi Sammilan and President of Sankardev Vidyaniketan Management Committee at the time of his death. He was also associated with the Jagiroad Satriya Sangeet Vidyalaya, Senior Citizens Committee and many other organisations. His demise is deeply mourned by many a organisations.

Three motorcycle thieves in police net



HT Correspondent
JORHAT, May 15: Jorhat police investigating motorcycle theft cases, on Wednesday arrested three persons from Bekajan and Merapani areas of Golaghat district and recovered a.22 Chinese made pistol along with two live rounds of ammunition.

A Hero Splendour motorcycle used in commission of the thefts was also seized by police from them. The three have been identified as Bolin Gogoi (27), of Chenijan village, Panikheti PS- Borholla, Jorhat, Gopal Kachari (28), Upar Torani village, PS Merapani, Golaghat, and Jiten Das (32), Panchawati Gaon, PS- Merapani, Golaghat. A police source said

that Gopal Kachari and Jiten Das were apprehended from Merapani, Golaghat and from the possession of Gopal Kachari, one 0.22 Chinese made pistol along with two live rounds were recovered.

The source said that another red colour Super Splendour bike without a number plate was also seized from them which was used for commission of the thefts. The Jorhat police team was led by Deputy SP (P) Kaushik Kalita and TSI Nabajyoti Das of Jorhat.

It may be mentioned that Jorhat police had earlier recovered three Royal Enfield Bullets from Bhandari PS under Wokha District of Nagaland.

Home guard kissing Zubeen removed

HT Correspondent
DIBRUGARH, May 15: A female home guard personnel was removed from his post after she publically kissed and hugged Zuben Garg in a Bihu programme in Chabua recently.

Dibrugarh police removed the female home guard personnel after her video gone viral in social media.

The incident has sparked outrage and prompted swift action from authorities, leading to the removal of the guard, who was stationed under Chabua police station.

In the viral video, it was clearly seen that she was engaged in inappropriate conduct, including hugging, kissing, and touching the feet of popular Assamese singer Zuben Garg while he was performing.

ABSU delegation meets Bodoland University VC

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, May 15: A delegation team of the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), led by its president Dipen Boro and vice president Kwrwmdao Wary, met the newly appointed Vice Chancellor of Bodoland University, Prof BL Ahuja, on Wednesday at the university office premises, Debagaoon in Kokrajhar. The students union submitted a memorandum to the VC of the university, and discussed various issues related to the education and development of the university.

The students union presented several demands, including the timely conduct of examinations and prompt declaration of results. They also emphasized the need for a 70% reservation for the Bodoland Territorial Re-

gion (BTR) in the university recruitment. ABSU urged the vice chancellor to prioritize the interests of the students and the overall development of the university, cautioning against any mismanagement as experienced in the past.

In response, vice chancellor Prof Ahuja assured that the students' interests and the university's development would be prioritized.

ABSU president Dipen Boro informed that the meeting with VC of Bodoland University was a fruitful, and discussed thoroughly over the uplift and welfare of the university in days to come. He said that the students union urged the university authority to make healthy and quality educational environment amongst the citizens in the region.

N F Railway maintains decent growth in freight loading

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 15: Northeast Frontier Railway has maintained decent growth in freight loading month after month, as a result of which loading of 10.24 million tonnes (MT) of freight was achieved during the last fiscal year. During the month of April, 2024 this zone has loaded 0.844 MT. During the month loading of few commodities have registered significant growth in comparison to corresponding period of the previous year. During the month, food grain loading has increased by 19.9%, fertilizer loading increased by 300%. POL loading has increased by 42.9% while container loading increased by 33.3% as compared to corresponding period of the previous year. During the last fiscal year loading of food grain has increased by 19.7% in comparison to previous fiscal year i.e 2022-23. Also, container loading has increased by 8% during last year. NF Railway is working dedicatedly round the clock to serve its customer and ensure essential commodities reach end users in time. The increase in freight loading year after year signifies the economic activities of the region.

Meeting held

HT Correspondent
DEMOW, May 15: An executive meeting of the Assam Science Committee Demow Branch was held in Demow Higher Secondary School recently. Arup Kumar Dutta, President of Assam Science Committee Demow Branch presided over the executive meeting. Dr Sajan Ali Hazarika, a retired professor of the Physics department at Jorhat Engineering College and is lifetime member of the Assam Science Committee Jorhat Branch, Dr Padmeswar Gogoi, a retired professor at D R College Golaghat, Rina Pujari, retired teacher as well as founder convener of Science Committee Bihpuria Branch Mahila Science Cell along other dignitaries were present.

Karbi Anglong DC clarifies doubts on police intrusion into churches

UFC has urged the DC to act upon the matter and immediately call off such exercise

HT Bureau
DIPHU, May 15: Karbi Anglong DC convened a meeting with UCF leaders and KA police to clarify doubts regarding police personnel intruding in various Churches in and around Diphu and Dokmoka town for collection of data.

A memo in this regard was submitted to the DC by UCF on May 14.

UCF, Diphu has submitted a memorandum to DC informing her about the sudden visit of police personnel in various churches in Diphu town area under Diphu police station and areas under Dokmoka police station under the pretext of collecting data has caused panic and a fear psychosis on the minds of general public. The UCF has urged the DC to act upon the matter and immediately call off such exercise by the authority concerned in the interest of public peace.

In the meeting the SP, Karbi Anglong, Sanjib Kumar Saikia informed the UCF members that necessary data collection was done as per directive from Director General of Police, Assam regarding the safety of Christian institutions and personnel and there was no any other negative aspect



to it. Based on the directive from higher authority police personnel have visited various Churches and educational institutions for collection of data regarding security issues faced by the Christian institutions.

In statement issued from the office of Superintendent of Police, Diphu said based on the memorandum submitted by Assam Catholic Education Trust (ACET) to the Director General of Police, Assam on 12/02/2024 regarding the safety of Christian institutions and personnel, Assam Police headquarters issued instruction to all

Superintendents of Police to collect information of all Christian institutions and to ensure safety and security of such institutions and personnel.

Accordingly, Karbi Anglong Police also collected and compiled a list of all such institutions in the district for ensuring safety and security of such institutions. However, later on Wednesday it has been learnt that one organisation namely United Christian Forum (UCF) of Diphu, Karbi Anglong has submitted a memorandum to the District Commissioner, Karbi Anglong stating that police personnel are collecting information of all Christian institutions of the district without any official mandate causing a fear psychosis among the public.

In today's meeting the UCF members attending were president, Rev Solomon Rongpi and secretary, Rev Primingson Millick and members Dilip Kathar, general secretary, Karbi Anglong Baptist Convention, Rev Kamson Rongphar, executive secretary, Nihang Karbi Baptist Association, Rev Tenson Bey, Borsing Tisso; Rev Luke Rongphar; Rev Abraham Taro and Rev James Rongpi.

PRESS NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed Tender eventually to be drawn on F-2 From affixing non-refundable court fee stamp of Rs 8.25 (Rupees Eight & Twenty five Paise) only with a validity period of 180 (One hundred and eighty) days only from the date of opening of Tenders are invited from registered eligible APWD Building contractors of Class -1 (A,B,C), II & III and equal category of PWD/Road wing for the following work and will be received in the office of the undersigned on 21-05-2024 (up to 3.00p.m hrs only) and will be opened on the same date and place at 3.30 pm hours in presence of the Tenderer or their authorized representatives. Detail particulars may be seen in the office of the undersigned during office hours on all working days on or before 20-05-2024.

Sl. No.	Name of work	Name of executing authority/ PWD Division.	Earnest Money	Approx Tender Value based on Schedule of rates	Time of completion of work
1.	Repairing of Counting Hall at Office Premise of the SDO (Civil) Rangia for ensuring Lok Sabha Election 2024.	District Election Officer, Rangia	2% (Two Percent) for General category and 1% for SC/ST/OBC/UG/UE Category	Rs. 8,21,974.00	10 (Ten) days

Sd/-
Janasanyog /CF/54/24/16-May-24
Addl. District Commissioner (I/C)
District Election Officer, Rangia

MISSING



Name : Shiv Chauhan (around 80 years)
Address : Pub- Sil-puta(Chauhan Basti), Bakulia, Karbi Anglong.

Missing Two months ago.

As stated by family members - the incident took place two months ago, when they were returning to Bakulia from Katihar (Bihar) in Train and in between Chauhan went missing.

Family members tried every possible way to find him but couldn't found. If anybody has any information Contact : 9954950049 / 8795646905

Name Change

I, Sahid Ashrof, residing at Ward No. 8, Islampur, Mangaldai, P.O & P.S - Mangaldai, Darrang district (Assam), hereby declare that I am a permanent resident of the aforementioned address and a citizen of India by birth. I affirm that my father's correct name is Sheikh MD. Ashrof. However, in certain documents, his name has been incorrectly stated as Sekh Mohamad Ashrof and Sekh Mahammad Ashrof instead of Sheikh MD. Ashrof.

I hereby request that all documents and records be corrected to reflect his accurate name as Sheikh MD. Ashrof."

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The future depends on what you do today.
— Mahatma Gandhi

US scrutiny on Chabahar Port deal

In the ever-evolving landscape of international diplomacy, strategic partnerships often intersect with geopolitical complexities, as evidenced by India's recent agreement with Iran over the development of the Chabahar Port. This landmark deal, while heralded as a step towards regional connectivity and economic growth, has also drawn scrutiny from the United States, raising questions about the delicate balance of alliances and interests in the Indo-Pacific region. The agreement, which extends over a decade, signifies a significant milestone in Indo-Iranian relations, particularly in the realm of maritime infrastructure. India Port Global Limited's commitment of \$120 million to upgrade the Shahid Beheshti Terminal underscores India's strategic investment in bolstering connectivity and trade routes, with an eye towards expanding its footprint in the region. However, amidst the fanfare of the agreement's signing, echoes of concern emanated from Washington, with the United States issuing warnings about potential sanctions risks. Vedant Patel, Principal Deputy Spokesperson for the US State Department, reiterated the active enforcement of sanctions against entities engaging with Iran, emphasizing the absence of exemptions for India in this regard.

The spectre of sanctions looms large, casting a shadow of uncertainty over the future of the Chabahar Port project. Yet, amidst these challenges, India remains steadfast in its commitment to advancing regional interests and enhancing connectivity. The utilization of Chabahar Port for humanitarian shipments to Afghanistan underscores its pivotal role in addressing pressing socio-economic needs in the region. Beyond the immediate implications, the Chabahar Port agreement holds broader strategic significance, particularly in the context of emerging geopolitical dynamics. The International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC), of which Chabahar Port is a critical node, offers a viable alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), providing a pathway for enhanced connectivity and trade across South Asia, Central Asia, and Europe.

Commodore (retired) Seshadri Vasani's assertion that the INSTC aligns with broader global interests underscores the transformative potential of this initiative in reshaping regional economic landscapes. The reduction in transit time and freight costs heralded by the INSTC promises to unlock new avenues for economic growth and development, transcending traditional trade routes and fostering greater interconnectivity. Yet, amidst the promise of progress, the specter of geopolitical tensions looms large, casting a shadow of uncertainty over the future trajectory of Indo-Iranian relations. The United States' assertion of its sanctions regime underscores the complex interplay of interests at play, as India navigates the delicate balance between advancing its strategic objectives and maintaining cordial relations with key allies. As India seeks to chart a course forward, the need for nuanced diplomacy and strategic foresight has never been more pressing. The Chabahar Port agreement serves as a litmus test of India's ability to navigate choppy waters, balancing the imperatives of regional connectivity with the demands of global geopolitics. In the final analysis, the Chabahar Port agreement represents more than just a bilateral pact; it embodies India's aspirations for regional leadership and economic integration. As the project unfolds, India must tread carefully, leveraging its strategic partnerships while remaining vigilant against potential pitfalls. Only through astute diplomacy and principled leadership can India navigate the complexities of the Indo-Pacific, forging a path towards greater prosperity and stability for all nations involved.

Congress workers are working very hard to ensure Rahul's win in Rae Bareilly



By: Pradeep Kapoor

All eyes are now focused on Rae Bareilly and Amethi Lok Sabha constituencies going to poll with 12 others including Lucknow on May 20. Rae Bareilly assumed importance since Rahul Gandhi is contesting against Dinesh Pratap Singh of BJP after lot of uncertainty.

Ever since Sonia Gandhi decided to opt for Rajya Sabha on health grounds, the political circles and media were debating whether Rahul or Priyanka will contest from Rae Bareilly or Amethi. Rahul Gandhi surprised everybody after the polling for his constituency Wayanad in Kerala that he would contest in Rae Bareilly and KL Sharma who had been very close to Gandhi family will take on Union Minister Smriti Irani at Amethi where Rahul got defeated in 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

Taking the elections in Rae Bareilly and Amethi very seriously, Congress Party deputed former chief minister Bhupesh Baghel of Chattisgarh to Rae Bareilly and former chief minister of Rajasthan Ashok Gehlot to Amethi. With these developments, Union Minister Smriti Irani and BJP appear to be in trouble as it is no longer a safe fight for BJP as the leaders thought earlier.

The experience of being in the constituency for more than 40 years goes in favour of Congress Party's KL Sharma in Amethi. Priyanka Gandhi too has taken election in two constituencies very seriously. She is camping with her team to reach out to every village. Priyanka is working very hard with her own style of campaigning to take back Amethi from Smriti Irani.

In Rae Bareilly local people are reminded about the old links with Gandhi family when husband of Indira Gandhi, Feroze Gandhi got elected from here. Since then Indira Gandhi, Sheila Kaul, Sonia Gandhi got elected from Rae Bareilly. Capt. Satish Sharma very close friend Rajiv Gandhi was also elected from Rae Bareilly.

In state capital Lucknow everybody is convinced about victory of sitting MP and Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. The only question is about the margin. BJP and supporters of Rajnath Singh have set the target of victory margin around five lakh votes.

There is no doubt that the family members of Rajnath Singh and local BJP leaders with the help of other frontal organizations of the Sangh Parivar did a commendable job to meet the voters. Samajwadi Party has put up sitting MLA Ravi Das Mehrotra to challenge Rajnath Singh.

Lucknow has always been safe seat for BJP ever since Atal Behari BJP returned to this constituency in 1991 Lok Sabha elections. After Vajpayee, his close associate Lalji Tandon also got elected in 2009.

The old-timers in Lucknow still remember 1967 Lok Sabha polls when journalists and intellectuals sitting in coffee house fielded Justice Anand Narain Mulla as independent candidate against top industrialist and Congress candidate VR Mohan.

Justice Anand Narain Mulla who was a great Urdu scholar became the voice of common man and defeated VR Mohan. So much so Bollywood actor Balraj Shahi came to Lucknow to campaign for Justice Anand Narain Mulla. (IPA Service)

Invincible Modi-Yogi key for BJP to storm UP

The ancient city of Varanasi was in a festive mood as the Prime Minister Narendra Modi has once again filed his nomination papers from the Varanasi on Tuesday for the Lok Sabha poll. Prior to filing his nomination papers, when PM Modi was going in a massive road show with his trusted comrade and UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and others, the mood in holy city was electric. It was so reassuring for the saffron party leaders and workers that it is going to demolish their rivals in the Lok Sabha poll.

Surely, if BJP led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) has to retain power third time in a row, the results of UP are very crucial. If political pundits are to be believed, UP is once again not disappointing BJP. We all know that the UP has 80 Lok Sabha seats. Of course, it is a big number.

Like in the past, Uttar Pradesh is not only deciding the present of Indian politics, but also its future. It is an old saying in political circles that the path to the throne of Delhi passes through UP. That is, the party that has the most seats in UP will have the easiest path to reach the Prime Minister's chair. This is the reason why political parties are leaving

no stone unturned to win the 80 seats of UP in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

However, contrary to political manoeuvring, political analysts believe that this time the results of the Lok Sabha elections in UP will not be unexpected. BJP will repeat its performance of the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

The formidable and invincible Modi-Yogi duo will once again give a charismatic performance. In fact, in political circles, the Modi-Yogi duo has become a guarantee of victory, in front of which the opposition also appears weak.

If BJP has entered the electoral fray with the goal of winning all 80 Lok Sabha seats in Uttar Pradesh, then it is also thanks to the confidence in this pair. The Prime Minister has praised Yogi's development model from public platforms many times. The Prime Minister is also claiming victory on all seats in UP through this model.

As the Prime Minister also said in his election recent rally in Amroha, "Yogi has shown what governance is. What is law and order? What is development and that is why records will be broken this time under Yogi's leadership. This time the record of 2014 and 2019 will be broken and UP will create



history."

The 2014 Lok Sabha elections proved to be a milestone in UP's electoral journey. BJP's political exile in UP ended this year. At that time, there was no alliance in front of BJP.

The BJP won 71 out of 80 seats, securing about 43 percent of the vote. The Samajwadi Party won five seats while the Congress was reduced to 2 seats. BSP's account could not even be opened.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, BJP contested the elections on the strength of the Modi wave and Yogi's work. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath had only completed his two-year in office. The Samajwadi Party and BSP came together to stop Narendra Modi.

RLD also supported him. However, the election results were in favour of BJP. BJP won 61 seats with about 50 percent vote

share. BSP got 10 seats, SP got 5 seats and only one seat came in Congress's account.

After 2019, Yogi built the image of a strong and tough Chief Minister, which culminated in the form of bulldozers in Uttar Pradesh. This somehow became the election symbol of BJP in the 2022 assembly elections.

The Chief Minister had turned the election into a virtual referendum due to his performance on the law and order front in the state. BJP made a historic comeback in the elections and the cycle of the Samajwadi Party, which had been going on for three decades, came to a complete halt. BJP's vote percentage in UP has also remained above 40 percent continuously since 2014.

The situation is quite different in the 2024 elections compared to the last

two Lok Sabha elections. This time SP has joined hands with Congress while BSP is contesting alone. RLD is also with BJP this time. NDA has also formed alliances with regional parties like Apna Dal (S), Nishad Party and Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party to strike a caste equation.

If BJP is in a better position in this Lok Sabha election in UP, then along with the achievements of the Modi government at the Centre, the Yogi model has a significant contribution. The way Prime Minister Narendra Modi implemented the schemes at the grassroots level in the centre. The way they brought prosperity in the lives of the poor, youth, women and farmers, similarly Yogi established the rule of good governance in UP.

If we look at Yogi's good governance on the parameter of figures, it is satisfying to know that not a single riot took place during his seven-year tenure. While during the time of previous Chief Ministers, on average there was a riot every third-fourth day. It is not hidden from anyone that earlier professional mafia and criminals used to spread terror under the patronage of power.

In Yogi Raj, the mafia was reined in. The public in UP is now fearless, the

criminals are afraid of the law.

The police have cracked down on criminals, mafia and rioters. As a result of which Uttar Pradesh has become crime-free, fear-free and riot-free. Due to the fear of the police in the state, big criminals and mafia have either fled leaving the state or surrendered.

The central government also gave full support in implementing development schemes in UP. This is the reason why the schemes of the Center yielded good results in UP. Due to which there has been a qualitative improvement in the economy of UP.

The Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) of the state has doubled to 25 lakh crores as compared to the year 2016-17. The state government has set a target to make the state's economy a one trillion dollar economy by 2027.

Where the state budget was ₹ 3.46 lakh crore in 2016-17, it has more than doubled to ₹ 7.36 lakh crore in 2024-25. Due to these figures of development, BJP is claiming to achieve the target of Mission 80 in UP. Who will win in the Lok Sabha elections is hidden in the womb of the future, but it is certain that the trust of the people of UP on the Modi-Yogi duo remains intact.

India's submarine challenges in the Indian Ocean region

By: Dipak Kurni

Recent developments concerning submarines in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) hold considerable importance for Indian security strategists in the near and medium future. This matter demands prioritization by the incoming government set to take office in June.

In late April, the Pakistan navy marked a milestone with the launch ceremony of its first Hangor-class submarine at the Wuchang shipbuilding group's Shuangliu base in Wuhan, China. This submarine, an export version based on the Chinese PLA Navy's Type 039A/041 Yuan class, is slated for induction into the Pakistan navy by 2028. Notably, it boasts air-independent propulsion (AIP), offering a substantial increase in underwater endurance compared to conventional diesel-electric submarines. This advancement is poised to significantly bolster Pakistan's sea-denial capability in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

Despite the Indian Navy's recognition of the need for an air-independent propulsion (AIP)-capable submarine since 1999, it has yet to possess one. It wasn't until June 2021 that the Defence Acquisition Council of the Ministry of Defence finally approved the long-awaited acquisition of six conventional submarines for the Navy under Project 75(I). With most of the Navy's conventional submarines aging over 30 years, their operational efficiency is significantly compromised. Therefore, Project 75(I) holds paramount importance for enhancing the Navy's underwater capability.

