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Families are 'not evicted but being shifted' from Gorukhuti to 'char' areas: District admin

Shifting of 600 families starts amid tight security

GUWAHATI, May 21: The state government is carrying out a drive to shift nearly 600 families, displaced by an eviction drive two years ago, from their temporary settlement at Gorukhuti in Darrang district, a senior official said on Tuesday.

The affected families, however, claimed that 620 houses have already been destroyed at two locations of Gorukhuti and the exercise is still underway.

Darrang district commissioner, Munindra Nath Ngatey told PTI that the families are "not evicted but being shifted" to a new place from Sipajhar revenue circle to 'char' (riverine islands) areas of nearby Dalgaon revenue circle.

"During the eviction drive of 2021, around 2,300 families were displaced and they started living in temporary houses in some other areas of Gorukhuti. We have been telling them to shift to other places designated by the administration



since then," he added.

Ngatey said that the administration identified Magurmar, Shyampur, Kalaichar and Arimari 'chars' for permanent settlement of these displaced families.

"Most of the 2,300 families had shifted, but only 550 were left out. Since yesterday, we are shifting them also. We have provided tractors to shift their goods," he claimed.

In order to avoid a repetition of the 2021 scenario, a heavy police force was arranged to carry out the eviction drive to shift the people.

Aftab Ali, an affected youth, said: "Since yesterday, 620 houses have been completely destroyed by bulldozers. We have lost many valuables also. We went to see the new places a few days ago, but

there is nothing except river sand."

He claimed that they will not be able to do any farming, which is the mainstay of Gorukhuti people, in the newly designated place due to the presence of excessive sand accumulated from Brahmaputra.

Around 1,200-1,400 houses, mostly belonging to Bengali-speaking Muslims, were razed to the ground on September 20 and 23 of 2021 in Dhalpur I, II and III villages of Gorukhuti, leaving over 7,000 people homeless.

Two persons were killed in police firing and over 20 people were injured, including policemen, during the massive eviction drive at Gorukhuti, where the Assam government initiated a multi-dimensional agriculture project. Asked if these people face threat of eviction from the new places also sometime in future, Ngatey said: "Nobody is going to evict them. Those places are presently non-cadastral villages, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

US unable to assist in probing Iranian President's chopper crash due to 'logistical reasons'

WASHINGTON, May 21: The Iranian government has requested the US to assist in probing the deadly helicopter crash that killed President Ebrahim Raisi, his foreign minister, and six others but Washington won't assist Tehran largely due to "logistical reasons", according to a senior American diplomat.

Raisi, 63, a possible successor for Iran's supreme leader, the 85-year-old Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, his foreign minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, and six others were found dead on Monday hours after their helicopter crashed in fog, leaving the Islamic Republic without two key leaders as extraordinary tensions grip the wider Middle East.

US state department spokesperson, Matthew Miller at a press briefing on Monday said the US when asked for assistance by the Iranian government made it clear that it was ready to offer assistance, as it would do in response to any request by a foreign government in this sort of situation, but

was not able to provide any help.

"I'm not going to get into the details, but we were asked by the Iranian government for assistance. We said that we would be willing to assist. It's something that we would do with respect to any government in this situation. Ultimately, largely for logistical reasons, we weren't able to provide that assistance," Miller told reporters.

In response to a question on the United States extending official condolences and participating in a moment of silence for Raisi at the UN Security Council, Miller said the US had been quite clear that Raisi was a "brutal participant" in the repression of the Iranian people for nearly four decades but Washington regretted any loss of life in a helicopter crash like incident.

"We regret any loss of life. We don't want to see anyone die in a helicopter crash. But that doesn't change the reality of his record both as a judge and as the president of Iran and the fact that he has blood on (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

CM's silence speaks volumes about his stance on women's safety, says Delhi LG

NEW DELHI, May 21: Delhi Lt Governor V K Saxena on Tuesday said chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's "deafening silence" on the alleged assault of AAP Rajya Sabha MP "speaks volumes of his stance on safety of women" and asked him to come clean on the matter.

The Delhi Police on Saturday arrested Kumar, an aide of Kejriwal, after Maliwal accused him of assaulting her on May 13 at the Delhi chief minister's official residence.

In a statement on X by Raj Niwas, Saxena said the Delhi Police is investigating the matter and it will be brought to its "logical conclusion." He also called the alleged U-turn by the party on the matter "baffling." "I have been deeply distressed over the unfolding media narrative over the last few days on the issue of alleged assault on Ms Swati Maliwal, MP, Aam Aadmi Party, at the residence of Chief Minister, when she went there to meet him all alone. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

HT BRIEFS

Drug peddler arrested
GUWAHATI: The Special Task force of the Assam police on Tuesday arrested a drug peddler from Koinadhara in the city and seized 30.5 grams of heroin, cash worth ₹ 2160 and three mobiles from him. The accused has been identified as Md Abdul Malik (33) hailing from Buraburi in Mayang in Morigaon district. He has been residing at Khanapara here. Acting on a tip off, the police team conducted a raid at Koinadhara in the evening on Tuesday and seized vials containing the heroin along with the cash and mobile phones from the accused.

Armed Forces day observed
TEZPUR: The Assam Rifles stationed observed the National Armed Forces Day with an inspiring weapon display at Lokra Kendriya Vidyalaya. A total of 203 students from KV, Assam Rifles High School and Gyan Vikas Academy witnessed the mega event. During the programme, the display team of Assam Rifles interacted with the children and briefed them about the significance of each weapon and equipment and its role in safeguarding the nation.

Cannabis seized
TEZPUR: The police arrested two youths and seized 20kg600 grams of cannabis from the Rakhysamari area in Dhekiajuli in Sonitpur district. The accused have been Biki Das (28) and Abdul Malek (36). While Das is the son of late Lakhidhar Das and hails from the Bahbari village, malek is the son of Mofiz Ali of Ulubari area. Acting on a top off, a police team conducted an operation at Rakhysamari. The accused had been on their way to deliver the cannabis to a drug peddler. The police apprehended them and recovered the contraband from the scooter in which they had been travelling.

NIA charge sheets against Canada-based Khalistani terrorist, 3 aides

NEW DELHI, May 21: The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has filed charge sheet against Canada-based pro-Khalistani terrorist, Arshdeep Singh and three of his aides for being part of a conspiracy to unleash terror attacks in various parts of Punjab and Delhi, the agency said on Tuesday.

The action marks a big leap in NIA's efforts to destroy sleeper cells operated by Singh alias Arsh Dala to unleash terrorist attacks in various parts of Punjab and Delhi, it said.

"Canada-based Arshdeep Singh alias Arsh Dala and his Indian agents Harjeet Singh alias Harry Maur, Ravinder Singh alias Rajvinder Singh alias Harry Rajpura, and Rajeev Kumar alias Sheela have been charge sheeted before the NIA

Special Court, New Delhi (on Monday)," said the statement issued by the anti-terror agency.

The three aides were running a major terror-gangster syndicate in India on the directions of Khalistan Tiger Force (KTF) terrorist Dala.

Accused Maur and Rajpura were operating as sleeper cells and were being harboured by Rajeev Kumar, and the trio had planned to carry out a series of terror attacks on Dala's directions and with funds received from him, the NIA said. While Maur and Rajpura were the gang's shooters and had the mandate of executing targeted killings, Rajeev Kumar alias Sheela was receiving funding from Arsh Dala for harbouring Harry Maur and Harry Rajpura, the statement said. NIA investigations (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

INDIA bloc communal, casteist and dynastic, says Modi

MAHARAJGANJ/MOTIHARI, May 21: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday dubbed the INDIA bloc as a "congregation of scamsters" that was communal, casteist and dynastic to a "severe" degree, "cent per cent".

Modi launched the blistering attack at rallies in Maharajganj and Purvi Champaran Lok Sabha constituencies in Bihar, where he also predicted a big blow for the opposition alliance that stood for corruption, appeasement politics and "perverted anti-Sanatan mind-set", on June 4 when Lok Sabha poll results will be out.

The PM, who is seeking a third consecutive term in office, also underscored that he shall be bequeathing no "viraasat (inheritance)" since he considered the people of the country as his only "warris (successors)". He also charged the RJD-Congress combine, which formerly ruled Bihar, with having brought disrepute to "the land which gave birth to first president Rajendra Prasad".

He pointed out that the state, in the 1990s, had become known for "irangdaari tax (extortion)" and the



NDA, which has been in power for nearly two decades, was trying to "bring to a halt the trend of large-scale migration to other parts of the country for want of industries and job opportunities in Bihar".

He lambasted the Nehru-Gandhi family, which he referred to as "Congress' royal family", for "keeping mum" over controversial remarks made by its leaders and allies against people (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Drive to trace students working as domestic helps launched

DIPHU, May 21: Member of Autonomous Council (MAC) of Chinthong constituency, Avijit Kro on Tuesday launched the comprehensive data collection drive to trace students from his constituency who have been residing in people's homes as domestic helps, particularly in Nagaon district of the state. He visited the Dakhin Haibargoan Kolongpar LP School, Uzan Haibargoan LP School and Haibargoan Girls High School, where he met 8 children from West Karbi Anglong. These students have been studying in these schools and also staying as domestic helps in the homes of different people.

MAC Kro said, "Many minors from our district, who have been staying in the homes of different people as domestic helps, have faced unpleasant



incidences. So, I have initiated this programme, which is supported by the Nagaon Karbi Students Association along with the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council. Chief executive member (CEM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous

VP Dhankhar to represent India at Raisi's funeral

NEW DELHI, May 21: Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar is likely to represent India at the funeral of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, who died in a helicopter crash, sources said on Tuesday.

They said Dhankhar is likely to leave for Iran on Wednesday. A one-day state mourning is being observed across India on Tuesday as a mark of respect for Raisi.

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 in the northwestern part of the country, Iran state media reported. The 63-year-old Raisi and his entourage were heading to the city of Tabriz after returning from a visit to a locality on the Azerbaijan-Iran border on Sunday. (PTI)

Let PM find keys to Ratna Bhandar if he has 'some knowledge': Pandian

PURI, May 21: Prime Minister Narendra Modi should find the missing keys to the Ratna Bhandar, the Jagannath Temple's treasure warehouse storing the jewellery of deities, if he has "some knowledge" on the matter, Odisha chief minister Naveen Patnaik's confidant V K Pandian has said.

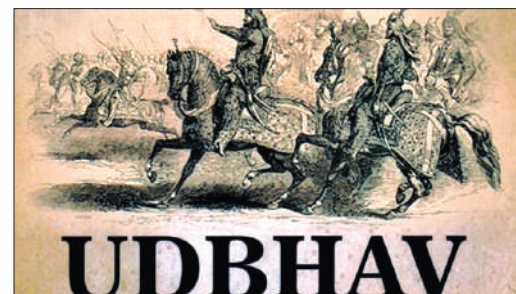
The issue that was long an emotive one in the state has rapidly gained political centrastage with the prime minister and Union home minister Amit Shah bringing it up in their rallies in the run-up to the simultaneous Lok Sabha and assembly elections. Modi recently said at an election rally that the keys could have gone to Tamil Nadu, a reference to Pandian's Tamil origins.

"The Prime Minister should find out where the keys have gone if he

has so much knowledge... I would humbly request him. He has so many authorities under him, he would be having some knowledge. He can enlighten the people of Odisha," Pandian said in an interview to PTI Videos. "He is making a political statement so we will take it like that," the former bureaucrat, Patnaik's confidant for years and now a star political campaigner, added about the matter.

Addressing election rallies in Angul and Cuttack on Monday, Modi took up the issue of the missing keys and asked why the Patnaik-led Biju Janata Dal (BJD) had "suppressed the judicial commission report" on the matter. "The BJD's role in the case is suspicious. After the BJP forms the government in Odisha, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Project Udbhav to play pivotal role in India's journey towards 'Atmanirbharta'



NEW DELHI, May 21: Union minister Ajay Bhatt said Tuesday the strength of a country resides not only in its military might but also in its ability to adapt to changing circumstances and leverage its cultural heritage as a source of power. The minister of state for defence was addressing an event at the National Museum here to mark the culmination of Project Udbhav, which aims to promote indigenous discourse in the Army by integrating India's ancient strategic acumen into a contemporary military domain with a focus on making the force "future-ready". The project is a collaboration of the Indian Army and Delhi-based think-tank United Service Institution of India (USI).

Praising the Army and USI, Bhatt said, "The aim of this project envisioned by USI is to find invaluable in-

sights into our strategic culture by finding ancient texts and oral traditions... The geopolitical landscape is continuously evolving and it is necessary for our armed forces to be adaptive and innovative in their thinking."

In his address, the minister also praised the ancient Indian philosophy of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam', which was part of the tagline used by India during its year-long presidency of the G20.

"The ancient principle of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'... has transcended cultural boundaries and become a guiding light in international diplomacy," Bhatt said. The Union minister said that in the last decade, the government of India has started a significant journey towards promoting indigenisation initiatives in various areas. From health to manufacturing and from basic infrastructure to defence, solid efforts have been made for a strong national commitment towards indigenisation, he added. "Today, we are nearly atmanirbhara, we are progressing to become fully self-reliant in future. And, Project Udbhav is going to play an important role in this," the minister said.

"There is a need to honestly make efforts to imbibe Indian thoughts and values even in our works and decisions. The dream of 'Viksit Bharat' can only be realised when we fully understand the priceless wisdom of our ancient past and implement it contextually in shaping modern ambitions and policies," he said. (PTI)

Report attributes degradation of natural pastures, other rangelands to overuse, misuse, climate change

'Silent demise' of rangelands threatens climate, survival of billions worldwide: UN report

NEW DELHI, May 21: Up to 50 per cent of the world's rangelands - vast open areas suitable for grazing livestock - are estimated to be degraded, posing a severe threat to food supply and survival of billions of people, the UN warned in a new report on Tuesday.

Launched in Ulaanbaatar in Mongolia, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification's (UNCCD) 'Global Land Outlook Thematic Report' attributed the degradation of the immense natural pastures and other rangelands to overuse, misuse, and climate change.

The degradation is driven largely by conversion of pastures to cropland and other land use changes due to population growth and urban expansion, rapidly rising food and fuel demands, excessive grazing, abandonment (end of maintenance by



pastoralists), and policies that incentivize overexploitation.

"When we cut down a forest, when we see a 100-year-old tree fall, it rightly evokes an emotional

response in many of us. The conversion of ancient rangelands, on the other hand, happens in 'silence' and generates little public reaction," said UNCCD Executive Secretary Ibrahim Thiaw. "Sadly, these expansive landscapes and the pastoralists and livestock breeders who depend on them, are usually under-appreciated," Thiaw said.

Pastoralist communities are frequently overlooked, lack a voice in policy-making that directly affects their livelihoods, are marginalised, and are even often seen as outsiders in their own lands, he added.

Covering 54 per cent of all land, the rangelands include savannas, shrublands, wetlands, tundra and deserts. Altogether, these lands account for one sixth of global food production and represent nearly one third of the planet's carbon reservoir. Two billion people - small-scale herders, ranchers and farmers, often poor and marginalized - depend on healthy rangelands worldwide. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

India likely to grow by 7.5 pc in Q1, says article in RBI Bulletin

MUMBAI, May 21: India is likely to grow by 7.5 per cent in the first quarter of the current financial year, driven by rising aggregate demand and non-food spending in the rural economy, according to an article in the RBI's May Bulletin released on Tuesday.

The Indian economy has demonstrated marked resilience in the face of geopolitical headwinds impacting the supply chain, said an article on the state of the economy published in the May Bulletin.

"According to the economic activity index (EAI), activity rebounded in April, and early estimates suggest that GDP growth for Q1:2024-25 is likely to remain close to 7.5 per cent," it said.

The economic activity index (EAI) was constructed by extracting the common trend underlying twenty-seven high-frequency indicators of economic activity, using a Dynamic Factor Model.

EAI was scaled to 100 in February 2020 and 0 in April 2020, the worst affected month due to mobility restrictions.

Meanwhile, the government will be releasing the quarterly GDP estimates for January-March, 2024 (Q4 2023-24), and provisional estimates of National Income for the



year 2023-24 on May 31.

The Indian economy grew 8.2 per cent in the June quarter, 8.1 per cent in the September quarter and 8.4 per cent in the December quarter of 2023-24.

The article noted that high-frequency indicators point towards sustained momentum in domestic demand conditions in April 2024.

Toll collections increased by 8.6 per cent (y-o-y) in April 2024. Automobile sales increased by 25.4 per cent (y-o-y) in April 2024, led by strong growth in the two-wheelers and three-wheelers segment, while passenger vehicles recorded the highest-ever monthly sales.

"There is a growing optimism that India is on the cusp of a long-awaited economic take-off. Recent

indicators are pointing to a quickening of the momentum of aggregate demand," said the article, prepared by a team led by Reserve Bank Deputy Governor Michael Debabrata Patra. Non-food spending is being pushed up by the green shoots of rural spending recovery. A modest easing of headline inflation in the reading for April 2024 confirms the expectation that an uneven and lagged pace of alignment with the target is underway.

It also noted that for the first time in at least two years, rural demand for fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) has outpaced urban markets in the quarter just gone by. FMCG volume growth of 6.5 per cent was driven by rural growth of 7.6 per cent relative to

urban growth of 5.7 per cent on the back of robust demand for home and personal care products.

Turning to private investment, for listed private manufacturing companies, earnings remained the major source of funds during the second half of 2023-24, it said.

Results that have been declared by listed corporates so far indicate that they closed the financial year 2023-24 with the highest growth in quarterly revenues registered in January-March 2024.

"A modest easing of headline inflation in the reading for April 2024 confirmed our expectation that an uneven pace of alignment with the target is underway," the authors said. The prices of vegetables, cereals, pulses, meat and fish in the food category may keep the headline elevated and closer to 5 per cent in the near term, in line with projections set out in the April Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) resolution in spite of deflation in fuel prices and further softening of core inflation to a new historic low, they said.

The central bank, however, said the views expressed in the Bulletin article are of the authors and do not represent the views of the Reserve Bank of India. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Shifting of 600 families

where no survey has been done." However, the government will start surveying the 'chars' in Mission Bandhara 3.0, a flagship programme to give land rights to indigenous people, and they will be offered permanent settlement accordingly, he claimed. In November last year, state agriculture minister Atul Bora said the agriculture project in Gorukhuti has not yielded the desired results with several Gir cows brought from Gujarat dying due to illness. In March 2023, he had informed the Assam Legislative Assembly that 300 Gir cows brought in the third phase from Gujarat through the NDDB were declared "inferior quality" by doctors and all of them were returned without costing anything to the exchequer.

Earlier, the Assam government had allocated Rs 9.6 crore in 2021-22 budget and ₹ 6.5 crore in 2022-23 to implement modern farming techniques and scientific animal rearing practices across 77,420 bighas of land at Gorukhuti in Sipajhar area. In March 2023, Bora had told the Assam Assembly that the government earned ₹ 1.51 crore, excluding income from animal husbandry and milk production, from the agriculture project against allocation of ₹ 16.1 crore in two years. Apart from milk products, the project also produces different types of seasonal vegetables, strawberry, pulses, fruits, corn, mustard, pigs and various other goods. (PTI)

US unable to assist in

his hands," Miller said. "Our fundamental approach to Iran has not changed and will not change. We will continue to support the people of Iran, to defend their human rights, their aspirations to an open, free society and democratic participation." Miller also responded to a remark by former Iranian foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif who blamed US sanctions for the incident.

Iran has offered no reasons for the crash that brought down the helicopter, which fell into mountainous terrain in a sudden, intense fog. The crash on Sunday killed all eight people aboard a Bell 212 helicopter that Iran purchased in the early 2000s, according to the state-run IRNA news agency.

"The Iranian government has used its aircraft to transport equipment to support terrorism. So, we will continue to fully enforce our sanctions regime, including our sanctions regimes on aircraft for use by the Iranian government. Ultimately, it's the Iranian government that is responsible for the decision to fly a 45-year-old helicopter in what was described as poor weather conditions," he said. The Bell 212 is a two-blade, twin-engine, medium helicopter that first flew in 1968. The Bell helicopters were originally manufactured by Bell Helicopter in Fort Worth, Texas, United States before the plant was moved to Mirabel, Quebec, Canada in 1988. (PTI)

CM's silence speaks volumes

"Yesterday, she called me out of sheer anguish, describing at length her traumatic experience, and the subsequent intimidation and shaming that she is being subjected to by her own colleagues. She also expressed concerns over reported tampering of evidence and coercion against her," he said. On Kejriwal, Saxena said, "I would have expected that at least for the sake of propriety, my CM would have come clean, rather than being evasive and dodgy. His deafening silence speaks volumes of his stance on safety of women."

Delhi is the national capital and is home to the entire diplomatic community from around the world and "such shameful incidents and the insensitive and conspiratorial contemptuous government response, on an issue of women safety, tarnishes India's image worldwide," he said. "Had such an incident happened in any other Chief Minister's residence in the country, external forces with vested interests, inimical to India, would have unleashed a scathing global narrative around women safety in India. The absence of any outrage in this case leaves several questions unanswered," he said in the statement. Saxena rooted for Maliwal even, as he said, she has been "vociferous", "hostile" and "blatantly partisan towards me and my office, often criticizing me unjustifiably." (PTI)

NIA charge sheets against

have further revealed that Kumar was also providing logistics support and arranging weapons for the other two on the instructions of Dala. The probe agency had arrested Maur and Rajpura on November 23, 2023 and Kumar on January 12, 2024.

"Investigations are continuing to destroy the entire terrorist-gangster syndicate," the NIA added. (PTI)

INDIA bloc communal,

of Bihar in states such as Punjab, Telangana and Tamil Nadu. "Your vote is not just for electing your local MP but also to make your PM strong," said Modi, who also claimed that migrants from Bihar were treated well in Gujarat when he was the CM of that state. The PM also launched indirect attacks on leaders like Rahul Gandhi, Akhilesh Yadav and Tejashwi Yadav, who he said were "born with silver spoons".

"The nation cannot move forward with the sins of the INDIA bloc, which stands for corruption, appeasement politics, represents the 'tukde-tukde' gang and a perverted mindset that heaps scorn on Sanatan Dharma," he said. "This is the reason why the INDIA bloc was exhausted in the very first phase of the elections. In the subsequent phases, it was battered. In the remaining two phases, the trend will continue, and on June 4 when votes are counted, the results will come as a big blow to the intentions of the opposition alliance," he claimed. Modi claimed that the opposition alliance did not look like a political front.

"It appears to be a congregation of scammers, who are together responsible for corruption scandals worth Rs 20 lakh crore," he alleged. Modi claimed the parties of the opposition alliance have three common "evils". "They are all communal, casteist and dynastic... to a degree that is severe, cent percent," he claimed. Modi also bristled at the opposition's criticism of welfare schemes run by his government, alleging that his opponents had "bundles of notes stashed away in Swiss banks" and could not understand the plight of the common people "the way I do, having been born in a poor family". "They were opening accounts in Swiss banks, while the people of India were starving," he alleged. Referring to Tejashwi Yadav, whom he did not mention by name, he said, "I am told that the 'waaris of jungle raaj' has been saying I will be advised bed rest after the Lok Sabha elections. The 'shehzada' of Congress says he wants to see me in tears. His party openly chants slogans like 'Modi teri kabr khudegi' (your grave will be dug)." (PTI)

FIR lodged against Kuki

site" under relevant Acts and it falls under Churachandpur Khoump Protected Forests, it said. The FIR registered at the Imphal Police Station stated the offences included "criminal conspiracy, promoting enmity between different groups to outrage religious feelings by insulting religious beliefs. The case has been transferred to the Khoump Police Station in Churachandpur district as PO falls under its jurisdiction, it said. (PTI)

Drive to trace students working

drive a success." Meer Teronpi of class I and daughter of Sarmen Teron and Kasang Rongpharpi, Rabina Phangchopi of class II and daughter of Pator Phango and Ganga Teronpi and Rashmita Lekhkepi of class IV, and daughter of Monshing Lekthe and Humtara Teronpi are studying at the Dakhin Haibargoan Kolongpar L.P School. On the other hand, Mirmili Bongrungrpi of class II and daughter of Sarsing Bongrungr and Basapi Engtipi, Biky Senar of class III and son of Mensing Senar and Kareng Senarpi, Mirmili Kropi of class III and daughter of Rupsing Kro and Jyoti Senarpi and Arjun Senar of class IV and son of Rasing Senar and Anjoli Malang are studying in the Uzan Haibargoan L.P School. Rubika Rongpharpi, daughter of Hemari Rongphar and Rani Hansepi is studying in class IX at the Haibargoan Girls High School. All these students have been residing as domestic helps in different households.

