

6 WORLD Israeli strikes kill at least 37 Palestinians, most in tents N Korea flies trash balloons over the South 8 NATION FIR against Mehbooba Mufti for 'violation' of poll code In Punjab, drug problem 'exists even today, increasing', says Rahul

Death toll in Mizoram landslides rises to 29, seven still missing

AIZAWL, May 29: The death toll in multiple landslides in Mizoram's Aizawl district mounted to 29 after four more bodies were recovered from various places, a police officer said on Wednesday. Seven people are still missing and rescuers presume that they are trapped under the debris at different locations following landslides and incessant rain in the aftermath of cyclone Remal on Tuesday, he said. A total of 25 bodies, including 14 from a stone quarry collapse site, were recovered till May 28 night. After four more bodies were found since late Tuesday night, the toll in a stone quarry collapse site at Methum has risen to 15 and that at Hliment to five, Aizawl superintendent of police Rahool Alwal said. Three bodies were found at Aizawl's Salem Veng locality, two each at Falkawn and Aibawk villages and one each at Lungsei and Kelsih villages on Tuesday, he said. Of the 29 victims, 23 are Mizoram residents, five people are from Jharkhand and one from Assam's Silchar town, according to Alwal. Among the deceased are a four-year-old boy and a six-year-old girl. Aizawl deputy commissioner Nazuk Kumar said that search and rescue operations are still on and will continue till all missing persons are found. She said that teams of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), police and fire department have been deployed in the search and rescue operations. The state capital was cut off for several hours from the rest of the country on Tuesday due to a landslide on National Highway-6 at Humthar in the western part of the town. The road blockades were cleared in the evening and



traffic movement was restored, officials said. In Aizawl town, cemeteries at Republic Veng, Kanan Veng and Kulikawn were damaged by the landslides. Officials said that the state capital witnessed no rain since morning on Wednesday. The Mizoram government ordered the closure of all offices and PSU units except those departments involved with disaster management and essential services on Wednesday in view of the inclement weather warning issued by the IMD. General administration department commissioner and secretary K Lalthawmmawia in an order also advised the private sector offices to adopt 'work from home' mode as far as possible. Mizoram chief minister Lalduhoma announced ₹ 4 lakh ex-gratia for the families of those killed in the calamities. He said that his government has earmarked ₹ 15 crore to tackle the disaster. More than 150 houses have been destroyed, dozens of trees and electric poles were uprooted, several roads were blocked and over 50 dwelling units were submerged across Mizoram in rain and landslides, officials said. (PTI)

Extend all possible assistance on war footing, DCs directed

Himanta reviews post-Remal situation in Assam • Cyclonic storm claims 4 lives

NEW DELHI, May 29: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday reviewed the situation arising in his state in the wake of heavy rains and landslides that took place after the landfall of cyclone Remal, officials said. Sarma, who was in the national capital, held a video conference with top officials of the state government and cyclone-affected districts, and instructed all concerned to be on alert to respond to exigencies at the quickest possible time in view of India Meteorological Department (IMD) forecast of heavy to very heavy rainfall. The chief minister directed district authorities to leave no stone unturned to reach out to the affected people and extend all possible help and assistance. So far, four people have died and 18 others have been injured in Assam due to heavy rains and storms in the aftermath of the cyclone that left a trail of destruction.



The chief minister asked the district commissioners (DCs) to pay ex-gratia immediately to the next of kin of those killed, an official said. Sarma instructed the DCs of cyclone-affected districts to ensure all necessary assistance to affected families and timely treatment to the injured. As the counting date of the Lok Sabha election (June 4) is

approaching, he directed the DCs to constitute separate teams for carrying out relief and rehabilitation operations. The chief minister asked the senior officials of the Assam Power Distribution Company Limited (APDCL) to work on war footing for restoration of electricity supply in all cyclone-affected areas. He also asked the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) for restoration of surface communication between Harangajao and Jatinga once rainwater subsides. Sarma asked the DCs of three districts of the Barak Valley to keep sufficient stock of foodgrains and other food items in view of the rising water level of rivers in Assam and neighbouring states of Manipur and Mizoram. He asked chief secretary Ravi Kota to ensure that the DCs of Barpeta, Chirang and Baksa take up with their respective counterparts of Bhutan to provide advance information in the event of release of water from the Kurichhu hydropower plant in the Himalayan kingdom. The chief minister asked the chief secretary and other officials to make a proper assessment of the full and partial damage to infrastructure and properties caused by cyclone Remal, the official said. (PTI)

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Severe flood

GUWAHATI: Severe flooding has engulfed several regions of Assam following the release of water from dams managed by the North Eastern Electric Power Corporation Limited (NEEPCO). In response to incessant rains and strong winds, NEEPCO opened the gates of the Karbi Langpi Hydro Electric Project and the Khandong dam, causing the Kopili and Borpani rivers to overflow. Specifically, five gates of the Karbi Langpi Hydroelectric Project and seven gates of the Khandong dam were opened, leading to the Borpani River swelling beyond its capacity. This sudden influx of water has resulted in substantial damage and disruption across the affected areas. The floodwaters have washed away the wooden bridge at Ramani Field on the Borpani River, cutting off a crucial traffic route for residents of Kachua Simaluguri. Several villages, including Kachua, Madhabpara, Juripar, Longjap, and Padumoni, are now submerged under water.

