- Iran's president, foreign minister and others found dead at helicopter crash site
- Nepal PM wins vote of confidence in Parliament



- Never spoken against minorities, but will not accept any 'special citizens': PM
- Scattered incidents of violence in fifth phase of LS polls in Bengal



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DIPHU. KARBI ANGLONG

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Bengal registers highest 73% polling, Maharashtra lowest at 48.88 %% ● Poll percentage to go up

Over 57 % turnout recorded in fifth phase of LS polls

While Maharashtra recorded lowest voter turnout at 48.88 per cent, West Bengal recorded highest polling percentage at 73 per cent

NEW DELHI, May 20: Over 57 per cent voter turnout was recorded on Monday in 49 constituencies in six states and two Union territories in the fifth phase of the Lok Sabha election amid sporadic incidents of violence in West Bengal, besides EVM glitches at some booths in the state and neighbouring Odisha. While Maharashtra recorded the lowest voter turnout at 48.88 per cent, West Bengal recorded the

highest polling percentage at 73. Among other states, Bihar recorded 52.55 cent turnout, Jammu and Kashmir 54.21 per cent, Jharkhand 63 per cent, Odisha 60.72 per cent, Uttar Pradesh 57.43 per cent and Ladakh 67.15.

According to the figures made available by the Election Commission till 7 pm, the approximate polling percentage was at 57.38. Although voting time was till 6

pm, people already in queue by

that time are allowed to vote.

Jammu and Kashmir's Baramulla Lok Sabha constituency recorded a voter turnout of more than 54 per cent, already registering its highest polling percentage in almost four decades. The overall polling percentage of 54.21 this time is second only to the 58.84 per cent turnout the constituency saw in 1984. Scattered incidents of violence marred the polls in seven parliamentary constituencies of West Bengal where TMC and BJP workers clashed in various parts of Barrackpore, Bongaon, and Aram-

bagh seats. The poll panel said it



New Mollusc species considered

extinct discovered in state

making this significant discovery.

Their findings were published in the

prestigious Zoological Journal of

the Linnean Society recently, men-

tioning the global significance of

"The rediscovery of the genus

has received 1,036 complaints from different political parties alleging EVM malfunctioning and agents being stopped from entering

Clashes broke out between supporters of the TMC and BJP in the Khanakul area of the Arambagh constituency. In neighbouring Hooghly constituency, BJP sitting MP and party candidate Locket contingent (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Chatterjee faced protests from TMC activists led by TMC MLA Ashima Patra.

As Chatterjee was on her way to a booth, TMC activists staged protests and shouted "Chor Chor (thief) slogans" following which the BJP MP got down from her car and shouted slogans against them. A huge police and central forces

Iran's president, foreign minister and others found dead at helicopter crash site

dent Ebrahim Raisi, the country's foreign minister and several other officials were found dead on Monday, hours after their helicopter crashed in a foggy, mountainous region of the country's northwest, state media reported.

The crash comes as the Middle East remains unsettled by the Israel-Hamas war, during which Raisi, who was 63, under Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei launched an unprecedented droneand-missile attack on Israel just last

During Raisi's term in office, Iran enriched uranium closer than ever to weapons-grade levels, further escalating tensions with the West as Tehran also supplied bomb-carrying drones to Russia for its war in Ukraine and armed militia groups across the region.

Meanwhile, Iran has faced years of mass protests against its Shiite theocracy over its ailing economy and women's rights — making the moment that much more sensitive for Tehran and the future of the

Khamenei hours later announced



Iran's first vice president, Mohammad Mokhber, would serve as the country's acting president until elections are held.

State TV gave no immediate cause for the crash that occurred in Iran's East Azerbaijan province. Among the dead was Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirab-

dollahian, 60. The helicopter also carried the governor of Iran's East Azerbaijan province, other officials and bodyguards, the state-run IRNA news

Early Monday morning, Turkish

authorities released what they described as drone footage showing what appeared to be a fire in the wilderness that they "suspected to be wreckage of helicopter." The coordinates listed in the footage put the fire some 20 kilometres south of the Azerbaijan-Iranian border on

the side of a steep mountain. Footage released by the IRNA early Monday showed what the agency described as the crash site, across a steep valley in a green mountain range. Soldiers speaking in the local Azeri language said:

Elephant attack

HT Correspondent

BOKAJAN, May 20: A woman died in an attack by a wild elephant in the Nahorjan Forest under Western Division Rongapahar Forest Range in Karbi Anglong.

A group of villagers, including a wedded couple, were foraging for firewood in the Nahorjan Forest in the afternoon when a herd of wild elephants attacked them. A man, seeing his wife being attacked rushed forward to help her, but he got his legs crushed by an elephant. His wife died on the spot.

The villagers rushed the injured man to a hospital in Dimapur for treament. The body of the deceased however, could not be retrieved as the wild elephants were still in the area. The police at Lahorijan outpost and officials of the forest department have been informed.

Nahorjan beat officer, Krishna Rongphar could not be contacted for details. The identity of the victims could also not be ascertained till filing of this report.

Students felicitated

HT Correspondent KHERONI, May 20: The Hazagafar Raising Youth Club, Hazagafar in West Karbi Anglong organised the felicitation of Dimasa students.

During the programme Dimasa students who have passed class 10 and class 12 examinations were felicitated. The Sengya Sambudhon Green Industries Private Limited also gave a cash prize worth Rs 50,000 to two students Princi Hamampura and Sara B Sanongpha. While Princi passed the class 10 examination with 88 per cent marks, Sara passed the class 12 examination with 85per cent marks.

The event was attended by Assam power minister Nandita Garlosa, executive member of NC Hills Autonomous Council, Niranjan Hojai, chairman of Sengya Sambudhon Green Industries Private Limited, Sujit Sarangsa, president of Hazagafar Raising Youth Club, Bikash Dibra, principal of Hawaipur HS School, Khemlal Khimir and principal of Model HS School, Sukhdev Singh.

Arms recovered

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 20: The Indian Army has recovered a huge cache of arms and ammunition from Gwaltabi village in Imphal East district in Manipur. Acting on specific information, a team of Army

personnel in collaboration with the Manipur police conducted a joint operation at the Gwaltabi village. During the raid, they recovered a substantive amount of explosives comprising of one improvised long range mortar (Pompi), one 303 rifle, two 12-bore guns, two hand grenades, ammunition and other war-

The recoveries have been handed over to the Manipur Police for further investigation and disposal. The security forces remain vigilant and committed to an early restoration of peace and harmony in the Manipur.

AGARTALA, May 20: The Tripura Pradesh grants from the three countries.

the discovery.

Congress MLA Sudip Roy Barman said granting citizenship to selected migrants will alter the demographic composition of both Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) and non-ADC areas.

The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 paves the way for granting Indian nationality to undocumented non-Muslim migrants -Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, Parsis and Christians - from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who came to India before December 31, 2014.

Barman noted that the current 31 per cent

Tripura will automatically decrease if the population of non-tribals increases after citizenship is granted to the "thousands" of mi-

He accused the BJP of using the CAA for

Criticising Tipra Motha without directly naming it. Barman questioned why the "messiah" of Tiprasa people, an indirect reference to Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma, re-

Both (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Rampant use of pesticides behind closure of tea factories

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 20: The Assam Bought Leaf Tea Manufacturer's Association (ABLTMA) has decided to close down the state's bought tea leaf factories from June 1 as tea buyers refuse to buy tea produced in these factories due to use of pesticides. However, the ABLTMA has denied shutting

down these factories in order to bring down the prices of raw leaves for the small tea growers as alleged by the All Assam Small Tea Growers Association.

It further stated that the price of raw leaf is being paid to the small tea growers at the price fixed by the Tea Board of India as per ne Price Sharing Formula.

The ABLTMA said that it had incurred loss as dried tea buyers were not willing to buy tea produced in the state's tea factories due to the rampant use of pesticides by the small tea growers. They had even approached the state government and the Tea man and attended by the district commis-Board of India for a solution. However, with

no solution in sight, it has decided to close down the factories from June 1.

"We would like to make it clear that some small tea farmers are using widely banned pesticides on raw leaves, thus violating the Tea Board of India's permissible limit for the use of pesticides. Therefore, factory-produced tea leaves (made tea) contain large amounts of pesticides. As a result, dried tea buyers are not willing to buy dried tea produced in such factories of the state. We are facing huge losses and various problems in this regard. The association had also approached the state and central governments as well as the Tea Board of India authorities concerning the issue, but to no avail," S Gohain, president of ABLTMA. "We are surprised to read the statement issued by the All Assam Small Tea Growers Association in the media blaming us. However, in a recent meeting chaired by secretary-general S Laxsioners of (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Cong threatens to launch statewide ED alleges over ₹ 7-cr foreign agitation against CAA in Tripura funding to Aam Aadmi Party

Assamnaia after more than a cen-

tury reaffirms the richness of biodi-

versity in Assam. It serves as a

reminder of the urgent need to pro-

tect and conserve the region's natu-

ral resources for future generations.

Congress Committee (TPCC) on Monday threatened to launch a protest against the implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) in the state.

HT Correspondent
DIBRUGARH, May 20: In a

major discovery, researchers at the

Dibrugarh University have an-

nounced the discovery of two new

freshwater mussel genera, Pseu-

doscabies and Assamnaia - from the

Brahmaputra river basin in the state.

The discovery is particularly signif-

icant as the genus Assamnaia was

considered extinct for 168 years,

making its rediscovery a momen-

tous event in the field of biodiver-

The team of researchers, led by

Devid Kardong and Jyotish

Sonowal from the department of

life sciences and Centre for

Biotechnology and Bioinformatics

at the Dibrugarh University respec-

tively, collaborated with Ivan Bolo-

tov, a corresponding member of the

Russian Academy of Sciences in

sity conservation.

Addressing a press conference here, senior

The BJP-led government has formed a sixmember empowered committee in the state to process applications for citizenship under

reservation for Scheduled Tribes (ST) in

political gain and warned that the move would embolden extremists in other countries to intensify their persecution of religious mi-

mained silent on the CAA's implementation.

"The Tipra Motha was established to oppose the CAA, yet the regional party is now silent. Its leaders claim the Act won't be implemented in the Sixth Schedule Areas of the state, but if the CAA is enforced, the entire state's demographics will change since the autonomous tribal council is part of the state," he said. "We strongly oppose the CAA's implementation and will submit a memorandum to the chief secretary (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

NEW DELHI, May 20: The Enforcement Directorate has written to the Union home ministry alleging the Aam Aadmi Party, which rules Delhi and Punjab, has received more than ₹ 7 crore foreign funds in contravention of the FCRA, official sources said Mon-

The federal probe agency sent the communication after it recovered some documents and emails during a drugs-linked money laundering probe against former Punjab AAP MLA Sukhpal Singh Khaira and some others. The probe was launched in 2021 and Khaira was arrested by the ED that year. He is now with the Congress party.

Official sources said the ED had sent a detailed communication to the Union Home Ministry in August last year, underlining the alleged violations by the AAP and

categorising these instances as contravention of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) and The Representation of the People Act.

It is understood that the ED recently shared some fresh inputs in this case with the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).

Sources said the ED found the AAP received overseas donations of about Rs 7.08 crore till now and they allegedly "mis-declared and manipulated" the identities and nationalities of the foreign donors apart from some other details.

The agency has also informed the MHA about the verified names of the donors, their nationalities, passport numbers, amount donated, mode of donation and bank account number of the receiver, billing name, address, phone numbers, email, time and the date of

donation and payment gateway used, the sources said.

Some fundraising events held by the AAP through its overseas wing volunteers in the USA and Canada between 2015 and 2016 are reported to have been made in alleged violation of the FCRA, the agency told the ministry.

Alleging violations in a particular instance, the ED also informed the MHA that the names of some Canada-based people and their nationalities had been "concealed" in the party's financial records to "hide" the foreign donations being made to the party into its Indian bank account. A senior official said cases of FCRA violations are probed by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the home ministry can write to it seeking an investigation into these charges made by the ED. (PTI)

'Headhunting to Beatboxing' delves into intriguing journey of rhythm and sound, charting music's growth through generations

Documentary on Naga music unveiled at 77th Cannes Film Festival

the intriguing journey of rhythm and

sound, charting music's growth



HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, May 20: Music legend AR Rahman, along with adviser to Nagaland chief minister, Abu Metha, and chairman of Task Force for Music and Arts (TaFMA) Nagaland Theja Meru, unveiled a

documentary film on Nagaland music titled 'Headhunting to Beatboxing' at the 77th Cannes Film Festival in France on Monday.

through generations. From the ancient traditions of headhunting tribes 'Headhunting to Beatboxing', of Nagaland to the musical renaisdirected by Rohit Gupta and prosance in the state, the documentary duced by AR Rahman, delves into promises to take audiences on an im-

mersive and enlightening musical anthropological odyssey. While talking about the feature documentary, Rahman said, "Music has this transformative power to change society and to connect and bring relevance to existence.

He said 'Headhunting to Beatboxing' is a celebration of this universal rhythm that unites humanity in its diverse expressions. "We look forward to the start of

its film festival journey, and what better than Cannes which celebrates cinema to make the first announcement on the film," Rahman added. Metha said the film is a collaboration of many creative minds. especially the TaFMA and masterfully captured by director Rohit Gupta. "The real heroes are the musicians of Nagaland, who tell stories that go back to times immemorial and their music exemplifies

the ambition of our youth," he said. Metha also highlighted Nagaland and its unique aspects to the international audience present at the launch of film. He thanked Rahman for his role in supporting and partnering with Nagaland. He said the young Naga musicians are very fortunate to be guided and mentored by a legendary figure.

"His contributions and partnership, especially by adopting an orphanage to empower them through music is commendable," Metha added. "Five years in the making, the journey of this film has been a sort of metamorphosis for me. The rich and vibrant music today, transcending the scars of the past is something that truly blew me away during the making. I am excited to see audiences witness our hard work and the magic that exists in the music of Nagaland," said director Gupta

BJP to score big in South, **NDA** will cross 400: Modi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has asserted that the BJP will emerge as the single largest party in the south, as he remained unwaveringly confident that his NDA alliance will cross 400 seats in

tion results come out on June 4. "Our strategy for the entire nation is the same. Phir ek baar modi sarkar. Aur chaar June 400

Lok Sabha when elec-

paar," Modi said in an interview to PTI Videos on Sunday night. Modi said his opponents have created a myth that the BJP has no strength or presence in the southern states.

"Look at 2019 elections. The largest party even then in the south was BJP. Again, I say this: the largest party in the south this time

BHUBANESWAR, May 20: will be BJP, and its allies will add more (seats) to it," he added.

> "We will be the single largest party in Southern India and by an even bigger margin than the last time. "We have seen a

jump in mind-share already. We will see a big jump in seat share and vote share for us across the region," Modi

Southern India accounts for 131 of the 543 Lok Sabha seats. In the outgoing House, BJP has 29 members besides one independent backed by it, from Karnataka.

Even in eastern India, "we are witnessing a massive surge of support from the people ... which is giving sleepless nights to people in sections of (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Signature Global buys 14.65-acre land in Gurugram for around ₹ 350 cr to build premium homes

NEW DELHI, May 20: Realty firm Signature Global has bought 14.65 acres of land in Gurugram for around ₹ 350 crore to develop a housing project as part of its expansion plan.

THE HILLS TIMES

In a statement, the company said it has acquired 14.65 acres of land in Sector 37D near Dwarka Expressway. Gurugram.

However, it did not disclose the deal value and the name of the

Sources said the deal value could be around ₹ 350 crore.

Signature Global plans to develop a residential project comprising 27 lakh square feet area.

Pradeep Kumar Aggarwal, Chairman of Signature Global, said, "Dwarka Expressway has swiftly become a premier destination for homebuyers seeking luxury residences. In recent years, numerous high-end residential projects have been launched in this area, with many more expected in the near future.

He expects the demand for residential housing in this region to remain strong.

"We aim to launch a residential project on this land in 2025-26, reinforcing our presence in the luxury housing market," Aggarwal

Hero MotoCorp

plans to expand



Signature Global Ltd has set a target to sell ₹ 10,000 crore worth housing properties in 2024-25, up 38 per cent from the last fiscal.

The company's sales bookings more than doubled to ₹7,268 crore in 2023-24 from ₹ 3,430 crore in the preceding year.

The company, which is mainly developing projects at Gurugram in Haryana, sold 4,619 units last fiscal as against 4,512 units in 2022-23.

In terms of area, Signature Global sold 6.18 million square feet in 2023-24, up from 4.35 million square feet in the preceding

Its net profit stood at ₹ 7.60 crore in the year-ago period.

Total income increased to ₹ 722.73 crore in the fourth quarter of last fiscal year from ₹ 709.86 crore in the corresponding period of the preceding year, according to a regulatory filing.

During the entire 2023-24 fiscal, the company posted a net profit of ₹ 16.18 crore as against a net loss of 63.86 crore in the preceding

However, total income decreased to ₹ 1,324.55 crore in the last fiscal from ₹ 1,585.87 crore in the 2022-23 fiscal

Signature Global is one of the leading real estate firms in the Delhi-NCR region.

It currently has a portfolio of 48.6 million square feet with 16.4 million square feet ongoing and 29.3 million square feet forthcom-

In September last year, Signature Global successfully launched its IPO (initial public offering) to raise ₹730 crore.

The public issue, comprising a fresh issue of shares worth Rs 603 crore and an Offer for Sale (OFS) of ₹ 127 crore, was subscribed

World stocks advance after Wall Street closes out another winning week

vear. Sales realization for the

2023-24 averaged ₹ 11,762 per

square feet compared to ₹ 7,886

per square feet in the previous fis-

marked a significant period for our

company, characterized by several

achievements, including a success-

ful IPO, expansion into the pre-

mium segment, and a notable

transition to mid-income housing

from affordable housing," Aggar-

Signature Global reported a

more than five-fold jump in its

consolidated net profit to ₹ 41.21

crore for the quarter ended March,

wal said.

"The financial year 2023-24

electric model NEW DELHI, May 20: Hero MotoCorp is looking to expand its presence in the electric two-wheeler segment as it aims to introduce new models below its current range to cater to a broader set of customers, as per a senior company official. The country's largest two-wheeler maker currently sells two electric scooters under its Vida range, priced between Rs 1 lakh and Rs 1.5 lakh

"We are expanding our portfolio in the first half of this year (current fiscal)..into the mid and the mass segment as well," Hero MotoCorp Chief Business Officer -Emerging Mobility BU Swadesh Srivastava said in an analyst call.

With new product introductions this fiscal, the company is going to be able to play in each of the three segments of premium, mid and mass, he noted.

"With this, we are looking at significant growth within this year. And we are also looking to improve our cost structures," he said.

The company is going to witness huge growth in the EV segment this year as well as next year, he stated.

"We are looking at steep growth this year and next year, based on the portfolio and the geographical expansion," Srivas-

Hero MotoCorp has expanded the presence of the VIDA brand to more than 120 cities and over 180 touch-points in the

It has also entered into a partnership with Ather Energy for an interoperable charging network, providing over 2,000 charging points across 200 cities to its customers.

To strengthen its global presence, VIDA is also expected to make its debut in European and UK markets in FY25.

Replying to a query, Hero MotoCorp CEO Niranjan Gupta said the company's capex guidance remains between Rs 1,000 crore and Rs 1,500 crore for the current fiscal. He noted that there are new product launches in the offing.

"We are going to launch Xoom 125, Xoom 160 - the scooter launches in the first half, you will see more, some more forays into the premium segment as well," he told an analyst.

He further said: "And we can confidently say that we are poised for accelerated growth moving forward for FY25 and beyond." (PTI)

HONG KONG, May 20: World stocks advanced Monday after US stock indexes drifted near their records, with the Dow Jones Industrial Average closing above 40,000 for the first time.

Oil prices climbed as investors focused on the Middle East, where a helicopter carrying Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and other officials crashed in the mountainous northwest reaches of Iran on Sunday.

European markets started the week higher with Britain's FTSE 100 gaining 0.3% to 8,447.28. Germany's DAX added 0.4% to 18,770.02 and the CAC 40 in Paris climbed 0.4% to 8,197.72.

The future for the S&P 500 edged 0.1% higher, and that for the Dow Jones Industrial Average was up less than 0.1%.

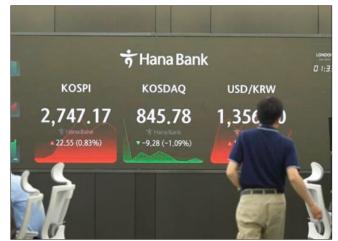
China's market extended last week's gains after the central bank announced new support for the property industry, including cutting required down payments for housing loans, cutting mortgage interest rates for first and second home purchases and removing a mortgage rate floor.

The Hang Seng in Hong Kong added 0.3% to 19.608.30, with its property index up 0.3%. Country Garden Holdings, one of many financially troubled developers, saw its US-listed shares surge 18.5% on Friday after the policy was announced.

The Shanghai Composite 0.5% to index advanced 3,171.15.

On Monday, China's central bank left the one- and five-year loan prime rate unchanged at 3.45% and 3.95%, in line with expectations. The one-year LPR serves as the benchmark for most new and outstanding loans in China, while the five-year rate affects the pricing of property

In Tokyo, the Nikkei 225 climbed 0.7% to Australia's



S&P/ASX 200 gained 0.6% to 7,863.70. The Kospi in Korea rose 0.6% to 2,742.14.

Elsewhere, Taiwan's Taiex edged 0.1% higher after Lai Ching-te was inaugurated as Taiwan's new president. Lai is expected to uphold the island's de facto independence policy from China and seek to bolster its defenses against Beijing, which claims the island as Chi-

In Bangkok, the SET was up

On Friday, the Dow rose 0.3% to 40,003.59. It and other indexes on Wall Street have been climbing since the autumn of 2022 as the US economy and corporate profits have shown resilience despite high inflation, the punishing effects of high interest rates and worries about a recession that seemed inevitable but hasn't arrived.

The S&P 500, which is the much more important index for Wall Street and most retirement savers, added 0.1%, closing out a fourth straight week of gains. The Nasdaq composite slipped 0.1% to 16,685.97.

A report last week rekindled hopes that inflation is finally heading back in the right direction after a discouraging start to the year. That in turn revived hopes for the Federal Reserve to cut its main interest rate at least once this year.

The federal funds rate is sitting at its highest level in more than two decades, and a cut would goose investment prices and remove some of the downward pressure on the economy. The hope is that the Fed can

pull off the balancing act of slowing the economy enough through high interest rates to stamp out high inflation but not so much that it causes a bad re-

Of course, now that a growing percentage of traders are betting on the Fed cutting rates two times this year, if not more, some economists are cautioning the optimism may be going too far. It's something that happens often on Wall Street.

In the bond market, the yield on the 10-year Treasury rose to 4.43% from 4.38% late Thurs-

In other trading Monday, benchmark US crude oil was up 2 cents at \$79.60 per barrel. Brent crude, the international standard, added 24 cents to \$84.22 per barrel.

The US dollar rose to 155.76 Japanese yen from 155.55 yen. The euro rose to \$1.0874 from

Airbus & SIDBI tie up to finance chopper purchase in India

NEW DELHI, May 20: Airbus tions for purchasing Airbus heli-Helicopters and Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) have signed a MoU for financing purchase of Airbus' helicopters in India. The same was signed by SIDBI chief GM Rahul Priyadarshi and Sunny Guglani, head of Airbus Helicopters (India and South Asia). Under the MoU, both Airbus Helicopters and SIDBI will identify potential civil helicopter operators in India who are interested in financing solu-

copters.

Airbus will provide the technical and helicopter industry knowledge to SIDBI who will evaluate these prospects and finance them exclusively for Airbus

"The MoU with SIDBI opens a new chapter in making civil helicopters more accessible to operators in India, which will further position these rotary wing aircraft as a critical tool for nation building. Combining our unmatched

product portfolio and industry expertise with SIDBI's attractive financing solutions will play a pivotal role in the expansion of the civil helicopter market in India," said Guglani.

Priyadarshi said, "This a new area for financing to helicopter operators by SIDBI and is expected to open new avenues for financing MSMEs related to this segment.

