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3 miners trapped inside illegal rat-hole mine of Patkai hills

Among trapped miners one from Nepal, 2 from Meghalaya

DIBRUGARH, May 26: At least three coal miners are trapped inside an illegal rat-hole mine of Patkai hills in Tinsukia district of Assam following a landslide, officials said on Sunday. According to information, the incident occurred around 12.30 am in the illegal Tikok West mining site between Bargolai and Namdang, located under the Tikok colliery in Ledo, a senior official of the district administration told PTI. "Three coal miners are trapped inside the illegal rat-hole mine after the landslide in Patkai hills. Among those trapped is Dawa Cherpa from Bhojpur in Nepal and two workers are from Meghalaya, identified as John and Fenaal," he added. In total, four coal workers were engaged in the work of procuring illegal coal from the rat-



hole mine, the official said. "Three of them went inside the mine and the fourth one was assisting in coal transportation. Suddenly, a landslide occurred, which trapped the three workers inside the mine. It has been suspected that they died inside the coal mine but we cannot say it until we get their bodies," the official said. The administration is carrying out a rescue operation at the moment and several agencies are being called in to assist, he added. (PTI)

Small tea growers facing uncertainty as factories to stop production over quality regulations

GUWAHATI, May 26: Small tea growers in Assam, who account for nearly half of the tea grown in this North Eastern state, are staring at uncertainty with the bought leaf tea factories (BLFs) to stop procuring their green leaves from next month over quality compliance regulations. The Assam Bought Leaf Tea Manufacturers Association (ABLTMA) had announced shutting down its factories from June one as it is not possible to produce FSSAI-compliant teas from untested green leaves provided by small growers. A Team Board India notification earlier this year made it mandatory for manufacture of only compliant tea by the BLFs. With no testing done of the green leaves, if the made tea is found non-compliant when sent for mandatory public auction, the failed teas will be destroyed with penal action against the BLFs, as per the notification. The small-scale planters, on



their part, maintained that they are working on cent per cent compliance by all their members, while urging for more time to ensure it and seeking government intervention in the matter. "We have written to the state government and Tea Board to intervene. But we have not received any response yet," working president of All Assam Small Tea Growers' Association (AASGTGA) Karuna Mahanta told PTI. Referring to the notification which also made routing of 100 per cent dust teas through public auctions mandatory, he said it was decided last month to maintain status quo till elections are over. "The BLFs were to continue procuring green leaves as earlier.

But this sudden decision by the factories has taken us aback," Mahanta said. The AASTGA has dashed off separate letters to the state government and Tea Board, seeking their intervention while also expressing concern that this unilateral decision of the ABLTMA was a ploy to lead to drop in prices of green leaves. Expressing similar concern, Jatin Chandra Bora, advisor of Lakhimpur district committee of AASTGA, said, "This is a strategy to bring down the prices of the green leaves as such a decision creates pressure on the grower to sell off at whatever price is given." He maintained that the small growers are now aware of harmful effects of pesticides and are ensuring on producing safety standards-compliant leaves. "We have been demanding for facilities for testing the green leaves in the factories itself. Currently, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

HT BRIEFS

Reception committee DIPHU: A reception committee has been formed for holding of the 31st edition of Shishu, Yuva and Aaeematri Central Samaroh of Srimanta Sankardeva Sangha (SSS) at Bakaliaghat on November 8, 9 and 10. A general meeting was held at Srimanta Sankardeva Sangha Bakaliaghat regional office at Bakulia to discuss the formation of the reception committee. The meeting was presided over by Bhabendra Nath Deka, Padaadhikaar Srimanta Sankardeva Sangha. Local Member of Autonomous Council of Langfer and executive member (EM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Madhuram Lekthe and EM, KAAC, Bili Mohan Khakhilary and many representatives of various SSS regional and primary committee attended the meeting. In the meeting it has been decided to form a reception committee for mega Samaroh.

Country's freedom, Constitution, democracy in danger: CM Kejriwal

CHANDIGARH, May 26: Delhi chief minister and AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday attacked the BJP, saying the country's freedom, Constitution and democracy are in danger and called upon Punjab to once again be at the forefront to save the nation. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader said the people of Punjab played a big role in the country's freedom movement. "So many sacrificed their lives for the sake of freedom. Today, our country's freedom, Constitution and democracy is in danger," Kejriwal said during a townhall programme with the traders and industrialists in Ferozpur. Kejriwal, who is on interim bail until June 1 in the Delhi excise policy case, sought support of the peo-



ple of Punjab and said that they need to come forward and be at forefront in the fight to save the Constitution, democracy and freedom in this country. Referring to his arrest, Kejriwal said, "On March 16, the general elections were announced and they arrested me on March 21. They arrested me, my party leaders Sanjay Singh, Manish Sisodia and Satyendar Jain, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Jihadis across border supporting SP, Cong: Modi

DEORIA (UP), May 26: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday claimed that "jihadis" across the border are supporting the Samajwadi Party and the Congress who are appealing for "vote jihad" in the country. Addressing an election rally here in support of BJP candidates in Bansaon and Deoria Lok Sabha seats, he alleged that the INDIA bloc does not want to take the country forward, but back by several decades. "Their agenda is not the development of India," Modi said. "In Pakistan, 'duas' (prayers) are being made for the INDI alliance of Samajwadi Party and Congress. Jihadis across the border are supporting them. The SP and the Congress are making an appeal for 'vote jihad' here," said the prime minister in an apparent reference to a remark by an INDIA bloc candidate.



He said, "This (INDIA bloc) group is saying that if they come to power, they will reimpose Article 370 in Kashmir. They will repeal the CAA (Citizenship Amendment Act) which gives citizenship again to the victims of Partition. Whose agenda is this... this is what these anti-India forces want?" Modi went on to allege, "Their agenda is not the development of India. They want to take back the country by several decades."

Hitting out at the bloc, Prime Minister Modi claimed the "INDI jamaat" has been abusing him for his opposition to reservation on the basis of religion. "I want to remind you that in 2012, the SP in its manifesto had stated that Muslim should get reservation equal to that of Dalits. The INDI jamaat wants to change the Constitution for this. When I ask them (about reservation) they abuse Modi," he said, adding he is opposing reservation on the basis of religion. He accused the SP of doing "dynastic politics." "In the (tenure of the) SP government, mafias had built palaces on public land. But since Yogi Adityanath has come (as chief minister of Uttar Pradesh) the environment has changed. Now, the good days of mafias are over. Houses of the poor (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

12 devotees dead as truck overturns on their bus in UP

SHAHJAHANPUR (UP), May 26: Twelve people, including six women and three children, headed to the Purnagiri temple in Uttarakhand were killed when a gravel-loaded dumper truck overturned on their bus in this district, police said Sunday. Nine other pilgrims were seriously injured in the Saturday night incident and have been admitted to the Government Medical College here, a senior official said. Purnagiri temple in Uttarakhand's Tanakpur is about 180 kms from Shahjahanpur. Shahjahanpur superintendent of police Ashok Kumar Meena told PTI that the accident took place at Hajiyapur village under the Khutar police station area when the privately owned bus carrying 59 passengers from Sitapur had halted at a roadside eatery on its way to the temple. While some of the devotees had alighted for dinner, others waited inside the bus. Suddenly, the dumper truck carrying gravel lost control, overturned and fell onto their bus, unloading the content on the waiting pilgrims, the SP said. According to Meena, 10 passengers identified as Sudhanshu (7), Aditya (8), Ajit (15), Rohini (20), Pramod (30), Seema (30), Suman Devi (36), Ramgopal (48), Shiv Shankar (48), and Chutki (50) died on the spot, while Sonavati (45) and Bindra (50) succumbed during treatment. Local police and villagers rescued some of the passengers from inside the bus. Police said that the victims -- all residents of Kamlapur in Sitapur district, had hired the bus and started their journey at about 6 pm on Saturday. The incident took place at around 11 pm, they said. According to eyewitnesses, there was no way left from where victims could be taken outside. The rescue and relief work was done using mobile phone torches and vehicle lights, Ghanshyam Gupta, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Education awareness

DIPHU: Karbi Students Association (KSA), Langmet Sub-Branch, West Karbi Anglong has organised a felicitation cum education awareness programme. The programme was held at Langmet LP School on Saturday. 11 students who passed in the 2024 HSLC examination and HSSLC final examination from Langmet area were felicitated for their success. On the occasion a drawing competition for school children of lower primary of Langmet LP School was also held. A guest Pradip Kro, a social worker, appreciated the organiser for arranging the felicitation to encourage students to pursue higher studies. Kro also stressed on checking early marriage which is a hindrance towards promoting education in rural areas. It is not only the teachers, but parents and guardians are also responsible to ensure that their ward study. He assured to provide necessary support and guidance to the students.

AVIAN SANCTUARY



Several Tukura Sorai nests seen beautifully hanging from a tree in Majuli on Sunday. UB photos

Shah pins Oppn's religion-based campaign slur

NEW DELHI, May 26: Union home minister Amit Shah has slammed the INDIA bloc's criticism of the Election Commission as a ploy to cover up for its impending loss in the Lok Sabha polls, asserting that the BJP will score a bigger win in opposition-ruled states due to a "positive mandate" for Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In an interview with PTI, Shah claimed that his party has not resorted to any religion-based campaign but insisted that if canvassing against reservation for Muslims, and reaching out to voters on the abolition of Article 370 and implementing a Uniform Civil Code is religion-based campaign, then the BJP has done it and will continue doing so. He dismissed the opposition's criticism of the Election Commission for its handling of poll data and the issue of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), saying that

similar protocols and practices have been followed in previous assembly polls, including Telangana, West Bengal and Himachal Pradesh where the BJP lost. "If those elections were fair, then this election is also fair. When you see defeat, you start crying in advance and try to find excuses to go abroad. This can't go on and on. They want to go on vacation on June 6. So, they are telling something or the other," he said. The Congress's questions about the polling process is aimed at covering up Rahul Gandhi's failure, he said. Shah said the opposition party had not offered any such suggestion at the customary all-party meeting called by the poll watchdog before the elections. "Whenever the opposition loses an election, they raise some questions. There is zero possibility of rigging in EVMs and they want an election which can be rigged." With six phases of (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'Before the ban, males in Bihar increased their frequent alcohol intake from 9.7% to 15%' Bihar alcohol ban prevented 21 lakh cases of intimate partner violence: Lancet study

NEW DELHI, May 26: Bihar's alcohol ban in 2016 prevented 24 lakh cases of daily and weekly consumption, and 21 lakh cases of intimate partner violence, according to new research published in The Lancet Regional Health Southeast Asia journal. The ban is also estimated to have prevented 18 lakh men in the state from becoming overweight or obese, it said. A team of researchers, including those from The International Food Policy Research Institute, Poverty, Health and Nutrition Division, US, analysed data from national and district level health and household surveys. "Strict alcohol regulation policies may yield significant population level health benefits for frequent drinkers and many victims of intimate partner violence," the au-



thors wrote. In April 2016, the Bihar Prohibition and Excise Act brought about a near complete halt on the manufacture, transport, sale, and consumption of alcohol throughout the state. The overnight launch and its strict enforcement made the ban an "attractive natural experiment to estimate the true causal impacts of a strict alcohol restriction policy on health and domestic violence outcomes," according to the authors. Data from the National Family

Health Surveys-3, -4, and -5 were included in the analysis. "Before the ban, males in Bihar increased their frequent alcohol intake from 9.7 per cent to 15 per cent, while in neighbouring states, it increased from 7.2 per cent to 10.3 per cent. "After the ban, these trends reversed, with at least weekly alcohol intake decreasing to 7.8 per cent in Bihar, while in neighbouring states it continued to increase to 10.4 per cent," the authors wrote. They also found evidence for reduced physical violence against women in Bihar, "with a 4.6 percentage points decrease in emotional violence and a 3.6 percentage points decrease in sexual violence". On the aspect of the ban's impact on men's health, the authors' modelling estimated (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'PM waived loans of 22 people but couldn't give ₹ 9,000 cr for HP monsoon disaster'



SHIMLA, May 26: Prime Minister Narendra Modi waived loans worth ₹ 16 lakh crore of 22 people in the last 10 years but could not give ₹ 9,000 crore to deal with the disaster caused by monsoon rains in Himachal Pradesh last year, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said on Saturday. Addressing an election rally at Nahani in Himachal Pradesh's Sirmour district, Gandhi said that rather than helping the hilly state, Modi made an attempt to "steal" its elected government. His statement came days after PM Modi alleged wrongful distribution of Central flood aid by the Congress government in the state and promised action. Gandhi was canvassing for Congress candidate from

Shimla (SC) Parliamentary constituency Vinod Sultanpuri. The former Congress president alleged Modi handed over all storage facilities to one person to control the prices of apples. The reference was apparently made to businessmen Gautam Adani, who possesses cold storage facilities and stores in the state. Share prices of Adani-owned companies rise whenever Narendra Modi is sworn in, Gandhi claimed, adding that under this government the dreams of only 22 people have been fulfilled, while the people of the country remain a mute observer. "The PM says God makes him do things," Gandhi said, taking a dig at Modi. "Maybe God wants Modi to help Adani." "PM Modi waived loans worth ₹ 16 lakh crore of 22 people in the last 10 years but could not give ₹ 9,000 crore to Himachal Pradesh to deal with the disaster caused by monsoon rains," he said. Multiple spells of extreme rainfall in July and August last year brought Himachal Pradesh to its knees, killing more than 550 people and damaging private property and public infrastructure. "I want to ask Modi whether this feeling or disease comes (to his mind) in the morning, evening or remains the whole day," he commented. Striking a chord with the people of the state, Gandhi asserted, "My sister lives here in Shimla. And remember, Rahul and Priyanka (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

IOC, GAIL, ONGC fined for 4th straight quarter for not appointing directors

NEW DELHI, May 26: State-owned oil and gas giants including IndianOil, ONGC and GAIL (India) Ltd have been slapped with fines for the fourth straight quarter for failing to meet listing requirements of having the requisite number of directors on their board.

Stock exchanges imposed a cumulative fine of ₹ 34 lakh on oil refining and fuel marketing giants Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) and Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL), explorers Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) and Oil India Ltd (OIL), gas utility GAIL, and refiner Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd (MRPL) for not meeting the listing requirement in the January-March quarter, stock exchange filings showed.

In separate filings, the companies detailed the fines imposed by the BSE and NSE for either not having the requisite number of independent directors or the mandated women director in the quarter ended March 31, 2024 (fourth quarter of 2023-24 fiscal year), but were quick to point out that appointment of directors was done by the government and they had no role in it.



The companies had faced fines for the same reason the previous three quarters as well. IOC, HPCL, BPCL, GAIL, OIL and MRPL in separate filings said they have been slapped with a fine of ₹ 536,900 each for the fourth quarter. ONGC faced a fine of ₹ 182,900. Listing norms require companies to have independent directors in the same proportion as executive or functional directors. They are also required to have at least one woman director on the board.

ONGC said it has been fined for its board being short of one independent director. IOC said, "the

power to appoint directors (including independent directors) vests with the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Government of India and hence the shortfall in independent directors including non-appointment of women independent director on the board of the company during the quarter ended March 31, 2024 was not due to any negligence/default by the company."

"Accordingly, IndianOil should not be held liable to pay the fines and the same should be waived-off," IOC said.

Stating that it regularly takes up

appointments of independent directors on the company board with parent ministry, the company said it "had received similar notices from the BSE and NSE in the past imposing fines and waiver requests from the company was considered favorably by the exchanges."

HPCL and BPCL made similar statements, while GAIL said appointments are outside the purview/control of company management. OIL said it has requested the ministry for appointment of independent directors.

MRPL said it has been continuously following up with the ministry for appointment of requisite number of independent directors on the board and the same has been under active consideration.

The companies were slapped a fine of ₹ 5,42,800 each for the third quarter (October-December 2023). They had faced a similar fine for the second quarter (July-September 2023). For non-compliance in April-June 2023, ONGC was slapped with ₹3.36 lakh fine, IOC ₹ 5.36 lakh and GAIL ₹ 2.71 lakh fine. HPCL and BPCL were each asked to pay ₹ 3.6 lakh fine, while Oil India had faced a penalty of ₹ 5.37 lakh. (PTI)

Mcap of 9 of top-10 most valued firms jump ₹ 1.85 trn



NEW DELHI, May 26: Nine of the top-10 most-valued firms together added ₹ 1,85,320.49 crore in market valuation last week, with Reliance Industries Ltd and HDFC Bank stealing the show with maximum gains, in line with rally in equities.

Last week, the BSE benchmark zoomed 1,404.45 points, or 1.89 per cent. The 30-share BSE Sensex hit its all-time intra-day high of 75,636.50 on Friday. From the top-10 most-valued firms pack, only ITC emerged as the laggard.

The market valuation of Reliance Industries jumped ₹ 61,398.65 crore to reach ₹ 20,02,509.35 crore. HDFC Bank added ₹ 38,966.07 crore, taking its valuation to ₹ 11,53,129.36 crore.

The market valuation of Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) rallied ₹ 35,135.36 crore to ₹ 6,51,348.26 crore. Bharti Airtel's market capitalisation (mcap) zoomed ₹ 22,921.42 crore to ₹ 7,87,838.71 crore and that of Hindustan Unilever climbed ₹ 9,985.76 crore to ₹ 5,56,829.63 crore.

The mcap of Infosys went up ₹ 8,821.99 crore to ₹ 6,08,198.38 crore and that of State Bank of India (SBI) soared ₹ 6,916.57 crore to ₹ 7,39,493.34 crore. ICICI Bank added ₹ 903.31 crore, taking its valuation to ₹ 7,95,307.82 crore and the mcap of Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) climbed ₹ 271.36 crore to ₹ 13,93,235.05 crore.

However, the market valuation of ITC declined ₹ 436.97 crore to ₹ 5,44,458.70 crore. (PTI)

FPIs take out ₹ 22,000 crore from equities in May amid poll jitters

NEW DELHI, May 26: Foreign investors have pulled out a massive ₹ 22,000 crore from Indian equities so far this month, due to uncertainty surrounding the outcome of the Lok Sabha elections and outperformance of Chinese markets. This came following a net outflow of over ₹ 8,700 crore in the entire April on concerns over a tweak in India's tax treaty with Mauritius and a sustained rise in US bond yields. Before that, FPIs made a net investment of ₹ 35,098 crore in March and ₹ 1,539 crore in February.

Going forward, as clarity emerges on the election front, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) are likely to buy in India, since they cannot afford to miss the post-election rally.

Actually, the rally may begin even before the election results, VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, said.