Two weeks ago Kro made it clear that children from his constituency would not be allowed to be taken to the neighbouring districts to be employed as domestic helps. Avijit Kro informed the media that data collection of minors kept as domestic help in other people's houses from West Karbi Anglong and Karbi Anglong districts has begun and will continue for a month.

The data collection drive was initiated by Nagaon Karbi Students Association (NKSA) and they will visit each school in Nagaon district. After collecting the data, the children will be relocated to West Karbi Anglong and provided free education.

Let PM find keys to Ratna

it will make the report public," Modi said. Naveen Patnaik should clarify on the missing keys of Puri Jagannath temple's Ratna Bhandar, Shah added in another rally in Nayagarh on Tuesday. Hitting back, Pandian said the inner chamber of the Ratna Bhandar has not been opened in almost four decades. Of these, one decade was when BJP ministers handled the issue. "So perhaps they should find out where the keys are," he said. The Ratna Bhandar has an outer chamber storing the day to day ornaments of the deities - Jagannath, Subhadra and Balabhadra - and an inner chamber. Keys to the latter were found to be missing in 2018 when the Orissa High Court ordered an inspection. Following the orders of the court, the Odisha government last year formed a committee headed by a retired Supreme Court judge. Though the original set is missing, there is a duplicate key. Asked if the Ratna Bhandar will be opened, Pandian said, "Absolutely, date is fixed." (PTI)

'Silent demise' of rangelands

In many West African countries, livestock production employs 80 per cent of the population. In Central Asia and Mongolia 60 per cent of the land area is used as grazing rangelands, with livestock herding supporting nearly one third of the region's population, the UNCCD said.

Ironically, the report underlined that efforts to increase food security and productivity by converting rangelands to crop production in mostly arid regions have resulted in degraded land and lowered agricultural yields.

It called out "weak and ineffective governance", "poorly implemented policies and regulations", and "the lack of investment in rangeland communities and sustainable production models" for undermining rangelands.

Rangelands occupy about 121 million hectares in India and a large part (around 100 million hectares) of these is considered underutilized. This includes degraded forest lands, land unsuitable for crop production, ravines, and wastelands.

The report highlighted that around 120 million hectares of land in India is degraded due to water erosion (82 million hectares), wind erosion (12 million hectares), chemical contamination (25 million hectares), and physical degradation (1 million hectares).

Crop losses due to water erosion in India alone are estimated to be USD 3.5 billion.

Committed to achieving its targets on land degradation neutrality (LDN) and ecosystem restoration, India has launched or reinvented several LDN-related programmes, including the National Afforestation Programme, Green India Mission, and Watershed Development Component.

Together, these programmes are expected to help restore 26 million hectares. "Although grasslands are considered threatened ecosystems in India, they have been virtually overlooked in environmental conservation and ecosystem restoration policies in favour of forestry-based interventions, which includes converting natural grasslands into plantation forests or other uses," the UN report said.

Less than five per cent of India's grasslands fall within protected areas, and the total grassland area declined from 18 to 12 million hectares between 2005 and 2015, it said.

Fortunately, there is a gradual shift towards recognition of the social-ecological role of rangelands and pastoralism, and India has recently taken a more encouraging approach, the report's authors noted. (PTI)

Oil India reports record Q4 profit

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 21: Oil India Limited (OIL), the youngest Maharashtra Central Public Sector Enterprise (CPSE) of the Government of India, announced its financial results for FY 2023-24 during its 55th Board of Directors meeting held on May 20, 2024. The company achieved its highest-ever combined oil and gas production (O+OEG) of 6.54 million metric tonnes of oil equivalent (MMTOE), leading to record-breaking earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization (EBIDTA) of ₹11,643.30 crore for the fiscal year.

In Q4 FY24, Oil India achieved its highest-ever profit after tax (PAT) at ₹2,028.83 crore, marking a 13.45% increase compared to Q4 FY23. However, the annual PAT for FY 2023-24 decreased to ₹5,551.85 crore from ₹6,810.40 crore in FY 2022-23, due to provisions for statutory compliances.

The company reported a 6% year-over-year increase in crude oil production for Q4 FY24, with a total annual increase of 5.76% to 3.59 million metric tonnes (MMT) compared to 3.176 MMT in FY23. Natural gas production also saw growth, with a 3.21% increase in Q4 FY24 over the corresponding quarter of FY23, culminating in the highest-ever annual production of 3.182 billion cubic meters (BCM).

Oil India drilled a record-breaking 61 wells during FY 2023-24, surpassing all previous records since its inception. In addition, the Board recommended issuing bonus shares in the ratio of one equity share for every two existing shares and a final dividend of ₹3.75 per equity share (pre-bonus), which translates to ₹2.50 per share post-bonus. This is in addition to interim dividends paid during the year totaling ₹12 per share (pre-bonus).

CLEAN & CLEAR launches 'Pimple Hi Toh Hai' campaign

HT Bureau

Guwahati, May 21: CLEAN & CLEAR®, a leading skincare brand for teens in India, has unveiled its latest digital film under the "Pimple Hi Toh Hai" campaign. This campaign aims to address the common anxiety and disruption pimples cause in the lives of teenage girls, encouraging them to maintain their confidence and focus despite skin blemishes. Central to the campaign is the newly improved CLEAN & CLEAR® Foaming Facewash®, clinically proven to reduce pimples within one week. The facewash features 50% more pimple-fighting ingredients, effectively cleansing the skin by removing dirt, oil, and bacteria without added parabens and sulfates. Additionally, it includes 4x hydrating ingredients to address concerns about skin dryness, helping retain 99% of the skin's natural moisture and leaving the skin glowing and fresh after each use. Manoj Gadgil, Vice President of Marketing & Business Unit Head, Essential Health & Skin Health at Kenvue, explained the inspiration behind the campaign.

India, US working together to bridge digital divide between West & global South: Ex-WH official

WASHINGTON, May 21: India and the US are working together to bridge the digital divide between the West and the Global South, a former senior White House official has said, underlining that the two nations were helping shape the framework for the "responsible and safe" use of Artificial Intelligence to benefit their societies.

Participating in a panel discussion on "Strategic Synergies: India-US Technology Cooperation" on Monday as part of the Motwani-Jadeja US-India Dialogue Series, Lisa Curtis, a former White House officer from the Trump Administration, said that the two countries are cooperating to advance the use of AI in cyber defence and in protecting critical infrastructure.

"We're working together to bridge the digital divide between the West and the global South," said Curtis, who served as the South Asia point person for former president Donald Trump.

"I think India's leadership at the G20 last year, especially on digital public infrastructure, demonstrated this critical role that India will play in this endeavour," she said at the event organised by the Hudson Institute think-tank.

Sensex edges lower nearly 53 pts amid weak global trends

MUMBAI, May 21: Bench-

mark BSE Sensex declined by nearly 53 points in a volatile trade on Tuesday amid weak trends from Asian and European markets and fresh foreign fund outflows. The 30-share Sensex declined 52.63 points or 0.07 per cent to settle at 73,953.31 as 18 of its constituents declined while 12 ended with gains. The index gyrated around 426 between a high of 74,189.19 and a low of 73,762.37 in day trade.

The broader Nifty of NSE, however, closed higher by 27.05 points or 0.12 per cent to 22,529.05, driven by gains in metal shares. As many as 27 Nifty shares declined while 23

closed with gains.

Among the Sensex components, Nestle, Maruti, IndusInd Bank, ICICI Bank, Hindustan Unilever, Larsen & Toubro, Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys, HDFC Bank and Axis Bank were the major laggards. Tata Steel, JSW Steel, Power Grid, Tech Mahindra and State Bank of India were among the gainers.

"The domestic market experienced a sideways trend and concluded on a flat note today, halting a three-day streak of gains as cautious comments from US Fed officials weighed on investor sentiment. As the general election approaches its final stages, volatility is antici-

pated to remain elevated. However, despite the ongoing volatility, the market has nearly recouped the losses from the previous peak," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge climbed 0.34 per cent while smallcap index declined 0.18 per cent.

Among the indices, metal rallied by 4.08 per cent, utilities by 1.99 per cent, power by 1.96 per cent, commodities by 1.79 per cent and energy by 1.01 per cent. Financial services, IT, telecommunication, auto, bankex and tech were the laggards. (PTI)

FICCI FLO launches Siliguri chapter

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 21: The FICCI Ladies Organization (FLO), the women's wing of India's apex business chamber FICCI, has launched its 20th chapter in Siliguri, West Bengal. This strategic move aims to empower women entrepreneurs and professionals in Northeast India, fostering economic growth and development in the region.

The Siliguri chapter, FLO's second in West Bengal, was chosen for its strategic location as the gateway to Northeast India and its rapid economic growth. The dynamic business environment and enthusiastic response from local women entrepreneurs made it an ideal choice for expansion.

The ceremonial launch event took place on May 18, 2024, at the Courtyard Marriott in Siliguri. Distinguished guests included Chief Guest Sushmita Dev, Member of Parliament and National Spokesperson for the All India Trinamool Congress, and Guest of Honor Tshering Y. Bhutia,

Commissioner of Siliguri Municipal Corporation. International Saree Drape artist Dolly Jain also graced the event. Other esteemed attendees were FLO National President Joyshree Das Verma, Chairperson Designate for the Siliguri Chapter Niharika Mitruka, and past FLO Presidents.

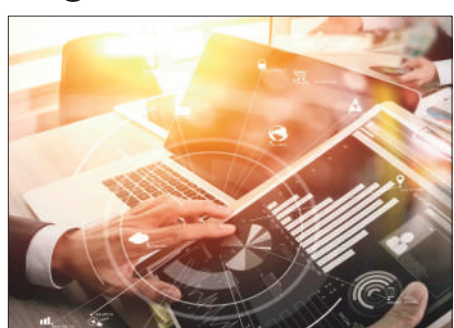
FLO National President Joyshree Das Verma highlighted the organization's commitment to supporting women entrepreneurs with resources, mentorship, and networking opportunities. She expressed confidence that the Siliguri chapter would serve as a catalyst for economic empowerment and gender equality in the region.

Niharika Mitruka, Chairperson Designate for the Siliguri Chapter, stated that FLO's programs and initiatives aim to create a conducive environment for women to thrive in business. The new chapter will provide a platform for women entrepreneurs in Siliguri to connect, collaborate, and access essential resources.

Axis Bank, VST Tillers Tractors Ltd to provide financial solutions for farmers

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 21: Axis Bank, a leading private sector bank in India, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with VST Tillers Tractors Limited (VST), a top farm equipment manufacturer, to offer financial solutions for farmers purchasing tractors and other mechanization products. The agreement was signed by Rajesh Dhage, Business Head of Farm Mechanization at Axis Bank, and Antony Cherukara, CEO of VST Tillers Tractors Ltd, in the presence of Ramasawmy Gopalakrishnan, Head of Retail Assets for Bharat Banking at Axis Bank, and V T Ravindra, Managing Director of VST Tillers Tractors Ltd. This partnership will leverage Axis Bank's extensive network of over 5,370 branches to provide farmers with easy access to credit facilities for farm mechanization.



"Together, we are helping shape the framework for the responsible and safe use of AI," she said. "This is because our two countries share technology values that emphasise both a culture of innovation, but also rules that place human life and human dignity and progress at the centre of our AI research and development," she said.

She added that both nations want to harness the power of AI to benefit "our societies and reduce the chances for the malign use of AI". At the same time, she said that it is hard to imagine

that a continued close Russia-India defence relationship would not impact US-India defence ties in the future.

"I think India is confident that it can segment its relations with Russia and the United States and that it could put up firewalls that would safeguard US technology," she said. "But I think the US will remain cautious and reluctant to link its secure networks to Indian platforms and share sensitive defence information when India is still heavily reliant on Russian platforms," Curtis said. She added that the US-India technology cooperation in a potential future Trump administration could continue.

"The momentum we saw a flourishing of the US-India relationship during the previous Trump administration. We saw very good ties between the leadership between Prime Minister (Narendra) Modi and President Trump when he was president," she said.

"I would fully expect that these two leaders would pick up the relationship where it left off, were we to see a second Trump administration," she said, ahead of the US presidential elections in November. (PTI)

Indian Army's Red Shield Warriors commemorate World Anti-Terrorism Day



HT Correspondent
MARGHERITA, May 21: In a steadfast commitment to fostering peace and unity, the Indian Army's Red Shield Warriors commemorated World Anti-Terrorism Day on Tuesday at Tipong, under the Margherita sub-division of Tinsukia district.

This significant day serves as a reminder of the necessity to combat terrorism and promote a message of non-violence and harmony.

The day's events began with a solemn ceremony honoring the brave soldiers who have sacrificed their lives in the fight against terrorism, followed by an inspiring speech highlighting the importance of vigilance and the collective responsibility of every citizen in combating terrorism.

As part of the event, various activities were organised to raise awareness about the dangers of terrorism, the importance of identify-

ing anti-national elements, and the role of citizens and youth in maintaining national security.

Educational lectures and seminars were conducted, aimed at educating participants on recognising and reporting suspicious activities, emphasising the vital role civilians play in safeguarding the nation.

A special exhibition was also held, showcasing the history and achievements of the Indian Army and Assam Rifles in counter-terrorism operations. The exhibition also highlighted various recruitment schemes for joining the Central Armed Police Forces and the Army.

The Indian Army remains committed to its mission of ensuring the safety and security of the nation. Anti-Terrorism Day stands as a testament to their unwavering dedication to protecting the country and promoting a message of peace.

Crop cultivation training conducted

HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, May 21: Krishak Nyas, the Gaurisagar-based NGO, organised a training program on sali crop cultivation at the ADO office conference hall on Sunday. Dr Prodip Handique, program coordinator at KVK, Sivasagar, and Dipen Boruah, a progressive farmer from Khanamukh, Jorhat, participated as resource persons.

Addressing the farmers, scientist Dr Handique emphasised that farmers must follow scientific methods to gain maximum benefits. He informed the farmers about improved paddy varieties like Ranjit Chab-1, Bahadur, Shrabani-2, Prafulla, and Labanya and their production. He added that the seedlings and seedbeds should be prepared scientifically to get a good yield.

Dipen Boruah cautioned the farmers to be conscientious in the selection of seeds. He also mentioned that farmers can gain benefits not only by selling paddy but also by selling paddy seedlings during the crop season. Dr Arun Changkakoti, retired joint director of the Agriculture department and president of Krishak Nyas, and Anil Gogoi, a science teacher at Cherekapar High School, along with Rajiv Dutta, publicity secretary, and Himadriyoti Dutta, chief secretary of Krishak Nyas, welcomed the guests and participants. Fifty-five farmers took part in the training.

Sibsagar Commerce College hosts fashion show

HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, May 21: 'Rangman - Rangdhal', a glamorous fashion show, was held at Sibsagar Commerce College on Saturday. Organised by the HRM and Marketing department in association with the 'Porcupine' group and Enajori Event, the fashion show was enjoyed by a large crowd, including the students of the college. The show, which started with a felicitation to Dr Saumarjyoti Mahanta (principal of the college), was inaugurated by Basanta Gogoi, president of ATASU. The chief guest, Paban Borkakoty, a well-known entrepreneur, along with Dr Ratul Sarmah, vice principal of the college, Dr Pradip Gogoi, head of the HRM and Marketing department, and Dr Ratul Dutta, associate professor of the HRM and Marketing department, spoke inspiring words to the participants.

The program was managed by a group of students from the event management department. The main motive of the competition is to focus on the students' leadership quality and how to conduct an event without hassles.

NTPC Bongaigaon Salakati leads massive plogging prog

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, May 21: In a remarkable display of community engagement and environmental stewardship, and as part of the ongoing Swachhata Pakhwada held from May 16 to 31, 2024, NTPC Bongaigaon organised a massive plogging event on Tuesday.

The event, held outside the premises of NTPC Bongaigaon Salakati, witnessed enthusiastic participation from over 100 employees and associates, marking a significant step towards a cleaner and greener environment. Led by KC Muraleedharan, business unit head of NTPC Bongaigaon, the plogging event kicked off with the solemn undertaking of the Swachhata Pledge, reaffirming the commitment to cleanliness and sustainable living.

Participants embarked on a 2-kilometer stretch from NTPC Bongaigaon Salakati Township premises to Salakati Market premises, adjacent to the plant, engaging in the collective effort of clearing the road and surrounding areas of litter and waste.

The event garnered support from senior officials including Induri S Reddy, GM (O&M), Asutosh Biswas, GM (Operation), AK Singh, AGM (FM), Onkar Nath, AGM (HR), and heads of departments, alongside employees from various departments. Their

ACMS-led demonstrations in Basmati and Hoolungooree Tea Estates Tea workers demand timely wages in protests

HT Correspondent
DIBRUGARH, May 21: Under the banner of the Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha (ACMS), hundreds of tea garden workers of Basmati Tea Estate staged a cease-work protest on Tuesday, demanding the payment of wages that have been pending for the last three months.

The tea garden workers, holding placards and banners, protested in front of the office of the tea estate, located at Lahowal in Dibrugarh.

Nabin Chandra Keot, Dibrugarh district ACMS secretary and central vice president, stated, "Today, the workers of Basmati Tea Estate ceased their work and staged a protest demanding regularisation of their wages. They have not received their wages for the last couple of months and are having a tough time running their families. The protest program was organised under the banner of ACMS."

"The workers work for eight hours a day, but if they don't get their payment on time, they face problems running their families. They have also not received their rations for the last two months. We urge the management to clear all their dues," Keot added.

An agitated worker said, "The garden management didn't pay attention to our demand. We have not received our payment for the last three months, and due to that, we



are facing serious problems. The management assured us that from next month the problem would be sorted out, but nothing has changed so far."

"If our problems are not solved within a few days, we will intensify our movement," he said.

The agitated workers burned effigies of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, Labour minister Sanjay Kisan, and Andrew Yule management in a display of their frustration and anger.

Our Jorhat correspondent added: The workers of Hoolungooree Tea Estate in Mariani, under the Titabar civil subdivision of

Jorhat district, staged a sit-in demonstration within the garden campus on Tuesday, demanding the fulfillment of several critical needs. The protest, led by the Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha (ACMS), highlighted the urgent requirements for timely payment of wages, provision of rations, and proper health benefits.

Holding banners and placards, the tea estate workers voiced their demands for the timely implementation of the Plantation Labour Act by the garden authorities. The protestors alleged that Andrew Yule Company, which owns ten gardens in Assam and employs about 20,000 permanent workers along

with numerous temporary workers, has been negligent in implementing the Act, leading to widespread suffering among the workforce.

The demonstrators shouted slogans to press for their demands and cautioned that if the company failed to address their grievances, they would escalate their agitation with a series of protest programs. The workers, united in their cause, marched in a procession to the demonstration spot, reinforcing their solidarity and determination.

The Hoolungooree Tea Estate is owned by Andrew Yule Tea Company Ltd, which is now under scrutiny for its handling of worker rights and benefits.

First North East Textile Expo concludes



Organisers Mrinal Ganeriwal and Vikram Modi highlighted that for the first time in the history of the north-east, many major manufacturers from Panipat participated in the North East Textile Expo, marking a significant achievement not only for Assam but for the entire north-east region. The expo also provided small local traders with a direct opportunity to conduct business. Both local and Panipat-based businesses praised the expo wholeheartedly.

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 21: The first-ever North East Textile Expo 2024, organised by the International Trade Corporation (ITC), concluded with grand success. Exhibitors from Panipat, participating for the first time in the three-day expo held in the Vrindavan Garden courtyard of Sri Gauhati Gauhala at Athgaon, appreciated the event and called for it to be organised on a larger scale in the coming years. The organisers of the expo, Mrinal Ganeriwal and Vikram Modi from ITC, thanked the Panipat exhibitors by presenting them with certificates and statues of Lord Ram Lalla.

On the last day of the expo, a huge crowd of local people gathered at the venue. In response, the exhibitors from Panipat offered sample items such as blankets, bedsheets, quilts, bed covers, handloom goods, and

home furnishings at very low prices, leading to a shopping spree among the customers.

Organisers Mrinal Ganeriwal and Vikram Modi highlighted that for the first time in the history of the north-east, many major manufacturers from Panipat participated in the North East Textile Expo, marking a significant achievement not only for Assam but for the entire north-east region. The expo also provided small local traders with a direct opportunity to conduct business. Both local and Panipat-based businesses praised the expo wholeheartedly.

The organisers expressed their encouragement by the positive response received from traders and the public at the inaugural North East Textile Expo. Consequently, Ganeriwal announced plans to continue and expand the expo in the coming years.

Freshers and parting social event organised

HT Correspondent
DEMOW, May 21: The Science Academy, Demow organised a freshers and parting social at Demow Public Hall on Tuesday for the newly admitted students as well as the outgoing senior students. Dr Sudhir Kumar Das, principal of Science Academy Demow, presided over the meeting. Dr Surajit Konwar, professor in the Chemistry department at Dibrugarh University, was present as the chief guest and delivered a valuable speech during the program.

A felicitation program was also organised as part of the event. In the HS Final Examination 2024, 38 students of class 12 in the science stream and 21 students of class 12 in the arts stream were felicitated with phulam gamosas and citations. Additionally, 34 students of class 10 in the HSLC Examination 2024 were also felicitated with phulam gamosas and citations. In the arts stream, Bhaswati Dehning secured 86.6 percent and became the topper in the arts stream, while Bristhi Gogoi secured 80.2 percent and became the topper in the science stream.

Conference of AEE of PHED concludes

HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, May 21: The three-day conference of assistant executive engineers (AEE) from the Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) concluded successfully at the Convention Centre in Sonitpur on Tuesday. The conference, which commenced on Sunday, focused on numerous critical topics related to the implementation of the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) in Assam.

Syedain Abbasi, IAS, special chief secretary to the government of Assam, participated as the chief guest. In his address, Abbasi reiterated the vital role of AEEs in ensuring the quality of public life by providing safe drinking water. He emphasised the importance of close monitoring of schemes, community participation, technological intervention, and inter-departmental coordination. He urged the AEEs to work with utmost dedication and devotion.

Sumit Sattawan, IAS, district commissioner of Kamrup (Metro), delivered an insightful speech on time and media management and inter-departmental coordination during the concluding day's program. He highlighted the critical role of accurate planning and technological interventions in the successful completion of the mission.

The event brought together participants from the Lower Assam Zone, Barak Valley Zone, BTAD, and DHAC, focusing on var-

ious aspects of the implementation of the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) in Assam.

The conference commenced with a keynote address and conceptual deliberation by the mission director of JJM Assam, Kailash Karthik N. IAS. In his address, the mission director emphasised the roles and responsibilities of AEEs, highlighting the state government's vision to make Assam a leading state in the successful execution of JJM schemes. He underscored the importance of the AEEs' contributions to achieving this goal.

Deba Kumar Mishra, district commissioner of Sonitpur, also attended the convention and shared his insights on the execution of JJM in his district. He stressed the significance of inter-departmental coordination and active community participation for the success of the mission.

Throughout the three days, the conference covered numerous critical topics related to JJM.

Additionally, discussions were held on office administration and procedures, legal aspects concerning corruption and unfair practices, and the importance of physical fitness, healthy eating, and a healthy lifestyle. The event was also attended by the special secretary, PHED, government of Assam, the additional MD, JJM Assam, the chief engineer, PHED (Water), Assam, and other senior officials of Jal Jeevan Mission, Assam.

Cyclists pedal 160 km for biodiversity conservation

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 21: The premier biodiversity conservation organisation of the region, Aaranyak, collaborated with the authorities of Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve (KNP & TR) as well as Orang National Park and Tiger Reserve (ONP & TR) to organise a 160-km bicycle rally spanning 2 days, from Kaziranga Park to Orang Park, in an effort to spread awareness about biodiversity conservation. The initiative was supported by the UK-based David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation.

During the "Ride for Conservation" bicycle rally, a team of eight cyclists from the Bokakhat Range of the rhino abode KNP & TR began the rally on May 19 and concluded it at the biodiverse Orang Park on May 21.

Dr Sonali Ghosh, director of KNP & TR, flagged off the bicycle rally in the presence of many dignitaries.

"Ride for Conservation cy-



cling expedition from Kaziranga to Orang was flagged off today! This initiative promotes wildlife conservation and physical well-being. Kudos to @aaranyak for their support in making this journey possible. Together, we pedal for a greener future!"

Posted by Kaziranga National Park & Tiger Reserve on the microblogging platform X on May 19.

The bicycle rally, conducted for the cause of con-

servation, was led by Arif Hussain, manager of Aaranyak's Rhino Research and Conservation Division (RRCD). The team also conducted rhino conservation outreach campaigns in two schools along the way.

As the team of cyclists arrived in Orang, they were welcomed by the divisional forest officer of Mangaldai Wildlife Division and the director of Orang National Park and Tiger Reserve, Pradipta Baruah.