This collaboration marks SIDBI's foray into helicopter financing. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Over 57 % turnout recorded

rushed to the spot and stopped the two groups. Violence was also reported from various parts of the Howrah constituency. In the Liluah area of Howrah, the BJP accused TMC workers of booth jamming leading to clashes between both groups. The central police forces rushed to the area and dispersed them. In Bongaon constituency's Gayeshpur area, local BJP leader Subir Biswas was allegedly beaten by TMC supporters outside a booth. He was later shifted to the hospital. In the Kalyani area of the same constituency, Union Minister and BJP candidate Shantanu Thakur caught a person using the identity card of his rival TMC candidate Biswajit Das inside a polling booth. The person was later removed from the booth by central forces. TMC workers also staged protests in some areas following allegations that central forces were assisting BJP workers for allegedly intimidating voters at some booths of Hooghly. In Uttar Pradesh, the Congress claimed EVM malfunctioning and accused the BJP of not allowing people to cast votes in three booths in Bela Khara village in Rahi block.

In a post on X, the Uttar Pradesh unit of the Congress, said, "Booth number 5, Rasulpur in Sareni in Rae Bareli is closed since 8 am (and) voters are going back. So this is how (the target of) 400 (seats) will be crossed!" Samajwadi Party candidate from Gonda constituency Shreya Verma complained to the Election Commission that fair polling is not taking place at booth numbers 180 and 181 in the Mankapur area.

According to reports from Kaushambi, voters of Hisampur Madho village boycotted the polls.

The villagers told the officials that they would consider voting only after the administration assured them that a road and railway bridge connecting the village to other areas would be built. In Maharashtra, Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray claimed there were a lot of complaints from electors about facilities outside

"A lot of complaints from voters about the facilities outside the booths @ECISVEEP At least having the voter lines in shade/ fans could help. They don't want much, just basics to stay cool. Please look into it," Thackeray said in a post on X. BJP leader Kirit Somaiya alleged that Shiv Sena (UBT) leaders Sanjay Raut and Sunil

Raut were found involved in "corrupt practices" outside their polling booth at Bhandup in Mumbai The former MP also claimed that two activists of the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) were arrested for "illegal and corrupt practices of using a fake EVM".

However, MLA Sunil Raut, who is the brother of Rajya Sabha member Sanjay Raut, dismissed the allegations saying a dummy electronic voting machine (EVM) was kept outside the 100-metre radius of the polling booth for educational purposes. Still, the police removed it under "political pressure", he claimed.

In Odisha, some unidentified persons allegedly hacked an auto-rickshaw driver to death near Sarsara in Bargarh district. The deceased was carrying some voters to the polling booth. While the family members claimed it was a political murder, police say personal enmity is the reason behind the crime. EVM glitches were also reported at some places in Odisha. Over 8.95 crore people, including 4.26 crore females and 5,409 third-gender electors, are eligible to vote in this round and 9.47 lakh polling officials have been deployed across 94,732 polling stations. Polling for 23 states and Union territories and 379 seats has been completed so far. (PTI)

Iran's president, foreign

is, we found it." Condolences started pouring in from neighbors and allies after Iran confirmed there were no survivors from the crash. Pakistan announced a day of mourning and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in a post on X that his country "stands with Iran in this time of sorrow." Leaders of Egypt and Jordan also offered condolences, as did Syrian President Bashar Assad.

Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev said he and his government were "deeply shocked" — Raisi was returning on Sunday after travelling to Iran's border with Azerbaijan to inaugurate a dam with Aliyev when the crash happened. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan conveyed his condolences. Russian President Vladimir Putin, in a statement released by the Kremlin, described Raisi "as a true friend of Russia." Khamenei, who had himself urged the public to pray Sunday night, stressed the business of Iran's government would continue no

Under the Iranian constitution, Iran's vice first president takes over if the president dies, with Khamenei's assent, and a new presidential election would be called within 50 days. Khamenei's condolence message Monday over Raisi's death, declared five days of public mourning and acknowledged Mokhber had taken the role of acting president.

Mokhber had already begun receiving calls from officials and foreign governments in Raisi's absence, state media reported. An emergency meeting of Iran's Cabinet was held as state media made the announcement Monday morning. The Cabinet issued a statement afterward pledging it would follow Raisi's path and that "with the help of God and the people, there will be no problem with management of the country.

A hard-liner who formerly led the country's judiciary, Raisi was viewed as a protégé of Khamenei and some analysts had suggested he could replace the 85-year-old leader after Khamenei's death or resignation.

With Raisi's death, the only other person so far suggested has been Mojtaba Khameini, the 55-year-old son to the supreme leader. However, some have raised concerns over the position being taken only for the third time since 1979 to a family member, particularly after the Islamic Revolution overthrew the hereditary Pahlavi monar-

Raisi won Iran's 2021 presidential election, a vote that saw the lowest turnout in the Islamic Republic's history. Raisi is sanctioned by the US in part over his involvement in the mass execution of thousands of political prisoners in 1988 at the end of the bloody Iran-Iraq war.

Under Raisi, Iran now enriches uranium at nearly weapons-grade levels and hampers international inspections. Iran has armed Russia in its war on Ukraine, as well as launched a massive drone-and-missile attack on Israel amid its war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip. It also has continued arming proxy groups in the Mideast, like Yemen's Houthi rebels and Lebanon's Hezbollah.

Meanwhile, mass protests in the country have raged for years. The most recent involved the 2022 death of Mahsa Amini, a woman who had been earlier detained over allegedly not wearing a hijab, or headscarf, to the liking of authorities. The monthslong security crackdown that followed the demonstrations killed more than 500 people and saw over 22,000 detained. In March, a United Nations investigative panel found that Iran was responsible for the "physical violence" that led to Amini's death. Raisi is the second Iranian president to die in office. In 1981, a bomb blast killed President Mohammad Ali Rajai in the chaotic days after the country's Islamic

New Mollusc species considered

Pseudoscabies and Assamnaia are endemic to Assam and it further solidifies the region's status as a global hotspot for freshwater mussel endemism. The discovery is also an example about the resilience of nature and the intricate web of life that exists in our freshwater ecosystems," Kardong said. Overall, the discovery of Pseudoscabies and Assamnaia in the state marks a significant milestone in the field of

biodiversity research. The researcher hopes that the finding will raise awareness about the importance of protecting and preserving the delicate ecosystems of the state and inspire further studies on the region's rich biodiversity. 'The presence of these two new genera is an example of the state's unique aquatic ecosystem and the importance

of biodiversity conservation in the region. As we continue to unravel the mysteries of the natural world, it is imperative that we work together to ensure the long-term survival of all species, no matter how rare or elusive they may be," Kardong added

Cong threatens to launch

on Tuesday. Following that, the party, along with its tribal wing, Adivasi Congress, will launch a statewide protest against this controversial Act," he added. (PTI)

Rampant use of pesticides

Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts, neither the president nor the secretary of the association were present,"

BJP to score big in South.

the media and politics in Bhubaneswar, Kolkata and even in Delhi," Modi said. Recalling how using a presentation a few years ago he had delved into development deficit in Eastern India in great detail, Modi said the NDA government was specifically working to empower this region. As a result, in the last decade, the region has seen the difference that a BJP government, an NDA government can make, he added. "The so-called 'red corridor' will become a 'saffron corridor' in these elections.

The Prime Minister said all assessments of the past phases of the elections show that the NDA is in "pole position" and the Congress along with its INDI alliance partners is struggling to even open its account in some states. 'The blessings of the people will take us to a record-breaking mandate. We will see more seats from all parts of

the country, particularly from the south and the east," he added. "NDA is on course to achieve the 400 seats." Modi said the BJP has been a truly national party "from Day 1, not only in our geographical presence but also in our ideology." "For us, nation first is the foundation of our ideology. If we take decisions for Bengal or Kerala it will be on the basis of nation first," he said. Asked about the national results, he said: "We have set out to cross 400. After four phases of elections, I can say with confidence that our estimate was correct, and more than our estimate the determination of people (janata Janardhan) was stronger.'

The Prime Minister said the narrative about BJP's weakness in the south is part of a campaign that has painted the party variously as urban centric, male centric, north centric and a "Baniya-Brahmin" party. "A myth has been spread. There is an ecosystem in our nation for years that creates all kinds of myths, to mislead the nation and to destroy the nation," he added. "It was also said that we are a Baniya-Brahmin party. But the largest number of Dalit, OBC and tribal MP/MLAs are from BJP. They do this deliberately, and a similar myth has been spread that we are not present in the south." (PTI)

NFRA imposes ₹2.5 Cr fine on two auditors in Reliance Commercial Finance case

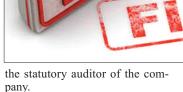
NEW DELHI, May 20: The National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA) has slapped penalties totalling ₹ 2.5 crore on two auditors for professional misconduct and auditing lapses in the Reliance Commercial Finance case for FY2018-19.

The audit regulator imposed a fine of ₹ 2 crore on Shridhar & Associates and ₹ 50 lakh on Ajay Vastani.

In addition, the regulator also barred Vastani for 5 years from undertaking any audit in respect of financial statements or internal audit of the functions and activities of any company or body corporate.

The order came after the corporate affairs ministry informed NFRA that Price Waterhouse & Co Chartered Accountants LLP (PW) had filed a report to the ministry under the Companies Act, 2013.

Thereafter, PW resigned as the auditor of RCFL, without issuing an audit report for FY 2018-19. Further, Shridhar & Associates was appointed by the board of directors of RCFL in June 2019 as



On examination of the audit file of RCFL conducted by Shridhar & Associates, "we were of the prima facie view that the auditors had not discharged their professional duties under the act as well as the standards on auditing (SA)", NFRA said in the order dated May

Consequently, a show cause notice was issued to the auditors under the rules for professional

misconduct. The auditors endorsed the company's legal interpretation that there was no fraud and based on that dismissed any suspicions of fraud even while the matter was pending with the ministry.

The auditors (Shridhar & Associates and Ajay Vastani) also did not perform the audit procedures to ensure the reasonability of the expected credit loss provision of ₹ 537 crore on loans of ₹ 12,224 crore, the regulator said.

Despite being aware of the report of suspected fraud by the previous auditor, the engagement partner (Vastani) stated in the audit report that there were no matters falling.

Therefore, the audit report to the members was misleading.

The auditors also failed to adequately examine the end-use of loans, indications of siphoning of funds from RCFL, management override of controls, and the business rationale of sanctioning and disbursing loans by the company.

Despite the resignation of the previous auditor and a reporting of suspected fraud, the auditors failed to conduct the audit as per the standards on auditing, the order stated.

The material misstatements in the financial statements due to inadequate provision, unjustified valuation of loans and irrational business practices were concurred by the auditors in disregard of their responsibilities under the Act and SAs, it added. (PTI)





Guv attends valedictory ceremony of two-day conference hosted at IIT Guwahati

Role of criminal justice system vital in nation's progress: Guv Kataria

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 20: Governor

Gulab Chand Kataria said that the criminal justice system and its contribution to the expeditious disposal of cases hold the key to the progress of the nation.

Speaking at the valedictory function of the two-day conference on India's progressive path in the administration of the criminal justice system organised at IIT Guwahati in the wake of the enactment of three laws namely the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023; the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, and the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023, the Governor said that these laws have the potential to expedite the development of India along with laying a strong foundation for the realization of the vision of Viksit Bharat.

The Governor said, "The criminal justice system rooted in the British era is now history. Now, justice takes precedence over pun-

The nation has got a new Nyaya Sanhita based on the principle of 'Justice First'. This new set of laws will ensure the protection of human rights and uphold the rule of law. They will also streamline procedures to reduce delays and

enhance the delivery of justice." Speaking on the new laws, Governor Kataria said, "These laws are embedded with the values of reform, perform, and transform. These new acts, besides bringing reform in the legal system, will adsurfaced in view of changing times and societal changes."

He said that the new laws will provide a holistic approach to deal with crimes in the digital age. These new enactments will also lead to the expeditious disposal of cases. This would help in clearing the vast backlogs and faster delivery of justice. The Governor said that considering the north-eastern region's diversities, this new set of clusive legal practices. The Governor expressed his

gratitude to the Ministry of Law and Justice for organising the conference for sharing insights, debating crucial reforms, and shaping the future of legal administration. He also thanked all the participants for their contributions to the conference and requested the stakeholders to work together with the civil society for the success of the laws

It may be noted that these new laws have replaced the earlier criminal laws namely, the Indian Penal Code 1860, the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, and the Indian Evidence Act, 1872.

Chief Justice of Gauhati High Court Justice Vijay Bishnoi, Judge, Gauhati High Court Justice Manash Ranjan Pathak; vice chancellor(I/C) NLUJA Assam Justice (Retd) Mir Alfaz Ali; director, Indian Law Institute, Delhi Prof (Dr) VK Ahuja; secretary department of Legal Affairs, Ministry of Law and Justice Dr Rajiv Mani also

Talk on Dr Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya's novels

HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, May 20: As part of the year-long Dr Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya's birth centenary celebrations, a talk on Dr Bhattacharya's novel-writing craft was organised by the celebration committee at Swahid Peoli Phukan College, Namti on Monday. The talk was delivered by Dr Prasanta Kumar Chutia, writer and vice president of Sivasagar Jila Sahitya Sabha. Dr Dhrubajyoti Nath, principal of the college, delivered the welcome address, while Syed Abdur Rahman, vice principal, lit the ceremonial lamp. The students presented a chorus written by Dr Birendra Kumar Bhattacharva.

In his speech, Dr Prasanta Kumar Chutia mentioned that like most writers in Assam, Dr Bhattacharya began his career in creative literature by writing poems and then short stories. Only after maturing enough in Assamese prose composition and mastering the subtle nuances of style did he begin writing novels of a wider gamut and diverse background. His first novel, 'Raj Pathe Ringiyai', was published in 1955. Dr Bhattacharya's writings bear a distinctive streak of



progressive thinking, as the global literary movemen of his time was deeply influenced by Marxist ideologies. Yuga Gogoi, president of the celebration committee, briefly spoke about how holding such programs would inspire the younger generation towards the creative world and introduce them to the colossal figures of Assamese literature. Swapna Gogoi, a fourth-semester student, delivered a speech on Dr Bhattacharva's literary contributions. Dr Mouchumi Rekha Khound, joint coordinator of the Celebration Committee, delivered the vote of thanks.

Research findings

show shift in Muslim

support dynamics

HT Correspondent SIVASAGAR, May 20: The

Media Management & Research

Association (MMRA), a Guwa-

hati-based media research associa-

tion, has claimed that the majority section of Muslims in the state now

support chief minister Himanta

Biswa Sarma for his uncompromising stand on development with-

out discrimination. The leaders of the association, Dr Zakirul Alam,

president, executive members Ka-

mala Rajkonwar, Hemanta Chang-

mai, Amirul Hazarika, and

Aminuddin Ahmed, through a

press release here recently, said

that the association carried out

field research during 2023-2024

among people of BPL, middle

class, lower middle class, and

highly literate categories in 31 dis-

ditional mode of permutation and

political discourse among Muslims

nas undergone sea changes over

the last decades. The Muslims, the

release said, are now extending

support to CM Sarma because they

are now enjoying all government-

sponsored support, benefits, and

aid like all other indigenous peo-

ple. The association, at the same

time, urged the chief minister to

consider sympathetically their de-

mands for job reservation like the

SC & ST categories, setting up

Ajan Fakir Kala Kshetra, granting

land rights, special aids for those

involved in agriculture and pisci-

The release also appreciates

minister Jogen Mohan's all-em-

bracing attitude towards all castes

culture, etc.

The findings reveal that the tra-

According to sources, Ganguly, an unmarried businessman, followed his usual routine of an early morning walk before taking his own life. His

Businessman found dead

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, May 20: Anup Kumar Ganguly, aged 74, a resident of ADP Road, Nagaon Christianpatty, was discovered deceased on Monday morning at his residence. His body was found hanging from a tree branch on the premises. Local authorities from Nagaon PS were promptly notified and arrived at the scene, transporting his remains to Nagaon BP Civil Hospital for further examination. The motive behind his tragic decision remains unclear at the time of this report.

passing has deeply saddened the ADP Road community.

Aaranyak conducts workshop



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 20: As part of a series of workshops on communication skill development, the region's premier biodiversity conservation organisation, Aaranyak, conducted a workshop on 'Essentials of Digital Post-Processing in Wildlife Photography' on Sunday in the city. The workshop was coordinated with the facilities and expertise available within the media production and communications division of Aaranyak, covering various topics such as the essentials of imagemaking using digital tools, including the need and ethics of processing, image management and cataloging, various image formats, and processing RAW files, along with the use of Adobe Lightroom, etc.

Udayan Borthakur, a senior scientist of Aaranyak and a well-published wildlife photographer from north-east India, conducted the workshop. Munmita Boruah, manager of the media production and communications division, and Chinmoy Swargiary, documentation & production officer of Aaranyak, coordinated the overall organisation

Meritorious students felicitated

DEMOW, May 20: The Bhagya Lakshmi Anchalik Sishu Kalyan Kendra organised a felicitation program in the auditorium of Demow College on Sunday to honour the meritorious students who passed with distinction and star marks in the HSLC Examination 2024 from the HSLC Examination Centers: Demow, Nitaipukhuri, Kotiyori, Palengi, Desang Rajabari, and Nemuguri.

Achyut Krishna Saikia, president of Bhagya Lakshmi Anchalik Sishu Kalyan Kendra, presided over the felicitation program, while Asish Sahu, secretary of Bhagya Lakshmi Anchalik Sishu Kalyan Kendra, outlined the aims and anchored the program. Rajen Borah, director of Bhagya Lakshmi Anchalik Sishu Kalyan Kendra, delivered the welcome speech.

The Bhagya Lakshmi Anchalik Sishu Kalyan Kendra honoured the meritorious students with phulam gamosa, citation, and certificate. Additionally, they felicitated Karishma Gogoi, a resident of Bandarmari Gaon near Demow, who secured first class first from the Chemistry department at Dibrugarh University. Karishma Gogoi's father, Uma Gogoi, received the felicitation on her behalf during the program.

Awareness meeting held in Desangmukh

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, May 20: A cancer awareness meeting organised by Pratishruti Cancer & Palliative Trust and Assam Science Technology & Environment Council (ASTEC), in association with TMPK, Boloma Mising Gram Unnayan Samity, and Desangmukh Health Center, took place at Dr BR Ambedkar Senior Secondary School on Sunday. Utpala Shrutikar Baruah, district coordinator of ASTEC, spoke about the objectives and led the discussion on the threat of the rapid rise of the killer disease among rural people. Dr Bandana Gupta Sharma, as a resource person, elaborated on the precautions and preventive measures for breast cancer, oral cancer, and pelvic cancer, which are rapidly increasing among rural women due to their ignorance about food habits and the use of carcinogenic substances. Nilakhi Baruah, manager of Canara Bank, Nazira, spoke about banking support to rural folk, mentioning a new scheme for cancer patients that is being launched, where a cancer patient can receive ₹ 2 lakh if they have an account with ₹ 5000 against their name.

Punaram Mili, former ONGCian and president of Sivasagar Sports Association, emphasised the importance of health as our asset and thanked Pratishruti and others for organising the camp in rural Desangmukh. Surajit Changmai, Himmat Chowdhury, Nasifa Jinnat Hakim, and Dona assisted the physicians and took care of the health check-up works. Bidya Patiri, president of the Management Committee of the school, Sashindra Mili, principal, along with Pratishruti members Dipa Das and Katiram Mili, also attended the function.

Modern English School hosts panel discussion

HT Correspondent

GUWAHATI, May 20: Modern English School, Kahilipara, in collaboration with the All Assam Private School Association (AAPSA), organised a panel discussion on 'Fostering Critical Thinking: Collaborative strategies between schools, parents, and students to reduce the need for extra tuition'. The event took place at Modern English School, Kahilipara, Guwahati, which also serves as the registered office of AAPSA. The central focus of the discussion was addressing why students feel the need for extra coaching outside of their regular classes. The association advocated for education boards to prioritise skill-based education, a shift that could significantly enhance students' learning experiences. Additionally, the association expressed its opposition to the proxy admission culture prevalent in the state.

Assamese short film bags two awards at international film fest

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, May 20: Aparadh, an Assamese short film depicting the sensitive subject of sexual exploitation of a minor girl by her male tutor, has garnered two prestigious awards at the 65th All India Multi-lingual Short Film Festival, hosted by Spice Group in Kolkata. Directed by Kongkon Jyoti Sharma and produced by Utpal Das under the banner of 'Ma Movies' in Jorhat, the 12-minute movie earned recognition for the 'Best Child Actor' and 'Best Actor in a Negative Role (Male)' cate-

Nikita Borah, a Class VI student from Kristo Jyoti High School in Bokakhat (Golaghat district), portrayed the central character, while Surai Saikia, a seasoned actor from Jorhat known for his roles in numerous movies, TV serials, and dramas, delivered a compelling performance as the antagonist.

In a recent press conference at the Jorhat Press Club, Sharma, Das, and the cast shared their experience of the film's success. They revealed that although the festival took place in December 2022 and the awards ceremony occurred in January this year at Gariahat, Kolkata, they couldn't attend due to unforeseen circumstances. Consequently, they received the awards, comprising certificates and trophies, through courier a few days ago.

Sharma, the writer and director of the film, explained that the inbehind 'Aparadh' stemmed from a real-life incident in Assam a few years ago. Highlighting the prevalence of such distressing occurrences across the nation, Sharma and Das aimed to provoke a thoughtful discourse within society to prevent such incidents from tarnishing the sacred teacher-student relationship. The filmmakers ensured a sensitive portrayal of the theme without resorting to exaggeration, with the movie attracting over 150 entries in the festival and featuring a cast of six actors.

Saikia, who portrayed the role of the male tutor perpetrating the act of harassment, expressed how the character deeply affected him, especially as a father himself, empathising with the pain of potential

NTPC Bongaigaon Salakati promotes hygiene awareness

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, May 20: In line with the nationwide 'Swachhata Pakhwada' initiative, which started on May 16, NTPC Bongaigaon Salakati organised a Swachhata Talk at Salakati ME School premises on Monday, where 100 enthusiastic students participated. The event aimed to instill the importance of cleanliness and hygiene among young minds to promote a healthier future for India.

Dr Kriti Agrawal, pediatrician at NTPC Bongaigaon, led the interactive session. She emphasised the significance of hand hygiene and shared valuable insights on the adverse effects and diseases caused by unsanitary surroundings. "Swachhata is not just a concept; it is a daily routine essential for a healthy life," Dr Agrawal remarked, inspiring students to adopt cleanliness in their daily lives. The session included practical tips on maintaining personal hygiene and the

importance of a clean environment. Dr Agrawal's engaging approach helped students understand the critical role they play in contributing to a clean and healthy India. The program was graced by the presence of Aduity Thakuri, CSR executive of NTPC Bongaigaon, who reiterated NTPC's commitment to social responsibility and community well-being. The principal of Salakati ME School, Sandita Brahma, was also n attendance, showing her support for the initiative. NTPC Bongaigaon's effort to educate and motivate students aligns with the broader goals of Swachhata Pakhwada, a fortnight-long cleanliness drive initiated by the government of India. The initiative underscores the importance of cleanliness in achieving sustainable development and improving public health. The event concluded with a pledge by the students to maintain cleanliness in their surroundings and to actively participate in creating a Swachh Bharat.

LGBIA launches official magazine

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 20: Lokpriya

Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport, Guwahati, has launched its first official magazine named 'LGBIA Chronicle' on Monday at the airport. The publication includes a brief history of the airport from its inception to the present. The magazine was launched at a function held at the LGBIA auditorium on the airport premises, with chief airport officer Utpal Barua inaugurating it in the presence of senior officers from AAI and GIAL

The LGBIA Chronicle features a colourful layout with several write-ups of different flavours, edited by corporate communication officer Ruma Devi of GIAL.

On this occasion, Baruah highlighted the objectives of publishing the magazine, stating, "I hope the magazine will serve as a mouthpiece of the airport. There has



the history of the first airport in the north-east. The magazine attempts to present the history of the airport, its growth trajectory, development plan, etc. We were entrusted with the operation of the airport by the central government on October 8, 2021. We have provided a brief overview of the work already done at the airport and also outlined future plans with vision and mis-

ilal Sharma, senior officer from AAI, Mantu Kumar, Nikhil Kansal, Srinivasan Gangadharan, Bhairab Baruah. Chakraborty, and several other executives of GIAL. Notably, the event also felicitated writers, including senior journalist Jayanta Kalita, who contributed articles to the publication.