According to data with depositories, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) witnessed a net outflow of ₹ 22,047 crore from equities this month (till May 24).

"This heavy selling was triggered by the massive outperformance of Chinese stocks. The

Hang Seng index, dominated by Chinese stocks (FPIs invest through the Hong Kong market since there are restrictions on investing through the Shanghai market) surged 7.66 per cent during the last month," Vijayakumar, said.

The election-related jitters, too, might have influenced FPI selling.

With the on-going general election in the country and the uncertainty surrounding its outcome, foreign investors at this point are wary to enter the Indian equity markets before the announcement of election results, Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director - Manager Research, Morningstar Investment Research India, said.

"In recent times, the US Fed has indicated that it would not go ahead with rate cuts until inflation cools and consistently moves towards the target range. This has raised scepticism over the possibility of an early rate cut.

"It led to the appreciation in the US Dollar leading to a surge in US Treasury yields. This doesn't augur well for the emerging markets like India, as under such scenario investments also tend to shift from riskier assets like emerging market equities to more safer asset classes such as US Dollar and US Treasuries," he added.

On the other hand, FPIs invested ₹ 2,009 crore in the debt market during the period under review.

Before this outflow, foreign investors put in ₹ 13,602 crore in March, ₹ 22,419 crore in February, ₹ 19,836 crore in January. This inflow was driven by the upcoming inclusion of Indian government bonds in the JP Morgan Index.

"The long-term outlook for FPI flows into Indian debt is positive due to India's inclusion in global bond indices. However, near-term flows are being impacted by global macroeconomic uncertainty and volatility. The trend will reverse once the interest rate outlook becomes clearer," Vipul Bhowar, Director, Listed Investments at Waterfield Advisors, said.

JP Morgan Chase & Co. in September last year announced it will add Indian government bonds to its benchmark emerging market index from June 2024. This landmark inclusion is anticipated to benefit India by attracting around \$ 20-40 billion in the subsequent 18 to 24 months. Overall, FPIs have withdrawn a net amount of ₹ 19,824 crore in equities in 2024 so far, however, invested ₹ 46,917 crore in debt market. (PTI)

CCI extends bidding deadline for AI to June 28

NEW DELHI, May 26: Fair trade regulator CCI has issued clarifications on the bidding for conducting the study on artificial intelligence and its impact on competition, and has extended the deadline for submission of bids till June 18.

Earlier, the deadline for the bids was June 3.

In a set of clarifications, the Competition Commission of India (CCI) said bids cannot be submitted through a consortium or a joint venture.

Among other eligibility requirements, the minimum annual turnover of ₹ 50 crore has been retained for the bidders.

"The Request For Proposal (RFP) does not provide for sub-

mission of bids through a consortium or joint venture. Turnover of the group companies may, however, be included only to meet the eligibility criterion of Rs 50 crore," the regulator said in a communication dated May 24.

The last date for submission of bids is June 18 and the financial bids will be opened on July 11. The study will cover various aspects, including the ways AI-driven personalised recommendations, services and pricing influence consumer choices.

It will also look at whether and in what manner can AI facilitate and/or implement anti-competitive strategies as well as the novel

strategies aided by AI that can lead to anti-competitive outcomes.

The new forms of collusion prompted by the use of AI such as self-learning algorithms and whether bias in AI algorithms can impact competition will be examined during the study.

Other elements that will be covered include "how do AI-driven personalised recommendations, services and pricing influence consumer welfare and choice", "what are the synergies and risks that may stem from M&As involving firms with AI capabilities" and "what are the specific factors/parameters that need to be considered in assessing competitive effects of such M&As". (PTI)

Most SFBs would not clamour to become universal banks if RBI eases some curbs, says Ex-Secy

NEW DELHI, May 26: Highlighting the importance of small finance banks (SFBs) in fostering financial inclusion, former Financial Services Secretary D K Mittal said most of them would not clamour to become universal banks if some restrictions are eased by the Reserve Bank.

To promote financial inclusion in the country, RBI, in 2014, issued the guidelines for licensing of small finance banks (SFBs) in the private sector. Following this, RBI granted licences to a dozen entities.

As per the RBI guidelines, SFBs are required to open at least 25 per cent of their branches in unbanked rural centres and are mandated to provide 75 per cent of loans to the priority sector compared to 40 per cent for the commercial banks.

Last month, the RBI invited applications from small finance banks meeting specified criteria, including a minimum net worth of Rs 1,000 crore, for becoming regular or universal banks.

"While issuing guidelines for Small Finance Banks to become universal banks, it would be in the



larger national interest of financial inclusion if RBI lifts some of the restrictions imposed on such SFBs including tag of SFBs," he told PTI.

Follow our WhatsApp channel. Talking about restrictions, he said, the RBI should consider allowing co-lending, pass through certificate (PTC) and securitisation, and setting up of subsidiaries.

Idea should be to make them at par with commercial banks except

for three basic principles of priority sector, below 25 lakh and Basel II for capital, he said, adding that these should work as universal banks with a differentiated focus on financial inclusion.

"After all they comply with all guidelines applicable to universal banks except a few related to capital but with additional responsibility of 75 per cent priority sector and 50 per cent below Rs 25 lakh lending. This will ensure that cus-

tomers look at all commercial banks as equal which is so," he said.

"If it is done, they would be as good as a universal bank with the added responsibility of furthering the objective of financial inclusion and serving the population of the lowest strata of society. This will also ensure that most SFBs would not clamour to become universal banks," he added.

As per the April guidelines of the RBI, an SFB aiming to become a universal bank should have a minimum net worth of Rs 1,000 crore at the end of the previous quarter (audited) and the shares of the bank should have been listed on a recognised stock exchange.

It should also have a net profit in the last two financial years and Gross NPA and Net NPA of less than or equal to 3 per cent and 1 per cent, respectively, in the last two financial years.

Other conditions include a prescribed CRAR (capital-to-risk weighted assets ratio) requirement and a satisfactory track record of performance for a minimum period of five years. (PTI)

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Small tea growers facing

we have to send the samples to Kolkata and it takes long to get the results. By that time, the leaves have to be sold off already," Bora said.

The ABLTMA had last week said its member factories will not operate until compliant green leaves are provided, which is nearly impossible for the small growers in the absence of testing facilities in the state.

"The BLFs do not use any chemical in the manufacturing process. But we are being made to pay for non-compliance by the growers," ABLTMA president Chand Gohain told PTI. "The Tea Board notification was given without consulting the BLFs. We had met the Union Commerce minister over the issue in March. Even after his intervention, we are awaiting a positive step from the Board," he added.

Gohain also pointed out that it is a "matter of shame that Assam doesn't have a single testing laboratory even after celebrating 200 years of Assam tea".

He said a meeting of all stakeholders has been conveyed by the government on May 29, adding that the ABLTMA will continue pushing for withdrawal of the Tea Board notification. As per Tea Board India data, there are a total of 1,25,484 small tea growers in the state, who have 1,17,304 hectares of land under cultivation and contribute nearly 48 per cent of the total tea produced annually in the state. Most of the green leaves of small growers are sold to the BLFs, with the ABLTMA having about 250 member factories under it. (PTI)

Country's freedom, Constitution

and then Modi says in Delhi let's fight election." Targeting the BJP-led Centre, the AAP leader said that several opposition leaders have been jailed and "then they say, let's fight election".

"In Maharashtra, Modi ji broke the NCP into two parts, snatched its party and its symbol, divided the Shiv Sena into two parts, snatched its symbol, arrested Hemant Soren (ex-Jharkhand chief minister) before the polls and then he says let's fight election," said Kejriwal. "Like in Pakistan, they arrested Imran Khan, snatched his party, symbol and after what they did to his party they then held elections and won. Had Imran been out (not jailed), his party would have won, everyone knows."

In Bangladesh, (PM) Sheikh Hasina put all opposition leaders in jail and then held elections and won," he added citing more examples.

Escalating his attack on the BJP regime, Kejriwal said, "Hamare desh k andar bhee ab tanashahi ho rahi hai (Dictatorship is now taking place in our country too)...If at this juncture we do not defeat Modi, then democracy, Constitution will not be saved." "I have not come for myself. I have come here to appeal to save the country," he added. Referring to Punjab Governor Banwarilal Purohit, Kejriwal said despite the AAP having overwhelming majority "if he can stop the bills passed by the assembly then it is an attack on democracy." "You have to raise voice against this," he said.

The AAP leader said the "country is moving towards dictatorship". "We can eat only one meal, but we cannot tolerate dictatorship," he added. Kejriwal slammed the BJP over the party's Puri Lok Sabha candidate Sambit Patra's "Lord Jagannath" remark. "Their leader Sambit Patra says Lord Jagannath is Modi's 'bhakt'. 'Ye apne ap ko bhagwan say bhi bada manney lag gaye' (now they are thinking they are bigger than God). Now they are openly saying God is Modi's 'bhakt' (devotee)," he said. Patra had later clarified that it was a slip of tongue and he wanted to mean that the prime minister was an ardent 'bhakt' (devotee) of Lord Jagannath. "What is their slogan 'jo ram ko laye hai, hum unko layenge'?" Kejriwal asked.

Attacking the BJP, he alleged they treat common people like cats and dogs. "If they come to power for the third term, they will change the Constitution and first of all end reservation," alleged Kejriwal. Referring to the Lok Sabha polls, where the AAP is contesting all 13 seats, he said, "If you give all 13 seats to the AAP, it will strengthen our hands and all issues will be resolved."

Notably, in Punjab, the AAP and the Congress, part of the INDIA bloc, are fighting the Lok Sabha polls separately. Referring to the governor, Kejriwal said, "In Punjab, you elected our government, but the governor here creates impediments and stops the bills passed by the state assembly. If you give us 13 seats in Punjab, the governor will not have courage to stop these bills. All 13 MPs will sit on a hunger strike outside the governor's house." The AAP leader also accused the Centre of stopping "₹ 5,500 rural development funds". "They also stopped funds under the National Health Mission, with which more mohalla clinics were to be opened. If you give us 13 seats, the Centre will not have courage to interfere in state's affairs," he said. Kejriwal said Punjab has its coal mine in Odisha and added the state wanted to bring coal from there to the state for thermal power plant.

"The Centre said we can bring it via Sri Lanka to Gujarat and then Punjab. Is this justified. This is 'dadagiri, goondagardi' (bullying, hooliganism)," he said. Kejriwal said Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann had to fight with the Centre, adding they have now given permission and the coal reaches directly by train. Addressing the gathering, Kejriwal said the AAP government treats traders as backbone of Punjab's economy. (PTI)

Jihadis across border

are being built in place of their palaces. This is the difference between the BJP and the INDI alliance," he said. Modi also alleged that the Congress "created roadblocks for countries that wanted to purchase BrahMos missiles".

Accusing the Congress of always playing with the country's security, the prime minister said, "Our country makes BrahMos missiles and the day is not far when BrahMos missiles will be made in Uttar Pradesh." "There has been a demand for this (missile) in many countries but the Congress does not like it. Many countries wanted to purchase the BrahMos but the Congress government created hurdles because the 'INDI' people do not want India to become self-reliant in the defence sector," Modi said.

He said the "INDI people want their arms deals to continue, their brokerage to continue, scams to continue." Modi added, "Today we are moving forward strongly towards a self-reliant India in the defence sector." Purnvanchal will launch an assault on the INDIA bloc in seventh phase of Lok Sabha polls, the prime minister said. Referring to the day of counting of votes of the elections, Modi said June 4 is going to decide the future of India. "India will begin a new journey after June 4," he said. The BJP has fielded Kamlesh Paswan from Bansa-gan and Shashank Mani Tripathi from Deoria in the seventh and last phase of the polls on June 1. (PTI)

Shah pins Oppn's religion-

the seven-phase Lok Sabha polls over, the BJP's key strategist said the party's assertion that its alliance will cross the 400-seat mark when the poll results are out on June 4 is not merely a poll slogan but a well thought-out goal. He said, "We will surely cross 400 seats. We will also form governments in Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Arunachal Pradesh." Assembly polls in the three states have been held alongside the Lok Sabha elections.

"If we get 399 seats and you say we have not crossed 400, then it is your wisdom. But the '400 paar' slogan is based on calculation and considered opinion," Shah said in his characteristic combative and sure-footed manner. Asked if the party was overly dependent on Modi and if a relatively weak opposition was benefitting from its alliance, he said it was not a negative but a positive vote which the ruling alliance is receiving. "This is not a negative vote. Please accept one thing. This is a positive vote. We will get people's support where (in states) we are in power. And mark my words...where we are not, we will be getting a bigger mandate. So this is a positive mandate for the work of the central government," he said.

As Modi has brought to fruition the BJP's core ideological plans, be it the poor's welfare, a secure country, abrogation of Article 370, a uniform law (UCC) across the country, women's reservation and Ram temple, his popularity naturally becomes the strength of the BJP, he added. "He is our biggest leader."

He accused the main opposition party of misleading people on the issue of Muslim reservation, insisting that its accusation that the BJP has been telling a lie rings hollow as it has already implemented such a religious quota in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. "If they divide the truth in pieces to mislead people, then isn't it our duty to put these pieces together and inform people," he said, defending Modi's intense attack on the Congress over the religious quota and the issue of redistribution of wealth.

"You might have heard and understood Rahul Gandhi's X-ray speech. So you want X-ray of what? And if you want to distribute it equally, then who will you distribute to? Manmohan Singh Ji said minorities are their priority. What do you make of this," he asked when questioned about the Congress's allegations against Modi. To a question about the Congress's promise of giving ₹ 1 lakh to women in poor households, he said the party has a history of making populist assurances to come to power but never fulfilling them. Shah said, "They are in power in two-three states. They should at least fulfil this promise there. At least start giving ₹ 1,500 which you promised (in Himachal Pradesh). You are talking about Rs 1 lakh, at least start giving ₹ 1,500. Who will trust them." (PTI)

12 devotees dead as truck

an eyewitness, said. The SP and district magistrate Umesh Pratap Singh had reached the spot after they were informed about the incident. The driver of the dumper fled from the spot and police are looking for him.

According to police, when SP Meena entered the bus, he heard the faint sound of someone yelling and when he removed the gravel, he saw a 12-year-old child, Yashraj, who could be rescued after two hours of struggle. Chief Medical Superintendent at the Government Medical College, Nepal Singh, said that postmortem of the bodies have been done and those injured are being given the best possible treatment.

Meanwhile, President Droupadi Murmu on Sunday grieved the loss of lives in the road accident and expressed condolences to the bereaved families.

"The news of the death of several people in a road accident in Shahjahanpur, Uttar Pradesh, is very sad. I express my condolences to the bereaved families and pray for the speedy recovery of those injured," the president said in a post in Hindi on X. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath expressed condolences to the families of the deceased and directed the district administration to ensure the injured are provided proper treatment. (PTI)

Bihar alcohol ban prevented

that cases of underweight men increased by four percentage points, and those of overweight or obese men decreased by 5.6 percentage points, compared to trends in the neighbouring states. "We estimate that the ban prevented 2.4 million cases of frequent alcohol consumption, and 1.8 million cases of overweight/obesity among males, and 2.1 million cases of intimate partner violence compared to neighbouring states without a similar prohibition," the authors wrote. The findings will be valuable for policy-makers contemplating similar bans in other Indian states, the researchers said.

"While we do not recommend outright bans as a practical and economically viable policy, our study, combined with new evidence that no level of alcohol consumption is safe for humans, suggests that stricter alcohol regulation policies may yield significant population level health benefits for frequent drinkers and benefits for victims of intimate partner violence," the authors wrote. (PTI)

PM waived loans of 22 people

are your soldiers in Delhi and Chief Minister Sukhwinder Singh Sukhu and the team of Congress party are your soldiers in the state." Gandhi also promised a guarantee on the Minimum Support Price for crops and farm loan waiver if his party comes to power at the Centre. He said poor families would get ₹ 1 lakh every year till they are brought above the poverty line. The former Congress president also promised to fill 30 lakh vacancies in government departments to provide jobs to the unemployed youths in the country. He claimed BJP leaders were attacking the Constitution by saying they would abolish it and appealed to Congress workers to protect the Constitution by making an effort to ensure the victory of party candidates in all four Lok Sabha seats. (PTI)

CEM Pramod Boro interacts with Frisbee Ultimate team in Chirang

Interaction underscores significance of sports in fostering holistic development & promoting environmental conservation initiatives in BTR

HT Correspondent KOKRAJHAR, May 26: The chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), Pramod Boro, visited the Frisbee Ultimate team, The Ant, in Rowmari, Chirang district on Sunday and interacted with its members.

Notably, Frisbee Ultimate is a unique team sport that builds self-discipline, agility, mindfulness, and promotes gender equality. The key element of Ultimate Frisbee is the Spirit of the Game (SOTG), which operates on five basic principles, including good knowledge and application of the rules, safe play and spatial awareness, a positive and respectful attitude towards teammates, fans, and opponents, fair-mindedness, and clear and calm communication.

It is noteworthy that The Ant, an NGO working for social upliftment and development, engages



with children and youth between 7 and 25 years for their physical, mental, emotional, and social development.

The absence of body contact during the game, the presence of players from both genders, the ab-

sence of any referee, and the presence of two team captains – one for each team – are other unique features of the game. CEM Boro said he was happy to have interacted with the Frisbee Ultimate team in Rowmari, Chirang. He

emphasised the importance of the spirit of the game among youths for maintaining good health.

Meanwhile, the CEM of BTR, Pramod Boro, also visited the adjoining areas of Ultapani Forest to inspect drought-affected areas and communities. The prolonged absence of rain and rising heat has affected humans, animals, and vegetation alike across the areas. En route, he also inspected a nursery, which is part of the Bodoland Green Mission to resuscitate the forest cover on a war footing. He emphasised the government's commitment to safeguarding the extremely rich and diverse forest resources that nature has so graciously endowed upon the region.

The executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region, Ranjit Basumatary, MCLA Madhab Chandra Chetry, and senior government officials were also present during the visit.

Police seize suspected ganja

HT Correspondent TEZPUR, May 26: Acting on a source of information, a team of Sonitpur Police led by OC Tezpur and IC Kacharigaon apprehended one woman, namely Babita Boro (40), wife of Lt Sambar Boro of Majbat Town under the police station, while she was attempting to smuggle approximately 10 kg of suspected Ganja from Mazbat, Udalguri, to Goromari in a public bus on Sunday. The accused was apprehended at Mission Chariali Bus Stand.