Village defence

SHILLONG: In a determined effort to address the pervasive drug and narcotics crisis, the Meghalaya government has resolved to strengthen Village Defence Parties (VDPs) throughout the state. This strategic initiative was decided during a high-level meeting on May 28, chaired by social welfare minister Paul Lyngdoh. The meeting included officials from various departments such as home, police, social welfare, and NGOs actively involved in the anti-drug campaign. Minister Lyngdoh highlighted the need to revamp and reorganize VDPs, particularly in identified hotspots like Shillong. Emphasizing the critical role of community participation, he stated, "To eliminate and eradicate the menace of drugs and narcotics, we need to broaden the involvement of civil society."

Aiyar's remarks show Cong's 'anti-India' mindset: BJP

NEW DELHI, May 29: The BJP claimed on Wednesday that Mani Shankar Aiyar's description of the Chinese attack on India in 1962 as an "alleged" invasion shows the "anti-India" mindset of the Congress and is an signal to "enemy" countries to interfere in the electoral process here as the opposition is facing a "rout". BJP national spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia alleged that Aiyar could not have made such a statement without the concurrence of Rahul Gandhi and also took a swipe at Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge for his "silence" over the issue. Aiyar had made the remarks at a book launch event on Tuesday, kicking up a row and embarrassing his party and handing over an issue to the BJP for yet another time with



his controversial comments. Aiyar, though, immediately issued an apology to defuse the crisis, while the Congress also distanced itself from the veteran leader. Bhatia suggested that the Congress has often distanced itself from

EU announces Euro 250,000 for victims of severe weather in Manipur

NEW DELHI, May 29: The European Union (EU) on Wednesday announced a financial aid of Euro 250,000 (over Rs 22.6 million) to help people hit by a hailstorm and heavy rain in the northeastern state of Manipur in early May. The EU said the aid will be delivered by its humanitarian partner ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency) and it will benefit more than 1,500 most vulnerable families. "The European Union has made available Euro 250,000 in response to the recent hailstorm and heavy rain that hit India's northeastern state of Manipur in early May," the EU said in a statement. It said humanitarian aid will provide crucial assistance to those

most affected in some of the worst-hit areas. The EU said priority will be accorded to the distribution of food and emergency shelter kits to help affected people whose livelihoods and houses have been damaged by the storm. "This will help communities to cope with the impact of the storm on their livelihood and to restore their houses," it said. On May 5, a severe hailstorm struck large swathes of Manipur, causing extensive damage to over 48,000 houses, a number of infrastructure and agricultural lands and crops across 16 districts. Lasting for 15 minutes with hailstones measuring up to four-five inches, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

191 BJP, 143 Cong IS poll candidates face criminal cases: ADR

NEW DELHI, May 29: Out of the 440 BJP candidates contesting the Lok Sabha polls, 191 have declared criminal cases in their election affidavits, according to an analysis by a poll rights body. For the Congress, out of its 327 candidates, 143, or 44 per cent, have declared criminal cases, the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) said in a report based on data compiled from the affidavits on the Election Commission's website. The cases, it said, include those related to murder, attempted murder, crimes against women and hate speech. The ADR said the data obtained from the poll panel's website reveals that a "significant portion of candidates contesting in the elections have self-declared criminal cases against them". The analysis presents a breakdown of candidates with declared criminal cases party-wise, it said. The report stated that among the major parties, the Bharatiya Janata Party has 191 (43 per cent) of candidates who have declared criminal cases, while the Congress has 143 (44 per cent) of such candidates. The report also delves into the number of candidates facing serious criminal cases. One hundred and thirty of the total BJP candidates in the poll fray have declared serious criminal cases, while for the Congress it is 88 candidates (27 per cent of the total candidates it has fielded), according to the report. The Samajwadi Party has 71 candidates in the elections and 40 have declared criminal cases, with 30 of them named in serious crimes. Thirty-three of the 52 candidates of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) have declared criminal cases, with 18 facing serious charges, and in the Trinamool Congress, 20 of 48 candidates have declared criminal cases with 12 facing serious charges. The state-wise analysis also provides (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Cyclonic storm Remal leaves trail of destruction in KA and West Karbi Anglong

DIPHU, May 29: The relentless fury of Cyclonic Storm Remal has wreaked havoc in the picturesque landscapes of Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong districts of Assam, leaving a trail of destruction in its wake. For the past 48 hours, heavy rains have lashed the regions, accompanied by gusty winds, causing widespread damage to property and infrastructure. In Dolamora, Arjison Rongphar, a local reporter, observed the rising water levels of the Diphlu River, which submerged embankments on both sides. However, there have been no reports of casualties or major structural damage, although electricity supply was disrupted due to fallen trees. Similarly, in Balipathar, reporter Rajiv Rongpi noted the swelling of the Paklangso River, inundating

nearby paddy fields for the third consecutive year. Flash floods in Upper Deopani submerged vehicles and equipment, highlighting the perilous conditions faced by locals. The district headquarters, Diphu, bore the brunt of the storm, with uprooted trees blocking roads and damaging homes. One of the local residents named Khonsing Rongpi, faced the grim reality of structural damage, while power outages added to the challenges faced by the community. On the other hand, in West Karbi Anglong, the situation was equally dire, with rivers overflowing their banks and flooding surrounding areas. Authorities, led by District Commissioner (DC) Madhumita Bhagwati, have sprung into action, issuing orders to close waterfall picnic spots and coordinating relief efforts. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Why was CBI, ED action against Suvendhu Adhikari, Tapas Roy stalled: Cong to PM