Commemorative meeting celebrates legacy of esteemed scientist

SIVASAGAR, May 20: Addressing a commemorative meeting at Moran Ushapur residence on Sunday for Dr Mahendranath Borgoscientist and former executive director of Assam Petrochemicals Ltd, Namrup, who recently passed away, Dr Dayandanda Borgohain, former chairman of AHSEC, Guwahati,

respected in the educational and industrial sectors of Assam. He possessed sharp intellect and, at the same time, humility as he hailed from a respected family. Dr Mahendranath Borgohain was also a professor at Gauhati University and Dibrugarh University before joining APL as its executive director. Khagen Bharali, a senior citizen, lit the ceremonial lamp, while Nabin Sarma Baruah and Dr Girish

Phukan garlanded his portrait. Journalist Sovit Kumar Chetri, Bhupen Borgohain, retired OIL officer, Ghanakanta Bhunya, president of the Senior Citizens' Forum, and Trailukya Chetia, editor of the local daily Arunodoi Batori, paid homage to the departed scientistteacher and spoke about his life and works. The souvenir 'Mahendrajyoti' was released by Dr

and communities and his extensive support to development works in Free health camp HT Correspondent
MARGHERITA, May 20: North Eastern Coalfields Coal India Ltd, Margherita, organised a free multispecialty health camp at Tikak Col-

sukia district on Monday. This camp was organised under the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) scheme of North Eastern Coalfields Coal India Ltd, Margherita.

liery Public Auditorium in the

Margherita sub-division of Tin-

B Veera Reddy, director Technical (DT) of Coal India Ltd, who was present as the chief guest, formally inaugurated the medical camp. B Veera Reddy and his wife, B Shobha Reddy, each planted a sapling.

A total of seven doctors, led by the duo chief medical officers Dr Bringeshwar Sarma and Dr Sanjib Sonowal of Central Hospital of North Eastern Coalfields, dedicatedly served at the multi-specialty health camp held at Tikak Public

'Lachit the Warrior' by Partha Sarathi Mahanta captivates global audience at Cannes 2024

GUWAHATI, May 20: Providing

a global platform for a wide range of films from all over the world to be screened or to compete in the festival, the 77th edition of the prestigious Cannes Film Festival kicked off on May 14. Apart from selections in the competition section, Un Certain Regard, and other categories, this year quite a few Indian films were screened at the Marché du Film and online screening sections. Some of the films that were screened in the online screening sections include names like 'In Search of Sunshine' (Kuch Alagsa) by Eon Films, 'Satvashodhak' by Nilesh Jalamkar, 'Navras Katha Collage' by Praveen Hingonia, 'Poyyamozhi' by Anna Sudhi, 'Am I a Hero' by Khatib Mohamed, and 'Lajja The Shame' by Mohan Das.

was part of the online screening section, was screened on May 18 for the global audience.

These films were woven together as an anthology titled 'In Search of Sunshine' for screening to accord honour and recognition to them, as traditionally the Cannes festival does not screen short films.

Written and directed by Parthasarathi Mahanta and produced by Mina Mahanta and Indrani Baruah, 'Lachit - The Warrior' is an audio-visual film on Lachit Barphukan that traces the genesis of the military commander's ancestry, his charismatic personality, his dexterous skills in diplomacy and naval warfare, physical prowess, unmatched valour, and most importantly, his resolute sense of patriotism.

The story of Lachit dates back to

the seventeenth century Assam. Marauding Mughals were defeating the Ahoms in a series of battles in 1662 and capturing huge swathes of land in Assam.

The Ahom king was preparing for a counteroffensive to win back the lost territory and honour, while a valiant man by the name of Lachit was fuming with rage, wondering as to why the king was unable to find someone worthy of defeating the enemy. The king, who had heard of Lachit's incredible valour, summoned him and asked him to lead the army against the Mughals.

It chronologically narrates the unfolding of events, starting with the launching of a series of onslaughts against the invading Mughals. Under Lachit, Guwahati was won back from the Mughals in September-October 1667. After a



series of intermittent skirmishes, the battle of Alaboi was fought in the year 1669, and eventually, the military campaigns decisively ended in the battle of Saraighat

(1671), where the Mughals were completely vanquished. Had it not been for Lachit, the geographical map of the nation would have been



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QUOTE OF THE DAY

Fear is the mother of foresight. -Thomas Hardy

Chopper tragedy in Iran

he recent helicopter crash in Iran, which claimed the lives of President Ebrahim Raisi and other high-ranking officials including Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian, has triggered a wave of speculation and concern both domestically and internationally. Official statements cite adverse weather conditions as the cause, but the lack of detailed information and the historical context of similar incidents have led to a flurry of conspiracy theories. As investigations continue, this event remains a focal point of intense scrutiny, with potential ramifications for Iran's political stability and future. Under the leadership of President Raisi, Iran has seen an aggressive foreign policy stance and increasing domestic unrest. The helicopter crash, occurring amidst this turbulent backdrop, adds a layer of complexity to the current political climate. Whether this incident will precipitate significant changes within Iran's political landscape or further destabilize the region is a question that looms large. The immediate aftermath of the crash saw frantic efforts by Iranian authorities, led by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, to control the narrative. For over 40 hours, statecontrolled media and government officials attempted to downplay the incident, referring to it as a "hard landing" and suggesting they were still receiving signals from passengers on board. This attempt to obfuscate the facts has only fueled public mistrust and speculation about the true nature of the

Aviation experts have pointed out that in cases of such significant incidents, it is standard procedure for aviation authorities to be promptly informed. The delay and the conflicting reports from Iranian authorities raise questions about the transparency and integrity of the official investigation. This lack of clarity has led many to speculate that the crash may not have been a mere accident but could involve more sinister undertones. Historically, Iran has a troubled record with incidents involving high-profile figures. Previous occurrences have often been shrouded in mystery and have had lasting impacts on the country's political dynamics. The death of Raisi, a pivotal figure in Iran's leadership, alongside other key officials, is a blow to the current administration. It disrupts the power structure and could lead to a period of instability as various factions vie for control. The international community is watching closely. Iran's geopolitical strategies, especially under Raisi, have been marked by confrontation and defiance. The sudden loss of its leadership could create a power vacuum, potentially altering its foreign policy approach.

Domestically, the incident could exacerbate existing tensions. Raisi's tenure has been marred by protests and economic challenges. The government's handling of the crash and the subsequent information blackout might ignite further public outrage and dissent. Supreme Leader Khamenei's role in managing the crisis will be critical. His response could either calm the situation or provoke additional unrest. Moreover, the crash's timing is particularly sensitive. Iran is at a crossroads, facing significant economic hardships due to international sanctions and internal mismanagement. The leadership vacuum might delay essential reforms and exacerbate the nation's economic woes. In the absence of clear leadership, policy paralysis could ensue, further diminishing public trust in the government. As investigations proceed, the need for transparency is paramount. The Iranian administration must address the growing demand for accountability and clarity. Failure to do so could have profound implications, not just for the current government but for the broader political stability of the re**Indian Democracy: Challenges** and hopes for the future

n the midst of election fervor, each of us plays a cru-Legial role in shaping the democratic process. Alongside this democratic exercise comes the enforcement of strict guidelines by the Election Commission, outlining the dos and don'ts for political parties and candidates. These guidelines include caps on the maximum expenditure permissible for candidates, a measure aimed at ensuring fairness and transparency in the electoral process.

However, it's no secret that these restrictions often face challenges, with expenditures frequently surpassing the prescribed limits

Despite the concern over the escalating costs associated with elections, it seems that the broader public discourse has shifted away from addressing this issue, even as it continues to strain both candidates' resources and the state exchequer.

The extensive reach of elections often results in the inefficient utilization of manpower and resources essential for the smooth execution of the electoral process.

Among the most impacted are the educators, who frequently find themselves drawn away from their primary responsibilities to fulfill election duties at various stages. This diversion of manpower particularly affects schoolchildren, as teachers are readily enlisted to support election operations.

Moreover, there's a notable reluctance among incumbents to make way for the next generation of leaders once elected. Additionally, election periods shed light on the declining behavior observed among individuals who have previously held positions of power but were subsequently voted out by the electorate.

In moments of frustration, individuals may resort to expressions that are not only socially unacceptable but also undermine the fabric of civil society. The older generation has, unfortunately, set a precedent that necessitates innovative responses from the younger "millennials." It's imperative for the youth to recognize how their predecessors have compromised the fundamental tenets of democracy by leveraging caste affiliations, stoking regional and linguistic



tensions, and fostering communal discord, all to the detriment of social harmony

Despite India's remarkable progress in literacy, soaring from approximately 18% at independence to nearly 80% today, and its impressive global stature post-independence, the rhetoric employed by politicians towards one another often descends into vulgarity and incivility. Such language not only falls short of the standards expected of educated individuals but also risks tarnishing the nation's reputation on the international stage.

The reverence for wisdom, dedication, and experience is a cherished aspect of our cultural heritage, yet regrettably, it appears to be fraying at the seams. India's rich tapestry of luminaries, from the iconic figures of Gandhi, Patel, Subhash Bose, Nehru, and Rajendra Prasad to the spiritual stalwarts like Swami Vivekananda, Ramkrishna Paramhans, Tagore, and Sri Aurobindo, constitutes an integral part of our national iden-

Understanding India without delving into the lives and teachings of these luminaries would be incomplete. However, there is hope in the younger generation, who, just a few years ago, were captivated by the teachings of the saint-scientist, the undaunted APJ Abdul Kalam, during their school years. They hold the potential to rejuvenate and uphold the values espoused by these great individuals, ensuring that their legacies endure and continue to inspire future gener-

Having personally witnessed numerous occasions where children across India were captivated by him, it became evident

transcended his official position or the success of Pokhran II. Rather, it was the genuine love and warmth he exuded towards every child and every Indian that endeared him

to the nation.

India is fortunate

communities.

Dipak Kurmi to have many such luminaries who have the potential to effect positive change within their

One can only hope that aspiring politicians take a leaf out of Kalam's book and learn from him and other luminaries on how to genuinely connect with people. APJ Abdul Kalam emerged as one of the most revered and beloved figures during the transition to the new mil-

He exemplified true leadership through his ability to forge genuine connections with people from all walks of life. His unwavering dedication to the nation was unparalleled, inspiring and motivating others to achieve their goals with enthusiasm and vigor.

APJ Abdul Kalam possessed a remarkable ability to win the hearts of every Indian, regardless of their social status, profession, or ideological beliefs. He held a special place in the hearts of Indian children, recognizing in them the future of the nation. Kalam's influence extended beyond mere admiration; he sparked the curiosity and unleashed the creativity of millions of young minds, providing them with the metaphorical "wings of fire" to soar to new heights.

Remarkably, despite his elevated position as the President of India, he remained grounded, leaving Rashtrapati Bhavan after five years with the same simplicity with which he had ar-

domand for stool in 2021

uals with such charismatic personalities at every level of governance, from grassroots panchayats to the highest echelons of Parliament. These are the leaders who can foster genuine connections with every citizen, earning the reputation of being truly "approachable" and inclu-

As the general elections loom closer, a plethora of thoughts inundate the mind. For those of us who have cast our votes in numerous elections, there's a palpable desire to discuss the significant shifts observed in leadership quality on a broader

Equally prominent is the lament over the erosion of mutual DEGREE OF THOUGHT respect and regard among pub-

> whether they reside in positions of power or within the ranks of opposition. These observations serve as poignant reflections on the evolving landscape of politics and public life.

The language used against opponents in contemporary politics would have been deemed shameful by societal standards half a century ago. Surprisingly, such discourse now evokes little

However, amidst this concerning trend, there is a glimmer of hope: voters are taking note and expressing their disdain for such behavior.

In the grand scheme of things, it's safe to assert that these tactics will not yield favorable outcomes for those who employ them. It's disheartening to observe that the flaws in the electoral process, highlighted by Gandhi as early as 1922, have permeated every level of elections, including those of local governance such as panchayat Raj bodies.

Even in the face of adversity, hope should never be abandoned. It is often said that after hitting rock bottom, the only way forward is up. Echoing the sentiments of countless rational Indians, APJ Abdul Kalam articulated the fundamental expectations we hold for our elected representatives: from grassroots panchayat members to municipal councilors, and from MLAs

a sense of ownership. Regardless of their position, whether it's a panchayat member, a development officer, a councilor, an MLA, an MP, or a minister, there must be a commitment to strive for excellence in fulfilling their elected responsibilities.

A visionary Parliament is indispensable, one that transcends narrow party politics and is guided by a broader, collective vision for the nation's progress.

Envisioning the potential of such a Parliament prompts reflection on how it could surpass the performance of its predecessors. The forthcoming Lok Sabha holds the opportunity to play a significantly more constructive role than its predeces-

It is my earnest expectation that the honorable members of the next Lok Sabha will wholeheartedly commit to refraining from actions that disrupt the functioning of the esteemed House, thereby setting a positive example for the youth of India. The recent spectacle witnessed within the parliamentary chambers has been a cause for grave concern over the past few decades.

Veteran politician C. Subramaniam expressed deep concern over the growing indiscipline witnessed in parliamentary and legislative proceedings. He noted with alarm the increasing occurrence of pandemonium and even acts of violence among members within these chambers, which have become all too com-

This disregard for established rules and norms raises a fundamental question: if those entrusted with lawmaking cannot uphold discipline and respect for regulations, how can we expect the general populace to do so?

The onus is now on future MPs and other elected representatives to fulfill the aspirations of their constituents by embodying qualities of responsibility, integrity, and dedication as community leaders. They must strive to become beacons of inspiration for future generations. Let them pledge to make every moment of parliamentary time count, sparing no opportunity for productivity. Such a commitment would undoubtedly be a valuable contribution to our nation. (The writer can be reached Essentially, what is required is at dipakkurmiglpltd@gmail.com)

Of sovereign fund and Lull in real estate market in China is restraining protest against Israel!



By: Er. Rajesh Pathak

aised through internal revenue and capital gained through foreign route account for the 'Sovereign fund' of any country. In our Sovereign fund, not from export, but it is mainly through FDI-FPIforeign remittances that the fund flows. Our government therefore can't take risk to invest it in any company - any country, as there may backfire into the crisis of balance of payment!

But, being endued with export oriented economy, the government of Norway is one of the prominent investors of the world. However now it is in news for it has refused to invest in Adani's company from its Sovereign fund. Reason being that Adani has invested in that Israel for its Haifa port that indulged in the 'Human right violation' in Gaza! However, this made no effect in financial health of Adani Company so is reported.

So not only the students of America-Europe's universities but, overlooking the misdeeds of Hamas, there are more who have chosen to stand by Palestine supporters. And also the Indians like Sivalingam, Sheyasi Sharma studying in US. Though

different matter that they had to withdraw from the stand as their registration itself in the college came under the risk of being put to the cancellation.

Nothing but this is the 'miracle' of well-organized 'Pan-Islam', which many in the world realize not. And Bahartvanshi (of Indian origin) abroad, perhaps, not at all!

Today Hindu students have thrown themselves behind Palestine for the so-called atrocities against them. But when in Kashmir the Hindus underwent far more horrible torture at the level of mental, physical and their habitation itself, where were the same people hailing from the lands of Arab and Pak-

However, here Netherlands have all the right to be showered with the praise. As it discerned the ruse of 'one sided humanity' inspired by Marxist- radicalist nexus. Breaking the boundaries, the anti-Israel protest when entered Europe and reached Netherlands, it met its proper match. Emulating the model of Yogi Adityanath, the country's administration went bulldozed the obstacles raised by protestors. Unlike in America, many of them sent into the jail without reluctant hands.

By: Kunal Bose orldSteel in its

latest short-term global outlook report says about China: "The outlook for 2024 is uncertain. The real estate market and exports will continue to exert negative pressure on steel demand and it might contract in the absence of additional government support measures."

Steelmakers in the country will be under incessant pressure to take a close hard look at production volume and new capacity commissioning as continuing weakness in construction activity, particularly building of new houses and rekindling of trade frictions resulting from very high exports are starkly evident.

Analysts have flagged concern about steel demand based on reports Chinese investment in real estate sector is likely to skid 6 per cent in 2024. Not only that real estate sale will continue to fall along with squeeze in new project startups, according to China Real Estate Association. All bad omen for the steel industry.

How much steel did China use in recent times, particularly since the second half of 2022, when from the depression in the property market started weighing heavily on the economy? China Metallurgical Industry Planning and Research Institute told the Press recently that the country's demand for steel fell by 3.3 per cent in 2023 from the previous year to 890m tonnes and there would be a further domestic steel use contraction of

1.7 per cent in 2024. For any overall demand

shrinkage, the villain of the piece as said earlier is the property sector where most players are badly stuck with debts and much of that may turn into nonperforming assets in a domino effect for banks. Real estate sector was also stressed by tight mortgage lending terms.

Beijing, therefore, was constrained to cut the down payment ratio both for first time buvers and for acquirers of second houses in mid-December in an attempt to improve market sentiment. This, however, did not happen to the expected extent.

As the property sector reels under several negative developments, that will translate into a further 4 per cent contraction of construction steel use in 2024 following a 4.8 per cent decline to 506m tonnes in 2023. Real estate and infrastructure together account for around twothirds of steel demand in

Improvement in property sector outlook will be linked to overall better economic performance, deep reforms and weeding out of irregular practices and close bank scrutiny before sanctioning of credit lines to real estate developers.

In the meantime, analysts are trying to find out to what extent any rise in steel demand from the infrastructure sector will compensate for the use decline in the real estate sec-

That Beijing will attempt a 5 per cent GDP growth in the current year on a base expanded in 2023 is made abundantly clear by Prime Minister Li Qiang at the recently held annual National People's

Congress. Li's message has an important bearing on near-term steel demand as it will address the challenge to defuse risks emanating from bankrupt property developers and bankrupt cities and correct structural imbalances of the economy. Steelmakers will, however, be eagerly awaiting the stimulus package boosting invest-

ment in infrastructure de-

velopment.

What will particularly aid infra development and in the process steel demand are the plans to issue 1 trillion yuan (\$139 billion) in special ultralong term treasury bonds. At the same time, the 2024 special bond issuance quota for local governments was set at 3.9 trillion yuan, against 3.8 trillion yuan in 2023. Manufacturing sector where the purchasing managers' index (PMI) continues to stay below 50 (a reading below 50 points to contraction) is a call for

The importance of the sector for steelmakers in underlined by it accounting for around a quarter of the metal demand. In that space, automobiles having a share of shades less than 10 per cent of steel demand features prominently.

policy support.

Encouragingly for steelmakers, production and sales of automobiles in China both recorded double digit rises in 2023 capping over 30m units.

Pointing out that 2023 saw China exporting a record 4.91m vehicles in 2023 (a 57.9 per cent jump on year), analysts say in the process considerable volumes of steel found their way out of the country. The observation is



steel and a further 12 to 15 per cent constitutes cast iron. Use of steel along with other metals such as aluminium and copper in the automobile space will rise further in 2024 as China Association of Automobile Manufacturers (CAAM) is anticipating auto sales to rise by over 3 per cent on year on year to top 31m units. Exports, according to

CAAM, will grow to 5.5m units. In China's manufacturing universe, automobile does not have the burden of killing overcapacity unlike in many other areas, which Li wants to be curbed. At the same time, he favours allocation of more resources for technology innovation and new advanced manufacturing systems.

All this will be in line with President Xi Jinping's promotion of "new productive forces." Steel, specially the new capacity replacing the old, is part of the campaign. When many foreign multinationals, based particularly in the US, Japan and South Korea are shifting some manufacturing capacity

from China to mainly south and south-east Asian countries, Li significantly has promised to lift all foreign investment restrictions in the manufacturing

sector. Whatever worth that promise maybe, foreign investment in steel has stayed particularly shy in China, which remains the second most important destination for foreign direct investment (FDI) after the US.

Notwithstanding high capacity overhang and demand fall compelling exports (fetching better prices than in domestic market) that invited dismay and criticism in importing nations, the country's steel industry, according to China National Bureau of Statistics, managed to earn profits of RMB 56.5bn (\$7.95bn) last year, a jump of 157.3 per cent over 2022, benefiting from a low base. What is to be noted is that more than half of 2023 profits were made in the final two months.

A common concern of analysts is that in spite of surplus global capacity and the industry smarting under demand fall, capacity growth is happening in many parts of the world, including the two leading

producers China

Take China for instance, where the official capacity swap mechanism if followed in letter and spirit will result in net lower new capacity than the old capacity being replaced. According to S&P Global calculations, after offsetting for the capacity shut during 2017-19, new facilities would "lead to a net increase of 11m tonne of pig iron and 14m tonne of crude steel capacity" mainly in 2023 with some likely spill over in 2024.

further says: "China's pig iron and crude steel capacity are likely to decline slowly from around 2025, as most of the long-closed facilities will have been replaced by 2023 or 2024, and new capacity on stream in 2025 will be replacing facilities still in operation.'

World steel capacity increase of 57m tonnes in 2023 was the highest in a decade and that rise is equivalent to the capacity in existence in a couple of major steelmaking economies such as Germany and Brazil. Africa, ASEAN and the Middle East saw significant capacity growth last year.



Why are teachers in India still Household savings underpaid with audacity?

By: Jaimine

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s the sun rose over the bustling streets of Varanasi, Ravi, a passionate educator at a local private school, prepared himself for another day of imparting knowledge and shaping young minds. With a heart full of purpose and a mind brimming with innovative teaching strategies, Ravi embarked on his daily routine, unaware of the broader challenges that loomed ahead.

Ravi's days were a whirlwind of activity, from captivating his students with engaging lessons to meticulously grading stacks of notebooks and organising extracurricular events. Yet, despite his unwavering dedication, he found himself constantly grappling with the stark realities of being an educator in India. "The financial strain can be overwhelming at times," Ravi confided, his brow furrowed with

"On a monthly salary of just ₹40.000, it becomes a constant struggle to make ends meet, let alone afford basic supplies like a new whiteboard marker." The disparity between Ravi's compensation and the ever-rising cost of living was a pressing issue that gnawed at him, especially as he witnessed his colleagues making difficult choices to supplement their income.

"We pour our hearts into shaping the minds of the next generation, but it feels like society doesn't truly value the immense responsibility we carry," he lamented. Ravi's frustration extended beyond the financial realm as he grappled with the pervasive lack of societal respect for the teaching profes-

"The notion that teaching is a fallback career rather than a noble calling is deeply disheartening," he said, his eyes reflecting the weight of this systemic challenge.

"Phrases like 'You're only a teacher because you couldn't get a real job' echo in the hallways, undermining the profound impact we have on our students' lives," Ravi continued, his voice tinged with a mixture of pride and exasperation.

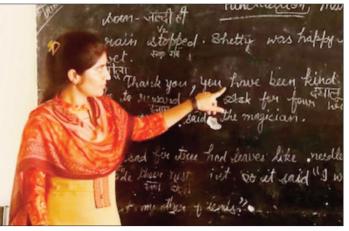
As Ravi navigated the complexities of his role, he couldn't help but witness the ripple effect of these issues on the quality of education.

"When teachers are strained and demotivated, it inevitably affects the learning experience of our students," he observed. "The enthusiasm wanes, and the potential for transformative educational experiences dimin-

Ravi knew that the path forward required a comprehensive approach, one that addressed the deep-rooted systemic challenges. "We need a fundamental shift in the way society perceives and treats teachers," he

"Educators deserve fair compensation, necessary resources, and genuine respect for the invaluable contributions we make to the nation's future."

As Ravi stood before his class, his eyes filled with a renewed sense of purpose. "By investing in the well-being and professional growth of teachers and not prioritising communal politics as we're seeing it today,



tween the compensation of primary teachers in India and Lux-

In India, primary teachers who have cleared the Central

A report by News18 in November 2018 revealed that teaching remains an underpaid profession in India, with educators facing challenging conditions in both private and government schools. A stark contrast emerges when comparing the remuneration of teachers in India with that in other countries, notably Luxembourg, where primary teachers receive a substantial salary

we can unlock the full transformative potential of education," he declared with conviction.