'Akash' prog at Demow Girls High School

HT Correspondent DEMOW, May 26: On Friday, the 'Akash' program took place at Demow Girls High School under the auspices of the Demow Branch Sahitya Sabha Akash Sub-Committee. The flag was hoisted by Runu Dutta, vice-president of the Demow Branch Sahitya Sabha, Beauty Konwar, former secretary of the Demow Branch Sahitya Sabha, performed the smriti tarpan, and Anju Gogoi Medhi, adviser of the Akash Sub-Committee, lit the ceremonial lamp.

As part of the program, a poetry recitation and dialogue delivery competition for women was inaugurated by Padma Lahon Chetia, president of the Demow Branch Lekhika Association. Judges for the competition included Gautam Dutta Phukan, Ujjashree Phukan, and Rina Barua. Ghana Kanta Gogoi, former president of the Demow Branch Sahitya Sabha, inaugurated the open session. Dr Diganta Gogoi, president of the Demow Branch Sahitya Sabha, chaired the meeting, with Ditimoni Dutta, secretary of the Demow Branch Sahitya Sabha, as the anchor. Lakhima Phukan, secretary of the Akash Sub-Committee, outlined the meeting's objectives.

As per the order, LP school timings are from 7:30 am to 12 noon, ME/upper primary is from 7:30 am till 12:30 pm, and high and higher secondary from 7:30 am till 1:00 pm. The order mentions that it comes into effect from May 27 and will remain in force until further notice.

District admin reschedules school timings amid rising heat, prioritises student safety

HT Correspondent JORHAT, May 26: The Jorhat district administration has rescheduled the school timings and has directed all schools (lower primary, middle English/upper primary, high, and higher secondary) to function from 7:30 am starting Monday (May 27) in view of the continuous rise in mercury and scorching heat.

In an order passed by the inspector of schools (Jorhat) Buli Gogoi Bhuyan on Saturday, it was stated that as per the instructions of the district commissioner and the direction of the state government in the interest of students' safety and public well-being, the timings of schools - government, provincialised, and private - have been rescheduled from Monday and will be functioning from 7:30 am.

As per the order, LP school timings are from 7:30 am to 12 noon, ME/upper primary is from 7:30 am till 12:30 pm, and high and higher

secondary from 7:30 am till 1:00 pm. The order mentions that it comes into effect from May 27 and will remain in force until further notice.

The order also directs the heads of the schools to conduct the morning assembly inside the classroom or in a shaded area. Furthermore, it mentions that adequate drinking water should be provided to every student, and students should be encouraged to carry water bottles and drink at intervals of every half an hour.

Electric fans should be kept in running condition, and in case of defective fans, immediate measures should be taken to repair or replace them, the order states. Outdoor activities should be restricted during this heatwave, and students may be instructed not to wear blazers, waistcoats, and ties. If students feel uncomfortable wearing shoes, they should be allowed to wear sandals, the order

mentions. The order further asks the heads of the schools to ensure that vendors selling ice creams, puchkas, etc., are not allowed to carry out their business near school premises.

Our Hojai correspondent adds: Due to the escalating temperatures, the Hojai district administration has decided to adjust school timings starting May 27. Bony Inam Shadab, ADC and district coordinator of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, with the approval of district commissioner Lachit Kumar Das, has issued a directive to all educational institutions in the district.

Effective from May 27, primary school classes will be conducted from 8:00 am to 12:00 noon, secondary school classes from 8:00 am to 12:30 pm, and higher secondary classes from 8:00 am to 1:00 pm. This schedule will be in effect until further notice.

Tezpur Cancer Centre organises breast cancer screening session

HT Correspondent TEZPUR, May 26: A proactive effort unfolded as Tezpur Cancer Centre orchestrated a dedicated breast cancer screening and awareness session for Women Police on Saturday at Tezpur Police Reserve.

Madhurima Das, additional SP, and Mausumi Kalita, additional SP Crime, Sonitpur, alongside Lt Col Dr Sanjib Hazarika (Retd), medical superintendent, and Dr Sanjeev Kumar Gupta, senior consultant radiation oncologist, joined by Dr Krishnapriya Banerjee, and other dedicated staff from Tezpur Cancer Centre graced the event with their presence.

The program commenced with an inaugural address by Madhurima Das, additional SP, Sonitpur, followed by Dr Sanjib Hazarika, medical superintendent at Tezpur Cancer Centre, shedding light on the noble mission of the Assam Cancer Care Foundation (ACCF) and the overarching goals of Tezpur Cancer Centre.

Dr Sanjeev Kumar Gupta elaborated on the prevailing landscape of breast cancer in the north-eastern region and across the nation, emphasising the pivotal role of screening and early detection. He elucidated various screening methods and treatment modalities available for breast cancer.

Journalist distributes water bottles



HT Correspondent BISWANATH CHARIALI, May 26: A local journalist and secretary of the Sootea Press Club, Uttam Kumar Nath, responded to an appeal by GP Singh, DGP Assam, to provide water to on-duty police personnel amidst scorching heat waves. Nath, along with the assistance of Shyamal Jyoti Saikia, the officer in-charge of Sootea PS, distributed water bottles to the police personnel deployed at the Sootea police station on Sunday. This initiative has garnered praise from conscientious individuals in the community.

HT Correspondent SIVASAGAR, May 26: A total of 25 schools in Sivasagar district showcased their innovative projects promoting sustainable environments at the 'LIFE' exhibition held at Betbari Sukanpukhuri HS School, organised by the Bhagyalakshmi Regional Child Welfare Centre. Students presented a variety of projects ranging from solar initiatives to cassava fertiliser projects, as well as rainwater harvesting systems, receiving commendation from the attendees.

The inauguration of the exhibition was led by Dulu Bhuyan, president of the Management Committee of Shukanpukhuri Higher Secondary School, alongside Rajen Bora, director of the Bhagyalakshmi Regional Child Welfare Centre, Jefri Ahmed, coordinator of the Welfare Centre, and Leenamoni Gogoi, principal of Dichang Shukan Pukhuri High School.

Doctor was 'accosted and threatened': MSU

IMPHAL, May 26: The Maring Students' Union (MSU) has alleged recently that a doctor was "accosted and threatened" by the police personnel on the night of May 24, 2024, around 9 pm at Konung Mamang area in Imphal. As such, the MSU demanded an immediate and thorough investigation into this incident. The MSU also said the police personnel involved in this "heinous act" must be held accountable for their actions.

In a statement issued today, the MSU said, "A grave and unwarranted act of police brutality was committed against Dr. Larung Mejonah by the Manipur Police in Konung Mamang". The Maring student body said Dr. Mejonah, a dedicated and respected doctor serving the Manipur Health Department, was returning home when he was "accosted and threatened" by police personnel.

The statement also said, "In a shocking display of misconduct, the police officers involved made threats against Dr. Mejonah's life, insinuating that because he is a tribal and posted at Moreh, his life held less value". The MSU said this behavior is an egregious vio-

lation of the rights and safety of an individual, and it is particularly alarming when perpetrated by those entrusted with maintaining law and order.

Dr. Mejonah, despite his esteemed position and invaluable service to the community, was subjected to questioning that was not only unnecessary but also deeply disrespectful, the Maring student body said. "This undermining of a professional's abilities and making a mockery of his dedication to his profession cannot be tolerated and is condemned at the highest level".

At this crucial juncture, given the unstable nature of the law and order situation in Manipur, such actions are not only reprehensible but also indicative of a dangerous and deep-seated prejudice within certain elements of "our law enforcement", the MSU also said. It is evident that some individuals are acting out of sheer hatred towards a particular community, abandoning basic humanitarian principles, it added.

The Maring student body said Dr. Mejonah has been a pillar of "our healthcare system", providing crucial services to the community

with unwavering commitment. "The assault and threats against him are not only an attack on his person but also on the values of justice and equality that our society stands for".

The MSU demanded an immediate and thorough investigation into this incident. The MSU also said the police personnel involved in this "heinous act" must be held accountable for their actions. "It is imperative that justice is served and that such incidents do not recur, undermining the trust and safety of the public".

The MSU then said the Manipur police must demonstrate transparency and take swift action to discipline those responsible for "this act of brutality". They should act according to the law, not beyond it, ensuring the protection of all citizens, regardless of their background or profession, the MSU added.

Dr. Mejonah's contributions to the health and well-being of the people of Manipur cannot be overstated, the Maring student body said, while adding, "We stand in solidarity with him and call for justice to be served swiftly and fairly". (NNN)

SEVERE CYCLONIC STORM REMAL Tripura issues red alert in four districts



AGARTALA, May 26: The Tripura government on Sunday issued a red alert in four districts — South, Dhalai, Khowai, and West — in the wake of severe cyclonic storm 'Remal' which is likely to make landfall between Bangladesh and adjoining West Bengal coasts by midnight.

"On Sunday, the chief secretary convened a meeting of the state executive committee of disaster management with all stakeholders to review the preparedness for 'Remal'. Officials from the revenue and meteorological departments, Airports Authority of India and security forces attended the meet," revenue secretary Brijesh Pandey told reporters.

"Thunderstorms with lightning, squally winds reaching speeds of 60 kmph, gusting to 70 kmph, and heavy to very heavy rainfall are likely in isolated areas of South, Dhalai, Khowai, and West Tripura districts on May 27. Hence, a red alert has been issued in these four districts," he added.

Pandey mentioned that orange and yellow alerts have been issued for the remaining districts for May

27 and 28.

Asserting that the state is fully prepared to handle any unforeseen events due to the cyclonic storm, Pandey said the state executive committee has decided to declare holidays in all schools on May 27 and 28 as a precautionary measure.

"The district magistrates and superintendents of police have been instructed to be ready to respond to any emergencies, considering the Met's alert for heavy rainfall and gusty winds," he added.

According to Pandey, three NDRF teams are stationed in different districts to assist the administration in case of any emergency resulting from the cyclonic storm. "Since Kolkata airport has already been shut down due to the cyclonic storm, all flights to and from MBB Airport to Kolkata have been suspended, but services on other routes — Agartala-Guwahati, Agartala-Delhi, and Agartala-Bangalore — are operating normally," said an AAI official.

Pandey urged air passengers to stay in close contact with their respective airlines for the latest updates on flight services. (PTI)

Sivasagar schools showcase projects at 'LIFE' exhibition

HT Correspondent SIVASAGAR, May 26: A total of 25 schools in Sivasagar district showcased their innovative projects promoting sustainable environments at the 'LIFE' exhibition held at Betbari Sukanpukhuri HS School, organised by the Bhagyalakshmi Regional Child Welfare Centre. Students presented a variety of projects ranging from solar initiatives to cassava fertiliser projects, as well as rainwater harvesting systems, receiving commendation from the attendees.

The inauguration of the exhibition was led by Dulu Bhuyan, president of the Management Committee of Shukanpukhuri Higher Secondary School, alongside Rajen Bora, director of the Bhagyalakshmi Regional Child Welfare Centre, Jefri Ahmed, coordinator of the Welfare Centre, and Leenamoni Gogoi, principal of Dichang Shukan Pukhuri High School.

DGP GP Singh's appeal spurs community support for police amid heatwave

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, May 26: On Saturday, amidst soaring temperatures and the challenging conditions faced by police personnel in the state, the state's director general of police, GP Singh, took to social media to make a heartfelt appeal to the citizens of Assam. Recognising the strain that continuous high temperatures can place on law enforcement officers, Singh urged the community to come together in support of their local police force.

Through his Twitter account, Singh emphasised the critical need for drinking water for police officers deployed in various locations across Assam. He specifically called upon the people living in proximity to police stations, residential areas, offices, commercial establishments, and other public spaces to extend a helping hand by providing hydration support to the officers working tirelessly in the heat. Singh highlighted the importance of this gesture, stressing that it would help ensure the well-being and effectiveness of the police force during the heatwave.

In response to Singh's clarion call, several individuals and organisations across the state swiftly mobilised to distribute water to both police officers and travelers in need. From Guwahati to Badarpur,

GP Singh @gpsinghips

An appeal to helpful and warm hearted people of Assam - In view of continuous high temperatures, it is requested that drinking water may please be provided to policemen and women deployed near your houses, offices, commercial & business establishments as long as the heat wave lasts. Our police personnel have been advised to carry water bottles with them, we would be grateful if these bottles are refilled as and when required. Assam Police shall always remain grateful.

Karimganj, Dima Hasao, and Sonitpur, acts of kindness and support were witnessed as communities rallied to assist their local law enforcement.

Singh actively shared accounts and images of these commendable efforts on his social media platforms, underscoring the positive impact of community solidarity and support during challenging times. Among the shared images were those depicting senior officers distributing water to their colleagues on duty, as well as

civilians extending a helping hand to parched travelers and police personnel.

The response from netizens was overwhelmingly positive, with many expressing gratitude and admiration for Singh's leadership and the collective efforts to ensure the well-being of Assam's police force. They commended Singh for his compassion and foresight in addressing the needs of the officers and lauded the spirit of solidarity and collaboration between law enforcement and the community.

NFR enhances passenger safety with operation of new FOBs

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, May 26: NF Railway is continuously enhancing passengers' safety, convenience, and comfort by constructing more foot over bridges (FOBs) at locations within its zone as per requirement. In railways, FOBs are commonly constructed at certain locations to bridge the gap between platforms at railway stations, promoting safety and convenience for passengers. It is the most commonly used path for safely changing platforms by passengers while boarding or de-boarding trains. FOBs are typically made of steel or concrete and can be either open or covered.

At NF Railway, there are 279 operational FOBs of various widths and lengths located over five divisions: Katihar, Alipurduar, Rangiya, Lumding, and Tinsukia. During the previous financial year of 2023-24, a total of 10 new FOBs were constructed in Rangiya and Katihar divisions of the zone. Under the Rangiya division, Azara, Patiladaha, Sorbhog, Singra, Boko, Bamunigaon, Changsari, Chaygaon, and Baihata stations each came up with one FOB. In the Katihar division, Harishchandra-pur railway station received one new FOB.



Railways are introducing advanced amenities at railway stations for passengers, such as lifts, escalators, FOBs, and upscale waiting lounges. Under the 'Amrit Bharat Station Scheme', 56 new FOBs will be constructed at selected stations of NF Railway to provide passengers with better safety and amenities during their train journeys.

Shiv Khera inspires youth at Moran Commerce College event

HT Correspondent DIBRUGARH, May 26: Motivational speaker Shiv Khera, renowned for his influential book 'You Can Win', graced an event at Moran Commerce College playground on Saturday, sharing his insights with eager minds.

The event, orchestrated by 'Growth from Grassroot', an NGO spearheaded by Bimal Borah, drew students from various schools and colleges.

In his trademark style, Khera engaged with the students, urging them towards positivity and emphasising the indispensable role of character in nation-building. He articulated, "Character building is the cornerstone of nation-building. A society can only flourish on the foundation of strong character. Teachers should prioritise character building over all else. The youth, as the torchbearers of our nation's future, must internalise the wisdom of great leaders and emulate their path towards societal betterment."

Highlighting the pivotal role of educators, Khera stressed that it is the duty of teachers to impart not just knowledge but also values that shape exemplary character. Drawing inspiration from luminaries like Guru Nanak, Dayananda Saraswati, and Swami Vivekananda, he urged educators to infuse their teachings with timeless wisdom. "Skill development is vital, but paramount is holistic education coupled with discipline and unwavering character. It is preferable to be uneducated than to be educated poorly," Khera asserted, driving home the importance of quality education in shaping future generations.

The motivational event, championed by state cabinet minister and Tingkhong MLA Bimal Borah, served as a beacon of inspiration for the attending students. **Free eye check up camp** **HT Correspondent SIVASAGAR, May 26:** The Jorhat Lions Club spearheaded a significant community initiative by organising a free eye check-up camp in Sivasagar recently. Patients, young and old, streamed into the camp seeking assistance with various eye-related concerns, ranging from routine check-ups to more complex issues requiring professional attention. The event not only provided vital medical support but also fostered a sense of community engagement and solidarity. Volunteers worked tirelessly to ensure the smooth operation of the camp, offering assistance and guidance to attendees throughout the process.

Indian Army thwarts IED attack in Manipur

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, May 26: In a significant achievement, alert and vigilant soldiers of the Indian Army averted a major incident by successfully diffusing three Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) in Imphal East district. The IEDs were discovered on the road connecting Nongdam Tangkhul and Etham Tangkhul villages, near Maphou Dam.

During a routine area domination and surveillance operation, Army personnel noticed the three IEDs placed, in tandem, along the road. Army column acted swiftly and cordoned the area. Subsequently the Bomb Disposal Squad arrived at the location and diffused the IEDs safely, thereby preventing potential loss of life and injury to locals.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Courage is fear holding on a minute longer.
-George S. Patton

Silence on CPI-IW figures

The Modi government has recently ceased the release of the All India Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers (AICPI-IW), a crucial metric for determining dearness allowance (DA), retirement benefits, and other compensations for millions of workers. This suspension, which began in February 2024, has created significant uncertainty and hardship for the working class, raising questions about the government's commitment to transparency and workers' rights. The Labour Bureau, responsible for the AICPI-IW, has not provided any explanation for the delay in publishing the figures for February and March. This gap has resulted in the non-calculation of DA for central public sector employees, including those in banks, leading to a direct impact on their incomes. According to the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), this delay erodes the real wages of workers due to unchecked inflation. The AICPI-IW is vital for regulating wages and DA for millions of employees. It also plays a critical role in measuring inflation and shaping economic policies. Historically, the index is released on the last working day of each month, ensuring timely adjustments to workers' allowances. However, since January's figures were released on February 19, there has been a disconcerting silence. This lack of data has broader implications. The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) has not adjusted retirement and death gratuity, adversely affecting government and organized sector workers. In March 2024, the government announced a 4% increase in Dearness Relief (DR) and DA but immediately suspended the order.

The Union Ministry of Labour and Employment's April 30 order to increase gratuity was reversed on May 7, citing an unspecified rationale. This unpredictability leaves workers and their families in financial limbo, especially given that the increases were tied to a DA hike, which is now on hold. Moreover, the delay affects other allowances, such as the Children's Education Allowance (CEA) and Hostel Subsidy, further exacerbating the financial strain on employees and retirees. The non-release of AICPI-IW data is not an isolated incident; it reflects a broader trend of the Modi government's opaque handling of labour and employment statistics. Urban labor data is consistently delayed by three months, and rural employment data is published annually, obscuring the real-time employment situation. Central Trade Unions (CTUs) have condemned this approach, highlighting how the government's policies have consistently neglected workers over the past decade. The CTUs are mobilizing efforts to defeat PM Modi in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, criticizing his administration for being anti-labour and pro-corporate. They also continue to protest the controversial labour codes passed in 2019-20, fearing that a third term for Modi would lead to their swift implementation, which could further degrade workers' rights and conditions.