"Ride for Conservation, a cycle Rally from Kaziranga NP&TR to Orang NP&TR and Awareness campaign on 'Save Rhino' 'Save Tiger' 'Save Nature'. Let's pledge to protect our nature & secure our future," posted DFO Mangaldai Wildlife Division on social platform X on Tuesday.

Aaranyak's educational campaign reaches 2000 students

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 21: Leading biodiversity conservation organisation Aaranyak has launched a series of educational campaigns about hoolock gibbon conservation targeting schoolchildren living on the fringes of Hoolongapar Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary in the Jorhat district of Assam. This ambitious series of campaigns aimed at conserving this precious species of ape is supported by The Habitats Trust and the state Forest department.

"These educational and awareness campaigns were focused on introducing the students to the hoolock gibbon (hoolock hoolock) - the only ape species in India, and to motivate them to come forward for the conservation of hoolock gibbon," said Dr Dilip Chetry, head of Aaranyak's Primate Research and Conservation Division.

"As of now, the primate research and conservation division of the organisation has reached 18 schools and taught around 2000 students about various aspects of conservation of this threatened ape," renowned primatologist Dr Chetry said. The western hoolock gibbon is a unique primate species found only in the seven states of north-east India and restricted to the south bank of the



Brahmaputra-Dibang river system.

The campaign reached the following schools: Meleng Saiding LP School, Madhupur LP School, 659 No. Tuni Mukh Meleng Grant LP School, Naren Chatia Suworani Jatiya Vidyalaya, Feuchal Jayshree High School, 95 No. Kaliapani Bagan LP School, Duklingia Bagisha LP School, 2 No. Jolotia Bonua LP School, Changchua Basti LP School, Dihingiapar 8 No. Pokaline LP School, Dihingiapar Bagan LP School, Kothalguri Bagan LP School, Thakurprasad ME School, Thakurprasad Public School, Hindubari Bagal LP School, Hindubari Masdur LP School, Adorcho Mising Janajatia LP School, and Adorcho Mising Janajatia High School.

The campaign began with a presentation on the importance of hoolock gibbons as well as the primate diversity of Assam and the need to conserve them. Additionally, cartoon films with a wildlife theme were screened. The education campaign concluded with the distribution of posters, stickers, and a book on Hoolock gibbon.

Dr Chetry said, "The western hoolock gibbon is a vital part of Assam's rich biodiversity. Through this campaign, we aim to ensure that these incredible primates continue to thrive in their natural habitat. Our collaborative efforts with local communities and government agencies are key to achieving this goal."

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Rough diamonds may sometimes be mistaken for worthless pebbles. -Thomas Browne

Iran faces uncertain future

The sudden death of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in a plane crash has thrown the Islamic Republic into a state of political uncertainty. Raisi's demise exacerbates the ongoing power struggle among Iran's hardline factions, each vying for influence in the eventual succession of the aging Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as Supreme Leader.

The upcoming presidential election in July, already burdened by historically low voter turnout, now faces even greater challenges. With only 8% of eligible voters in Tehran participating in the recent parliamentary elections, mobilizing the electorate for the presidential race appears increasingly difficult.

Vaali Nasr, a former US State Department advisor and current professor at Johns Hopkins University, underscores the importance of this leadership contest. Nasr highlights the years it took to establish Raisi as a potential Supreme Leader through his presidency.

Freeing Julian Assange is a struggle for justice, journalism and peace

By: Ben Chacko

Judges of British Court must decide if Julian Assange would enjoy the same rights as a US citizen if tried in the United States.

It's an ironic question. The persecution of the WikiLeaks founder has rested from the beginning on US exceptionalism - that rules do not apply to the United States as they apply to other countries - and extraterritoriality, that US law somehow applies to non-US citizens' conduct thousands of miles away from the US.

The US can murder citizens of other countries by the hundred in drone strikes, without due process or even much in the way of diplomatic upset.

It can launch illegal war after illegal war, its soldiers can laugh as they gun down unarmed civilians from helicopters, it can loftily decline to recognise the authority of bodies like the International Criminal Court (while publicly welcoming indictments of other countries' officials before that court); but still it claims to police a "rules-based international order" under supposed threat from its rivals.

This is about journalism: as New York Times executive editor Dean Baquet has stated, it sets a frightening precedent when a journalist can be accused of espionage for publishing classified material that was handed to him. Assange did not leak the information: he was never in the US government's employ. The Assange case warns reporters everywhere that publicising the crimes of the powerful could result in years behind bars.

But it is also about empire. It is about proving that the reach of Washington is global, that you don't have to be in the US or from the US for it to punish you.

British politicians have cringed before US demands because of our country's vassal status in that empire. It has often been observed that the US-Britain extradition treaty is unequal, with the

bar higher for US citizens to be extradited here than vice versa. But the Assange case has taken that to extremes: evidence of US wrongdoing can pile up without it making any difference to the extradition case.

As campaigner John Rees has written, "In the course of the court hearings it has become public knowledge that a lead witness for the prosecution lied, that Assange and his lawyers were spied on by the CIA, and that the CIA discussed at the highest levels plans to abduct or assassinate Assange. In any normal trial any one of these, let alone all of them, would have had the case dismissed."

But Britain can't dismiss the case. Tony Blair assured US president George W Bush when the invasion of Iraq was first mooted that Britain would be "with you, whatever": a decision he stuck to in the face of overwhelming opposition from the British public.

He was with Bush in what was termed the "project for a new American century." The project that dictated the wars now dictates the punishment Assange faces for showing the world, in intimate detail, how horrific they were, from the "collateral murder" video to the logs recording the hundreds of civilians killed by our bombs in Afghanistan.

Now the US and Britain want to militarise still greater wars, in "multiple theatres including Russia, China, Iran and North Korea," according to Defence Secretary Grant Shapps. To do it they must maintain the myth that the West are the good guys.

Which means ensuring there are no more embarrassing exposures of the bloody lawlessness of the "rules-based international order" they claim to uphold. Assange, by this logic, must be punished.

For us, that makes his freedom all the more important. This is about justice for Julian Assange, and it is about defending the freedom of the press, but more crucially still it is about understanding the horrific reality of war, so we can stop the wars of the future. (IPA Service)

Impact of Ebrahim Raisi's death on Iran's political landscape

The demise of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, tragically occurring in a helicopter crash on May 19, 2024, marks a significant loss for the nation's conservative leadership. Known for his unwavering loyalty, Raisi's passing leaves a profound void in Iran's political landscape.

Despite challenging conditions including rain, fog, dense forests, and rugged mountains, search and rescue teams tirelessly scoured the area for the wreckage. During this critical time, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called upon the nation to unite in prayer for President Raisi.

With expertise in Iran's domestic politics and foreign policy, I foresee that Tehran's apprehension regarding the helicopter crash extends beyond mere human tragedy. The resultant change carries significant implications for a nation grappling with internal turmoil and facing regional and international challenges.

Since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, Raisi diligently served as a devoted supporter of the Islamic Republic, emerging as a notable protégé of Supreme Leader Khamenei, who wields supreme authority in the nation.

Prior to assuming the presidency in 2021, Raisi occupied several roles within the judiciary, all under the oversight of the supreme leader. Notably, as a prosecutor following the conclusion of the Iran-Iraq War in 1988, he was a member of the committee responsible for sentencing thousands of political prisoners to death.

Raisi's involvement in the executions earned him the infamous moniker "the Butcher of Tehran," leading to sanctions from the United States and condemnation from the United Nations and various international human rights organizations.

Since 2006, Raisi has been a member of the Assembly of Experts, a significant body tasked with appointing and overseeing the supreme leader of Iran. Despite not possessing the charisma and eloquence often associated with leadership, there were speculations that Raisi, aged 63, was being prepared to succeed the 85-year-old Khamenei as the supreme leader of Iran.

Raisi's presidency was marked by both the origins and outcomes of a legitimacy crisis and societal unrest within the regime's domestic sphere. Amid controversy, Raisi secured victory in the 2021 presidential election following the disqualification of numerous candidates by the Guardian Council, responsible for vetting candidates. This election witnessed a historically low voter turnout of less than 50 percent.

To cater to his conservative support base, Raisi and his administration revitalized the morality police and reinstated religious constraints on society. This approach triggered the Women, Life, Freedom protests following the tragic death of Mahsa Amini in police custody in 2022. These demonstrations became the largest and most prolonged in the Islamic Republic's nearly 50-year history.

Confronted with escalating U.S. sanctions, Iran under Raisi's leadership has shown hesitance in reengaging with the nuclear deal. Instead, the country has ramped up uranium enrichment, obstructed international inspectors, and positioned itself as a nuclear threshold state.

Continuing the legacy of his predecessor, Hassan Rouhani, Raisi upheld the "Look to the East" policy, prioritizing closer ties with China. This approach was pursued diligently by Raisi and his administration.

During Raisi's tenure, Iran's economy persisted in its struggles, plagued by a blend of governmental mismanagement, corruption, and escalating U.S. sanctions. These sanctions were amplified in response to Tehran's domestic crackdowns and international provocations.



DEGREE OF THOUGHT Dipak Kurmi

environmental mismanagement, corruption, and escalating U.S. sanctions. These sanctions were amplified in response to Tehran's domestic crackdowns and international provocations.

While Khamenei holds ultimate authority over foreign policy as the supreme leader, Raisi led a nation that remained steadfast in its confrontational approach toward key adversaries, particularly the United States and Israel. Whether by deliberate decision or perceived imperative, Tehran has increasingly distanced itself from any notion of reconciliation with the West.

Throughout the unrest, Raisi reaffirmed his allegiance to the supreme leader and conservative factions by intensifying restrictions and crackdowns.

During Raisi's tenure, Iran's economy persisted in its struggles, plagued by a blend of governmental mismanagement, corruption, and escalating U.S. sanctions. These sanctions were amplified in response to Tehran's domestic crackdowns and international provocations.

In return, Beijing extended an economic lifeline to Iran by importing Iranian oil and facilitating a diplomatic accord between Iran and Saudi Arabia in March 2023.

During Raisi's presidency, Iran persisted as a staunch ally and financier of anti-US and anti-Western conflicts. The country supplied combat drones to Russia for the war in Ukraine and provided arms to various regional proxies throughout the Middle East.

Since the outbreak of the Gaza war on October 7, 2023, Iran, under the leadership of Khamenei and Raisi, has carefully balanced supporting its regional proxies in their efforts against Israel and the United States, while steering clear of direct conflict with these conventionally superior adversaries.

The equilibrium was briefly shattered in April when, for the first time in history, the Islamic Republic launched a direct assault on Israel using drones and missiles. This unprecedented action was a response to an attack on Iran's consulate in Damascus.

Although Raisi doesn't directly handle foreign policy, he has been a staunch ally of the Iranian regime in its efforts to detach from the established international order. He has actively supported forging alliances with

nations that share a similar hostility towards the West.

When the helicopter crashed, Raisi and his colleagues were on their way back from a dam inauguration ceremony in neighboring Azerbaijan. This event was likely an attempt by Iran to improve relations with Azerbaijan, despite Iran's previous ambiguous, if not adversarial, stance during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which concluded with a decisive Azerbaijani victory in late 2023.

Supreme Leader Khamenei found in Raisi a steadfast loyalist, a trusted insider of the regime, and a potential successor with a long-standing commitment to the cause.

According to the Iranian constitution, if a president dies, the first vice president assumes the role of interim president. In this scenario, Mohammad Mokhber would step into this interim role. Mokhber shares many political traits with Raisi and has played a significant role in Iran's negotiations for weapons deals with Moscow.

Additionally, Iran must conduct presidential elections within 50 days of a president's death. The supreme leader's endorsement for the next president and potential successor is yet to be determined. It's highly likely that conservatives in Tehran will persist in rallying together, considering the internal and external pressures confronting them.

On the domestic front, this may manifest as increased state repression and manipulation of elections.

In the regional and global arenas, it could translate into cultivating closer relationships with emerging allies while strategically confronting longstanding adversaries. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)

Indian supply of BrahMos missiles to Philippines is a signal to other ASEAN countries

By: Girish Linganna

The escalating maritime tensions between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea have significant implications for India's maritime trade interests. As a major player in the region, India has a vested interest in ensuring the safety and security of its maritime commerce.

In response to these growing concerns, key stakeholders including the United States, Japan, Australia, and now India are actively supporting the Philippines' efforts to enhance its defense capabilities and deter potential threats from China.

India is helping the Philippines strengthen its defenses by providing advanced weapons. In 2022, India agreed to sell BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles to the Philippines, a deal worth \$375 million. The first shipment of these missiles and launchers arrived in the Philippines on April 19, 2024, and will be used by the Philippine Marines. India used its Globemaster transport aircraft to deliver the first batch of BrahMos coastal defense systems to the Philippines. The delivery took place at Clark International Airport. The ground systems for these missiles were shipped to the Philippines in March. Concerned by China's assertive actions in the Indo-Pacific region, including the South China Sea, India has been strengthening its military partnerships with ASEAN countries.

The agreement signed in January 2022 was a significant step forward for India's ambitions to become a major exporter of defense equipment. This is the first time the BrahMos missile, jointly developed by India and Russia, has been sold to another country. The delay in delivery was due to the lack of a non-disclosure agreement between India and Russia.

The BrahMos cruise missile is renowned for its incredible speed, reaching Mach 2.8, which translates to almost three times the speed of sound, or approximately 1,000 kilometers per second. The BrahMos missile system is versatile, with versions capable of being launched from land, air, and sea. All three variants are currently in use by the Indian armed forces. The BrahMos missiles sold to the Philippines have a range of 290 kilometers.

However, India has also developed a longer-range variant with a reach of nearly 500 kilometers. India's Cabinet Committee on Security has approved the purchase of over 200 BrahMos missiles and related systems to equip its warships. This significant upgrade for the Indian Navy is estimated to cost around 19,000 crore rupees. India has set an ambitious goal of reaching 35,000 crore rupees in defense exports by 2024-25.

To strengthen military cooperation with the Philippines, India has decided to station a defense attaché in the country. As part of a broader strategy to enhance strategic partnerships worldwide and promote arms exports, India plans to appoint 15 to 16 new defense attachés from the Navy, Army, and Air Force in various key locations globally. In addition to the Philippines, India plans to establish defense attaché positions in Ethiopia, Mozambique, Poland, Ivory Coast, Armenia, Tanzania, Mozambique, and Djibouti. This strategic realignment involves reducing the number of military officials stationed at larger embassies in Russia, the UK, and France.

India hopes that its first BrahMos export to the Philippines will open doors for future deals with the Philippines and other ASEAN nations, such as Indonesia and Vietnam. The delivery of BrahMos missiles to the Philippines marks a major achievement for India's defense export aspirations. This development highlights India's advanced technological capabilities and its dedication to becoming self-sufficient in defense production. As India pursues opportunities to expand its defense exports, overcoming challenges and strengthening its capabilities will be crucial to achieving its goal of becoming a leading defense supplier in the region.

The delivery of BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles to the Philippines marks a major stride for India in its efforts to boost defense exports and achieve self-reliance in defense production. This action underscores India's commitment to the 'Make-in-India' initiative and its ambition to become a leading defense supplier in Asia.

India's sale of BrahMos missiles to the Philippines is a big deal, showing how close the two countries are becoming in terms of military cooperation. This is especially important because of China's growing influence in the region. The \$375 (Approx INR 3,075 Crores) million deal is also a historic moment because it's the first time India has exported these advanced missiles.

Each BrahMos missile costs less than \$5 million (Approx INR 41 Crores). Its outstanding capabilities have attracted a lot of attention from buyers in India and abroad. Recognized as a strategic asset, India is deploying the BrahMos at the Minicoy military base to oversee Chinese movements in the Indian Ocean.

Minicoy Island is located in the southern part of the Lakshadweep archipelago, which is a group of islands in the Arabian Sea off the southwestern coast of India.

India's progress in space technology, highlighted by the recent Chandrayaan launch, mirrors its achievements in locally producing the BrahMos missile. This underscores the country's significant technological advancements. Currently, over 76% of BrahMos missiles are made in India. Efforts are underway to raise this to 85% by using Indian-made seekers and boosters, with a goal of achieving 100% local production by 2026.

Seekers are components in missiles that help them find and lock onto targets, while Boosters are the engines that provide the initial thrust to launch the missile and accelerate it toward its target.

India's strategy to enhance defense ties with the Philippines indicates that New Delhi is expanding its influence beyond the Indian Ocean, aiming to help uphold stability in the Indo-Pacific region. During his visit to Manila in March 2024, Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar reaffirmed India's commitment to supporting the Philippines in safeguarding its national sovereignty.

Enrique Manalo, the Philippine Foreign Minister, responded by expressing his country's strong desire to collaborate with India in creating a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region. Manalo emphasized that "our ongoing discussions on defense and security cooperation are particularly important in this region and within this context."

Coinciding with the Indian minister's visit, an Indian Coast Guard ship made a port call to the Philippines. The two nations are also planning to conduct more joint naval exercises in the future.

The Philippines recognizes that India is a close security partner of its key allies, like the United States, Japan, and Australia. This makes it even more beneficial for the Philippines to strengthen its relationship with India. Official sources say that India and the Philippines are natural partners, united by their shared vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific. Both countries believe in a region that embraces diversity, upholds democratic values, and promotes prosperity for its people through economic cooperation. (IPA Service)

AAP's political future depends on the outcome of Kejriwal's liquor case

By: Kalyani Shankar

Delhi's Chief Minister, Arvind Kejriwal, has overcome numerous obstacles in the past decade. Yet, his unwavering resilience has been a beacon of inspiration. He and his party are currently facing the biggest crisis in the liquor policy case.

Despite the challenges, Kejriwal's political journey is a testament to his indomitable spirit. From a brief 49-day tenure and losing all seven Lok Sabha seats in Delhi in 2014, he orchestrated a remarkable comeback, securing 67 out of 70 seats in the 2015 Delhi Assembly polls.

The arrest of Kejriwal in the Delhi liquor policy case last month, which involves allegations of corruption and misuse of power, has cast a shadow of uncertainty over the future of the Aam Aadmi Party. Will this be the end of the party's road, or can they weather this storm and continue their political journey?

The Apex court's decision to grant bail to Kejriwal, allowing him to campaign for his party in the ongoing elections, is a beacon of hope for Kejriwal's supporters. This positive development paves the way for Kejriwal's success, especially if he garners public sympathy.

Kejriwal presents himself as the underdog, highlighting Prime Minister Narendra Modi's alleged persecution and his colleagues' imprisonment. Kejriwal and his party have been trying to show the public how he was mistreated in prison and how he was denied insulin and his diabetes medication.

Kejriwal's arrest is the biggest crisis for the Aam Aadmi Party (A.A.P.) since its founding in November 2012. The party has faced numerous challenges, including internal conflicts, allegations of corruption, and the need to maintain its image as a party for the common man.

Over the years, many of Kejriwal's associates from the India Against Corruption (I.A.C.) days have been dumped and allegations are there that Kejriwal has introduced a personality cult centred around him.

The Aam Aadmi Party's rise to power has been quite dramatic. It originated from the India Against Corruption movement led by Anna Hazare in 2011. The party came into power within months, but Kejriwal's resignation within 48 hours was unsurprising.

However, he returned in the next two assembly elections, winning polls with a significant majority. These events have sparked curiosity about the party's political trajectory and Kejriwal's resilience.

Kejriwal has always been ambitious. He positioned himself as a prime ministerial candidate and even ran against Modi in Benares in 2014 but lost. This bold move significantly boosted Kejriwal's and his party's profile.

In the recently formed IN D I A coalition, a significant political alliance that aims to challenge the dominance of the B.J.P., the A.A.P. stands out as the only party other than Congress to rule more than one state. This alliance could pave the way for his party's expansion beyond Delhi and Punjab.

However, currently, A.A.P. will have a significant political impact in only 20 constituencies. Kejriwal's national influence depends on his party's performance. The A.A.P. currently holds one seat in the Lok Sabha and ten in the Upper House. The party has expanded its influence to other states and was granted national party status in April 2023.

The Aam Aadmi Party's rise to power in Indian politics is fascinating. Unlike the B.J.P. or the Left parties, it has no solid ideological stance. It has not relied on regional or socialist backgrounds like the A.I.A.D.M.K., D.M.K., Samajwadi Party, Biju Janata Dal, or Rashtriya Janata Dal. Instead, it has gained power by championing development anti-corruption and freebie culture.

The A.A.P. is now contesting Lok Sabha elections in Delhi with the Congress party, while in Punjab AAP is contesting in 13 seats independently. These alliances offer a promising outlook for Kejriwal's political journey.

The Aam Aadmi Party is not just a political entity. It is poised to fill the void left by Congress and target politically bipolar states like Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Gujarat.

Modi has promised a "Modi ki guarantee," while Kejriwal has outlined a ten-point agenda. This agenda includes "freeing" Indian land from Chinese occupation if the I.N.D.I.A. bloc forms the government at the Centre, attaining statehood for Delhi, ensuring a 24/7 power supply, and providing free education. These promises reflect Kejriwal's focus on national issues.

The Delhi liquor policy case has become inconvenient for the A.A.P. and convenient for the B.J.P. as elections are underway. It raises questions like, is it the end of the road? Can the second rung of leaders like Gopal Rai, Saurabh Bhardwaj, Sandeep Pathak, Raghav Chadha, and Atishi run the party, or will Kejriwal, with his usual luck, return?

Kejriwal is optimistic and hopes that luck will be on his side. This positive outlook has served him well so far. His popularity will rise if his party secures a respectable number of seats in the current Lok Sabha polls.

Only the voters can decide, and their decision will shape the future of Kejriwal and the Aam Aadmi Party in Indian politics. (IPA Service)

Why do some mothers kill their own children?

By: Shoma A. Chatterji

The whole country is still reeling under the shock of the Suchana Seth case. Seth, a highly educated, financially independent and empowered young mother killed her own small son, reportedly first drugging him to put him to sleep, and then suffocating him. The child was only four years old.

But this should not have been as shocking as it is now because we already are aware of the Sheena Bora case of a young woman in love having been diabolically and cold-bloodedly murdered allegedly by her own high-flying, glamorous and affluent mother Indrani Mukherjea. Neither of these women subscribe to the commonly held theories of why mothers kill their children.

Why do mothers kill their children at all? One reason forwarded is poverty where the mother kills her kids, and then herself, because life becomes unbearable. She is convinced that she cannot save her kids from poverty.

The other reason is domestic violence where the mother and her children are the victims. She kills her children so that they do not fall victim to more abuse. This is also known as altruistic killing in order to 'protect' the children from violence.

The third reason is that a kid dies accidentally when the mother physically beats the kid up. Her intention was not to kill but the beating is so bad that the

child dies. This mainly happens in middle-class and upper middle-class urban families where the pressure on the child to achieve, in any field chosen by the mother, is too high. The mother remains unhappy when the child fails to live up to her aspirations.

The fourth, and most dangerous, reason is when there is serious marital trouble between the husband and the wife, and the child becomes a victim. This is what fits into the Suchana Seth case.

She was desperate not to allow her husband to meet their little son, when they were going through a divorce. She reportedly disobeyed the court orders to permit her husband visiting rights.

When the husband approached the court and got the sanction, she still did not take the son to the appointed place to meet his father and ultimately, first drugged him to sleep and then smothered him to death. This is also known as murder resulting from spousal revenge.

For Indrani Mukherjea, the trigger was perhaps mainly pushed through greed for wealth which her daughter was refusing to part with.

Mythological stories are replete with mothers who have killed their own children. The first mythological character that comes to mind is Goddess Ganga who killed her seven children. She drowned her newborn babies immediately after the birth, one after the other.

After the eighth child's birth, her husband could not resist questioning her cruel act. The husband was oath-bound never to question her; otherwise, Ganga would leave him, but he had to this time. Ganga said that the children were famed sages, and she freed them from their pathetic mortal lives.

But because she couldn't save the eighth one from his destiny, she had to leave him and go. Ganga is a ferocious river and can never be tamed or questioned, and her husband broke the fundamental rule.

A 37-year-old Australian mother in Cairns, Queensland was arrested on suspicion of having killed eight kids between two and 14 years of age. Seven of these were her own.

The children were found by the local police when they went in response to a report from her 20-year-old son, about an injured woman but found much more.

The children were stabbed and the woman herself had bloodied wounds on her body. The mother was suspected to have been suffering from Münchhausen Syndrome by Proxy (MSBP).

Münchhausen's Syndrome is named after Baron Von Münchhausen (1720-1791). People with Münchhausen Syndrome have an uncontrolled need to exaggerate health complaints, falsify tests and/or inflict illnesses on themselves directly.