"It is time for a collaborative effort, one that empowers us to become catalysts for systemic

Ravi's unwavering dedication to his profession, despite the challenges he faced, served as a testament to the resilience and passion that define the teaching community in India.

Facts do not care about feel-

A report by News18 in November 2018 revealed that teaching remains an underpaid profession in India, with educators facing challenging conditions in both private and government schools. A stark contrast emerges when comparing the remuneration of teachers in India with that in other countries, notably Luxembourg, where primary teachers receive a substantial salary.

According to a report from the World of Statistics, a Luxembourg teacher with 15 years of experience earns an annual salary of US\$104,846, equivalent to ₹ 87,14,060 in Indian currency. This staggering figure highlights the vast disparity beTeacher Eligibility Test (CTET) receive a basic salary ranging from ₹ 9,300 to ₹ 35,400. Monthly salaries for these teachers hover around Rs 35,000 to ₹ 37,000, while upper-primary level teachers earn ₹ 43,000 to ₹ 46,000 per month.

Despite the land of Gurus and Goddess Saraswati, when compared with Luxembourg, Indian teachers are paid nearly 16 times less than their counterparts in the affluent European nation.

Germany secures the second position globally for higher primary teacher salaries, with an annual figure of US \$85,049 (₹

The report outlines salaries in other countries as well: the Netherlands (US \$70,899), Canada (US \$70,331), Australia (US \$68,608), and the United States of America (US \$63,531). Ireland, Denmark, South

Korea, Japan, and other nations follow suit, showcasing varied compensation levels for primary teachers worldwide.

The predicament gets deeper In the bustling heart of Ayodhva, where the city's most prestigious private schools stood tall, a growing chorus of discontent echoed through the hall-

Scores of dedicated educators, the very pillars upon which these esteemed institutions were built, found themselves grappling with a harsh reality: they were severely underpaid and

overburdened, a stark contrast to

the public perception of their

cushy positions. Shoaib Mohammed, a seasoned teacher at one of the region's top private schools, had been a silent witness to this troubling trend. With over a decade of experience, he had poured his heart and soul into shaping the minds of his students, only to find himself facing a constant fi-

nancial struggle. "The irony is palpable," Shoaib lamented, his brow furrowed with a mix of frustration and determination. "These schools collect exorbitant fees from parents in the name of 'development,' yet they fail to pass on the financial benefits to their teaching staff in a fair and transparent manner.

The disparities were staggering. While the school's coffers swelled, with quarterly fees exceeding ₹ 20,000 per student and an annual revenue of over ₹ 150 crore, Shoaib's own monthly salary hovered around a meagre ₹ 60,000—a figure that fell woefully short of the recommendations set forth by the Seventh Central Pay Commission (CPC).

"The CPC clearly laid out a 23.55% hike in pay and allowances across all sectors, yet many of these elite schools have simply refused to implement it," Shoaib said, his voice tinged with a sense of injustice.

"The authorities claim they lack the funds, even as they increase fees year after year. It's an utter disregard for our contributions and expertise.'

The problem extended far beyond just Shoaib's institution. Across the region, teachers in other prestigious private schools echoed similar sentiments, sharing tales of mental harassment and a complete lack of transparency in their compensation and workload.

"It's not just about the salary anymore," lamented Meera, a teacher with over eight years of experience who earned a mere ₹ 40,000 per month, sans any health or other benefits. "The workload has become unbearable, with a constant demand for us to go beyond the realm of teaching and engage in a myriad of administrative and extracurricular tasks."

The frustration within the teaching community was palpable, as they grappled with the realization that their dedication and expertise were not being valued in proportion to the exorbitant fees charged by their emplovers.

"We are not just teachers; we are mentors, role models, and catalysts for change," Shoaib asserted. "Yet, we are treated as if we are somehow unqualified or undeserving of the fair compensation recommended by the

The ripple effects of this systemic injustice were far-reaching, as the teachers' discontent threatened to spill over into the classroom, potentially compromising the quality of education that these prestigious institutions were known for.

"When teachers are demotivated and overburdened, it inevitably impacts the learning experience of our students, Shoaib said, his eyes reflecting the weight of this responsibility. We cannot afford to let the passion and enthusiasm that define our profession be extinguished by the relentless pursuit of prof-

"There is simply no transparency and equilibrium when it comes to our salary and workload," Gayatri, a teacher sitting next to Shoaib, lamented. "Some schools have implemented the CPC, while others continue to exploit us, citing vague excuses like 'lack of experience' or 'unqualified' sta-

As the debate rages on, the spotlight shines brightly on the systemic inequities that plague the private school ecosystem in India. The time has come for a comprehensive, transparent, and equitable solution that upholds the true value of the teaching profession and ensures that the educators who shape the nation's future are adequately recognized and rewarded? (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)

haven't fallen



By: Nilanjan Ghosh & Arya Roy Bardhan

edia has been report-ing on the decline in net financial assets of Indian households! It does not end there - this decline has also been interpreted as an indication of households' financial distress. Both are far from

According to media reports May 7), net financial household savings declined sharply by ₹9-lakh crore to ₹ 14.16lakh crore in three years to 2022-23 (and 17 per cent below FY22), on the basis of National Accounts Statistics data, a five-year low. This is bound to raise a few eyebrows, if the data is not understood

and interpreted correctly. In sum, there has been a shift from financial to physical savings, with an overall increase in gross savings. While it was the net financial savings which went down by ₹ 9 lakh crore in three years, the aggregate household saving (net of debt) has gone up by ₹ 4 lakh crore during the same period owing to a significant rise in physical

According to the RBI data, the flow of net financial assets in 2022-23 was 5.1 per cent of GDP (5.25 per cent of the revised GDP estimates), down from 11.5 per cent in 2020-21 and 7.2 per cent in 2021-22.

The decline was driven by both a 0.2 percentage point reduction in net financial assets and a 2.0 percentage point rise in net financial liabilities of households. Despite the steep rise in liabilities, they stood at only 5.8 per cent of GDP during the year.

However, a conceptual error occurred while juxtaposing the cumulated stock of household debt of 37.6 per cent as of March 2023 with the additional net flow of financial assets in the financial year.

A stock figure cumulated over years cannot be compared to one-year flow data! Rather, the debt numbers are dwarfed in front of the cumulated financial asset numbers that stand at a staggering 103.1 per cent of

In absolute terms, a year-onvear comparison shows an increase in both financial assets and liabilities, but a steeper rise in liabilities. This would have been concerning if it implied that aggregate household sav-

ings had slowed down, posing a threat to economic growth. However, is not the case for two major reasons.

First, households continue to be the powerhouse behind fixed capital formation, commanding over 60 per cent of gross national savings, according to recent NSO figures.

The apparent disconnect between financial savings and overall savings is clarified once we examine the various savings avenues — ranging from financial instruments to physical assets, and even gold

and silver ornaments. This variety suggests that a decrease in financial savings doesn't necessarily signal a drop in total savings; it could instead indicate a shift in household preferences, risk tolerance, and confidence in the country's economic future.

Secondly, while the Private Final Consumption Expenditure (PFCE) growth rate has slowed to 6.7 per cent (FY23, real terms), below the GDP growth rate, this moderation in consumption likely translates into increased savings amid rising national income.

The principles of national income accounting assure us that gross savings remain robust, potentially setting the stage for a higher domestic savings rate and a move toward investmentdriven growth.

Despite households maintaining their status as key contributors to domestic savings ture. (Courtesy: ORF)

and showing growth in absolute terms, their proportion of total savings has seen a gradual decrease.

This shift is partly due to stronger financial positions of non-financial corporations and healthier public finances postpandemic.

Yet, the lingering question is the direction of household financial flows. Where is the household spending? When investment-friendly conditions foster wealth accumulation, consumption typically slows, a trend that redistributes wealth such a phenomenon is partly evident in the Indian economy. The propensity to consume declines with increasing incomes and wealth.

Concurrently, the aspirational Indian household is increasingly investing in real estate, as evidenced by the growing share of physical assets in household savings for 2022-23.

In fact, gross household savngs saw a notable increase of 4.65 per cent from FY21 to FY22. This doesn't mean the money has left the household sphere; rather, it's simply shifting from one pocket to an-

This dynamic is echoed in the substantial role households play in gross capital formation, financing over 40 per cent of domestic investments, predominantly in real estate such as homes, buildings, and other structures.

This desire to secure a personal roof is driving a significant surge of savings into the market, but it's also ballooning household debt as families stretch financially to embrace the real estate boom.

This is where the latest MOSPI estimates are also being grossly misinterpreted, causing widespread confusion in the media.

The claim that 'net financial savings' have gone down is not just inaccurate but a testament to how blatantly statistics are misused to sway public opin-

To further simplify the conundrum

The aspirational Indian household is increasingly investing in real estate, signifying the major role it is playing in gross capital formation net household savings can be expressed as the sum of net financial savings, physical savings and bullion savings The MOSPI data shows a clear growing trend in net household savings even after adjusting for their debt.

While orthodox neo-Keynesian and neoclassical macroeconomic theories might relate a slowdown in savings growth as a precursor to GDP growth slowdown, this needs to be looked at as a structural inflexion point towards higher domestic savings in the context of a more diversified savings portfolio.

The entire problem lies with the nomenclature and definition of savings, investment and consumption. Household savings directed towards real estate of any form (residences and dwellings) are accounted as investment, and not private consumption.

That is why one might note a departure in the consumptiondriven growth phenomenon in the last quarter, where consumption growth has comparatively slowed down, despite a high GDP growth and better growth performances of gross capital formation.

Apart from real estate, the sustained surge in bullion markets, coupled with an increase in savings through ornaments. suggests that Indian households favour tangible assets over financial ones, which carry a higher risk premium. This trend reflects the changing consumer preference over time and in the economic fu-

How does extreme exercise affect lifespan? Study offers new insight



By: Corrie Pelc

hile everyone knows that exercising regularly is important for a healthy life, some previous studies have shown that intense exercise may have the opposite effect. A new study, recently published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine, suggests that people who participate in extreme exercise may live

Researchers tracked a select group of elite runners capable of running a sub-4-minute mile and found they may live five years longer on average than the general population.

André la Gerche, PhD, a sports cardiologist and head of the Heart, Exercise and Research Trials (HEART) Laboratory supported by St Vincent's Institute of Medical Research and the Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute, and lead author of this study, explained to Medical News Today:

"There is a stubbornly held view in the community that you can do too much exercise. We thought that this was an opportunity to look at an exercise feat that, at the time, was thought impossible and that may stress the body beyond its limits. There was speculation that attempting such feats could have a detrimental effect on the body, Thus, it was an opportunity to address this fallacy.

Elite runners may live longer than the

average personFor this study, la Gerche and his team focused on the longevity of a group of the first 200 male elite runners to run a sub-4-minute mile. The runners were from 28 different countries across North America, Europe, Oceania, and Africa

All study participants were born between 1928 to 1955 and were on average 23 years old when they ran a mile in under 4 minutes. Of the 200 participants, 60 - or 30% - had died, leaving 140 still alive at the time of the study. Researchers found the average age of death for the study participants overall was 73, but the average age for the surviving elite runners was 77.

At the study's conclusion, the scientists discovered:

Generally, those who ran a sub-4minute mile lived about five years more than their predicted life expectancy based on age, sex, birth year, and nationality.

Those who ran a mile in under 4 minutes during the 1950s lived an average of nine years longer than the general population. Participants accomplishing the sub-

4-minute mile in the 1960s lived about 5.5 years longer, and in the 1970s lived about 3 years more. Findings similar to those seen in

elite cyclists la Gerche said they were not surprised by these findings regarding elite runners, as they are consistent with sevDe France cyclists, in which greater longevity has been observed.

"Our study set out to see how exercise affected elite athletes over the long term," la Gerche said.

"We know that elite athletes have bigger hearts due to their sustained aerobic output, and there was some belief that this could affect their health and longevity, but we found the opposite. Five years of extra life compared to (the) average is very significant, especially when we found that many of these runners not only enjoyed long lives but were also healthy. They live better, for longer.'

"This is one of many projects that we are undertaking related to cardiovascular changes and health and exercise," he added. "We continue to assess the factors that lead to favorable outcomes in those training regularly.'

How can you live longer if you're

not an elite athlete? Of course, not every person can run a sub-4-minute mile or be an elite athlete. So, how can the general population apply these findings to their own exercise regimen to hopefully extend

their lives? "Although we are told not to extrapolate in science, personally, I use this data as an aspiration to try and emulate as many lifestyle factors as a 4-minute miler: good diet, modest alcohol, dedication, and regular, intense exercise,"

la Gerche said. "Whilst I can't necessarily share the genetic predisposition that likely also contributes to elite speed, the rest I can try to achieve.'

Jennifer Wong, MD, a board certified cardiologist and medical director of Non-Invasive Cardiology at Memorial-Care Heart and Vascular Institute at Orange Coast Medical Center in Fountain Valley, CA — who was not involved with this study — told MNT:

"I think it reiterates the importance of exercise, maybe not necessarily this extreme level of exercise, but just any exercise being helpful for one's cardiovascular health and ultimately,

eral other publications, such as the Tour hopefully extending one's life that

Tracy Zaslow, MD, a board certified pediatrician and pediatric and adult primary care sports medicine specialist at Cedars-Sinai Kerlan-Jobe Institute in Los Angeles, CA, not involved in this study, told MNT that more research is needed to determine how to better extrapolate this data

'While I would not recommend changing practice based on this single study, it may be reassuring to know that there may not be as many risks of 'overdoing it' as previously believed. I would encourage readers to be inspired by these elite athletes to improve their own fitness, aiming for moderate exercise as often as possible," Zaslow said. Further research needed on types,

During further discussion, Wong said she felt this study's findings made sense that this level of fitness early on in life would be associated with longevity.

duration of exercise

"(It's) also reassuring because sometimes we hear about extreme exercises causing problems," she continued. "I would love to see more studies

showing (a) correlation between exercise later in life. Also, there's a difference when someone continues exercising and (this) study was specifically just looking at one's ability at one point in their life, but doesn't speak to what happens later or who kept it up. Maybe there'd be a bigger difference between people who continued to exercise later in life.

Zaslow told MNT she found the study interesting as it contradicts many other studies that previously show extreme exercise may increase rates of cardiac events, and changes in cardiac structure or function.

'Next steps include further studies of other types of athletes as this study was exclusively runners," she said. "Additionally, comparing a broader range of athletes to determine if there is an optimal amount or intensity of exercise to best promote longevity." (Courtesy: Medical News Today)

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei made the announcement of Mokhber's appointment in a condolence message he shared for Raisi's death

Mohammad Mokhber, appointed acting president after Raisi's demise

DUBAI, May 20: Iran's first Vice President Mohammad Mokhber was appointed as acting president of the Islamic Republic on Monday after the death of President Ebrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash in the country's northwest.

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Mokhber, 68, largely has been in the shadows compared to other politicians in Iran's Shiite theocracy. Raisi's death under the constitution thrust Mokhber into public view. He is expected to serve as caretaker president for some 50 days before mandatory presidential elections in Iran.

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei made the announcement of Mokhber's appointment in a condolence message he shared for Raisi's death in the crash on Sunday. The helicopter was found Monday in northwestern Iran.

Despite his low-key public profile, Mokhber has held prominent positions with in the country's power structure, particularly in its bonyads, or charitable foundations. Those groups were fuelled by donations or assets seized after Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution, particularly those previously associated

Mokhber oversaw a bonyad known in English as the Execution of Imam Khomeini's Order, or EIKO, referring to the late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khome-

The US Treasury said the organisation oversaw billions of dollars in assets as "a business juggernaut under the direct supervision of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei that has a stake in nearly every sector of the Iranian economy, including energy, telecommunications, and financial services".

"EIKO has systematically violated the rights of dissidents by confiscating land and property from opponents of the regime, including political opponents, religious minorities, and exiled Iranians," the Treasury said in 2021 in sanctioning Mokhber. The European Union also had sanctioned Mokhber for a time with others over concerns then about Iran's nuclear programme.

As the head of EIKO, Mokhber oversaw an effort to make a Covid-19 vaccine during the height of the pandemic, pledging to make tens of millions of doses. Only a fraction of that ever made it to the public, with-



Mokhber previously worked in banking and telecommunications. He also worked at the Mostazafan Foundation, another bonyad that's a major conglomerate that manages the country's mega-projects and businesses. While there, he found

himself entangled in a bitter legal dispute between mobile phone service providers Turkcell and South Africa's MTN over potentially entering the Iranian market.

MTN ended up entering Iran. A Turkcell filing alleged Mokhber sought MTN's help in securing

"certain defence equipment" in exchange for potentially working with it as opposed to Turkcell.

Mokhber used "improper influence up to and including negotiating with and on behalf of the Supreme Leader in MTN's favour," Turkcell later alleged in a legal filwere no arms transfers, though it acknowledges Mokhber was a player in Iran's decision to go with

Iranian media reports suggest Mokhber, who holds a doctorate in international law, was crucial in Iranian efforts to bypass Western sanctions on its oil industry.

Mokhber has been a member of Iran's Expediency Council since 2022, which advises the supreme leader, as well as settles disputes between parliament and the Guardian Council, Iran's constitutional watchdog that also oversees the country's elections.

Mokhber was born Sept 1, 1955, in Dezful in Iran's southwestern Khuzestan province to a clerical family. He served as an officer in the Revolutionary Guard's medical corps during the 1980s Iran-Iraq war, according to the pressure group United Against Nuclear Iran.

"Mokhber used the vast wealth accumulated by EIKO — at the expense of the Iranian people—to reward regime insiders like himself." UANI said. "Managing the patronage network endeared him to the supreme leader, but at a cost." (AP)

Nepal PM wins vote of confidence in Parliament

KATHMANDU, May 20: Nepal Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' on Monday won a vote of confidence in Parliament, the fourth within 18 months of taking office, amidst sloganeering by the main Opposition Nepali Congress

that abstained from the voting. Prachanda, 69, a former guerilla leader from the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) - the third largest party in the House of Representatives (HoR) - received 157 votes in the 275-member House of epresentatives.

In total, 158 lawmakers took part in the voting. The main Opposition Nepali Congress boycotted the voting process and chanted slogans against Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Rabi Lamichhane, accused of misappropriation of cooperative funds, leading to the delay in the session. One HoR member remained neutral. Speaker Dev Raj Ghimire announced that Prachanda had won the floor test as he got a majority in the Parliament.

The vote comes days after one of the coalition partners, Janata Samajbadi Party (JSP), withdrew its support last week for his government while quitting the coalition government. The government required at least 138 votes to win the vote of trust. Earlier, the voting had to be delayed due to obstructions caused by the Nepali Congress, which has been demanding the formation of a Parliamentary probe committee to investi-Lamichhane's involvement in the scam.

This was the fourth time that Prachanda sought a vote of confidence in the House in less since he assumed prime ministership in December 2022. According to constitutional provisions, a prime minister has to take a vote of confidence after an ally withdraws support to the ruling coalition. (PTI)

contractors for Taiwan arms sales

BEIJING, May 20: China's Ministry of Commerce announced sanctions against Boeing and two other defense companies on Monday for arms sales to Taiwan, on the day of Taiwan's presidential inauguration.

The move is the latest in a series of sanctions Beijing has announced in recent years against defense companies for weapons sales to Taiwan, a self-ruled island that China considers as part of its

own territory.

China's Ministry of Complaced merce Boeing's Defense, Space & Security unit, General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, and General Dynamics Land Sys-

tems, on what is called an "unreliable entities" list, forbidding their further investment in China, in addition to travel bans on senior management for the companies.

Lai Ching-te, Taiwan's new president, has vowed to strengthen Taiwan's security through imports of advanced fighters and other technology and strengthening its domestic defense industry.

In April, China froze assets of General Atomics Aeronautical Systems and General Dynamics Land Systems held within China.

Corporate filings show General

Gulfstream and jet aviation services operations in China, which remains heavily reliant on foreign aerospace technology even as it attempts to build its own presence in the field.

The company also helps make the Abrams tank, which is being purchased by Taiwan to replace outdated armor intended to deter or resist an invasion from China.

General Atomics produces the Predator and

Reaper drones used by the U.S. military., though it is unclear what weapons if any company sells to Taiwan. In 2022, China announced sanc-

tions against Ted Colbert, the president and CEO of Boeing Defense, Space and Security. after the company won a \$355 mil-

lion contract to supply Harpoon missiles to Taiwan. Taiwan has faced increasing mili-

tary harassment from China's People Liberation Army, which regularly flies fighter jets and sails warships near the island.

The likely impact of Beijing's sanctions on businesses such as Boeing is unclear. The United States bars most sales of weapons-related technology to China, but some military contractors also have civilian businesses in aerospace and other industries. (AP)

SAfrica's top court rules ex Prez cannot stand in election over criminal record

CAPE TOWN, May 20: South Africa's highest court ruled on Monday that former President Jacob Zuma is not allowed to stand as a candidate for Parliament in a national election next week because of a previous criminal conviction, a decision that's likely to increase political tensions ahead of a pivotal vote.

The Constitutional Court said that a section of the constitution disqualifying people from standing for office if they've been sentenced to more than 12 months in prison without the option of a fine does apply to the 82-year-old Zuma.

Zuma was sentenced to 15 months in prison in 2021 by the Constitutional Court for contempt of court for refusing to testify at a judicial inquiry into government corruption.

The case over whether that sentence disqualified Zuma from the election came about because he had no option to appeal the ruling by the apex court that sent him to prison.

Taiwan's new President Lai in his inauguration speech China sanctions Boeing, two US defense urges China to stop its military intimidation

TAIPEI, May 20: Taiwan's new president, Lai Ching-te, said in his inauguration speech on Monday that he wants peace with China and urged it to stop its military threats and intimidation of the self-governed island that Beijing claims as its own territory.

"I hope that China will face the reality of (Taiwan)'s existence, respect the choices of the people of Taiwan, and in good faith, choose dialogue over confrontation," Lai said after being sworn into office.

Lai pledged to "neither yield nor provoke" Beijing and said he sought peace in relations with China. But he emphasised the island democracy is determined to defend itself "in the face of the many threats and attempts at infiltration from China".

Lai's party, the Democratic Progressive Party, doesn't seek independence from China but maintains that Taiwan is already a sover-

Lai, 64, takes over from Tsai Ing-wen, who led Taiwan through eight years of economic and social development despite the COVID-19 pandemic and China's escalating military threats. Beijing views Taiwan as a renegade province and has been upping its threats to annex it by force if necessary.

Lai is seen as inheriting Tsai's progressive policies, including universal health care, backing for higher education and support for minority groups, including making Taiwan the first place in Asia to recognise same-sex marriages

bolster Taiwan's social safety net and help the island advance in fields such as artificial intelligence and green energy. Lai, who was vice president during Tsai's

second term, came across as more of a fire-

HOUSTON, May 20: Aviator Gopi Thotakura has

said that he is proud to become the first Indian to ven-

ture into space as a tourist aboard Amazon founder

Blue Origin's seventh human flight carrying Tho-

takura, 30, and five others lifted off from Launch Site

One in West Texas on Sunday and landed success-

He is the first Indian space tourist and the second

"India into space," he was heard saying from the

Indian to venture into space after the Indian Army's

spaceflight in a video posted by Blue Origin on X.

He was also seen holding the small Indian flag. The

30-year-old Andhra Pradesh-born entrepreneur and

pilot was also seen holding a banner which read "I

Other astronauts on the flight include Mason

Angel, Sylvain Chiron, Kenneth L. Hess, Carol

Schaller and former Air Force Captain Ed Dwight,

who was selected by President John F Kennedy in

1961 as the nation's first Black astronaut candidate

but never had the opportunity to fly. All the crew

members were excited to be on the flight. New Shep-

ard has now flown 37 people into space, including

This mission was the seventh human flight for the

New Shepard programme and the 25th in its history.

To date, the programme has flown 31 humans above

the Karman line, the proposed conventional boundary

am an eco-warrior for our sustainable planet".

Jeff Bezos's Blue Origin's NS-25 mission.

Wing Commander Rakesh Sharma in 1984.