In the Modi 2.0 era, there has been a no-

table push towards achieving self-reliance, or *atmanirbharta*, in the defense sector to mitigate import dependency. However, the execution of this initiative has not met expectations. Under the concept of 'strategic partnership' projects, four significant platforms have been designated for collaboration between Indian entities and foreign manufacturers. These include AIP-enabled submarines, along with fighter aircraft, helicopters, and armored vehicles.

The Project 75(I) submarine agreement is anticipated to hover around \$5 billion (roughly ₹ 44,000 crore), signifying a considerable investment. Over the last three years, two foreign manufacturers, one German and the other Spanish, have been pinpointed, marking the commencement of the final evaluation phase. The German conglomerate TKMS (Thyssenkrupp Marine Systems) has forged a partnership with the public sector unit Mazagon Docks Ltd (MDL), a collaboration that enjoys robust backing from the German government.

Another competitive partnership in contention involves the Indian private sector firm L&T and the state-owned Spanish shipbuilding yard Navantia. Field evaluation trials of the TKMS offer were conducted by Indian naval teams in March, with the Spanish trials anticipated to conclude by June. With Project 75(I) representing a significant techno-commercial endeavor, intense competition is expected between the final contenders: the MDL-TKMS partnership and the L&T-Navantia team.

The importance of India procuring AIP-capable submarines is evident, yet recent experiences with significant defense ac-

quisitions paint a less-than-encouraging picture. The acquisition of Rafale fighter aircraft from France serves as a notable example. The suddenness of the final decision and the opacity surrounding technology transfer did little to further India's quest for self-reliance.

While numerous factors come into play beyond just technological and commercial considerations when finalizing decisions on major military platforms, a brief assessment reveals a checkered history in the indigenous development of India's submarine program. In the mid-1980s, India procured its first HDW-Type 209 conventional submarine from West Germany with the aim of establishing an indigenous submarine production line at MDL.

However, this endeavor was marred by a bribery scandal, which also implicated the Bofors artillery gun deal with Sweden. Consequently, the Rajiv Gandhi government abruptly terminated the entire submarine acquisition program, dealing a significant blow to indigenous efforts and resulting in substantial fiscal losses.

The subsequent Project 75(I) with France for the Scorpene-class submarines faced challenges, including cost escalations, delays, and disagreements regarding the extent of technology transfer.

In the realm of underwater maritime propulsion, AIP technology holds a unique position, with its expertise even scarcer than that of nuclear propulsion. While India has successfully reined the exclusive group of nations capable of nuclear propulsion design and manufacturing, with assistance from Russia, AIP technology still eludes its grasp. The indigenous

AIP project undertaken by the Defence Research and Development Organisation is currently underway and shows promising progress, with hopes for successful certification in the near future.

At present, Germany holds the top position globally in AIP technology. India faces the challenge of balancing its immediate tactical needs, such as the urgent induction of AIP-equipped submarines into the Navy, with the overarching strategic goal of bolstering indigenous AIP design and manufacturing capabilities for the long term.

Navigating this endeavor poses significant challenges, as expertise in underwater technology is closely guarded, with collaboration opportunities being scarce. The collaboration between China and Pakistan on the Hangor-class submarine exemplifies strategic cooperation between the two nations dating back to the 1970s. This partnership has posed challenges to Indian interests, highlighting the complexities of regional dynamics.

The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is on the brink of witnessing a surge in Chinese-designed submarines, with both Pakistan and Bangladesh set to acquire vessels from the PLA Navy. These submarines, alongside underwater drones and UDA systems, will significantly shape the evolving naval competition in the region, spanning from the Arabian Sea to the Bay of Bengal. To effectively navigate this dynamic landscape, New Delhi must demonstrate greater agility and resolve in its decision-making processes compared to previous approaches. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurnimiglttd@gmail.com)

China, the biggest producer of steel in the world is impacting global economy

By: Kunal Bose

Being by far the largest owner of steelmaking capacity in the world and what automatically follows the biggest producer, consumer and exporter of the ferrous metal, China will perform leave a significant impact on the global working of the industry in all situations. According to the OECD Steel Committee, the world steel capacity rose 57m tonnes in 2023, marking the sharpest increase in a decade to 2.498bn tonnes. Accurate capacity data about China may not be available since there are producers in the unorganized sector whose operation is enveloped in obfuscation. But even then a safe guess is the world's second largest economy had steelmaking capacity of around 1.35bn tonnes by the end of 2023.

Armed with capacity of this order, China for the fourth straight year produced over 1bn tonnes of steel last year, almost identical to 2022 when global production remained unchanged at 1.888bn tonnes. In the face of slowing down of the economy manifest particularly in the construction sector taking toll of domestic steel demand, Chinese steelmakers turned aggressive in selling their products in the world market. Exports rose a robust 36.2m tonne year on year to 90.3m tonnes in 2023, a level not seen since 2016. In the past in 2015, China exported a record volume of 110m tonnes, a sharp rise from 91.3m tonnes the year before.

Besides dip in domestic demand, Chinese exports got a shot from tight international supply and competitive prices. Such large exports are inevitably disrupting international trade in the commodity and causing trade frictions. It will be recalled that there was a raft of anti-dumping measures by import afflicted countries in the wake of 2015 aggressive sales pitch by China.

Steelmakers around the world, including the ones in India, as a result, became wary of China. The leviathan that China's steel industry is will be producing over a billion tonnes in the next few years despite poor local demand to be left with no alternative but to offload much of surplus output in the world market with disturbing economic and political consequences for export tar-

geted countries. Remember, steel, in spite of all the advances in technology, remains a highly labour intensive operation.

In the meantime, Chinese exports are undergoing structural changes with the focus gradually shifting to high value-added products. For example, 14m tonne of hot rolled coils in the first nine months up to September last year far exceeded that of whole of the record year 2015. The phenomenon is having disturbing consequences for steelmakers in advanced economies such as Japan. Despite being the world's largest exporter, China also is an importer of steel products. Imports of 7.64m tonnes in 2023 marked a decline of 27.6 per cent over the previous year.

December average price of imports at \$1,569.6 a tonne gives an idea of the kind of steel the country is still required to import. Tata Steel MD and CEO TV Narendran expresses concern that if Chinese steel product exports remain at last year's level then that could bring pressure on "world steel prices impacting producer margins." At the same time, he talks about a more balanced Chinese approach to production and demand. Expectations are that Beijing moves to infuse life to property and infrastructure sectors will improve demand growth prospects for the metal.

Besides exerting pressure on prices, high volumes of Chinese exports, according to Narendran, have environment damaging impact as these leave in their trail "significant carbon emissions." He wonders if China exports of the current order are not at variance with the declared Beijing objective of progressively reducing carbon emissions. Premium available in the world market over domestic prices is one consideration for China to be a big exporter. But Narendran says: "There perhaps will be a bit more stability in China going forward, with potential production cuts or reduced exports due to because the prices they are exporting are not sustainable."

Chinese deceleration in steel production every month since December 2023 proves Narendran right. In the meantime, concerns about Indian imports of finished steel staying ahead of exports are leading local producers to seek intervention of New Delhi by way of safe-

guard measures against import surges in 2023-24. India with imports rising 38.1% to 8.3m tonnes in the past financial year turned into a net buyer of foreign origin steel, as its exports of finished steel were up 11.5% to 7.5m tonnes.

Indian producers are not comfortable that imports grew at that rate. In spite of this, New Delhi will not be rushed into building new barriers to imports in view of the continuing strong domestic demand. Indian use of steel rose an impressive 13% to a multi-year high 136m tonnes in 2023-24, the only country where demand continues to race ahead like that buoyed by focus on infrastructure and construction development. Automotive steel demand was also strong.

In contrast, Chinese steel demand is set to fall again this year. Narendran thinks gradual shift to investment-led growth from consumption-led growth in India is fuelling demand buoyancy for the metal. He and his peers in the steel industry in India are encouraged by budgetary allocation for the infrastructure sector going up by up to 30 per cent every year. At the same time, railways and gas pipeline development continue to receive significant investment. Thus, according to Narendran, "surge in activity across multiple steel-consuming sectors in India is a pointer to annual steel consumption growth expectation of at least 8 per cent." As the world noticed in China in better times in the past, steel demand in India "will be ahead of GDP growth rate, which typically hovers here around 7-7.5 per cent," says Narendran.

Considerations of economies of scale and new capacity that keeps on coming on stream will be constraints to ration production. Even then, S&P Global Commodity Insights says the challenge of addressing global oversupply and weak profit margins (the phenomenon is universal) will see China steel production slowing by 0.5 per cent this year. Mysteel China, however, pegs the country's expected production squeeze at 0.3 per cent. In forecasts of this nature what is to be considered is whether Beijing will introduce additional stimulus measures to support the economy, which in turn could stimulate demand for steel. (IPA Service)

Climate change made April heatwaves across Asia - including India - more frequent, intense

By: Aathira Perincher

Many parts of Asia including India witnessed record-breaking temperatures and heatwaves in April this year. Now, a preliminary study released on May 15 shows that climate change made these heat waves more frequent, and more extreme.

As per the 'rapid study' by scientists associated with World Weather Attribution (WWA), a collective that studies the impact of climate change on extreme weather events worldwide, the heatwaves that swept across Asia were made more likely by climate change. Climate change also made the likelihood of such a heatwave occurring across south Asia - including India - 45 times more likely and 0.85 degrees Celsius hotter than it would otherwise be, their report found.

Mercury rising across Asia
Summer temperatures have been breaking records across the world. This April was the 11th consecutive month being the warmest for the respective month of the year, as per Europe's Copernicus Climate Change Service press release on May 7.

In India too, it has been no different: March-April 2022 was one of the hottest months in

more than a century in parts of India. The heat waves that parts of northern and northwestern India witnessed in April 2023 claimed several lives, apart from affecting crops, livestock and livelihoods. Looking at temperature data, scientists associated with WWA found that climate change - caused by human activity such as the burning of fossil fuels that release greenhouse gases into the atmosphere - made the 2023 heat waves around 30 times more likely in India and Bangladesh.

On April 1 this year, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) warned that many parts of India would witness not just a hot but an abnormally hot summer. The IMD had also cautioned that the number of heat wave days that many regions witness would also be higher than usual.

And as the month unfolded, reports came in of heat waves across the country. Many parts of eastern India witnessed the hottest April on record, per reports. Several other countries in Asia - from Lebanon to Vietnam and Cambodia - too witnessed the impacts of heat waves.

Climate change is amping up the heat

Most of Asia experienced temperatures of up to and over 40 degrees Celsius, noted WWA



scientist Friederike Otto, Senior Lecturer in Climate Science at the Grantham Institute - Climate and the Environment, Imperial College London, in a virtual press conference on May 14.

Scientists with the WWA analysed three different sets of temperature data for three regions across the continent: three-day averaged daily maximum temperatures in March-April for west Asia (Jordan, Syria, Israel, Palestine and Lebanon), the averaged daily maximum temperatures across 15 days annually in the Philippines, and the average April temperatures over South Asia (India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Lao PDR, Vietnam and Cambodia).

In south Asia, their results show that extreme temperatures are now about 45 times more likely and 0.85 degrees Celsius

hotter due to climate change.

"These results align with our previous studies, where we found that climate change made the extreme heat about 30 times more likely and 1 Deg C hotter," the report said.

The team also found that the heat wave that struck the Philippines would have been nearly impossible if it hadn't been for climate change. In west Asia, the heat wave made living conditions worse for Palestinians as they struggled in relief camps with Israel continuing to attack civilians; climate change increased the probability of the event by about a factor of 5, the report said.

"From Gaza to Delhi to Manila, people suffered and died when April temperatures soared in Asia," Otto said in a press release. "Heatwaves have always happened. But the additional heat, driven by emissions

from oil, gas and coal, is resulting in death for many people. If humans continue to burn fossil fuels, the climate will continue to warm, and vulnerable people will continue to die."

Impacts of the El Niño

The team also studied the impacts of the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO), a complex climate pattern influenced by fluctuating sea surface temperatures and atmospheric changes in the tropical Pacific Ocean, on the occurrence of the heatwave over south Asia. The ENSO can cause what are called El Niño years (usually characterised by weak monsoons and reduced rainfall in many regions including most of south Asia), neutral conditions and La Niña years (which are often cooler and wetter).

Though the past year has been an El Niño year, which means that temperatures can be higher and rains lesser, the impacts of climate change far overshadowed those that would be seen in a normal El Niño year.

The El Niño year made a difference for it did contribute to the heat waves, said Mariam Zachariah, researcher at Grantham Institute - Climate Change and the Environment, Imperial College London, who is also among the team of researchers associated with the

WWA that conducted the rapid study. "The ENSO did make a difference but not as much as climate change did," Zachariah said in the online press conference on May 14.

While results of the study are not peer-reviewed yet, all studies by the WWA are later peer-reviewed and there have not been any changes in the numbers, said Otto during the virtual press conference.

"All heat waves occurring today are made more hot, more frequent and intense due to climate change," Otto said. "So it is right to say that there is a climate change component in a heatwave if it occurs today." While some countries - such as India - have heat action plans in place, there's more than needs to be done, per the report. Different sections of people are more vulnerable to the impacts of heat waves, and heat plans need to cover all vulnerable sections, with plans comprising "mandatory regulations such as workplace interventions for all workers to address heat stress, such as scheduled rest breaks, fixed work hours, and rehydrate-rehydrate programs", the report noted. These regulations are not yet part of worker protection guidelines in the affected regions, it said.

But...it's not over yet

India's tryst with heat waves this year, however, isn't over yet, even as its elections still continue.

While the IMD has predicted that the much-awaited south west monsoon is very likely to advance into the South Andaman Sea and some parts of southeast Bay of Bengal and Nicobar Islands by around May 19, heat waves are predicted across some parts of the country.

As per a press release by the India Meteorological Department on May 14, northwestern India will witness a fresh heatwave from May 16 onward.

Severe heat wave conditions are "very likely" in parts of West Rajasthan on May 17 and 18, as well as in isolated pockets of Punjab and south Haryana on May 18, the release said. Heat wave conditions are likely to occur in some parts of the Konkan coast on May 14 and 15, and over West Rajasthan from May 15-18. Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, southern Haryana and Bihar will also likely witness a heat wave from May 16-18, as will northern Madhya Pradesh and eastern Rajasthan in the two days to follow.

The Konkan coast meanwhile is also likely to witness hot and humid weather, according to the IMD release. (Courtesy: The Wire)

Dust devils in Mumbai, Delhi caused by merging wind systems

By: Akshit Sangomla

Mumbai on May 13 and Delhi on May 10, separated by 1,500 km, experienced dust storms with extremely high wind speeds. Both the events occurred due to powerful storm systems that were fuelled by fierce external winds.

While two people were killed in Delhi and 23 were injured, 14 people were killed when a billboard collapsed in Mumbai.

There are multiple factors responsible for the formation of dust storms. "The prerequisite factor for the formation of any storm is heating of the land. Usually, heating of 4-5 days is needed for convection to form which develops into a storm," KJ Ramesh, former director-general of India Meteorological Department (IMD), told Down To Earth (DTE).

"Once the storm forms, it is sometimes piloted by cold and dry downdraft winds that are downward facing and energetic, also aided by gravity. These winds can get very strong when they travel over hot surfaces caused by heating during summers," said Ramesh.

They precede the actual rainfall and thunder-causing storm and sometimes get added onto the winds of the storm, raise the dust and lead to dust storms, he added. "The storm that affected Mumbai formed around Igatpuri between Mumbai and Nashik, which is a hilly area. It seemed to be moving in a westerly direction but was suddenly pushed in the

southwest direction towards Kalyan and Thane due to the prevailing winds," Rushikesh Agre, an independent weather forecaster from Pune, told DTE.

The easterly winds were dominant over the normal westerly winds which flow in from the sea, according to Agre. Agre tracked the storm and said the storm system expanded and intensified around Badlapur due to a merger with another storm which was not expected.

"I was taken by surprise by the sudden intensification, as the wind speed recorded at Badlapur was around 107 kilometres per hour and the usual humidity of the region was lacking. It was quite dry at the time when the storm happened," said Agre. There were quite a few places that recorded wind speeds more than 100 km / hr. The last time Mumbai experienced an intense dust storm was in January 2022.

For Delhi, this was the first dust storm of the season. Dust storms are common events during the summer season for the city and the rest of north and northwest India, but the intensity of the winds was higher than normal this time.

The observatory at Delhi airport recorded a peak wind gust of 92.7 km / hr, according to independent weather forecaster Navdeep Dahiya on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter).

The normal wind speeds during these dust storms are around 40-50 km / hr. During the record-breaking dust storms in 2018, which affected many northern, central and eastern states of India, wind speeds as high as 130 km / hr were

recorded at some places.

DTE had reported that the intense and unusual dust storms that killed 423 people and injured 785 were caused by increased western disturbances, heating of northwestern India and the rapid warming of the Arctic region.

The further intensification of the winds that was witnessed in Mumbai and Delhi could also be because of the tunnelling effect caused by winds flowing in cities in valleys between high built up areas, according to Ramesh. In the case of Mumbai, the Western Ghats surrounding the region could have further enhanced the winds. "Tunnelling effect may increase wind speeds by up to 40 per cent during these dust storms," said Ramesh.

On May 10, there were two cyclonic circulations, one over Iran and the other over northwest Rajasthan, according to IMD. The weather agency predicted that these would induce dust storms over Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Chandigarh and Delhi between May 10 and May 13 and over Rajasthan during May 10-11.

A cyclonic circulation is a swirl of winds in the lower levels of the atmosphere (troposphere), which is generally responsible for inducing storm systems and causing rainfall. These circulations are often affected by western disturbances coming in from the Mediterranean region over Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. The western disturbances have been active throughout the summer season of 2024, causing unseasonal snowfall and rainfall in the Himalayas.

On May 13, IMD highlighted that a cyclonic circulation was lying over south-interior Karnataka region and a trough (an extended low pressure area) was existing between the circulation and northwest Madhya Pradesh. This could have had an influence on the dust storm in Mumbai. There were also other factors at play in both places. "An anticyclone is present over the Arabian sea. Winds, thus, become northerly which also became a favourable condition for the dust storm," said Rushikesh Agre. "Anticyclones over the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal with their clockwise winds are bringing winds on shore all across India right now. These have been causing thunder / dust / hail storms, sometimes with rainfall, in many states in the west, south and east," said Ramesh.

"More of the winds over Delhi are coming from over upper Pakistan but the winds over Mumbai are sweeping in from the Middle East and lower Pakistan," Raghu Murtugudde, professor of climate studies at Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay and emeritus professor at University of Maryland, told DTE.

"The anticyclone can bring more moisture or more dust depending on how far north it is. We have to wait and see if a trend is emerging but the Middle East warming and the wind shifts over the Arabian Sea during March-April-May and the Arabian Sea warming are a trend already," Murtugudde added. (Courtesy: Down To Earth)

Strategic dynamics in a melting Arctic

By: Zerin Osho & Eoin Jackson

The Arctic region is rapidly becoming a focal point of global geopolitics, propelled by the melting of sea ice due to climate change, which presents both opportunities and challenges. As the Arctic ice recedes, previously inaccessible resources such as oil, gas, and minerals become available, tempting major powers like the United States (US) and Russia, to exploit them. However, this exploitation comes at a cost—accelerated climate change due to increased greenhouse gas emissions. The long-term consequences of losing the protection offered by the Arctic sea ice would mean that the Earth would experience catastrophic global warming.

Analysing the dynamic of the Arctic from a strategic decision-making perspective underscores the imperative of maintaining the balance between cooperative efforts to safeguard the Arctic from the impacts of climate change and the individual pursuit of new resource opportunities arising from the melting sea ice. Rationality dictates that for the global commons to survive, all states should converge towards collective action for the long-term preservation of the Arctic.

To understand the dynamic, we must identify the key Arctic players. Firstly, there are the members of the Arctic Council—the primary intergovernmental forum on the Arctic, consisting of the US, Russia, Norway, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Canada, and Iceland. Then, there are the emerging Arctic states—members of the Global South who have taken an increased interest in Arctic policy.

These are China, which is interested in gaining access to the Arctic's resources and has declared itself to be a "near-Arctic" state, and India, which is concerned about the scientifically-established connection between the loss of the Arctic sea ice and the increasing instability of India's monsoons.