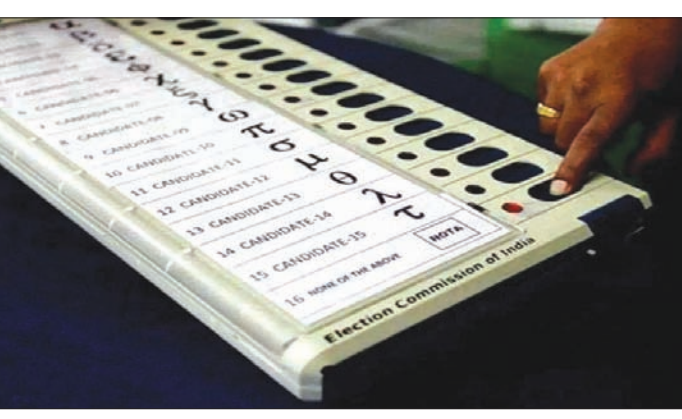
NEW DELHI, May 29: The Congress on Wednesday asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi whether he was withholding ₹ 7,000 crore of paddy procurement funds to West Bengal and if the CBI case against Suvendhu Adhikari has got "washed away" in the BJP's washing machine. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh also asked if the prime minister prioritised his PR over vaccines and funds under the National Health Mission. "Today's questions for the outgoing PM's West Bengal visit: Is the outgoing PM withholding ₹ 7,000 crore of ration funds so that his face is plastered on ration shops? Did Suvendhu Adhikari's CBI case get washed away in BJP's washing machine? Does the PM prioritise his PR over vaccines for India's children?" he asked in a post on X. He posed the questions on a day the prime minister is campaigning in West Bengal for the last phase of elections on June 1. "In an incredibly petty move, the Centre has been withholding National Food Security Act funds from West Bengal for not displaying the outgoing PM's face on ration shops. In an attempt to coerce the state government into displaying sign boards and flexes featuring the outgoing PM's photos, the Centre has withheld



₹ 7,000 crore of paddy procurement funds," Ramesh charged. He said this could seriously hinder the state's paddy procurement and the availability of rice for the public distribution system. "Why has the outgoing PM so callously neglected the health and wellbeing of the people of West Bengal? Is his publicity more important than people's daily food?" the Congress leader asked. He said in April 2017, the CBI filed an FIR against then TMC MP Adhikari in connection with the Narada scam. In April 2019, the CBI sought sanction from the Lok Sabha speaker to prosecute him and in December 2020, Adhikari joined the BJP, and the CBI never received the Lok Sabha (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

The analysis also sheds light on the prevalence of criminal cases among candidates 104% rise in number of political parties contesting LS polls from 2009-24: ADR

NEW DELHI, May 29: There has been an increase of 104 per cent in the number of political parties contesting Lok Sabha elections from 2009 to 2024, according to an analysis by poll rights body ADR. According to the analysis, 751 political parties are participating in 2024 as compared to 677 who participated in 2019, 464 in 2014, and 368 in 2009. This surge represents a staggering 104% increase from 2009 to 2024. The Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and National Election Watch have conducted a comprehensive analysis of the self-sworn affidavits of 8,337 candidates vying for seats in the upcoming Lok Sabha 2024



Elections. Out of the total 8,360 contesting candidates, the breakdown reveals a diverse landscape of political representation: 1,333 from national parties, 532 from state parties, 2,580 from registered unrecognised parties and 3,915 independent candidates.

The analysis also sheds light on the prevalence of criminal cases among candidates. Among national parties, 443 out of 1,333 candidates have declared criminal cases, with 295 facing serious criminal charges. State parties exhibit a higher proportion, with 249 out of 532 candidates facing criminal cases and 169 facing serious charges. Registered unrecognised parties show comparatively lower figures with 401 out of 2,580 candidates having criminal cases and 316 facing serious charges. Independent candidates fall in between with 550 out of 3,915 candidates facing criminal cases and 411 facing serious charges. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Massive erosion threatens Dibrugarh's vital flood Defence

DIBRUGARH, May 29: A looming crisis grips the Tinkhang Matikata area near Aithan in Dibrugarh, as massive erosion continues to eat away at its banks, endangering the vital Ring Bund. In recent days, extensive erosion has devoured large portions of land along the bank, particularly in Mohanaghat and Aithan areas. This relentless erosion poses a serious threat to the Ring Bund, a crucial defense structure safeguarding over 15,000 residents from flooding. Residents express growing concern as erosion persists unabated. "For the past 10 days, erosion has plagued our area, with this year's devastation surpassing the previous. The proximity of the Ring Bund to the erosion site heightens our fears," remarks a local resident. In re-



sponse, communities from 25 villages have joined forces, organizing religious ceremonies to seek protection from the impending flood and erosion. Authorities are not taking the threat lightly. Dibrugarh District Commissioner (DC) Bikram Kairi, accompanied by officials from the Water Resources Department, conducted an on-site inspection on Tuesday. "Erosion has affected a stretch of 2.05 kilometers in the Tinkhang Matikata area near Aithan, with a critical vulnerable area spanning 800 meters. We've deployed measures (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Sensex declines 667, Nifty falls to 22,700 level on profit taking

MUMBAI, May 29: Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty declined nearly 1 per cent on Wednesday, continuing their losing streak for the fourth day running amid profit-taking by cautious investors ahead of the results of the Lok Sabha polls and weak global trends.