In his inauguration speech, Lai pledged to



scribed himself as a "pragmatic worker for Taiwan's independence", drawing Beijing's rebuke. He has since softened his stance and now supports maintaining the status quo across the Taiwan Strait and the possibility of talks with Beijing.

Thousands of people gathered in front of the Presidential Office Building in Taipei for the inauguration ceremony. Donning white celebratory hats, they watched the swearing-in on large screens, followed by a military march and colourful performances featuring folk dancers, opera performers and rappers. Military helicopters flew in formation, carrying

Lai accepted congratulations from fellow politicians and delegations from the 12 nations that maintain official diplomatic relations with Taiwan, as well as politicians from the US, Japan and various European states.

Lai, also known by his English name William, has vowed to continue his predecessor's push to maintain stability with China while beefing up Taiwan's security through imports of military equipment from close partner the US, the expansion of the defense industry with the manufacture of submarines brand earlier in his career. In 2017, he de- and aircraft, and the reinforcing of regional

Gopi is the 1st Indian space tourist and the 2nd Indian to venture into

space after the Indian Army's Wing Commander Rakesh Sharma in 1984

Gopi Thotakura shares his excitement after becoming 1st Indian

space tourist on Blue Origin's private astronaut launch

partnerships with unofficial allies such as the US, Japan, South Korea and the Philippines.

The Chinese government didn't immediately address Lai's inauguration, but the Chinese Ministry of Commerce announced sanctions against Boeing and two other defence companies on Monday for arms sales to

US Secretary of State Antony J Blinken congratulated Lai on his inauguration. "We look forward to working with President Lai and across Taiwan's political spectrum to advance our shared interests and values, deepen our longstanding unofficial relationship, and maintain peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait," Blinken said in a statement from his

The US doesn't formally recognise Taiwan as a country but is bound by its own laws to provide the island with the means to defend it-

Lai's relatively conciliatory tone will come across as reassuring to foreign governments that may have been concerned about his past reputation as a firebrand, said Danny Russell, vice president of the Asia Society Policy In-

'There is virtually nothing that Lai could have said, short of unconditional surrender,' that would satisfy Beijing," he said.

During her tenure, Tsai oversaw a controersial pension and labour reform and extended the military conscription length to one year. She also kickstarted a military modernisation drive.

Tsai's leadership during the pandemic split public opinion, with most admiring Taiwan's initial ability to keep the virus largely outside its borders but criticising the lack of investment in rapid testing as the pandemic progressed. (AP)

Dynamics operates a half-dozen

Pakistan's former PM Imran Khan, others acquitted in two vandalism cases

ISLAMABAD, May 20: In a relief to beleaguered Imran Khan, a district and sessions court in Pakistan on Monday acquitted the jailed former prime minister and other leaders of his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party in two vandalism cases.

The court's verdict in the two cases related to the vandalism during the March 2022 long march came during the hearing of acquittal pleas filed by the 71-year-old PTI founder and other politicians, Geo News reported. Other leaders of the party who were acquitted included Zartaj

Gul, Ali Nawaz Awan, Faisal Javed, Shah Mahmood Qureshi,

Qasim Suri, Raja Khurram Nawaz, Shireen Mazari, Saifullah Niazi, Asad Umar and Awami Muslim League chief Sheikh Rashid Ahmad. The cases against Khan and other politicians were registered in the Kohsar and Karachi Company police stations for violation of

Section 144 imposed by authorities following the arrest of the former prime minister in an alleged corruption case. Speaking with journalists here, Khan's lawyer Naeem Panjotha said the cases against the PTI founder were based on political

"No evidence of vandalism found against the PTI founder during the long march," he said, adding that the Islamabad adminis-

tration did not issue any notification to enforce Section 144 in the Various cases of the same nature have been registered against the PTI founder and he has been acquitted in several cases about the long march, the counsel added.

He also noted that other political leaders were acquitted in the The verdict on the acquittal of Khan, Qureshi, Rashid, Awan,

Suri, and Nawaz was issued by Judicial Magistrate Shahzad Khan for a case registered at Kohsar police station. The court had earlier reserved its verdict in the Long March van-

The development comes days after a district and sessions court on May 15 acquitted Khan in two cases about the May 9 vandal-Khan, the only prime minister to be voted out of his office, who

remains behind bars in Adiala jail, and several other PTI leaders have been facing various allegations in the cases related to the violence following his arrest on May 9. Islamabad High Court on May 16 also approved the PTI

founder's bail petition in the 190 million pound National Crime Agency (NCA) settlement case. (PTI)

Ireland's top diplomat concerned over slow pace of justice in peacekeeper's killing in Lebanon

BEIRUT, May 20: Ireland's top diplomat in a visit to Lebanon on Monday expressed his concern over the slow progress in criminal proceedings against several Lebanese men charged with the killing of an Irish peacekeeper in 2022 in the tiny Mediterranean country.

Micheal Martin, Irish foreign and defence minister, said he was 'very, very concerned" about the case. He met with Irish peacekeepers in south Lebanon and with Lebanese Foreign Minister Abdallah Bou Habib and a representative of the Lebanese defence ministry.

Lebanon's military tribunal last June charged four men with the killing of Pvt. Seán Rooney, 24, of Newtown Cunningham, Irefollowing land. half-year probe. Rooney was killed on December 14, 2022.

Only one of the sus-Mohammed pects. Ayyad, was arrested. However, he was released on bail in November, with officials citing his medical condition. The four others facing charges — Ali Khalifeh, Ali Salman,



Hussein Salman, and Mustafa Salman — remain at large All five are allegedly

linked with Lebanese militant group Hezbollah. Hezbollah has repeatedly denied any role in the killing.

On the fatal night, Rooney and several other Irish soldiers from UNIFIL were on their way from their base in southern Lebanon to the Beirut airport. Two UN vehicles apparently took a detour through Al-Aqbiya, which is not part of the area under the peacekeepers' man-

Initial reports said angry residents confronted the peacekeepers, but the indictment concluded that the shooting was a targeted attack. The UN peacekeeper vehicle reportedly took a wrong turn and was surrounded by vehicles and armed men as they tried to make their way back to the

main road.

"We want justice to be done" and for the killers to be "brought to justice", Martin told reporters. "We understand the separation of powers. But we are concerned at the slow pace of the trial. And the Irish people want justice"

UNIFIL was created to oversee the withdrawal of Israeli troops from southern Lebanon after Israel's 1978 invasion, and its mission was expanded following the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah.

Relative calm prevailed in the border region after that war until the beginning of Israel's war against Hamas, a Hezbollah ally, in Gaza

For more than seven immediate

in October.

months, Hezbollah and allied groups have clashed near-daily with Israeli forces, with no apparent prospects for a halt to hostilities. (AP)

New Shepard is a fully reusable sub-orbital launch

today's crew.

between Earth's atmosphere and outer space.

Gopi co-founded Preserve Life Corp, a global centre for holistic wellness and applied health located near Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport. In addition to flying jets commercially, he pilots bush, aerobatic, and seaplanes, as well as gliders and

hot air balloons, and has served as an international

vehicle developed for space tourism by Blue Origin.

ator who learned how to fly before he could drive."

According to Blue Origin, "Gopi is a pilot and avi-

medical jet pilot. A lifelong traveller, his most recent adventure took him to the summit of Mt Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. Thotakura is a graduate of Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. During the mission, the crew soared to more than three times the speed of sound.

line, an area 100 kilometres above Earth's surface that is widely recognized as the altitude at which outer space begins - but there's a lot of grey area, CNN re-

The rocket vaulted the capsule past the Kármán

few minutes of weightlessness and striking views of Earth through the cabin windows, it added. During the flight, each astronaut carried a postcard to space on behalf of Blue Origin's foundation, Club for the Future. This programme gives students access to space on Blue Origin's rockets, including an all-

At the peak of the flight, passengers experienced a

digital method to create and send postcards. The Club's mission is to inspire and mobilise future generations to pursue careers in STEAM (science. technology, engineering, arts and mathematics) for the benefit of Earth. From an environmental standpoint, nearly 99 per cent of New Shepard's dry mass is reused, including the booster, capsule, engine, landing gear, and parachutes. New Shepard's engine is fuelled by highly efficient liquid oxygen and hydrogen. During the flight, the only byproduct is water vapour

with no carbon emissions, the company earlier said. Bezos' space company had paused its suborbital tourism programme following a liftoff malfunction of the New Shepard rocket. In September 2022, an uncrewed flight of New Shepard ended in flames around a minute after liftoff. (PTI)



Five Bangladeshi nationals arrested for entering Indian territory

Bangladeshi nationals were arrested from Tripura's Khowai district for entering Indian territory without any valid travel document, a police officer said on

The five Bangladeshi citizens identified as Litan Das (37), Babul Das (26), Pankaj Sarkar (18), Nikku Sarkar (22) and Rupan Das (26) sneaked into Khowai after crossing over border fencing at Ashrambari, a border village and were going to Santirbazar in South Tripura district, they officer said.

'They entered Indian territory after crossing over border fencing at Ashrambari. When the five were travelling from Ashrambari to Santirbazar by a vehicle, they were detained on Sunday," said

CDF cadre

arrested

AIZAWL, May 20: A cadre of the

Myanmar-based Chinland Defence

Force (CDF) was arrested with am-

munition in south Mizoram's Siaha

district, the Assam Rifles said in a

Acting on a tip-off, the Assam

A person riding a 'Kenbo' bike

On thorough checking, 170

rounds of 12 gauge shotgun car-

tridges, 14 radio sets and some tac-

tical gear along with the bike were

the apprehended person belonged

to the CDF, and was tasked with

the transportation of the ammuni-

tion across the India-Myanmar

Initial investigation revealed that

seized, the Assam Rifles said.

was intercepted at the checkpost, it

Rifles set up a mobile checkpost at

Tuipang Road Junction on Satur-

statement on Monday.

day, it said.



duce any passport or visa for trav-

The five arrested Bangladeshi na-

tionals would be produced before court on Monday, he added.

Meanwhile, Hannan Miah, a resident of Sepahijala district, who was wanted by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in a human trafficking case, was arrested from Rastarmatha on Sunday, said Officer in Charge (OC), Bishalgarh police station, Rana Chatterjee.

The arrest was made following a request from the NIA Guwahati office, he said, adding that the mastermind of the human trafficking case will be taken to Guwahati on transit

According to police, Hannan who was on the run for many months, is the mastermind of a human trafficking case lodged by NIA in Guwa-

He said as they could not pro- elling to Indian territory they were Concerns mount as Meghalaya grapples with 2.5 lakh drug addicts

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 20: Meghalaya social welfare minister Paul Lyngdoh raised concerns on Mon-

day (May 20) about the surging number of drug addicts in the According to Lyngdoh, the

number of drug addicts in Meghalaya reached a staggering 2.5 lakh, inclusive of women and minors. Briefing the media, the Megha-

laya minister said: "In a state with a population of 35 lakh, if 2.5 lakh are drug addicts, the situation is rather grim." Notably, the Meghalaya gov-

ernment allocated ₹ 15.65 lakh as the second instalment of funding to support an anti-drug campaign initiated by the Mawlai Town

This initiative marks the first traditional institution in Meghalaya to undertake efforts aimed at rehabilitating drug addicts from the locality and its surroundings.

Lyngdoh stressed on the impor-



cotic Task Force (ANTF) at key entry points, particularly in the East Jaintia Hills district of Meghalaya, which serves as the primary gateway to the Khasi-Jaintia Hills sector.

He stressed the need to enhance the ANTF's efficiency and manpower, anticipating improvements with upcoming recruitments in the state police and home guards.

tioned plans to incentivize the Meghalaya home department through the DREAM project, enabling them to organize similar anti-drug programs involving local police departments and Village Defence Parties (VDPs).

These strategic measures aim to combat the drug menace effectively, with additional strategies in the pipeline, promising visible re-

Chittagong Hill Tracts have already taken refuge in Lawngtlai district. They began entering Mizoram in November 2022 due to a military offensive by the Bangladeshi army against the Kuki-Chin National

lated incidents and situations. Rio also directed the public works department (roads and bridges) to arrange JCBs in every district< he also said the engineering divisions of the department in every district must arrange and keep a JCB handy through hiring or contribution from contractors or private parties to come to the rescues of the

Rio asks state depts to be

prepared for monsoon season

dents during monsoon season. Rio appealed to the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited to clear all drainages, hume pipes ment Authority, said the state and culverts so that there is a smooth flow of water as to avert

people for any untoward inci-

He asked the agriculture department to supply quality seeds

and distribute seeds on time to the farmers. He also instructed the power department to be prepared for any unforeseen incidents as every year power cuts during monsoon seasons cause a lot of hardship to the citizens. Rio further asked the state

chief secretary to have a meeting with the village councils in all the districts in the early part of June on the district preparedness for the upcoming monsoon season.

Rio stressed that the relief and aftereffects of different diseases and response and restoration need the coordination of all the departments.

"When such coordination meetings are called, the civil societies including women leaders, should be invited," he added.

BJP's policies crippling state's **Over 80** refugees from education system: Tripura Cong Chief Bangladesh enter Mizoram HT Bureau GUWAHATI, May 20: Tripura

Pradesh Congress Committee President Asish Kumar Saha slammed the ruling BJP, claiming that the party in power has completely para lyzed the education

system in the state. dents' futures

Addressporters at Khowai after an organizational

meeting, Saha

so far fled to Mizoram during the said, "The results of Vidyajyoti About 1,241 ethnic Mizoram schools clearly show communities from Bangladesh's the faults of the state government and their weaknesses. The

government must find a solution. Parents are worried, and students are changing schools, leading to a rise in dropout numbers. The number of English teachers is very low. The government has introduced such schemes just to fool people and for advertisement purposes, paralyzing

the education department. They are playing with students' lives."

He said that two days back the BJP held a protest rally, but they should protest against the former Education Minister and former

Chief Minister, asking why parents and students are facing problems. "They

pushing the future of students into uncertainty The schools under Vidyajyoti have no facilities and no infrastructure. The has no guardian. Where will people go? The government must think seriously

about Vidyajyoti," he told reporters. On the election results, he said, 'Across the country, the fourth phase of the poll concluded. If you look at the real pictures now coming out on social media, you can see that the Congress party and the INDI bloc are set to form the government with a thumping majority.'

border, the statement said. (PTI) MPCC to move GHC against election commission



AIZAWL, May 20: Mizoram Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) on Monday said that it will move the Gauhati High Court against the Election Commission for not facilitating voting for about 1,047 police personnel who were deployed for poll duty in other

They had failed to cast their votes in the Lok Sabha polls held on April 19 in the state, the MPCC

It said that the party had on May 13 written to the state chief electoral officer (CEO) asking him to

take steps so that the policemen could exercise their franchise.

As per the reply of the CEO, the Election Commission is unlikely to arrange voting facilities for the policemen, who did not cast during the elections due to their deployment for the Lok Sabha elections in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, the MPCC said.

The party said that it will file a Public Interest Litigation at the Aizawl bench of Gauhati High Court to ensure that the police personnel cast their votes before the counting of votes

Although they were supposed to exercise their franchise at facilitation centres, no such arrangements could be made for them as they had to leave the state, before the candidates could be finalised, due to direction from higher authori-

The state election department has claimed that it requested the Election Commission at least two times to allow the police personnel to cast their votes for the lone Mizoram Lok Sabha seat.

However, the Central poll panel rejected the requests, the CEO office in the state said.

On Saturday, the People's Conference (PC) party also wrote to the Election Commission principal secretary S B Joshi, urging the poll panel to allow 1,047 policemen from Mizoram, to cast their votes.

The party blamed the authorities for failing to arrange the Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS) for the police personnel

It said that 1,047 votes will have a meaningful impact on the poll results in a small state like Mizoram.

R Lalramnghaka sworn in as new chairman of MPSC

Army (KNA), an ethnic insurgent

group fighting for a separate state.

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, May 20: Nagaland

chief minister Neiphiu Rio on

Monday directed all government

departments in the state to be pre-

pared for the upcoming monsoon

season since Nagaland monsoon

character cannot be predicted be-

cause there may be excess or defi-

disastrous effect in both cases.

ciency in rainfall which will have

Chairing a state-level monsoon

preparedness meeting at the

CM's secretariat in Kohima, Rio,

who is also the chairman of the

Nagaland State Disaster Manage-

should provide some funds for

emergency situations to the dis-

trict administrations so that im-

mediate relief can be given to

those affected by monsoon-re-

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, May 20: More than

80 refugees from Bangladesh's

Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) en-

Sources said that the refugees

have traversed in forest for more

than a month to reach Mizoram

from their villages in CHT, it said.

Many of them did not possess

proper clothing and they have been

without proper food for several

the Bawm tribe, one of the ethnic

Mizo tribes from Bangladesh have

About 300 people belonging to

tered Mizoram on Sunday.

weeks, it said.

past few weeks.

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, May 20: In a ceremony held at the Raj Bhawan, retired Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer R Lalramnghaka was sworn in as the new chairman of the Mizoram Public Service Commission (MPSC) on Monday (May 20) afternoon

The oath-taking proceedings began with Mizoram chief secretary Dr Renu Sharma reading the warrant of appointment issued by the governor.

Mizoram governor Hari Babu Kambhampati administered the oath of office to Lalramnghaka. The ceremony was attended

by high-ranking officials of the of Kolasib district, joint secretary of LR&S/LAD, director of chief minister Lalduhoma, speaker Lalbiakzama, home minister K Sapdanga, and former chief minister Zoramthanga.

> R Lalramnghaka holds a BSc in agriculture and joined the Mizoram Civil Service (MCS) in 1991. He was promoted to the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) of the AGMUT cadre in

> Throughout his career, Lalramnghaka has held numerous key positions in the Mizoram government, including director of SIRD, deputy commissioner

LR&S, director of FCS&CA, and additional secretary of

He also served as the secretary of various Mizoram government departments, including health and family welfare, commerce and industries, and personnel and administrative reforms, as well as deputy commissioner of Aizawl.

Before his appointment as chairman of MPSC, Lalramnghaka served as secretary of the general administration department (GAD) and public works department.

Meghalaya hosts IKCA selection trials for the Canoe Slalom World Cup, 2024

In the K1 women's category, Elizabeth Vincent from Meghalaya secured 3rd place

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 20: Meghalaya proudly hosted the Indian Kayaking Canoeing Association (IKCA) selection trials at Whitewater Village in Shillong on May 18 and 19. These trials were essential in forming the Indian team for the 2024 ICF Canoe Slalom World Cup and Kayak Cross events, crucial qualifiers for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games.

Over 25 athletes from across India, including strong contingents from Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, and Meghalaya, competed fiercely. The event underscored Meghalaya's growing prominence in the sport of canoe slalom, as it provided an ideal setting for this highstakes competition.

In the K1 women's category, Elizabeth Vincent from Meghalaya secured 3rd place. In the Kayak Cross, Elizabeth Vincent from Meghalaya achieved 1st place.

In the K1 men's category, Batskhem Nongbak finished in 6th position, Pynshngaiñ Kurbha finished in 8th position, Manbhalang Kharkrang finished in 9th posi-



tion.In the C1 men's category, Indra Sharma from Meghalaya fin-

ished in 6th position. These athletes will now represent India on the global stage, aiming to qualify for the canoe slalom events at the Paris 2024 Olympics. Hosting the 2024 ICF Canoe Slalom World Championships trials is a significant milestone for Meghalaya, showcasing its capability to host world-class sporting

events and its dedication to promoting water sports. The selected Indian team will now compete against the world's best, gaining invaluable experience and honing their skills for the international

This event highlights Meghalaya's importance in India's sporting landscape and marks a crucial step for the nation's athletes as they strive for Olympic success.

Bandh cripples normal life in Imphal

GUWAHATI, May 20: Normal life was crippled in Imphal city on Sunday due to a 24-hour Bandh called by the shop owners and businessmen in protest against the unbearable monetary demands and various inconveniences created by several armed miscreants.

In response to the Bandh that started on the intervening night of Sunday, all shops, business establishments and banks in the Imphal city remained closed.

For emergency services, the patient parties rushed to the nearby hospitals to avail the medical items. Public transport was also largely off the roads and there were fewer private vehicles than usual, officials

However, some auto-rickshaws and inter-district

cabs were plying.

Paona Bazar and Thangal Bazar shop owners' community of Imphal city in a statement condemned the relentless monetary demands served on shops from different armed groups and anti-socials.

Additionally, it has also taken strong exception to the recent incidents of violence against non-Manipuris by motorcycle-borne miscreants.

In this regard, the police said that over ten individuals allegedly involved in the extortion campaigns and assaults on non-locals in the city areas were rounded up. The Bandh was called after the arrests of three alleged valley-based insurgent cadres with the recovery of ₹ 1.9 lakh during the operations in the Thangal bazaar area recently.

Attempted robbery at 2 arrested in road rage murder of man in Kohima **SBI Umium branch**

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 20: An attempted robbery occurred at the State Bank of India (SBI) branch in the ICAR area of Umiam under Ri Bhoi district of Meghalaya, on Sunday (May 19) night. Unidentified miscreants tried to break into the bank by forcibly entering

through the back door under the cover According to reports, intruders managed to break the grills of the bank's back door but failed to access the drawer

containing money. The attempted robbery was discovered on Monday (May 20) morning when SBI Umiam branch staff arrived at work and immediately alerted the Umiam police station in Meghalaya.

KOHIMA, May 20: Two persons were arrested for allegedly beating to death a man in Nagaland's Ko-

police said Monday. Kezhalelie Lawrence Miasalhou, the political assistant to the deputy commissioner of Kohima district, was assaulted on Saturday, they said.

hima in an incident of road rage.

Miasalhou, who was in his late 50s, collapsed due to the assault and was rushed to a private hospital where he breathed his last in the early hours of Sunday, they added.

The two accused, identified as Neizosetuo Kire (24) and Khrietsonyü Whuorie (25), were arrested on Sunday, police said.

A case was registered under IPC

sections 323 (voluntarily causing hurt), 325 (voluntarily causing grievous hurt), 352 (assault or use of criminal force) and 302 (murder) at the North police station, they said.

Meanwhile, the Western Angami Youth Organisation (WAYO) held a protest rally in the state capital.

Demanding that no bail should be given to the accused under any circumstances, WAYO said that any person trying to bail them out would be held responsible for any "untoward consequences"

Various other civil society organisations, youth bodies and village councils also condemned the incident. (PTI)

Earth excavation work prohibited in **Gangtok** during monsoon

GANGTOK, May 20: Earth excavation work has been prohibited in Gangtok district of Sikkim for four months from June 1 due to the risk of landslides with the onset of monsoon, an official notification said on Monday.

The order was issued by District Magistrate Tushar Nikhare under Section 30 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005.

"There shall be no new earth excavation work in Gangtok district during the monsoon period from June 1, 2024 to September 30, 2024," the order stated.

The decision has been taken in view of the monsoon starting in the Northeast region of the country, especially Sikkim, entailing a high risk of landslides at various vulnerable locations which may cause damages to various properties, the district collector, who is also the chairman of the Gangtok District Disaster Management Au-

thority, said. Hill-cutting work will make sites vulnerable to landslides, he said, while demanding strict compliance with the order. (PTI)

Poll panel said it has received 1,399 complaints until 1 pm from different political parties alleging EVM malfunctioning and agents being stopped from entering booths

Scattered incidents of violence in fifth

phase of LS polls in Bengal

KOLKATA, May 20: Scattered

incidents of violence marred the

fifth phase of Lok Sabha polls in

seven parliamentary constituen-

cies in West Bengal on Monday, as

TMC and BJP workers clashed in

various parts of Barrackpore, Bon-

Although the poll panel has

claimed that polling has been

peaceful so far, it said it has re-

ceived 1,399 complaints until 1

pm from different political parties

alleging EVM malfunctioning and

agents being stopped from enter-

Clashes broke out between sup-

Two live crude bombs were also

'BJP goons have unleashed a

intimidating voters," TMC candi-

BJP candidate Arup Kanti Digar

rubbished the allegations and

blamed the TMC for letting loose

stituency, BJP sitting MP and

party candidate Locket Chatterjee

faced protests from TMC activists

led by TMC MLA Ashima Patra.

a booth, TMC activists staged

protests and shouted "Chor Chor

Following which, the BJP MP

A huge police and central forces

In Barrackpore constituency,

contingent rushed to the spot and

BJP candidate and MP Arjun

Singh faced protests outside a

black flags and shouted slogans

got down from her car and shouted

(thief thief) slogans"

stopped the two groups.

counter slogans.