In Münchhausen Syndrome by Proxy perpetrators fulfil their need for positive attention by



hurting their own child, thereby imposing the sick role onto their child, by proxy. In 1977, Roy Meadow, then professor of paediatrics at the University of Leeds, England, discovered the extraordinary behaviour of two mothers and labelled this Münchhausen Syndrome by Proxy.

Professor Meadow said that one of the two mothers had poisoned her toddler with excessive quantities of salt, while the other had introduced her own blood into her baby's urine sample.

MSBP is a lesser-known, lesser-written-about and lesser discussed issue of psychological health where the child is the victim of his/her mother's insane mental state who otherwise appears and behaves 'normally.' Mark Gado in his serialised article 'Mothers who Kill' in 'Crime Library' describes in detail some of the most notorious mothers in the history of crime.

Among them are Susan Smith, Andrea Yates, Sally Clark, Angela Cannings, Maxine Robinson and the most no-

torious of them all, Marybeth Tinning. It took 14 years and nine tiny corpses to finally take action against Tinning in 2011.

Tinning was charged with the murder of only one child, Tami Lynne. By that time, she was already 68 but was due for parole two years later.

Is India an exception? According to papers in the 'Indian Journal of Psychiatry', MSBP is present among Indian mothers but is manifest in different ways. In one case, a 12-year-old girl of 'low IQ' was brought to the psychiatric ward by her parents because dead house flies were coming out of her ears.

The girl's ears were plugged with cotton wool which the mother had removed. The mother refused to leave the girl's side during examination and hospitalisation. When the doctors persuaded her to go home, the flies stopped coming out of the girl's ears.

The doctors organised a family meeting and the mother finally confessed that she had actually introduced dead flies

into her child's ear. The mother had been treated for generalised anxiety disorder and for dissociative disorder in the past.

In another case, when the mother of an infant brought in for a foamy discharge from the scalp was questioned by doctors, she confessed to applying baby shampoo on the scalp of her child and fabricating it for the doctor.

This is explained by a medical theory which mentions Sudden Infant Death Syndrome or SIDS. When sudden and completely asymptomatic death occurs in a new-born or infant, when every kind of post-death reasonings are exhausted, the death is labelled as SIDS.

The SIDS deaths only occur while the baby is in the crib. A baby does not die from SIDS in its mother's arms. In fact, picking up a baby is the only known way to prevent a sudden infant death.

But in many of these SIDS deaths of infants, doctors have expressed suspicion about the mother's hand in the death. However, it could not be proved for lack of concrete evidence, and also because the role of the mother is entirely sanctified by history, society, literature, cinema and family.

In some rare cases, the new mother becomes so psychologically depressed that the only relief she thinks she can get is by killing the infant. This is a severe case of depression and needs urgent medical attention to keep the new mother from doing it again.

SIDS was originally referred to as 'cot death' because the infant was normally discovered in its bed or crib. However, since SIDS is a cause of death by exclusion and we still don't know what causes it.

Julie Gregory, a survivor of MSBP, in 'Sickened: The Memoir of a Munchausen' by Proxy Childhood (2003) lucidly sets out the story of her traumatic childhood spent under the supervision and 'care' of an insane mother and grandmother.

From early childhood, Gregory was continuously X-rayed, medicated, and operated on—in the vain pursuit of an illness created in her mother's mind.

The Mother Goddess in Hindu mythology is worshipped more as a mother than as a goddess. So, when a human female kills her own offspring, she is deemed to destroy this ideology of motherhood completely.

As Indians, we revere the mother in real life, history, literature and so on. It is impossible for us to accept that a mother can kill her own child. It is a patriarchal construct that sanctifies motherhood and places it on a pedestal ideologically higher than fatherhood.

That is why we are completely shocked by the criminal conduct of Suchana Seth and Indrani Mukherjea, who have effectively destroyed the pedestal called 'motherhood', built so carefully and cautiously by patriarchy. (Courtesy: *Te Citizen*)

Tips to avoid melting makeup in summer months

By: Shahnaz Husain

It's summertime and to keep makeup intact in the scorching heat is a big task. With the sun blazing right upon us, the severe heatwave and sweat often lead to bad body odour, melting foundation, sticky skin and sweat tricking down your face. There's nothing worse than spending time perfecting your look only to have it slide off your face the moment you step outside.

The harmful rays can not only melt your make-up and end up making you look more dull but they can also damage your skin by penetrating deep into it. Due to heat, there is water loss from the body leading to dehydration, more sweat and more oil. Learning how to prevent makeup from melting in hot weather is important to look your best even on warm, humid days.

From opting for waterproof, sweat proof products to correctly prepping your face before applying makeup, there are ways to ensure that your foundation, contouring, and highlighting will stay in place, even through the sweat by making some significant changes in your makeup routine to prevent makeup from melting off into nothingness.

The golden rule for summer makeup is "soft, delicate and very sparing." Water-based and powder make-up items are better during summer. Waterproof make-up cosmetics are also available.

For example, waterproof mascaras and eyeliners will prevent eye makeup from running during the hot and humid season. Waterproof or water-resistant lip colours and lip liners are also available. Or, go for matte (non-shiny) lipstick and add just a dab of gloss in the centre for a delicious pout.

1. Always begin with a clean face

Cleansing the skin with plenty of cool water before make-up is most important. Use your face cleanser to get rid of all the excess oil and refresh your skin. After cleansing, use chilled rose water to tone and cool the skin. This is not only refreshing but also helps to close the pores. Dip cotton wool pads in it and wipe the skin. Also, pat briskly on the skin to stimulate circulation and add a glow. If the skin is oily, apply an astringent lotion, using cotton wool.

2. Blotting paper

Blotting papers can be your best friend if you tend to sweat on the face. Keep blotting paper handy to slick off any excess oil over the face or T-zone and be ready for touch-ups! They are great at absorbing shine, oil, and sweat and keeping your makeup looking great.

Apply a loose powder in key areas where makeup tends to disappear first, such as around the nostrils, T-zone, and under the eyes. For extra security, use a finishing spray.

3. The better your skin you use, the better your makeup will stay on throughout the day,

keeping it easier to maintain in hot weather.

Make sure your makeup is minimal and lightweight to keep up with the easy breezy vibe of the summer season! Avoid rich, thick moisturizers, heavy concealers and foundations that would easily melt off and opt for a lighter formula that contains sunscreen. Your skin will feel less sticky and be able to breathe more easily if you wear less makeup.

4. Go for waterproof mascara

Use mascara wisely. First, swipe a few coats of non-waterproof mascara. Then a coat or two of waterproof mascara to save yourself from the embarrassment and sticks to your eyelids even on a hot and sweaty day. This way, there won't be any smudges on top and it will be easy to clean the makeup off your lashes when you get back home.

5. Invest in a good primer

Waterproof primer is the most ideal in the hot summer season. Look for a primer that hydrates the face and helps cool down the skin. Use one which has hyaluronic acid to soften lines and blur imperfections. It can help you stay cool.

The less you sweat, the less damage is done to your makeup. You can also try adding a splash

of a naturally-cooling essential oil, like peppermint, to keep your face cool. Just make sure to dilute any essential oil you use with carrier oil, like olive oil, before applying it to your face.

6. Tips to make your makeup last longer in summer

Use waterproof make-up in summer to cope with perspiration. Wrap an ice cube in a clean cloth and wipe the face with it, just for a few seconds. This helps to close the pores.

For oily skin, apply astringent lotion with cotton wool, to close pores and reduce oiliness. After a few minutes, apply a water-based foundation, blending with a damp sponge for a smooth finish.

Add a drop or two of water, before applying, to provide a lighter coverage. Then apply powder to "set" the foundation.

When you apply powder, press the powder all over the face and neck, with a slightly damp sponge. This helps it to set and last longer.

7. Use powder eye shadows and powder blush-on

If you use kajal, after applying it on the lower lid, just below the eyelashes, apply a line of grey or brown eyeshadow over it. This prevents smudging and helps makeup last longer.

8. Blot the makeup with a tissue

Applying foundation on the lips before helps lipstick last longer. (The author is an international fame beauty expert and is called the *herbal queen of India*)

Empowering women at the grassroots

By: Rajesh Ranjan

The low workforce participation of women and its consistent decline in India is a matter of critical concern. A recent report by the World Bank reveals that the Female labour workforce participation in India has declined since 2005.

The research on female workforce participation in India is limited to just the formal sector. The informal sector in India, such as domestic, care and household work, the work in the unorganised sectors remains an understudied topic.

This paper by KREA University shows how the invisibility of scholars has further exacerbated the documentation of the plight of women in the informal sector and this report by the International Labour Organisation further reinforces this claim that the investment in care work is largely male-dominated.

Claudia Goldin, a noted economist, has argued the need to revisit the economic theory to overcome the limitations and challenges of the masculine nature of the discipline of economics. Julie Nelson, an economist and Professor at the University of Massachusetts, has documented how social meaning associated with gender influences the meaning and theories of economics in the pragmatic sense.

Despite the limitations and challenges, there is an urgent need to invest in women, especially at the micro level.

The Constitution of India under Article 16

(4) mandates equality of opportunity. Article 39 of the Constitution casts an obligation on the State to secure the right to an adequate means of livelihood.

Besides the constitutional mandate, the reasons to invest in women at the grassroots level are manifold. One prominent reason is that when women are skilled at the panchayat level, they not only contribute to the village economy and raise living standards but also act as a trickle-down messenger for the holistic development of other women.

For instance, reservation at the Panchayat level through the constitutional amendment brought women to the forefront of the decision-making process. However, at the same time, on the social and economic forefront, there is an urgent need to invest in the empowerment of women. Very few women at the grassroots level work in the organised sector.

A report by the Ministry of Women and Child Development reveals that 95 per cent of women work in the informal sector. Investing in their skills would not only be beneficial for the overall economy but also ensure a diverse workplace.

The Gram Panchayat Surpura in Jodhpur, Rajasthan recently established a 'Shilpjeevika Centre'—a Skill Development Centre in Panchayat Bhawan Surpura. The skill development centre was conceptualised by the Sarpanch and the Legal Aid and Awareness Committee of National Law University, Jodhpur, a year back to act as a nodal centre for skill and training of the women at the

Panchayat level.

The Panchayat, in the last two years, have opened a community library and the computer lab in the Panchayat Bhawan with the help of the Legal aid and awareness Committee of National Law University, Jodhpur, which was spearheaded by this author as a convener of the Committee.

These different centres cater to different needs of the villagers. While the computer lab provides a platform for women and children to learn online skills and fill out online forms, the library is a resource centre for books.

The newly initiated skill development centre where women learn vocational skills like soap making, embroidery etc will equip them with skills to earn.

The Village Panchayat Surpura offers a great example by the Panchayat authorities to empower women at the grassroots level. The government through the National Policy for Empowering Women has also focused on imparting vocational and technical skills.

Empowerment of women at the grassroots level requires multidimensional intervention, not just from the government, but also from the civil society. As we move towards the 100th year of the journey of our nation and the constitution, what B R Ambedkar said should always be our guiding light, "I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved". (Courtesy: *The Quint*)

Regularly eating avocado linked to lower diabetes risk in women

By: Kelsey Costa

New research published in the *Journal of Nutrition and Dietetics* suggests a potential association between avocado consumption and diabetes risk among Mexican adults. Diabetes is the second leading cause of death in Mexico, affecting around 15.2% of adults (12.8 million).

To investigate the relationship between avocado consumption and diabetes risk, researchers studied mostly self-reported dietary habits and diabetes diagnosis information from survey responses of a portion of the Mexican population. The majority of these respondents were classified as having overweight or obesity.

The results showed that women who consumed avocados were less likely to develop diabetes than those who did not eat them. This connection, however, was not observed in men.

Studying avocado consumption and diabetes risk

This study analyzed data on Mexican adults aged 20 and older from the Mexican National Survey of Health and Nutrition (ENSANUT) years 2012, 2016, and 2018. After excluding specific individuals, such as those who were pregnant or breastfeeding, and those with missing or unreliable data regarding diabetes and avocado intake, the final sample included 25,640 participants.

Approximately 59% were female, and more than 60% had abdominal obesity.

In the surveys, dietary information was assessed using a 7-day food-frequency questionnaire to determine avocado consumption habits, and participants were strictly classified as avocado consumers (consuming any amount of avocado) or non-consumers. The presence of diabetes was primarily identified through self-reported diagnoses, with a portion of the participants using clinical measures of blood sugar levels to confirm diabetes cases.

The participants also self-reported demographic and cardiometabolic risk factors such as age, sex, socioeconomic level, education, body mass index (BMI), abdominal obesity, healthy eating index (HEI-2015) score, calorie intake, lifestyle habits, and pre-existing conditions.

However, trained personnel measured the participants' weight, height, and waist circumference. Upon gathering the survey data, the researchers analyzed it using descriptive statistics and logistic regression models to investigate the link between avocado consumption and diabetes risk among the adult population in Mexico.

Eating avocado tied to lower diabetes risk in women

Among the participants, about 45% reported consuming avocados, with average daily intakes of 34.7 grams (g) for men and 29.8 g for women.

Those who ate avocados generally had higher levels of education and belonged to a higher socioeconomic class than those who did not consume avocados. Additionally, over three-quarters of avocado consumers resided in urban areas.

Across both genders, avocado eaters also tended to have slightly higher scores on the healthy eating index, indicating a somewhat more nutritious diet overall.

These findings suggest that individuals who consumed avocados likely had greater access to and resources for healthier food options. It is important to note, however, that the study's adjusted models considered and accounted for these factors. In women, avocado consumers showed a 22% and 29% lower risk of developing diabetes in unadjusted and adjusted models, respectively. However, this protective effect of avocado consumption was not observed in men.

This relationship remained consistent when laboratory-confirmed diabetes diagnoses were used instead of self-reported diagnoses.

How might avocados contribute to lower diabetes risk?

Medical News Today spoke with Avantika Waring, MD, a board-certified physician in endocrinology, diabetes, and metabolism, and chief medical officer at 9amHealth, not involved in the

study, about how avocados may reduce diabetes risk among women.

Waring explained:

"There are a few potential ways that avocado consumption could lower risk of diabetes in women, including the presence of antioxidants which can reduce inflammation and cellular damage that would otherwise increase the risk of conditions like diabetes. Avocados, being high in fat and fiber, also have a low glycemic index, and therefore don't promote spikes in glucose and the resulting rise in insulin levels that are metabolically unfavorable."

She pointed out, though, that these mechanisms are speculative, and suggested that the high fiber and healthy fats in avocados could also promote fullness, subsequently decreasing the intake of less nutritious foods.

Thomas M. Holland, MD, MS, physician-scientist at the RUSH Institute for Healthy Aging, Rush University System for Health, not involved in the study, similarly highlighted that avocados, rich in "insulin-sensitizing nutrients," could potentially stabilize the diabetic disease process.

"However, it remains a challenge to precisely determine why the association was observed only in women and not in men," he said.

He proposed that various factors might influence the disease course in women, including sex differences in diabetes that are related to hormonal changes across the lifespan, genetic and environmental factors, and psychosocial stressors that uniquely impact women's diabetes risk.

Waring concurred, emphasizing the significant hormonal shifts women experience during key life stages. "During pregnancy, women become more insulin resistant for example, and during menopause as estrogen levels drop, body fat patterns change in women that can result in a higher risk of diabetes," she said.

Ultimately, it is unclear what caused the sex differences in avocado consumption's impact on diabetes risk in this study, highlighting the need for further research on sex-specific dietary interventions and personalized nutrition recommendations.

Should we eat more avocados to lower risk of diabetes?

Eliza Whitaker, MS, RDN, a registered dietitian and medical nutrition advisor at Dietitian Insights, who was not involved in the study, noted the study's major limitation in broadly categorizing avocado consumers, making it hard to determine the beneficial amount of avocado intake.

She mentioned that lumping occasional and frequent avocado consumers together complicates understanding the precise impact on diabetes risk.

As far as we can tell, based on current science, she said: "Avocados may be associated with a lower risk of diabetes, but avocados alone aren't enough to reduce that risk. We have to look at the diet as a whole when it comes to reducing the risk of developing diabetes."

Waring echoed this sentiment, suggesting the study supports the consumption of unprocessed, heart-healthy foods, including fruits and vegetables, for better metabolic health but doesn't result in specific dietary guidance regarding avocado consumption.

Overall, "maintaining a healthy lifestyle, with diet being one component, enhances an individual's ability to take control of their disease process," Holland added, emphasizing a holistic approach to disease prevention.

Although the study cannot be used to draw definitive conclusions about avocado consumption and diabetes risk, Holland suggested the associations it reveals still carry significant weight. Regarding whether individuals should incorporate avocados to reduce diabetes risk, Holland concluded:

"Considering the abundance and diversity of nutrients found in avocados, there is compelling evidence that incorporating them into a healthier diet, such as the DASH diet, Mediterranean diet, or MIND diet, is strongly recommended for diabetes management." (Courtesy: *Medical News Today*)

Mourners begin days of funerals for Iran's president and others killed in helicopter crash

DUBAI, May 21: Mourners in black began gathering on Tuesday for days of funerals and processions for Iran's late president, foreign minister and others killed in a helicopter crash, a government-led series of ceremonies aimed at both honoring the dead and projecting strength in an unsettled Middle East.

For Iran's Shiite theocracy, mass demonstrations have been crucial since millions thronged the streets of Tehran to welcome Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1979 during the Islamic Revolution, and also attended his funeral 10 years later. An estimated 1 million turned out in 2020 for processions for the late Revolutionary Guard Gen. Qassem Soleimani, who was slain in a U.S. drone strike in Baghdad.

Whether President Ebrahim Raisi, Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and others draw the same crowd remains in question, particularly as Raisi died in a helicopter crash, won his office in the lowest-turnout presidential election in the

country's history and presided over sweeping crackdowns on all dissent. Prosecutors already have warned people over showing any public signs of celebrating his death and a heavy security force presence has been seen on the streets of Tehran since the crash.

But Raisi, 63, had been discussed as a possible successor for Iran's supreme leader, the 85-year-old Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. His death now throws that selection into question, particularly as there is no heir-apparent cleric for the presidency ahead of planned June 28 elections.

"Raisi's death comes at a moment when the Islamist regime is consolidated," wrote Alex Vatanka, an Iran expert at the Middle East Institute. "In short, there will be no power vacuum in Tehran; nonetheless, post-Khamenei Iran suddenly looks far less predictable than it did just a few days ago." A procession Tuesday morning led by a semitruck carrying the caskets of the dead slowly moved through the narrow streets of downtown



Tabriz, the closest major city near the site of the crash Sunday.

Thousands in black slowly walked beside the coffins, some throwing flowers up to them as an emcee wept through a loudspeaker for men he described as martyrs. On Wednesday, a funeral presided over by Khamenei will then turn into a procession as well.

The caskets later arrived in Tehran to an honor

guard at the airport. They will go on to the holy Shiite seminary city of Qom before returning to the Iranian capital.

It remains unclear what international presence that funeral will draw, as Raisi faced U.S. sanctions for his part in mass executions in 1988 and for abuses targeting protesters and dissidents while leading the country's judiciary. Iran under Raisi also shipped bomb-carrying drones to Russia to be used in its war on Ukraine.

"I don't feel comfortable sending condolences while Iran is sending drones that are used against civilians in Ukraine," wrote Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis on the social platform X. United Kingdom Security Minister Tom Tugendhat echoed that in his own message on X: "President Raisi's regime has murdered thousands at home, and targeted people here in Britain and across Europe. I will not mourn him."

On Thursday, Raisi's hometown of Birjand will see a procession, followed by a funeral and burial

at the Imam Reza shrine in the holy city of Mashhad, the only imam of the Shiite's faith buried in Iran. That shrine has long been a center for pilgrims and sees millions visit each year. Over the centuries, its grounds have served as the final burial site for heroes in Persian history. It's an incredibly high, rare honor in the faith. Iranian President Mohammad-Ali Rajai, the only other president to die in office when he was killed in a 1981 bombing, was buried in Tehran.

Iran's theocracy declared five days of mourning, encouraging people to attend the public mourning sessions. Typically, government employees and schoolchildren attend such events en masse, while others take part out of patriotism, curiosity or to witness historic events.

Across Iran, its rural population often more closely embraces the Shiite faith and the government. However, Tehran has long held a far different view of Raisi and his government's policies as mass protests have roiled the capital for years. (AP)

Israel is seeking to contain the fallout from a request by the chief prosecutor of the world's top war crimes court for arrest warrants for Israeli and Hamas leaders

Israel tries to contain fallout over ICC warrant requests after allies voice support for the move

JERUSALEM, May 21: Israel's foreign minister was headed to France on Tuesday in a bid to contain the fallout from the decision by the prosecutor of the world court to request arrest warrants for Israeli and Hamas leaders, a move supported by several European countries, including key ally France.

France, as well as Belgium and Slovenia, each said Monday they backed the move by International Criminal Court prosecutor Karim Khan, who accused Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, his Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, and three Hamas leaders — Yahya Sinwar, Mohammed Deif and Ismail Haniyeh — of war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Gaza Strip and Israel.

Their support exposes divisions in the West's approach to Israel and deepens the country's global isolation over its conduct in the war in Gaza.

Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz' meetings with his French counterpart and other senior officials could set the tone for how countries navigate the warrants — if they are eventually issued



— and whether they could pose a threat to Israeli leaders.

Israel still has the support of its top ally, the United States, as well as other Western countries that spoke out against the decision. But if the warrants are issued, they could complicate international travel for Netanyahu and Gallant. Israel itself is not a member of the court.

As the fallout from the prosecutor's decision spiralled, violence continued in the region, with an Israeli raid in the occupied West Bank killing at least seven Palestinians, including a local doctor, according to Palestinian health officials.

In a late-night statement Monday about the ICC prosecutor's

warrant requests, France said it "supports the International Criminal Court, its independence, and the fight against impunity in all situations."

"France has been warning for many months about the imperative of strict compliance with international humanitarian law and in particular about the unacceptable nature of civilian losses in the Gaza Strip and insufficient humanitarian access," the statement said.

France has a large Jewish community and has close trade and diplomatic ties with Israel, whose leaders frequently visit.

Belgian Foreign Minister Hadja Lahbib said Monday in a post on X that "crimes commit-

ted in Gaza must be prosecuted at the highest level, regardless of the perpetrators."

Netanyahu and other Israeli leaders condemned the prosecutor's move as disgraceful and antisemitic. US President Joe Biden also lambasted the prosecutor and supported Israel's right to defend itself against Hamas. The United Kingdom called the move "not helpful," saying the ICC does not have jurisdiction in the case, while Israeli ally Czech Republic called Khan's decision "appalling and completely unacceptable."

A panel of three judges will decide whether to issue the arrest warrants and allow a case to proceed. The judges typically take two months to make such decisions. Israel has faced rising criticism from even its closest allies over the war in Gaza, which is now in its eighth month.

More than 35,000 Palestinians have been killed according to the Health Ministry in Gaza, which does not distinguish between noncombatants and fighters in its count. The war has sparked a humanitarian crisis that has displaced much of the coastal

enclave's population and driven parts of it to starvation, which Khan said Israel used as a "method of warfare."

The war between began on October 7, following Hamas' deadly attack, when the militants from Gaza crossed into Israel and killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took 250 hostages. Khan accused Hamas' leaders of crimes against humanity, including extermination, murder and sexual violence.

Since the war began, violence has also flared in the occupied West Bank. On Tuesday, an Israeli raid into the Jenin refugee camp and the adjacent city of Jenin killed at least seven Palestinians, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry. The area has both long been a bastion of armed struggle against Israel.

The military said its forces struck militants during the operation while the Palestinian Islamic Jihad militant group said its fighters battled the Israeli forces. However, according to Wissam Abu Baker, the director of Jenin Governmental Hospital, the medical center's surgery specialist Ossayed Kamal Jabareen

was among the dead. He was killed on his way to work, Abu Baker said.

Jenin and the refugee camp, seen as a hotbed of militancy, have been frequent targets of Israeli raids, long before Israel's war with Hamas in Gaza broke out. Since the start of the war, nearly 500 Palestinians have been killed in West Bank fighting, many of them militants, as well as others throwing stones or explosives at troops. Others not involved in the confrontations have also been killed.

Israel says it is cracking down on soaring militancy in the territory, pointing to a spike in attacks by Palestinians on Israelis. It has arrested more than 3,000 Palestinians since the start of the war in Gaza.

Israel captured the West Bank in the 1967 Mideast war, along with east Jerusalem, which it later annexed, and the Gaza Strip, which it withdrew troops and settlers from in 2005. The Palestinians seek those territories as part of their future independent state, hopes for which have been dimmed since the war in Gaza erupted. (AP)

Australia and New Zealand begin evacuating nationals from unrest in New Caledonia

NEW CASTLE, May 21: Australia and New Zealand sent airplanes to New Caledonia on Tuesday to begin bringing home stranded citizens from the violence-wracked French South Pacific territory.

Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong said Australia had received clearance from French authorities for two flights to evacuate citizens from the archipelago, where indigenous people have long sought independence from France. Hours later, a Royal Australian Air Force C-130 Hercules touched down in Noumea, the capital. The plane can carry 124 passengers, according to the Defence Department.

"We continue to work on further flights," Wong wrote on the social media platform X on Tuesday. The Department of Foreign Affairs said 300 Australians were in New Caledonia. It did not immediately confirm whether the Australian-organised flights would also evacuate other stranded foreign nationals, believed to number in the thousands.

New Zealand's government also announced that it had sent a plane to New Caledonia to begin evacuating about 50 of its citizens.

"New Zealanders in New Caledonia have faced a challenging

few days - and bringing them home has been an urgent priority for the government," Foreign Affairs Minister Winston Peters said. "In cooperation with France and Australia, we are working on subsequent flights in coming days."

Noumea's international airport remains closed to commercial flights. Its reopening will be reassessed on Thursday.

At least six people have died and hundreds more have been injured since violence erupted last week in New Caledonia following controversial electoral reforms passed in Paris.

About 270 suspected rioters have been arrested as of Tuesday, and a 6 p.m.-6 a.m. curfew is in effect for the archipelago of about 270,000 people, which is a popular tourist destination with its idyllic beaches and climate.

France has sent in over a thousand security personnel, with hundreds more due to arrive Tuesday, to try to quell the unrest and restore control.

Armed clashes, looting, arson and other violence turned parts of Noumea into no-go zones. Columns of smoke billowed into the sky, hulks of burned cars littered roads, businesses and shops were ransacked and buildings became smoking ruins. (AP)

Germany's foreign minister visits Kyiv as Ukraine battles to hold off a Russian offensive

KYIV, May 21: Germany's foreign minister arrived in Kyiv on Tuesday in the latest public display of support for Ukraine by its Western partners, although deliveries of promised weapons and ammunition from NATO countries like Germany have been slow and have left Ukraine vulnerable to a recent Russian push along parts of the front line.

Annalena Baerbock renewed Berlin's calls for partners to send more air defense systems, as Russia pounds Ukraine with missiles, glide bombs and rockets. Germany is the second-biggest supplier of military aid to Ukraine after the United States.

Ukraine's depleted troops are trying to hold off a fierce Russian offensive along the eastern border in one of the most critical phases of the war, which is stretching into its third year. Germany recently pledged a third US-made Patriot battery for Ukraine, but Kyiv officials say they are still facing an alarming shortfall of air defenses against the Russian onslaught.

The Kremlin's forces have used their advantage in the skies to debilitate Ukraine's power grid, hoping to sap Ukrainian morale and disrupt its defense industry.

Baerbock, accompanied by Ukrainian Energy Minister Herman Halushchenko, toured a thermal power plant in central Ukraine that was heavily damaged on April 11. In the plant's scorched interior, workers of Centrenerg, a state company that operates the plant, were still scooping up rubble several weeks after it was hit.



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the Kremlin's forces are still focusing their efforts on the eastern Donetsk province and northeastern Kharkiv region, where explosive-laden Russian glide bombs are wreaking destruction on military and civilian areas.

"This brings us back again and again to the need for air defense - for additional defense systems that could significantly mitigate the difficulties for our warriors and the threat to our cities and communities," Zelenskyy said late Monday on social media.

Zelenskyy claimed Ukraine's forces are still in control of the contested areas, though Russia says it has captured a series of border villages. It was not possible to independently verify either side's battlefield claims.

Baerbock had planned to visit Kharkiv on Tuesday but the trip had to be called off for security reasons, German news agency dpa reported. Almost 11,000 people have been evacuated from Kharkiv border areas since Russia launched its offensive actions there

on May 10. A Russian overnight drone attack hit transport infrastructure in Kharkiv city, the regional capital, damaging over 25 trucks, buses, and other vehicles, regional Gov. Oleh Sychubov said Tuesday. Seven people were injured, he said.

Ukraine's general staff said the frequency of Russian attacks in Kharkiv slowed on Monday, though fighting continued.

Russian troops are also conducting reconnaissance and sabotage raids in Ukraine's northern Sumy and Chernihiv regions, shelling border settlements and laying more minefields, according to Dmytro Lykhovii, Ukraine's general staff spokesman. The front line is some 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) long.

Baerbock was due to meet with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba in Kyiv. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has been resisting appeals from Ukrainian officials to provide Taurus missiles, which are equipped with stealth technology and have a range of up to 500 kilometers (300 miles).

The German- and Swedish-made missiles would be able to reach targets deep in Russia from Ukrainian soil. But Berlin has balked at that prospect, saying that sending the missiles would bring a risk of it becoming directly involved in the war.

The restriction on not allowing Ukraine to fire at Russia has denied Kyiv the ability to strike at Russian troops and equipment massing for attacks on the other side of the border, a Washington-based think tank said. (AP)

Amnesty chief criticises military trial of civilians in Pak; urges govt to uphold international obligations

KARACHI, May 21: Military courts in Pakistan should not try more than 100 people for their alleged role in attacks on army installations during the riots that followed former premier Imran Khan's arrest on May 9 last year, Amnesty International chief has said, urging the government to uphold its international obligations. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights clearly state that civilians should not be tried by military courts, Amnesty International's Secretary General Dr Agnes Callamard said.

The Amnesty chief, who is on her first regional visit to South Asia, was on Tuesday quoted by Dawn News as saying that although military trials for civilians are a "no-no" under international law, "sadly it has happened throughout Pakistan's political history... [and] is not a novelty". Callamard, emphasising the principles of transparency, due process and judicial independence, urged Pakistan to uphold its international obligations and safeguard constitutional guarantees ensuring the right to a fair trial.

"The use of military courts is threatening the constitutionality of what's happening right now," she said. Regarding the ban on X (formerly Twitter) in Pakistan, Callamard said Amnesty was quite alarmed by the

shrinking space for freedom of expression in the country. Calling the ban "disproportionate, unnecessary and against international law", Callamard said it was particularly bad for individuals unable to access Virtual Private Networks (VPNs).

"Everything is being targeted, the means of expression and the people who are expressing themselves. This includes journalists."

"The space for free speech in Pakistan is shrinking," Callamard said, noting that criticism of state institutions should not constitute a crime under international law.

"Pakistan should do the opposite of what it is doing right now," she said. Her statement came amidst the decision by Pakistan to conduct the trial of more than 100 civilians for their alleged role in attacks on army installations during the riots that followed jailed former premier Imran Khan's arrest on May 9 last year.

According to the Pakistani Army, 102 accused have been arrested for their alleged involvement in the attacks on key military establishments, including the General Headquarters in Rawalpindi, the Corps Commander's House in Lahore, Pakistan Air Force Base Mianwali, and an office of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) in Faisalabad, have been handed over to the military authorities for trial. (PTI)

World leaders plan new agreement on AI at virtual summit co-hosted by South Korea, UK

SEOUL, May 21: World leaders are expected to adopt a new agreement on artificial intelligence when they gather virtually on Tuesday to discuss AI's potential risks but also ways to promote its benefits and innovation. The AI Seoul Summit is a follow-up to November's inaugural AI Safety Summit at Bletchley Park in the United Kingdom, where participating countries agreed to work together to contain the potentially "catastrophic" risks posed by galloping advances in AI.

The two-day meeting -- co-hosted by the South Korean and UK governments -- also comes as major tech companies like Meta, OpenAI and Google roll out the latest versions of their AI models.

On Tuesday evening, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak are to meet other world leaders, in-

dustry leaders and heads of international organisations for a virtual conference. The online summit will be followed by an in-person meeting of digital ministers, experts and others on Wednesday, according to organisers.

"It is just six months since world leaders met at Bletchley, but even in this short space of time, the landscape of AI has changed dramatically," Yoon and Sunak said in a joint article published in South Korea's JoongAng Ilbo newspaper and the UK's online news site on Monday. "The pace of change will only continue to accelerate, so our work must accelerate too." While

the UK meeting centred on AI safety issues, the agenda for this week's gathering was expanded to also include "innovation and inclusivity," Wang Yun-jong, a deputy director of national security in

South Korea, told reporters Monday. Wang said participants will subsequently "discuss not only the risks posed by AI but also its positive aspects and how it can contribute to humanity in a balanced manner."

The AI agreement will include the outcomes of discussions on safety, innovation and inclusivity, according to Park Sang-wook, sen-

ior presidential adviser for science and technology for President Yoon.

The leaders of the Group of Seven wealthy democracies -- the US, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and Britain -- were invited to the virtual summit, along with leaders of Australia and Singapore and representatives from the UN, the EU, OpenAI, Google, Meta, Amazon and Samsung, according to South Korea's presidential office.

China doesn't plan to participate in the virtual summit though it will send a representative to Wednesday's in-person meeting, the South Korean presidential office said.

In their article, Yoon and Sunak said they plan to ask companies to do more to show how they assess and respond to risks within their organisations. (AP)

Sri Lanka launches probe after 4 Lankan nationals with IS links arrested in India: Report

COLOMBO, May 21: Sri Lanka has launched an investigation to obtain information on four of its citizens with links to the banned Islamic State, who were arrested in India when on an alleged mission to carry out terror activities in the country, a media report said on Tuesday.

Acting on a tip-off, the Gujarat Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) on Sunday apprehended four Sri Lankan nationals at the Sardar Vallabhai Patel airport in Ahmedabad after they travelled from Colombo via Chennai.

The men travelled to India to carry out terror activities at the behest of the banned terror outfit Islamic State (IS) and are members of IS radicalised by a leader from Sri Lanka who is living in Pakistan, according to the Indian police.

Sri Lanka's state intelligence has asked for further information from its Indian counterpart to verify the background of the suspects and probe their links to the IS, the Daily Mirror newspaper reported.

Sri Lankan authorities will "immediately investigate" to take further action once the information is obtained, the newspaper said, citing sources.

Public Security Minister Tiran Alles and Inspector-General of Police (IGP) Deshabandu Tennakoon said they were taking these reports seriously and closely monitoring the developments.

Alles and Tennakoon said they would initiate discussions with Indian authorities to gather detailed information about the suspects and their activities, the report said.

"We are working in close coordination with our Indian counterparts to ensure that all necessary measures are taken to address any potential threat," Alles was quoted as saying.

The accused, Mohammad Nusrat (35), Mohammad Faarukh (35), Mohammad Nafran (27) and Mohammad Rasdeen (43), informed investigators that they were earlier associated with the banned Sri Lankan radical militant outfit, National Thowheeth Jamath (NTJ), and joined IS after getting in touch with Pakistani handler Abu Bakr Al Bagdadi, said Gujarat Director General of Police Vikas Sahay.

The ATS team 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, adding that the men were allegedly directed by their Pakistani handler to collect these.

"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.

The men were instructed to leave these flags at the site of their terror activities, he said.

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

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. (PTI)

Recent disruption in the railway network in Assam, alternative arrangements explored

Tripura govt working on arrangement for bringing commodities via Bangladesh: Minister

AGARTALA, May 21: The Tripura government has been working on an arrangement to strengthen the supply of fuel and essential goods via Bangladesh, a minister said.

The alternative arrangement to bring fuel and goods to Tripura will bypass rail links through Assam and the national highway connecting the state's capital Agartala with the neighbouring state, he said.

Notably, the northeastern state had faced a severe fuel crisis after the derailment of a goods train in Assam's Jatinga.

Disruption of traffic movement on the Assam-Agartala highway, considered a lifeline for Tripura, and through the rail links connecting the neighbouring state due to landslides during the monsoon season is common.

"In view of the recent disruption in the railway network in Assam's Jatinga, we are working



on alternative arrangements to ensure a seamless supply of fuel and goods via Bangladesh. The Agartala-Gangasagar (Bangladesh) rail tracks will be ready for goods transportation in the next six months to one year. Once the route is opened for goods movement, we can bring fuel and goods from Kolkata directly via Bangladesh," transport minister Sushanta Chowdhury said at a

press conference on Monday. Chief minister Manik Saha has recently said that the rail service between Agartala and Gangasagar will be made operational shortly. Chowdhury said the Indian Oil Corporation Ltd (IOCL) has been working to build a large fuel depot in Sepahijala district's Sekerkote for fuel storage. "We are hopeful that IOCL will complete the project in six months

to one year. If this facility is created, the state will have enough stock of fuel which will prove beneficial in case of any disruption in goods transportation," he said.

Chowdhury also said the state has built up a sufficient stock of fuel - 1,700 kl of petrol and 2,726 kl of diesel - in view of the upcoming monsoon season.

The minister said the Food and Civil Supplies Department has stored a sufficient quantity of essential food items such as rice, wheat, oil, sugar, salt and pulses.

"Under the Public Distribution System, the state has rice for 70 days, sugar for 28 days, pulses for 22 days and salt for 45 days. Besides, the stock of other food items, including edible oil, seems good. There should not be any shortage of essential items during the monsoon even if there is any disruption in the connectivity," he added. (PTI)

Nagaland bans unauthorised collection of money on highways, marketplaces

HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, May 21: The Nagaland government has banned illegal collections of money by unions, NGOs, associations, or any other private and community organisations by whatever name on state highways, national highways or marketplaces in the state, an official release said on Tuesday.

It said anyone indulging in any such illegal activities is liable to be prosecuted under Sections 188 and 384 of the IPC.

In an order, the state home department said the government issued instructions from time to time to prevent and curb unauthorised collection of money in the form of taxes, membership fees, subscriptions, contributions, donations, charges, levies, tolls, or any other form of collection of money



by any organisation on highways and marketplaces.

In this regard, the department referred to order no. CON-1/G/41/2011 dated May 31, 2012, which banned illegal collections of money by unions, NGOs, etc. and notification no. CON-1/G/41/2011 dated May 19, 2022, which banned

erection and operation of intra-state check gates and any unauthorised collection at inter-state check gates by any association, groups, or private individuals.

The department directed the respective district administration and police authorities for strict enforcement of the above orders.

International Cyber Olympiad 2024 for students of Classes 1 to 10

HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, May 21: The Nagaland Board of School Education (NBSE) on Tuesday informed that the International Cyber Olympiad (ICO) is organising the International Cyber Olympiad 2024 for students of Classes 1 to 10.

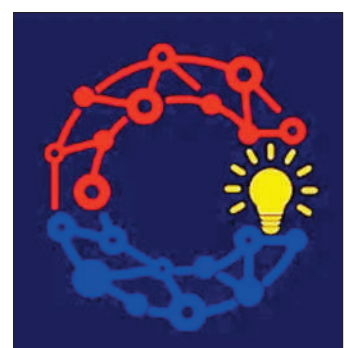
The ICO is a prestigious competition that tests students' knowledge and skills in computer science and also spreads awareness about the safe use of the internet and cyber security.

In a notification, the NBSE says it is a great opportunity for students to showcase their talent, compete with their peers on a global level and receive recognition for their achievements, the NBSE said in a notification.

The Cyber Olympiad is based on the national curriculum framework for school education developed by the NCERT. All the questions given in the question paper will be of multiple choice questions (MCQs).

The notification said the available exam dates for Round I (school level) for classes 1 to 10 are Aug/Sept/Oct/Nov and the last date for registration is 15 days before the exam date.

For Round II (international level) for Classes 3 to 10, the date



and examination centre will be notified at the appropriate time, it said.

The mock test will be held in July for which a student has to register before June 30.

The details of the students participating in the ICO 2024 must reach the headquarters of the Cyber Olympiad Foundation through email: info@cyberolympiad.org or WhatsApp: +919911554575 or speed post 15 days before the date of examination.

For more details, the schools may visit the website: <http://www.cyberolympiad.org/ico>

The board asked all heads of institutions to share this information with the students and encourage them to participate in the ICO 2024 competition.

CAA issue ignites war of words between Pradyot & Sudip Barman



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 21: The ongoing debate over the citizenship amendment act (CAA) has ignited a new war of words between Pradyot Debbarma, founder of Tipra Motha party, and Sudip Roy Barman, a Congress MLA and former BJP minister.

The dispute centres on the implementation of CAA in the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous

District Council (TTAADC). In a heated audio message released on Tuesday (May 21), Pradyot accused the Congress party of contributing to the diminishing status of Tripura's indigenous population.

His comments were a direct response to allegations by Sudip Roy Barman, who criticized Tipra Motha for its perceived silence on the CAA issue after forming an al-

liance with the BJP. Pradyot countered by highlighting Sudip's political inconsistency. He stated Sudip's numerous party switches—from Congress to Trinamool Congress (TMC), then to BJP, before re-joining Congress when his political ambitions were unmet.

"This man always does politics for himself," Pradyot asserted. Addressing Sudip's accusations about Tipra Motha's stance on CAA, Pradyot clarified his continued involvement in the Supreme Court case against the Act. He reaffirmed his commitment to preventing the implementation of CAA within the TTAADC and criticized Sudip for neglecting the broader security concerns of indigenous people living outside the ADC areas.

Pradyot stressed that his party's agreement was with the Government of India, not just the BJP, and that his primary focus remains on safeguarding the interests of the indigenous community.

Missing junior engineer found dead in Umiam River

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 21: The body of Ron Cooper Massar, a 54-year-old resident of Umroi Jaiwarpeng in Ri Bhoi district of Meghalaya, was discovered floating in the Umiam River at Umroi Nongrah on Tuesday (May 21).

Massar had been reported missing since early Monday (May 20) morning when he left his home for a jog around 4:00 AM, according to local police.

While the exact cause of death remains unconfirmed, initial suspicions point to drowning.

The Meghalaya police have stated that an investigation is ongoing to determine the circumstances surrounding his death.

Tripura Congress adivasi unit appeals to state govt to halt CAA implementation

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 21: The Tripura Pradesh Congress Adivasi Committee, representing the indigenous faction of the Tripura unit of the Congress party, met with state chief secretary Jitendra Kumar Sinha, urging him to prevent the implementation of the citizenship amendment act (CAA) in Tripura.

The Adivasi Committee of the Congress party stressed on the need to safeguard the interests of the indigenous population of Tripura.

In a detailed memorandum, the committee highlighted the historical context of Tripura, a state that shares borders with Bangladesh on three sides.

They emphasized that Tripura, once a princely state with a tribal majority, has seen its indigenous population dwindle to a minority due to continuous immigration from erstwhile East Pakistan, now Bangladesh.

"Being a minority in one's own

land creates a profound sense of deprivation among Tripura's indigenous people," the memorandum stated.

Prior to the CAA's passage in 2019, the cut-off year for obtaining Indian citizenship was 1971. Thus, any foreigner entering Tripura from Bangladesh after 1971 was ineligible for Indian citizenship, providing a sense of security to the indigenous population that further infiltration would not exacerbate their minority status."

The Committee expressed concern that the CAA, which extends the cut-off year to December 31, 2014, would allow foreigners from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan who entered India by that date to obtain citizenship if they faced religious persecution.

"This Act could open the floodgates, potentially altering Tripura's demographic composition," the memorandum stated.

"Although Section 6B of the CAA exempts areas under the 6th

Schedule of the Constitution, this is insufficient protection, as foreigners could settle in non-Autonomous District Council (ADC) areas first. Once they acquire citizenship, they could freely move to any part of Tripura, including the TTAADC. An influx of foreigners would impose additional economic and social burdens on the state's population."

The Committee concluded by urging the Tripura chief secretary to take decisive action to prevent the CAA's implementation in Tripura, thereby protecting the indigenous community and the broader state population.

"We trust you will take appropriate steps to ensure the CAA 2019 is not implemented in Tripura," they added.

The appeal underscores the ongoing concerns among Tripura's indigenous population regarding the potential demographic and socio-economic impacts of the CAA, advocating for measures to preserve their rights and cultural heritage.

Highway extortion won't be tolerated: M'laya new DGP

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 21: Meghalaya's newly appointed DGP, Idashisha Nongrang said that the police department will tackle the issue of alleged extortion faced by truck drivers on National Highways.

She said that there would be a zero-tolerance policy and the use of "extreme measures" would be taken when necessary.

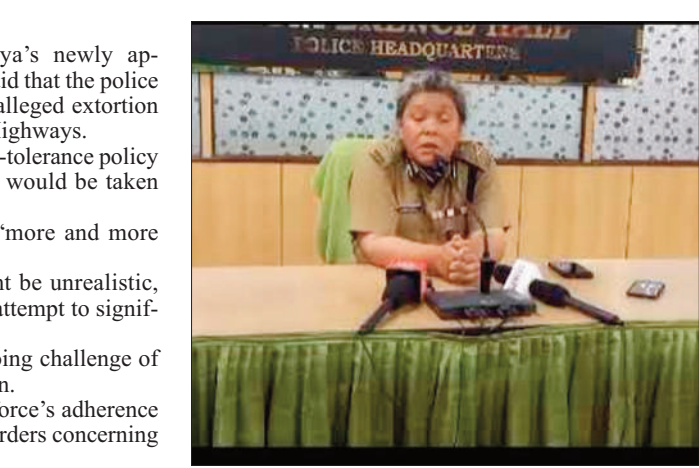
Nongrang stated it has become "more and more open in the last few years."

While complete eradication might be unrealistic, she said that her department would attempt to significantly reduce its frequency.

The DGP also addressed the ongoing challenge of illegal coal mining and transportation.

Nongrang highlighted the police force's adherence to government directives and court orders concerning environmental protection.

Traffic congestion in Shillong was another focus. Nongrang stressed the need for a comprehensive so-



lution, acknowledging the limitations of police intervention alone.

9,662 people living with HIV in three Nagaland districts

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 21: Nodal Officer of Integrated Health Campaign, Nagaland State AIDS Control Society (NSACS) and deputy director of Sexually transmitted infections, Dr Zaiwang said on Tuesday that districts of Dimapur, Chumoukedima, and Niuland have an estimated 9,662 people living with HIV. However, the actual number of PLHIVs could be significantly



higher due to underreporting and social stigma. He was speaking during the launch of Integrated Health Campaign in Dimapur.

Comparing to India's HIV prevalence rate of 0.22 percent, the officer noted that Nagaland's rate is alarmingly higher at 1.61 percent, making it second highest in the country after Mizoram. Dr Zaiwang reported that out of the estimated 9,662 PLHIV, only 3,034 are receiving antiretroviral therapy, ART as of March 2024. This leaves 6,628 individuals without

treatment, highlighting urgent need for increased outreach and support services.

The campaign data also detailed targeted interventions for high-risk groups, including injecting drug users, female injecting drug users, men who have sex with men, transgender individuals, female sex workers, truckers, and migrants. EAC Dimapur Imlijungla urged various stakeholders to work

together to ensure that these programs are effective and sustainable. Imlijungla stressed on early screening and prevention, adding that health issues among pregnant women was high. From April 2023 to March 2024, a total of 48 thousand 777 individuals were tested for HIV across Nagaland, with 960 testing positive. Among these, 919 were general clients, and 41 were antenatal care clients, indicating a significant number of HIV cases among pregnant women.

AMBA observes World Bee Day 2024

Bees are essential for pollinating one-third of the food we consume

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 21: The All Manipur Beekeepers' Association (AMBA) observed World Bee Day 2024 recently, underscoring the theme "Bee Engaged with Youth."

The event, held at AMBA's office in Khundrakpam Awang Leikai Mamang Ching, celebrated the vital role of bees in our ecosystem and stressed the importance of involving young people in beekeeping and pollinator conservation.

Chief guest Maibam Rina Devi, social activist from Khundrakpam, and guests of honour including president Apunba Imagi Machasing (AIMS), Mayanglambam Kheleन्द्रo Singh, organic expert and agriculturist Thokchom Biren, Apiary Warrior from New Tusom, Ukhrul District, Worthing Horam, and Secretary of the Rural Area Development Organisation (RADO), Saikhom Premjit, graced the occasion. The programme was presided over by a National Awardee in Beekeeping and Secretary of AMBA, who highlighted the significance of bees and the



challenges they face. The event commenced with a welcome address by W. Dinamani, Treasurer of AMBA. The keynote address was delivered by Dr. Atom Sunil Singh, Secretary of AMBA, who discussed the history and importance of beekeeping, emphasizing that bees are essential for pollinating one-third of the food we consume and supporting biodiversity and agriculture.

Despite their importance, bees face challenges such as habitat loss, climate change, pesticides, and diseases. The theme for World Bee Day 2024, "Bee Engaged with Youth," underscores the need to involve young people in beekeeping and conservation efforts to ensure the future of these vital pollinators.