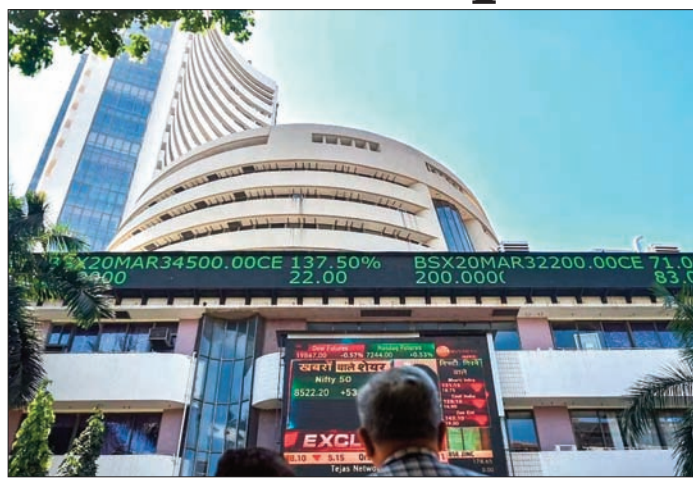
The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 667.55 points or 0.89 per cent to settle at 74,502.90. The index declined below the 75,000 mark to hit the day's low of 74,454.55, plunging 715.9 points or 0.95 per cent. The BSE benchmark hit its all-time peak of 76,009.68 on May 27.

The NSE Nifty dropped 183.45 points or 0.80 per cent to 22,704.70 amid high volatility. The 50-share barometer hit its lifetime high of 23,110.80 on Monday.

From the Sensex pack, Tech Mahindra, ICICI Bank, Bajaj Finserv, HDFC Bank, UltraTech Cement, Axis Bank, Reliance Industries and Infosys were the biggest laggards.

Power Grid, Sun Pharma, Nestle, ITC and Bharti Airtel were the gainers.

"Weak global cues prompted investors to take profits ahead of the US core PCE data, a key gauge of inflation that is anticipated to rise," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services said.



"Markets continued their corrective trend for another session, losing over half a per cent. After an initial drop, Nifty fluctuated within a range and ultimately closed near the day's low at 22,704.70 level. With the May derivatives contracts expiry approaching, volatility is expected to remain high," said Ajit Mishra SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd.

Analysts also said that soaring global inflation is diminishing investor expectations of a US Fed rate cut in the near term. Broad based weakness is noticed across the sectors with heavy underperformance from financials and IT.

The BSE midcap gauge declined

0.38 per cent while smallcap index climbed 0.23 per cent.

Among the indices, bankex declined 1.37 per cent, financial services (1.32 per cent), oil and gas (0.95 per cent), realty (0.88 per cent) and services (0.60 per cent).

Healthcare, industrials, telecommunication, capital goods, metal and power were the gainers.

"Nifty continued falling for the fourth consecutive day and recorded its biggest fall in 14 sessions," Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities, said.

As many as 2,136 stocks declined while 1,680 advanced and 113 remained unchanged on the

BSE.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Hong Kong settled lower while Shanghai ended with gains. European markets were trading lower. US markets ended on a mixed note on Tuesday.

The last phase of polling is scheduled for June 1. The results of the ongoing general elections will be declared on June 4.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.88 per cent to USD 84.94 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 65.57 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

After gyrating between gains and losses during the day on Tuesday, the BSE benchmark finally ended 220.05 points or 0.29 per cent lower at 75,170.45. The NSE Nifty dropped 44.30 points or 0.19 per cent to settle at 22,888.15.

Giving thumbs up to the economic management of the Modi government, S&P Global Ratings after a gap of 14 years upgraded India's sovereign rating outlook to positive from stable on robust growth, improved quality of public spending in the last five years and expectation of broad continuity in reforms and fiscal policies.

S&P, however, retained India's sovereign rating at the lowest investment grade of 'BBB-'. (PTI)

TEPC exploring global markets for exports of Indian telecom products

SINGAPORE, May 29: The Telecom Equipment & Services Export Promotion Council (TEPC) is exploring global markets and has set up a regular participation schedule in international trade shows to promote Made in India products, its Director General Arun Gupta said on Wednesday.

He further said the region-wise market development focus is on ASEAN, Africa, Europe and other developing economies. TEPC has been set up by Government of India to promote and develop export of telecom equipment and services.

Gupta said the aggressive marketing campaign is aimed at generating 15 per cent year-on-year annual growth to achieve USD 100 billion telecom equipment exports by 2047. He was speaking at ATX Enterprise exhibition being held here from May 29-31, 2024. TEPC has over 160 members and the industry is averaging at USD 8 billion a year.

"Our member companies are exporting to over 75 global markets," Gupta told PTI adding that optical fibre, network and 4G & 5G equipment manufacturers are being put in the forefront of TEPC export campaign. Amit Pasari, a governing council member of TEPC, said India is being represented by 27 companies and 110 delegates at the exhibition.

He underlined the government-initiated R&D in the

telecom equipment manufacturing sector, pointing out the importance of ongoing development of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR).

"The government wants the sector to focus on IPR, and it is promoting a lot of companies in the development of IPR," said Pasari, also CEO of XS INFOSOL, which has business operations out of Noida, Edmonton and Al Hamra Industrial Zone of the UAE.