Currently, much of the Arctic Council's work has been suspended as a result of the Western boycott of Russia due to its invasion of Ukraine. This divide is further exacerbated by the accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO, creating a "West and the rest" dynamic at the Arctic Council. All Arctic Council members have a rational interest in avoiding a further escalation of Arctic tensions to avoid spillover from the Ukraine conflict.

For Russia, pouring troops and resources into accessing Arctic bases and minerals creates a new flank

that needs to be defended against NATO. Militarising an already volatile region, which in turn accelerates the loss of sea ice, will compromise Russia's ability to conduct the war in Ukraine, given it is already under pressure to break the grinding stalemate. Russia also lacks the capacity to access the Arctic's resources by itself, having been forced to turn to China and India for assistance in obtaining icebreakers to open shipping lanes in the Northern Sea Route.

Creating a scramble for resources in the Arctic will, therefore, place Russia at a competitive disadvantage to its Arctic peers who are not facing extensive trade sanctions and can acquire Arctic equipment without problems. On the other hand, working to protect the Arctic, even in a limited capacity, restores some of Russia's legitimacy on the world stage. While it cannot offset continued aggression in Ukraine, it would provide a rational foundation for Russia to be seen once again as a partner in Arctic governance.

For the remaining Arctic states, cooperation on Arctic climate protection diffuses tension in the region caused by the Ukraine war, which mitigates the current lack of defence capacity the US and NATO has in the Arctic. Cooperation also opens up new opportunities to work with emerging Arctic states like India, through the development of new initiatives on Arctic science. This is seen as strengthening the West's connection to India and towards opening new avenues for partnership to help counter Chinese influence.

More selfishly, the loss of Arctic permafrost due to climate change caused by human activity will release vast amounts of greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere. This would force the Global North to escalate its reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, as well as require further compensation to the Global South for loss and damage caused by the worsening impact of climate change. Protecting the Arctic slows down the rate at which the Western members of the Arctic Council would need to make the necessary cuts in emissions, buying them more time to phase out fossil fuels. There may be some concerns about cooperating with Russia even in a limited scientific capacity.

However, the cooperation between the US and Russia during the Cold War on space science in the 1970s shows that there is precedent for big powers coming together in the common interest of humanity even amidst a wider context of divided geopolitics. This scientific cooperation was crucial to the later development of the International Space Station.

The same form of cooperation today would be in the self-interest of Western Arctic states who can expand their Arctic scientific capacities while retaining their wider detachment from Russia.

We must also consider the possibilities from the perspective of emerging Arctic states such as China and India. For China, accessing resources in the Arctic as part of its "Polar Silk Road" initiative will increase existing tensions within the West regarding the disproportionate influence China is exerting on the global economy.

On the other hand, working with current Arctic states would demonstrate China to be a credible leader in climate mitigation, without it having a major impact on China's economy. China can also strengthen and enhance its research capabilities in the Arctic by cooperating with Arctic states on science, which can open new sustainable opportunities for it within Arctic governance and policy. Arctic cooperation would therefore enhance China's claim to be a "near-Arctic" state.

For India, the rational interest in Arctic climate protection is even more clear-cut. Working with Arctic states on Arctic climate measures bolsters India's claim as the leader of the Global South, while also granting it a new role in Arctic governance.

More directly, it prevents further damage to the monsoons from the teleconnection to the loss of sea ice. The stability of the monsoons is critical to preserving India's agricultural sector, which ensures that it stays on track to become the third-largest economy in the world by 2030.

India also has first-class expertise in Arctic science and technology, having recently launched its first Arctic winter expedition in 2023. Using this expertise in climate research and monitoring would further strengthen India's role in the Arctic.

Ultimately, the outcome hinges on collective action to preserve the Arctic sea ice. While resource exploitation may offer short-term gains, the long-term consequences for the planet and each state's rational self-interest outweigh them. Therefore, prioritizing science-led cooperation to monitor and protect Arctic sea ice is paramount for ensuring a sustainable future for the region and the planet as a whole.

In conclusion, Arctic geopolitics necessitates collective climate action. A unified approach to climate protection can enable Arctic stakeholders to navigate these complexities and secure a sustainable future for the region and the planet. (Courtesy: ORF)

How climate change is shaping democracy

By: Manoranjan Ghosh & Hemant Kumar

What effect could the changing climate have on democracy?

As India's 18th general election proceeds during the scorching summer, experts are concerned that heat waves and extreme temperature events could leave their mark on the democratic exercise. This is already a growing body of research on how climate events have shaped democratic institutions and nations.

In 1970, for instance, researchers say that the devastation left by Cyclone Bhola played a key role in triggering the formation of Bangladesh. The ineffective response of the Pakistan government to the devastation that left between 300,00 and 500,00 people dead, fanned disaffection that intensified demands for East Pakistan to secede.

Over the decades, floods and drought have impacted the electoral process in the lower Indo-Gangetic-Brahmaputra plains. For example, as Newsland reported in 2021, households in Assam that have lost land were more concerned about finding work than participating in the voting.

That was also obvious in Northern Karnataka this month, as TAAmeerudheen reported in Scroll. The intense drought has grabbed much more attention than the promises of candidates for the Lok Sabha elections.

Furthermore, climate change is altering voters' perceptions of power structures. For example, the corruption in distributing relief after the devastating cyclone Amphan in the Sunderbans in May 2020, splintered the support base of the Trinamool Congress.

In June last year, a political controversy erupted in the Balia district of Uttar Pradesh with the deaths of 44 persons within four days. After the district medical officer said that many of the deaths were due to heatstroke, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party removed him from his post. It denied that these deaths were due to the heat, insisting that pre-existing comorbidities were the cause of death.

But in the summer of 2021, as cyclone Yaas hit Odisha, Naveen Patnaik's government won praise for handling it effectively. India has already held several elections during the summer months, with citizens lining up enthusiastically at the booth. The soaring temperatures have never been considered a threat to this exercise of democracy. But could that change in the face of accelerating climate change?

The world is facing two lethal crises. Climate change is reshaping every sphere—social, economic and political. At the same time, the space for democracy is shrinking worldwide. As electoral autocracies

emerge, climate change-induced extreme events may hurt the electoral process.

At the most basic level, the heat makes it difficult for parties to mobilise crowds at rallies. That was driven home on April 16 last year when 14 people died of heat stroke during a state-supported event in Navi Mumbai.

Several concerns have emerged. How will candidates reach out to voters to convey their message in extreme temperature conditions? Are political parties and the Election Commission concerned about parties holding rallies and conventions in the heat? What about the heat mitigation strategy for security personnel and officers working to secure a fair election? Are the voting centres designed to be heat wave-proof? Are election organising institutions providing water, cooling and medical facilities? Could heatwaves affect voter turnout?

Heatwaves can have a delayed effect on political participation, according to a study led by University of Kent's Amrit Amirapu. It found that during state legislative assembly polls between 2009 and 2017 in some places in Western India, higher turnouts were observed because citizens turned out in large numbers to vote out incumbents who had failed to provide sufficient mitigation and adaptation support during a previous year's heatwave.

However, in general, citizens avoided voting when temperatures were oppressive—especially if they were affluent urban resident. This year, for instance, the drop in voter turnout in the second phase of the election in Kerala to 71% from 77.8% was attributed to the high temperatures.

A related concern is that many places across the country face power cuts during the summer. Are the authorities equipped to ensure that citizens exercise their right to vote in a safe, cool environment?

It is essential for the Election Commission to make the process easier for voters by disseminating accurate risk alerts at the polling station level. The commission should start collecting data about how heat could possibly harm the health of citizens to help it prepare for future elections effectively.

It is clear that if efforts to mitigate the effects of climate change are to be successful, it is essential for democracy to flourish. David W Orr argues in his book Democracy in a Hotter Time: Climate Change and Democratic Transformation that as citizens look to mitigate the effects of climate change, demanding for instance that thermal power plants be phased out, a people-centric transition to a post-fossil fuel future requires a functional democracy at all levels. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

Zelenskyy had been expected to visit Spain, and perhaps Portugal, later this week

Zelenskyy postpones all upcoming foreign visits as Ukraine faces a new Russian offensive

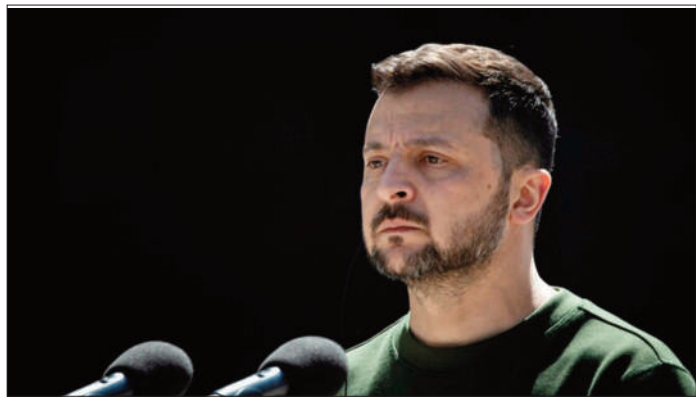
KYIV, May 15: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy postponed all his upcoming foreign trips as Ukraine's army battled to contain a front-line push by the Kremlin's forces, as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Wednesday visited a drone manufacturing facility in Kyiv on the second day of a visit meant to reassure Ukrainians of continuing American support.

Zelenskyy cancelled all foreign visits "that were planned for the coming days," his office said Wednesday on Telegram. The head of state instructed his team to reschedule the visits.

"We are grateful to our partners for understanding," the announcement said. Zelenskyy had been expected to visit Spain, and perhaps Portugal, later this week. No reason was given for his decision, but Ukraine is having a hard time fending off the latest Russian assault. Blinken also toured a grain transshipment facility and a bionics factory, praising Ukrainian innovation and ingenuity in the face of wartime difficulties.

"Ukraine has had to adapt and adjust to this and it's done so remarkably," Blinken said of grain exports now being taken by rail after traditional shipping routes were interrupted by Russia's full-scale invasion, which began on February 24, 2022.

Russian troops are pressing a fresh offensive in northeast Ukraine's Kharkiv region. It began last week, marking the most significant border incursion since the full-scale invasion began and forcing almost 8,000 local



people to flee their homes.

Together with Moscow's week-long effort to build on its recent gains in the eastern Donetsk region, the more than two-year war has entered a critical stage for Ukraine's depleted army.

Against that grim backdrop, with thousands of Ukrainian troops locked in fierce battles in towns and villages, Blinken on Tuesday pledged unceasing US support for the country, during and beyond the war. He also tried to lift spirits in Kyiv, performing on guitar with a band at a city bar and eating pizza at a veteran-run restaurant.

Russia is opening new fronts in order to stretch Ukraine's army, which is short of ammunition and manpower, along the about 1,000-kilometre front line, hoping defences will crumble. Russian artillery and sabotage raids have also been menacing Ukraine's northern Chernihiv and Sumy regions.

Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address Tuesday that the

"Ukraine has had to adapt and adjust to this and it's done so remarkably," Blinken said.

Meanwhile, Russian air defences shot down several Ukrainian missiles over the Black Sea and near the Belbek air base, Sevastopol Gov. Mikhail Razvozhayev said. Sevastopol is where the Russian Black Sea Fleet is headquartered.

The fragments of downed missiles fell into residential areas but caused no casualties, Razvozhayev said. Russian air defences also shot down nine Ukrainian drones, two Vilha rockets, two anti-radar HARM missiles and two Hammer guided bombs over the Belgorod region early Wednesday, the Defense Ministry said. Two people were injured in the village of Dubovoye when a Ukrainian rocket set their house ablaze, according to Belgorod Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov.

The military said five other Ukrainian drones were downed over the Kursk region and three drones were shot down over the Bryansk region.

The Defense Ministry also said that another Ukrainian drone was downed over the Tatarstan region. Tatarstan is located more than 1,000 kilometres east of the border with Ukraine.

Vasily Golubev, the governor of the Rostov region, said two drones attacked a fuel depot. He said there were no casualties or fire. Ukraine has launched a steady series of drone attacks on oil refineries and fuel depots across Russia over the past months, causing significant damage. (AP)

Blinken on Wednesday visited a drone manufacturer on the outskirts of Kyiv and toured a grain transshipment facility where Ukrainian grain is loaded into containers for export by rail. Blinken praised the ingenuity of the process, which local companies adopted after traditional shipping routes were interrupted by Russia's full-scale invasion, which began on February 24, 2022.

Russia says it downed 10 US-supplied missiles over Crimea as Blinken visits Kyiv



KYIV, May 15: Russia's Defence Ministry said that air defences shot down 10 US-supplied Ukrainian missiles targeting the Crimean Peninsula early on Wednesday, as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spent a second day visiting Kyiv, and Ukraine's army battled to contain a front-line push by the Kremlin's forces.

The ATACMS long-range ballistic missiles were destroyed over the Black Sea, the ministry said. The US included the Army Tactical Missile System, known as ATACMS, in a military aid package in March.

The Ukrainian attack came as Russian troops pressed their offensive in northeast Ukraine's Kharkiv region that began last week, marking the most significant border incursion since the full-scale invasion began and forcing almost 8,000 local people to flee their homes.

Together with Moscow's weeklong effort to build on its recent gains in the eastern Donetsk region, the more than two-year war has entered a critical stage for Ukraine's depleted army.

Against that grim backdrop, with thousands of Ukrainian troops locked in fierce battles in towns and villages, Blinken on Tuesday pledged unceasing US support for the country, during and beyond the war. He also tried to lift spirits in Kyiv, performing on guitar with a band at a city bar and eating pizza at a veteran-run restaurant. Russia is opening new fronts in order to stretch Ukraine's army, which is short of ammunition and manpower, along the about 1,000-kilometre front line, hoping defences will crumble. Russian artillery and sabotage raids have also been menacing Ukraine's northern Chernihiv and Sumy regions.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address Tuesday that the army has sent reinforcements to the Kharkiv and Donetsk re-

gions. "It is too early to draw conclusions, but the situation is under control," he said. Even so, Zelenskyy cancelled a planned trip to Spain later this week, according to the Spanish government. It gave no reason for the cancellation.

The pace of Russia's advance in the Kharkiv border region, where it launched an offensive late last week and has made significant progress, has slowed, the Institute for the Study of War said late Tuesday.

The Washington-based think tank said Moscow's main aim there is to create a "buffer zone" that will prevent Ukrainian cross-border strikes on Russia's Belgorod region. Blinken on Wednesday visited a drone manufacturer on the outskirts of Kyiv and toured a grain transshipment facility where Ukrainian grain is loaded into containers for export by rail.

Blinken praised the ingenuity of the process, which local companies adopted after traditional shipping routes were interrupted by Russia's full-scale invasion, which began on February 24, 2022.

"Ukraine has had to adapt and adjust to this and it's done so remarkably," Blinken said.

Meanwhile, Russian air defences shot down several Ukrainian missiles over the Black Sea and near the Belbek air base, Sevastopol Gov. Mikhail Razvozhayev said. Sevastopol is where the Russian Black Sea Fleet is headquartered.

The fragments of downed missiles fell into residential areas but caused no casualties, Razvozhayev said.

Russian air defences also shot down nine Ukrainian drones, two Vilha rockets, two anti-radar HARM missiles and two Hammer guided bombs over the Belgorod region early Wednesday, the Defense Ministry said. Two people were injured in the village of Dubovoye when a Ukrainian rocket set their house ablaze, according to Belgorod Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov. The military said five other Ukrainian drones were downed over the Kursk region and three drones were shot down over the Bryansk region.

The Defense Ministry also said that another Ukrainian drone was downed over the Tatarstan region. Tatarstan is located more than 1,000 kilometres east of the border with Ukraine.

Vasily Golubev, the governor of the Rostov region, said two drones attacked a fuel depot. He said there were no casualties or fire.

Ukraine has launched a steady series of drone attacks on oil refineries and fuel depots across Russia over the past months, causing significant damage. (AP)

An Afghan military helicopter crash in western Afghanistan, 1 dead

ISLAMABAD, May 15: An Afghan military helicopter crashed on Wednesday in Ghor province in western Afghanistan, killing at least one person, the Taliban defence ministry said.

The crash of the MI-17 was caused by a technical problem, according to a statement.

The helicopter was on a rescue mission after a vehicle carrying civilians plunged into a river near the city of Feroz Koh, the provincial capital of Ghor, the ministry said in post on the social media platform X.

Twelve passengers were injured in the crash, according to the statement.

The crew tried to make an emergency landing but the helicopter hit a wall and crashed, it added.

The statement did not identify the individual who was killed in the accident and it was not clear how many people were on board.

Images posted on X show the crash site along a river, where dozens of people gathered to try to help the survivors. (AP)

Consultative mechanism helps enhance mutual cooperation between Nepal and India: FM Shreshtha

KATHMANDU, May 15: A consultative mechanism has been established between Nepal and India to facilitate cooperation in various areas of bilateral relations, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Narayan Kaji Shreshtha has said, asserting that such mechanisms have enhanced mutual cooperation and partnership.

"Cross-border connectivity is being expanded to facilitate trade and transit. We need to further expand and improve this network," Shreshtha was quoted as saying by the Himalayan Times newspaper on Wednesday.

Addressing the third series of lectures - themed 'Nepal-India Relations: Prospects and Pathways' here on Tuesday, Shreshtha said that a consultative mechanism has been established to facilitate cooperation in various areas of bilateral relations. Such mechanisms have enhanced mutual cooperation and partnership, he added.

Invoking the long-standing history of mutual friendship and cooperation between Nepal-India that include geographical proximity; religious, cultural and linguistic relations; economic engagement and intensely flourished people-to-people relations, Shreshtha said that there are some bilateral issues that need to be resolved through dialogue and diplomatic channels.

"...there are some bilateral issues historically left behind that need to be resolved through dialogue and diplomatic channels based on historical facts and in accordance with the spirit of (being) good neighbours," Shreshtha said.

The exchange of high-level visits has

helped strengthen the relations and enhance partnership in many fields, he said.

"This will pave the way for taking Nepal-India relations to a new height, for which the Government of Nepal is committed," the Deputy Prime Minister said.

Envisaging a "wider scope" for cooperation in various areas of mutual benefits, he said a partnership in the energy sector is important.

"Proper utilisation of Nepal's immense potential of hydropower generation can transform the development landscape of our region with clean energy."

Pointing that there is a lot of scope for cooperation between Nepal and India in the field of information technology, the Foreign Minister stressed the need to expand bilateral cooperation in the field of education, science and technology. Stating that Nepal's development and economic prosperity would also serve the interests of its neighbours, he said a peaceful neighbourhood was Nepal's desire.

The event was organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in honour of former ambassador and former foreign secretary Prof Yadunath Khanal here. Khanal had served the nation as foreign secretary for two terms and ambassador to China, India and the United States.

Nepal shares a border of over 1,850 km with five Indian states - Sikkim, West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Land-locked Nepal relies heavily on India for the transportation of goods and services. (PTI)

Pak court adjourns hearing of 190 mn pounds graft case against Imran Khan over 'security concerns'

ISLAMABAD, May 15: An accountability court in Pakistan on Wednesday adjourned the hearing of the 190 million pounds corruption case against Imran Khan till Friday, citing "security concerns" at the high-security Adiala prison where the former prime minister is currently imprisoned, media reports said.

The 71-year-old Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder has been lodged at the high-security Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi since August last year.

The Islamabad accountability court accepted the request of the Adiala Jail's superintendent to adjourn the hearing of the case against Khan due to 'security concerns', The Express Tribune newspaper reported. The court adjourned the hearing till May 17, it said.

In his request, the jail official cited reports received by the Punjab Home Department of the threat alerts on prisons in Punjab by banned organisations.

Asserting that the Adiala jail is the most sensitive prison in the province and houses more than 7,000 prisoners,

the official said that criminals involved in serious crimes, including high-profile political entities, are also incarcerated there. Security threats were also received for the Mianwali, Dera Ghazi Khan, Rawalpindi (Adiala) and Attock jails, said the request.

Following the reports, security was increased in and around the prison, and a mock exercise was also conducted by security forces there.

Surrounding areas were also being combed by security personnel, the paper said. On Tuesday, the Punjab Home Department imposed a ban on meeting of relatives and others with all prisoners in the Adiala Jail for three days owing to security concerns, the Dawn newspaper reported. A ban on providing any items to prisoners was also imposed.

In March, the Punjab government banned Khan from holding any meetings, including with his family members, lawyers and party leaders for two weeks at the Adiala Jail. The Al-Qadir Trust case is about the settlement of 190



million pounds, about Rs 50 billion, which the UK's National Crime Agency sent to Pakistan after recovering the amount from a Pakistani property tycoon. Being the prime minister then, Khan, instead of depositing in the national treasury, allowed the businessman to use the amount to partly settle a fine of about Rs 450 billion imposed by the Supreme Court some years ago.