As Chatterjee was on her way to

violence on the day of the polls. In neighbouring Hooghly con-

ing booths.

ity personnel.

date Mitali Bag said.

gaon, and Arambagh seats.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said he has never uttered a word against minorities, and the BJP has "not just today but never" acted against them. He, however, made it clear that he is not ready to accept anyone as "special citizens".

8 THE HILLS TIMES

The comments in an interview to PTI Videos late Sunday are Modi's most unequivocal on minorities amid an outcry from the opposition that his election speeches are communally divisive and polarising.

He also said the Congress has constantly violated the secular spirit of the Constitution, and his campaign speeches are aimed at exposing the opposition parties' bid to appease minorities with vote bank politics.

In the interview, he was asked what he has to say about the apprehension among minorities because of his statements. "I have not spoken a word against minorities. I am only talking against the vote bank politics of Congress. Congress is working against the Constitution, that's what I have been saying," he

Modi said the makers of India's Constitution, including B R Ambedkar and Jawaharlal Nehru, had decided there will be no reservations on the basis of religion. "Now you are turning away from that. It is my responsibility to ex-



sabka vikas'. We believe in 'sarva

dharma sambhav'. We want to take

everyone along with us. We are not

ready to accept anyone as special

citizens but consider everyone

He was also asked if he really

believes the Congress will actually

give away the Hindus' wealth to

Muslims, or if it was just a cam-

equal," the prime minister said.

no members of my party in the Constituent Assembly. It was an assembly of eminent people from across the country.

He was again asked if he had never meant to target the minorities in his election speeches, to which he said, "BJP has never been against minorities. Not just today but never.'

He then added that the Congress follows the path of appearement. "I follow the path of satisfaction. (Woh log tushtikaran ke raastey pe chaltey hain, main santushtikaran ke raastey pe chalta hoon). Their politics is that of appearement. My politics is that of 'sabka saath

"It is not the question of me thinking that way. To campaign without any logic is a sin. I have never committed such a sin nor will I want to. Such an illogical campaign has been done by them (opposition)," Modi said.

He acknowledged that the day the Congress manifesto came out he had said it has the imprint of the Muslim League. "Congress party should have rebutted me the same

from the Buddhist-dominated Leh -

Congress' Tsering Namgyal -- Inde-

pendent candidate Mohammad Ha-

neefa Jan is the lone candidate from

the Shia Muslim-dominated Kargil

ference leader, quit the party along

with its entire Kargil unit to contest

as an Independent after the Con-

statehood, appear divided over the

polls with expectations of voting

Observers here say the candidate

taking place on regional lines.

Haneefa, a former National Con-

- the BJP's Tashi Gyalson and the

have to gradually educate the people of India", Modi said. He claimed that the Congress

But because they remained

silent "it seemed to me that I will

manifesto promises reservations for minorities in awarding of tenders. "You want to make a bridge. Who will bid for the tender? Someone with resources, expertise, technology. But if you want to bring reservations there also, what will happen to my country's develop-

Congress leaders have in turn accused Modi of twisting their manifesto's phrases out of context.

ment?" Modi asked.

To make his point, Modi again referred to former prime minister Manmohan Singh's remarks in 2006 at a National Development Council meeting that Muslims have the first right over the country's resources.

He also referred to a decision by the Congress government of Karnataka to bring all Muslims under OBC reservation category. "They committed a robbery on OBC quota," Modi said.

"I believe that it is these people who have destroyed the spirit of secularism in our Constitution for their electoral politics. I want to restore that spirit of the Constitution. That's why it is necessary to expose these people," Modi said.

porters of TMC and BJP in Khanakul area of Arambagh con-Iran prez death: Govt stituency as both parties clashed over stopping polling agents from announces one-day entering the booths. state mourning today recovered from the area by secu-

NEW DELHI, May 20: A one-day state mourning will be observed across India on Tuesday as a mark of respect for Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, who died in a helicopter crash, the Union Home Ministry has announced. The national flag will be flown at half-mast on all buildings where it is regularly flown across India and there will be no official entertainment during the period of state mourning. The Iranian president, the country's foreign minister and several other officials were found dead on Monday, hours after their helicopter crashed in a foggy, mountainous region of the country's northwest, Iran state media reported. A home ministry spokesperson said Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi, president the Islamic Republic of Iran, and Hossein Amit-Abdollahian, the country's foreign minister, passed away in a helicopter crash. "As a mark of respect to the departed dignitaries, the government of India has decided that there will be one day's throughout India," the spokesperson

the TMC and BJP supporters. The central police personnel accompanying Singh and present outside the booth resorted to baton charge to disperse the mob.

As Singh protested against the

slogans, clashes ensued between

BJP leader Kaustav Bagchi too faced protests while on his way to Titagarh as bricks were pelted at

Sporadic incidents of violence were reported from various parts of Howrah constituency.

In the Liluah area of Howrah, the BJP accused TMC workers of booth jamming leading to clashes

between both groups. The central police forces rushed to the area and dispersed the mob. In Bongaon constituency's Gayeshpur area, local BJP leader

Subir Biswas was allegedly beaten by TMC goons outside a booth. He was later shifted to hospital. In the Kalyani area of the same reign of terror in the area and are constituency, Union Minister and BJP candidate Shantanu Thakur

caught a person using the identity card of his rival TMC candidate Biswajit Das inside a polling booth. The person was later removed from the booth by central forces.

In some areas, TMC workers staged protests following allegations that central forces were assisting BJP workers in intimidating voters at some booths of Hooghly.

A voter turnout of 48.41 per cent was registered in seven Lok Sabha constituencies of West Bengal until 1 pm on Monday, an Election Commission official said.

Voting is underway in Arambagh, Uluberia, Hooghly, Howrah, Bongaon, Srerampore, and Barrackpore Lok Sabha constituen-

Out of these, five were won by BJP in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

Ladakh records over 67 per cent polling

LEH, May 20: Over 67 per cent polling was recorded in Ladakh till 5 pm on Monday in the election to decide the fate of three candidates in the fray for the lone Lok Sabha seat in the Union territory, polling officials said. Spread over an area of over

59.000 square kilometres -- around 40 times the size of Delhi -- Ladakh is the largest parliamentary constituency in India in terms of area and covers the two districts of Leh and Kargil.

The polling percentage recorded till 5 pm is 67.15, according to the Election Commission.

Lt Governor Brig (Dr) BD Mishra (retd) and his wife Neelam Mishra were among those who cast their votes at Skara Yokma in Leh.

"Voting is the festival of democracy. I am happy that we are celebrating it like that. Free and fair voting is an important step of democracy. I want Ladakh to always grow and our youth to get every good opportunity," Mishra told reporters after voting.

Sonam Wangchuk, who was in the news recently for leading a 66-day

MUMBAI, May 20: Shiv Sena (UBT) president Uddhav Thackeray

alleged on Monday afternoon that

voting was delayed at several places

in Mumbai and the Election Com-

mission of India was doing this de-

liberately at the behest of the

Delay was taking place at the

polling booths in areas where his

party expects more votes, he said at

a press conference here while urging

electors to stand in queues as long as

early morning if the process was

turnout of 48.66 per cent was

recorded till 5 pm in 13 Lok Sabha

seats in Maharashtra where the fifth

As per poll officials, a voter

Narendra Modi government.



sit-in protest in Leh over demands such as safeguards under the 6th Schedule for Ladakh and statehood, cast his vote in Leh's Ulvaktopo vil-

"I have just voted and I am happy. I am also feeling sad because many people don't exercise their right to vote. Many leaders sacrificed a lot for this country. People should celebrate the festival of Wangchuk told PTI

Ladakh Chief Electoral Officer

Voting process delayed deliberately in Mumbai at central govt's behest, alleges Uddhav

and final phase of general elections

In Mumbai, polling is taking place

"Dirty games are being played

across all six Lok Sabha constituen-

through the Election Commission.

There is a lot of enthusiasm among

voters, but the Election Commission

is acting in a partisan manner. There

is a delay by EC's representatives in

Officials were cross-checking

names several times, and women

and senior citizens were facing prob-

lems at polling booths, the former

There was no drinking water at

Maharashtra chief minister said.

many places, he claimed.

certain areas," Thackeray alleged.

was taking place.

Yetindra M Maralkar said they are expecting up to 75 per cent voting by the end of the day.

"We are witnessing enthusiasm among the voters and I think, polling percentage will also improve this time. It may go up to 75 per cent by the end of the day," Maralkar said.

Ladakh witnessed 71.05 per cent turnout in the 2019 general election. fray for the Ladakh Lok Sabha seat. While there are two candidates

"The Modi government is using

the EC as its handmaiden due to its

fear of losing. This is a ploy of the

Modi government to ensure that vot-

ing against it is minimized," Thack-

ing outside polling stations in Mum-

bai city district due to slow voting

process, said Mumbai city collector

In the morning, voters in large

numbers assembled outside booths

in Sewri, Sion Koliwada and one

more place, but additional man-

power was used to clear the rush

and the polling process was con-

ducted swiftly, the senior bureau-

There was no incident of crowd-

eray alleged.

Saniav Yadav.

gress fielded Namgyal as the INDIA bloc candidate. The two districts, which came together over demands including 6th Schedule of the Constitution and

> from Kargil is likely to have an Of the total 1.84 lakh voters in Ladakh, 95,926 are in the Kargil district and 88,877 in Leh. There

> 279 booths in Kargil. This is the first major electoral battle in the region after it was and granted Union territory status in

seats in the ongoing Lok Sabha polls.

majority with more than 270 seats.

past 400.

HISAR (HARYANA), May 20: Union Home Min-

ister Amit Shah on Monday said after June 4, Rahul

Gandhi will have to take out a "Congress Dhundo

Yatra" as the grand old party will not even get 40

Shah kept up his attack on the Congress on various

fronts at another public meeting in Hisar, where he

campaigned for the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP)

Asking the gathering if it wants to know the re-

Lok Sabha poll candidate, Ranjit Singh Chautala.

sults after four phases of polling in the general elec-

tion. Shah said the BJP, under the leadership of

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has already secured

of polling, the saffron party's tally of seats will go

He asserted that after the three remaining phases

"Shehzadon, damadon-wali Congress will not

After addressing a rally in Haryana's Karnal,

are 298 polling stations in Leh and

After June 4, Rahul Gandhi will have to take out 'Congress Dhundo Yatra': Shah

even get 40 seats," Shah claimed

Pointing out that the "shehzada" (prince) of the Congress, "Rahul baba" (Rahul Gandhi), had taken out the "Bharat Jodo Yatra", he said, "After June 4, Rahul baba will have to take out the 'Congress Dhundo Yatra'. The Congress will not be seen even with binoculars," he said

The Lok Sabha poll results are scheduled to be declared on June 4.

Shah said Modi's "Vikas ka Kamal" is blooming everywhere in Haryana.

He said for the voters, on one hand there is Congress, during the rule of which scams worth Rs 12 lakh crore took place, and on the other hand there is Modi, who also served as the Gujarat chief minister for years and no one could level an allegation of corruption involving an amount of even "25 paise" on

On one hand there is "Rahul baba", who was born

with a silver spoon, and on the other hand there is the prime minister who was born in a poor family, Shah said.

He claimed that Gandhi heads to "Thailand and Bangkok" when temperatures increase in India. "Remember my words, the (poll) results will be declared on June 4 and Rahul baba will head for a vacation on June 6," he added.

The senior BJP leader said on the other hand, Modi has worked without a single off day for more than two decades, including when he was the chief minister of Guiarat. "You have to decide between the two" he told

the gathering.

Attacking the previous Congress-led government at the Centre, he said, "Aliya, Maliya, Jamaliya from Pakistan used to enter India every day, carry out bomb blasts and (then prime minister) Manmohan Singh never used to utter a word." (PTI)

BHU study on Covaxin side effects poorly designed, erroneously acknowledges ICMR: Dr Bahl

NEW DELHI, May 20: The Indian Council of Medical Research Director General Dr Rajiv Bahl on Monday criticised a recently published study on the long-term safety analysis of the Covaxin in adults and adolescents for its poor methodology and design, and clarified the article misleadingly and "acknowledges" erroneously ICMR.

Dr Bahl said the study had no control arm of unvaccinated individuals for comparing the rates of events between the vaccinated and unvaccinated groups. Hence, the reported events in the study cannot be linked or attributed to COVID-19

The ICMR is not associated with the study and has not provided any financial or technical support for the research. Dr Bahl said.

The ICMR DG has written a letter to the authors of the paper and Editor of the journal to immediately remove the acknowledgement to

ICMR and publish an erratum. A research paper, titled 'Long-Term Safety Analysis of the

BBV152 Coronavirus Vaccine in Adolescents and Adults: Findings from a 1-Year Prospective Study in North India' stated that nearly onethird of the 926 participants in the study who received Bharat

Biotech's anti-Covid vaccine Covaxin reported 'adverse events of special interest, or AESI.

Dr Bahl said that ICMR was acknowledged for research support without any prior approval of or in-

timation to ICMR, which is inappropriate and unacceptable. He stated that ICMR cannot be associated with this poorly designed study which purports to present a "safety analysis" of Covaxin due to several critical flaws.

He said the study does not even provide background rates of observed events in the population, making it impossible to assess the change in incidence of observed

events in the post-vaccination period. Baseline information of study participants is missing.

The study tool used is inconsistent with 'Adverse Events of Special Interest (AESI)' as defined in the reference pro-

> vided in the paper for AESI. The method of data collection has a high risk of bias, he said.

Study participants were contacted telephonically one year after vaccination and their responses were

recorded without any confirmation with clinical records or by physician examination, he pointed out. Dr Bahl also noted that similar acknowledgements to ICMR have been made in previous papers with-

"The authors have been urged to immediately rectify the acknowledgment to ICMR and publish an

out permission, raising concerns

about the authors' practices.

erratum. Additionally, they are asked to address the methodological concerns raised. Failure to do so may prompt ICMR to consider legal and administrative action," he

The Editor has been asked to retract the paper which implicitly makes conclusions on vaccine safety which are not supported by evidence

The study, conducted by researchers from the Banaras Hindu University from January 2022 to August 2023, stated that nearly 50 per cent of 926 study participants in the study complained of infections during the follow-up period, predominated by viral upper respiratory tract infections.

Serious AESI, which included stroke and Guillain-Barre syndrome, were reported in one per cent of individuals, the study, which looked at long-term safety of the BBV152 (Covaxin) vaccine in adolescents and adults, claimed.

The study involved 635 adolescents and 291 adults, who received the BBV152 vaccine. (PTI)

Graffiti 'threatening' Kejriwal appear inside metro trains, AAP says BJP behind it NEW DELHI, May 20: The Aam Aadmi Party on

Monday accused the BJP of being behind the anti-Arvind Kejriwal graffiti that were found scribbled inside metro trains in Delhi. The party has sought time from the Election Commission for a meeting on the issue and has sent a request for a representation in email. A senior police officer said they have taken cognisance of the matter and probing into it.

Addressing a press conference, AAP leader Atishi said the BJP is rattled by the fact that it is going to lose all seven seats in Delhi, that is why it has been targeting Kejriwal by "hatching different conspiracies.

'They got him arrested on March 21 and then when he was lodged inside Tihar jail, they stopped his insulin for 15 days and we had to approach the court. After he came out, they used Swati Maliwal to target him but that conspiracy also did not pay off since the videos revealed that the assault allegations were false." she alleged.

"Now there is a danger to his life," she added Atishi claimed that a man had scribbled graffiti inside three metro stations -- Rajiv Chowk, Patel Chowk and Patel Nagar -- threatening Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal. "The images of the graffiti have also been uploaded on social media. These stations are under CCTVs and security personnel are posted round-the-clock. Why are the police not acting on it? Where is the Cyber Cell? This shows that this is being orchestrated by the BJP," she alleged.

Pictures of graffiti that did rounds on social media showed that several of them were written inside the metro trains, and at least two of them on sign boards bearing the stations' names at Patel Nagar and Rajiv Chowk metro stations. Several pictures of the graffiti also carried an Instagram handle.

It is not known yet whether the graffiti were first shared from the same handle.

Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva asked the police and EC to double the security of Kejriwal, alleging he and his party can orchestrate an attack on him to gain public sympathy ahead of May 25 Lok Sabha polls in the city. Sachdeva said that the AAP was trying to divert attention from the incident of assault on Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal inside the Delhi Chief Minister's residence.

"My only question to Kejriwal is when will he break his silence over the Maliwal assault incident in his house?" he said in a press conference.

Delhi cabinet minister Saurabh Bharadwaj, in a press conference later, said the party has emailed arepresentation to EC seeking time to discuss the issue.

"Arvind Kejriwal has been publicly threatened. The person has written threats inside the coaches of metro stations. The accused has also shared it on social media handles.

"There is CCTV coverage inside metro stations. It is a cause of worry that the chief minister has been threatened but no action has been taken by Delhi Police and metro. If there is any complaint made against AAP police indulges in negative publicity. There have been attacks on Kejriwal earlier but nothing is known what action was taken in them," Bharadwaj said. (PTI)

School timings changed in Himachal after heat wave alert in 8 districts

SHIMLA/DHARAMSHALA/BILASPUR (HP), May 20: The Directorate of Higher Education in Himachal Pradesh on Monday ordered change in school timings for places in the lower hills after a heat wave alert for several districts.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Sunday issued a heat wave alert for eight out of 12 districts, barring Shimla, Chamba, Kinnau and Lahaul and Spiti.

The heat wave has also left the political leaders in quandary as they are unable to move out during the daytime for campaigning across the state, which goes to polls on June 1 in the last phase of Lok Sabha elections.

Amarjeet Sharma, Director, Higher Education department told PTI that instruction has been issued for adjusting the class timings from 7.30 am to 1 pm in in the schools in Kangra, Hamirpur, Una, Bilaspur, Baddi-Barotiwala-Nalagarh area of Solan, and Poanta sahib and Nahan In Sirmaur district. In a notification issued on Monday, Sharma said that these areas are experiencing unprecedented rise in the maximum temperature up to 45 degree Celsius and students are facing difficulties due to the harsh weather conditions.

Meanwhile, Kangra Deputy Commissioner Hemraj Bairwa also announced that classes will now start at 7.30 am and end at 1 pm. The new timings will apply to all sub-divisions of Kangra district, except Dharamshala, Baijnath, Jaisinghpur, and Palampur and will remain in effect until further notice, he said. Additionally, schools have been advised to avoid any outdoor activities during this period and ensure proper drinking water availability for students, Bairwa said. (PTI)

No attempt be made to reduce area of open air prisons functioning in country, says SC

NEW DELHI, May 20: The Supreme Court has directed that there shall be no attempt to reduce the area of open air prisons functioning in the country.

Semi-open or open prisons allow convicts to work outside the premises during the day to earn a livelihood and return in the evening. The concept was introduced to assimilate the convicts with society and reduce psychological pressure as they faced difficulties in leading normal lives outside.

A bench of Justice BR Gavai and Justice Sandeep Mehta noted advocate K Parameshwar, assisting it as an amicus curiae in a matter related to iails and prisoners, submitted that a model draft manual has been prepared by the Centre wherein the nomenclature 'open correctional institutions" was used open camps/institutions/prisons.

"We further direct the (Union) Ministry of Home Affairs to present a status report on recent developments in respect of the open correctional institutions after coming of the Model Prison Manual, 2016, and the Model Prisons and Correctional Services Act, 2023," the bench said in its order passed on May 17.

The bench noted it has been informed that there is a proposal to re-



duce the area at Sanganer open air camp in Jaipur.

"We thus direct that there shall be no attempt of reduction in area of open air camps/institutions/prisons, wherever they are functioning," the bench

"The data put on record, wherein such open correctional institutions are shown to be functioning in different names, would further show that the said institutions are not being utilised to their optimum capacity," it said. It noted the amicus curiae submitted

that strengthening of the open correctional institutions, apart from addressing the issue of overcrowding of jails, will also help in the rehabilitation of prisoners and do away with caste discrimination faced by them.

The top court directed Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Kerala and West Bengal, where such facilities are functioning most robustly, to share their best pracexperience on setting up, expansion and management of open correctional institutions with the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA).

"The registry shall communicate this order to the chief secretary of the states of Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Kerala and West Bengal for compliance,' it said.

Taking into consideration the importance of the matter, the bench asked the amicus curiae and the counsel appearing for NALSA to jointly prepare and circulate a questionnaire to obtain information from all the states in respect of the status and functioning of open correctional institutions.

It noted that insofar as the modalities for visitation by lawyers in jail is concerned, NALSA's counsel stated she has modified the format of letter to be filled by the visiting advocate.

"The same is taken on record and approved," the bench said and posted the matter for further hearing in the second week of July.

While hearing the matter on May 9. the apex court had observed that establishing open jails can be one of the solutions to overcrowding and also address the issue of rehabilitation of

Agniveers are not just soldiers but leaders, innovators and defenders: CDS Anil Chauhan

BENGALURU, May 20: Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan on Monday visited the Maratha Light Infantry Regimental Centre in Belagavi to address the Agniveers, as they embark on

their military journey, an official said. In his address, he underscored the noble purpose of military service and its pivotal role within the military framework. He said the Agniveers are not only soldiers but also leaders, innovators and defenders

of the nation's sovereignty. In a statement, the Defence PRO said, "Addressing the evolving nature of warfare, he underscored the complexity and unpredictability of future conflicts to include cyber warfare, Artificial Intelligence and asymmetric threats which are now an integral part of the battlefield."

He also spoke about technology integration and continuous learning and mentioned that in addition to staying abreast with the latest advancements, there is also a need to showcase innovative approach towards combat. He expressed his gratitude for the commitment made by Agniveers by choosing the armed forces as a profession which is a testament to their exceptional duty towards the nation.

The CDS acknowledged the personal challenges faced by the soldiers and their families and the hardships they endure while operating in challenging environments. He assured that despite the challenges, the Agniveers will find their journey immensely rewarding and each step, will lead to their personal growth and deep sense of pride in serving the nation. The CDS lauded the Regimental Centre and the team of instructors for creating a conducive environment for training and ensuring that best of the training is being imparted to the Agniveers. (PTI)

Issuance of postal ballot: SC refuses to entertain plea against HC order



NEW DELHI, May 20: The Supreme Court on Monday refused to entertain a plea challenging a Chhattisgarh High Court order that rejected an application of a 78-year-old bedridden woman, who had sought a direction for the issuance of a postal ballot to her to cast vote in the Lok Sabha polls.

The woman had initially filed a petition before the high court seeking a direction for the issuance of the postal ballot considering her age and ailments to cast her vote in the Bilaspur constituency that went to polls on May 7. On April 29, the high court allowed her to make an application before the

returning officer concerned and directed the authority to consider her claim strictly in accordance with the law. The high court had said if it was found that she was entitled to cast her vote through a postal ballot, the same shall be issued in her favour according

to the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961 and the notifications issued in this regard from time to time by the Election Commission (EC). On Monday, her counsel told a vacation bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Pankaj Mithal that according to the April 29 order of the high court, she

had made an application before the returning officer for the issuance of postal ballot. Senior advocate Gaurav Agrawal, appearing in the court for the woman, said the returning officer rejected her application on May 1. 'He said you are not haying physical disability of more than 40 per cent

and therefore, I will not permit you to cast vote (through a postal ballot). This is the sum and substance of the order," he said. Agrawal said the woman again approached the high court, which dealt

with her application seeking grant of interim relief on May 6. On May 6, the high court rejected her application noting that the polling date was May 7 and the instructions issued by the EC with regard to the issuance of the postal ballot and its collection cannot be completed in 24 hours.

The woman had approached the apex court challenging the May 6 high court order. "It has become infructuous," the top court observed, adding that the polling date was May 7. Agrawal said according to Rule 27(I) of the Conduct of Election Rules, postal ballots can be received anytime before the date of counting of votes, which is scheduled for June 4.

"Even for postal ballots, some time is fixed. That procedure has to be followed if some time period is fixed for postal ballots," the bench observed. Agrawal said the high court had passed an order in the petitioner's favour on April 29. When he referred to the April 29 order, the bench said the high court had directed the authority to consider the petitioner's application.