Gupta further said the government has allocated 5 per cent of the Universal Service Obligation Fund for technology development.

Among international exhibitors at ATX Enterprise, California-based Inovonics Broadcast is working with the Indian radio and broadcast stations which are upgrading to digital systems from analogue.

"We have proof of concept (demonstration) worked out with All India Radio, and are ready to provide digital systems for their upgrade programme," said Mukesh Chaudhary, regional sales manager for South Asia and the Middle East, Inovonics.

"India is an important market for us and we see good prospects once the Indian stations get approvals and policy is released on digital systems," he said.

Inovonics is a 52-year-old global brand and serves over 500 stations in Indian metros and state capitals, he added. (PTI)

Range Rover unveils custom-made vehicles in India

GUWAHATI, May 29: Range Rover House has launched in India, bringing a bespoke luxury experience tailored to the affluent clientele of the region. Debuting in the upscale coastal town of Alibaug, Range Rover House India showcases the first Range Rover and Range Rover Sport vehicles to be produced locally, exclusively for the Indian market.

Responding to increasing demand for Range Rover's premium SUVs and the dynamic Range Rover Sport will be manufactured in Pune, India, marking a significant milestone for Jaguar Land Rover

(JLR). This move aims to reduce wait times for Indian customers and enhance JLR's luxury client journey.

India is the first country to manufacture these models locally, joining the production of Range Rover Velar, Range Rover Evoque, Jaguar F-PACE, and Discovery Sport at JLR's Pune facility. This expansion supplements the global production in Solihull, UK, the traditional home of Range Rover since 1970, which will continue to produce global models and upcoming electric and 'SV' vehicles.

Lennard Hoornik, Chief Commercial Officer of JLR, stated, "India's economic growth presents

immense opportunities to localize our offerings for the discerning Indian market. Local manufacturing of Range Rover and Range Rover Sport is a significant step in solidifying our position as the premier modern luxury SUV brand in India."

Geraldine Ingham, Managing Director of Range Rover, highlighted the unprecedented global demand for Range Rover, noting a 160% surge in retail sales in India for FY24.

"Locally manufacturing Range Rover will allow us to meet the growing demand from discerning Indian clients and celebrated personalities across the country."

ShareMarket Launches WealthBasket

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 29: ShareMarket, a PhonePe product, has unveiled its latest investment innovation, WealthBasket, a streamlined and user-friendly solution designed to simplify the investment process for all types of investors. WealthBasket offers a diverse range of investment options, including stocks and ETFs, meticulously curated by ShareMarket's SEBI-registered research team.

Navigating the complexities of the stock market can be daunting for many investors. WealthBasket addresses this challenge by providing an easy-to-use platform that simplifies investment choices, aligning them with individual financial goals.

Ujjwal Jain, CEO of ShareMarket, commented, "At ShareMarket, our vision is to equip investors across India with accessible and simplified solutions, paving the way for wealth generation. WealthBaskets streamline investment journeys, providing seamless experiences and expert guidance from our research arm. Through WealthBasket, we are not only transforming portfolios; we are reshaping the future of investing."

Launched last year, ShareMarket aims to elevate discount broking by integrating market intelligence, quantitative research-based WealthBaskets, a scalable technology platform, and exceptional customer experiences. It offers a broad spectrum of investment products, enabling investors from various demographics to build well-rounded, balanced portfolios. ShareMarket's offerings include stocks (both intraday and delivery), mutual funds, ETFs, and WealthBaskets.

S&P ups India's outlook to positive, raises hope for rating upgrade in 2 years

NEW DELHI, May 29: Giving thumbs up to the economic management of the Modi government, S&P Global Ratings after a gap of 14 years upgraded India's sovereign rating outlook to positive from stable on robust growth, improved quality of public spending in last 5 years and expectation of broad continuity in reforms and fiscal policies.

S&P, however, retained India's sovereign rating at the lowest investment grade of 'BBB-'. In a statement on Wednesday, the US-based agency said India's rating can be upgraded in the next 24 months if the country adopts a cautious fiscal and monetary policy that reduces the government's elevated debt and interest burden while bolstering economic resilience.

S&P's rating commentary comes within a week of RBI's record ₹ 2.10 lakh crore dividend transfer to the government. The funds may be used to cut the Centre's fiscal deficit. "India outlook revised to positive on robust growth and rising quality of Government spend; BBB- long-term and 'A-3' short-term unsolicited foreign and local currency sovereign credit ratings affirmed," S&P said.

Sovereign rating is a tool to measure the risk level of a country's investing environment and shows investors the ability of a country to repay its debts. In 2010, S&P had upped the outlook to stable from negative.

The ratings are looked at by investors as a barometer of the country's creditworthiness and has impact on borrowing costs. "Our positive outlook on India is predicated on its robust economic growth, pronounced improvement in the quality of government spending, and political commitment to fiscal consolidation. We believe these factors are coalescing to benefit credit metrics," S&P said. It said the composition of



government spending has been transformed, with an increasing share going to infrastructure. This will ease bottlenecks to put the country on a higher growth trajectory. S&P said India's robust economic expansion is having a constructive impact on its credit metrics.

"We expect sound economic fundamentals to underpin the growth momentum over the next two to three years. Regardless of the election outcome, we expect broad continuity in economic reforms and fiscal policies," S&P said.