Reportedly, the tycoon, in return, gifted about 57 acres of land to a trust set up by Khan and Bushra Bibi to establish the Al-Qadir University in the Sohawa area of the Jhelum district of Punjab.

In December 2023, the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) initiated an investigation against the former cricketer-turned-politician, his wife and others in the case of alleged acquisition of hundreds of canals of land under the name of Al Qadir University Trust, resulting in a reported loss of 190 million pounds to the exchequer.

Since his removal from power in a no-confidence motion in April 2022, Khan has been convicted in at least four cases, including the cipher (secret diplomatic communication) case. (PTI)

Thai prime minister promises investigation after activist died in detention

BANGKOK, May 15: Thailand's prime minister on Wednesday offered his condolences to the family of a young activist who died in detention after a monthlong hunger strike, amid a public debate on the country's justice system.

Netiporn "Bung" Sanesangkhom, 28, died on Tuesday after suffering cardiac arrest while she was being detained at Bangkok's Central Women's Correctional Institution on charges that included defaming the monarchy. She had been on a hunger strike to protest the revocation of her bail in January.

Her death has prompted calls for reviewing a judicial process that allows people accused of politically-motivated, nonviolent offenses to be held for extended periods ahead of trial.

Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin told reporters that Netiporn's death was a loss that

no one wanted, and said he has ordered the Justice Ministry to investigate.

Officials from the Corrections Department said during a press conference on Wednesday that while Netiporn appeared fatigued following her prolonged hunger strike, she had been well and there was no sign that she would develop such critical conditions, and that they had done everything to try to save her life.

They also said the activist had already resumed eating, but refused to take other supplements that could help her body take nutrients better after fasting for so long. They declined to speculate on the possible cause of death until the autopsy results are released.

An autopsy was carried out on Wednesday morning and the initial results are expected on Thursday, said Netiporn's lawyer Kritsadang Nutcharat. But Kritsadang told re-

porters that he doesn't believe the Corrections Department's version of events.

"She died in your arms. If she had been well, she wouldn't have died," he said, adding that the public should focus on the fact that Netiporn died while being detained, not whether she had been eating.

Netiporn was a member of the activist group Thaluwang, loosely translated as "breaking through the palace." Its members are known for aggressive campaigns demanding reform of the monarchy and abolition of the law that makes it illegal to defame members of the royal family.

Until recent years, criticism of Thailand's monarchy was taboo, and insulting or defaming key royal family members remains punishable by up to 15 years in prison under a law usually referred to as Article 112 of Thailand's Criminal Code. (AP)

Young South Koreans are increasingly drawn to Buddhism via social media-savvy influencers

SEOUL, May 15: A South Korean deejay dressed as a Buddhist monk bounced up and down on stage while playing electronic music and shouting: "This too shall pass!" The performance brought cheers from a crowd of thousands at an annual lantern-lighting festival over the weekend to celebrate the Buddha's birthday.

Religious belief in South Korea has been on the decline for years. In 2021, just 22% of South Koreans in their 20s identified as religious, compared to 45% in 2004, according to a Gallup poll. But that might be changing as social media fuels an uptick in interest in Buddhism among young people.

The festival DJ, Youn Sung Ho, is a significant contributor to this trend. Youn, who is also a comedian, said he has received much support from the younger generations, especially Millennials and Gen Z, for his Buddhist monk alter ego, whom he calls NewJeansNim.

Youn said he created the persona last year when he was deejaying at the lantern-lighting ceremony. "I wasn't NewJeansNim at the time. I was the comedian Youn Sung Ho. It

was just my authentic self."

But he wore a hanbok, the traditional Korean clothing that resembles a monk's robe, and said the performance video drew millions of views on social media. "That's when I thought, 'Oh, I need to make a character quickly,'" he said.

He carefully built his alter ego while seeking support from Buddhist leaders in South Korea, trying to balance popular culture with authentic Buddhist teachings.

NewJeansNim is a hybrid moniker of Sunim, a Korean title for Buddhist monks, and NewJeans, a Dharma name that a senior monk gave him, Youn said.

Youn's DJ-monk persona has attracted many young South Korean adults to Buddhism, including Kwon Dohyun, a university student who attended the lantern-lighting festival with two friends and was excited to see NewJeansNim perform.

"Isn't the hairstyle really hip?" Kwon told The Associated Press, adding that his interest in Buddhism also stemmed from the perceived inclusivity and openness of the faith.

Youn's popularity especially among young



adults was apparent at the weekend's performance as they cheered while he sang lyrics from his latest song: "Suffering because your paycheck didn't go up... My stocks are down; Monday can't come soon enough."

Youn believes his attempts to break the traditional mold have struck a chord with young South Koreans. "It was so new and exciting to people for someone to make electronic music and make people jump, jump, in this serious, solemn religion of Buddhism," he said.

Youn said most people associate Bud-

French prez convenes top ministers to discuss spiralling violence in territory of New Caledonia

PARIS, May 15: At least two people were killed and three were seriously injured overnight in the French Pacific territory of New Caledonia, French media reported Wednesday, as President Emmanuel Macron convened a meeting of top ministers to discuss the spiralling violence.

It was the third day of violent unrest over a constitutional reform pushed by Paris that has roiled the archipelago, which has long sought independence.

The special defence and security council meeting called by Macron on Wednesday typically brings together a limited group of officials, including Prime Minister Gabriel Attal and the ministers for defence, interior, economy and foreign affairs.

On Tuesday, the French Interior Ministry sent police reinforcements to New Caledonia, which long served as a prison colony and now hosts a French military base. Four mobile gendarmerie squadrons are being deployed as reinforcements, including 15 gendarmes from an elite intervention unit.

French broadcaster BFM reported that two people had been killed and three gravely injured in the unrest overnight.

French authorities in the territory said more than 130 people have been arrested since Monday in the violence that has raged across the archipelago, with decades of tensions between indigenous Kanaks seeking independence and descendants of colonisers who want to remain part of France.

Clashes between police and protesters have continued in and around the capital, Noumea, despite a curfew and ban on gatherings.

Schools have been closed "until further notice" and the main airport, La Tontoura, "remains closed to commercial flights."

The territory's top French official, High Commissioner Louis Le Franc, warned that if calm is not restored, there will be "many deaths" in the Noumea metropolitan area, where protests over the voting rights turned violent on Tuesday. (AP)

dism with quiet temples in the mountains, wind chimes, chanting, quiet meditation and sitting still.

"People think these are Buddhism, but what I am doing now is the opposite," he said.

Another Buddhist who has been garnering young followers on social media is Venerable Beomjeong, who is also known as Kotsnim, which means "flower monk" in Korean. He is active on Instagram where he communicates with Buddhists and non-believers alike.

Beomjeong frequently uploads photos of himself with captions featuring Buddhist teachings and his thoughts.

"People think monks are supposed to be noble, they are supposed to be in the mountains, they are supposed to be purer than anyone else," he said, adding he hopes to dispel such notions about monks and Buddhism in Korean society through social media.

He said he receives many messages asking him basic questions about Buddhism such as: Are monks not supposed to eat meat? Are monks allowed to marry? He's also been asked: "Will you marry me?" (AP)

Women folk protests against stationing of Assam Rifles

'No objection to the deployment of other security forces, other than the Assam Rifles'

IMPHAL, May 15: A large number of women blocked troops of Assam Rifles who came to take post at an inspection bungalow (IB) of Manipur Water Resources department in Kakching district of Manipur. Reports said that a column of 33 Assam Rifles came to take post at the IB situated near Keirak-Sekmai Barrage in Kakching on Wednesday.

However, a large number of residents of Keirak, Sekmajin and Wabagai areas, mostly womenfolk, protested against the stationing of the Central paramilitary in the area. They forced the vehicles of the Assam Rifles to move back from the area.

The protesters said that they have no objection to the deployment of other security forces, may be the



state or Central force other than the Assam Rifles in the area.

"We have no trust on the Assam

Rifles and will not allow stationing of the paramilitary force in the area at any cost," a woman leader among

the protesters said.

Meanwhile, timely intervention by a strong team of police led by SDPO Kakching and OC of the Kakching police station prevented any unwanted incident arising out of obstruction given to the movement of the security force.

In a separate case, the protest against alleged move to replace troops of 9 Gorkha Regiment by Assam Rifles at a security outpost at Leimaram, a village in Bishnupur district adjoining Kangpokpi district intensified on Wednesday.

Meitei dominated villages in Leimaram areas have been protesting in the past three days against an alleged move of the authorities to replace the troops of 9 Gorkha Regiment deploying in the area by the Assam Rifles. (N/N)

ICJ statement on deportation of Myanmar nationals baseless: CSCHR



IMPHAL, May 15: Civil Society Coalition for Human Rights in Manipur and the United Nations (CSCHR) has strongly reacted to a recent statement of International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) regarding the deportation of 77 Myanmar nationals which the later termed it a forced deportation.

To date, there have been no instances of forcibly deporting any of the refugees or immigrants who entered Indian territory in Manipur.

Neither the government nor civil society organizations have any intention of mistreating these unfortunate people who fled their homes to save their lives, CSCHR convener Phulindro Kongsam wrote a letter to the ICJ while giving a detailed account of the situation in Manipur pertaining to the immigrants.

The CSCHR appreciated ICJ's acknowledgment and concern for the human rights situation in the Western Southeast Asian region (WESEA), particularly in Manipur (India) and Myanmar.

However, CSCHR felt compelled to bring to your attention some discrepancies in the information presented in your recent statement, it said. "It seems that the ICJ's conclusions on the issue of illegal immigration and periodic exodus from Myanmar to Manipur may be based on misinformed or unauthenticated sources, as they do not align with the ground reality that we have observed and worked with over the years," Kongsam stated.

As a group within CSCHR comprising organizations working under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) for several decades, have been closely monitoring and addressing the issue of immigration due to instability in the neighboring countries.

"However, we have never observed any instances where competent agencies dealing with the matter have breached or violated fundamental principles of human rights protection," he also wrote in the letter.

He stated that the recent repatriation of 77 Myanmar nationals was conducted by the district adminis-

trations on both sides of the border, and it was their own choice to return to their respective villages as the situation in the area returned to normal.

They expressed a desire to resettle in their native villages, and there were no lapses or intentions of forcible deportation.

Since the eruption of violent conflict in Myanmar, thousands of Myanmar nationals have fled their homes and entered the sovereign territory of India in Manipur and Mizoram sectors since 2021.

Initiatives have been taken by the government to identify them, and several shelter homes have been built as temporary shelters.

However, the majority of the immigrants or refugees have shown reluctance to stay in these camps and have opted to build permanent cottages in the area illegally.

Kongsam stated that according to a survey conducted by a government-appointed cabinet sub-committee headed by Minister Letpao Haokip, upon arrival at the site of inquiry, the majority of the immigrants or refugees protested against staying in the shelter camps and instead began building permanent cottages inside the Gamphajol Areas, planning to settle permanently without undergoing any due citizenship processes under established law.

"Despite this, we have been urging the government to provide assistance for all immigrants and allow them to stay in the identified camps set up by the government until they are willing to return to their respective native places," CSCHR convener stated in the letter. To date, there have been no instances of forcibly deporting any of the refugees or immigrants who entered Indian territory, and neither the government nor civil society organizations have any intention of mistreating these unfortunate people who fled their homes to save their lives. While denying the forced deportation which the ICJ termed in its statement, the CSCHR provided a brief data regarding illegal immigrants detected in Kamjong district of the state as of May 7, 2024 while putting the total cumulative cases of detection of illegal migrants at 5457.

Of this total, biometrics data of 5173 have been captured and a total of 329 have moved back voluntarily to Myanmar. No FIR cases registered for any of the illegal immigrants to date, he stated.

Kongsam also mentioned about a recent letter written to the Manipur chief minister by the concerned elected representative of the area in which Leishiyu Keishing has indicated an alarming situation with deep concern over the increase in criminal activities, where local law enforcement agencies are finding it difficult to apprehend and control the situation.

The immigrant population has outnumbered the local indigenous inhabitants in the said area, as reported by the concerned MLA.

This phenomenon is not unique and rare, as many European countries are already experiencing such alarming situations due to immigrants. "However, in Manipur, it is even more concerning as the immigrant population has been continuously engaging in various serious illegal activities such as illicit drug and small arms trafficking from across the border, massive opium poppy cultivation in encroached immigrant population infiltrated areas, massive deforestation, and the expansion of 996 illegal villages solely by the immigrant population," the letter also said.

Additionally, immigrant armed groups have been involved in the recent violence since May 3, 2023, putting the indigenous population of the region in jeopardy.

"We appreciate ICJ's concern for the people who have been suffering under the guise of political instability and geopolitical interests in the region. However, we urge ICJ to ensure that any future statements or actions are based on accurate information and a comprehensive understanding of the situation on the ground," CSCHR convener stated in the letter.

At the same time, he also stated that CSCHR said it is ready to extend necessary cooperation and coordinate with ICJ to uphold the principle of basic human rights and deliver justice to those who need it the most. However, it cautioned against drawing conclusions without thorough investigation. (N/N)

Meghalaya Police chief seeks Court's intervention to quash FIR against him

SHILLONG, May 15: Meghalaya Director General of Police (DGP) Lajja Ram Bishnoi has filed a petition before the Meghalaya High Court seeking quashing of the FIR filed by suspended cop GK Langrai against him for using a fake number plate.

This came days after the FIR was registered at Sadar Police Station.

It was registered under Sections 409 (criminal breach of trust), 467 (forgery), 471 (using as genuine a forged document), and 120B (criminal conspiracy) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), along with section 192 of the Motor Vehicles Act.

The DGP in his petition has alleged that FIR is not maintainable and that it should be set aside and quashed.

He claimed that the FIR was nothing but vengeance and grudge against him since the suspended police officer had faced action during his tenure.

On May 9, former Assistant Inspector General (AIG) of Meghalaya Police GK Langrai filed an FIR against DGP Lajja Ram Bishnoi for allegedly misuse and tampering of registration number plate of his vehicle.

The complaint filed with Sadar Police Station, also came close to the heel of Bishnoi's retirement

on May 19.

Langrai, who was arrested on November 2, 2022 for allegedly misappropriating funds sanctioned for the construction of the Nationwide Emergency Response System (NERS) building in Shillong, also sought action against the members of the Inquiry Committee in the matter.

In the FIR, the former AIG said that the Enquiry Committee constituted dated July 18, 2022, in its report contained in Para 1 of page 3, states as follows: "One Hyundai Verna which is parked at Central Workshop has been allotted a fake number and no Registration of the vehicle was done by AIG-A, since no documents are available".

He said that the said report appears to have been prepared in any easy chair i.e. to say without making an on the spot inquiry and cross checking the record of the transport department.

As per a letter under Right to Information (RTI) dated July 27, 2023 about the said vehicle i.e. Verna 1.6 VTVT is registered with the transport department, government of Meghalaya, Shillong as ML-02-A-0001, in the name of the Director General of Police, government of Meghalaya.

"The aforesaid information under the RTI by the transport de-

partment, government of Meghalaya, nails down the said report of the Inquiry Committee, which calls for necessary action against the members of the Committee," Langrai said.

Further in the FIR, the former AIG said that the another aspect of the matter is really intriguing as would be evident from the following facts: "Lajja Ram Bishnoi, who is holding the chair of the Director General of Police, Meghalaya, came to Shillong, to join his present posting on May 17, 2022 in a white Kia Carnival Limousine model vehicle, which was having registration of Government of Assam, but thereafter, it appears Lajja Ram Bishnoi, in an act of criminal conspiracy, changed the number plate of the vehicle and now he is putting a new number plate bearing registration number ML-02-A-0001, which number is registered for the aforesaid vehicle Verna 1.6 VTVT."

He said it has further been learnt that the said white Kia Carnival Limousine is requisitioned vehicle, for the purpose, best known to Lajja Ram Bishnoi, but he is using the same for his personal use, as would be evident from the photographs of the use and his presence in the vehicle. (N/N)

MSCW chairperson to be appointed soon: M'laya minister

SHILLONG, May 15: Meghalaya social welfare minister, Paul Lyngdoh recently informed that the appointment of the new chairperson of the Meghalaya State Commission for Women (MSCW) will be made once the model code of conduct (MCC) period is over even as he attributed the growing trend of crimes against women to the increasing abuse of social media and the lacunae in the Information Technology (IT) policy of the country.

Speaking to reporters, Lyngdoh said there has been no such thing as a 'delay' in the appointment of the new MSCW chairperson. The post has been lying vacant for almost a year now following the resignation of the former MSCW chairperson Phidalia Toi in June last year. Earlier, the department had shortlisted four names for appointment as the chairperson. Commenting on the increasing crimes against women in the state, Lyngdoh said, "This is a growing trend which to a very large extent can be attributed to changing moral attitude and the entire outlook of citizens especially given the increasing abuse of social media." Also holding the IT policy of the country accountable, the minister said, "There are a number of lacunae in the IT policy being followed in this country, which is why people have free access to a number of sites, which actually encourage the trend of disrespecting women, abusing them and physically attacking them." (N/N)

Need to restrict drugs to M'laya at entry points: Minister

SHILLONG, May 15: Meghalaya social welfare minister, Paul Lyngdoh has emphasized the need to detect and stop the supply of drug and other narcotic substances at the entry points to Meghalaya.

"I have pointed out to the deputy chief minister in-charge Home (police) that we need to increase our policing at the entry points. 70% of the narcotics that come to Meghalaya come from East Jaintia Hills district and policing in that district has to be strengthened," Lyngdoh told reporters. "But again that will only happen when the current recruitment to the police where about 3000 more personnel will be joining the police force and 500 volunteers of the home guards will also be employed. It is only when those things happen that we can actually effectively curtail the efficacy of the drug network," he said. He said that Meghalaya has one of the lowest police to civilian ratios in the entire country. Stating that the government had already declared a war against drugs, Lyngdoh said

that the fact that there has been more detention, more cases being unearthed and more of the violators being brought to book shows the efficacy of the government and of the various interventions that the government has announced. Lyngdoh then said, "You will recall that the PITNDPS was invoked last year. Cases against certain frequent offenders have already been built and these people surely come under detention under this revised Act." He further informed that the department had also proposed appointment of a new mission director for the DREAM project as the current director is tight with a number of responsibilities in the home department. On whether it is the right approach by NGOs to apprehend drug users, the minister however said there is need to build a rapport with society and traditional institutions are requested to play their role in the setting up of deaddiction and rehabilitation centres at the village and locality level. (PTI)

3-day-long International Conference on Biological Sciences

Book of Abstracts was also released by the delegates during the inaugural session



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 15: A three-day-long International Conference on "Emerging Frontiers in Biological Sciences: Focus on Climate Change, Agrotechnology and Entrepreneurship" has been inaugurated at the Central Auditorium of the University of Science and Technology Meghalaya in the presence of Prof Mahesh Narayan, chief of the Biochemistry Division at University of Texas, El Paso, USA; Prof. S. J. Joshi Deputy Director, Amity Institute of Microbial Technology; Prof GD Sharma, Vice Chancellor USTM, and other delegates and a host of participants.

The Conference has been organised by the department of Botany USTM in collaboration with the Bodoland University and Botanical Society of Assam from May 15-17.

A Book of Abstracts was also released by the delegates during the inaugural session.

Addressing the gathering, Prof GD Sharma, vice chancellor USTM said, "This Conference is going to help our students by exposing them to different emerging areas giving opportunities to do research in those areas and publish papers. More than 168 research papers are to be presented by researchers at this conference."

Now things are changing and academic curriculum has given more emphasis on application-based education, he added.

Speaking on the occasion as the chief guest, Prof Mahesh Narayan thanked USTM and said, "The facilities here are fantastic and I think the students have everything they need. I am looking forward to future collaborations with USTM". He said that entrepreneurship has changed the role of biotechnology, microbiology, and agro-economy in a place like India.

Addressing the gathering, Prof. S. J. Joshi said that the theme of the Confer-

ence has connected the topic of climate change and agriculture as India is an agriculture-based economy.

He also encouraged the students to be entrepreneurs and become job giver, instead of job seekers.

In this context, Mahbul Hoque, chancellor USTM said, "This conference marks a significant milestone in our collective endeavor to address the pressing challenges posed by climate change. In today's world, where the impact of climate change looms large, it has become imperative for us to adopt interdisciplinary approaches that integrate biological sciences, climate science, and engineering."