"Now they have considered and they have found that you are not that physically disabled and therefore, they have rejected your application," the bench said, adding, "They have considered the medical certificate."

The top court observed that the petitioner had not even produced the benchmark disability certificate. "Everybody would like to sit home and cast vote," the bench said, adding, "We are not entertaining this plea."

"First, you have to produce the benchmark disability certificate, then they will go to verify whether this certificate is correct or not," it said.

It also asked, "If you are below 80 years, then why should you be permitted?" The bench said it was not inclined to interfere with the interim order passed by the high court. (PTI)

Guj ATS arrests four Lankan nationals with IS links on mission to carry out terror activities

AHMEDABAD, May 20: The Gujarat Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) has arrested four Sri Lankans with links to the banned outfit Islamic State (IS) who were allegedly on a mission to carry out terror activities in India, police said on Monday.

Acting on a tip-off, the ATS apprehended the accused at the Sardar Vallabhai Patel airport here after they travelled from Sri Lanka's capital Colombo via Chennai on Sunday night, an official said.

The men travelled to India to carry out terror activities at the behest of IS, Director General of Police Vikas Sahay said.

The ATS team also recovered three Pakistan-made pistols and 20 cartridges lying abandoned at a location in the city's Nana Chiloda area based on geo-coordinates and photographs found on the mobile phone seized from the accused, Sahay said.

The men were allegedly directed by their Pakistani handler to collect

NFR yields ₹ 66.27 cr from 'special

drives' against ticketless travelers

and better services to all the bonafide

ticketless and irregular travelers

drives are conducted to discourage

such activities that lead to inconven-

During the current FY from 1st

April, 2024 till 19th May, 2024 such

drives lead to recovering an amount

of more than ₹ 10.65 cr from ticket-

It can be mentioned here that dur-

ing the period from April, 2023 to

March, 2024, 793170 cases of tick-

etless/irregular ticket passengers

were detected leading to more than ₹

66.27 cr earnings towards realisation

of fare and penalties from offenders.

realised ₹ 62.98 cr from 778808 de-

tected cases. Thus, in comparison,

14362 more cases were detected dur-

ing the last FY of 2023-24 leading to

5.23 percent higher earnings in terms

of penalty and fare from offenders.

The preceding FY of 2022-2023

ience for genuine passengers.

Keeping a constant check against

passengers.

less travelers.



these weapons, he said.

The accused, Mohammad Nusrat (35), Mohammad Faarukh (35), Mohammad Nafran (27) and Mohammad Rasdeen (43), took a flight from Colombo and reached Chennai in the wee hours of Sunday.

They then took another flight to Ahmedabad, where they landed around 8 pm Sunday, the official

The men informed investigators that they were earlier associated with the banned Sri Lankan radical militant outfit, National Thowheeth Jamath (NJT), and joined IS after getting in touch with Pakistani handler Abu Bakr Al Bagdadi, he said. They are members of IS radi-

calised by a leader from Sri Lanka who is living in Pakistan, Sahay told reporters. 'They got in touch with Abu (the IS leader in Pakistan) in February this year and remained in contact

with him through social media and were completely radicalised by the ideology," he said. Their leader ordered them to carry out terrorist activities in India,

to which they agreed, and even showed readiness to carry out suicide bombings, Sahay said. The men were paid Rs 4 lakh in

Sri Lankan currency to carry out the activities, he said.

The mobile phones recovered from the accused had photographs and documents showing their association with IS, and an IS flag was also recovered from their bag, and two such flags were recovered from the abandoned parcel containing weapons, the official said.

activities, he said. Sahay said the ATS used a translator to interrogate the accused, as they did not understand any other

language apart from Tamil. Interrogations revealed that Abu had informed the accused about the weapons hidden at the given location in Ahmedabad for their use, he

The pistols carried star marks, and cartridges were prima facie found to be made in the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) of Pakistan, he said.

One of the four arrested terrorists, Mohammad Nusrat, also holds a valid visa for Pakistan.

The men were booked under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), Indian Penal Code and Arms Act, and further investigation was underway, Sahay said. (PTI)

HUBBALLI (KARNATAKA), The men were instructed to leave May 20: Days after a 20-year-old these flags at the site of their terror woman was stabbed to death for allegedly rejecting a love proposal,

Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara on Monday visited her residence and assured justice to her family. Anjali Ambiger was allegedly stabbed multiple times at her home

Anjali murder case: K'taka

HM Parameshwara

assures justice to family

at Veerapur Oni here on May 15. Two days after the incident, the 22year-old accused -- Girish Sawanth was arrested from Davanagere, according to police. Distressed over Anjali's brutal

murder, her sister Yashoda Ambiger recently attempted to end her life, their grandmother Gangamma Ambigera had said.

Parameshwara offered condolences to the grieving family and assured justice to Anjali.

After meeting the Home Minister, Anjali's grandmother Gangamma Ambigera said she pressed for death

penalty for the accused in the case. He also assured compensation and

a house for the family post the Lok Sabha elections, she said.

"We have been promised justice by the government. We want the accused to be hanged. The Home Minister assured that the case will be investigated thoroughly and punishper law. We have faith in the minister's promise," she told reporters here. Aniali's family had said they had complained to the police that the accused had threatened her saying she would meet the same fate as 23year-old college student Neha Hiremath, who was stabbed to death by a former classmate on her college campus in Hubballi on April 18.

Meanwhile, Parameshwara also visited Neha's residence, daughter of Congress Councillor Niranjan and offered condolences to the family. (PTI)

Nine held by Delhi Police for duping people of ₹ 2.38 cr in share market fraud

NEW DELHI, May 20: Delhi Police has busted a cy-GUWAHATI, May 20: N. F. Railbercrime racket and arrested nine people, including a crime were arrested," the DCP said. way conducts a regular intensive woman, who duped people on the pretext of high reticket checking drives in order to enturns from investment in share market, officials said sure hassle-free, comfortable travel on Monday.

> The police said the accused have collected around ₹ 2.38 crore after cheating four people and efforts are underway to recover this amount.

"On January 17, a complaint of Vishal Sodhi was received at IFSO (special cell) regarding cheating on the pretext of investment through trading applications. Similar complaints were also received from three other people Manoj Kumar, Rajbir Yadav and Shailendra Kumar," Deputy Commissioner of Police (IFSO) Hemant Tiwari said.

The victims told the police that they were added in a messenger group where online tutorials were conducted to train them on stock market trading.

The complainants were then lured to invest in multiple companies through their respective bank accounts and they invested a total amount of around ₹

"Based on the complaints, an FIR was registered and further investigation was taken up," the DCP said. During the investigation, it was found 25 multiplebeneficiary bank accounts in which the fraudsters asked the complainants to deposit their money.

Tracing the digital footprint of the accused and trail of the cheated money, the police identified a suspect as Munish Sharma (37).

"A raid was conducted and Sharma was arrested

eight more accused persons actively involved in the

The latest arrest in the case was made on May 18, According to the police, accused Vikas Bansal and

his associates Manoj Bansal, Tushar Garg and others have floated more than 400 bogus firms and also opened over 400 bank accounts linked to these firms. The fraudsters are using these bank accounts to siphon off the cheated money.

To park the proceeds of their crime, the accused used to contact indigent people and convinced them to open bank accounts in their names in lieu of a handsome amount, he said.

"The accused persons also collected their Aadhar cards, Pan cards and other KYC documents and floated bogus firms in the names of such people," he

The police also said the accused had taken premises on rent at different places in Delhi to register the Those who were arrested were identified as Mun-

ish Sharma, Guaurav Kumar (34), Paramjit (27), Ram Kumar Raman (32), Vikas Bansal (52), Tushar Garg (30), Manoj Bansal (50), Rajesh Kumar Goyal (57), Rachna (26). We also got to know that these accused were selling fake bank accounts to Dubai-based cyber cheaters," the DCP said.

The police said they have recovered 84 mobile phones, 250 sim cards, two laptops, four cheque book, five voter cards, 28 ATMs, and some documents of their bogus firms from their possession. (PTI)

NOTICE I, GS NO - 175012L RANK

MSW (COOK) NAME-SHIBA BAHADUR BANIA OF UNIT HQ 752BRTF (GREF) S/O LATE BHAKTA BAHADUR BANIA R/0 VPO -DI-HINGHULLA, TEH-DIKOM, DIST - DIBRU-GARH, STATE - ASSAM, - 786101 DO HEREBY DECLARE THAT MY WIFE NAME AND DATE OF BIRTH IN MY ARMY/GREF SERV-ICE IS RECORDED AS RANU BANIA AND DATE OF BIRTH AS 20/01/1976 INSTEAD OF CORRECT NAME OF MY WIFE IS RENU BANIA AND COR-RECT DATE OF BIRTH IS 22/11/ 1971 AS PER AAD-CARD 535023543847 AND PAN CARD NO CFDPB4577D AND NOW I AM APPLY-ING FOR CORRECTION, **OBJECTION IF ANY MAY** BE CONVEYED TO CON-CERNED AUTHORITY WITHIN SEVEN DAYS FROM THIS PUBLICA-TION NOTICE.

18 killed as mini goods vehicle plunges into valley

KAWARDHA (CHHATTIS-GARH), May 20: Seventeen women and a man were killed and four others injured when a mini goods vehicle they were travelling in plunged into a valley in Chhattisgarh's Kabirdham district on Monday, police said.

The accident occurred around 1.45 pm on Banjari Ghat near Bahpani village under Kukdur police station limits, an official said.

The victims were returning after plucking tendu leaves from a forest in the vehicle meant for transporting

The vehicle skidded off the road. tumbled down considerably and crashed onto the road below the valley, the official said.

After being alerted, a police team rushed to the spot and launched the rescue exercise, the official said.

"Twelve women and a man were killed on the spot, while nine others sustained injuries and were shifted to a hospital, where five women died," Kabirdham Superintendent of Police Abhishek Pallava said. (PTI)

Delhi's power demand soars to May's highest ever at 7,572 MW amid rising temperatures

NEW DELHI, May 20: A heatwave in parts of Delhi on Monday pushed the national capital's peak power demand to its highest ever for May, discom officials said. Realtime data from the State Load Dis-

demand at 7.572 MW at 3:33 pm. This was the highest-ever peak power demand for Delhi in May. It was also higher than the peak power demand recorded last

patch Centre, Delhi, showed the peak power

year -- 7,438 MW on August 22. Discoms expect the city's peak power demand to cross the 8,000-MW mark this

Delhi's all-time high peak power demand was recorded at 7,695 MW on June 29, 2022. Discom officials said Monday was the third consecutive day that Delhi's peak power demand crossed the 7.000-MW mark, breaking the previous all-time May high of 7,070 MW, recorded on May 19,

The weather has a profound impact on power demand. This was visible even during April when compared to the same period in 2023, they said.

In April, Delhi's peak power demand



ranged between 3,809 MW and 5,447 MW. In April 2023, the peak power demand ranged between 3,388 MW and 5,422 MW, they added.

"The demand can be attributed to weather conditions that lead residents to use more

air conditioning and cooling equipment, causing an increase in electricity consumption. Air conditioning can contribute to 30-50 per cent of a domestic or commercial establishment," the discom officials said.

A Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited

cessfully met a peak power demand of 2,178 MW -- the highest so far in the current season -- in our area of operations today without any network constraint and power outages.'

spokesperson said, "Tata Power-DDL suc-

Peak power demand in BSES Raidhani Power Limited (BRPL) areas of south and west Delhi, which clocked 3,250 MW and 3,389 MW, respectively, during the summers of 2023 and 2022, is expected to reach around 3,680 MW this year, a BSES spokesperson said.

In east and central Delhi -- areas served by the BSES Yamuna Power Limited (BYPL) -- the peak power demand, recorded at 1,670 MW and 1,752 MW during the summers of 2023 and 2022, respectively, is expected to touch around 1,860 MW, he said.

The two discoms are geared to ensure a reliable power supply to meet the demand of consumers, he added.

BRPL and BYPL successfully met a peak power demand of 3,274 MW and 1,664 MW, respectively, in their respective areas on Monday, the spokesperson said. (PTI)

Delhi-bred filmmaker in Cannes Critics' Week with Estonian entry

CANNES, May 20: Critics' Week is one the few sections of the 77th Cannes Film Festival that do not officially include an Indian entry. But dig just a little into the selection of the parallel segment and one finds an Indian name attached to an exceptional short fiction film.

The film is "Sauna Day", directed by the Estonia-based film-making couple Anna Hints and Tushar Prakash.

Tushar Prakash belongs to Delhi. He went to the National Polish Film School in Lodz. He has lived in Estonia since 2020 and straddled two diverse countries and cultures.

"Sauna Day", a 13-minute film, is a follow-up to Hints' award-winning "Smoke Sauna Sisterhood", a 90-minute documentary that follows a group of women who, by baring their bodies and souls in a smoke sauna, form a sorority that is way more than skin deep. The critically lauded feature-length film was edited by Prakash.

was edited by Prakash.

"Sauna Day" focuses on two Southern Estonian men who go to a smoke sauna to unwind after a hard day at work. Their desire for connection, although largely unstated, surfaces beneath

their masculine exteriors.

Hints, who is a singer-musician in addition to being a film-

maker, says: "The two men in Sauna Day 'talk' a lot about mundane issues but not through words. Men tend to avoid intimacy. We wanted to explore their courage to be vulnerable."

"The challenge," says Prakash, "was to tell a story without using much dialogue. The film takes recourse to the language of silences and glances, of the unspoken."

Prakash studied history before doing a short-term filmmaking course in Delhi. That stint helped him meet people from Jamia Millia Islamia. "They gave me the building blocks that enabled me to understand cinema and its nuances," he says.

At the cultural centres in Delhi, he watched world cinema masterpieces. He was especially enthralled by Krzysztof Kieslowski's "Decalogue" and "Three Colours" trilogy. In 2007, Prakash became the first ever Indian to earn a seat at the prestigious Lodz film school. He passed out of the school in 2012 and returned to Delhi, where he spent the next few years. Anna and Prakash first met at a workshop and that is how their partnership, in life and in filmmaking, began.

Does Prakash have an Indian film on the anvil? "Yes, of course," he replies. "As a man, I am Indian-Estonian. As a filmmaker, too, I am Indian-Estonian." (PTI)



Daisy Ridley recalls challenging shoot for 'Young Woman and the Sea': It was scary

LOS ANGELES, May 20: Actor Daisy Ridley, who is leading the upcoming romantic drama "Young Woman and the Sea", says she had to go through intense training for her role.

Ridley, 32, is set to portray Gertrude Ederle in the film which is based on the 2009 novel of the same name by Glenn Stout. It narrates the true story of Trudy Ederle, who was an American swimmer and the first woman to swim across the English Channel, an arm of the Atlantic Ocean that separates Southern England from northern France.

The actor admitted training before the shoot and during it.
"I was really alone in the Black Sea, and I was really trying to

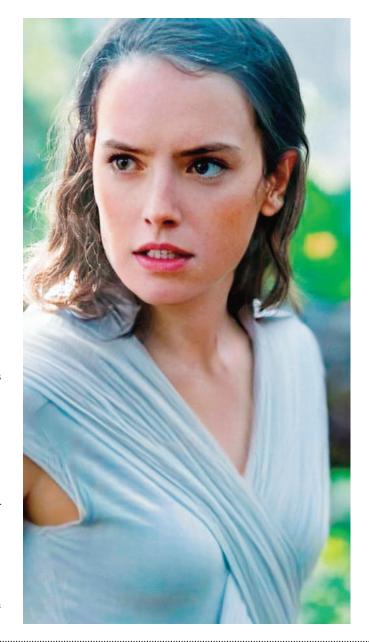
keep pace with the camera", Ridley told Deadline.

"And then I was trying to keep pace with the boat and the camera boat. I trained for three months and then we were training dur-

She called the experience "overwhelming" and "scary" at the same time

"And then we did the big swim at the end. So it was nine days in the Black Sea. It was overwhelming. It was cold. Each time, it was scary".

Directed by Joachim Ronning and produced by Walt Disney Pictures and Jerry Bruckheimer Films, the film is set to release on May 31. (PTI)



Jamie Bacon, Pradeep Khadka team up for Pradeep Shahi's upcoming sci-fi 'Eklo'

LOS ANGELES, May 20: British-Nepalese director Pradeep Shahi's film "Eklo" will feature British actor Jamie Bacon and Napalese star Pradeep Khadka in lead roles. According to news entertainment outlet Deadline, Shahi's directorial will be the first science fiction film to come out of Nepal.

The story is set in a "futuristic version of Earth in which a deadly viral epidemic forced humanity to flee the planet in 2030. Sixty years later, British space agency astronaut Zach (Bacon) is on a reconnaissance missions and crashlands in the Himalayan region

of Nepal with his partner.
Eklo takes place in a futuristic version of Earth in which a deadly viral epidemic

forced humanity to flee the planet in 2030. Sixty years later, British space agency astronaut Zach (Bacon) is on a reconnaissance missions and crash-lands in the Himalayan region of Nepal with his partner.

They explore their surroundings and uncover a hidden city of caves nestled among the mountains, where they encounter a mysterious figure (Khadka), who is the mythical guardian of the Himalayan region.

Bacon is also signed on as a producer, as he and Shahi look to build connections between the Nepalese and British film industries and hope to sell Nepal as a strong shooting location option in Asia. (AGENCIES)

Julianne
Moore On
Women
Representation
On Screen:
Very Exciting



LOS ANGELES, May 20: Hollywood actor Julianne Moore says its "exciting" to see women represented at different ages on screen today

Talking about the latest works which feature more of women of different age, she also noted that women directors and camera operators have increased in numbers.

However, the actor pointed that it is still far from "gender parity"

ity".

"Meryl (Streep) said this too the other day, this idea that when she was 40, she thought it was all going to be over. I think we're now seeing women represented through all stages of their lives,

which is very exciting."
"Whereas before
there were none. But
we're still really far
from gender parity," the
actor, 63, told Variety.

Moore said it is wonderful that young actors are now also producing their work. "I think that expectations have changed about what's possible for women to achieve. Certainly, when I was Sydney's (Sweeney) age, that's not something I ever

considered", she added.

Moore debuted back in 1984 with the television series "The Edge of Night". She has been a part of projects like "Gloria Bell", "The End of the Affair", "Chloe" and "Non-Stop" to name a few. She won an Oscar in the best actress category for her role in "Still Alice". (PTI)

Ranveer Singh, Deepika Padukone, Akshay Kumar and other celebrities vote in Mumbai

MUMBAI, May 20: Popular Hindi cinema stars Ranveer Singh, Deepika Padukone, Akshay Kumar, Farhan Akhtar and Tabu were among the celebrities who stepped out to exercise their right to vote for Lok Sabha Election 2024 here on Monday.

Polling was underway since 7 am in 13 Lok Sabha constituencies of Maharashtra, including six in Mumbai.

While Ranveer and Deepika cast their votes at a polling booth in Bandra, Dhawan and Kapoor took to their social media accounts to encourage others to vote.

Kumar, who voted for the first time since receiving Indian citizenship, was one of the early voters.

"I want my India to be developed and strong and I've kept these things in my mind when I went to cast my vote, and all the Indians should think what is right for them and vote," Kumar said after voting at a polling station in Juhu.

Akthar, who queued up at a polling station in Bandra West to cast his vote, told PTI: "My vote is for good governance, the government that looks after all people, gives us a better city." The actor-filmmaker urged people, especially youngsters to step out and vote.

"I just heard from somebody that young people are complaining that it's too hot but it's not hot at all, so please do step out, do vote," Akhtar said.

Tabu was also seen showing her inked finger to the paparazzi.

Filmmaker Zoya Aktar and mother Honey Irani also accompanied Farhan to cast their votes. Actor Hema Malini, who's BJP candidate from Mathura Lok Sabha constituency, said she is hopeful that voters' turnout will be good.

"We are very much concerned (about voter turn-out). We've done maximum publicity for people to come and vote. Across India, celebrities have requested (people to vote). I'm sure the voter turnout will be good," Malini, who was accompanied by daughter Esha, said after casting her vote in Mumbai.

Malini's husband Dharmendra, 88, said, "They (voters) know how to be a good Indian citizen. They know how to take India to great heights, and they know how and what to do for that." Other Bollywood celebrities, who have voted so far, include Sanya Malhotra, Govinda, Manoj Bajpayee, Anil Kapoor, Paresh Rawal, filmmakers Ashutosh Gowariker, Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra, Subhash Ghai, noted poet and lyricist Gulzar, his filmmaker daughter Meghna Gulzar, Aamir Khan's children Ira Khan and Ju-

Bajpayee also urged people to cast their votes. "It is the biggest celebration of democracy, and you get this chance to elect your leader in five years. I appeal to everyone to use your rights because you will get this chance again after five years and for those five years, you will not have the right to complain," the actor told PTI

"Vote because you have a choice! Vote because you have a voice!! Vote because it is duty! Vote because it is your right! #Election2024 #LokSabhaElection2024 #Vote #Votingday," Gowariker wrote on X alongside a photo of himself.

"There are hundreds of issues facing a nation but I am voting for positivity, development, unleashing the potential of this beautiful country, unleashing the potential of young, voting for equal distribution of wealth and not to be lop-



sided, and voting for a happier society which can take care old and children," Mehra said after casting his vote. Veteran actor Paresh Rawal said, "Everyone should cast their vote no matter if it's hot or cold. You are voting for the country and India's growth."

Anil Kapoor said it his "duty and right" to vote.

"I am proud to be a citizen of this country, there is no country like India. The voter turnout is terrific. I'm sure more people will come (to vote)," Kapoor said. Actor-filmmaker Pooja Bhatt, who along with her filmmaker father Mahesh Bhatt came to vote, also urged others to vote.

"Please go out and cast your vote. Your voice matters! #MumbaiNorthCentral #Bandra #Mumbai," Pooja Bhatt wrote on X.

Filmmaker Kunal Kohli, who cast his vote in Pali Hill, Bandra West, Mumbai, appealed to people to vote.

"I appeal to people to vote because that's your right, and later you don't have the right to complain if you don't vote. So, you must vote and enjoy the rest of the day," Kohli told PTI.

Actor Shriya Saran said voting is the easiest thing to do. "Voting is the biggest power that you've and with this you can have a better future. Voting is the easiest thing to do, it barely takes a minute or two to vote. It feels good to see how senior citizens have stepped out to vote, then the new generation can do it too," Saran, who cast her vote in Versova, told PTI. Veteran actor Shubha Khote and her actor

daughter Bhavana Balsavar also cast their votes.

"I've come here and want everyone to vote for the right person. Whatever is needed we should get that. I hope everyone gets inspired watching us and comes out to vote," Khote said after casting her vote at a polling booth in Juhu's Gandhigram school in Mumbai. (PTI)

CHENNAI, May 20: Former India opener Gautam Gambhir loves the IPL, and the quality of cricket it produces, but doesn't want the franchise-based T20 league to become the pathway to the Indian team for young-

Speaking on Ravichandran Ashwin's YouTube show, 'Kutti Stories with Ash', Gambhir said, "The bigger concern that arises is about how many youngsters want to play Test cricket for India. I hope the IPL is not a shortcut to play for India."

The Kolkata Knight Riders team mentor also asserted that the IPL has benefitted the Indian domestic cricketers.

"Today, when I look at international T20 sides, apart from 2-3 teams, I don't see enough competition when it comes to playing for India," he said.

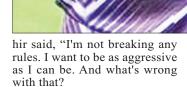
"Not many teams can match the quality that India has. So, I feel that in today's day and age, IPL has become far more competitive than international T20

"Just the quality of the domestic players has changed, the way domestic players want to play in the IPL and the way they work around T20 cricket -- I think most of their focus is on playing T20 cricket."

Gambhir, who helped India win the ODI World Cup final in 2011 alongside MS Dhoni and led KKR to twin Indian Premier League titles in 2012 and 2014, returned to the side as the team mentor this season.

The 42-year-old is known for his outspoken attitude and seri-

Speaking on the same, Gamb-



"That's my nature. That's my characteristic because, for me, winning, it's an obsession, and I'm obsessed with winning. That's the problem I have.