Chief guest Maibam Rina Devi spoke passionately about the need for community support in conser-

vation efforts and the critical role bees play in our ecosystem. President Apunba Imagi Machasing (AIMS), Mayanglambam Kheleन्द्रo Singh, highlighted the economic importance of bees, noting that they are vital for the pollination of numerous crops essential for human diets. Thokchom Biren emphasised innovative and sustainable practices in beekeeping, sharing insights on organic farming techniques and habitat restoration projects. Worthing Horam focused on the importance of beekeeping and his passion for nature. Saikhom Premjit stressed the importance of community engagement and education in fostering a culture of conservation and stewardship. Dr. Singh also highlighted the ongoing conflict between the Meitei and Kuki communities, which has severely impacted bee farmers, leading to loss of life, displacement, and damage to property, including bee farms. AMBA has been actively working to address these challenges, providing support to affected beekeepers.

Chief guest Maibam Rina Devi spoke passionately about the need for community support in conser-

Sikkim forms committee to probe complaints of overcharging by tour operators

HT Bureau
GANGTOK, May 21: The Sikkim government has formed a committee to investigate complaints of exorbitant rates for taxis and travel permits being charged by tour operators, officials said on Tuesday.

The three-member committee was formed after the Union Tourism Ministry sent a strong letter to the state government, citing complaints registered in the Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS) regarding steep rates for taxis and travel permits in Sikkim, they said.

"The three-member committee will be headed by an additional secretary," Tourism and Civil Aviation Department Principal Secretary CS Rao said. The committee has been asked to submit its report within 15 days, he said. Strict action will be taken against any tour operator if it is found overcharging tourists, he added. (PTI)

Elected representatives in Meghalaya has criminal cases pending

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 21: As many as six criminal cases are currently pending against elected representatives in Meghalaya. This was revealed in a status report submitted to the Meghalaya high court.

The Meghalaya high court reviewed the report during a hearing on Monday (May 20), which detailed the progress of these cases as of May 01, 2024. The report indicates that six cases are ongoing.

Four of these cases are being heard by the district & sessions judge in East Khasi Hills district in Shillong, Meghalaya.

One case is before the district & sessions judge in West Jaintia Hills district in Jowai, and another is in the court of the district & sessions judge in West Garo Hills district in Tura, Meghalaya.

"The report indicates that currently there are six pending cases, of which four are before the court of the district & sessions judge, East Khasi Hills district, Shillong, one in the court of the district & sessions judge, West Jaintia Hills district, Jowai, and one in the court of the district & sessions judge, West Garo Hills district, Tura," the Meghalaya high court noted in its order. The court also mentioned that individual status reports have been furnished by the respective judges overseeing these cases.

The next hearing on this matter is scheduled for June 11.

Nagaland to participate in Miss Universe India from this year

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 21: For the very first time, Nagaland will be participating in Miss Universe India. The Beauty and Aesthetic Society of Nagaland, BASN will be officially launching Miss Universe Nagaland India on the day of the audition which is slated on July 2 at Niathi Resort in Chümoukedima. Addressing media persons in Kohima on Tuesday, BASN president Mele Pucho informed that BASN has obtained franchise of Miss Universe Nagaland under Gلمانand Entertainment Pvt Ltd. He exuded happiness that Nagaland will be sending a candidate to represent the state for Miss Universe pageant from this year. From next year, winner of Miss Nagaland will directly represent the state. The BASN president who is also state director of Miss Universe India, said this would be a once a life time opportunity as only this year there will be an open audition and invited interested candidates to participate in the pageant.

NDA has bagged 310 seats after five phases of LS polls: Amit Shah

SAMBALPUR/KEONJHAR (ODISHA), May 21: Claiming that the NDA has already bagged 310 seats after the completion of five phases of the Lok Sabha polls, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday urged the people of Odisha to free the state from "babu-raj" and allow the BJP to form government at the Centre and also in the state.

Addressing two election rallies in Sambalpur where the BJP has fielded Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, Shah said this time lotus, the party's symbol, will bloom in Odisha.

"After the fifth phase of polls, the NDA has already bagged 310 seats. We will secure 400 plus seats after the sixth and seventh rounds of polls," Shah claimed.

Alleging that Odisha has been ruled by a "handful of officers", Shah said this election will end the ongoing "babu raj" in the state. He alleged that the tribals of Keonjhar get no benefit even though most of the mines and mineral reserves of the country are located in Keonjhar district.

Claiming that Modi has ensured that there is no terrorism across the country, the Union Home minister said: "PoK (Pakistan occupied Kashmir) was with India and it would remain with us. India would take PoK." He criticised the Congress and its leaders who are reportedly frightened over Pakistan possessing an atom bomb. "Modi has given a befitting reply to Pakistan's terror activities and he does not fear such threat of nuclear bomb," Shah said.

Coming down heavily on the previous Congress government, Shah said: "Congress has done nothing for tribals. Former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had formed a separate ministry for tribal affairs while Narendra Modi as the PM has worked to eliminate Naxalism in Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana."

Shah said PM Modi has constituted DMF (district mineral foundation) and given crores of rupees for the development of the tribal region.

"The budgetary allocation for tribal affairs has been enhanced to Rs 1.25 lakh crore during Modi government from Rs 25,000 crore given during the previous

UPA regime," Shah said, adding that the BJP government has set up 740 Ekalabya Schools where one lakh students have been studying. He said about 40,000 teachers were appointed in these schools.

Shah said kendu leaf pluckers will get bonus and proper price on their minor forest produce. He also announced setting up a 500-bed hospital in Keonjhar and also another 500-bed hospital and medical college in Sambalpur. He said PF (provident fund) provision will be made for Kendu leaf workers.

Shah also accused the BJD government of insulting Odisha's pride, language, culture and tradition.

"BJP will give a young, energetic, hardworking and dynamic Odia 'Bhumiputra' (son of the soil) as chief minister if voted to power in the state," he told the gathering. He said the new BJP government will provide jobs to two lakh people in a span of one-and-a-half-year. Shah said: "Naveen Babu is forcing 'Babu shahi' (officers rule) on Odisha, and is assaulting the pride and dignity of the Odia people. He is throttling the culture and pride of the state."

Shah urged the people to elect a BJP government in the state to ensure speedy development and preservation of their rich culture. "A Bhumiputra will rule the land of 'Utkala Bhumi' and not a Tamil babu if people vote for BJP," he said.

Alleging that the BJD government wants to convert the Jagannath temple to a commercial centre, Shah said that the mutts and temples have been "destroyed" in Puri and all four gates of the Jagannath temple are yet to be opened for the public.

"Even a conspiracy was hatched to halt the world-famous Rath Yatra of Lord Jagannath," Shah alleged. He also alleged that Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik is leaving no stone unturned to "loot mineral resources" of the state.

He said though Odisha has rich mineral resources, the state doesn't have a chief minister who can protect the state's resources. "The BJD government has also neglected western Odisha. BJP is committed for equal development of all parts of the state," the Home minister said. (PTI)

'This election of 2024 will decide the direction in which the Triveni of India's future will flow' SP, Cong more concerned about their vote bank than Kumbh: Modi in Prayagraj



PRAYAGRAJ (UP), May 21: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday called the opposition Congress and the Samajwadi Party "anti-development", and said both parties have competed in the appeasement of their vote bank.

"What used to happen (at Kumbh) during the time of SP-Congress? There used to be stampedes. People used to die... SP-Congress were more concerned about their vote bank than Kumbh," he said.

"They were afraid that if they were seen doing too much for Kumbh, their vote bank might get offended. There was a competition of appeasement between SP and Congress," Modi

said, addressing a rally in the region known for the Kumbh Mela and the 'Triveni Sangam'.

"This election of 2024 will decide the direction in which the Triveni of India's future will flow," the Prime Minister added.

Drawing a parallel between the spirit of Allahabad and that of today's India, he said, "Big countries tell me that they also need India's digital technology. India is raising its voice in the world. When India hosts the G20, the whole world is surprised. This is the nature of Prayagraj, people here are neither subdued by anyone nor do they live in fear of anyone."

The prime minister alleged that the members

of the opposition INDIA bloc cannot digest the praise the country is getting abroad.

"The SP, Congress and INDI alliance members cannot digest the praise of India. The Congress' 'shahzade' goes abroad to abuse India. On what agenda are these INDI alliance members fighting the elections? Their agenda is to bring back Article 370 in Kashmir, cancel CAA and repeal the laws brought against corruption," he added.

"Modi's mantra is development as well as conservation of heritage. A grand Ram temple has been built in Ayodhya, and now Shringverpur of Nishadraj will be developed. Will the SP-Congress ever do this? The shehzade of SP-Congress cannot see anything beyond their families," Modi said.

"The people of Prayagraj will never forgive those who insult Lord Shri Ram. I salute this holy land of Triveni," Modi said.

The prime minister claimed that during the previous SP government in Uttar Pradesh, the mafia used to occupy the lands of the poor.

Now, the BJP government demolishes their illegal palaces and builds houses for the poor, he said.

The prime minister also alleged that the previous SP government used to give jobs on the basis of caste and in exchange for bribes.

Modi was addressing the rally in Prayagraj to seek votes for BJP candidate Neeraj Tripathi.

The main contest in Allahabad is between Neeraj Tripathi, the son of former West Bengal governor and speaker of Uttar Pradesh Assembly Keshari Nath Tripathi, and Ujjwal Ram Singh, the son of former Samajwadi Party leader and Rajya Sabha MP Reoti Raman Singh. (PTI)

INDIA bloc inching closer to victory with each poll phase: CM Kejriwal

NEW DELHI, May 21: Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday accused Union Home Minister Amit Shah of referring to the people of Delhi as "Pakistanis" and asserted that they are his family and should not be abused.

Addressing a virtual press conference, Kejriwal said with the completion of each phase of the Lok Sabha polls, it is becoming clearer that the Narendra Modi government is on its way out and the INDIA bloc is coming to power on June 4. He said the INDIA bloc will give a stable government to the country.

On Monday, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Uttar Pradesh Yogi Adityanath addressed public meetings in South Delhi and East Delhi parliamentary constituencies respectively. Kejriwal alleged the number of people who attended Amit Shah's rally was less than 500.

"He said the supporters of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) are Pakistanis. I want to ask him that the people of Delhi have formed the government by giving us 62 seats (and) 56 per cent vote share. Are the people of Delhi Pakistanis?"

"The people of Punjab have formed the gov-

ernment by giving us 92 out of 117 seats. Are the people of Punjab Pakistanis? The people of Gujarat gave us 14 per cent votes. Are the people of Gujarat also Pakistanis? The people of Goa gave us love (and) trust. Are the people of Goa also Pakistanis?" Kejriwal questioned.

He also said the AAP's panch, sarpanch, municipal mayors and councillors were elected in many parts of the country in the panchayat and municipal elections.

"Are all the people of this country Pakistanis? What are you saying?" said the Delhi chief minister. Kejriwal's reaction came in response to a statement made by Shah during his rally a day earlier while seeking votes for his party's candidate in the South Delhi constituency, Ramvir Singh Bidhuri.

"Kejriwal and Rahul (Gandhi) have no support in India. Their supporters are in Pakistan," the home minister had said.

The AAP national convener said, "The Prime Minister has chosen you as his successor. You have become so arrogant about this that you started abusing people (and) threatening them."

Kejriwal, who is out on interim bail till June 1, has been alleging that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will retire next year after turning 75 and will appoint Shah as the prime minister if the NDA comes to power for the third time.

"You have not even become the PM yet and you have become so arrogant. For your information, let me tell you that you are not becoming the PM because the people are not forming the BJP government on June 4. The BJP is leaving (losing)."

"Control your ego a little and do not abuse the public. Your enmity is with me (so) you can abuse me. But if you abuse the people of the country, no one is going to tolerate it," said Kejriwal. Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva said Kejriwal is raising question over Union minister Amit Shah's rally.

"Thousands gathered to listen to the home minister. Kejriwal's character is to lie. We are just asking him to break his silence over the Swati Malwani assault case. He should speak at least once for the honour of Malwani who is a Rajya Sabha MP of his party," he said. (PTI)

Modi 'Jhoothon Ka Sardar': Congress chief Kharge at Haryana rally

JAGADHARI (HARYANA), May 21: Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Tuesday called Prime Minister Narendra Modi 'Jhoothon Ka Sardar' and accused him of lying about Congress's manifesto to mislead the public.

Addressing his first rally in Haryana here in Yamunanagar district, Kharge slammed Modi for his saying that the Congress was planning to redistribute wealth and take away women's mangalsutras.

"If Congress comes to power, it will snatch away all your properties. After getting X-ray done, where is mangalsutra, where is gold, silver and will take it out, give it to others," he said Modi said in his rallies.

"If you have 2 acres, one acre will be given to others, if you have two buffaloes, one will be given to Muslims. He (Modi) said this ... These are not our words," Kharge said in the district's Jagadhari city.

"If a PM sitting in such a position says these things, then what should we say? Should such people be given votes again?" he asked the gathering. "He is a 'jhoothon ka sardar.'"

Congress candidate from Ambala Lok Sabha seat Varun Chaudhary and AAP's Kurukshetra candidate Sushil Gupta were also present at the rally.

Congress is contesting nine seats, while the Aam Aadmi Party, its partner in the INDIA bloc, is contesting the Kurukshetra seat for the May 25 polls.

Kharge said the alliance will bring a caste census, and it will do it for the good of the public, not to snatch anyone's property.

He said the Congress is fighting against the ideology of RSS - a Hindu right body and the ideological parent of the BJP.

"You are snatching the Constitution and we are fighting against it. You want to end democracy

and we are fighting it," Kharge said.

The Congress president said the current fight is between the people and Modi, and the people and the BJP. "Because, people are fed up with them."

Kharge also sought BJP's response on its promise of 2 crore jobs each year, Rs 15 lakh in everyone's bank account, and doubling of farmers' income.

"Did you get it?" he asked the gathering. "...Did he give (jobs)... How can a PM tell such a lie?"

Kharge from the dias also paid tribute to former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi on his death anniversary.

He said it was under the leadership of Rajiv Gandhi that the Congress got the biggest mandate with 414 seats in 1984.

He hailed him for framing 11 "important" policies, including the anti-defection law, laying the foundation of communication, IT and computerisation.

"Today women are sarpanches, Dalits are sarpanches, OBC are sarpanches," it is all because of the Congress, he said.

He said it was Rajiv Gandhi, at whose initiative, the voting age was reduced from 21 to 18.

"We do not lie like Modi. We have shown what work we have done."

"We did everything, that is why Modi ji you became the Prime Minister of the country," he said and listed such projects as Bhakra dam, and factories like HMT, HAL, BEL set up under the Congress.

"You (Modi) say the country is secure because of you. Tum to pahad khod ke chuha nikalne wale log hai," Kharge said, adding, it was former prime minister Indira Gandhi who divided Pakistan into two and freed Bangladesh.

"You always say I did this and I did that. What Indira Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi did for the nation, that is called work," he said.

Kharge also took exception to Modi likening Congress's manifesto to a "Muslim League manifesto" and said, "He must read it. If he cannot read it properly, we can send one person from the Congress office to make you understand."

Kharge, holding a copy of the Constitution in his hands, said: "This fight is to save the Constitution and democracy in the country." (PTI)



Anger against Art 370 abrogation also a reason behind high voter turnout in Baramulla: Omar



SRINAGAR, May 21: National Conference leader Omar Abdullah said on Tuesday that the high voter turnout in the Baramulla Lok Sabha constituency in Jammu and Kashmir was due to the courage shown by the people to express themselves through their votes.

Abdullah, who is a candidate for the Baramulla Lok Sabha seat, did not agree with the claims made by the BJP top brass that the record turnout was due to abrogation of Article 370 by the Centre in 2019.

"We know how good the situation is. What happened in Shopian and Pahalgam two days earlier tells us how good the situa-

tion is.

"People showed courage to use their right to vote. The Centre does not get any credit for it. If they want to link it to Article 370 (abrogation), they will have to answer why the turnout was higher in the elections held before 1990," the NC vice president told reporters at NC headquarters here.

Asked if the high voter turnout was due to the anger of the people against abrogation of Article 370, the former chief minister said it was "also a reason".

The Baramulla Lok Sabha constituency, which went to polls on Monday, recorded an all-time high voter turnout of 59 per cent.

"The second reason is that they are not hearing at any level. The present dispensation is ruled like undisputed kings.

"Who gets the permission to enter the government offices today? And even if one manages to enter, whose issues get redressed?" he asked.

All decisions are announced like royal decrees and the people are anxious. There are many reasons but the good thing is that they have used their vote as, in a democracy, it is the only way to express yourself, Abdullah added. (PTI)

1 killed, 3 injured in post-poll violence in Bihar's Saran

SARAN (BIHAR), May 21: One person was killed and three others injured in post-poll violence in Bihar's Saran district on Tuesday morning, police said. The incident happened in the Bada Telma area near Bhikhari Thakur Chowk, they said.

An altercation broke out between two groups, said to be supporters of the BJP and RJD, over allegations of irregularities during polling that happened on Monday in the area, amid which shots were fired.

One person was killed on the spot, and three others were injured, a police officer said.

The deceased was identified as Chandan Yadav (25), he added.

"The injured persons were admitted to the nearest hospital. Later, two of them were sent to Patna for better treatment," Superintendent of Police Gaurav Mangla said.

"A case has been registered and an investigation is underway. Three persons have been arrested in connection with today's incident," he said.

Internet was also suspended in the district to prevent a flare-up, he added.

RJD president Lalu Prasad's daughter Rohini Acharya was the Mahagathbandhan candidate in Saran against BJP MP Rajiv Pratap Rudy. (PTI)

Over 30 flamingos killed after being hit by aircraft in Mumbai; environment activists seek probe

MUMBAI, May 21: More than 30 flamingos were killed after allegedly being hit by an aircraft in Mumbai, police said on Tuesday, as environmental activists demanded a probe into it by the DGCA and claimed urban planners had ignored warnings about such disasters.

So far, carcasses of 32 flamingos have been recovered from Ghatkopar area, the police said.

The birds were hit by the aircraft before it landed here on Monday night, a police official said.

Various calls were received from people about the dead birds spotted at some places in Ghatkopar, said Pawan Sharma, founder of the Resqink Association for Wildlife Welfare (RAWW) and honorary wildlife warden with the forest department.

The forest department's mangrove cell along with the RAWW teams during a search operation found 29 dead flamingos in the area on Monday night, he said.

Three more carcasses were found dead on Tuesday, he said.

Stray dogs scavenged a few birds after they fell on the ground and some of the animal body parts were also spotted by locals, Sharma said.

The carcasses were sent for an autopsy and would later be disposed of as per the protocols, he said.

The Wildlife Conflict Mitigation and Management Plan needs to be reviewed and revised by the airport authorities based on proper evaluation of the situation in coordination with the forest department and wildlife experts so that such incidents can be avoided in future, RAWW secretary and zoologist Chintmay Joshi said.

NatConnect Foundation director B N Kumar in a release said he has sent an email to the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), and sought a high-level probe to ascertain how the Emirates aircraft hit the birds and whether the pilot could not notice the flock on his radar.

"We are sad to say that it was a disaster waiting to happen," said the foundation working for environmental causes.



"Had any passenger been affected due to the bird hit, it would have made global headlines, but the death of 40 flamingos does not seem to bother the authorities, urban planners in particular," Kumar said.

The flamingos were apparently on their return from Mumbai to Gujarat and their death is a warning to human beings of the impending disasters, Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) researcher Mrugank Prabhu said.

Nearly a lakh flamingos keep flying to the Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary,

which is a Ramsar site, NatConnect said.

The NGO, which along with other environment-focused organisations has been conducting a series of campaigns to save Mumbai's biodiversity, wetlands and mangroves, cautioned that the upcoming international airport in neighbouring Navi Mumbai could also be prone to such incidents.

This is because the wetlands and the flamingo abodes in Navi Mumbai are being systematically buried despite warnings from organisations such as BNHS, it said in the release.

The birds, if they miss their traditional destinations, could land at the Navi Mumbai airport site which has mudflats along the Panel Creek, it said.

As part of the wildlife mitigation measures for the Atal Setu, the state government had planned bird sanctuaries at Sewri-Mahul, NRI-TS Chankaya and Panje-Dongari wetlands and other places, the release claimed.

"The Atal Setu is operational but we have not heard anything about protect-

ing the wetlands," Kumar said.

NatConnect said the upcoming Navi Mumbai airport has committed in its Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) report that the wetlands as outlined by BNHS would be preserved.

The EIA, submitted for renewal of the environmental clearance (EC) for the Navi Mumbai airport, has also said that a golf course, planned on the NRI wetlands, was cancelled.

"This gave us the hope that wetlands would be preserved, yet the systematic destruction of water bodies is on," NatConnect said.

These birds have a right to their habitats, of which the Mumbai Creek and its satellite wetlands are a crucial cog in the wheel, Kharghar-based activist Nareschandra Singh said.

"We need to carefully maintain the ecological and environmental balance at and around these habitats, otherwise expect such incidents," Singh said.

Sandip Sareen of the Navi Mumbai Environmental Preservation Society said the incident is heart-wrenching. (PTI)

Lost 10 members of my family in this tragedy, can never forget it: Chhattisgarh accident survivor

KAWARDHA, May 21: A 57-year-old man, who survived the accident in Chhattisgarh's Kabirdham that claimed 19 lives including that of his wife, said he managed to jump out of the mini goods carrier in time thinking the driver would gain control over it, but as the latter also leapt out of the vehicle it led to the tragedy.

Recounting the horrifying incident that occurred on Monday afternoon, Jodhiram Dhurve said he will never be able to forget the accident as he has lost 10 members of his family.

A total of 15 women, one man and three girls, all tribals, were killed and three others injured when the mini goods vehicle (a pick-up van) ferrying a group of tendu leaves collectors plunged into a valley on Banjari Ghat under Kukdur police station area.

Of the deceased, 17 were residents of Semarha village, two others were from nearby villages.

Talking to PTI on Tuesday in Semarha, Dhurve said, "We had been using the same vehicle for the last three days, but nobody knew the fate would be otherwise on Monday."

"Like any other day, around 36 people left from Semarha at around 4 am on Monday in the mini goods vehicle to pluck tendu leaves in Bahpani area, around 25 km away. After completing the work, they gathered near the goods vehicle at around 12.30 pm and had our lunch



and then left for Semarha around 1.20 pm," he said.

"The bundles of tendu leaves were kept on the cargo bed on the rear side of the goods vehicle and women were sitting over the bundles. I was sitting next to the driver in his cabin. When the vehicle was descending in Banjari Ghat, the driver asked people to jump off from the moving vehicle citing that brakes had failed and he was not able to stop it," Dhurve said.

"I then told the driver to turn the vehicle toward the rock as it will help in stopping the vehicle. I shouted to the occupants to jump off the vehicle following which some of the men did so. After the person sitting beside me jumped off

the vehicle, I also did the same," he said.

He said they thought the driver would gain control over the vehicle, but he also jumped out leaving the steering unattended following which the vehicle plunged around 40 feet deep into the valley and crashed onto the road below the hill.

"We heard screams and cries and those who had managed to jump out of the vehicle rushed towards them. My wife and other women were lying on the road. We offered them water to drink," he said.

Dhurve said he lifted his wife, Dhanbai (52), with the help of others and brought her under a tree. Two anganwadi workers arrived there and two people who were passing by called an ambulance. Forty-five

minutes after the accident, an ambulance arrived at the place, he said.

"My wife had suffered injuries on her head, but was conscious and talking to me," he said, adding that the ambulance took the injured persons, including his wife, to Kukdur hospital.

"I informed my elder son, who was in the village, about the incident over the phone, following which he reached the hospital. After her preliminary treatment there, when my wife was being shifted to Kabirdham district hospital in Kawardha, she succumbed on the way," he added.

Dhurve said he lost 10 members of his family in the tragedy and can never forget the incident.

Of the 17 deceased from Semarha, 10 belonged to one family and four to another family, while three others from another single family.

Pyari Bai God (40), her daughter Sonam (16), Shanti Bai God (35), her daughter Kiran (15) and Leela Bai (35) and her daughter Bharti (16), all natives of Semarha, are among the deceased.

While final rites of 17 deceased were performed on Tuesday in Semarha, the bodies of two others were taken to Singhari.

Heart-wrenching scenes were witnessed on Wednesday morning at Semarha as mortal remains of the deceased were taken for final rites on tractor-trolleys. (PTI)

Antarctica demands highest commitment to protection, study: Kiren Rijiju at meet



KOCHI, May 21: India on Tuesday made a strong pitch for regulated tourism in Antarctica saying it was a front-burner issue as the number of tourists visiting the icy continent has increased significantly over the past few years.

"This icy expanse is not just a frozen desert; it is a dynamic, living laboratory that demands our highest commitment to protection and study," Earth Sciences Minister Kiren Rijiju said at the inauguration of the 46th Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM) here.