The positive outlook reflects S&P's view that continued policy stability, deepening economic reforms, and high infrastructure investment will sustain long-term growth prospects.

"That, along with cautious fiscal and monetary policy that diminishes the government's elevated debt and interest burden while bolstering economic resilience, could lead to a higher rating over the next 24 months," S&P said.

The Indian economy has staged a "remarkable comeback" from the COVID-19 pandemic, S&P said, adding it forecasts India's real GDP growth at 6.8 per cent this year, which compares favourably with emerging market peers amid a broad global slowdown.

The agency estimates real GDP growth in the past three years to have averaged 8.1 per cent

annually, the highest in the Asia-Pacific region.

It expects these growth dynamics to continue to play out in the medium term, with GDP expanding close to 7 per cent annually over the next three years which will have a moderating effect on the ratio of government debt to GDP despite still wide fiscal deficits.

S&P said the quality of government spending has improved in the past four to five years and public investment and consumer momentum will underpin solid growth prospects over the next three to four years.

The Modi administration has increasingly shifted budget allocation to infrastructure spending. Capital expenditure is scheduled to increase to ₹ 11 lakh crore, or about 3.4 per cent of GDP in fiscal 2025. This is almost 4.5x from a decade before. S&P believes that the improvements in infrastructure and connectivity in India will remove chokepoints, which are hindering long-term economic growth.

India's weak fiscal settings had always been the most vulnerable part of its sovereign ratings profile. All three major global rating agencies - S&P, Fitch and Moody's - have accorded the lowest investment grade rating to India.

S&P said with economic recovery now well on track, the government is again able to depict a more concrete (albeit gradual) path to fiscal consolidation. S&P projects general government (Centre + states) deficit of 7.9 per cent of GDP in fiscal 2025, which will slowly decline to 6.8 per cent by fiscal 2028.

"Respective of the June 2024 general election results, we expect the incoming government to carry on economic reforms to support the growth vigor, continued infrastructure investment drive, and commitment to fiscal consolidation," S&P said. (PTI)

Investor wealth erodes by Rs 5.12 lakh cr in 4-day fall in stock markets

NEW DELHI, May 29: Investors' wealth eroded by ₹ 5.12 lakh crore in four straight days of fall in the equity markets which witnessed profit-taking after a record-breaking rally and caution ahead of the results of the Lok Sabha polls.

The 30-share BSE Sensex dropped 667.55 points or 0.89 per cent to settle at 74,502.90 on Wednesday. It fell below the 75,000-mark during the day and tanked 715.9 points or 0.95 per cent to 74,454.55.

The barometer fell amid selling in bank stocks and weak global trends. In four sessions since May 24, the benchmark gauge dropped 915.14 points or 1.21 per cent amid profit-taking by cautious investors. The BSE benchmark Sensex hit an all-time high of 76,009.68 on May 27.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies eroded by ₹ 5,12,921.96 crore to Rs

4,15,09,713.94 crore (USD 4.98 trillion) in the four sessions to Wednesday.

From its all-time peak, the BSE benchmark is down 1,506.78 points or 1.98 per cent.

The combined market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies hit the USD 5-trillion milestone for the first time on May 21. The NSE Nifty declined 183.45 points or 0.80 per cent to 22,704.70.

"Nifty dropped by 183 points, marking the fourth consecutive decline as election jitters triggered intense selling. The Sensex fell by nearly 668 points to 74,503," said Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd..

From the Sensex pack, Tech Mahindra, ICICI Bank, Bajaj Finserv, HDFC Bank, UltraTech Cement, Axis Bank, Reliance Industries and Infosys were the biggest laggards. Power Grid, Sun Pharma, Nestle, ITC and Bharti

Airtel were the gainers.

"Nifty opened gap down and remained under pressure throughout the session to finally close with a loss of 183 points at 22,704 levels. Weak global cues along with uncertainties surrounding election outcome seemed to have led to this sharp fall over the last 14 trading sessions," Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Retail Research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said. The BSE midcap gauge declined 0.38 per cent while smallcap index climbed 0.23 per cent.

Among the indices, bankex declined 1.37 per cent, financial services (1.32 per cent), oil and gas (0.95 per cent), realty (0.88 per cent) and services (0.60 per cent). Healthcare, industrials, telecommunication, capital goods, metal and power were the gainers. As many as 2,136 stocks declined while 1,680 advanced and 113 remained unchanged on the BSE. (PTI)

Rupee falls 21 paise to close at 83.39 against US dollar

MUMBAI, May 29: The rupee settled 21 paise lower at 83.39 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, tracking a negative trend in domestic equities and elevated crude oil prices.

Forex traders said dollar demand from importers and oil marketing companies (OMCs) also weighed on the rupee.

However, foreign inflows in the bond markets ahead of inclusion on India's government bonds in global bond index cushioned the downside.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.22 and finally settled for the day at 83.39 (provisional), down 21 paise from its previous close.

On Tuesday, the rupee pared initial gains to settle 5 paise lower at 83.18 against the US dollar. "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on month-end dollar demand from OMCs and importers to meet their obligations. Risk aversion in global markets and a strong US dollar may further pressurize the rupee," said Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas.