Gambhir also clarified that he doesn't need to smile since the fans come to watch him help the team win and that all he cares about is his players giving their

"Sometimes when people talk about – he doesn't smile or are in. I can't help it." love. He's always intense,

100% on the field.

grumpy, walking on the edge, old and has his game face on,"

"People don't come to watch me smile. Unfortunately, people come to watch me win. That's the kind of profession we guys

"I'm not an entertainment. I'm

Aarav Dewan emerges champion

in Meritus Cup karting

not a Bollywood actor, or I'm not a corporate. I'm a cricketer into performing art.

"My job is I want to come back in a willing dressing room. Fortunately, unfortunately, a winning dressing room is a happy dressing room is a win-

Indian mixed 4x400m relay team sets national record while winning gold in Asian Relays

BANGKOK, May 20: India's filled on the basis of best timmixed 4x400 relay team set a national record while winning the gold medal at the inaugural edition of Asian Relay Championships here on Monday but missed the target of entering the Paris Olympics qualification bracket.

The quartet of Muhammed Ajmal, Jyothika Sri Dandi, Amoj Jacob and Subha Venkatesan clocked 3 minutes 14.12 seconds to win the race. The earlier national record of 3:14.34 was clocked by the Indian team while winning silver medal at the Hangzhou Asian Games last year.

India was leading in all the four legs of the relay race.

Sri Lanka finished second with a time of 3:17.00 while Vietnam was third with 3:18.45. Monday's timing will put India in the 21st place -- from earlier 23rd -- in the Road to Paris list of World Athletics while the aim was to be either in

the 15th or 16th spot. India, thus, is in a difficult position to make the Olympics cut as only sixteen teams will compete in the mixed 4x400m relay event in Paris.

Fourteen mixed 4x400m teams have already automatically qualified for Paris Olympics during the World Athletics Relays in Nassau, Bahamas earlier this month, and ings of countries till the qualification deadline of June 30.

Czech Republic (3:11.98) and Italy (3:13.56) are currently in the 15th and 16th spot in the Road to Paris list, below the top 14 teams that have booked Paris ticket during the World Athletics Relays in Bahamas, where India had failed to make the

India's target here on Monday was to at least better 3:13.56 and sit at the 16th spot, but the country failed to do so.

Athletics Federation of India (AFI) may consider sending the mixed 4x400m relay team in international competitions before the June 30 deadline.

India will compete in the men's and women's 4x400m relay races on Day 2 on Tuesday. In Bahamas, the Indian mixed 4x400m relay quartet of Rajesh Ramesh, Rupal Chaudhary, Avinash Krishna Kumar and Jyothika Sri Dandi ran a poor race and failed to make the Paris cut in the heat race of first round qualifiers.

The Indian team pulled out of the second round qualifiers heat race after Ramesh got injured while running the men's 4x400m relay race.

Later, both the men's and women's 4x400m relay teams made the Paris cut during the second round qualification heat

Australia likely to name McGurk, Short as travelling reserves for T20 WC: report

big-hitting Jake Fraser McGurk and Matthew Short are likely to be Australia's travelling reserves for the T20 World Cup which begins on June 1 in the Americas. The 22-year-old McGurk has been in blazing form for Delhi Capitals in the IPL.

But the top-order batter, who is yet to make his T20I debut, missed out on the 15-member provisional squad because Australia already have an established top three in David Warner, Travis Head and captain Mitchell Marsh. Batting all-rounder Short, on the other hand, played nine of Australia's last 14 T20Is, opening in five of them and he was also the Big Bash League player of the tournament in back-to-back seasons. "Australia's chair of selectors George Bailey had suggested that Australia would carry just one reserve to the Caribbean when the provisional squad was announced, but they are likely to add a second with the in-form Fraser-McGurk set to be named alongside Short," ESPNCricinfo

The Australian World Cup squad will fly to the Caribbean on Thursday for a training camp in Trinidad that will include two practice matches against Namibia and West Indies on May 28 and 30 respectively.

Head, Cameron Green, Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc and Glenn Maxwell, who are all locked to play in the IPL playoffs, will join the squad later.

Players like Marsh, Warner, Agar, Josh Hazlewood, Adam Zampa, Matthew Wade, Nathan Ellis and Josh Inglis have played little cricket since the end of the Australian domestic summer in

Under ICC rules, only players named in the 15-man squad can compete in the warm-up fixtures.

"Marsh, Hazlewood, Inglis, Zampa and Agar have all trained in Brisbane over the past fortnight along with Short. Marsh is understood to have recovered from his hamstring injury but he is still yet to bowl," the report

BENGALURU, May 20: Gurugram's 14-year-old Aarav Dewan emerged as a new talent, winning his major championship in style dominating the wet conditions to clinch the FMSCI Meritus Cup for the Indian Karting Academy Trophy. The youngster is in the OK Junior class in the third and final round at the Meco Kartopia

"It is a very competitive event and I am so happy to get my maiden trophy. I thank my team and family who supported me all through," said Aarav, a Class 8 student at Heritage Experiential School, Delhi.

Aarav of the Leapfrog Racing team started P5 and went on to win the final race with a display of exceptional skills in wet conditions to beat Eshanth Vengatesan of MSport by a handsome margin of 22 points and annexed his maiden title in the FMSCI Cup

In the Micro class, the 11-yearold Rivaan Dev Preetham of MSport completely dominated the season with an all-win record and won the championship in the MicroMax class with 102 points ahead of teammate Rehan Khan.



In the Senior class, the 18-yearold Bengaluru driver Siddharth Rooso of Kartkrew Motorsports won the title ahead of teammate Ethan Joy.

Brief Results: Meritus Cup Champions: Preetham (MSport) 102 points; 2. Rehan Khan R. (MSport) 86; 3. Rishik R Reddy (Peregrine Racing) 54; OK Junior: 1. Aarav Dewan (Leapfrog Racing) 92

MicroMax: 1. Rivaan Dev 3. Arafath Sheikh (Crest Motorsports) 68;

Seniors: 1. Siddharth Rooso (Kartkrew Motorsports) 90; 2. Ethan Joy (Kartkrew) 77; 3. Aditya Sharma (MSport) 66. points; 2. Eshanth V. (MSport) 70; (AGENCIES)

Taunted for being 'mentally impaired' once, Para world champion Deepthi is now feted in village

NEW DELHI, May 20: For a long time, Deepthi Jeevanji's parents were taunted by fellow villagers for having a "mentally impaired" child.

But now they are counting the compliments as the same bunch converged at their modest house in Telangana's Kalleda hamlet to celebrate her world record-beating gold medal in the Para Athletics World Championship in Kobe, Japan.

Born to daily wage labourers at in Warangal district of Telangana. the 20-year-old Deepthi on Monday clinched gold with a world record time of 55.07 seconds in the women's 400m T20 category race. She also qualified for the upcoming Paris Paralympics.

The T20 category is meant for athletes who have intellectual im-

Deepthi's coach Nagpuri Ramesh said her parents were at the receiving end of taunts from the villagers, who would often say that she will never get married since she is "mentally impaired". "Deepthi's parents were daily wage labourers and they

were struggling to run the family. On top of that they faced constant taunts from the villagers that a mentally impaired girl cannot get married," Ramesh told PTI from Hyderabad, where Deepthi trains currently.

"After Deepthi won gold in the Hangzhou Asian Para Games last year, the scenario changed. Now, the same villagers are praising them for being parents of Deepthi. They told me this when they came in Hyderabad after the Para Asian Games.

"They told me even the district collector and politicians of the area visited their house which was a shock to them, considering how things have changed." She had won gold in 400m T20 category in the Hangzhou Para Asian Games with Asian record time of 56.69 seconds.

Deepthi's father J Yadagiri and mother J Dhanalaxmi were so poor that they did not even have money to afford bus fare to send their child to Hyderabad from Warangal when Ramesh wanted

"She was spotted in a school

Warangal. When I told them to send Deepthi, they said they didn't have money for bus fare. I told them to just board a bus and give me the phone number of the "After that I explained to the

bus conductor to let her board the bus and told him I will pay the fare when she reaches Hyderabad. During the 130km journey from Warangal to Hyderabad I kept calling the bus conductor inquiring about her safety." Ramesh said Deepthi's parents had earlier sold their half acre land due to financial difficulties but they bought an identical piece of land with the ₹ 30 lakh reward she got for winning the Para Asian Games gold medal.

"Deepthi's parents are now doing better. They have bought land with the money Deepthi got as reward for her achievements and they have started farming,' said Ramesh.

After Deepthi was brought to Hyderabad, she was enrolled at the Sports Authority of India's

meet through a PET teacher in Training Center in Hyderabad where Ramesh is a coach. She was studying in ninth standard at that time

Ramesh, who is also the Athletics Federation of India's national junior team coach, said he had a tough time initially in training Deepthi because she could not communicate.

"You cannot teach her too many techniques as she is slow in learning things, If you do that she will get confused," he said.

Her parents once told Ramesh that Deepthi fell down from the roof of a building but acted as if she didn't feel any pain because of the inability to express her feelings

Chief national badminton coach Pullela Gopichand also played a role in Deepthi's career.

It was Gopichand who suggested Ramesh to take her to the National Institute for the Empowerment of Person with Intellectual Disability in Hyderabad. After medical tests, she was certified as "mentally impaired" and that allowed her to compete in para meets. (PTI)



Taunted for being 'mentally impaired' once, Para world champion Deepthi is now feted in village

NEW DELHI, May 20: For a long time, Deepthi Jeevanji's parents were taunted by fellow villagers for having a "mentally impaired" child.

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IPL 2024: Mumbai coach Boucher felt sorry for Hardik after he was booed at

MUMBAI, May 20: Mumbai Indians coach Mark Boucher really felt bad watching skipper Hardik Pandya face hostile reactions and boos from the fans throughout the disastrous IPL campaign and admitted that it did affect the star allrounder, something that the management would need to address in coming days.

Pandya, after two successful seasons as Gujarat Titans skipper was brought back as captain of Mumbai Indians, removing five-time champion skipper Rohit Sharma, a decision that didn't sit well with legion of fans.

It wasn't great hearing all the boos. I felt sorry for Hardik as well. It's never nice to have to go through something like that, Boucher said after MI lost their last league game to Lucknow Super Giants by 18 runs. I do think that there are certain things that did affect individuals, which ultimately did affect the team, Boucher said after MI finished last for the second time in three years.

Boucher felt the underwhelming performances and outside pressure did cloud his judgement.

There's a lot of stuff going on around him that, maybe, clouded his thoughts every now and again, which is tough for him as a leader as well. He certainly had a lot of support within our dressing room as well and guys trying to help him out as well. But it's a tough thing to go through as a player, he said.

Boucher said if any off-field issues are hampering the team, they require attention from management.

Those are the sort of things that, yes, we do need to sit down and address and hopefully make some good calls going forward, to address the off-field stuff that we can get it right on the field, he added. Ultimately, this is a professional unit and players and staff and everyone alike gets judged about the performance that they put on the field. If there's stuff



week's time

well. Boucher said.

We need to evaluate exactly what's

going on, things that we need improve-

ment on, whether it be on the field or off

the field stuff. We've got some great

heads within the management team as

how to make it better, ultimately, for the

players to come out and produce the sort

of cricket that I think we know that these

players can produce, which was under

Boucher said Pandya did find form as

a bowler but a lot was left to be desired

as a batter. If he was here (at the press

conference), he'd also (say that he was)

disappointed in his performance. From a

captain perspective, I thought he had

a stronger leader from this experience.

Pandya was booed twice on Friday --

once he walked out to bat and once after

A lot of the stuff that he's going

Boucher said Pandya would emerge as

some good games, he said.

he was dismissed.

par this season, the head coach added.

We'll sit down and we'll find a way on

that's happening off the field which is in the nearest time, which is now in a hampering that, then we need to address it, he said. Boucher backed Pandya to continue as MI skipper even though he admitted a thorough review of the team's abysmal performance would be assessed but no emotional decisions must be

I think so. As I said, we haven't had discussions. Everything's been about the cricket stuff at the moment. Going forward, I'm sure that he is the guy that the franchise would like to take forward. We'll wait and see. We'll have these conversations at a later stage, he said.

When asked if Boucher felt Mumbai Indians franchise should have handled the leadership change any differently, the South African agreed.

To be honest, I haven't really chatted to a lot of team management about that decision, Boucher replied when asked if the captaincy change could have been handed differently.

Now is not probably the right time. Everyone is very disappointed and emotional, so no good decision will get made

Pandya failed as a batter was also due to the change in role from Gujarat Titans to Mumbai Indians. Pandya was 10th among MI batters with a mere 216 runs from 14 matches at an average of 18 with no fifties.

Boucher said one of the reasons why

grow him in the role as well, he said.

Boucher felt that Pandya has only been effective as finisher when someone else has fired for MI at the other end and mostly during successful years, it was Kieron Pollard.

When Hardik was playing for Mumbai Indians, he was a finisher. He was playing in that sort of role with Polly (Kieron Pollard). He then went to (Gujarat) Titans and he was batting in a completely different scenario, Boucher said.

He was batting up front. There were slight technical adjustments that he had to make to his game in order to face a newer ball and the different lengths when you're facing a new ball as well.

He made himself aware of that as well. Throughout the whole season, it was a work in progress trying to get him back to the new role that he was playing now, more as a finisher, batting in the back end of innings as well, Boucher said, adding that Pandya needed to rediscover his hitting power.

The South African admitted even his role as head coach would be under scrutiny among many other issues that MI need to address. I'm not too sure where I'm going, to be honest with you. As I said, it's quite early days at the moment. A lot of people are emotional. There's probably going to be discussions about all of us, he said. (PTI)

Sunrisers Hyderabad in power-hitting slugfest through is, personally, maybe a little uncalled for. It'll certainly be a learning curve for Hardik as his growth in leadership. While times are tough now, a couple of things will pass and it'll make him a tougher leader and it'll certainly

Salt-less KKR take on



AHMEDABAD, May 20: High-flying Kolkata Knight Riders and an unpredictable Sunrisers Hyderabad, teams that have built their IPL 2024 campaign on power-hitting, will look to outmuscle each other in Qualifier 1 here on Tuesday.

If KKR were the first team to make IPL playoffs this year, SRH gave themselves a huge boost by inflicting a fourwicket loss on Punjab Kings on Sunday to eventually finish second with 17 oints, ahead of Rajasthan Royals.

While the two top teams from the 70match league round have enjoyed some time off courtesy incessant rains during their respective clashes over last 10 days, the lack of turnaround time to compete in a high-intensity playoff game will also pose a unique challenge.

KKR and SRH will get only a day's time to traverse thousands of kilometres and get here for the first half of the playoffs as they both featured on the final day of the league round on Sunday.

SRH would feel they have hit their strides following a comprehensive win over PBKS and having also got recent game-time, which isn't the case for KKR whose last complete game was on May 11. Shreyas Iyer's KKR had won four games on the trot before rains washed away their last two league games and the two-time winners.

Table-toppers KKR (19 points) will also have to fill in the huge void at the top with their second-highest run-scorer and wicketkeeper Phil Salt (435 runs) leaving the camp for national duties with England ahead of the T20 World Cup.

Salt had forged a devastating partnership with Sunil Narine (461) at the top and KKR were immensely benefited by their ultra-aggressive approach with the bat, backed up well by a potent middleorder even though skipper Iyer (287) has not had a major impact yet.

The washed out contest against RR in

particular robbed KKR of an opportunity to give expected replacement Rahmanullah Gurbaz a go at the top with Narine, something that would have settled a few concerns certainly. For KKR, the form of Nitish Rana adds

more solidity to the middle-order while a fiery Andre Russell among the finishers promise them vital runs. In many ways, SRH match KKR's fire-

power on paper and that is what adds more to the lure of this contest. Travis Head and Abhishek Sharma

have both got their runs at a strike rate exceeding 200 while inspiring their side to rewrite a few records. Australian southpaw Head has in many

ways redefined aggressiveness with the bat while also remaining successful (533 runs with one century and four fifties).

His fearlessness has also brought the best out of the young Indian batter Abhishek (467), who has clobbered an overall 41 sixes this IPL — 10 more than his overall tally of 31 in the previous six sea-

SRH have also managed to find answers to a couple of questions which were lingering on for a while. At No 3, the 2016 winners have found a dependable option in Rahul Tripathi who can both accelerate as well as weather storms when bowlers are on-song. Additionally, Heinrich Klaasen has re-

discovered his form after a dip in the middle of the tournament. With a crucial knock of 42 against PBKS, Klaasen has signalled having found his mojo back, which only makes SRH even more for-

At Ahmedabad, as seen in the World Cup final last year, teams batting second have had more success, winning four out of six completed games while only twice the team which batted first could defend successfully.

Also, against the style of play for both these teams — to bury oppositions under mountains of runs — this venue has had only two scores of 200 or above in 12 innings, which means the bowlers will also have their say.

If KKR have a battery of spinners to back their fast bowlers led by Mitchell Starc, SRH's pace bowling attack led by skipper Pat Cummins has time and again produced unified efforts to make their

In their only meet earlier this season back in late March, KKR had pipped SRH by four runs in a high-scoring game.

Teams (from): Kolkata Knight Riders: Shreyas Iyer (c), KS Bharat (wk), Rahmanullah Gurbaz (wk), Rinku Singh, Angkrish Raghuvanshi, Sherfane Rutherford, Manish Pandey, Andre Russell, Nitish Rana, Venkatesh Iyer, Anukul Roy, Ramandeep Singh, Varun Chakravarthy, Sunil Narine, Vaibhay Arora, Chetan Sakariya, Harshit Rana, Suyash Sharma, Mitchell Starc, Dushmantha Chameera, Sakib Hussain, Mujeeb Ur Rahman, Allah Ghazanfar.

Sunrisers Hyderabad: Abhishek Sharma, Travis Head, Heinrich Klaasen (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 Viyaskanth, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Marco Jansen, Akash Maharaj Singh, Mayank Agarwal.

Match starts at 7:30pm IST. (PTI)

Didn't broadcast private

NEW DELHI, May 20: IPL broadcaster Star Sports on Monday denied airing the audio of any personal conversation involving Rohit Sharma after the Indian captain accused the channel of "breaching" his privacy despite his requests to stop the recording. A video shared by Kolkata Knight Riders, involving Rohit and KKR assistant coach Abhishek Navar, in which the former was purportedly seen contemplating his future at the Mumbai Indians, had gone viral on May 11. KKR subsequently deleted the video from its social media pages. On May 16, Rohit was seen having a chat with Dhawal Kulkarni ahead of MI's fixture against Lucknow Super Giants. The opener requested the broadcaster to turn off the audio when he noticed that the cameras were once again directed towards him. On Sunday, he accused the channel of airing a private conversation but Star denied the charge in a statement. "The clip, taken during a training session on May 16 at Wankhede stadium, for which Star Sports had authorised access, momentarily showed the senior player in conversation with his friends on the sidelines. No audio from this conversation was either recorded or broadcast. "The clip, which only showed the senior player requesting for the audio of his conversation to not be recorded, got featured in Star Sports' live coverage of pre-match preparations and lacked editorial relevance beyond this," the

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on the sidelines. No audio from

Rohit had called for restrain while recording on-field moments. "The need to get exclusive content and focused only on views and engagement will one day break the trust between the fans, cricketers and



vail," Rohit said on Sunday. The channel said it was

committed to protecting players' privacy. "Respect for players' privacy while bringing fans, moments of intense action and preparations, sits at the core of this ethos, which the broadcaster remains com-

Dhansiri Super League commences



DIPHU, May 20: The inaugural match of Dhansiri Super League (DSL) 2024, held on Sunday, was scored to a draw between Demalu Football Club and Bheta Gaon Football Club by 1-1 at full time. The Dhansiri Super League (DSL) 2024 has been organised by the youth of Dhansiri and Disagisim Jallai Hosom at Dhansiri High School playground. A total of 16 teams are reportedly taking part in the tournament. Subul Maibangsa, chief director, scientist, at Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Diphu, attended as the chief guest and inaugurated the tournament. President of Youth of Dhansiri, Ringson Diphusa; secretary, Dilbahadur Chetry and others were also present at the game.

Nagal bows out of Geneva Open after loss to world No 19 Baez

GENEVA, May 20: India's top-ranked singles player Sumit Nagal made a first round exit from the Geneva Open after going down fighting against Argentina's Sebastian Baez.

The world no.94 went down 6-7 (7) 3-6 to the Argentine, who is a clay court specialist, in a match that lasted one hour, 52-minutes here

"Gutted with the loss today. But good preparation ahead of Roland Garros. Paris next," Nagal, who has qualified for the French Open, tweeted after the loss.

Nagal started off brightly taking an early 4-1 lead over Baez. He also had a set point.

But world no. 19 Baez, who has already won two titles on clay this season, showed his class to force a tiebreaker owing to his fantastic first serve performance.

In the second set, Baez continued to bank on his superb first serve, and wrapped up the proceedings in 38 minutes. (PTI)

Focus on Sindhu as she looks to end title drought at Malaysia Masters

KUALA LUMPUR, May 20: Back from a break, P V Sindhu will look to hit the right notes in her quest for some confidence-boosting wins ahead of Paris Olympics when she spearheads India's campaign in the Malaysia Masters badminton tournament starting here on Tuesday.

Sindhu, a former world champion, returns to the

international circuit after skipping the Uber Cup and Thailand Open, and she will aim to go deep in the women's singles draw of the BWF World Tour Super 500 28-year-old The

channel stated. (PTI)

from Hyderabad hasn't been able to hit top form after recovering from a knee injury sustained in October last year. A silver and bronze-winner at the Olympics,

Sindhu's return hasn't been smooth and she has endured a series of narrow losses. Sindhu has just two quarterfinal finishes to show in her six competitive appearances so far.

The last title win for her came in the 2022 Singapore Open though she did come close to claiming the Spain Masters last year when she reached the finals

Sindhu, who had also suffered a stress fracture on her left ankle en route to the 2022 Commonwealth Games gold, will look to hit the ground running when she opens against Scotland's Kirsty Gilmour this

Top stars such as An Se Young, Chen Yu Fei, Akane Yamaguchi or Carolina Marin are not participating this week and Sindhu will be desperate to test her preparation against the next generation players, who have troubled her recently.

With a new set-up under mentor Prakash Padukone, Sindhu has shown glimpses of her menacing game but she

hasn't been consistent with her shot-selection. Ashmita Chaliha, Aakarshi Kashyap and Malvika Bansod too will look to produce some good results after having been in the circuit for

Chaliha has played some quality matches against the likes of Han Yue and Aya Ohori, both of whom she had pushed to

quite sometime now.

three games recently. In men's singles, Kiran George is the lone Indian in fray and he will open against Japan's Takuma

While Thailand Open champions Satwiksairaj

Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty have opted out and it will be a chance for Krishna Prasad Garaga and Sai Pratheek K to show their prowess in men's doubles. In mixed doubles, the husband-wife duo of B Sumeeth Reddy and N Sikki Reddy, and Sathish Kumar Karunakaran and Aadya Variyath would be

carrying India's hopes. (PTI)

Be it sports or education, discipline is necessary: Gopichand to students

PATNA, May 20: Discipline defined him both as a player and coach. So, it was hardly a surprise that Pullela Gopichand stressed on the virtue as he delivered a motivational speech to youngsters preparing for competitive exams here, drawing sporting analogies

to drive home his point. The 50-year-old former All England champion, who is also a Droncharya awardee, was addressing a gathering of students preparing for competitive exams in streams such engineering and medicine.

"Be it sports or education both are same. In both, discipline as well as dedication is necessary. With time, another need has been added to both these fields and that is mentoring," Indian badminton's chief national coach said

"Only when there is training along with teaching, a student becomes capable of competing in the present times. Similarly, in sports also, if coaching becomes good along with discipline and dedication, then the player moves ahead," he added at an event held at the Allen Career Institute here.

The Hyderabadi, who is credited for shaping Olympic medallists Saina Nehwal and P V Sindu among others, said he foresees bright future for youngsters growing up in cities like Patna.

"One-sided results cannot always be expected in sports. Sometimes you may be the best with your best performance and sometimes the player in front of you



may be better, this does not mean that we should stop working hard. "Cities like Kota and Patna are modern-day Gurukuls of India nurturing dreamers with potential

like you into world champions in field of engineering, medicine and beyond. It takes a good coach to know when he sees a world champion," he added. (PTI)

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