The current situation underscores the urgent need for the Modi government to release the AICPI-IW data and clarify its stance on workers' benefits. Transparency and timely data dissemination are essential for protecting workers' rights and ensuring fair compensation. As the country approaches a critical election, the government must address these issues promptly to restore trust and safeguard the welfare of its workforce. The suspension of the AICPI-IW figures not only disrupts the economic stability of workers but also signals a deeper disregard for labour welfare. The government must act swiftly to resolve this issue and demonstrate its commitment to the well-being of India's working class.

Julian Assange won a victory, but the battle for his release continues

On Monday, May 20, 2024, the British High Court granted Julian Assange his first legal victory in four years. The court found that the WikiLeaks founder could appeal his extradition to the United States on the basis that he may be denied free expression rights and face discrimination if tried there. In the UK system, leave must be granted to appeal. Courts have previously refused to grant Assange leave to appeal on key issues.

Assange remains locked up in the notorious Belmarsh Prison. And while he's been granted the right to appeal on two narrow grounds, it's still possible the court could rule against him. Assange still could be extradited - and press freedom hangs in the balance.

The US war on WikiLeaks, its sources, and its founder is a long, sordid affair. It entered its current phase on April 11, 2019, when British police arrested Assange. The United States then unsealed a series of indictments against him and sought his extradition. Ultimately, Assange would be charged with seven counts under the Espionage Act and one count of conspiring to violate the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act. All of the charges stem from WikiLeaks' receipt and publication of classified documents from whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

Assange's attorneys argued that the United States was clearly seeking to extradite Assange for a political offense and that his extradition was barred under British law. In 2021, a British judge rejected these arguments. Nonetheless, the judge blocked Assange's extradition to the United States due to the prison conditions he would likely face. The United States, represented by the UK government, appealed this decision.

They also offered diplomatic assurances about Assange's potential prison conditions. Amnesty International called the assurances "inherently unreliable." But UK courts accepted the assurances, overturned the judge's ruling, and denied Assange the right to appeal.

Assange's attorneys then sought to appeal the parts of the original decision that were ad-

verse to them. They presented nine separate grounds for appeal. At the heart of the defense's legal arguments was the assertion that Assange was a journalist who published information about state criminality. Such actions were in the public interest. Prosecuting a journalist for his work exposing war crimes and abuses of power is a form of government retaliation that violates free expression rights.

The High Court rejected the overwhelming majority of these grounds, ruling that the bulk of charges against Assange dealt with ordinary crimes with no relationship to free expression rights. For the limited number of charges the High Court found touched on free expression rights, the High Court ruled there was not a significant public interest in the publications to prohibit Assange's prosecutions. Prosecuting Assange for exposing war crimes therefore did not violate Assange's right to free expression under Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which the court found to be similar to the US First Amendment.

In a particularly disturbing part of the decision, the High Court ruled Assange's lawyers could not introduce additional evidence about the CIA plot to kill the journalist - not because they found such a plot inconceivable but because the High Court believes if Assange were extradited to the United States, the CIA would no longer have reason to assassinate him.

The decision was not a total defeat for Assange. The United States failed to provide an assurance not to seek the death penalty. Although Assange was not charged with an offense that carried the death penalty, his lawyers argued he could be. The court found these concerns to be persuasive and granted leave to appeal on this point.

Additionally, one of the prosecutors in the case, Gordon Kromberg, stated the United States might argue that as a foreigner Assange had no First Amendment rights. The UK High Court found that if the US government succeeded in this ar-

gument, Assange would face discrimination because of his nationality and be deprived of his right to free expression, in violation of Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. As a result, Assange could also appeal.

The High Court gave the United States an avenue to avoid the appeal. If the United States offered assurances that they would not seek the death penalty against Assange, that Assange would not face discrimination due to his nationality, and that Assange could rely on the First Amendment, Assange would lose his right to appeal. The High Court was taking the ominous and highly unusual step of telegraphing to the United States what to say to extradite Assange.

During past phases of Assange's extradition proceedings, UK courts maintained that US assurances had to be taken at face value and that the defense could not challenge them. This time, the UK High Court announced it would accept both a written challenge to the assurances and hold a hearing on whether they were sufficient.

The United States waited until the April 16 deadline to submit its assurances. The first assurance was a standard death penalty assurance; a routine diplomatic matter given that most of the world does not share the United States' belief in the death penalty. The second assurance read: Assange will not be prejudiced by reason of his nationality with respect to which defenses he may seek to raise at trial and at sentencing.

Specifically, if extradited, ASSANGE will have the ability to raise and seek to rely upon at trial (which includes any sentencing hearing) the rights and protections given under the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States. A decision as to the applicability of the First Amendment is exclusively within the purview of the US Courts.

Going into the May 20 hearing, a sense of pessimism pervaded for Assange's team. Given the judge's dismal assessment of

Assange's rights, I felt certain that this was likely to be the end of the road for Assange's case in the UK legal system. Everyone I spoke to who had followed the case closely, either as journalists, activists, or human rights advocates, also believed Assange's prospects were bleak.

At the outset of the hearing, Assange's defense announced they fully accepted the US assurance on the death penalty, but the remaining assurance was insufficient. The High Court had asked for an assurance that Assange could rely on the First Amendment. The United States instead said Assange could "seek to rely" on the First Amendment.

The defense also noted that diplomatic assurances in extradition typically include promises to refrain from doing something, such as declining to seek the death penalty or require bail. In its assurance, the United States made no promises that the Department of Justice would not argue Assange lacked First Amendment rights on the basis of his nationality. As the defense told the judges, "Mr Kromberg has caused the concern and done nothing to allay it."

After roughly an hour and half of arguments, Assange's lawyers and UK prosecutors representing the US government concluded their arguments. The judges hearing the case, Victoria Sharp and Jeremy Johnson, began whispering to each other. Part of their comments could be heard on a hot mic, but the only word I could make out was "discriminatory." Sharp then announced the court would adjourn for ten minutes, then the judges would let us know "where we are."

In the overspill room where most of the press was, there was confusion. As we discussed among ourselves what this could possibly mean, one journalist quipped, "Where we're at? We're at the Royal Courts of Justice." When the judges had been gone more than twenty minutes, it became clear they were making a decision.

It would be nearly a half hour before the judges returned. Sharp announced that Assange was granted a full appeal on whether he would face discrimi-

nation as a foreign national or be denied free expression rights. Sharp denied an appeal on the issue of the death penalty, however, all parties had already agreed the assurance was sufficient.

The High Court had essentially told the United States what to say in order to prevail. And yet the United States couldn't even muster that. The court had also tied the hands of the defense. And in spite of the seemingly insurmountable odds, they prevailed.

Supporters of Assange began gathering outside the Royal Courts of Justice a full two hours before the hearing. When news of what had happened inside the courtroom reached the hundreds of protesters outside, there was clear jubilation.

Assange's victory should be celebrated by all those who value press freedom. Assange, however, is not out of danger. The two judges ruled Assange a right to appeal, they did not rule in favour of the arguments. And the arguments Assange's lawyers can raise are still extremely narrow.

The Assange extradition has been filled with twists and turns, which makes it impossible to predict what will happen next, made all the more confounding by the High Court's seeming indifference to many of the fundamental press freedom and human rights issues at stake. The March ruling read very much like the High Court judges wanted to rubber stamp the prosecution of a journalist, but the United States and UK lawyers blundered so badly as to make that impossible. Now those same judges have issued a stunning rebuke to the United States. Could judges who believe prosecuting Assange for his journalism does not violate his free expression rights block US extradition, given that the United States may not allow him First Amendment rights as a foreign national?

Uncertainty aside, Assange's supporters are right to celebrate a rare legal victory. Assange's defense will have another chance to fight his extradition. Anyone who cares about press freedom should be rooting for them to prevail. (IPA Service)

Shadows of truth: How democracy strives to survive each day?

By: Unmana Chakraverty

It is no hidden truth that India is heading towards a more politically active environment with the rise of social media. More and more youngsters are taking interest in engaging themselves in socio-political discourses and the entire country is divided into left vs. right. The dominant political parties in India, the Indian National Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party are busy setting up narratives in the media through advertisement, public rallies and public speeches during the time of Lok Sabha elections of 2024. Amidst all of these, where people are busy discussing their favorite and unfavourite political leaders and their work in the past five years, there still remains a crucial issue i.e., the changes seen in the dynamic landscape of Indian media.

Before getting into the discussion of the political parties and corporations influencing media channels for producing content favoring right wing politics and attacking the opposition, it is important for the viewers to take a firm stand against the notable media houses and the journalists working for them. It is indeed a serious issue and an undeniable fact that corporations own media houses and their association with a certain political party can reflect on the kind of news reporting and content creation which is mostly accused of being biased and one-sided. But, considering the fact that political and corporate pressure on journalists have persisted for quite a long period of time, journalists yet earlier questioned the ones in power.

Reflecting back to the period of Emergency in 1975, when the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi made an attack on the freedom of expression of speech of media houses, the Indian Express still had the courage to take a stand against the then Indira Gandhi government by leaving the editorial space in their newspaper blank. Ramnath Goenka, who led the Indian Express newspaper during the emergency period, had been a strong critic

of government censorship even during the period of British government, was of the view that he had two options in front of him, either follow the government orders or listen to his heart. Goenka did what his heart said and he rebelled against Gandhi's restriction on freedom of press. Contrast to that, today in the Narendra Modi led government where most of the media houses are controlled by rich industrialists, more than threat to press freedom, manipulation of news and facts have become inevitable.

Top journalists of India are seen to be blindly supporting right-wing ideologies and constantly brushing issues under the carpet. It seems as if the most acclaimed journalists of this nation have forgotten the basics news values, which includes accuracy, transparency, fairness, proximity and the most important giving voice to the voiceless.

When Manipur was burning due ethnic conflict and extreme violence, for certain A-list media personnels it was more important to cover Israel-Palestine war from Television, which was miles away from where the actual bombardments were happening.

However, none of these famous journalists or so-called courageous journalists had the sensibility to come to Manipur and have an overview of the situation the valley was going through. We often blame political leaders and corporations owning media houses for the deteriorating condition of news reporting, but we should not forget that journalists are also to be blamed, or rather, they should be blamed more.

Before being journalists they are supposed to fulfill the responsibilities of being accountable citizens of this country, where they are keeping the nation's interest and well-being at the forefront by being unbiased and authentic. The 9 pm prime time shows have become more like daily soap operas with debates containing similar and repetitive storylines. The topic for debates would either be about love jihad, hindus versus muslims, India

and Pakistan and attacking the opposition especially Indira Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru.

Severe issues like rape cases, women safety, unemployment rate, scandals, public infrastructure and water crisis are discussed only in small tea shops and the credit goes to social media platforms which gives people some sort of access to information that are either hidden by mainstream media channels or they fail to meet the standards of Indian journalists in order to get a slot in the prime time shows. Journalism students spend lakhs of money in pursuing a degree, with a dream to become a responsible and respected journalist, however it is sad to see the ones on television do not even know what question to ask while interviewing the Prime Minister of India.

In April, the country's largest sex exploitation case, the Prajwal Revanna case, made headlines. Prajwal Revanna, the BJP-JD(S) MP from Hassan district, Karnataka, was accused of assaulting thousands of women and recording 2,967 molestation videos. These official numbers showed women crying and pleading for Revanna to stop. The videos were circulated on pen drives by Revanna's former driver, Karthik, just before the Lok Sabha elections in Karnataka in 2024. Before the media exposed the case, Revanna fled to Germany. The victims included house helps at Revanna's home and wives of several government officials.

Despite the severity of the case, there were no debates or discussions on prime-time shows. Not even prominent female journalists like Rubiqa Liyaquat, Anjana Om Kashyap, or Navika Kumar raised the issue or demanded that the government bring Revanna back to India to face justice. However, there is also an uprising of independent media outlets like the NewsLaundry and Newsminute on YouTube who attempts to function as a Public Service Broadcaster, Unfiltered by Sandish Bhatish who brings to the audience interesting conversations by interviewing both opposition and ruling party leaders, thus giving us a wider perspective of everything. We also have senior journalists like Ravish Kumar who left NDTV in 2022 for the sake of serving the public truth with transparency.

Israel is continuing its destruction of Rafah by massive bombing

By: Krishna Jha

Amidst massive bombing of Rafah, its major part is in ruins now. There is also sealing of entry and exit for life-saving aid. Brutality is in its full bloom. Israel, a built up habitat for those survivors of extremities during holocaust, now has spread out its own genocidal intent it had faced once several decades back. The poisonous flame of hatred has been kept alive by those who believed in clash of civilizations.

At the end of the Second World War, to create the state of Israel, there was mass displacement of over 750,000 Palestinians. It was on May 15 that the mass displacement started taking place at the peril of huge masses. The date was a reminder of the tragedy that they had to go through and was called by the Palestinians, Nakba, and Arabic for "catastrophe".

On May 15 this year, a 100-page report, on 'Genocide in Gaza: Analysis of International Law and its Application to Israel's Military Actions since October 7, 2023', was submitted to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide, and the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel.

The report has been prepared by International legal experts over Israel's genocide in Gaza after conducting the most comprehensive legal analysis to date of Israel's military operation. It is clear from its findings that Israel has committed and continues to commit genocide against Palestinians in

Gaza. Tens and thousands of displaced and also exhausted Palestinians have started their journey to the unknown seeking justice and succour.

The report has been submitted at a moment when Israel invades Rafah, 'last refuge' for Gaza, forcing more than a million Palestinians to flee from Israel's attacks on the southern city. The report has become a caution and to create awareness among other states that they have an obligation against any kind of injustice, and work together to prevent and punish Israel's egregious violations of the prohibition on genocide. They also serve to strengthen the current legal cases against Israel in the International Court of Justice and against the Biden Administration in US federal court.

The report finds that Israel has killed at least 34,568 Palestinians, 14,500 of whom are children, and injured 77,765 other Palestinians in Gaza, comprising more than five percent of Gaza's population in total. The operation has destroyed up to 70 percent of homes in Gaza, as well as the majority of civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, universities, UN facilities, and cultural and religious heritage sites. A staggering 1.7 million civilians-over 75 percent of Gaza's population-have been forcibly displaced by Israel's military offensive, and civilians in Gaza face catastrophic levels of hunger and deprivation due to Israel's restriction on, and failure to ensure adequate access to, basic essentials of life, including food, water, medicine, and fuel.

"This assault has been one of extremes: the deadliest conflict for journalists and



aid workers ever recorded, the world's fastest starvation rate ever, and more children killed in four months than all conflicts in the past four years combined. Simply put, the devastation in Gaza is unparalleled," said Thomas Becker, Legal and Policy Director of UNHR. These actions have taken place as representatives from all levels of the Israeli government have openly and repeatedly made statements evincing genocidal intent. "What is unique about the situation in Gaza is that Israel's rights abuses and its leadership's candid genocidal discourse has been on full display for the world," said Susan Akram, Director of the International Human Rights Clinic at Boston University School of Law.

In the last few days, people on foot and vehicles have crowded the roads of Rafah. The southern city on the borders of Egypt is now in shambles, though formally Israel is yet to unleash the attack. Though a small city, Rafah now houses 1.5 million highly vulnerable Palestinians, majority of them being refugees who had been forced by Israelis to flee from north and central Gaza.

The UN humanitarian chief has warned of horrific destruction which would have the apocalyptic consequences since the relief material is stopped by Israeli ruling circles. The military offensive of Israel has in-

cluded in its offensive the blocking of food itself. Fuel is running out and the rescue material fails to reach those who need them. Famine has covered the entire area. The battles near the Rafah and Kerem Shalom Crossing in south of Gaza is a pointer that the vital packages are properly blocked. It has been clearly an effort to block all land routes too. By land, to the south and for Rafah, to those who are uprooted from this city, any movement is almost impossible.

In fact the Rafah operation has become a great negative fallout. These are the people that have been seeking to gain roots, as they have been chased away from Rafah that has turned into rubble, and facing homelessness not once or twice but more than five to six times. The closure of the land-crossings for relief material has forced a significantly large number of Gazans on the verge of starvation. Although some relief supplies have been sought to be sent through sea, it cannot replace the land route as it cannot reach with adequate quantity. There are also some agencies trying to send relief like food materials, water and aid into Gaza, and also tents but all these initiatives are crushed by Israeli authorities. On top of all these, there is the continuing bombing of Rafah over the weekends. (IPA Service)

Radiosurgery: Pioneering non-invasive approaches to tumor therapy

By: Dr Aditya Gupta

Radiosurgery is an advanced non-invasive and high-precision medical procedure that uses a focused beam of radiation to treat tumors and other medical conditions. It is a very special form of radiation therapy which delivers high doses of radiation with precise accuracy to a concentrated area. Radiosurgery is used to treat a wide range of medical conditions, including benign and cancerous tumors of the brain, spine, lungs, liver, and prostate, as well as non-cancerous conditions such as trigeminal neuralgia.

One of the most advanced radiosurgery systems available today is the M6 CyberKnife. This cutting-edge system combines advanced imaging technology with a robotic arm that delivers high doses of radiation to tumors with sub-millimeter accuracy. The M6 CyberKnife can treat tumors anywhere in the body, including the brain, spine, lungs, liver, pancreas, and prostate. The system uses real-time imaging to track the position of the tumor and automatically adjusts the radiation beam to ensure that the tumor receives the correct lethal dose of radiation.

One of the key advantages of the M6 CyberKnife is its accuracy. The system can deliver high doses of radiation with extreme precision, which minimizes damage to surrounding healthy tissue. This precision also allows the M6 CyberKnife to treat tumors that may be difficult to access with traditional surgery, such as tumors located deep in the brain or spine.

All this is accomplished without any pain, as this technology is frameless, and does not need a frame to be fixed onto the head.

Benign tumors - are non-cancerous growths that can occur in various parts of the body, including the brain, spine, and lungs. While these tumors are typically not life-threatening, they can cause significant discomfort and affect a person's quality of life. Traditional surgery can be effective in removing benign tumors, but it can also be invasive and involve significant recovery time.

CyberKnife offers a non-invasive alternative that delivers a high dose of radiation to the tumor with extreme accuracy, destroying the tumor cells while minimizing damage to surround-

ing healthy tissue. The compelling reason to avoid traditional surgery is also when the tumor is small, which is when radiosurgery is most effective.