Earlier, the welcome address was delivered by Dr Bedabati Choudhury, Head, Department of Botany USTM. The inaugural session was also addressed by Dr RK Sharma, Advisor USTM, Dr Hemen Sharma, Head of the Department of Botany, Bodoland University; Prof PK Baruah, president, Botanical Society of Assam and Dr R M Kakati, Dean School of Biological Sciences USTM.

Some of the themes of different plenary sessions include Exploring Biodiversity: A Journey Through Systematics, Community-Based Conservation, Genetic Diversity and Breeding Innovations, Ethnobiology and Indigenous Knowledge, Environmental Sustainability through Traditional Practices, Biological Monitoring of Ecosystem Health, Harmony in Flux: Nurturing Ecology Amidst Climate Change, Eco-friendly Biotechnological Innovations, Ecology Environment & Climate change. The inaugural session of the international conference ended with a vote of thanks delivered by Dr Milu Rani Das, department of Botany USTM.

Agriculture policy in Manipur need of the hour



IMPHAL, May 15: The need for having an agricultural policy of its own in Manipur was stressed as World Farmers' Day was celebrated in Manipur on Tuesday.

Loumi Yaipha Lup (LOYALUP), a farmer's body, hosted one of the celebrations in Imphal's Manipur Press Club.

Addressing the occasion, director of Horticulture and Soil Conservation, K Debadutta Sharma said that while celebrating the day, there is the need for a thorough deliberation on the plights and concerns of the farmers in the state.

Right from non-availability of irrigation facility, the plights of the farmers are numerous. The farmers of the state are struggling for their survival despite all these odds, he said.

Addressing these numerous plights of the farmers will take time, the officer added. Now, the time has come to find ways to address the plights of the farmers so as to bring forward the progress, the state would need to be self-sufficient which would be able to attend only when the plights of the farmers are addressed, the director further said.

In this regard the responsibility of the or-

ganizations working in the interest of the farmers is also very important besides a comprehensive policy and programme of the government.

These organizations need to press the government for implementing various farmers' oriented welfare schemes in a fair manner.

One of the main reasons for farmers of the state suffering is the absence of a specific policy for agriculture. The state needs implementation of an agriculture policy.

The neighboring state of Assam has its own agriculture policy, he said.

Meanwhile, the director expressed apprehension of failure of various horticulture projects in the hill areas of the state owing to the ongoing prolonged ethnic crisis.

As the projects are on the verge of failure, there is the need for extra efforts on the part of the farmers to increase the productivity of the state.

There is the need for growing suitable crops in the fields not affected by the ongoing crisis. This also would need a specific policy or programme of the government, the director further added. (N/N)

Stage set for Naga Plebiscite Day today

DIMAPUR, May 15: Naga leaders from various regions have arrived in Kohima and Dimapur to commemorate Naga Plebiscite Day on May 16. Nagas in New Delhi will also commemorate the day in a big way.

Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR) is all set to commemorate Naga Plebiscite Day at NBCC Convention Centre in Kohima. FNR has invited several Naga organisations and prominent leaders to participate in the programme.

Meanwhile, NSCN-IM has prepared to commemorate the event at General Headquarters Church of Naga Army, Hebron Camp off Dimapur. According to the NSCN-IM programme, the event has been christened as "Commemoration of Naga Plebiscite 1951".

Naga Army chief, Gen. Ningkhan Shimray will give the welcome address on the occasion, while presidential speech will be delivered by NSCN-IM vice chairman Tongmeth Wangnao.

Deputy atilonser (deputy prime minister) Gen. VS Atem, secretary general of Naga People's Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR) Neingulo Krome, general secretary of Naga Hoho (NH) Atoho Kihoo, president of Naga Students' Federation (NSF) Medovi Rhi, vice president of Naga Mothers' Association (NMA) Apeuna Iheilung, convener of Global Naga Forum (GNF) Chuba Ozukum, president of United Naga Council (UNC) Ng Lorho, president of Tirap Changlang Longding People's Front (Arunachal Pradesh) Ngunchim Changmi, president of ENPO Tsapiliu Sangtam and representative of Naga People's Organisation (Myanmar) Michael Kyarlynn will also deliver speeches on the occasion at Camp Hebron. (N/N)

Muslims divided over CAA narrative in Matua bastion

Schism within Muslim community in Bongaon is palpable, mirroring the broader national discourse surrounding CAA

BONGAON (WB), May 15: In the Matua stronghold of Bongaon, considered the cradle of the citizenship movement that shaped the CAA, there's a diverse array of beliefs, aspirations, and divisions within the Muslim community.

The Matuas, a Hindu refugee community originally from East Bengal (now Bangladesh), has long been a dominant force in Bongaon's socio-political landscape. With their roots deeply entrenched in the struggle for citizenship rights, the CAA represents a beacon of hope, promising a pathway to citizenship for persecuted Hindu minorities from neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

The Indo-Bangla border region, characterised by lush fields and tight-knit communities, is currently experiencing a notable split as political parties adopt contrasting positions on contentious issues, with apprehensions of NRC looming large. Juxtaposed against this narrative, Bongaon's Muslim population faces uncertainty regarding the CAA, adding to their challenges.

While some see it (CAA) as a compassionate Act to help persecuted minorities, others regard it as a means of discrimination, worsening already existing socio-religious



tensions. "What is the need for CAA when all of us are citizens here. How come we can cast our votes and have all necessary documents," said 62-year-old Amirul Mondal of Mallickpur village along the Indo-Bangla border in Bongaon.

Mintu Rahman, a weathered farmer with hands calloused from years of toil, voiced the fears of many. "Why target Muslims," he questioned, "When their roots run deep into the soil of this motherland? It is discriminatory that in CAA, Muslims have been omitted. All religions should have been allowed under the Act," he said.

The schism within Muslim community in Bongaon is palpable, mirroring the broader national discourse surrounding CAA. On one end of the spectrum are those who vehemently oppose the Act, viewing it as an assault on the secular fabric of the nation. They argue that the CAA, by explicitly excluding Muslims, contravenes the principles of equality enshrined in the Constitution, thereby marginalising an already vulnerable community.

Conversely, there are Muslims in Bongaon who, albeit reluctantly, express tacit support for CAA. Their rationale stems from a prag-

matic assessment of the socio-political landscape, where aligning with the dominant narrative might offer a semblance of security and acceptance.

"CAA is for persecuted minorities from neighbouring countries. The Act is about giving citizenship and not taking it away. Muslims like us who have been living here for generations are citizens of this country," Amirul Dafadar told PTI.

Amirul, BJP's booth president of Sayestnagar in Bongaon, has been tediously reaching out to every Muslim household in his area trying to apprise people about the "negative campaign" going over CAA.

"It is the TMC which is instigating the Muslims against the CAA. They are misguiding them," he said.

Moidul Sheikh echoed similar sentiments, emphasising that as long as their identity and citizenship remained unquestioned, people from the community should not worry about the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) as much as they did about the NRC in Assam.

"If our rights and status are secure, there is no need for undue concern regarding the CAA. We are opposed to NRC but not against CAA," he said.

However, this support is often ac-

companied by a sense of apprehension, as they grapple with the moral implications of endorsing a policy that appears to "disenfranchise their community".

"Many people say that we are going against our community but it is not about opposing or supporting anything. It is about a humane approach," Moidul Sheikh said.

The recent enactment of the CAA has sparked fears of a potential NRC exercise that could leave many in the Muslim community vulnerable to statelessness.

"With the implementation of the CAA, there is a looming fear that the NRC might follow suit, subjecting us to scrutiny and uncertainty about our citizenship status," Bapan Sheikh said, echoing the sentiments of many in Bongaon.

A large section of Muslim residents fear that they may face similar challenges in proving their citizenship, especially considering the lack of documentation.

"As Muslims are persecuted minorities, they have all their documents in place. They are very thorough about their documentation. In Assam also, we had witnessed a similar situation where more Hindus got omitted than Muslims," political analyst Moidul Islam said. (PTI)

This election is to punish those who are anti-Ram, anti-national: Nadda



MOTIHARI (BIHAR), May 15: Launching a scathing attack on opposition INDIA bloc, BJP national president JP Nadda on Wednesday said this election is about holding those accountable who oppose the core values of 'Ram', nationalism, reservation, Sanatan Dharma and the Constitution and hinder the Centre's mission to make India 'Viksit Bharat'.

He accused the opposition leaders, including RJD, of misleading the electorate in the name of providing employment to youths.

"They will first take the land of the poor before giving them jobs. If anyone can do good for the poor, then it's only the NDA government at the Centre led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi," said Nadda while addressing an election rally here in support of Lovely Anand, the NDA nominee from Sheohar Lok Sabha constituency.

The allusion was apparently to the land-for-jobs scam during RJD supremo's tenure as the railway minister in the Manmohan Singh government. The scam is currently being probed by the Enforcement Directorate (ED).

"When Sonia Gandhi was the chairperson of UPA, she had raised questions of the existence of Lord Ram and the then government gave an affidavit in the court terming him as fiction (imaginary). This election is to punish those who are anti-Ram, anti-national, anti-reservation, anti-Sanatan Dharma and against the Constitution. This election is also to punish those who are opposing the Centre's initiatives to make India a 'Viksit Bharat'," Nadda said.

"Tamil Nadu minister Udhayanidhi Stalin had denigrated Sanatan Dharma as dengue, malaria etc. No Congress leader condemned his statement. They are anti-Sanatan

Dharma," said Nadda. Nadda said the party led by Lalu Prasad stands for 'Rishwatkhor Jungleraj Dal'. He accused the opposition coalition of "protecting" corrupt people, whereas Modi was "striving hard" to end corruption in the country. "A majority of the leaders of the INDIA bloc, including those of the Congress and RJD, are either in jail or out on bail," he added.

"We have a PM who is working for the country and on the other hand, you have the INDIA bloc, a 'parivar bachao, dynasty bachao' alliance," he said and alleged that Rahul Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi, Lalu Prasad and Tejashwi Yadav are all out on bail.

Reiterating that the BJP-led NDA will win 400-plus Lok Sabha seats, including all 40 in Bihar, Nadda asserted that the eastern state has developed only under NDA rule.

"Bihar is also likely to get Rs 3 lakh crore aid from the Centre for its overall development," he said. "Modi's only aim is welfare of every person. But INDIA bloc leaders want to give reservation on religious lines. The Congress is giving tickets to those belonging to 'tukde-tukde' gang," Nadda added.

On Indian economy, Nadda said, "All major economies in the world are in trouble and there is only one bright spot in this economic scenario of the world and that is India. We were on the 11th spot when Modi came to power and now we are the fifth-largest economy leaving behind Britain and other strong countries. India will be the third major economy in the coming years."

Sheohar, Valmiki Nagar, Paschim Champaran, Purvi Champaran, Vaishali, Gopalganj, Siwan and Maharanjan will go to polls on May 25 (sixth phase) in Bihar. (PTI)

Congress wanted to allocate 15 pc of budget to minorities, says PM Modi at poll rally

NASHIK, May 15: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday alleged the Congress during its previous rule wanted to allocate 15 per cent of the government budget for minorities and vowed not to allow splitting of budget or reservation in jobs and education on the basis of religion. Addressing an election rally at Pimpalgaon Baswant in north Maharashtra's Nashik district in support of Mahayuti candidates -- Union minister Bharati Pawar (BJP) and Hemant Godse (Shiv Sena) -- the PM said splitting budget on religious lines was dangerous. The BJP's star campaigner maintained Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, the chief architect of the Constitution, was firmly against religion-based reservation in jobs and education. Modi claimed the Congress, when in power at the Centre, had drawn up plans to allocate 15 per cent of the total budget to minorities. "When I was the chief minister (of Gujarat), the Congress had brought up this proposal. The BJP opposed this move strongly and hence it could not be implemented. But the Congress wants to bring this proposal again," he told the gathering. The PM asserted Ambedkar was against religion-based quota, but the Congress wants to take away reservation rights of SCs/STs/OBCs and give them to Muslims.

"Modi is the chowkidar (watchman) of rights of deprived sections of society and will never let the Congress take away their rights," the BJP stalwart declared. Modi said the ongoing Lok Sabha polls are about electing a prime minister who takes strong decisions for the country. In the last 10 years, the PM said, his government has provided free ration, water, electricity, houses and gas connections irrespective of religion. "Welfare schemes are made for every one," he maintained. Without naming NCP (SP) president Sharad Pawar, Modi said, "An INDI alliance leader from Maharashtra knows the Congress is losing badly (in elections). So, he has suggested that small parties merge with the Congress so that it at least stands as an opposition party."

"When the duplicate Shiv Sena (referring to Sena UBT) merges with the Congress, I will remember Balasaheb Thackeray because the late leader dreamt of a grand Ram mandir in Ayodhya and abolishing Article 370," he added. (PTI)

Onus to change Bengal's political violence culture rests with its leaders: TMC star nominee Dev

JHARGRAM, May 15: There is a dire need to change the culture of political violence in West Bengal and its prime responsibility rests with the state's political leaders, said Trinamool Congress superstar candidate and aspiring MP for third term Dipak Adhikari aka Dev.

Speaking exclusively to PTI in the aftermath of the fourth phase of polls where the ugly, albeit familiar, picture of poll-related violence returned to haunt certain pockets of Bengal after a relatively peaceful first three phases, Adhikari claimed he has initiated such changes from his home constituency of Ghatil in the state's West Midnapore district.

"Of course, I am concerned with the reported incidents of violence," Dev said, "That's why I strictly stay away from using abusive language during my campaigns. I never say anything which could instigate my followers to fight, what's supposed to be a political battle, by physical means. I think the responsibility primarily lies with the political leaders to dissuade their workers from indulging in violence. This is as much true for Bengal as for the rest of the country." The actor-leader was speaking after his road show in Jhargram in support of TMC candidate and Padma Shri awardee Kalipada Soren. While scattered incidents of violence

from Durgapur and Birbhum were reported throughout the day during the polls on Monday, some resulting from clashes between TMC and BJP supporters with workers on both sides and at least one security personnel of BJP candidate Dilip Ghosh injured, a TMC worker was found murdered in Ketugram, Birbhum barely hours ahead of the polls.

"Both leaders and their followers need to change. Voters should vote for those who are deserving and who would bring about a change in their lives. They should vote for leaders who respect people and not for those who talk rubbish on stage," Dev said. "I may not be able to change the world, but if I can change myself and if people can see that change in me and learn something, I think my job is done," he continued.

Told how pleasantly the day began during Monday's polls when the two opposing candidates of the Burdwan-Durgapur seat, Dilip Ghosh and TMC's Kirti Azad, were seen greeting and hugging each other during a chance meeting and how quickly that deteriorated into the alleged attacks on the BJP candidate's convoy and clashes with police, Dev said he too was saddened with the developments. "I think a wrong message has gone to workers at the grassroots. I believe the leaders will first have to decide

and bring about a change in their behaviour, and the way they speak and conduct themselves in public. Only then can they hope to find some resonance to those from the people on the ground," he maintained. Adhikari insisted that political leaders should first spread the message of "friendship between workers" irrespective of their political affiliation.

"That aspect is lacking. A BJP supporter encountering a TMC candidate inevitably shouts Jai Shri Ram and there are Joy Bangla slogans when the vice versa happens. The acrimony starts spreading from there. We should stop this first and start from the basics. The message should be loud and clear that we are not here to fight a war. It's just a political battle and whoever wins would be spreading love in the first place," the incumbent MP said.

Dev declared that he has sent out a "strict message" to TMC workers in his home constituency not to shout such slogans, not even Joy Bangla, if they come face to face with their BJP counterparts during campaigns. "I am trying to propagate a new political culture in Ghatil which is perhaps different from what's happening in the rest of the seats in the state," he said.

Talking of the 18 seats which have already polled in Bengal, the Tolly-

gungue superstar, however, predicted a confident win for the Trinamool Congress.

"Psephology is not exactly my area of expertise. But I must have visited at least 14 of the 18 seats which went to the polls and my takeaway is extremely positive. I think we will be way ahead this time compared to what our number of seats was in 2019," he said.

Asked if he was enjoying poll campaigns despite his initial reluctance to join the poll fray, Dev said he realised that people have begun taking him seriously only now. Which is why, he said, he wants to finish what he started before hanging up his boots.

"The vibe I am getting from people this year is the trust they are reposing in me, which is a rare thing in politics. They think that someone like me should be in politics. Right from my involvement with the Ghatil Master Plan for mitigating flood impact in my constituency to the way I am conducting myself in public life, I think people have started taking me seriously only this year although I have been in politics for a decade," he said.

Adhikari defended his party needing his "star power" to reach out to voters in a tribal belt like Jhargram by stating there's nothing wrong with that move. (PTI)

Will give 10 kg free ration to poor if INDIA bloc comes to power: Kharge

Will give 10 kg free ration to poor if INDIA bloc comes to power: Kharge

LUCKNOW (UP), May 15: Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge announced Wednesday that if the INDIA bloc is voted to power, it will double the quantity of free rations provided by the BJP government to the poor. He referred to the Modi government scheme providing five kilograms of ration to the poor every month and said, "The Congress brought the Food Security Act, you did nothing." "You are giving five kg, if INDIA bloc government is formed, we will give 10 kg of ration to the poor," Kharge said, addressing a joint press conference here with Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav. "I am saying this with guarantee because we have already done it in states, including Telangana and Karnataka," he added. In a campaign speech recently, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra had pitched for more employment opportunities for youngsters, saying the Modi government's scheme to provide free ration to the poor every month was not a solution. "This will not build your future, this won't make you self-reliant," she had said. BJP leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, list the government's free ration scheme in every political rally. The party has even mentioned in its manifesto that it will continue the scheme till 2029 after coming to power. (PTI)

EC summons Andhra chief secretary, DGP over post-poll violence in state

NEW DELHI, May 15: Taking cognisance of post-poll violence in Andhra Pradesh, the Election Commission of India has summoned the state's chief secretary and the DGP on Thursday to "personally explain" the reasons for the administration's failure to contain the incidents, sources said.

Reminding the state government that the Model Code of Conduct is still in force, the EC also asked the chief secretary and the police chief to ensure such incidents are not repeated.

The Commission has repeatedly emphasised that there is no place for violence in a democracy and since the announcement of Lok Sabha elections, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar has been personally monitoring

the election space to ensure peaceful and violence-free conduct of polls, officials pointed out.

When they appear at the EC headquarters here on Thursday, the top Andhra Pradesh officials will be asked to "personally explain" the reasons for the administration's failure to contain the post-poll violence, the sources said.

They will also be asked about preemptive steps being taken to avoid any such incidents in the future, the sources said. Post-poll violence was reported in parts of Andhra Pradesh on Tuesday where Lok Sabha and assembly polls were held together on Monday.

The leaders of the ruling YSRCP and opposition TDP have levelled allegations against each other for the incidents. (PTI)

Himachal: Poll officers traverse tough terrains to make each vote count

SHIMLA, May 15: Each vote counts, and the truism is not lost on the polling officers, some of whom take the long precarious road to bring democracy to the far-flung and frugally populated areas, such as Bara Bhangal of Himachal Pradesh, which has all of 63 voters.

The journey involves trekking for two days on a perilous mountain path, braving several landslide-prone stretches, and avoiding falling into the imperious Ravi River, which flanks the road.

Located in Kangra district, Bara Bhangal has little to offer in way of comfort in everyday life, and conducting elections should not be an exception.

Just so any weather caprice does not thwart the polling, the election office sends two teams via two different routes to Bara Bhangal -- one team is air-dropped in the area in Baijnath and the other treks for two days on foot.

Another area which tests the mettle of polling officers is Sat Kuthera of Fatehpur, where it takes a 5.5 km boat ride to



reach the polling station.

Dr Surjit Saroch, a polling officer who was part of a team in the 2019 Lok

Sabha polls, told PTI how he took journey to Bara Bhangal five years ago.

"Starting from Chamba side, we com-

menced our journey on foot from Naya

Gram and reached Dharari, the only vil-

lage en route to Bara Bhangal, and

stayed in a small two-room kachha house in the village," he said.

The team, which included porters and mules, walked for two days on the hazardous narrow footpath with a bellowing Ravi River flowing beneath and shooting stones rolling down from the hilltop, Saroch recalled.

Rakesh Chandel, the polling officer who supervised the assembly polls in Bara Bhangal in 2022, said he felt he had left the world behind when he reached the area.

"With solar panels being the only mode of electricity and no communication devices except the satellite phone given to the polling officer, we felt we were cut off from the rest of the world," he said.