Considered as the Parliament for Antarctica, the ATCM is the highest forum for governing the

icy continent with the participation of 56 countries, 29 of whom enjoy the consultative status, which comes with decision making powers. The ATCM takes all decisions by consensus.

A separate working group on developing a framework for regulating tourism in Antarctica has been set up at the ATCM that got underway here.

At the outset, the ATCM elected former deputy national security adviser Pankaj Saran as the chairman for the 10-day deliberations that are scheduled to conclude on May 30.

The 26th meeting of the Committee for Environment Protection is

also being held during this period.

Rijiju also announced India's plans to build a new research station Maitri-II to strengthen capabilities to conduct vital research, particularly in connection with the instability of the East Antarctic Ice Sheet.

Voicing concern over the increase in the number of tourists in Antarctica, M Ravichandran, Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences, said it was the collective resolve of the ATCM to ensure that all activities, including research and tourism, were conducted in a manner that preserve its ecological integrity for future generations.

"India is honoured to lead this crucial initiative at the 46th ATCM that is expected to bring a series of actionable recommendations to be incorporated into the broader framework of the Antarctic Treaty System," said Ravichandran, the head of the Indian delegation.

He said regulating tourism in Antarctica has been on the agenda since 1966 and a dedicated working group for the purpose has been formulated for the first time at the 46th ATCM hosted by India. (PTI)

290 cases of Covid-19 variant KP.2, 34 cases of KP.1 detected in India: INSACOG

NEW DELHI, May 21: As many as 290 cases of KP.2 and 34 cases of KP.1, both sub-lineages of COVID-19 that are responsible for surge in cases in Singapore, have been found in India, according to official data.

However, a source in the Union health ministry told PTI that they are all sub variants of JN.1 and there is no associated increase in hospitalization and severe cases.

"So there is no reason for concern or panic. The mutations will keep happening at a rapid pace and this is the natural behaviour of viruses like SARS-CoV2," the source said.

The source further said that the INSACOG surveillance is sensitive and is able to pick up the emergence of any new variant and samples are also picked from hospitals in a structured manner to detect any change in the severity of disease due to virus.

Data compiled by the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG) showed that 34 cases of KP.1 have been found across seven states and UTs with 23 cases registered from West Bengal.

The other states are Goa (1), Gujarat (2), Haryana (1), Maharashtra (4) Rajasthan (2) and Uttarakhand (1).

As many as 290 cases of KP.2 have been registered with Maharashtra reporting the highest number at 148, according to the data.

The other states and Union territories are Delhi (1), Goa (12), Gujarat (23), Haryana (3), Karnataka (4), Madhya Pradesh (1), Odisha (17), Rajasthan (21), Uttar Pradesh (8), Uttarakhand (16) and West Bengal (36).

Singapore is seeing a new COVID-19 wave as the authorities recorded more than 25,900 cases from May 5 to 11 with KP.1 and KP.2 accounting for over two-thirds of cases in Singapore.

Globally, the predominant COVID-19 variants are still JN.1 and its sub-lineages, including KP.1 and KP.2.

KP.1 and KP.2 belong to a group of COVID-19 variants scientists have nicknamed "FLIRT", after the technical names of their mutations.

The strains in FLIRT are all descendants of the JN.1 variant, an offshoot of the Omicron variant. KP.2 was classified by the World Health Organization as a Variant Under Monitoring. (PTI)

Create joint culture: CDS Gen Chauhan to armed forces as govt looks at rolling out theatre commands

NEW DELHI, May 21: The proposed theatre commands will lay the foundation for catapulting the armed forces into the next orbit of military preparedness and war fighting, Chief of Defence Staff Gen Anil Chauhan said on Tuesday.

His comments came as India looks at implementing the ambitious and long-awaited theaterisation plan.

In an address at an event, the Chief of Defence Staff also called upon the three services to create a joint culture as they move towards forming "joint operational structures".

He said the theatre commands will not be an end state but the beginning of the next set of reforms.

The integrated theatre commands will lead to many reforms like single to multi domain operations, fusing space and cyber space into traditional domains, digitisation of battlefield information and visualisation, net centric to data centric among others, he said.

Developing joint culture in the armed forces would be "jointness 2.0" which is the way forward, the Chief of Defence Staff said delivering the Maj Gen Samir Sinha Memorial Lecture.

He said "jointness 1.0" was about



better bonhomie and consensus among the services, and as there were no major differences, there is an impetus to move towards the next level which is "jointness 2.0".

Acknowledging the distinct culture of all the three services, Gen Chauhan underscored that there was a need to create a fourth culture in the services.

"We must be able to distill the best of each service, and incorporate the highest common factor, rather than settle for the least common denominator,"

said the Chief of Defence Staff.

He mentioned various initiatives of symbology that were being processed towards fostering the joint culture, including tri-services participation in national events.

Under the theaterisation model, the government seeks to integrate the capabilities of the army, air force and navy and optimally utilise their resources for wars and operations.

According to the theaterisation plan, each of the theatre commands will have

units of the Army, the Navy and the Air Force and all of them will work as a single entity looking after security challenges in a specified geographical territory.

At present, the Army, Navy and the Air Force have separate commands.

The theatre commands are being planned to integrate the capabilities of the three services and to ensure optimal utilisation of their resources.

In his address, the Chief of Defence Staff termed jointness and integration as pre-requisites to the creation of functional integrated theatre commands, and explained the significance of such commands.

"The creation of such commands will separate the 'operational' functions from the Raise-Train-Sustain (RTS) and other administrative functions, and will allow greater focus of the operational commander to matters of security," he said.

Stressing that the reforms in the Indian defence ecosystem are a necessity, Gen Chauhan said, nation states across the globe are facing a new set of challenges, and current flux in world order is forcing them to review their security strategies. (PTI)

Debt ridden farmer died by suicide in Karnataka

BELAGAVI (KARNATAKA), May 21: A 55-year-old farmer died by suicide after allegedly being harassed by a woman money-lender over repayment of ₹ 1.50 lakh loan amount taken from her, police said on Tuesday.

The incident occurred in Islampur village of Hukkeri taluk in Belagavi district, they said.

According to police, the farmer - Raju Khotagi - allegedly consumed poison on Sunday and was rushed to a hospital where he was admitted. Unfortunately, he died a day later.

Preliminary enquiry has suggested that the farmer had taken ₹ 1.50 lakh loan from 60-year-old Siddavva Bayyanavara of the same village some six months ago after he allegedly suffered losses owing to severe drought. On May 18, the woman had summoned Raju and his family to her house. She asked them to pay back the loan amount immediately, a senior police officer said.

Apparently, the accused woman had taken the loan money from someone else and was allegedly putting pressure on Raju to return the amount. The farmer, however, sought some more time to repay the amount. He tried to arrange the money but when he failed to do so, he was allegedly insulted by the lender, he said. (PTI)

Not involved in personal views arising due to miscommunication: Bharat Sevashram on monks' row

KOLKATA, May 21: The Bharat Sevashram Sangha on Tuesday attempted to bury the hatchet over the monks' row following controversial remarks by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, with the monastic order contending that it is not involved in "personal views arising due to miscommunication".

A monk from the order's Murshidabad district had sent a legal notice to Banerjee over her comments about certain socio-religious organisations in the state acting at the behest of the BJP.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday accused the CM of "acting under pressure of Islamic extremists" and held her responsible for "instigating violence" against monks "to appease the TMC's vote bank". Banerjee, on her part, had clarified that her subject of criticisms were certain individual monks belonging to the orders who "were working under instructions of the BJP" and not against any institution per se.

"There may be some personal views and opinions arising due to miscommunication, but the Bharat



Sevashram Sangha is not involved in it. As a philanthropic institution, we are not against anyone," its principal secretary Biswatmananda Maharaj, also known as Dilip Maharaj, told PTI.

He also hailed both the Centre and the state government for their endeavours to promote activities of the Sangha.

"Mamata Banerjee has always been supportive," he said.

Sources in the Sangha said that after Banerjee softened her stance on Monday, the organisation did not find any reason to continue dragging the controversy.

Last week, while speaking at a public meeting at Goghat in Arambag, the chief minister had claimed, "Some monks of the Ramakrishna Mission and Bharat Sevashram Sangha are working under the influence of BJP leaders in Delhi."

Banerjee named Swami Pradiptananda, better known as Kartik Maharaj, a senior monk with the Sangha working from its Beldanga establishment in Murshidabad, and alleged that he did not allow TMC poll agents to sit inside a polling station in Rejinagar when the Baharampur seat went to polls on May 13.

Kartik Maharaj responded by sending a legal notice to the chief minister and demanded a public apology from her.

Besides offering her clarification, Banerjee had on Monday stuck to her guns, saying the monk "garnered support for the BJP" while propagating spiri-

tualism endorsed by the Sangha. "I have no issues if you do that. But, you should do it with wearing the BJP's badge, not as a monk," she had said.

Meanwhile, on early Sunday, unidentified miscreants reportedly threatened monks and other employees at gunpoint at the Ramakrishna Mission premises in Jalpaiguri district.

Condemning the attack, the PM accused the TMC regime of unleashing a reign of terror on monks to appease its vote bank.

Addressing an election rally in Jhargram on Monday, Modi had claimed that Banerjee was "issuing threats" against the monks of the Ramakrishna Mission and Bharat Sevashram Sangha, emboldening "TMC goons to attack" the ashram.

"ISKCON, Ramakrishna Mission and Bharat Sevashram Sangha are known for service and morality, but today the chief minister of Bengal is openly threatening them. This is being done to appease the vote bank. As the CM herself is threatening the monks, TMC goons now dare to attack Ramakrishna Mission," he had said. (PTI)

Scientists call for more screening, awareness on inherited defects in anaemic patients in India

NEW DELHI, May 21: Researchers have uncovered inherited iron metabolism defects in anaemic patients in India, suggesting the need for "active screening and awareness of such rare diseases" in the population.

"This research is particularly important at this time to help reduce the burden of rare inherited defects in our country, devise strategies to identify the target at risk population for screening, and provide options for novel therapeutics or timely stem cell transplant," said Amita Trehan, a lead researcher of the study led by the Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER), Chandigarh.

Anaemia resulting from iron deficiency in the body is the most common cause of the disease globally. Other forms of anaemia include those arising out of vitamin deficiency and sickle cell.

However, the condition is underdiagnosed due to lack of awareness or methodical screening, according to the study.

Possible symptoms of anaemia are fatigue, dizziness, pale skin and headaches.

"In India, iron deficiency anaemia affects 30-40 per cent of children aged 2-5 years. With such high frequency, clinicians in out-



patient departments, especially in peripheral healthcare facilities, end up prescribing oral iron to any child suffering from micro-

cytic hypochromic anaemia upfront without systematic evaluation of a basic iron profile," said the lead authors Trehan, Pra-

teek Bhatia, and Pankaj Sharma from the Pediatric Haematology Oncology Unit, PGIMER.

Microcytic hypochromic anaemia refers to the condition in which the red blood cells are smaller than usual and show reduced redness.

"When the response to this treatment is suboptimal or absent, they (clinicians) are unsure how to proceed. In addition, they are puzzled when they encounter a case with anaemia and abnormal iron profile suggestive of iron overload without secondary evidence of hemolytic disease or hemoglobinopathy on screening," said the lead authors of the study, which was published in The Journal of Molecular Diagnostics.

For the study, the researchers shortlisted nearly 300 anaemia cases from 2019 to 2022 after an initial screening. After excluding patients diagnosed with conditions such as inflammation and chronic bleeding, the team included 41 cases of suspected iron metabolism defects in their analysis.

"The systematic evaluation of anaemic cases from our high iron deficient endemic population, based on clinical criteria and basic and advanced genomic tests, helped

us uncover an inherited iron defect in 41 per cent of the cases, suggesting the need for active screening and awareness for such rare diseases in our population," said Bhatia.

The authors explained that the iron metabolism defects, potentially causing anaemia, can be of two types -- sideroblastic or nonsideroblastic.

While the sideroblastic defects result when iron is abnormally used during the production of RBCs, the nonsideroblastic ones can block iron being utilised within the cells, they said.

The next stage of analysis involved genomic analysis, which helped the researchers identify both these kinds of iron metabolism defects in the 41-case cohort.

The authors said they were "surprised" to find many of the rare sideroblastic defects in the cohort presenting either in late childhood or adulthood or being undiagnosed.

They were also "surprised" to find a different novel yet recurrent mutation in SLC25A38 gene in unrelated patients from the northern part of the country, suggesting an ethnically diverse population in the Indian subcontinent. (PTI)

NAME CORRECTION

I, SOLEMAN ALI do hereby declare that I am a permanent resident of the below mentioned address AND CITIZEN OF India by birth. That my actual and correct name is SOLEMAN ALI and the same is recorded in my Voter ID card vide No - HCK5643492, Adhar card Vide No - 545875005727 and in my Passport bearing No- M0397153 date of issue 13/08/14 whereas my name is wrongly recorded as SULAMAN ALI in place of SOLEMAN ALI. That Sulaman ALI and SOLEMAN ALI are the same and one person.

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

Cannes entries 'All We Imagine as Light' and 'Santosh' find North American buyers

LOS ANGELES, May 21: 'All We Imagine as Light', Payal Kapadia's competition entry for the 2024 Cannes Film Festival, has found a distributor for its release in North America. According to American news outlet Variety, two companies -- Sideshow and Janus Films -- have jointly acquired the North American (US and Canada) rights to the movie, which is the first Indian film in 30 years and first ever by an Indian woman director to be screened in the main competition of the prestigious film gala. Sideshow and Janus Films are planning a theatrical release, the report by Variety added.

Janus, which was set up in 1956, handles rights in all media to an extensive library that includes the work of Michelangelo Antonioni, Ingmar Bergman, Federico Fellini, Abbas Kiarostami, Akira Kurosawa, Andrei Tarkovsky, Francois Truffaut, Agnes Varda.

The company also handles many titles of Indian cinema legend Satyajit Ray, including the critically-acclaimed 'Apu' trilogy, comprising 'Pather Panchali' (1955), 'Aparajito' (1956) and 'The World of Apu' (1959).

Besides Kapadia's film, the North American rights to Sandhya Suri's 'Santosh', which was screened under the Un Certain Regard section, have been acquired by Metrograph Pictures. Metrograph Pictures will distribute the film theatrically, with additional release details to be announced at a later date. 'All We Imagine as Light', also written by Kapadia, marks her narrative feature debut. An alumna of the Film & Television Institute of India (FTII), Kapadia is best known for her acclaimed documentary 'A Night of Knowing Nothing', which premiered at the 2021 Cannes Film Festival's Director's Fortnight side-bar where it won the Oeil d'or (Golden Eye) award. (PTI)

ACTOR MOHANLAL TURNS 64; FANS, COLLEAGUES EXTEND HEARTY WISHES

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, May 21: Malayalam superstar Mohanlal turned 64 on Tuesday, with fans and movie colleagues flooding social media with heartfelt greetings for their favorite actor.

Diehard fans shared pictures of the Drishyam actor on their social media accounts, adding touching captions to wish their beloved 'Laletta'. Superstar Mammootty is one of his industry colleagues who first extended birthday greetings to Mohanlal. "Happy Birthday, Dear Lal," Mammootty said in a Facebook post. He also shared a photo of him giving a kiss to Lal on his cheek during a function. "Lead man for forty years among a very critical and discerning audience. 400 films? Some might exclaim in disbelief. I, on the contrary, am looking forward to him beat Mr. Prem Nazir's record of 500 films. On his birthday, that is my best wish to him. The best of health to you, Mr.@Mohanlal, to break many more records," Kamal Hassan posted on his X handle. Adujevitham actor Prithviraj Sukumaran posted photos of the legendary actor on all his social media handles with the caption "Happy Birthday Laletta".

Sukumaran, who is currently working with Mohanlal on his directorial venture L2: Empuraan, also shared a picture of him from the upcoming movie. (PTI)



A R Rahman to perform in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur

SINGAPORE, May 21: Music composer AR Rahman will be returning to Singapore in August with his first concert performance in the country in 10 years.

The Oscar and Grammy-winning musician will perform at the National Stadium on August 31. Maestro Productions, the company behind the singer-songwriter-musician's upcoming concert titled 'A Rahman Rhapsody', shared the announcement on social media on Monday. "Singapore! It's been a decade! We look forward to performing again in our favourite city! Join us on the 31st of August at the National Stadium," the company posted.

The 57-year-old musician had last played here in 2014 at Gardens by the Bay.

Before coming to Singapore, Rahman will hold a concert on July 27 at Bukit Jalil National Stadium in Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia.

Rahman's Malaysia gig is organized by Star Planet, the country's premier entertainment company, a press release said.

"The concert presents a unique opportunity for fans to immerse themselves in AR Rahman's timeless classics, including chart-topping hits from his acclaimed films. With a setlist that promises to evoke nostalgia and stir emotions, attendees can expect an unforgettable evening filled with musical brilliance and unparalleled entertainment," it added.

Tickets for the Kuala Lumpur concert are now available on BookMyShow, using BigTix, the company's revolutionary SaaS ticketing platform for Southeast Asian entertainment. (PTI)

Richa Chadha-Ali Fazal production 'Girls Will Be Girls' to be screened under Cannes Ecrans Juniors

CANNES, May 21: "Girls Will Be Girls", the debut production of actor couple Richa Chadha and Ali Fazal, will be screened under the Cannes Ecrans Juniors at the 2024 edition of the Cannes Film Festival.

The sidebar section is a selection of eight international films that present a particular interest to young people above 13, introducing them to diverse themes, cultures, and cinematic art. Directed by Shuchi Talati, "Girls Will Be Girls" will be screened at the film gala on May 22 and 23 at the Alexandre III theatre, and on May 24 at the Raimu Hall, a press release stated.

According to the makers, the film is set in a boarding school in a small Himalayan hill town in northern India. It follows the journey of Mira, a 16-year-old girl, whose rebellious awakening is intertwined with her mother's unfulfilled coming-of-age experiences.

It features Preeti Panigrahi, Kani Kusruti, Jitin Gulati, Preeti Panigrahi, and Kesav Binoy Kiron.

"Girls Will Be Girls" is an Indo-French co-production, a collaboration between Chadha and Fazal's banner Pushing Buttons Studios, and Blink Digital, Crawling Angel Films and Dolce Vita Films. "Producing this film has been a labour of love, and to see it resonate with audiences globally is incredibly fulfilling. We believe in the power of stories that challenge and inspire, and 'Girls Will Be Girls' does just that. It's a film that speaks to the complexities of growing up, and we can't wait for the Cannes audience to experience it," Chadha said in a statement. Fazal said the team knew from the very beginning that "Girls Will Be Girls" was a special project. "Shuchi Talati has crafted a beautiful, poignant story that deserves this platform. We are proud to be part of a film that not only entertains but also sparks important conversations. This is just the beginning, and we are excited for what's to come," he added. (PTI)



SHOCKED AND IN DISBELIEF

Scarlett Johansson accuses OpenAI of making ChatGPT voice similar to her

LOS ANGELES, May 21: Hollywood actor Scarlett Johansson has accused OpenAI of ripping off her voice for the new ChatGPT AI named "Sky", even though she had declined the company's offer. The artificial intelligence company on Monday announced that it has decided to "pause" the Sky feature after questions were raised over the voice feature.

"We've heard questions about how we chose the voices in ChatGPT, especially Sky. We are working to pause the use of Sky while we address them," the company posted on its official X page.

In a statement to American news outlet Variety, Johansson said she was contacted by OpenAI CEO Sam Altman in September 2023 about the company hiring her to provide the voice for ChatGPT 4.0 but she declined the offer for

"personal reasons". "When I heard the released demo, I was shocked, angered and in disbelief that Mr. Altman would pursue a voice that sounded so eerily similar to mine that my closest friends and news outlets could not tell the difference," Johansson said. "Mr Altman even insinuated that the similarity was intentional, tweeting a single word 'her' — a reference to the film in which I voiced a chat system, Samantha, who forms an intimate relationship with a human," she added.

On Monday, OpenAI also posted a blog post in which the company said that Sky's voice was not an imitation of Johansson, but belonged to a different professional actress.

"We believe that AI voices should not deliberately mimic a celebrity's distinctive voice—Sky's voice is not an imita-

tion of Scarlett Johansson but belongs to a different professional actress using her own natural speaking voice.

"To protect their privacy, we cannot share the names of our voice talents," the company posted.

Johansson, 39, also revealed that Altman contacted her agent two days prior to the release of ChatGPT 4.0 demo and urged her to reconsider the decision.

"Two days before the demo was released, Mr Altman contacted my agent, asking me to reconsider. Before we could connect, the system was out there. As a result of their actions, I was forced to hire legal counsel, who wrote two letters to Mr Altman and OpenAI, setting out what they had done and asking them to detail the exact process by which they created the 'Sky' voice. Consequently, OpenAI reluctantly

agreed to take down the 'Sky' voice," she said in the statement.

"In a time when we are all grappling with deepfakes and the protection of our own likeness, our own work, our own identities, I believe these are questions that deserve absolute clarity.

"I look forward to resolution in the form of transparency and the passage of appropriate legislation to help ensure that individual rights are protected," she wrote. When asked for a comment over the matter, Altman, in another statement, reiterated that the voice used by the company for Sky belonged to a different actor and had nothing to do with Johansson. (PTI)



Paralympics champion Sumit defends F64 javelin world title, India jump to third

KOBE (JAPAN), May 21: Reigning Paralympics champion Sumit Antil on Tuesday defended his F64 javelin throw world title while Thangavelu Mariyappan and Ekta Bhyan also grabbed gold medals in their respective events as India jumped to third place in the World Para Athletics Championships here.

With five medals won on a productive fifth day, India's tally swelled to 10 (4 gold, 4 silver, 2 bronze) and the country is currently placed below China (15 gold, 13 silver, 13 bronze) and Brazil (14 gold, 6 silver, 5 bronze).

Antil, who had won gold medals in the Tokyo Paralympics and 2023 World Para

Athletics Championships, sent his spear to a distance of 69.50m to stand on top of the podium.

The 25-year-old Haryana athlete thus continued his global domination in the F64 javelin event. He is the current world record holder also, courtesy his massive 73.29m throw while winning gold in the Para Asian Games in Hangzhou, China last year.

He also holds the World Para Athletics Championships record of 70.83m which he had produced while winning the gold in the last edition in Paris in 2023.

Compatriot Sandeep won the bronze medal in the same event with a throw of 60.41m. Sri

Lanka's Dulan Kodithuwakku took the silver with a throw of 66.49m.

Antil was the leader all through the event in the nine-man field as he opened with a 68.17m effort before coming up with his day's best jump of 69.50m in the second attempt. His next four attempts read 64.04m, 65.58m, 69.03m and 68.08m.

Sonipat's Antil wanted to pursue a career in wrestling, but in 2015, when he was 17, his motorbike was hit by a speeding truck while he was returning home from a tuition class.

As a result, his left leg was amputated and he had to abandon his dream of becoming a wrestler. His father, employed

in Indian Air Force, died when he was seven.

Tokyo Paralympics silver winner Mariyappan also grabbed a gold in T63 high jump with a championship record of 1.88m. This was his first gold in a major event in eight years.

The 28-year-old Mariyappan won gold in T42 high jump in the 2016 Rio Paralympics and a silver in the Tokyo edition in 2021 in T63. He also won a

silver in the T63 class in the Hangzhou Para Asian Games last year.

The T63 classification is for athletes with single knee or above knee limb deficiency competing with a prosthesis.

Americans Ezra Frech and Sam Grewe won silver and bronze with jumps of 1.85m and 1.82m respectively.

Hailing from Salem district in Tamil Nadu, Mariyappan was



Liverpool confirms Arne Slot as Jurgen Klopp's replacement

LONDON, May 21: Arne Slot will take on one of the most daunting challenges in soccer by replacing Jurgen Klopp as Liverpool manager.

Slot was confirmed on Monday after he signed a long-term contract with the six-time European Cup winner and 19-time English champion. He will follow in the footsteps of an Anfield icon in Klopp, who ended Liverpool's 30-year wait for the English title in 2020 and won a full set of major trophies in his time at the Merseyside club.

Slot comes in with a winning record of his own after leading Feyenoord to the Dutch title last year and following that with the Dutch Cup this season.

He will formally take up his role on June 1 and his contract runs through to 2027, a person with knowledge of the deal told The Associated Press. The person spoke on the condition of anonymity because the details of the contract have not been made public. Slot's appointment was expected for some time, as the 45-year-old Dutchman said he was in talks with Liverpool in April and announced he would be Klopp's successor last week.