AVMs - Arteriovenous Malformations are a rare condition that occurs when there is a malformation of the blood vessels in the brain or spinal cord. AVMs can cause a variety of symptoms, including headaches, seizures, and neurological deficits. Traditional surgery to remove an AVM can be risky and may involve significant recovery time. CyberKnife offers a safe and effective alternative, delivering a high dose of radiation to the AVM with extreme accuracy, leading to a gradual closure of the blood vessels.

Metastatic tumors - are tumors that have spread to other parts of the body from their original location. Metastasis is a common complication of many types of cancers, including breast, lung, and prostate cancer. Traditional treatments for metastatic tumors include surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation therapy. CyberKnife offers a targeted approach to treating metastatic tumors, delivering a high dose of radiation to the tumor with extreme precision while minimizing damage to surrounding healthy tissue.

Another advantage of the M6 CyberKnife is its non-invasive nature. Unlike traditional surgery, which requires incisions and can result in significant pain and recovery time, the M6 CyberKnife does not require any incisions or anaesthesia. Patients can typically return to their normal activities immediately after treatment, within minutes.

The CyberKnife is a relatively new technology in India, and while there is limited data on its usage, it is steadily gaining popularity among medical practitioners and patients alike. Despite having high success rates, effectiveness and 100% safety, this technology is underutilised in India as of now.

While more research is needed to fully understand the impact of CyberKnife on cancer treatment in India, the initial findings suggest that it is a promising option for patients who require precise and non-invasive treatment for various types of tumors and cancers. *(The author is the Director of Neurosurgery and Cyberknife, Artemis Hospital, Gurugram)*

How alcohol consumption can affect the brain well before a diagnosis of addiction

By: Nikki Crowley

With the new Amy Winehouse biopic *Black in US* theatres as of May 17, the late singer's relationship with alcohol and drugs is under scrutiny again. In July 2011, Winehouse was found dead in her flat in north London from "death by misadventure" at the age of 27. That's the official British term used for accidental death caused by a voluntary risk.

Her blood alcohol concentration was 0.416%, more than five times the legal intoxication limit in the US - leading her cause of death to be later adjusted to include "alcohol toxicity" following a second coroner's inquest.

Nearly 13 years later, alcohol consumption and binge drinking remain a major public health crisis, not just in the UK but also in the US.

Roughly 1 in 5 US adults report binge drinking at least once a week, with an average of seven drinks per binge episode. This is well over the amount of alcohol thought to produce legal intoxication, commonly defined as a blood alcohol concentration over 0.08% - on average, four drinks in two hours for women, five drinks in two hours for men.

Among women, days of "heavy drinking" increased 41% during the Covid-19 pandemic compared with pre-pandemic levels, and adult women in their 30s and 40s are rapidly increasing their rates of binge drinking, with no evidence of these trends slowing down.

Despite efforts to comprehend the overall biology of substance use disorders, scientists' and physicians' understanding of the relationship between women's health and binge drinking has lagged behind.

I am a neurobiologist focused on understanding the chemicals and brain regions that underlie addiction to alcohol. I study how neuropeptides - unique signaling molecules in the prefrontal cortex, one of the key brain regions in decision-making, risk-taking and reward - are altered by repeated exposure to binge alcohol con-

sumption in animal models.

My lab focuses on understanding how things like alcohol alter these brain systems before diagnosable addiction, so that we can better inform efforts toward both prevention and treatment.

The biology of addiction

While problematic alcohol consumption has likely occurred as long as alcohol has existed, it wasn't until 2011 that the American Society of Addiction Medicine recognised substance addiction as a brain disorder - the same year as Winehouse's death.

A diagnosis of an alcohol use disorder is now used over outdated terms such as labeling an individual as an alcoholic or having alcoholism.

Researchers and clinicians have made great strides in understanding how and why drugs - including alcohol, a drug - alter the brain. Often, people consume a drug like alcohol because of the rewarding and positive feelings it creates, such as enjoying drinks with friends or celebrating a milestone with a loved one.

But what starts off as manageable consumption of alcohol can quickly devolve into cycles of excessive alcohol consumption followed by drug withdrawal.

While all forms of alcohol consumption come with health risks, binge drinking appears to be particularly dangerous due to how repeated cycling between a high state and a withdrawal state affect the brain. For example, for some people, alcohol use can lead to "hangxiety," the feeling of anxiety that can accompany a hangover.

Repeated episodes of drinking and drunkenness, coupled with withdrawal, can spiral, leading to relapse and reuse of alcohol. In other words, alcohol use shifts from being rewarding to just trying to prevent feeling bad.

It makes sense. With repeated alcohol use over time, the areas of the brain engaged by alcohol can shift away from those traditionally associated with drug use and reward or pleasure to brain regions more typically engaged during stress and anxiety.

All of these stages of drinking,

from the enjoyment of alcohol to withdrawal to the cycles of craving, continuously alter the brain and its communication pathways. Alcohol can affect several dozen neurotransmitters and receptors, making understanding its mechanism of action in the brain complicated.

Work in my lab focuses on understanding how alcohol consumption changes the way neurons within the prefrontal cortex communicate with each other.

Neurons are the brain's key communicator, sending both electrical and chemical signals within the brain and to the rest of your body.

What we've found in animal models of binge drinking is that certain subtypes of neurons lose the ability to talk to each other appropriately. In some cases, binge drinking can permanently remodel the brain. Even after a prolonged period of abstinence, conversations between the neurons don't return to normal.

These changes in the brain can appear even before there are noticeable changes in behaviour. This could mean that the neurobiological underpinnings of addiction may take root well before an individual or their loved ones suspect a problem with alcohol.

Researchers like us don't yet fully understand why some people may be more susceptible to this shift, but it likely has to do with genetic and biological factors, as well as the patterns and circumstances under which alcohol is consumed.

Women are forgotten

While researchers are increasingly understanding the medley of biological factors that underlie addiction, there's one population that's been largely overlooked until now: women.

Women may be more likely than men to have some of the most catastrophic health effects caused by alcohol use, such as liver issues, cardiovascular disease and cancer. Middle-aged women are now at the highest risk for binge drinking compared with other populations.

When women consume even moderate levels of alcohol, their risk for various cancers goes up, including digestive, breast and pan-

creatic cancer, among other health problems - and even death. So the worsening rates of alcohol use disorder in women prompt the need for a greater focus on women in the research and the search for treatments.

Yet, women have long been underrepresented in biomedical research.

It wasn't until 1993 that clinical research funded by the National Institutes of Health was required to include women as research subjects.

In fact, the NIH did not even require sex as a biological variable to be considered by federally funded researchers until 2016.

When women are excluded from biomedical research, it leaves doctors and researchers with an incomplete understanding of health and disease, including alcohol addiction.

There is also increasing evidence that addictive substances can interact with cycling sex hormones such as estrogen and progesterone. For instance, research has shown that when estrogen levels are high, like before ovulation, alcohol might feel more rewarding, which could drive higher levels of binge drinking.

Currently, researchers don't know the full extent of the interaction between these natural biological rhythms or other unique biological factors involved in women's health and propensity for alcohol addiction.

Looking ahead

Researchers and lawmakers are recognising the vital need for increased research on women's health. Major federal investments into women's health research are a vital step toward developing better prevention and treatment options for women.

While women like Amy Winehouse may have been forced to struggle both privately and publicly with substance use disorders and alcohol, the increasing focus of research on addiction to alcohol and other substances as a brain disorder will open new treatment avenues for those suffering from the consequences. *(Courtesy: Scroll.in)*

Undernutrition is the original and most important AIDS

By: Scott K. Hevsel and Pranav Sinha

COVID-19, RSV, Flu A, Flu B, Disease X. We are all beleaguered by reports of the next emerging airborne germ that will start another conversation of masks, vaccines, hospitalization, and yes, death. Faced with the near-daily urgency of a headline grabbing alphabet soup of pathogens, it is easy to grow numb. Let us pinch ourselves then, and for a moment, consider another lettered foe, TB.

The rise of acquired-immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) because of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) opened our eyes to this ghost from the past. Despite urgent action on AIDS and billions of dollars invested in tests, treatment, and vaccine development, TB remains the leading bacterial killer worldwide. As Infectious Diseases physicians and global health researchers who have studied TB and cared for those it afflicts across the world, we believe TB continues to haunt us because we have failed to recognize an even more important and pervasive AIDS: undernutrition.

Before the antibiotic era

Dr. Peter Cegielski, currently at Emory University, was one of the first physician-scientists to begin cataloging the links between nutrition and TB; in seminal work he described numerous revealing natural experiments. During the Dutch famine (1944-1945) of World War II, daily caloric intake for the average adult plummeted to a mere 600 kcal/day, with a consequent dramatic increase in TB mortality. Conversely, the German blockade of Denmark during World War I prevented the Danish from exporting nutrient rich foods such as meat, fish, and dairy products, leading to an unexpected surplus. In the following months, TB rates fell drastically in Denmark even as those rates climbed in nearby warring countries. This period on the calendar was so unusual it was referred to as the "the year of health" by the Danes. Such ecological events provide insight into the critical role of food in the prevention of developing TB disease and improving treatment outcomes, distinct from antibiotics.

So why does weight loss and malnutrition drive TB?

Akin to how HIV causes AIDS by attacking and weakening our body's immune system leading to the inability to ward off infectious diseases like TB, undernutrition deprives the immune system of the array of nutrients including proteins, vitamins, and minerals it needs to function. Malnutrition is the most common cause of immun-

odeficiency worldwide and has even been described as nutritionally-acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (N-AIDS). This is why we continue to see the impact of hunger on TB in the 21st century. Economic crises and resultant food insecurity in Venezuela and Zimbabwe both resulted in skyrocketing TB rates in those countries.

While we contend with the grim consequences of starvation in Gaza and Sudan now, experts fear that nutritional deprivation in Afghanistan, Yemen, Ukraine, and other zones of conflict, combined with harsh and cramped living conditions might recapitulate the effect of the Dutch Hunger Winter. As grievous as a new Hunger Winter may be, most undernutrition is borne silently by masses chronically and slowly deprived of access to food.

TB and undernutrition are co-epidemics of poverty

Writing at the turn of the 20th century, Sir William Osler described TB as a social disease with a medical aspect. He was not isolated in this opinion. The early 20th century was notable for the social medicine movement. Whereas public health focused on environmental issues such as housing and sanitation to reduce diseases like TB and cholera, social medicine had a broader focus on nutritional, educational, economic, and psychological wellness. Illustratively, Chile's social medicine campaign against TB in the 1930s focused on increasing wages, ensuring better nutrition, improving the built environment at home, reducing unsafe conditions at work, reducing alcoholism and venereal diseases, cleaning public places, constructing parks, and promoting sports. Similarly, the Papworth study in England (1918-1943) created an almost utopian city of social protections and demonstrated convincingly that housing and nutrition reduced progression to TB disease.

The impact of social medicine is writ large in the TB mortality trends seen in the United States in the 19th and 20th century. In the 1860s, estimates of TB mortality in the US exceeded 300 per 100,000 which is considerably higher than rates seen in high TB burden countries such as India, Tanzania, and South Africa today. Between the 1860s and the 1940s, the rate dropped by about 80%. Similar trends were noted in the United Kingdom. However, streptomycin, the first effective medication for TB was only deployed in 1947 and the first TB vaccine came into use in 1954. So what drove this massive reduction? The historian Thomas Mckewon has posited the most credible theory; he believed that improvements in nutrition and living conditions

which occurred concurrently and relatively rapidly led to the drops in TB and effective nationwide cures for N-AIDS. So how significantly did nutritional status improve in the United States? We have data on the body mass index (BMI) of 19-year-old men enrolled in America's West Point Military Academy over this period of time which are revealing. BMI is a rough estimate of an individual's nutritional status and is calculated using height and weight. Despite errors in higher BMIs misrepresenting body mass of muscle or healthier patterns of fat distribution, low BMIs reliably correlate with malnutrition such that individuals with BMIs below 18.5 are considered malnourished. Records indicate that the average BMI was only 20.5 during the second half of the 19th century. This means a 6-foot tall cadet would be about 150 pounds. For a visual, think Captain America before the super serum.

The BMI of cadets surged after the first world war and there was an increase in the average weight by nearly 30 pounds over the course of the 20th century and most of this increase occurred prior to 1959. A large systematic review of data from 2.4 million individuals suggests that for every unit increase (i.e. going from a BMI of 20 to 21) reduces the risk of TB disease by 14%. A 30 pound gain for a 6 feet tall cadet would mean a 4 point increase in BMI. This amount of weight gain would now provide Captain America with a shield that effectively halved the risk of TB disease. While military cadets do not fully represent the American population, they do provide some sense of the nutritional transformation afoot in the United States at a time where TB rates were dropping without any clear medical intervention.

The turn away from nutrition

In the 1960s, a landmark clinical trial in Madras (now Chennai) in India showed that treatment of TB disease with newly invented antibiotics was comparable to high intensity nutritional rehabilitation and surgical approaches being offered for only a privileged few. This was a triumph of modern science. Antibiotics provided public health practitioners tools to tackle TB at scale. The allure of cure in a pill is powerful. Even as they hailed this important advance, the scientific community forgot the lessons of the past and concluded that nutrition did not have a role in the management of TB in the modern era. Enough effective treatment for transmissible disease would limit the need for other preventative therapies, so the prevailing thinking went.

TB became the purview of the mod-

ern hospital system and peripheral clinics, viewed myopically through a biomedical lens. Decades have followed where the response to the persistence of the global TB pandemic has been to search for new drugs, new tests for disease, and an ever-elusive vaccine. Replacing meals with medications may have constituted an egregious case of throwing out the baby with the bathwater.

While the bulk of TB mortality in higher income countries was driven down through socioeconomic progress which has myriad benefits beyond TB elimination, a double standard was in play in lower income countries. In a regressive application of the strict biomedical approach, poor countries endemic for TB and undernutrition have found recovery loans through donor agencies tied to performance in adhering to World Health Organization metrics for certain health conditions, like TB. Performance required the majority of resources for TB care directed to delivery of pills for TB disease that necessitated daily treatment for half a year's time in most cases, and mandated strict adherence to pill counts.

In the extreme, such an obligation to misguided metrics contributed to undesired suffering from antibiotic resistance, or to put it bluntly, a loan from the International Monetary Fund was associated with an increase in TB mortality. Whereas programs that saw gains in TB prevention and disease treatment married social protections with evolving diagnostics and therapeutics, at the same time international funders demanded austerity measures which shrank those very protections.

What is not measured is not valued

We now have ample evidence that malnutrition is the leading driver of TB, accounting for 19% of people with new TB disease, more than double that caused by HIV. Yet with N-AIDS, we have seen far fewer gains than with the remarkable advances for HIV-AIDS. As Infectious Diseases physicians, when we care for someone with TB that is caused by HIV, to not prescribe antiretroviral medication to treat their immune compromising virus would be malpractice. We employ sophisticated biomarkers of HIV burden including measurement of subsets of immune cells and circulating viruses, and we tailor medicines to the person's preference, needs and viral genetic background.

In contrast, while about half of all persons with TB are malnourished and we know that malnourished individuals have a more guarded prognosis, we often use their weights merely to calculate the doses of their TB antibiotics. We do not tailor a nutritional

intervention and chart its impact on N-AIDS. This lack of measurement is part holdover of World Health Organization reporting patterns, part misperception of the benefits of a nutritional intervention, and part despondence that undernutrition is so tied to the intransigence of poverty.

Both of us have had the privilege of working with and caring for persons with TB. When we do, it is clear why this disease is called consumption. It appears as if something is consuming individuals from within, the temples become concave, the eyes recess into the orbital socket, cheeks lose their plumpness, and the skeleton rises to prominence. The Victorians believed that the disease consumed all that was inessential, leaving sufferers with a moral purity. But when we apply our stethoscopes to chests with protruding ribs and hear the accelerated thudding of hearts frantically pumping anaemic blood, we know that the disease has, in fact, consumed their vitality, their productivity, and their future.

What is truly essential is personhood rehabilitation where one regains the ability to care of themselves, their families, and follow the life paths of their choosing. Feeling the weakness of their grips as they shake our hands, we know that TB antibiotics are necessary, but not sufficient for that goal. We remain incredulous that malnutrition, so inescapable and so cardinal to TB disease, was ever sidelined.

Hope for communities burdened by TB and undernutrition

March 24 marks World TB Day, recognised in awareness and advocacy. Despite the enormity of the global TB pandemic, we remain steadfastly hopeful. Our optimism is buoyed by the pivotal Reducing Activation of Tuberculosis by Improvement of Nutrition Status (RATIONS) study led by Drs. Anurag and Madhavi Bhargava from Yenepoya University in India. The Bhargavas are a husband and wife team who have dedicated their life to addressing health inequities among the most vulnerable individuals in India.

The RATIONS study provided empirical evidence that nutritional support can reduce TB disease development and TB transmission by randomizing 10,000 household contacts of people with new TB disease to either receiving nutritional support in the form of a food basket that provided 750 kcal per day (including 23g of protein) and micronutrients or routine monitoring and care of the person with new TB disease only. The team in India found a 40% reduction in people with new TB disease over 2 years of follow up. Such a reduction in TB

disease is on par with the projected impact for the novel M. tuberculosis M72/AS01E vaccine.

Could the answer to TB be as simple as feeding households at-risk of TB? Firstly, we do not wish to suggest a false dichotomy with a M. tuberculosis vaccine and nutritional interventions. The two approaches may be complementary as improving the underlying nutritional status could improve the efficacy of vaccines. Vaccines work better in well-fed people.

Secondly, there may be optimal micronutrient and macronutrient combinations in food preparations that are better for one population or another. Further still, food alone may not help if one unwittingly carries additional gut pathogens that prevent nutrient absorption. Yet these are questions that can be solved by interdisciplinary scientists in TB and undernutrition endemic settings where arguably more considerable scientific resources should be aimed.

Advocates for nutrition are often dismissed as idealists who dwell in castles in the sky. Yet, there is a hard economic argument to be made for nutritional interventions for TB. The Copenhagen Consensus ranked TB elimination efforts as the best global health investment. Good nutrition is a global health best-buy. Given that malnutrition affects every single organ of the body, combatting malnutrition reduces overall health spending and improves economic productivity. Indeed, an investment of \$1.4 billion in nutrition yields an estimated \$19 billion in lifetime earnings and saved expenditure.

A mathematical model projected that a robust nutritional intervention run by the Indian government would lead to an approximately 80% reduction in TB cases and deaths over five years while being more cost-effective than most other enthusiastically implemented health interventions. And while this might sound quixotic, the pre-antibiotic decline of TB in the United States and the striking results of the RATIONS study give the model's projections verisimilitude.