"We were fortunate to be airdropped to Bara Bhangal but flying across the Dhauladhar mountain range amid clouds and against strong winds was a nerve-racking experience," he added.

Poll officer Rajesh Kumar recalled that there was no light and they had to carry inverters/generators on a boat to

Sat Kuthera, which has around 100 voters.

"There was no school there and we stayed at a temple and came back the third day," Kumar, one of the members of the polling party which conducted voting in the area in the 2022 assembly polls, said.

The 63 voters of Bara Bhangal have been given the option to vote in the area or at a polling station in Bir.

Reaching Bara Bhangal will not be easy this year considering the landslides and washing away of bridges last monsoon.

According to state Chief Electoral Officer Maneesh Garg, parts of Lahaul and Spiti and Kinnaur, Pangi and Bharmaur in Chamba, and Dodra Kwar in Shimla district remain cut off due to snowfall, which takes place throughout May, and this is one of the reasons the polling in the state is being held in the last phase on June 1.

In 2019, the voting for Lok Sabha polls was held in the last phase on May 19. (PTI)

Rajasthan mine collapse: Chief vigilance officer of Hindustan Copper dies, 14 rescued

JAIPUR, May 15: Hindustan Copper Limited's Chief Vigilance Officer Upendra Kumar Pandey died after a lift collapsed at a mine in Rajasthan's Neem Ka Thana, police said on Wednesday.

Fourteen others were pulled out and sent to a hospital in Jaipur in a rescue operation that lasted several hours following the accident Tuesday night.

An HCL vigilance team from Kolkata and others were being lowered down a shaft in a "cage" Tuesday night when its cable snapped, trapping them at a depth of 1,875 feet, police said.

Additional Director General (ADG) of Rajasthan Police Anil Paliwal said the rescue team recovered the body of Chief Vigilance Officer Pandey from the mine.

A vigilance team of 15 personnel of HCL, a Central government enterprise, had gone down the mine for an inspection and while returning, the cable of the cage broke, police said, adding the rescue team pulled out the personnel in multiple rounds on Wednesday.

In a statement, the HCL said, "An accident occurred at Kolihan copper mine of Khetri Copper Complex (a unit of HCL), Khetri-nagar, Rajasthan at around 7.30



pm on May 14."

It further said that in the accident, one person died and 14 others suffered serious injuries. The company is taking all steps to bring normalcy and resume operations at the mine.

In Delhi, Mines Secretary V L Kantha Rao said an inquiry will be ordered in the incident.

"I had been in the same lift a few months back. It was all good...we will get an enquiry done and find out what happened," Rao told re-

porters. Earlier, police said the SDRF control room received information about the incident at around 10 pm on Tuesday following which a rescue team was rushed from Jaipur.

SDRF team commander Ravi Verma along with nine jawans and the rescue team of HCL reached the injured with the help of another lift. They gave first aid to the seriously injured and brought them from -72 metre level to zero metre level (sea

level) with the help of a trolley, police said. The injured were taken out to the base at plus 64 metre level with the help of an improvised stretcher, a pulley and a rescue rope.

Thereafter, the injured were taken out from the base by mine vehicles and sent to the hospital, police said, adding three people were taken out in the first round, five in the second round, and the remaining seven including Pandey were taken out in the third round.

Pandey had taken charge of the CVO of HCL in June last year. The 14 personnel who were rescued are Khetri Copper Complex unit head GD Gupta, Kolihan Mine Deputy General Manager AK Sharma, Senior Manager Vidyut Singh Shekhawat, Assistant Deputy General Manager AK Bera, Chief Manager (Mine) Arnava Bhandari, Assistant Deputy General Manager Yashraj Meena, Assistant Deputy General Manager (Vigilance) Vanendu Bhandari, Photographer Vikas Pareek, Senior Manager Research Niranjn Sahu, Security Officer Karan Singh, Manager Preetam Singh, Senior Manager Mine Ramesh Narayan Singh, Harsi Ram and Bhagirath.

They were admitted to a private hospital in Jaipur. (PTI)

SC slams Uttarakhand for 'lackadaisical' approach in controlling forest fires, calls chief secretary

NEW DELHI, May 15: Slamming the Uttarakhand government for its "lackadaisical" approach in controlling forest fires, the Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the state's chief secretary to personally present himself before it on May 17 to give explanation, including on utilisation of funds and vacancies in forest department.

Termining it a "very sorry state of affairs", the apex court said the state was just trying to find some excuse or the other.

A bench headed by Justice B R Gavai directed that the staff and vehicles of the forest departments of states shall not be requisitioned for election purposes or any other purposes like the 'Char Dham Yatra'.

"We are at pains to say that the approach of state of Uttarakhand in controlling the fires is, to say the least, lackadaisical. Though action plans have been prepared and finalised, no steps are being taken for implementation of the same," said the bench, also comprising Justices SVN Bhatti and Sandeep Mehta.

The top court was hearing a plea on raging forest fires in Uttarakhand. The bench said when funds from the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) were available and also sanctioned by the central authority, it saw no reason as to why only ₹ 3.41 crore out of the ₹ 9.12 crore was utilised for forest related activity in Uttarakhand in 2023-24. The bench observed it also saw no reason as to why the balance amount was not utilised for forestry.

"Another issue that needs to be addressed is with regard to huge vacancies in the forest department of the State of Uttarakhand," it said.

The bench noted that one of the grievances raised by the state was regarding failure of timely disbursement of the national disaster management fund or state disaster management fund.

"We fail to understand as to how state could have grievance with regard to the disbursement of state disaster

management fund in as much as it is within the domain of the state to disburse the said funds," it said.

"It is further pertinent to note that at one hand, the state contends that the resources, that is, manpower and vehicles are not available, and on the other hand, keeps large number of vacancies..." the bench observed.

It said taking into consideration the importance of controlling forest fires in Uttarakhand, the apex court had requested Additional Solicitor General (ASG) Aishwarya Bhatti to take instructions with regard to disbursement of funds for financial year 2023-2024.

The bench said in so far as CAMPA funds are concerned, it has been submitted that these funds are lying with the state and it was for the state to release them for works undertaken by the forest department.

It noted that as far as exemption of field officials of the forest department from election duty, Char Dham yatra and other related activities was concerned, the Election Commission by various orders has already exempted its staff and vehicles from elections and allied purposes. "Be that as it may, we direct that in all the states, the forest staffs as well as the forest vehicles shall not be requisitioned for election purposes or any other purposes like 'Char Dham Yatra'," the bench said.

It also directed the Centre to explain its position with regard to timely disbursement of the national disaster management fund and funds under centrally sponsored schemes.

"We direct the chief secretary of state of Uttarakhand to personally remain present in this court on May 17..." it said. The bench said the chief secretary shall explain as to why CAMPA fund of only ₹ 3.4 crore was released for financial year 2023-24 when the Centre had sanctioned ₹ 9.12 crore.

"It shall also be explained as to whether the said fund is being utilised for some other purposes which are not related to forest activities," it said. (PTI)

J&K High Court modifies interim order to pave way for stalled key police projects

JAMMU, May 15: The High Court of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh has paved the way for the construction of key police projects involving national security matters, modifying an interim order passed in March last year.

The interim order had stalled important police projects such as the construction of a battalion headquarters in Kishtwar and an anti-corruption bureau office in Udhampur.

"The court is of the opinion that to buttonhole the project is in nobody's interest but is only antithetical to public interest...the project, in question, relates to larger public interest, more so, when the question of national security is involved," Justice Wasim Sadiq Nargal said in his 12-page order passed last week.

The court said the respondents had "misinterpreted the staying of the communication as a stay on the entire tender process".

The bench said was hearing an application filed by Senior Additional Advocate General Monika Kohli on behalf of the government, seeking vacation of the interim order passed by the high court on March 1, 2023 on a petition filed by a contractor.

The contractor had moved the court over a communication issued on February 20, 2023 stating that the progress executed by the petitioner's firm was less than ₹ 10.5 crore and requested that all the related correspondence made earlier be treated as 'null and void'. This resulted in withdrawal of all the earlier certificates issued to him, therefore causing hindrance in the new contractual works.

Kohli argued that the interim order was operating harshly against the respondents as the prestigious police projects such as the construction of Indian Reserve Police battalion headquarters at Kishtwar and construction of Anti-Corruption Bureau Office in Kathori-Patnitop village in Udhampur, at a cost of ₹ 1,752 lakh and ₹ 1,713.50 lakh, respectively have been held to ransom. After hearing the counsels appearing for both sides, the court said it found force in the arguments made by Kohli and held continuation of the interim direction to be in nobody's interest, saying it would serve no fruitful purpose to the parties, let alone the petitioner who was declared as the lowest bidder.

"Rather, this court views the perpetuation of the interim direction by way of an obstacle to adjudicate the rights of the petitioner which have been projected in the instant petition and the petitioner is surely going to get no leverage out of it, if the same is continued," the bench said. (PTI)

Six pollution-hit villages in Gujarat to get ₹ 25 lakh compensation after SC order

AHMEDABAD, May 15: Six villages in Gujarat's Rajkot district that were affected by pollution due to a landfill will collectively get ₹ 25 lakh compensation following a recent order of the Supreme Court, an NGO said on Wednesday.

The company responsible for the pollution had been directed by the top court to deposit the money as per a 2013 order of the National Green Tribunal (NGT). The NGO, Paryavaran Mitra, said they will now follow up with the authorities to get the amount released.

As per the case details, the Rajkot Municipal Corporation had signed an agreement with Hanjer Biotech Energies Private Limited (HBEPL) in 2003 to set up and run a solid waste disposal site at Nakrawadi village near Rajkot city.

However, due to improper handling of solid waste and dispersion of untreated garbage in nearby areas, people from six villages in the vicinity faced health issues and other problems like



groundwater contamination and degradation of farmland, said NGO director Mahesh Pandya.

About 7,500 people live in these villages - Nakrawadi, Pialiya, Nagalpar, Hadmatiya, Khijadiya and Rajgad.

"We had filed a petition with the NGT, which found merit in our case. Through an order in December 2013, the NGT had asked the company to deposit Rs 25 lakh with the collector for disbursement as compensation to these five village panchayats,"

said Pandya. While the company challenged the NGT order in the Supreme Court, which directed it to first deposit ₹ 25 lakh with the collector, it became bankrupt during the pendency of the appeal, he said.

"We are of the opinion that during the rainy season the air and water pollution is caused on account of water slippage from the landfill site because of untreated solid waste which flows along with rainy water from the

slope of a small hillock towards the village side," the NGT had said in its order 2013 order.

"We also find that HBEPL failed to take proper precaution for maintenance of landfill site," the green court had added.

In its order dated May 7, the SC "disposed of" the appeal of HBEPL and directed the Rajkot collector to distribute Rs 25 lakh to the affected villages. It has come over a decade after the NGT passed its order about compensation, said Pandya.

"Our team will soon meet the Rajkot collector and municipal commissioner with the demand that the interest on ₹ 25 lakh be included in the final amount. Moreover, we will also ask RMC (Rajkot Municipal Corporation) to give separate compensation to the villagers," said Pandya.

After HBEPL became bankrupt, the Rajkot civic body signed an agreement with another company to manage the landfill. "The new company is managing solid waste at the site systematically," he added. (PTI)

Dakshina Kannada district administration gears up for monsoon season

MANGALURU (KARNATAKA), May 15: The Dakshina Kannada district administration has got down to work ahead of the monsoon season (June to August) by beginning preparations to tackle various rain-related issues. At a meeting held on Tuesday, the district authorities, Deputy Commissioner Mullai Muhilan MP reached out to the ground-level bureaucracy with directions on how to handle the challenges during the monsoon season.

Addressing the drinking water and disaster management authority officials, he highlighted the problems faced due to poor maintenance of the electrical system under Mangaluru Electric Supply Company (MESCOM) and said it was not just failure of power supply during rains but also snapping of live cables and falling electric poles which were a concern.

Since this would cause serious damage to life and property, he urged MESCOM to take precautions by carrying out inspections.

Muhilan also directed MESCOM to deploy additional men and open more control rooms across the district during the monsoon season and said both urban and rural areas must be given equal importance.

Muhilan said in the run-up to the monsoons, the existing domestic water availability should be managed prudently.

At the meeting, emphasis was laid on cleaning of dumping yards and garbage disposal areas before the monsoon.

The health department was asked to take precautionary measures against the spread of infectious diseases such as dengue and malaria during the rainy season.

He said that the National Highway should list areas where landslides occur in Charamdi Ghat areas and information should be made available to people about traffic related issues in ghat areas.

The district Deputy Commissioner instructed the Fisheries Department to hold a meeting on precautionary measures for fishermen during the rainy season. (PTI)

Woman stabbed to death over rejection of love proposal in K'taka

HUBBALLI (KARNATAKA), May 15: Just weeks after college student Neha Hiremath was stabbed to death by her former classmate, a 21-year-old woman was murdered inside her house by an acquaintance here for allegedly rejecting her love proposal on Wednesday.

Vishwa alias Girish Sawant, 23, knocked on the door of Anjali Ambigera's residence at Veerapur Oni area here at around 5.45 am. When she opened the door, Girish stabbed her to death with a knife and fled the place, a senior police officer said, adding that her sister was a witness to the brutal murder. A case of murder under Section 302 of the Indian Penal Code has been registered against the accused, police said, adding that teams have been formed to nab him.

Neha Hiremath, 23, was stabbed to death by her former classmate Fayaz Khodunak

inside her college campus in Hubballi on April 18. "Girish was harassing my sister Anjali for sometime now. He expressed his love to her but my sister declined. He even pressured my sister to go with him to Mysuru. He had also threatened her that she will meet the same fate as that of Neha Hiremath," Anjali's sister Yashodha told reporters here. "When we informed police about his threats, they didn't pursue it seriously and today see, my sister is dead," she said. Anjali's family and local residents staged a protest here demanding strict action against the accused. Later, the police reached the spot and dispersed them, assuring them that justice will be delivered.

Anjali's father Mohan said that around seven months ago she had told them that Girish was harassing her. "I had warned him (Girish). But today morning, unfortunately

my daughter was murdered by this same person. The accused has to be punished," he said. No girl should be in the situation that Anjali has been in, her family said, and demanded strict action against the accused who is still at large.

Meanwhile, Congress Councillor Niranjn Hiremath -- father of Neha -- met the deceased's family and slammed the state government over the "deteriorating" law and order situation in north Karnataka and also sought suspension of Police Commissioner of Hubballi-Dharwad Renuka Sukumar for alleged "failure".

Talking about the brutal murder of Anjali, he said that despite the accused openly threatening the victim that she would meet the same fate as that of Neha, the police did not take the issue seriously when the woman's family approached them to complaint. (PTI)

Brain dead subedar's organs give new lease of life to three ill soldiers

CHANDIGARH, May 15: Three critically ill soldiers have got a new lease of life, thanks to the family of a retired subedar which took the decision to donate his organs after he was declared brain dead following a brain stroke. After the subedar's death on Tuesday, the harvested organs were airlifted by the Indian Air Force to Army's Research and Referral Hospital in Delhi.

The organ retrieval and transplant team of Army's Command Hospital, Chandimandir performed a multi-organ harvest procedure on the 70-year-old subedar, a resident of Palampur in Himachal Pradesh, according to an official statement here on Wednesday. He had served for 30 years in the Jammu and Kashmir Rifles of Indian Army, it said.

"He was declared brain dead in the ICU due to brain stroke. The next of kin of the deceased decided to donate the liver, kidneys and cornea, which has given a new lease of life to three soldiers, who were critically ill," the statement added.

The transplant team carried out an overnight marathon operation Tuesday night for the retrieval of organs from the deceased. The organs were transported via a green corridor to Army Hospital (Research and Referral), Delhi Cantonment within one hour, the release said.

The transplant team was led by Brigadier Anuj Sharma, Professor and Head of surgical team and Chief Transplant Coordinator, Colonel Anurag Garg. (PTI)

PEC condemns murder of UP journalist, demands punishment to perpetrators



HT Correspondent

GENEVA, May 15: Press Emblem Campaign (PEC), the global safety and media rights body, strongly condemns the murder of Ashutosh Srivastava, an Indian journalist based in Uttar Pradesh, on 13 May 2024 and demands a fair probe to identify and punish the perpetrators under the law of the land. Ashutosh (45), who hails from Jaunpur locality, was associated with nationalist news channel Sudarshan News and he was targeted by miscreants on the outskirts of the city. He was sent to a nearby hospital but the attending doctors declared him dead. Soon

after he received threats for a series of reports on illegal cow slaughtering incidents, Ashutosh even urged the local police for protection, but in vain.

"Ashutosh Srivastava is the 46th victim among journalists killed since 1 January this year. We urge the Uttar Pradesh government led by hardliner Hindu nationalist Yogi Adityanath to investigate the murder and book the culprits for legal punishment. PEC also extends the local scribe's body named Jaunpur Patrakar Sangh in its fight for justice to the victim," said Blaise Lempen, president of PEC (<https://pressemblem.ch/pec-news.shtml>), adding that the local media organisations have demanded the government in Lucknow to offer Rs 5 million to the bereaved family.

PEC's south Asia representative Nava Thakuria revealed that five journo-casualties have been reported this year where Pakistan lost three scribes (Maulana Mohammad Siddique Mengal, Jam Saghir Ahmed Lar and Tahira Nosheen Rana) along with one (Ko Myat Thu Tun) in Myanmar. Last year India witnessed the killing of journalists namely Shashikant Warishe, Abdur Rauf Alamgir and Vimal Kumar Yadav.

Monday witnessed the fourth phase of polling under India's general elections to form 18th Lok Sabha and three phases more are waiting for voting, where the counting for votes will take place on 4 June next (results are expected the same day).

As the slaughtering of cows, which is adored by the Hindus as holy, remains illegal in Uttar Pradesh, it's often reported the conflicts between the cow traders and Hindu nationalists in media outlets. Ashutosh might have become a victim of circumstance and definitely deserves justice.

Over a fifth of excess deaths linked to heatwaves over past 30 years occurred in India: Study

NEW DELHI, May 15: More than 1.53 lakh deaths a year were associated with heatwaves around the world, with over a fifth of these deaths - the greatest share - coming from India, according to new research looking at data over 30 years since 1990.

India was followed by China and Russia, with each experiencing roughly 14 per cent and 8 per cent of these heatwave-linked excess deaths, respectively.

The study, led by Monash University, Australia, found that heatwave-linked excess deaths accounted for about a third of all heat-related deaths and 1 per cent of total deaths globally.

Researchers also found that of the overall 1.53 lakh excess deaths occurring every summer, close to half came from Asia and more than 30 per cent from Europe.

Further, the largest estimated death rates (deaths per population) were seen in regions with dry climates and lower-middle incomes. The findings are published in PLoS Medicine.

"During the warm seasons from 1990 to 2019, heatwave-related



excess deaths accounted for 153,078 deaths per year, a total of 236 deaths per ten million residents or 1 per cent of global deaths," the authors wrote.

For the study, the researchers used data from the UK-based Multi-Country Multi-City (MCC) Collaborative Research Network that included daily deaths and temperatures from 750 locations

across 43 countries.

Comparing the decade up to 2019 with that up to 1999, the duration of heat waves each year was found to have extended from 13.4 to 13.7 days on average around the world, with average ambient temperature warming by 0.35 degrees Celsius every decade.

The researchers said that while previous studies have quantified

excess deaths due to heatwaves locally, they have not compared these estimates across the globe over a prolonged duration.

"Heatwaves are associated with substantial mortality burden that varies spatiotemporally (with space and time) over the globe in the past 30 years," the authors wrote.

The findings show that government actions taken to enhance health sector adaptation and resilience can have potential benefits, the authors said.

They called for a "comprehensive approach" tackling not only immediate health risks during heatwaves but also implementing long-term strategies to minimise vulnerability and inequalities across communities.

"The strategies include climate change mitigation policy, heat action plans (e.g., heat early warning system), urban planning and green structure, social support program, healthcare and public health services, education awareness, and community engagement and participation," the authors wrote. (PTI)

Shabana Azmi awarded Freedom of the City of London

LONDON, May 15: Celebrated actress Shabana Azmi has been awarded the Freedom of the City of London in recognition of her prolific contribution to Indian cinema and as a campaigner for women's rights.

The 73-year-old winner of five National Awards for Best Actress and six Filmfare Awards, who was in London for a celebration of her 50 years in cinema at the annual UK Asian Film Festival (UKAFF), received the honour at a ceremony last week.

The Freedom of the City of London dates back to the 13th century and is conferred upon individuals as a way of paying tribute to their outstanding contribution to London or public life, or to celebrate a very significant achievement.