However, fresh foreign inflows in FPIs and bond markets may support the rupee at lower levels. Traders may take cues from Richmond manufacturing index and speeches from US Fed officials. Investors may remain cautious ahead of core PCE price index data later this week, Choudhary added.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading at 104.67, higher 0.05 per cent, on hawkish Fed speak and upbeat economic data from the US.

Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.78 per cent to USD 84.88 per barrel. On the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 667.55 points, or 0.89 per cent, to close at 74,502.90 points. The broader NSE Nifty fell 183.45 points, or 0.8 per cent, to close at 22,704.70 points. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net buyers in the capital markets on Tuesday, as they purchased shares worth ₹ 65.57 crore, according to exchange data. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Aiyar's remarks show Cong's

the UPA was in power, and said the opposition party has not disclosed its details yet. Rahul Gandhi can betray India but not go against China, Bhatia alleged, and also called the donations given to the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation by the Chinese embassy as a "bribe". (PTI)

EU announces Euro

the intensity of the storm resulted in major flooding in urban areas that caused widespread power outages. The European Union and its Member States are the world's leading donor of humanitarian aid. Relief assistance is an expression of European solidarity with people in need all around the world, the EU readout noted.

The EU funding is being made available via the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) department of the European Commission. With headquarters in Brussels and a global network of field offices, the EU helps millions of victims of conflict and disasters every year, providing assistance to the most vulnerable people on the basis of humanitarian needs, the grouping said. (PTI)

Cyclonic storm Remal leaves

Organisations such as APDCL, Forest Department, NHAI, and PWD are working tirelessly to restore essential services and infrastructure. Meanwhile, in Dongkamukam, the rising waters of the Kapili River have forced residents to evacuate to safer ground, while road closures and power outages add to the community's woes.

Why was CBI, ED action

speaker's sanction. Similarly, he said, TMC leader Tapas Roy was raided by the ED in January this year in connection with a money laundering case and by March, he had also joined the BJP. Just a few months prior to his joining, Adhikari had alleged that Roy was involved in a municipal recruitment scam but this allegation also "disappeared" once Roy joined the party, he alleged.

"The PM's 'Bhramshatkar Hatao' slogan is shamelessly plastered all over the country even as his party is busy handing tickets to corrupt politicians. "Can the outgoing PM shed any light on why CBI and ED action against these leaders has been stalled? How can the BJP make pretensions to eradicating corruption when their 'washing machine' is clearly at full spin in West Bengal?" Ramesh asked in his post.

He also alleged that the government has blocked the National Health Mission funding to over 11,000 sub-health centres in West Bengal. These sub-health centres form the first line of defence for India's poor - they are staffed by nurses and provide vaccines for children, tablets, and medicines for common fever, malaria, TB, and other infectious diseases, he claimed.

While the sub-centres are supposed to be called Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres, the state government had named them Sushasthya Centres, he claimed, adding that in a letter on November 25 last year, the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) wrote to states, ordering them to rename sub-centres "Ayushman Arogya Mandir" and paint them orange. The medical community has criticised this attempt by the BJP to "saffronise" medical centres, and the state government has refused to implement it, he said.

"In a petty and vindictive move, the Modi Sarkar seems to have blocked funds just because the state government refused to paint sub-centres a different colour. This comes after the Centre has already blocked state funds to MGNREGA and a Central housing scheme. "In their vindictiveness, why is the BJP denying essential health services to the poorest communities in the state? Does the outgoing PM prioritise his PR over vaccines for India's children?" Ramesh asked. (PTI)

191 BJP, 143 Cong LS poll

insights into the prevalence of candidates with criminal backgrounds. For instance, in Maharashtra, 266 of the 1,119 contesting candidates have declared criminal cases, with 183 names serious crimes. Tamil Nadu has 137 out of 945 candidates with criminal cases, with 83 facing serious charges.

In Uttar Pradesh, 213 out of 851 candidates have declared criminal cases against themselves with 179 of them being registered against serious offences. In Telangana it is 104 of 524 candidates, 112 of 507 candidates in West Bengal and 115 of 496 candidates in Bihar. For Jharkhand it is 69 of 242 candidates, Odisha it is 52 of 207 candidates and Kerala it is 67 of 189 candidates. In Punjab and Andhra Pradesh, 69 of 328 candidates and 88 of 450 candidates, respectively, have declared criminal cases. In Delhi, 25 of 162 candidates have declared criminal cases, the report stated. (PTI)

104% rise in number of

Additionally, the analysis reveals financial assets of the candidates with 2,572 out of all 8,337 candidates being crorepatris or millionaires. Among national parties, 906 out of 1,333 candidates are crorepatris, followed by 421 out of 532 in state parties, 572 out of 2,580 in registered unrecognised parties, and 673 out of 3,915 among independent candidates. (PTI)

Massive erosion threatens

like Geo-seeds and porcupines, but the risk to the Ring Bund remains significant," explains a Water Resources Department official. Chandmari Ghat in Dibrugarh faces a similar erosion onslaught, leading to the loss of substantial agricultural land into the Brahmaputra River. To combat the threat, the state government's water resources department has initiated plans to construct two spurs along the riverbank. These structures, designed to redirect the river's course, aim to mitigate erosion and safeguard Dibrugarh from future flood-related catastrophes.