So as we mark the passage of another World TB Day, let us imagine a vaccine that can be grown locally, shipped regionally without a cold chain, and administered in a concoction limited only by consumer's imagination - a vaccine without predilection to conspiracy and when fully embraced carries protection against the world's deadliest bacterial pathogen while also conferring household economic security. Food is the TB vaccine we already have. *(Courtesy: The Wire)*

Israel must take over Rafah in order to eliminate Hamas' last remaining battalions and achieve its goal of 'total victory' over the militants: Netanyahu

Aid trucks begin entering Gaza under agreement with Egypt to bypass Rafah

DEIR AL-BALAH, May 26: Aid trucks entered Gaza from southern Israel on Sunday through a new agreement to bypass the Rafah crossing with Egypt after Israeli forces seized the Palestinian side of it earlier this month. But was unclear if humanitarian groups would be able to access the aid because of on-going fighting in the area.

Egypt refuses to reopen its side of the Rafah crossing until control of the Gaza side is handed back to Palestinians. It agreed to temporarily divert traffic through Israel's Kerem Shalom crossing, Gaza's main cargo terminal, after a call between US President Joe Biden and Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi.

But that crossing has been largely inaccessible because of fighting linked to Israel's offensive in the nearby city of Rafah. Israel says it has allowed hundreds of trucks to enter, but United Nations agencies say it is usually too dangerous to retrieve the aid on the other side.

The war between Israel and Hamas, now in its eighth month, has killed nearly 36,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials. Around 80 per cent of the population's 2.3 million people have fled their homes, severe hunger is widespread and UN officials say parts of the territory are experiencing famine.

Hamas triggered the war with its October 7 attack into Israel, in which Palestinian militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and seized some 250 hostages. Hamas is still holding some 100 hostages and the remains of around 30 others after most of the rest were released during a cease-fire last year.

Hamas claimed to have captured an Israeli soldier during fighting in northern Gaza and released video late Saturday showing a wounded man being dragged through a tunnel. The Israeli military denied any of

its soldiers had been captured, and Hamas did not provide any other evidence to substantiate its claim.

In a separate development, the Israeli military said it had detained a suspect over a widely circulated video in which a man dressed as an Israeli soldier threatens mutiny. In the video, the man said tens of thousands of soldiers were ready to disobey Defense Minister Yoav Gallant over his suggestion that Palestinians should govern Gaza after the war and pledged loyalty to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu alone.

It was not clear if the man was on active duty, or when or where the video was made. Yair Netanyahu, the prime minister's son, had shared the video on social media, sparking criticism from political opponents. The prime minister's office released a brief statement condemning all forms of military subordination.

Egypt's state-run Al-Qahera TV aired footage of what it said were trucks entering Gaza through Kerem Shalom. Khaled Zayed, head of the Egyptian Red Crescent in the Sinai Peninsula, which handles the delivery of aid from the Egyptian side of the Rafah crossing, told The Associated Press that 200 aid trucks and four fuel trucks are scheduled to be sent to Kerem Shalom on Sunday.

It was not immediately clear if the UN was able to retrieve the aid from the Gaza side.

Southern Gaza has been largely cut off from aid

since Israel launched what it says is a limited incursion into Rafah on May 6. Since then, over 1 million Palestinians have fled the city, with most having already been displaced from other parts of the besieged territory.

Northern Gaza, which has been largely isolated by Israeli troops for months and where the UN's World Food Program says famine is already underway, is still receiving aid through two land routes that Israel opened in the face of worldwide outrage after Israeli strikes killed seven aid workers in April.

A few dozen trucks have also been entering Gaza daily through a US-built floating pier, but its capacity remains far below the 150 trucks a day that officials had hoped for. Aid groups say the territory needs a total of 600 trucks a day to meet colossal humanitarian needs.

Netanyahu has said Israel must take over Rafah in order to eliminate Hamas' last remaining battalions and achieve its goal of "total victory" over the militants, who have recently regrouped in other parts of Gaza where the military had already operated.

Netanyahu faces growing pressure from the Israeli public to make a deal with Hamas to free the remaining hostages, something Hamas has refused to do without guarantees for an end to the war and the full

withdrawal of Israeli troops. Netanyahu and other Israeli leaders have ruled that out.

Scuffles broke out between Israeli police and protesters in Tel Aviv on Saturday after thousands gathered to demonstrate against the government and demand the return of the hostages. The protesters called for Netanyahu's resignation and demanded new elections.

International pressure is also growing, as the war leaves Israel increasingly isolated on the world stage.

Last week, three European countries announced they would recognize a Palestinian state, and the chief prosecutor for the International Criminal Court requested arrest warrants for Netanyahu and Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, along with three Hamas leaders.

On Friday, the International Court of Justice ordered Israel to end its military offensive in Rafah. The top United Nations court also said Israel must give war crimes investigators access to Gaza.

Israel is unlikely to comply with the orders, and has sharply condemned the ICC's move toward arrest warrants for its leaders. Israel says it makes every effort to avoid harming civilians and blames their deaths on Hamas because the militants operate in dense, residential areas.

The Gaza Health Ministry said Sunday that the bodies of 81 people killed by Israeli strikes have been brought to local hospitals over the past 24 hours. That brings the overall Palestinian death toll from the war to at least 35,984. The ministry does not distinguish between civilians and fighters in its count.

The Israeli government has said that 14,000 militants and 16,000 civilians have been killed in Gaza since the start of the war, without providing evidence. (AP)



Aid trucks enter Gaza from southern Israel on Sunday through a new agreement to bypass the Rafah crossing with Egypt.

South Korean, Chinese and Japanese leaders gather in Seoul



SEOUL, May 26: South Korea's president reportedly called for a greater Chinese role in addressing concerns about North Korean nuclear threats during a meeting with the visiting Chinese premier on Sunday on the eve of a trilateral meeting involving Japan's leader.

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, Chinese Premier Li Qiang and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida held rounds of bilateral talks among themselves on Sunday to discuss ways to enhance cooperation and other issues. They were set to meet Monday for a trilateral session, the first such meeting in more than four years.

No major announcement is expected from Monday's three-way gathering. But observers say that just resuming their highest-level, three-way talks is a good sign and suggests the three Asian neighbours are intent on improving relations. Their trilateral meeting was supposed to happen annually but it had stalled since the last one in December 2019 because of the COVID-19 pandemic and complex ties among the three countries.

Yoon and Li agreed to launch a new South Korean-Chinese dialogue channel involving senior diplomats and defence officials in mid-June. They also agreed to restart negotiations to expand the free trade agreement and reactivate dormant bodies on personnel exchanges, investments and other issues, according to Yoon's office.

Chinese state media reported Li told Yoon that the two countries should safeguard the stability of their deeply intertwined industrial and supply chains and resist turning economic and trade issues into political and security-related issues.

Yoon also asked China, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, to contribute to promoting peace on the Korean Peninsula, while speaking about North Korea's nuclear programme and its deepening military ties with Russia, according to South Korean media reports.

Yoon's office couldn't immediately confirm the report. But it said Yoon and Kishida in their separate meeting expressed worries about North Korea's nuclear program and agreed to strengthen their cooperation with the United States.

South Korea, Japan and the US have long urged China — North Korea's major ally and economic pipeline — to use its leverage to persuade the North to abandon its nuclear ambitions. But China is suspected of avoiding fully enforcing UN sanctions on North Korea and sending clandestine aid shipments to help its impoverished neighbour stay afloat.

North Korea's nuclear program and other sensitive topics like China's claim over self-governed Taiwan and territorial disputes in the South China Sea are not among the official agenda items for Monday's trilateral meeting. South Korean officials said that a joint statement after Monday's meeting will cover the leaders' discussion on cooperation in areas like people-to-people exchanges, climate change, trade, health issues, technology and disaster responses. (PTI)

Emergency crews in Papua New Guinea move survivors of massive landslide to safer ground

MELBOURNE, May 26: Emergency responders in Papua New Guinea were moving survivors of a massive landslide — feared to have buried scores of people — to safer ground on Sunday as tons of unstable earth and tribal warfare, which is rife in the country's Highlands, threatened the rescue effort.

The South Pacific island's government meanwhile is considering whether it needs to officially request more international support.

Crews have given up hope of finding survivors under earth and rubble 6 to 8 metres deep after a landslide wiped out part of Yambali village in Enga province a few hours before dawn on Friday, said Serhan Aktoprak, the chief of the International Organisation for Migration's mission in Papua New Guinea.

Local authorities initially estimated the death toll could be around 100, but others fear many more have died.

"Hopes to take the people out alive from the rubble have diminished now," Aktoprak told The Associated Press.

"People are coming to terms with this so there is a serious level of grieving and mourning," he added.

Only five bodies had been dug out of the debris by hand by late Saturday, with heavy earth-moving equipment yet to arrive at the mountainous location 600 kilometres northwest of the capital, Port Moresby.

Estimates of homes destroyed were revised up from 60 on Saturday to more than 100 on Sunday.

Government authorities were establishing evacuation centres on safer ground on either side of the massive swathe of debris that covers an area the size of three to four football fields and has cut the main highway through the province.

"Working across the debris is very dangerous and the land is still sliding," Aktoprak said.

Besides the blocked highway, convoys that have transported food, water and other essential supplies since Saturday to the devastated village 60 kilometres from the provincial capital Wabag have

faced risks related to tribal fighting in Tambitanis village about halfway along the route. Papua New Guinea soldiers were providing security for the convoys.

Eight locals were killed in a clash between two rival clans on Saturday in a longstanding dispute unrelated to the landslide. Around 30 homes and five retail businesses were burned down in the fighting, local officials said.

Aktoprak said he did not expect tribal combatants would target the convoys but noted that opportunistic criminals might take advantage of the mayhem to do so.

"This could basically end up in carjacking or robbery," Aktoprak said. "There is not only concern for the safety and security of the personnel, but also the goods because they may use this chaos as a means to steal." Longtime tribal warfare has cast doubt on the official estimate that almost 4,000 people were living in the village when a side of Mount Mungalo fell away.

Justine McMahon, country director of the humanitarian agency CARE International, said that figure was based on an out-of-date census and didn't take into account the recent movements of refugees fleeing tribal violence in the region.

"The authorities do anticipate that the number of casualties will rise," McMahon said.

"Because of tribal fights, other displaced people had moved into the area, so they do expect that the population is much bigger than the official figures indicate," McMahon added.

McMahon said moving survivors to "more stable ground" was an immediate priority along with providing them with food, water and shelter. The military was leading those efforts.

The numbers of injured and missing were still being assessed on Sunday. Seven people including a child had received medical treatment by Saturday, but officials had no details on their conditions.

Medical facilities were buried along with more than 100 houses, several small businesses, a guest house, school and gas station, officials said. (PTI)

UK PM Rishi Sunak plans mandatory National Service for youth in election pledge

LONDON, May 26: In one of his first major election pledge announcements on Sunday, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said he will introduce a "bold new" form of mandatory National Service for young people if the Conservatives win another five-year term in the July 4 polls.

The British Indian leader said his plan would see 18-year-olds given the choice of a full-time military placement for 12 months or a scheme to volunteer for one weekend a month for a year. The military placement would be selective, with tests used to decide eligibility, and involve working with the armed forces or in cyber defence.

"We have so much to be proud of in Britain but one of the problems in our society is that we have generations of young people who don't have the opportunities they deserve," said Sunak in a campaign video to announce this new Tory proposal.

"Britain today faces a future that is more dangerous and more divided. There's no doubt how democratic values are under threat; that is why we will introduce a bold new model of National Service for 18 year olds to be spent either in a competitive full-time military commission over 12 months or with one weekend per month volunteering in roles within the community, like delivering prescriptions and food to infirm people or in search and rescue," he said.

B'desh will seek Interpol's help to bring back 'mastermind' of lawmaker's murder: Official

DHAKA, May 26: Bangladesh will seek help from Interpol to bring back the fugitive "mastermind" of the brutal killing of the ruling party lawmaker Anwarul Azim Anar, who was found murdered in Kolkata last week, a top official said here on Sunday.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police's (DMP) Detective Branch (DB) chief Mohammad Harun-or-Rashid made the remarks while talking to reporters at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport on Sunday just before leaving for Kolkata to investigate the murder case.

Anar, a three-time parliamentarian from the Jhenaidah-4 segment in Bangladesh and also the president of Awami League's Kaliganj sub-district unit left Dhaka on May 12 to undergo medical treatment at Kolkata, from where he went missing the very next day.

Search for him began after Gopal Biswas, a resident of Baranagar in north Kolkata and an acquaintance of the Bangladeshi politician, filed a complaint with the local police on May 18.

According to the Kolkata police, circumstantial evidence indicated that the MP was first strangled and killed after which his body was chopped into pieces and

The Tory leader said this would enable young people to gain valuable skills, make the UK more secure and build a stronger national culture.

"This ambition benefits our country and our young people alike," he said, pointing to Sweden where 80 per cent of young people completing National Service say they recommend it to their friends.

"Uncertain times call for a clear plan and bold action to charter course to a better future. Our plan will ensure new generations and our country meet the challenges of an uncertain world," he added.

While he took aim at the Opposition to say they lack such a "clear plan", the Keir Starmer led Labour Party hit back against the proposal.

"This is another desperate GBP 2.5 billion unfunded commitment from a Tory party which already crashed the economy, sending mortgages rocketing, and now they're spoiling for more. This is not a plan — it's a review which could cost billions and is only needed because the Tories hollowed out the Armed Forces to their small size since Napoleon," the Labour Party said in a statement.

Questioned on how the Tory plan would be enforced, UK Home Secretary James Cleverly told 'Sky News' that the military option would be selective.

"There's going to be no criminal sanc-

tions, nobody's going to jail over this," he clarified, adding that nobody would be compelled to do the military element but those who do will be paid and those who choose to volunteer will not be paid.

He explained: "We want to build a society where people mix with people outside their own communities, mix with people from different backgrounds, different religions, different income levels."

"The bulk of this is about helping build a cohesive society where people mix outside their bubble."

The Liberal Democrats accused the governing Tories of "decimating" the country's world class professional armed forces with damaging budget cuts.

"Our armed forces were once the envy of the world. This Conservative government has cut troop numbers and is planning more cuts to the size of the Army," said Lib Dem defence spokesperson Richard Foord.

Historically, National Service was introduced in 1947 after World War II by the then Labour government which involved men between the ages of 17 and 21 required to serve in the armed forces for 18 months. This mandatory National Service scheme came to an end in 1960.

Besides Sweden, a number of other European countries such as Norway and Denmark have similar forms of conscription for their armed forces. (PTI)

Lithuanians return to the polls with incumbent president favoured to win 2nd election round

VILNIUS, May 26: Lithuanians return to the polls Sunday for the second round of the Baltic country's presidential election as incumbent President Gitanas Nausėda seeks to hold off Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonyte and secure another five-year term. The 60-year-old Nausėda, a moderate conservative, has been a strong backer of Ukraine, a position shared across most of the political spectrum. The popular Nausėda has been in office since 2009 and during that time Lithuania has also given refuge to many who have fled an authoritarian crackdown in neighbouring Belarus and increased repression in Russia. The president's main tasks in NATO-member Lithuania's political system are overseeing foreign and defence policy, along with acting as the supreme commander of the armed forces. Given that Lithuania is strategically located on NATO's eastern flank, the presidency of

a relatively small nation is given added importance as tensions rise between Russia and the West over the war in Ukraine. The election comes as Russian gains in Ukraine are fuelling greater fears about Moscow's intentions, particularly in the strategically important Baltic region. After regaining its independence in 1991 from the Soviet Union, which occupied the southern-most Baltic country for five decades, Lithuania joined the European Union and NATO in 2004. Both candidates have been outspoken critics of Moscow and of Minsk, a Russia ally. Nausėda who is favoured to win another five-year term, is a former banker who entered politics with his successful presidential run in 2019. He and Šimonyte won the first round but failed to muster the 50 per cent of the votes needed to win the presidency outright. Nausėda won the first round on May. (AP)

At least 5 dead in Texas after severe weather sweeps across Texas and Oklahoma, authorities say

OKLAHOMA CITY, May 26: A Texas sheriff says at least five people are dead after powerful storms tore through a rural community, obliterating homes and leaving thousands of people without power on Sunday.

Cooke County Sheriff Ray Sappington told The Associated Press that the victims included three family members who were found in one home near Valley View, a rural community near the border with Oklahoma.

The destructive storms began Saturday night. Officials said a tornado north of Dallas overturned heavy recreational vehicles, shut down an interstate and caused extensive damage to a highway travel center where drivers had rushed to take shelter.

"It took some time to get back in there because of all the damage with the power lines, and trees were down. It was kind of a monumental task just to get back to where they were," Sappington told Dallas television station

WFAA.

Forecasters had issued tornado and severe thunder storm warnings for parts of both states, as some heat records were broken during the day in South Texas and residents received triple-digit temperature warnings over the long holiday weekend.

A tornado crossed into northern Denton County in Texas late Saturday and overturned tractor-trailer trucks, stopping traffic on Interstate 35, Denton County Community Relations Director Dawn Cobb said in a statement.

The tornado was confirmed near Valley View, moving east at 40 mph (64 kph), prompting the National Weather Service to issue a tornado warning for northern Denton County, Cobb said.

The storm damaged homes, overturned motorhomes and knocked down power lines and trees throughout the area including points in Sanger, Pilot Point, Ray Roberts Lake and Isle du Bois State Park, Cobb said.



People who suffered injuries in the storm were transported to area hospitals by ground and air ambulances, but the number of injuries in the county was not immediately known, Cobb said, while a shelter was opened in Sanger.

The fire department in the city of Denton, about 37 miles (59.5 kilometers) north of Fort Worth, Texas, posted on X that emergency personnel were responding to a marina "for multiple victims, some reported trapped."

The Claremore, Oklahoma, police announced on social media that the city about 28 miles (45 kilometers) east of Tulsa was "shut down" as a result of storm damage including downed power lines and trees and inaccessible roads.

Earlier Saturday night, the National Weather Service's office in Norman, Oklahoma, said via the social platform X that the warning was for northern Noble and far southern Kay counties, an area located to the north of Oklahoma City. "If you are in the path of this storm take cover now!" it said.

A following post at 10:05 pm said storms had exited the area but warned of a storm moving across north Texas that could affect portions of south central Oklahoma.