Slot has coached Feyenoord since 2021 and was previously with AZ Alkmaar. His work with both clubs has seen his reputation rise for his coaching

methods and achievements in a short time. Klopp stunned the world of soccer when he declared in January he would step down at the end of the

season. The German established himself as one of the finest managers of his generation. He won the Champions League in 2019, the Premier

League in 2020, and the English League Cup and FA Cup in 2022. He departed with one final trophy, the League Cup in February. Under his watch, Liverpool also won the UEFA Super Cup and Club World Cup and was a beaten finalist in two more Champions Leagues.

Liverpool took its time identifying Klopp's successor.

Michael Edwards, its former sporting director, returned in March as chief executive of football for the club's American owners Fenway Sports Group and led the search.

Edwards was a key figure in Klopp's success — overseeing the signings of star players like Mohamed Salah, Alisson Becker, and Virgil van Dijk.

Liverpool fans can only hope he is as adept at identifying coaching talent after putting his faith in Slot.

Former Liverpool midfielder Xabi Alonso was a leading contender for the job until he announced in March he was staying at Bayern Leverkusen after its unbeaten run to the German title.

Sporting Lisbon coach Ruben Amorim was among other potential candidates. (AP)

Vennam fourth in rankings, takes India to second spot in qualifying round



YECHHEON (SOUTH KOREA), May 21: Reigning Asian Games champion Jyothi Surekha Vennam's fourth place finish lifted compound women's team to second spot in the qualifying rankings of the Archery World Cup Stage 2 that got underway here on Tuesday.

Fresh from winning a hat-trick of gold medals at the season-opening Shanghai leg of the World Cup last month, Jyothi missed the top-three spot in the rankings by just three points, finishing behind South Korea's Oh Yoohyun, who shot 707.

Han Seunghyun took the pole position at 711, followed by Luxembourg's Mariya Shkolna one point adrift.

At eighth and 15th places respectively, Parneet Kaur (704) and world champion Aditi Swami (702) were the next best Indians as overall as a team India grabbed the second seed behind South Korea.

The Indian women's team will get a bye into the quarters where they will face seventh seeded

Italy.

It was a forgettable outing for the compound men archers and Priyansh and Jyothi combined to get a fourth spot in the mixed team ranking as well.

Prathamesh Fuge and multiple World Cup gold medalist Abhishek Verma, who seemed to have past his prime, were the next best Indians finishing lowly at 20th and 24th places.

It impacted the team ranking as they slipped to fourth place. Priyansh and Jyothi combined to get a fourth spot in the mixed team ranking as well.

The qualifiers for the recurve archers will begin on Wednesday. Indian men's recurve team are coming back after upsetting South Korea for the first time in a World Cup final in the Shanghai leg in April.

India topped the medal standings at the Stage 1 World Cup with five gold medals, two silver and one bronze, pushing South Korea to second spot (two gold, three silver and two bronze medals). (PTI)

Nadal returns to Roland Garros to practice amid doubts over his fitness

PARIS, May 21: Rafael Nadal returned to Roland Garros on Monday to practice and try to figure out whether to compete at the French Open, a tournament he has won a record 14 times.

The 37-year-old Spaniard showed up late in the afternoon with his coach, Carlos Moya, and a couple of sparring partners at Court Philippe Chatrier, which was open to the public.

About 6,000 fans were there at the French Open's main stadium, cheering loudly as Nadal stepped onto the court. After the practice, which lasted about an hour and a half, Nadal signed several autographs before disappearing through a doorway and into a tunnel that leads toward the locker rooms.

The training session gave Nadal a chance to reacquaint himself with the red clay at Roland Garros — he hasn't played a match there in two years — and test his fitness.

The tournament begins on Sunday and it remains uncertain if Nadal will enter.

He is still regaining his match readiness after missing nearly all of 2023 with a hip injury that required surgery, and much of this season because of problems with a hip muscle and an abdominal muscle. His recent loss in his second match at the Italian Open — 6-1, 6-3 against Hubert Hurkacz — left Nadal unsure about whether he would consider himself ready for the French Open. "Let's see what's going on, how I feel myself mentally tomorrow, after tomorrow, and in one week," Nadal said in Rome. "If I feel ready, I (am) going to try to be there and fight for the things that I have been fighting (for for) the last



The training session gave Nadal a chance to reacquaint himself with the red clay at Roland Garros he hasn't played a match there in two years and test his fitness. The tournament begins on Sunday and it remains uncertain if Nadal will enter. He is still regaining his match readiness after missing nearly all of 2023 with a hip injury that required surgery, and much of this season because of problems with a hip muscle and an abdominal muscle

15 years, (even) if now (that) seems impossible."

As of Monday, Nadal still had not announced whether or not he would play in Paris. This is expected to be his final season on tour — and so this would be his final appearance at a tournament he has won more times

than any other tennis player has won any Grand Slam title.

He won the French Open in 2022 for his 22nd major championship overall, which ranks second among men to Novak Djokovic's 24. Nadal missed the French Open last year because of the hip. (AP)

McGurk, Short offer something different: Aus coach on pairs inclusion as travelling reserves for WC

SYDNEY, May 21: Australian cricket team coach Andrew McDonald said on Tuesday that charismatic young batter Jake Fraser-McGurk and all-rounder Matthew Short have been added as travelling reserves with the squad for the T20 World Cup in the Americas because they bring something different to the table.

Fraser-McGurk, 22, in only his debut IPL season, gave an excellent display of explosive batsmanship for Delhi Capitals smashing four half-centuries in nine games at an astronomical strike rate exceeding 234.

He hit 330 runs, including 32 boundaries and 28 maximums, prompting several Australian greats to pitch for his inclusion in the 15-member squad. But after being overlooked for the World Cup in the West Indies and USA next month, he has been finally included as a travelling reserve.

"I think they're (Fraser-McGurk and Short) slightly different in what they offer. Fraser is an out-and-out opener and the way we've grown Matthew Short into the team is through the middle order and that spin (bowling) ability as well," McDonald told Sen Radio.

McDonald indicated that Short could come in handy in the event of Glenn Maxwell getting injured.

"We feel like he's (Short) a spinning all-rounder much like Glenn Maxwell if anything should move there, and obviously Jake Fraser-McGurk is an out-and-out top order player," added McDonald.

The two reserves will, how-

ever, not be able to play unless there is an injury in the squad.

The Australian team is set to fly out for the World Cup on Wednesday.

"Both exciting, I think they both add a lot.

"Those guys sit outside of the 15, the only way they can come onto the selection table is if there was to be an injury, we've got two options there depending on what we lose or what may unfold in terms of injuries," McDonald added.

The coach said that apart from the two players, Australia had several other options as well, should a player in the 15-member squad get injured or indisposed.

"We've also got some other options in Spencer Johnson, Xavier Bartlett that are playing in the West Indies and USA next month, so if we were to lose a bowler those guys are up and running in the UK and they can come in, it's only a short flight into the West Indies from England.

On opener David Warner's fitness concerns, McDonald said the 37-year-old was doing fine.

"No, not at this stage. We believe he's fully fit, everything he says is he's fully fit, we know that he missed the last game for Delhi (Capitals in IPL), clearly that was a selection mechanism there with the way they want to play late in the tournament, I think he played the second last round... we have no fears he won't be fit and fully available."

Australia play their opening group stage match against Oman in Barbados on June 6. (PTI)



Indian junior men's hockey team begins Europe tour with a thrilling win over Belgium

ANTWERP, May 21: Shardanand Tiwari struck twice as the Indian junior men's hockey team beat Belgium via penalty shootout in the opening match to kick off its tour of Europe with a thrilling win here.

Tiwari (3', 27') scored a brace as the two teams ended the regulation time 2-2 before India won the penalty shootout 4-2 on Monday. India took the lead early with Tiwari firing in a penalty stroke. They maintained their tempo throughout the first quarter to hold onto their lead going into the break.

In the second quarter, Tiwari (27') doubled the lead with yet another penalty stroke as the first half ended with the visitors leading 2-0. Belgium converted a penalty corner early in the third quarter to reduce the goal deficit to one. No further goals were scored in the quarter as the score read 2-1 in favour of the Indian team at the end of the third quar-

ter.

Although the Indian colts had a one-goal lead going into the final quarter, Belgium didn't give them much breathing space and kept the pressure on them.

With just a few minutes left in the game, the Belgians converted yet another penalty corner to equalise.

As no more goals were scored in the regulation time, the fourth quarter ended with the scoreline reading 2-2, taking the game into a shootout.

Gurjot Singh, Sourabh Anand Kushwaha, Dilraj Singh and Manmeet Singh scored for the Indian colts in the penalty shootout while goalkeeper Prince Deep Singh made two brilliant saves as they won the penalty shootout 4-2 to begin their Europe tour with a win.

India will play their next match against Belgium in Breda, Netherlands on Wednesday. (PTI)

IPL Eliminator: Rajasthan Royals desperate to arrest slide against Royal Challengers Bengaluru



AHMEDABAD, May 21: Sanju Samson's Rajasthan Royals will face a stern test of character as they look to arrest a shocking slide in a do-or-die IPL Eliminator against an in-form Royal Challengers Bengaluru, here on Wednesday.

The Royals, at one stage, had looked set for a top-place finish in the league stage before a string of four defeats and a washout in the last game against KKR resulted in Sanju Samson's side finishing third behind Sunrisers Hyderabad.

On the other hand, RCB have sensationally fought their way back from the brink of elimination. After losing seven of their first eight games this season, the team led by Faf du Plessis hit a dream run and finally knocked out defending champions Chennai Super Kings a few nights ago to seal a playoff berth.

If Rajasthan Royals are coming off four losses and a rained-off game, RCB have notched up six consecutive wins to sound a warning to their rivals that they mean business in the playoffs.

RR, the 2008 IPL winners, suddenly find themselves as the underdogs, when a couple of

weeks ago they were red-hot favourites.

When on song, Rajasthan Royals have shown they are unbeatable, but the last four games have exposed frailties in their batting and bowling.

The exit of Jos Buttler has taken a lot of fire-power out of their batting and a lot will depend on Yashasvi Jaiswal (348 runs), skipper Samson (504) and Riyan Parag (531) to halt the slide.

Samson and Parag will once again be expected to deliver the goods for RR, with England's Tom Kohler-Cadmore expected to partner Jaiswal in what seems like a frail opening pair going by form and experience. Shimron Hetmyer is expected to be available for the contest giving Rajasthan solidity in the lower order, which has not made a big contribution with the bat this season. RR's strong bowling lineup could come in handy given the venue for the Eliminator has not been a batting paradise like the other grounds, where shorter boundaries and docile tracks have made the bowlers' job tougher.

The 200-run mark has been breached only twice in 12 innings this season at the Narendra

Modi Stadium, which means the team having a disciplined bowling attack and a strong batting lineup is more likely to win here. On the other hand, RCB's Virat Kohli continues to be the highest run-getter this season with 708 runs from 14 matches and could make the difference in the contest. After initial struggles, RCB skipper Faf du Plessis has also found form with the bat to forge a dominating partnership at the top with Kohli, while Rajat Patidar (five half-centuries this season) has also given solidity at the top.

RCB have not been impacted much by the exit of England's Will Jacks, while veteran Dinesh Karthik is firing on all cylinders with a strike rate in excess of 195 lower down the order.

In their last match, left-arm seamer Yash Dayal turned around his fortunes to dish out a splendid final over against CSK to deny them a win and lead RCB into the playoffs.

For a bowler who was devastated after conceding five consecutive sixes in an over last year, Dayal has proved his mettle this year.

Teams (from):

Rajasthan Royals: Sanju Samson (c&wk), Abid Mushtaq, Avesh Khan, Dhruv Jurel, Donovan Ferreira, Kuldeep Sen, Kunal Singh Rathore, Nandre Burger, Navdeep Saini, Ravichandran Ashwin, Riyan Parag, Sandeep Sharma, Shimron Hetmyer, Shubham Dubey, Rovman Powell, Tom Kohler-Cadmore, Trent Boult, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Yuzvendra Chahal, Tamush Kotian.

Royal Challengers Bengaluru: Faf du Plessis (c), Glenn Maxwell, Virat Kohli, Rajat Patidar, Anuj Rawat, Dinesh Karthik (wk), Suyash Prabhudessai, Will Jacks, Mahipal Lomror, Karn Sharma, Manoj Bhandage, Mayank Dagar, Vijaykumar Vyshak, Akash Deep, Mohammed Siraj, Reece Topley, Himanshu Sharma, Rajan Kumar, Cameron Green, Alzarri Joseph, Yash Dayal, Tom Curran, Lockie Ferguson, Swapnil Singh and Saurav Chauhan.

Match starts at 7:30pm IST.

Treesa-Gayatri enter second round of Malaysia Masters

KUALA LUMPUR, May 21: Indian shuttlers Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand progressed to the second round of women's doubles competition after securing a straight-game win over Chinese Taipei's Huang Yu-Hsun and Liang Ting Yu at the Malaysia Masters Super 500 here on Tuesday.

Commonwealth Games bronze medallists Treesa and Gayatri, seventh seeded, notched up a fine 21-14 21-10 win over Huang and Liang, ranked 104, in the round of 32. There were four Indians in men's singles qualification round but none could make the cut for the main draw.

Sathish Kumar Karunakaran, who won his maiden BWF Super 100 title at Odisha Masters last December, beat Malaysia's Cheam June Wei 21-15 21-19 before going down 21-13 20-22 13-21 to Indonesia's Shesha Hiren Rhusavitto. Ayush Shetty, a bronze medallist at the World Junior Championships, beat compatriot Kartikey Gulshan Kumar 21-7 21-14 but lost 21-23 21-16 17-21 to Thailand's Panitchaphon Teerarat-sakul. (PTI)

PCB wants Viv Richards as mentor for national team during T20 WC

KARACHI, May 21: The Pakistan Cricket Board is keen on roping in legendary Vivian Richards as a mentor for the national team during the upcoming World T20 Cup scheduled in the Americas.

Richards has worked as a mentor for Quetta Gladiators in the Pakistan Super League since 2016 and as per PCB sources current chairman Mohsin Naqvi is keen on having a big name associated with the national team. Also with most of the Super Eight games in the Caribbean, Richards' experi-

Bayer Leverkusen's two steps from soccer immortality start in Europa League final against Atalanta



DUBLIN, May 21: Bayer Leverkusen is two games from European soccer immortality. The new champion of Germany has two cup finals in four days — starting Wednesday in the Europa League against Atalanta — to complete a previously unthinkable unbeaten season in domestic and continental competition.

On Saturday, Leverkusen will be heavily favored to win the German cup final against a Kaiserslautern team that finished 13th in the second division, not so far from falling into relegation playoffs.

And so the biggest remaining challenge for coach Xabi Alonso's team is game No. 52 of 53, in Dublin against an Atalanta that is finishing the season strong. It feels fitting because the Europa League has been a regular drama for Leverkusen.

Three times in six games in the knockout rounds the team was 2-0 down deep into the second half and still behind entering stoppage time: In both round of 16 games against Qarabag and in the semifinals return leg against Roma.

In another streak-saving Europa game, at West Ham in the quarterfinals, Leverkusen was set to advance on aggregate score yet needed an 89th-minute goal by wing-back Jeremie Frimpong to draw 1-1 and stay unbeaten.

"We don't want to wait until the last seconds of the game," said Patrick Schick, whose three stoppage-time goals against Qarabag in March were key to advancing 5-4 on aggregate. "We would like to make it clear, really, earlier."

There have been other stellar teams in European soccer who added the elite Champions League to their domestic league title, unlike Leverkusen playing in the second-tier Europa League.

Still, Manchester United in 1999, Inter Milan in 2010, Barcelona in 2011 and Manchester City last year were wealthy clubs whose success could have been expected. Each started their season with established, star-packed teams led by coaches — Alex Ferguson, Jose Mourinho, Pep Guardiola — who'd already won multiple domestic and European trophies.

This is Alonso's first full season coaching at the top level. His team was in relegation trouble last season. There was no superstar transfer signing in the offseason.

"For me it's very special," the 42-year-old Alonso said last week. "My first title as a coach was the Bundesliga. It was super, it was very special. But a title in Europe would be wonderful and hopefully we will

be able to say that."

Alonso twice won the Champions League as an elegant midfielder, with Liverpool and then Real Madrid, who will play Borussia Dortmund for this season's Champions League title. That June 1 final at Wembley Stadium is between two teams involved in the failed Super League breakaway in 2021 — Madrid driving it forward, Dortmund declining its invitation.

Bayer Leverkusen and Atalanta were nowhere close to being invited to the breakaway three years ago and today represent soccer projects that won respect from neutral fans across Europe.

Both are based in provincial cities, each with more than 100 years of history, reaching surprise peaks. Before this season, they had only ever won three trophies: Atalanta's Italian cup in 1963 and Leverkusen's 1988 UEFA Cup — the forerunner of the Europa League — and Germany cup in 1993.

While Leverkusen once lost a Champions League final, to Madrid in 2002, and Atalanta was minutes away from a semifinals place in 2020, neither has felt entitled to European success.

Their modest stadiums in Leverkusen and Bergamo add up to a combined capacity of about 51,000 that could fit into the Dublin venue, formerly Lansdowne Road, that will host them Wednesday. For a showpiece European final, the official limit is 48,000.

Leverkusen and Atalanta do not figure in UEFA research of the top-50 earnings list of European clubs for total matchday income from ticket and hospitality sales.

Two well-run clubs, relying on smart transfer dealings — albeit underwritten, respectively, by pharmaceutical giant Bayer and Boston Celtics co-owner Steve Pagliuca — had combined total revenues last year that added up to about the same \$500 million as Manchester City's player wage bill alone.

Yet both Leverkusen and Atalanta, under coach Gian Piero Gasperini since 2016, play easy-on-the-eye soccer in attack and team-first defense.

"They play one against one on the whole pitch," Schick said of Atalanta. "Wherever you move, you have one defender behind you so they don't leave you the space to breathe."

Atalanta has been a refreshing force under Gasperini and already has a place in the Champions League next season. In any normal year they would be popular first-time European title winners. What Leverkusen has done is not normal, though, and a legend could be just days from being created. (AP)

In professional sport, nobody gives you a discount for age: Dhoni

NEW DELHI, May 21: Nearing 43, Mahendra Singh Dhoni's six-hitting ability and fitness remains as good as anyone and the former India skipper says he has no option but to keep working hard and stay fit since "nobody gives you a discount for age". Dhoni, who handed Chennai Super Kings' captaincy to Ruturaj Gaikwad at the start of the 2024 IPL season, played all 14 league stage games, batted way down the order and yet made a huge impact.

The World Cup-winning captain scored 161 runs at an incredible strike rate of 220.55, forcing many to believe that he can play for two more years in the IPL.

The iconic cricketer admitted that it is tough for him to perform after he comes straight to the IPL without playing any cricket prior to the league.

"The toughest thing is, I am not playing cricket throughout the year. So I have to be fit. Once I come, you are competing against youngsters who are fit and playing international cricket. Professional sport is not easy, nobody gives you a discount for age," Dhoni said in a video that is doing the rounds on social media.

"If you want to play, you have to be as fit as the other guy. Age does not really give that grace to you. So, eating habits, a bit of training and all those things are there. Social media, thankfully, I am not on social media, so there's less distraction," Dhoni said in the video posted by Dubai Eye 103.8 YouTube channel.

For the legendary cricketer from Jharkhand, things like farming, riding bikes and vintage cars work as stress buster for him.

"Once I quit international cricket, I wanted to spend a bit more time with my family. But, at that same time, to be mentally ac-



tive, to have that passion to stay focussed — for me, I love farming, for me it is the motorbikes, I have started getting into vintage cars.

"These things de-stress me. If I am stressed, I would maybe go to the garage, spend a couple of hours over there and I will just be fine, I would come back," he said.

"I have always felt growing up with a pet, whether it is a cat or a dog... I prefer dogs though. They have unconditional love towards you. I have said this in a previous interview, even if I lose a game and come back, my dog greets me the same way."

He has been a much admired leader at CSK and Dhoni said that "we need to earn that respect of the people you're leading".

"You cannot command or demand respect. You need to earn it. I may have a position in an institution, and yes, that position needs to be respected. But me as an individual sitting on the chair, I need to earn that respect.

"I cannot just say 'respect me'! If you have the respect of the people around you, they give 10 to 15 percent more.

"India is slightly different. People talk about being professional.

Yes, we Indians are professional, but our emotional connect is stronger. I feel as an Indian, my strength is the emotional connect. My connection with CSK is an emotional connect.

"It's not just a player who comes and plays for a couple of months and then goes back home."

While he is not a big fan of social media, Dhoni would prefer Instagram over X to avoid controversy. "I prefer Instagram over Twitter (X). I believe that nothing good has happened over Twitter, you know, especially in India, there's always a controversy. Somebody will write something and it turns into a controversy.

"I was like why do I need to be there? It used to be 140 characters. You cannot elaborate. Imagine me putting something over there and then it is left to the people to read it. And they just interpret what they want to interpret.

"So I'm like, no, no, that's not really for me. Instagram, still I like because I could put up my picture or video or something and just leave it. That is also changing now. So I still prefer Instagram, but I'm not very active because less distractions are better." (PTI)

WFI exempts Olympic quota winners from trials but will assess them in Hungary

NEW DELHI, May 21: The Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) on Tuesday decided to exempt all six Olympic quota winners from selection trials but their form and fitness will be assessed at the upcoming Ranking Series event and the subsequent training camp in Hungary.

The WFI said the decision to not hold trials has been taken under peculiar circumstances and should not be used as a precedent in future.

The WFI also made it clear that if any wrestler is found to be lacking in fitness, the federation would consider a replacement through trials before July 8, the deadline for sending entries. India have got six quotas for the Paris Games where Aman Sehrawat (57kg) will be the lone male wrestler in fray from the country. Vinesh Phogat (50kg), Antim Panghal (53kg), Anshu Malik (57kg), Nisha Dahiya (68kg) and Reetika Hooda (76kg) are the women wrestlers who have qualified.

The wrestlers had requested the WFI not to hold trials, arguing that it could lead to injuries and the selection committee, led by President Sanjay Singh, accepted the plea.

"We discussed the issue and both chief coaches were also of the view that trials could lead to injuries and impact India's medal chances. So we have decided not to hold trials," Sanjay Singh told PTI after the meeting.

The quota winners will compete in a UWW Ranking Series in Budapest from June 6-9 and will also participate in a training camp after the conclusion of the tournament from June 10-21. "We have to ensure that no wrestler carries any injury into the Olympics. So, instead of trials, the Indian coaches will assess the quota winners at the Ranking Series event and at the following training camp in Budapest. (PTI)

Hockey Pro League: Indian men's, women's teams hope to make most of European leg

ANTWERP (BELGIUM), May 21: Indian men's hockey team will hope to iron out the flaws ahead of the Paris Olympics, while the women's team under new skipper Salima Tete will look to overcome the disappointment of not qualifying for the Summer Games, when the gruelling European leg of the FIH Pro League commences here with matches against Argentina on Wednesday.

The men's team under drag-flicker Harmanpreet Singh is coming into the tournament following a 0-5 Test series whitewash at the hands of Australia and would look to make the most of the opportunity in Europe to get back to winning ways ahead of the Paris Games.

"Undoubtedly, we are focused on the Olympics but we also need to give our best to finish as champions (in Pro League) and secure

direct qualification for the 2026 Hockey World Cup as well," said Harmanpreet, whose team is currently placed third with 15 points from eight Pro League games.

Netherlands are leading the charts with 26 points (12 matches), while Australia are on 20 points (8 matches).

"To achieve both these targets (doing well ahead of Olympics and secure direct qualification for 2026 World Cup), we will strive to give our all on the pitch and win all our matches," the skipper added.

Besides Argentina, the Indian men's team will also test their Olympic preparations against Belgium, Germany and Great Britain.

The Indian women, currently placed sixth on the Pro League table, have a chance to climb up the table when they take on world No.7 Argentina on Wednesday.



The world No.6 side has earned eight points from an equal number of games in the Pro League home leg, registering victories against the United States and Australia.

Newly-appointed captain Salima said the friendlies against South Africa in India earlier this month had helped her team prepare

for the European leg of the Pro League. "We played practice matches against South Africa (in India) to prepare for these Hockey Pro League matches. The point difference between us and second-placed China is just seven points," said Tete in a Hockey India release. "We (will) aim to close this

gap in the remaining matches against Argentina, Belgium, Germany, and Great Britain in a bid to finish as high as we can," she added. China are placed second on the table with 15 points from eight games, while leaders Netherlands are on 36 points with an all-win record in 12 games.

Following the matches against Argentina, the women's team will play Belgium on May 23, while the men's side will take on the hosts a day later.

The women's and men's teams will face Belgium again on May 25. India women and men will end their first half of the European tour with matches against Argentina on May 26, before moving on to the final leg in London where they play Germany on June 1 and 8 and take on hosts Great Britain on June 2 and 9. (PTI)