"I am deeply honoured to receive the Freedom of the City of London award. It is a testament to the power of cinema and activism that we are able to transcend borders and make a meaningful impact on society," said Azmi.

"I am grateful for this recognition and remain committed to using my voice and platform to advocate for positive change," she said.

She was nominated by Alderman Alastair King DL and Deputy Brian Mooney BEM for the award, conferred by the financial hub of London referred to as the City of London or the Square Mile.

"I was delighted to nominate Shabana to receive this award for her remarkable contributions, both on and off screen. With an impressive acting career, coupled with her unwavering commitment to make the world a better place, it is not surprising that she is regarded as a role model by so many women who look to her for inspiration," said Alderman King.

Azmi made her debut in Satyajit Ray's 1974 classic 'Ankur', among the films screened at UKAFF this year as part of its "Celebrating the Golden Girl of Indian Cinema" segment. Outside the world of stage and screen, the award recognises her as a strong advocate for public health and women's rights, serving as President of Nivara Hakk - a housing rights non-governmental organisation - and heading the Mijwan Welfare Society, focusing on the upliftment of rural India. "Her unequivocal talent, commitment, and dedication, makes her a trailblazer in global cinema; the versatility and authenticity in the characters she has played has helped to inspire many women across the globe," said City of London Corporation Policy Chairman Chris Hayward. (PTI)



2024 edition of MAMI Mumbai Film Festival to take place from October 19 to 24

MUMBAI, May 15: The 2024 edition of the MAMI Mumbai Film Festival will be held in the city from October 19 to 24, the organisers announced on Wednesday.

Mumbai Academy of Moving Image (MAMI), which organises the festival annually, has invited filmmakers to submit their films for the latest edition. The early bird deadline for film submissions is May 31, 2024, a press release stated.

"Building on the success of previous editions, MAMI Mumbai Film Festival continues to support an ecosystem that spotlights the talent and films of South Asia and the South Asian Diaspora.

"The festival remains committed to amplifying emerging and established independent cinematic voices while also nurturing the audience in India to watch cinema from a new perspective," the release said. Priyanka Chopra Jonas, who serves as the chairperson of MAMI, said the festival is "where we celebrate innovative storytelling and every film that deserves global attention".

"With our new vision at MAMI, launched in 2023, we've successfully established an ecosystem that highlights South Asian and South Asian diaspora films and filmmakers. As the landscape of cinema and storytelling undergoes significant shifts, we firmly believe that our festival plays a crucial role in championing diverse narratives and facilitating connections between filmmakers and their audiences," the actor said.

Deepti DCunha, Artistic Director of MAMI, said they are committed to showcasing the finest works by South Asian, South Asian Diaspora, and international filmmakers. "The festival's South Asian focus lends it a unique and strategic position, serving as a melting pot for new and emerging cinematic voices from the region. Our team invests countless hours in meticulously selecting the finest contemporary cinema, spanning countries, languages, and genres. (PTI)

'Succession' actor Jihae joins 'Dune: Prophecy'



LOS ANGELES, May 15: South Korean actor Jihae, best known for playing PR consultant Berry Schneider in "Succession", has boarded the cast of "Dune: Prophecy". She joins Indian superstar Tabu in "Dune: Prophecy", which is a prequel series to director Denis Villeneuve's blockbuster "Dune" film franchise. According to Variety, Jihae will play Reverend Mother Kasha, described as "the Emperor's own Truthsayer and confidant. Reverend Mother Kasha occupies a position of great influence in the Imperium. But when a new challenge leads her to question the Sisterhood's intentions, she finds her role increasingly difficult to navigate." The series, previously titled "Dune: The Sisterhood", is set up at HBO Max and hails from Legendary Television.

"Dune: Prophecy" is set 10,000 years before the events of Frank Herbert's "Dune" and is based on the novel "Sisterhood of Dune" by Brian Herbert and Kevin J Anderson. As per official logline, "Set within the expansive universe of 'Dune', created by acclaimed author Frank Herbert, and 10,000 years before the ascension of Paul Atreides, 'Dune: Prophecy' follows two Harkonnen sisters as they combat forces that threaten the future of humankind, and establish the fabled sect that will become known as the Bene Gesserit." Also part of the star cast are Emily Watson, Olivia Williams, Travis Fimmel, Johdi May, Mark Strong, Sarah-Sofie Bousmina, Josh Heuston, Chloe Lea, Jade Anouka, Faolainn Cunningham, Edward Davis, Aoife Hinds, Chris Mason, and Shalom Brune-Franklin. (PTI)

'Mr and Mrs Smith' to return for second season

LOS ANGELES, May 15: Amazon Studios has ordered a second season of spy series "Mr and Mrs Smith", a reimagining of the 2005 film starring Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie.

Sources told Variety that season one stars Donald Glover and Maya Erskine are not expected to return to star in Season 2.

Glover will continue to be credited as a co-creator and executive producer on the series alongside Francesca Sloane, who will return as showrunner.

Jennifer Salke, head of Amazon MGM Studios, said they are excited to announce that the second season of the "groundbreaking spy series" is in the works for global Prime Video customers.

"The success of the first season, with its incredibly modern, sexy reinvention of the original film, is a testament to the brilliant creators Donald Glover and Francesca Sloane. We

are proud to bring you another season filled with unforgettable journeys and new adventures," Salke said.

According to official series description, the first season of "Mr & Mrs Smith" follows two lonely strangers who land jobs working for a mysterious spy agency that offers them a life of espionage, wealth, world travels, and a dream brownstone house in Manhattan, New York.

"The catch? New identities in an arranged marriage as Mr. and Mrs. John and Jane Smith. Now hitched, John and Jane navigate a high-risk mission every week while also facing a new relationship milestone. Their complex cover story becomes even more complicated when they catch real feelings for each other. What's riskier: espionage or marriage?" it read. (PTI)



Wasn't sure whether SS Rajamouli would approve my voice for 'Baahubali': Sharad Kelkar

MUMBAI, May 15: Actor Sharad Kelkar, who lent his voice to Telugu star Prabhas in the Hindi dubbed version of the popular "Baahubali" films, says he was initially unsure whether filmmaker SS Rajamouli would approve of him for the role.

In "Baahubali: The Beginning" (2015) and "Baahubali: The Conclusion" (2017), the 47-year-old actor voiced the double roles of Amarendra Baahubali and Mahendra Baahubali (Shivudu), played on screen by Prabhas.

Kelkar said he was working on the 2016 Telugu-language action comedy "Sardar Gabbar Singh", fronted by Pawan Kalyan, when a crew member recommended his name to Rajamouli.

Up north, his acting credits include films such as "Ram-Leela", "Tanhaji: The Unsung Warrior" and Prime Video series "The Family Man".

"I was not sure whether he would approve it (voice) or not, it (approval) came as a pleasant surprise. Somebody suggested that in Pawan Kalyan's film

there's a villain who has a good voice, 'Please test him'. So, he (Rajamouli) asked, 'Does he speak Hindi?' and they said, 'He is from Gwalior and he is good at Hindi,' the actor told PTI in an interview.

Soon, the makers of "Baahubali" called him for a voice test.

"I had no idea about 'Baahubali' but I had seen 'Maga-dheera' and 'Makhi' ('Eega')," said Kelkar, referring to Rajamouli's previous films.

"As an actor, I wanted to meet the creator of this masterpiece. So, I gave my voice test, took the tape and met him (Rajamouli) at the studio. Next day, he said, 'You're doing the dubbing for 'Baahubali,'" he recalled.

Kelkar has now collaborated with Rajamouli on the upcoming animated series "Baahubali: Crown of Blood", a prequel to the blockbuster movies.

According to the makers, the Disney+ Hotstar show promises to take the audiences into an animated world of "Baahubali" to

experience an untold story of epic adventure, brotherhood, betrayal, conflict and heroism. Rajamouli and Sharad Devarajan of "The Legend of Hanuman" fame serve as series creators.

It was a nostalgic feeling, said Kelkar about reteaming with the "RRR" director, whom he credited for his popularity.

"That character is close to my heart. I got a huge fan base because of 'Baahubali'. It was a new high in my career. People started calling me, 'the voice of Baahubali, the voice of India'. It brought about many changes in those two-three years. Now that we are coming back with 'Baahubali: Crown of Blood', I am excited," he said.

This time around, the actor said, the animation was created after he finished dubbing for the series in Hindi.

"It was tougher to understand what kind of visuals or scene it would have or how far the other character is from you. Or, how loud or sharp you can be. At that point, the creator and director

come (for your help). It was a different process. But it was fun as well."

Kelkar, who also lent his voice to Prabhas for his outing as Lord Ram in 2023's "Adipurush", also opened up about the on-screen depiction of the Hindu deity while dubbing for the modern retelling of Ramayana.

Directed by Om Raut, the film was panned on social media for its poor quality of VFX and colloquial dialogues.

"The subject is very sentimental. As a Hindu, I have read or heard it (Ramayana) so many times, so there were a few things which I felt I had not heard about or maybe it was a different version. So, it was odd for me. But it's a film, it's fiction, so we should watch it as a film.

"But it's Lord Ram, if we have hurt anybody's sentiments then we are sorry for that. But we should move on, and look forward to a bigger and honest product, which he (Raut) is going to make, and I'm 100 per cent sure about it," the actor said. (PTI)



After competitive series against Pak, Ireland eye India clash in T20 WC

BENGALURU, May 15: Ireland batter Lorcan Tucker on Wednesday hoped to bank on their competitive outings in the recent series against Pakistan to make a strong impression against India, their opponent in the T20 World Cup on June 5 in New York.

Ireland beat Pakistan by five wickets in the first T20I at Dublin but the visitors won the next two matches to bag the series 2-1.

But the wicketkeeper batter said even the lone win was a good reflection of their skills and confidence.

"One victory alone was good. It would have been nice to win the series against Pakistan. But that one win has given us a lot of confidence.

"It will boost us ahead of the match on June 5 (against India). So, it has come at the right time," Tucker told media during a function to unveil Karnataka-based diary major 'Nandini' as their team sponsor for the ICC marquee event to be held in the Americas in June.

Ireland are in Group along with India, Pakistan, USA and Canada. Tucker said despite the defeat, they have learned a lot against Pakistan, their World Cup opponent on June 16 at



Lauderhill, during the home series. "We were trying to make use of Power Play, so that there will be less pressure on us in the middle of the innings.

"But Pakistan showed their class, with a bit of defensive

bowling. But we have learned a lot about them as opponents which will be handy for us in the World Cup," he added.

The 27-year-old impressed against Pakistan making 51 and 73 in the second and third

T20Is, and he said the upcoming tri-series against Scotland and Netherlands would help them to prepare well for the big event.

"Both Scotland and Netherlands are good teams and they have challenged us in the last 12

months or so. So, there is not much between the sides.

"We are aware that if we play good cricket then we can beat any side. We have showed that over the years in various formats," he added. (PTI)

Arjun outplays Safarli in Sharjah Masters



SHARJAH, May 15: World number seven Erigaisi Arjun started his campaign on a positive note, outplaying Eltaj Safarli of Azerbaijan in the first round of the Sharjah Masters chess tournament here. Indian Grandmasters Arvindh Chithambaram and P Iniyar also started on the winning side defeating compatriot Bharath Subramaniyam and Irani Pouya of Iran respectively in the USD 52000 prize money tournament considered as one of the strongest open of the world.

Besides the three Indian winners two young players having Indian origin - Abhimanyu Mishra of United States and lowest seed Shreyas Royal of England also recorded victories at the expense of Raja Ritvik and Rinat Jumabayev of Kazakhstan respectively. It was generally a tough day for the higher seeded players as they conceded a lot of draws. The strength of the tournament became clear on the opening day itself with just 18 decisive games out of total 44. Arjun though was relentless and capitalized on a strategic middle game error from Safarli who suffered for the rest of the game. A Najdorf by the Azerbaijani as black was met with the Classical treatment and Arjun gained the upper hand when Safarli went for unwarranted complications giving Arjun a dangerous passed pawn in the middle game. Arjun marched his pawn to the seventh rank collected a rook for a knight and cruised through. Chithambaram gave a nice lesson on the Bishop pair advantage to Subramaniyam. Chithambaram sacrificed a pawn early in the queen pawn opening and regained it later in the middle game with a decent advantage. The Bishop pair hardly moved but controlled key squares for any counterplay.

Iniyar also played a fine game

to beat Idani Pouya. It was another Queen pawn game of the day wherein Iniyar got a queen side pawn majority when the dust settled. The Iranian was left shocked in a difficult but defensible Knight and pawns endgame when Iniyar spotted this brilliant tactic through a knight sacrifice. The game lasted 49 moves.

Amongst other Indians in the fray, S L Narayanan had to split the point with Turkish Sanal Vahap while young Turk Yagiz Kaan Erdogmus held Nihal Sarin to a creditable draw.

The lone Indian women in the fray, GM D Harika got off to a good start holding Manuel Petrosyan of Armenia but Leon Luke Mendonca, the winner of this year's Tata Steel Challenger went down to Polish Marcin Krzyzanowski. Eight rounds still remain in the 88-player tournament. Indian results round 1 (Indians unless stated): Erigaisi Arjun beat Eltaj Safarli (Aze); S P Sethuraman drew with Temour Radjabov (Aze); Amin Tabatabaei (Iri) beat V Pranav; S L Narayanan drew with Sanal Vahap (Tur); Yagiz Kaan Erdogmus (Tur) drew with Nihal Sarin; Arvindh Chithambaram beat Bharath Subramaniyam; Raunak Sadhwani drew with David Gavrilescu (Rou); Sankalp Gupta drew with Ter-Sakhanyan Samvel (Arm); Nguyen Thai Dai Van (Cze) beat Pranav Anand; Leon Luke Mendonca lost to Marcin Krzyzanowski (Pol); Abhimanyu Mishra (USA) beat Raja Ritvik; Abhimanyu Purnanik drew with B Adhiban; D Harika drew with Manuel Petrosyan (Arm); Nikolas Theodorou (Gre) beat Aditya Samant Samant; Aditya Mittal drew with Cardoso Jose Gabriel (Esp); P Iniyar beat Idani Pouya (Iri); Abhijeet Gupta drew with Bibisara Assaubayeva (Kaz). (PTI)

Scheffler never happier with his life, wife and son; Now he's ready to grab another major at PGA

LOUISVILLE, May 15: Scottie Scheffler has never spent much time reflecting on anything he has done, especially with something grand — another major championship — on the immediate horizon.

But for that moment in Dallas last week, when wife Meredith came home with their first baby, it was hard not to think about a special time in his life.

"I married my high school sweetheart and I always wanted to play professional golf, and now I'm here," Scheffler said. "I was sitting there with a newborn in my arms and the green jacket in the closet. It was a pretty special time." Scheffler has wanted to play professional golf for so long that as a youngster, he wore long pants in the hot Texas sun because that's what the pros did. Now he has 10 titles on the PGA Tour and only a month ago added another Masters green jacket.

Their son, Bennett, was born last Wednesday.

But what makes the 27-year-old Texan tick is how much he hates to lose no matter how much he wins. And it didn't take long for Scheffler to think about the PGA Championship and a chance to further stamp such a dominant stretch. "The competitiveness in me doesn't let me reflect too much," he said. "And I was trying to do my best to get ready to play this week." There is much at stake. Since the modern Grand Slam came into the golf vernacular in 1960, only four players have captured the first two majors of the year — Arnold Palmer in 1960, Jack Nicklaus in 1972, Tiger Woods in 2002 and Jordan Spieth in 2015.

"The amount of greens he hits, he just wears you out that way," said Woods, who knows plenty

about wearing down an entire field. "And then he has an amazing pair of hands around the greens. If he putts awful, then he finishes in top 10. If he putts decent, he wins. He putts great, he runs away.

"So, he's just that good a ball-striker and that good an all-around player."

Nothing comes easily, no matter how easy Scheffler can make it look. Valhalla Golf Club is a new experience, and it doesn't help a supreme ball-striker like Scheffler that the course already is soft. And that was before a spell of heavy rain closed the course for a few hours Tuesday.

The harder the test, the greater the separation. Soft conditions shrink the margins, and this might be as good a time as any for someone to stop this remarkable train.

This could be ideal for Brooks Koepka, the defending PGA champion, who looked to be dialed into his irons when he won LIV Golf Singapore, or perhaps even golf's basher, Bryson DeChambeau. They play on LIV and have not been subjected as much to Scheffler's dominance.

Scheffler also is coming off a substantial in-season break, at least by his standards. Except for the impending birth of his son, he would have played two weeks ago in Dallas. He has been away from competition since winning the RBC Heritage on April 22 for his fourth victory in his last five tournaments.

"Definitely rested going into this week, for sure," Scheffler said. "I don't really feel like any rust has accumulated. I was able to practice and play a lot at home. I'm able to do stuff at home to simulate tournament golf, especially on the greens, competing and gambling with my buddies. I don't really want to lose to them, either." (AP)

Woods is still deciding whether he has time to be Ryder Cup captain

LOUISVILLE, May 15: Tiger Woods brings a lot of uncertainty to Valhalla for the PGA Championship. Some of that has to do with his achy body. And some of that involved the Ryder Cup.

The PGA of America still has not settled on a captain for the 2025 matches at Bethpage Black, with Woods as the most obvious candidate. Seth Waugh, CEO of the PGA of America, had said he would be speaking to Woods.

"We're still talking," Woods said Tuesday. "There's nothing that has been confirmed yet. We're still working on what that might look like — also whether or not I have the time to do it."

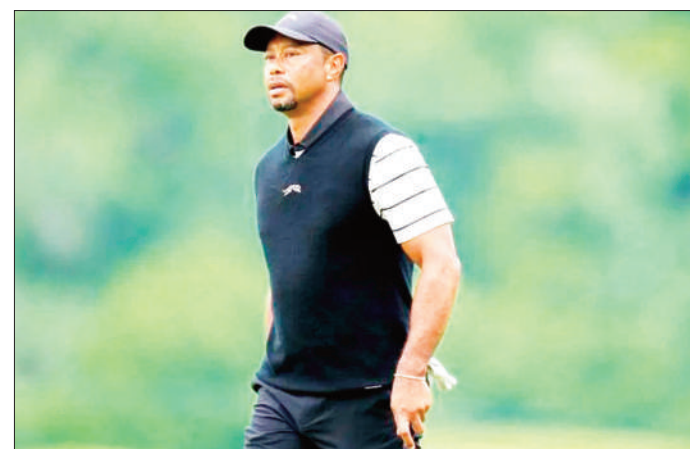
The PGA of America typically announces the Ryder Cup captain well before the Masters of the preceding year. Zach Johnson was announced in February 2022 for last year's Ryder Cup.

Woods, who has tied it up only twice this year going into the PGA Championship, is keeping plenty busy off the golf course.

He was appointed to the PGA Tour board last summer and has been a central voice in meetings. Woods also is on the committee that is meeting with the Public Investment Fund of Saudi Arabia about becoming a minority investor. The U.S. Ryder Cup captain, whoever that is, has a lot of promoting to do, which includes a "one year out" event at Bethpage Black in September.

"I need to feel that I can give the amount of time that it deserves," said Woods, who won his second U.S. Open at Bethpage Black in 2002.

Woods had mixed memories when he returned to Valhalla. He played a practice round late last week and was on the course the past two days. Heavy thunder-



storms shut the course for a few hours on Tuesday.

There was 2000, where he made what he still considers the most pressure-filled putt of his career. He had a fabulous duel with unheralded Bob May, ending with Woods having to make a 6-foot birdie putt on the last hole to force a playoff.

And there was 2014, when he was trying to recover from the first of four back surgeries. Woods had to withdraw the previous week at Firestone, and he didn't come close to making the cut at Valhalla. "At that time I was maybe one back procedure into it. Now it's a hell of a lot more than that number," he said.

"Back is now fused, as you know. Yeah, coming into 2014, I wasn't feeling very good. But I'm always going to feel soreness and stiffness in my back, but that's OK. Just need other body parts to start feeling better."

He also needs more than two good rounds. Woods set a Masters record this year by making the cut for the 24th consecutive time, but he followed with an 82 in the third round and wound up

in last place among those who made the cut.

He has not played since then.

"I still feel that I can win golf tournaments. I still feel I can hit the shots and still feel like I still have my hand around the greens and I can putt," Woods said. "I just need to do it for all four days, not like I did at Augusta for only two." As for his other job, Woods didn't reveal much about discussions with PIF or any of the obstacles in the way of the sport somehow being reunited. He described negotiations as fluid, with plenty of work ahead.

"It may not be giant steps, but we're making steps," he said.