At 10:24 pm, the weather service office in Fort Worth posted a message warning residents in Era and Valley View they were in the direct path of a possible tornado and to immediately seek shelter. The Fort Worth office continued to post notices and shelter warnings tracking the movement of the storm through midnight and separately issued a severe thunderstorm warning with "golf ball sized hail" possible.

The weather service office in Tulsa, Oklahoma, warned on X of a dangerous storm moving across the northeast part of the state through 2 am and issued severe thunderstorm notices for communities including Hugo, Boswell, Fort Towson, Grainola, Foraker and Herd.

The Norman office had compared conditions Saturday to "a gasoline-soaked brush pile." Forecasters said any storms that form could explode with large hail, dangerous winds and tornadoes.

"There's a small chance most of the matches are duds and we only see a few storms today. Still, that's not a match I would want to play with. It only takes one storm to be impactful," it said via Facebook.

Excessive heat, especially for May, was the danger in South Texas, where the heat index was forecast to approach 120 degrees Fahrenheit (49 degrees Celsius) in some spots during the weekend. Actual temperatures will be lower, although still in triple-digit

territory, but the humidity will make it feel that much hotter.

The region is on the north end of a heat dome stretching from Mexico to South America, National Weather Service meteorologist Zack Taylor said.

Sunday looks like the hottest day with record highs for late May forecast for Austin, Brownsville, Dallas and San Antonio, Taylor said.

Brownsville and Harlingen near the Texas-Mexico border already set new records Saturday for the May 25 calendar date — 99 degrees Fahrenheit (37 degrees Celsius) and 100 degrees Fahrenheit (38 degrees Celsius), respectively — according to the weather service.

Red Flag fire warnings were also in place in West Texas, all of New Mexico and parts of Oklahoma, Arizona and Colorado. Humidity was very low, under 10 per cent, and wind gusts of up to 60 mph (97 kph) were recorded. (PTI)

SC to hear BJP's plea against Calcutta HC order on advertisements

NEW DELHI, May 26: The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a plea filed by the BJP challenging a Calcutta High Court order that had refused to interfere with a single-judge verdict restraining the party from issuing advertisements that are allegedly "violative" of the Model Code of Conduct during the Lok Sabha polls. According to the cause list of May 27 uploaded on the apex court website, a vacation bench of Justices J K Maheshwari and K V Viswanathan is scheduled to hear the plea.

On May 22, a division bench of the high court had said it was not inclined to entertain the appeal against the interim order passed by the single-judge bench. The single-judge bench on May 20 had restrained the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) from publishing advertisements that violated the MCC until June 4, the day the Lok Sabha poll results are scheduled to be declared. The court had also restrained the saffron party from publishing the advertisements mentioned by the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) in West Bengal, in its petition claiming unverified allegations against it and its workers. The high court's division bench had said that the BJP can approach the single judge for a review or for modifications or a recall of the order. The BJP had moved the intra-court appeal before the division bench, claiming that the single-judge bench had passed the order without giving it any hearing.

In its petition filed in the apex court, the BJP has said the division bench of the high court ought to have considered that the party was not heard and an ex-parte mandatory injunction was granted at an ad-interim stage by the single judge. "It is pertinent to highlight that such interim relief granted by the high court was beyond the prayer sought by the All India Trinamool Congress (AITMC/respondent no.1) which was limited only to the grant of interim order directing the ECI (Election Commission of India) to take steps in accordance with law," it has said. The plea has claimed that the single judge "erred by granting an interim injunction" based on the purported violation of the MCC, without taking into consideration that the issue is pending before the EC, which, by virtue of Article 324 read with Article 329 of the Constitution, has the authority to take appropriate action against any political party that violates the MCC. (PTI)

PM Modi's 'mujra' remark an insult to Bihar: Kharge

SASARAM (BIHAR), May 26: Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Sunday hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his 'mujra' remark against opposition leaders and said that he "insulted Bihar" by making such a comment. Addressing an election rally in favour of Manoj Kumar, Congress leader and Mahagathbandhan nominee for Sasaram Lok Sabha seat, Kharge said, "Modi ji insulted Bihar by using this word... it means mujra happens here. This is an insult to Bihar and its people. This is not how a PM should talk. He should be talking in a statesman-like manner."

The Congress president's attack came after Modi vowed to thwart alleged attempts to rob Dalits and backward classes of reservation by INDIA bloc, which he accused of being "enslaved" and performing "mujra" for its Muslim vote bank.

"Bihar is the land that has given a new direction to the fight for social justice. I wish to declare from this soil that I will foil the plans of the INDIA bloc to rob the SCs, STs and OBC of their rights and divert those to Muslims. They may remain enslaved and perform 'mujra' to please their vote bank," the PM had said while addressing a poll rally in the state on Saturday.

Kharge further said, "PM Modi considers himself as a 'Tees Maar Khan' (a person who glorifies himself). He is under the wrong impression. It is the people who are real 'Tees Maar Khan'. He (Modi) is like a dictator. If he returns

to power for a third term, people will not be allowed to speak freely."

He alleged that the BJP was spreading communal hatred to divert the attention of the people from issues that matter.

"Neither the PM nor other BJP leaders will talk about issues such as growing unemployment or price rise. They are spreading communal hatred. The forces that are attacking the Constitution and spreading the politics of hate... must be defeated. They are dividing this country on the lines of religion and caste," he alleged.

Kharge claimed that the PM was lying that the Congress would impose an inheritance tax if voted to power.

"This election is very crucial... it's an election to save the democracy and the Constitution. We have to fight unitedly. This election is basically 'mujra' vs Modi' and not 'Rahul vs Modi'," he claimed.

The Congress president said he respects Modi as he is the Prime Minister but claimed that the latter does not respect leaders of the grand old party.

"He (Modi) knows only to abuse Sonia ji, Rahul ji and other Congress leader. He hugs the rich and not the poor. His government neglected the rights and welfare of the underprivileged sections," Kharge alleged.

Voting will take place in Sasaram, Nalanda, Patna Sahib, Pataliputra, Arrah, Buxar, Karakat and Jehanabad Lok Sabha constituencies in the last phase on June 1. (PTI)

It's Rahul, who enjoys vacations abroad, vs Modi who celebrates Diwali with jawans: Shah

SASARAM/KARAKAT, May 26: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday asserted that the ongoing Lok Sabha polls were a choice between Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who celebrates Diwali among Armymen, and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi who "rushes abroad for vacations whenever the weather becomes uncomfortable".

Addressing back-to-back election rallies in Karakat and Sasaram Lok Sabha constituencies in Bihar, Shah dubbed the INDIA bloc as the one comprising "scammers guilty of financial wrongdoings worth Rs 12 lakh crore" which was taking on Modi, "with an unblemished record during the 23 years he was CM (of Gujarat) and the PM".

He said that unlike Gandhi, who was "born with a silver spoon", Modi has worked hard to reach the

top, coming from an "ati pichhda (extremely backward class) family" and selling tea at one point of time to make ends meet.

The former BJP president claimed that the INDIA bloc lacked a cohesive leadership and "its prominent figures are looking at one year of prime ministership each. Such an arrangement can never provide a strong government capable of defeating Pakistan-sponsored terrorism".

The home minister slammed the Congress for being "scared of Pakistan's atomic bombs" and asserted that his government, which has scrapped Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir, was resolved to claim Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir "which was ours, is ours and shall remain ours".

Shah lambasted parties opposed to the BJP for providing reservations,

INDIA bloc will rewrite Constitution to give reservation on basis of religion: Modi



MAU (UP), May 26: Prime Minister Narendra Modi Sunday claimed INDIA bloc parties will rewrite the Constitution to provide reservation on the basis of religion, and alleged they want to turn the country's majority community into second-class citizens.

Addressing a public meeting in Purvanchal region's Ghosi here, he also alleged the opposition grouping will end the reservation given to SC, ST, OBC and give all of it to Muslims. He accused INDIAI parties of making different castes fight among themselves.

Attacking INDIA bloc partners Samajwadi Party and Congress, Modi said they have neglected Purvanchal over the years and turned it into a "region of mafia, poverty and helplessness".

The SP and INDIA bloc are making castes fight among themselves so that they become weak, he alleged, adding this is being done "to divert people's attention from the real issues".

"Today, I have come to alert the people of Purvanchal and Ghosi about the big conspiracy of the INDIAI alliance," Modi said, and counted the grouping's three "big conspiracies".

"First, the people of INDI alliance will change the Constitution and write in it afresh that reserva-

tion should be given on the basis of religion in India. Second, these INDI people will end the reservation given to SC, ST, OBC. Third, they will give the entire reservation to Muslims on the basis of religion."

He said, "A third method has been created to circumvent the OBC reservation. They are declaring Muslim castes as OBC overnight. Recently, the Calcutta High Court has rejected OBC reservation for 77 Muslim castes."

The PM went on to add, "Today, the SP, Congress and INDI people want to make the majority commu-

nity in India second-class citizens."

He alleged those associated with the Samajwadi Party kept Purvanchal backward under a conspiracy and the people of the region will continue to punish them for this.

"The families of SP and Congress had their dynastic mindset turn Purvanchal into a region of mafia, poverty and helplessness," he said.

"The people associated with the INDI Alliance who set fire to your houses, encroached on land, who emboldened rioters, who shed tears for the mafia, such people should not be allowed to set foot in Pur-

vanchal," said the PM.

The rally was held in support of BJP and NDA candidates from Ghosi, Salempur and Ballia Lok Sabha seats.

Referring to the SP and Congress' previous manifestos, Modi said, "In 2012 (assembly polls), the SP had clearly written in its manifesto that the reservation that Babasaheb gave to Dalits, similar reservation will be given to Muslims." Modi further claimed the Congress declared educational establishments as minority institutions and gave reservation to Muslims there.

"Before 2014, the Congress changed the law overnight to declare schools, colleges and universities as minority institutions. They declared thousands of educational institutions as minority institutions. Earlier, the reservation SC, ST and OBC students were getting there was completely ended and Muslims got reservation."

"What can be a bigger betrayal than this of the sons and daughters of Dalits, backward tribals?"

The entire world is watching the ongoing general elections in India, he said, adding the more powerful government India elects, the more powerful prime minister it gets, and its echo will be heard in every country of the world. (PTI)

No progress taking place in lives of people under BJP govt: Priyanka

FATEHGARH SAHIB/PATIALA, May 26: Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Sunday lashed out at the BJP-led Centre, asking why there is no prosperity in the lives of people if the country's economy is growing at a rapid pace.

Addressing her first poll rally in Punjab in favour of party candidate from Fatehgarh Sahib seat Amar Singh, she also accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of "speaking lies and making hollow promises with the public only to capture power".

Attacking the Modi government, she said 70 crore youth are unemployed in the country and unemployment is the highest in 45 years.

She said 30 lakh posts are vacant in the government sector under the Modi regime.

"At stages, he (Modi) makes big claims that the economy is growing at a rapid pace. I want to ask if it is growing so fast and if there is progress in the country then why there is no progress in your (people) lives. Why did your children not get employment?" the Congress general secretary asked.

"And why inflation has gone up too much. If the country is progressing fast then why are steel factories here shutting down. Why the industry is being weakened by imposing GST? There is not even a single scheme for the middle class and for your relief. Progress is only being seen on TV, but no progress is taking place in your lives," she told the gathering.

The Congress leader accused the BJP of not respecting the public at all. "They do not speak about your problems. They do not tell what they are doing to contain inflation and bring down unemployment," she said. "They do not tell why women are feeling unsafe in Punjab. They do not tell why the drug problem has increased so much in Punjab," she added.

The Congress general secretary asserted it is only her party which speaks about the public.

"Modi ji can do anything for power," she said and added that the PM removed the "black" farm laws, referring to the now-repealed farm laws, because of elections and votes.

"Whatever lies he puts before you and makes hollow promises only to capture power," she said.

She also alleged that the BJP tried to topple state governments. She further alleged that the BJP took do-

nations from companies, which were raided by the CBI, ED and Income Tax department.

Without naming anyone, she referred to the registration of an FIR against the managing editor of Ajit Group of Newspapers Barjinder Singh Hamdard.

"You have seen here (Punjab) what happened to Ajit Newspaper," she said. The Punjab Vigilance bureau has registered a case against Hamdard and 25 others in connection with alleged misappropriation of funds in the construction of ₹ 315 crore Jang-e-Azadi memorial at Kartarpur in Jalandhar.

"You need to understand what is happening at the Centre and what is happening in your state and how you are being misled at every level. " she told the gathering. In Patiala, the Congress general secretary addressed an all-women rally where she hit out at the BJP on the issues of inflation and unemployment.

"Today, the biggest problem of women is inflation. You (women) go to shops and you cannot buy many things. Everything has turned costly," she said.

Attacking Prime Minister Modi, she said that he was saying, "If you have buffaloes, the Congress will steal." "In order to create an illusion among the women, he would say that the Congress will conduct an X-ray and will steal your 'mangalsutra'," she said. "He would say they (Congress) are anti-Hindu and it is written in our manifesto that it will take your jewellery and give it to others," she said.

"Whereas our party is a party which is of Mahatma Gandhi. His entire freedom movement was based on teachings of Bhagavad Gita. It was based on the principles of truth and non-violence and teachings of our centuries-old Hindu religion. Then how can we be opposed to religion," she asked.

By saying such a thing, the PM is thinking that all the women in the country are fools, she said.

The Congress leader said Prime Minister Modi did not utter a single word on bringing any policy on how to make the women safe and empowered.

Referring to Prime Minister Modi's remarks that he made in Bihar, she asked him to maintain the dignity of his post.

"What he said in Bihar yesterday, I cannot say this here. We are his rivals even then we respect the post. There is a dignity of the post," she said. (PTI)

Heard of work from home, first time hearing about work from jail: Rajnath's dig at Kejriwal

CHANDIGARH, May 26: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday took a dig at Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, saying he had heard about "work from home" but it is the first time that he is hearing of "work from jail". Addressing an election rally in Khanna for the BJP's Fatehgarh Sahib candidate Gejja Ram Valmiki, Singh said, "Here, AAP is the ruling party. You don't need to be told much about what kind of work it is doing."

"There is also an AAP government in Delhi. But the AAP leader was jailed in the liquor scam," Singh, said referring to Kejriwal's arrest in a money-laundering case linked to the alleged excise policy scam.

The defence minister said he thinks every leader should have the moral courage to resign from their post if they face any allegation until being cleared of the charges. This is morality, he said.

"AAP leader Kejriwal was jailed in the liquor

scam. Even after that, he says he will continue to occupy the chief minister's post. He says he will work from jail," Singh said. The Supreme Court granted AAP supremo Kejriwal interim bail till June 1, the last day of the seven-phase Lok Sabha elections, and directed him to surrender and go back to jail on June 2.

"We know about work from office, I have heard about work from home but this is the first time I am hearing about work from jail," Singh said in a dig at the Delhi chief minister.

He also attacked Kejriwal on floating AAP following the Anna Hazare-led movement against corruption.

Singh said when Kejriwal was running the agitation with Anna Hazare, the veteran leader had told him that the movement was against the Congress' corruption and its success should not be used for political gains and no political party floated. "But Kejriwal did not listen to his guru.

And he formed the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)," he said. Singh claimed Kejriwal had said that he would never live in a government accommodation if he became chief minister.

"But he later turned the chief minister's residence into a 'sheesh mahal' and used crores of public money on it," he said.

The veteran BJP leader also referred to the alleged assault on AAP Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal in Kejriwal's residence by his aide Bibhav Kumar, who has since been arrested in this connection.

"She was badly beaten. And now he (Kejriwal) is giving speeches before the people of the country," Singh noted.

"You must be thinking why I am speaking in such anger. A mother, a sister can be from any caste, community or political outfit. For us, she is a mother, a daughter," he said and added respect for women is integral to Indian culture. (PTI)

Severe cyclone 'Remal' barrels towards Bengal coast; over 1 lakh shifted to shelter

IMD has warned of localised flooding and major damage to vulnerable structures, power and communication lines, kutcha roads, crops, and orchards in the South and North 24 Parganas districts of West Bengal

KOLKATA, May 26: Severe cyclonic storm 'Remal' has intensified and is expected to make landfall between the coasts of Bangladesh and adjoining West Bengal around Sunday midnight, prompting the evacuation of over 1 lakh people from vulnerable areas of the state to safety.

Bengal's coastal areas have been put on high alert as the cyclone, accompanied by high-velocity winds, has already triggered rain in several parts of the state.

According to an India Meteorological Department (IMD) bulletin, the 'Remal' was centred 160 km south-southeast of Sagar Island at 6pm.

The cyclone, which has a maximum sustained wind speed of 100-110 kmph, gusting to 120 kmph, is likely to hit land between Sagar Islands in West Bengal and Khepupara near Mongla port in Bangladesh by Sunday midnight, officials said.

By 3 pm, the West Bengal government had evacuated around 1.10 lakh people from coastal and vulnerable areas and shifted them to cyclone shelters, schools, and colleges.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday chaired a meeting to review response and preparedness for

cyclonic storm 'Remal'.

State minister Akhil Giri said, "Our experience in tackling Cyclone Amphan and Cyclone Yaas will be put to good use."

West Bengal Governor Dr CV Ananda Bose said he is closely monitoring the situation and is in constant touch with state and central experts to ensure a coordinated response to counter it.

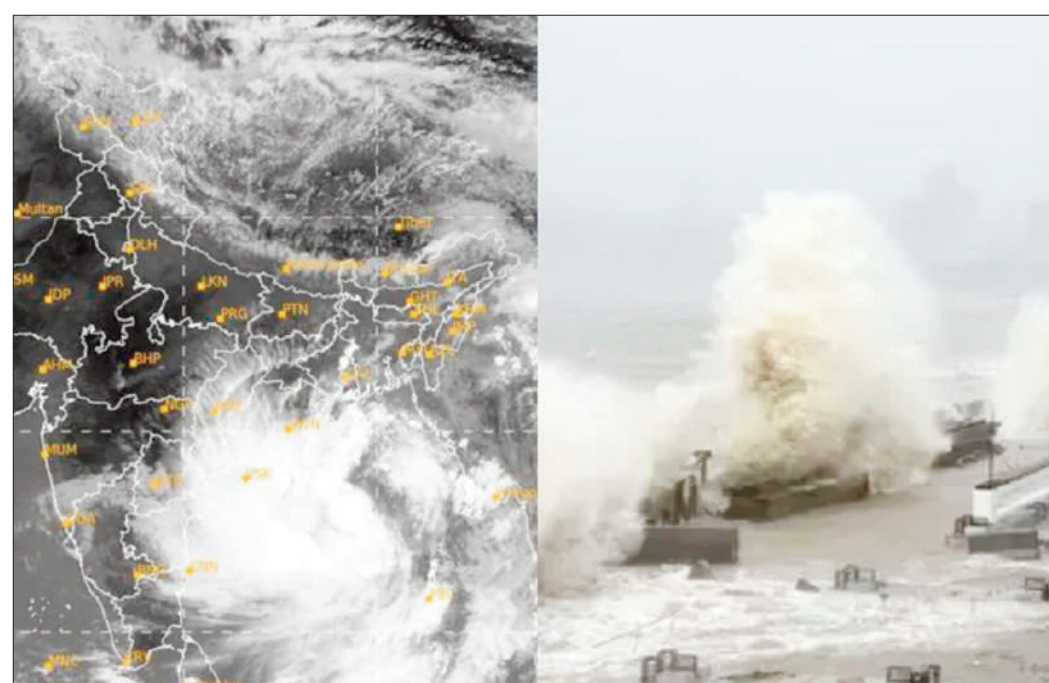
Bose emphasised the importance of safety for residents in the coastal regions of Bengal, urging them to adhere to the standard operating procedures (SOPs) for cyclones.