He also said he was surprised by the resignation Monday of Jimmy Dunne, a PGA Tour board member and key architect of the June 6 framework agreement with the Saudis.

Dunne said that with the balance now tilting toward players over business leaders on the PGA Tour board, he felt his input was "superfluous." Woods was asked if golfers were best suited to handle business dealings of the PGA Tour. (AP)

Is it time to worry about another trial, or start preparing for Olympics, asks Aman Sehrawat

NEW DELHI, May 15: Aman Sehrawat, the lone male Indian wrestler to have qualified for Paris Olympics, finds it annoying that instead of shifting his focus on preparing for the Games, he still has to worry about cutting his weight to prepare for another round of trials.

The 20-year-old Under-23 world champion saved India the blushes by securing a berth in men's freestyle 57kg for the Games at the recent World Qualifiers in Istanbul. In 11 other weight categories where the country's male wrestlers competed, India drew a blank as none of them could qualify.

"So many times I have cut my weight. How many times I have to do it? It causes a lot of

weakness. I don't understand do I think of now winning trials again or start preparing for Olympics. I think the work I need to put for a good preparation will be affected if I am asked to go through the trials again," Aman told PTI in an interview.

"By the time trials are finished, Olympics will be almost there, so when do we start preparations? In my opinion trials should not be held," said Aman, whose natural body weight is 62kg.

Aman, who is Asian Games bronze medalist and Asian Championships title winner, is confident that he will be in reckoning for a medal at the Games.

"I see myself in top-3 in the world. Russia and Albania are strong and it will be close with them, others I can manage," he said. Aman had lost to Albania's Zelimkhan Abakarov in the 2023 World Championship where Serbia's Steven Andria Micici had emerged champion. Zaur Uguev, the two-time world champion from Russia is also a strong wrestler, who had defeated Ravi Dahiya in the Tokyo Games gold medal match. Most probably Aman will have to beat Ravi Dahiya when the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) holds trials.

Ravi, and the other top-3 wrestlers in men's 57kg category at the last trials held in Sonapat, will have to compete



against each other and the winner among them will fight it out with quota winner Aman.

"I would have already left for Russia for training if not for these trials. It is better that I

train abroad with good wrestlers. I think I have done enough training in India and now it's time to train and spar with my competitors.

"That will prepare me well

for Olympics. I will get a fair idea about my rivals," said Aman, who joined the Chhatarsal Stadium at the age of 10 and has been making a steady progress.

Aman argues that it's not just weight-cut that troubles wrestlers. "Recovery is also very important. Trials, weight-cut and recovery will eat up a lot of time before Olympics if trials are held again," he said.

Aman also understands the weight of expectations. He is considered the next big thing in Indian wrestling and he is aware of that.

"I hear a lot of things about me. People have expectations now from me. I felt very bad when I could not qualify at the

Asian Qualifiers in Bishkek. It does affect if I am not able to meet expectations. I worked hard for World Qualifiers and finally achieved it," he said adding that he likes the fame coming his way.

He lost his parents in 2015 and since then, Chhatarsal Stadium has been his home. He spoke about the support and care he gets from his "brother" Sagar, who is a Greco Roman wrestler. "I relish my success with Sagar. He is more than a brother for me. He takes care of everything at 'akhada'. I just focus on my practice. He manages what I need to do, what I need to eat, when to eat, and helps in practice," said Aman. (PTI)

IPL: Sunrisers look to seal playoff berth; GT aim to end campaign on a high

'Abhishek's performance in IPL this season will help him play for India'

HYDERABAD, May 15: Masters of their own fate right now despite being erratic, Sunrisers Hyderabad will hope their destructive batting line-up delivers when they take on Gujarat Titans in pursuit of a playoffs berth in the Indian Premier League here on Thursday.

Another win will be enough for Sunrisers to seal a playoff berth as they need only one point to ensure qualification.

But the Pat Cummins-led side will also want to challenge for the top two spots, which is a possibility considering they have one more game after this match and a healthy net run rate of +0.406. SRH have 14 points from 12 matches and can reach a maximum of 18 points, which may be enough to ensure a top-two finish if other results go their way.

Not only are the Sunrisers players well-rested ahead of the clash against GT as they got a week off, their morale will also be sky high after notching yet another record-breaking win against Lucknow Super Giants on May 8.

The 2016 champions would hope to restrict LSG to a blow-par score, the opening duo of Travis Head and Abhishek Sharma made a mockery of the hosts by chasing down 166 in just 9.4 overs to notch a 10-wicket win at home.

SRH have made a habit of securing unbelievable victories throughout the season but they have also suffered sizeable defeats, including against GT (by 7 wickets) earlier in the competition.

The boom or bust approach by the bat-



ters has either done exceedingly well or has simply let the side down, including three times in the last five games, where SRH lost to RCB (by 35 runs), CSK (by 78 runs) and MI (by 7 wickets).

The 2016 champions would hope Head and Sharma deliver as SRH are heavily dependent on the explosive starts provided by the duo.

They will also want to do a better job at re-building their innings, especially while chasing. The likes of Nitish Reddy, Heinrich Klassen and Abdul Samad need to manage that better.

On the other hand, the Titans, who have only five wins from 13 games and are on 11 points, are out of the reckoning

and will look to end their forgettable campaign on a high. With former skipper Hardik Pandya moving to Mumbai Indians this season, GT struggled to find a replacement for the all-rounder who was key to their title-winning run in 2022 and runners-up finish last year.

The absence of pacer Mohammed Shami, who was ruled out of the tournament due to injury, has also hurt them.

GT's bowling hasn't been as effective this season, with inconsistent pacers and leaky spinners. Their last match against Kolkata Knight Riders was a washout but the bowlers showed promise by taking three wickets in the first three overs against CSK. Mohit Sharma's variations

and knuckle balls were particularly effective, and Rashid Khan's clever bowling was noticeable. They'll hope for an encore. In the batting department, much will depend on skipper Shubman Gill and B Sai Sudharsan, who revelled in the role of an opener. David Miller has looked off-colour this season and his big hits would be crucial to ensure that the side signs off on a positive note.

Squads:
Sunrisers Hyderabad: Abhishek Sharma, Travis Head, Heinrich Klassen (wk), Aiden Markram, Abdul Samad, Nitish Reddy, Shahbaz Ahmed, Pat Cummins (c), Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Jaydev Unadkat, T Natarajan, Mayank Markande, Umran Malik, Anmolpreet Singh, Glenn Phillips (wk), Rahul Tripathi, Washington Sundar, Upendra Yadav (wk), Jhathavedh Subramanyan, Sanvir Singh, Vijayakanth Vijayakanth, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Marco Jansen, Akash Maharaj Singh, Mayank Agarwal.

Gujarat Titans: Shubman Gill (c), David Miller, Matthew Wade, Wriddhiman Saha, Kane Williamson, Abhinav Manohar, B. Sai Sudharsan, Darshan Nalkande, Vijay Shankar, Ajay Yadav, Rahul Tewatia, Noor Ahmad, Sai Kishore, Rashid Khan, Joshua Little, Mohit Sharma, Azmatullah Omarzai, Umesh Yadav, Shahrux Khan, Sushant Mishra, Kartik Tyagi, Manav Sutar, Spencer Johnson, Sandeep Warrier and BR Sharath.

Match starts: 7.30pm. (PTI)



NEW DELHI, May 15: Sunrisers Hyderabad's South African import Aiden Markram believes Abhishek Sharma's destructive IPL form would fetch him an India cap in the not so distant future.

Sharma, who is striking at over 200 in the ongoing edition, has 401 runs in 12 matches. He and Australian Travis Head make for an explosive opening pair and most recently chased down over 160 runs in a less 10 overs against Lucknow Super Giants. Markram, who is the captain of the South African team, described the duo as "brothers of destruction" in an interview to PTI Videos.

"Abhi (Abhishek) has made massive strides this season. He was showing some really positive signs in the previous seasons and what he's achieved so far this season puts him in good stead for hopefully representing India one day," Markram said of the 23-year-old left-hander. "He's got a very calm and level head on his shoulders and he'll take everything in his stride. But my fingers are certainly crossed for him to go to higher honours," he added.

Joining the debate surrounding the impact player rule, Markram said that the addition of an extra batter in the line-up has allowed teams to adopt a more aggressive approach. "Naturally, when you have that extra batter in your batting line-up, you feel more freedom as a player. And obviously from the start of the innings, the openers feel that extra bit of freedom as well," he explained.

"I think we've seen it with quite a few other teams that have been doing it. So

I'll definitely say that the impact players have created that and created probably a new brand of T20 cricket that happens here in IPL," he said.

Markram also commended the team's bowling unit, particularly the leadership of Bhuvneshwar Kumar.

"I don't think he's (Bhuvneshwar Kumar) ever lost it, to be honest. He sort of leads from the front in his own calm and silent way. It's been fantastic for us to watch.

"But the bowling unit as a whole has really confronted this challenge of the batters that's been happening this season with the scene of impact player. They found their own unique ways to try to keep the batters calm and also try to find ways to keep taking wickets," he said.

"But definitely someone like Bhuvu leading from the front, as he's done for many, many years, has been excellent for you," he added. Markram hasn't had the best of seasons so far and has managed 199 runs from nine matches so far. The 30-year-old said he is happy with the effort he is putting into his game.

"I'm still feeling really good. IPL is a tough beast to crack and you as a player have to appreciate that. It's all for good reasons. For me, it's spending lots of time working on my game, working hard off the field as well.

"And if you get another opportunity, you'll feel ready to take that and grab that opportunity hopefully. And if it doesn't work out, then whatever cricket lies ahead, you trust that this preparation puts you in a good state for that," he said acknowledging being out of form. (PTI)

Satwik-Chirag sail into Thailand Open second round, Prannoy loses

BANGKOK, May 15: Star Indian pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty progressed to the men's doubles pre-quarterfinals but it was curtains for fifth seed HS Prannoy after being stunned by compatriot Meiraba Luwang Maisnam in the men's singles opening round of Thailand Open here on Wednesday.

Top seeds Satwik and Chirag took just 34 minutes to get past the Malaysian pair of Nur Mohd Azriyn Ayub Azriyn and Tan Wee Kiong 21-13 21-13 in the opening round.

The Indian combination of Satwik and Chirag will play the Chinese pair of Xie Hao Nan and Zeng Wei Han in the next round.

But Prannoy failed to clear the first hurdle, losing 19-21 18-21 to Meiraba in a match lasting 55 minutes. Meiraba will take on Denmark's Mads Christophersen, who beat India's Kiran George 21-15 13-21 21-17.

In women's singles, Ashmita Chaliha came from behind to enter the second round of with a hard-fought 19-21 21-15 21-14 win over Ester Nurumi Tri Wardoyo of Indonesia. But a tough second round encounter awaits Ashmita as she will be up against top seed Han Yue of China. Yue got the better of another Indian in Malvika Bansod, registering a comfortable 21-11 21-10 win. (PTI)

We aren't afraid, here to win: Scotland's Cross looks to challenge Aussies, England in T20 WC

BENGALURU, May 15: Scotland might be short on big-match experience but not in confidence as vice-captain Matthew Cross on Wednesday hoped to meaningfully challenge England and Australia during next month's T20 World Cup.

Scotland are placed in Group B, consisting of title holders England, former champions Australia, besides fellow Associates Oman and Namibia, in the ICC showpiece to be held

in the Americas.

"We are here to win. We are not afraid. We have enough talent on our side to give them a good challenge," Cross told PTI during an online interaction after a function to announce Karnataka-based diary major 'Nandini' as the Scotland and Ireland team sponsor for the World Cup.

Pacer Chris Sole, who has considerable experience in various T20 leagues around the world, was banking on Scot-

land's prior experience in the West Indian conditions to spring a surprise or two.

Scotland will play their group matches in Barbados, Antigua and Gros Islet.

Sole has played for St Lucia Zouks in the Caribbean Premier League in August last year.

"Many of us have prior experience in the West Indies. We have played quite a bit of cricket there, and are aware of the conditions and pitches in

the Caribbean.

"Hopefully, that will help us in the tournament (T20 WC) as we are up against some very good team out there. It will be exciting to face England and Australia in a World Cup," said the 30-year-old Sole.

Scotland have added top-order batter Michael Jones and pacer Brad Wheel to their World Cup squad, and Cross said their experience in English County cricket will be handy for his side. (PTI)

Bopanna-Ebden pair bows out of Italian Open with pre-QF loss

ROME, May 15: The Indo-Australian pair of Rohan Bopanna and Matthew Ebden bowed out of the ATP Italian Open following a pre-quarterfinal loss to local hopes Simone Bolelli and Andrea Vavassori here.

The second seeds went down 2-6 4-6 in a match that lasted one hour and 13 minutes on Tuesday.

They had defeated wildcards Matteo Arnaldi and Francesco Passaro in their opening round clash.

It was a disappointing day for Bopanna and Ebden, who were broken twice in

the first set. Their opponents, however, did not concede a single break point in the opener. The Indo-Australian combination also double-faulted twice to concede the early initiative.

In the second set too, Bopanna and Ebden continued to be on the backfoot and were broken thrice. They did manage to break their rivals Bolelli and Vavassori twice but were out of depth overall.

The defeat continues a poor recent run that included a first-round exit from the Madrid Masters earlier this month.

Bopanna and Ebden have nonetheless enjoyed a good run on the circuit, winning the Australian Open men's doubles title this year.

Last year, they won the Indian Wells Masters which made the 43-year-old Indian the oldest ever ATP Masters 1000 champion.

The duo made the men's doubles semi-finals at Wimbledon and the final of the US Open in the same season.

Bopanna also became the oldest world number one in doubles, thanks to the Australian Open triumph in January. (PTI)

Pakistan has mental block when it comes to playing India in WC: Misbah

NEW DELHI, May 15: Former Pakistan captain Misbah-ul-Haq believes his country will find it difficult to edge past India when the two sides clash in next month's T20 World Cup as there seems to be a "mental block" when it comes to playing the arch-rivals in ICC events. India and Pakistan will clash on June 9 in New York in arguably the most awaited league stage match of the T20 World Cup that begins on June 1 in the Americas. India have lost to Pakistan just once (in 2021) in seven T20 World Cup matches.

"You call it Pakistan's jinx or mental block when it comes to playing India in World Cups. Pakistan will need to do a lot because this is a very skilled Indian team with a powerful bowling line-up and two good spinners," Misbah said on "Star Sports Press Room" on Wednesday.

"India has quality fast bowlers in (Jasprit) Bumrah, (Mohammed) Siraj and Hardik (Pandya). The Indian cricket team's quality has risen many folds. It will be difficult to break, mental attitude matters a lot and Australia handles the mental side the best way.

"There is no pressure of excess baggage with Australia, and it needs to be seen how both India and Pakistan handle that pressure."

Misbah said Virat Kohli, who has played some memorable knocks against his country, will once again be a major threat even though there has been considerable chatter surrounding his strike rate in the ongoing IPL.

"Kohli is going to be a big factor. He has damaged Pakistan many a times. He



enjoys supremacy over Pakistan mentally. He takes motivation from big occasions and not pressure," he said.

"The Virat Kohli effect will definitely be there. He is a top-class cricketer. He is one player who can win you matches, strike rates don't matter. Good players take motivation from those voices or criticism."

Misbah still hasn't forgotten the ill-executed scoop shot in the inaugural T20 World Cup final against India in 2007.

With Pakistan needing just six runs to win from the last four balls, Misbah attempted that shot over fine leg which was caught by S Sreesanth as Pakistan crumbled to 152, chasing a target of 157, handing India the trophy.

But Misbah said that tournament was responsible for the rapid growth of T20 cricket.

"In 2007 T20 World Cup, all teams were not so serious. India handed captaincy to a young (Mahendra Singh) Dhoni. But the final between India and Pakistan, the greatest rivalry in the history of cricket. The hype that T20 got after that World Cup is immense.

"The way T20 cricket flourished, I

feel whatever we achieved and the current players are now plying their trade in different leagues and IPL is something great," he said.

Speaking on the same platform, former India off-spinner Harbhajan Singh said Rohit Sharma can emulate Dhoni's 2007 feat, provided the team flies collectively in the Americas.

"Rohit sharma alone can't win the cup, it is about we and not me. The more we play like 'we', you can achieve anything," he said. Harbhajan also said the long and tiring IPL will definitely have an impact of Indian players' performance and advised Rohit and Co. to consider the World Cup as an extended part of the cash-rich league.

"IPL is a tiring tournament, travel is very tiring. The players will be physically and mentally a bit tired but they need to look at it is an extended part of IPL. "There is nothing bigger than World Cup, you need to give your best, you have to be switched on the given day. You have to bowl well, bat well and field well," he said.

"Winning a world cup is not going to be easy, you have to be mentally strong."

Harbhajan, however, refused to speculate on the pitches being prepared for the World Cup.

"Pitches nobody knows, how long they will last. Practice matches will give an idea about team combinations.

Former India pacer S Sreesanth added: "Two spinners is our strength. Hardik (Pandya) as third seamer, and two fast bowlers. India has a very strong batting line-up." (PTI)





National Dengue Day

16th May, 2024

Connect with Community, Control Dengue

LOOK OUT FOR SYMPTOMS

- High Fever
- Joint Pain
- Headache
- Redness of the Eyes
- Pain Behind Eyes
- Rash on Skin
- Muscular Pain
- Bleeding from Gums

STEPS TO PREVENT

Make sure there is no water stagnating in and around your house, in open containers, discarded coconut shells, unused flower pots etc.

Always use mosquito bed nets and age appropriate repellents like coils, creams, electric mats etc.

Protect yourself from mosquito bites by wearing long sleeved clothes & trousers.

If you feel any dengue-like symptoms, consult a doctor immediately, Don't take medicines without a doctor's consultation.

If you want to impregnate your own bed net, contact your District Malaria Officers/District Vector-Borne Disease Consultants.

<p>Baksa & Tamulpur Shri Pradiop Kr. Haloi 9859134661</p> <p>Barpeta & Bajali Mrs. Jyotirupa Das 9957420463</p> <p>Biswanath Dr. Eliza Deka 9435383153</p> <p>Bongaigaon Dr. Imdadul Islam Khan 7002822066</p> <p>Cachar Dr. M. I. Barbhuiya 9435461298</p> <p>Charaideo Dr. Kumud Chandra Das 9435138231</p> <p>Chirang Shri Robin Chandra Baro 9435540428</p> <p>Darrang Shri Shyam Prasad Baruah 9365234334</p> <p>Dhemaji Dr. K. K. Kaman 9957821651</p> <p>Dhubri Dr. Arup Kr. Choudhury 9435129614</p> <p>Dibrugarh Dr. Dondeswar Deori 9435487749</p>	<p>Dima Hasao Dr. P. K. Gonju 9435151721</p> <p>Goalpara Shri Niranjan Nath 86381102355</p> <p>Golaghat Dr. Bharat Phukan 8011470777</p> <p>Hailakandi Shri Ashish Kumar Paul 9957214482</p> <p>Hojai Shri Nanda Ram Choudhury 9707029766</p> <p>Jorhat Md. Abdur Rohim 9401092350</p> <p>Kamrup Shri R. Rajkumar 9435146623</p> <p>Kamrup Metro Shri Mridul Talukdar 7086641463</p> <p>Karbi Anglong Dr. Semsing Singnar 7002805248</p> <p>Karimganj Dr. M. Sutradhar 8001587034</p> <p>Kokrajhar Shri Jugal Gam 8638809309</p>	<p>Lakhimpur Dr. Dhiren Saikia 9678950371</p> <p>Majuli Dr. Diganta Dutta 9435084804</p> <p>Morigaon Mrs. Supriya Das 8011329900</p> <p>Nagaon Mrs. Santana Sarma 9101291916</p> <p>Nalbari Dr. Nabanita Das 9954293021</p> <p>Sivasagar Mrs. Swagota Dutta 9854034697</p> <p>Sonitpur Ms. Kakali Dutta 9954663064</p> <p>South Salmara Dr. S. L. Nag 8876802282</p> <p>Tinsukia Ms. Ujjwala Baruah 9954594576</p> <p>Udalguri Ms. Nazia Hassan 8486375988</p> <p>West Karbi Anglong Dr. Montu Shyam 8011211937</p>
---	---	--

Prevent incubation of mosquitoes inside and outside your home. Save yourself from dengue.

Treatment of dengue is available in all Government Hospitals. Laboratory facilities for testing dengue is available free of cost in all District Hospitals and Medical Colleges.

Call 104 for Health related queries | Call 108 for Ambulance Service | For any help, contact ASHA/ANM