The cyclone has already caused light rain and winds in areas like Digha, Kakdwip, and Jaynagar, which are expected to intensify on Monday.

IMD's eastern regional head Somnath Dutta said from Sunday evening, districts in south Bengal would experience squally winds of 45-55 kmph, gusting to 65 kmph, affecting Kolkata, Howrah, Hooghly, and Purba Medinipur.

"This will gradually increase to gale wind speed, reaching 70 to 80 kmph gusting to 90 kmph," he told reporters.

Dutta warned that surface wind speeds in coastal areas of West Bengal could reach 100-120 kmph, gusting to 135 kmph from Sunday



evening to Monday morning.

However, he mentioned that the damage caused by 'Remal' would be less severe compared to the destruction wrought by Super Cyclone Amphan in 2020.

Amphan, which was categorised as a super cyclone, had made landfall on May 20 in 2020 over Sagar

Island and caused widespread destruction in Kolkata, South and North 24 Parganas, Howrah and Nadia.

The IMD has warned of localised flooding and major damage to vulnerable structures, power and communication lines, kutcha roads, crops, and orchards in the South

and North 24 Parganas districts of West Bengal.

Residents in affected areas are advised to remain indoors and avoid vulnerable structures.

Fourteen teams of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) have been deployed across South Bengal districts, including Kolkata,

North and South 24 Parganas, Purba and Paschim Medinipur, Howrah, and Hooghly.

The state government has also readied SDRF teams and is working with teams from the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC).

Relief materials, including dry food and tarpaulins, have been dispatched to coastal areas, and quick response teams comprising trained civil defence volunteers and equipped vehicles are already in place.

The impending landfall of Cyclone 'Remal' has led to significant disruptions in air, rail, and road transportation in Kolkata and other parts of South Bengal. Eastern and South Eastern Railways have cancelled some trains on Sunday and Monday.

Kolkata Airport authorities have suspended flight operations for 21 hours from Sunday noon, affecting 394 flights in both international and domestic sectors.

The Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port in Kolkata has also suspended cargo and container handling operations for 12 hours from Sunday evening in response to the cyclone forecast.

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) has taken measures to ensure no loss of life or property at sea. Re-

mote operating stations at Haldia and Paradip are alerting fishing vessels and merchant ships through VHF broadcasts.

Additionally, nine disaster relief teams are on standby at Haldia, Fraserganj in West Bengal, and Paradip and Gopalpur in Odisha to respond to emergencies.

The Indian Navy has readied two ships equipped with Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) and medical supplies for immediate deployment to ensure the safety and welfare of the affected populace. Additionally, Indian Naval aviation assets, including Sea King and Chetak helicopters as well as Dornier aircrafts, are on standby for rapid response, officials said.

Specialised diving teams have been stationed in Kolkata to provide prompt assistance. "Further, diving teams with necessary equipment are on standby in Visakhapatnam, prepared for quick deployment if needed. Two Flood Relief Teams (FRTs), along with HADR and medical supplies, are being positioned in Kolkata. In addition, two FRTs each from Visakhapatnam and Chilka are ready and on standby for deployment at short notice," officials said. (PTI)

Afridi concerned about Pakistan's middle-over strike rate

DUBAI, May 26: Former captain Shahid Afridi is confident Pakistan will once again reach the final of the T20 World Cup but expressed apprehension regarding the batters' sluggish strike rate in the middle overs.

"The former all-rounder added that Pakistan's pace attack comprising Shaheen Afridi, Naseem Shah, Haris Rauf, Abbas Afridi and Mohammad Amir is the best in the world.

"The thing that bothers me is the strike rate of our batters, especially in between the seven to thirteen over phase," Afridi, who is a tournament ambassador for this edition of the T20 World Cup, told the ICC.

"I hope that the strike rate improves in that phase. In terms of runs per over, eight or nine runs per over are needed but still Pakistan are my favourite," he added.

The 47-year-old, who was part of Pakistan's title-winning team in 2009, feels the pacers will have a huge responsibility to deliver.

"I feel Pakistan should make the final. The reason is that the conditions (in West Indies and USA) suit our team."

"I think in any cricket team in the world, nobody has such a strong bowling line-up. All our four fast bowlers have a lot of skill and even the bowlers sitting on the bench like Abbas (Afridi)...has a lot of skill with a good slower ball. It's an incredible attack. (PTI)

KKR bowl out SRH for 113, lowest ever in IPL final



CHENNAI, May 26: Mitchell Starc justified his eye-popping auction billing with a magical delivery as Kolkata Knight Riders produced a complete bowling performance to dismantle Sunrisers Hyderabad for a paltry 113 in what is turning out to be a lopsided IPL-17 final here Sunday.

This is the lowest total by a team batting first in an IPL final as SRH were shot out in 18.3 overs.

It won't be wrong to say that KKR has one hand on their third IPL title and deservedly so after playing brilliant cricket from start to finish and the one-sided title clash is a testimony to their total domination of Season 17.

Starc (2/14), who peaked at the right time after a disappointing league phase, made full use of overcast conditions as league's break-out youngster Abhishek Sharma (2) got one that swung late, drawing him forward. The delivery eluded the outside edge of Abhishek's bat and clipped the off-bail.

The delivery could have got any batter out and it was just that the unfortunate Abhishek's name was written on it on the day.

It was the kind of ball that would always send shivers down the spine of those sitting in the dug-out and even Travis Head (0), who had a forgettable business end in this IPL, wasn't left behind.

Vaibhav Arora, who bowls at barely 130 clicks, also made full use of conditions and got one on fuller length delivery to shape away from Head, who could only nick it to stumper Rahmanullah Gurbaz. Head now has three ducks in his last four games.

Rahul Tripathi (9) was busy and fidgety and the extra pace and bounce did him in when Starc fired one which held its angular trajectory and hit Tripathi's willow at a place which was touch above the sweet spot as the shot ballooned up. Ramandeep Singh completed the catch and by the time Powerplay ended, SRH were 40 for 3. Starc's first spell (3-0-14-2) was complete value for his Rs 24.75 crore price tag.

Once the Powerplay was ended, Heinrich Klaassen (16 off 17 balls) was left to do the heavy lifting with Harshit Rana (2/24 in 4 overs) and Andre Russell (3/19 in 2.3 overs) tightening the noose in the middle overs with wickets of Nitish Reddy (13) and Aiden Markram (20) respectively to effectively end SRH's challenge.

At 62 for 5, there weren't any hopes of a fightback in SRH camp as ruthlessness KKR pace battery aided by extra bounce and movement in the air and a shade off the pitch made a lot of difference.

When KKR comes out to bat, it should be a mere formality. (PTI)

Sindhu ends runner-up at Malaysia Masters after leading 11-3 in decider

KUALA LUMPUR, May 26 : Star Indian shuttler PV Sindhu blew away a massive 11-3 lead in the deciding game of the Malaysia Masters final against Wang Zhi Yi, missing out on a great opportunity to end her title drought here on Sunday.

The trophy was well within her reach but world number 15 Sindhu suffered a shocking meltdown after the final change of ends to go down 21-16 5-21 16-21 against the Chinese world number seven in 79 minutes.

Fifth seed Sindhu, a double Olympic medallist, last won the Singapore Open and Commonwealth Games gold in 2022 and finished runner-up at the Madrid Spain Masters in 2023.

The title would have been the icing on the cake but her impressive run to the final will still give her a lot of confidence as Sindhu looks to put the finishing touches ahead of the Paris Olympics.

It was her first final appearance on the BWF World Tour after more than a year.

"Overall, I can say that it's been a very good match. It's a bit disappointing, but a lot of positives to take from this match and the whole tournament as well," said Sindhu ranked 15th in the world.

"I am happy that I at least came to the finals, I played well. These matches will definitely give me a lot of confidence, but I could have won that. It's just not one of those days."

Sindhu used a combination of



poise and power to dominate the proceedings against the reigning Asian champion Wang for most part of the match but all fell apart after the break in the decider as the trophy slipped out of her hands.

A silver and bronze medallist in the last two editions of the Olympics, Sindhu had lost to Wang at the Arctic Open last year but has defeated the Chinese twice in three meetings.

Interestingly, it was Wang against whom Sindhu had won the finals during her last BWF title at the Singapore Open.

Sindhu was leading 11-3 at the interval in the third game but she fell into a pool of errors after the change of sides as Wang won 18 of the next 23 points to seal the tro-

phy in her name. World No. 15 Sindhu, who will be eyeing her third Olympic medal at the Paris Games, has looked subdued since making a comeback from a knee injury early this season.

It has been a while since Sindhu has defeated big guns such as Carolina Marin, Tai Tzu Ying, Chen Yu Fei and Akane Yamaguchi -- whom she is expected to come across at the Paris Olympics.

But the 28-year-old from Hyderabad, who now trains at the Prakash Padukone Badminton Academy in Bengaluru, looked in fine fettle this week but the loss against Wang from a winning position is something which she would look to address in the coming months. (PTI)

Barcelona finally beats Lyon and retains Women's Champions League crown

BILBAO (SPAIN), May 26: With a triumph over the rival it could never beat, Barcelona made it clear who's in charge of women's soccer.

Barcelona ended its losing streak against the game's most successful club on Saturday, beating Lyon 2-0 to clinch its third Women's Champions League title in four years.

World player of the year Aitana Bonmati scored in the second half and former world player Alexia Putellas added a second deep in

stoppage time for defending champion Barcelona in front of a record crowd of 50,827 for a final.

"This team has made history. With each passing year we just want more," said Bonmati, the player of the match. "The first time we have beaten Lyon, and to do it like this in a final, winning back-to-back Champions League titles ... this team deserved it."

Barcelona lost the two previous finals it played against the French side and all four of its previous

matches against Lyon, which was seeking a record-extending ninth European trophy.

"The reality is that Barcelona has taken two consecutive titles and their dynamic is extremely positive, not only regarding results but also about the quality of the game and the amount of support that they have," Lyon coach Sonia Bompastor said. "The other clubs, not only Lyon, have to be motivated by that and try to find ways to beat that." (AP)

Bayer Leverkusen wins the German Cup and completes undefeated domestic double

BERLIN, May 26: Granit Xhaka's early strike was enough for Bayer Leverkusen to win the German Cup final 1-0 over Kaiserslautern for an unbeaten domestic double on Saturday.

Xhaka fired the ball in under the crossbar from distance in the 16th minute. It proved to be enough against second-division Kaiserslautern despite losing defender Odilon Kossounou to a second yellow card just before the break.

Leverkusen won the Bundesliga unbeaten, an historic feat. The only blip on the record of Xabi Alonso's team this season was losing the Europa League final to Atalanta 3-0 on Wednesday in Dublin. That ended Leverkusen's record 51-game unbeaten run across all competitions. It

was its only loss in 53 games this season.

"The whole journey, the whole season was wonderful," the Spanish coach said after doubling Leverkusen's trophy haul in just one season. "What we did this season is unbelievable."

Alonso and his players ran to their fans after the whistle on Saturday in Berlin's Olympiastadion. They had supported the team loudly throughout, though were drowned at times by the even more vociferous Kaiserslautern supporters.

They displayed a spectacular tifo of a red devil grasping the trophy in front of a hellish background of fire and brimstone before the game. Flares sending red smoke into the sky embellished the effect -- and gave an inkling of what

was to come.

The stadium announcer's repeated requests to stop the pyrotechnics were met with continued indifference. The second half began to a huge fireworks display from the Leverkusen fans.

Despite the smoke above, there was little fire on the field after a long hard season. Kossounou was booked for stopping Kenny Prince Redondo's break in the third minute, then issued another yellow for a foul on Boris Tomiak in the 44th.

It didn't stop the Leverkusen machine from grinding out the win. Jeremie Frimpong should have made it 2-0 in the 75th after going past the goalkeeper. (AP)

PSG wins the French Cup and the double in Kylian Mbappe's last game

PARIS, May 26: Paris Saint-Germain beat Lyon 2-1 in the French Cup final and completed the domestic double in Kylian Mbappé's last game for the club on Saturday.

France winger Ousmane Dembele and Spain midfielder Fabian Ruiz scored for PSG in the first half.

Lyon defender Jake O'Brien got a consolation goal in the second half. PSG won the league and cup for the first time since 2020 when it achieved a domestic treble by also lifting the now defunct League Cup.

Mbappé celebrated with a big roar after the final whistle. With an equally big smile on his face, he hugged and high-fived his teammates. The ecstatic PSG staff lifted Mbappé and threw him in the air.

"You feel a bit more the weight of things because you realize that it's really over," Mbappé told broadcaster beIN Sports. "When I said goodbye to the Parc des Princes, there were still some games left, so you're still focused on what awaits you. Now, I have nothing left with PSG. But I'm very happy to have been able to finish with a trophy."

Despite losing in the final, Lyon still qualified for the Europa League by finishing sixth in the league.

Dembélé opened the scoring in the 22nd minute by heading home a cross from Nuno Mendes.

Ruiz doubled the lead by converting a rebound in the 34th after his header was blocked by O'Brien.

Lyon goalkeeper Lucas Perri pulled off some outstanding



saves in the opening minutes, denying Bradley Barcola and Warren Zaire-Emery, but misjudged the flight of the ball when Mendes made the cross for the opener.

O'Brien cut the deficit to 2-1 by heading in a corner in the 55th.

PSG has struggled in the air this season and nearly conceded from another corner in the 64th, but goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma tipped a header from Lyon left back Nicolas Tagliafico over the bar.

"The players are disappointed but let's not forget that we must also be proud of what we have done," Lyon coach Pierre Sage told broadcaster beIN Sports. (AP)

Neeraj Chopra clarifies: Not injured, withdrawal from Golden Spike meet a precautionary move



NEW DELHI, May 26: Olympic champion javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra on Sunday clarified that he is not injured but has pulled out of the Ostrava Golden Spike meet in Czech Republic on May 28 as a precautionary measure after he felt "something" on his adductor muscles during a recent training session.

Chopra said he would not want to risk injury in an Olympic year and hence decided to skip the prestigious meet.

"Following a recent throwing session, I decided not to compete in Ostrava as I felt something in my adductor. I have had problems with it in the past and pushing it at this stage can lead to injury," Chopra wrote on his Instagram.

"Just to clarify, I am not injured but I don't want to take any risk during the Olympic year so had to take this decision.

Once I feel it's fully recovered, I will get back to competitions," he added.

Chopra's clarification came just hours after the organisers of the prestigious meet said he has decided to skip the event due to an injury he sustained while training two weeks ago.

"Due to an injury that he sustained in training two weeks ago (adductor muscle) he will not be able to throw in Ostrava, but he will arrive at the event as a guest," the organisers of Golden Spike said earlier in the day.

The 26-year-old world champion will, however, attend the meet as a guest, according to the organisers.

This was to be Chopra's first foray in Golden Spike meet, a World Athletics Continental Tour Gold level event, which is a going to see a star-studded field, with Tokyo Olympics silver medallist and 2023 world championships bronze winner Jakub Vadlejch of Czech Republic and former world champion Anderson Peters of Grenada set to be in action.

Chopra has competed in two competitions this season -- the Doha Diamond League and the Federation Cup.

He commenced his 2024 season on a strong note, clinching silver with an impressive throw of 88.36 metres at the Doha Diamond League on May 10.

He then made a return to domestic competition after almost three years, win-

ning gold in the Federation Cup on May 15 with a throw of 82.27m, pushing DP Manu to second spot in Bhubaneswar.

The Golden Spike was not initially announced to be Chopra's third competition of the season. But during Doha Diamond League on May 10, he said he would be competing in the Golden Spike.

Before that, Chopra had announced that he would be taking part in the Paavo Nurmi Games in Turku, Finland on June 18.

Chopra is one of India's best medal hopes in the Paris Olympic Games where he would be keen to retain the gold medal he won at the Tokyo Olympics.

The Golden Spike organisers said they had received a note from Chopra informing them about his pull out from the competition.

"The organisers did note a message from the Olympic champion Neeraj Chopra."

European champion, Germany's Julian Weber, will be the replacement for Chopra.

"The best possible replacement was managed by the organisers. European champion Julian Weber from Germany, who threw 88.37 on Friday, the third best performance of the year, will come to Ostrava. It will be a big test for Jakub Vadlejch before the EC in Rome," the statement added. (PTI)

Protect and Prevent

Continue the fight against Japanese Encephalities

Remember, immediate medical treatment can save a life

Symptoms of J.E.

- High grade fever
- Severe Headache
- Irrelevant Talk & Confusion
- Unconsciousness
- Convulsion
- Unable to speak properly

Breeding habitats for mosquitoes

- Paddy fields
- Blocked drains
- Irrigation canals
- Ponds

Protect yourself from mosquito bites

- Avoid going to areas where water is accumulated (example rice fields) during dusk and dawn as the mosquitoes are most active at those times.
- Wear light coloured, long sleeve clothing and trousers.
- Use mosquito net while sleeping.
- Use insecticide or coil to repel mosquitoes.
- Keep the drains around the house clean and do not allow water to accumulate in empty containers.
- Pig rearing should be done atleast 100 meters away from human settlements.
- Use pig nets or mosquito nets for pig sty farms.
- Vaccinate pigs against common diseases at regular intervals.

Hosts

- Birds (herons and egrets) are reservoirs for J.E. virus.
- Pigs act as amplifiers of the virus and produce a high viral load that infect mosquitoes.

Call 104 for Health related queries

Call 108 for Ambulance Services

(NHMI/D/2024-25/38)