DC chairs discussion on enhancing response systems and protecting vulnerable communities

Monsoon preparedness review meeting held in Haflong



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 29: Simanta Kumar Das, ACS, the district commissioner and chairman of the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) for Dima

Hasao, chaired a review meeting on monsoon preparedness on Wednesday at the DC Conference Hall. The meeting gathered various dignitaries, including Prabr Kumar Dutta, ACS, principal of

the Survey and Settlement Training Centre and nodal officer of the Revenue and DM Department. Shhaurya Sharma, ACS, CEO of DDMA, Ankur Bikash Dev from ASDMA, Mukunda Upadhyay

from UNICEF, Ricky Phukan, DPO, and representatives from different district-level departments.

The focus of the meeting was on the crucial measures required to enhance monsoon preparedness and the district's response systems. Prabr Kumar Dutta led discussions on the technical aspects, stressing the importance of maintaining minimum standards and taking specific actions to protect vulnerable communities at risk of disasters. He advised on infrastructural preparedness and the strengthening of community-based institutions for a more coordinated and comprehensive response.

Experts from ASDMA and UNICEF emphasised the necessary actions to ensure minimum assured facilities in relief camps. The meeting concluded with final remarks from deputy commissioner and chairman DDMA, Simanta Kumar Das.

AWU partners with Mirai Japanese Learning Center

HT Correspondent
JORHAT, May 29: Assam Women's University (AWU) in Jorhat has reached an agreement through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Mirai Japanese Learning Center.

According to the MoU, Assam Women's University will support and coordinate with the Mirai Japanese Learning Center in mobilising candidates for identified job roles in Japan, specifically in the skilled work sector. Assam Women's University will provide infrastructure for training, conducting interviews, and related activities under the 'Up-skilling youth of Assam by imparting job-oriented Japanese language and culture training' program. The MoU was signed in the presence of registrar Tapan Kumar Gohain, vice chancellor Dr Ajanta Borgohain Rajkonwar, Hemanta Kumar Mazumdar and Dr Bidit Kumar Gogoi of Mirai. The Mirai Japanese Learning Center, a Guwahati-based corporate entity formed in 2017, specialises in providing language coaching for Japanese proficiency, covering writing, reading, and speaking Japanese, along with initiation into the country's mannerisms, culture, business etiquette, etc.

Happy Child High School hosts annual function



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 29: Happy Child High School, a well-known educational institution in Guwahati city, celebrated its grand annual function, Cele-Fiesta, on Wednesday at the 'Pragiyoti ITA Cultural Centre', Machkhowa, Guwahati. School chairman CA BK Bansal, Management Committee members Sunil Agarwal, Anup Khemani, Kamal Jain, school secretary CA Saloni Binnani, principal Neelanjana Chakraborty, headmistress

Soma Mukherjee, and Sanghamitra Roy formally started the program by lighting the ceremonial lamp.

In a spectacular colorful cultural program, children enthralled the auditorium with welcome songs, melodious flute playing, various types of dances like anand utsav, ayodhya tableau, twinkling toys, aikyam, mobile cataclysm, luit sammanav setu, jamboree, robotics, and ornamentation fashion show, among others, making it a

wonderful show. Principal Chakraborty presented the annual report of the school and motivated all the teachers and students to contribute positively and achieve good results in the current session as well.

The school's annual magazine, Agnitio, was also released during the program. School teachers and students were awarded for their co-curricular and extra-curricular activities carried out throughout the year for the all-round development of the students, for good examination results, highest attendance, punctuality, etc.

As always, the school's results in the HSLC Exam 2024 were excellent. In the program, school topper Jagrit Kanoi and 37 students who scored 90 percent and above marks were awarded.

The school always appreciates the positive cooperation of its employees; hence, all the employees rendering services in the school were also rewarded. School secretary Saloni Binnani congratulated the entire school family and expressed hope that they will make the academic session successful with positive thinking and cooperation.

Jagiroad Press Club hosts snake awareness camp

HT Correspondent
JAGIROAD, May 29: With the aim of raising awareness about snakes and preserving natural balance, the Jagiroad Press Club recently organised a snake awareness camp at the premises of Dongabari Secondary School near here.

Hites Sarma, president of Prakity Mancha, Assam, served as the resource person for the meeting. Sarma informed the audience that there are approximately 300 different species of snakes worldwide, with 74 of them found in Assam. However, only a few species pose a threat to humans, with the king cobra being one of them. He emphasised that snakes typically do not attack first but may retaliate when provoked or accidentally disturbed. In case of a poisonous snake bite, he explained that two clear teeth marks are usually visible, and the patient should remain calm and avoid any action that could worsen the situation. Instead, they should be promptly taken to the nearest hospital where antivenom is available. Sarma also advised students in rural areas to carry flashlights when venturing outside during the rainy season.

Akhilesh Singh takes charge at NTPC Bongaigaon Salakati

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, May 29: Akhilesh Singh has taken charge as the project head of NTPC Bongaigaon, Salakati, the 750 MW flagship power station of NTPC located in Kokrajhar district, effective from May 27, 2024. Prior to his appointment at NTPC Bongaigaon, Salakati, Singh served as the head of project at NTPC Lara, Chhattisgarh, overseeing a generating capacity of 1600 MW. Singh succeeds KC Muraliedharan, who has been transferred to NTPC Dadri as the head of project.

Akhilesh Singh began his journey with NTPC as an executive trainee (ET) in 1993 after obtaining a degree in electrical engineering from Bhagalpur University. With over 30 years of experience, Singh has garnered rich exposure to working in NTPC's largest power stations at Riband and Vindhyachal, where he played a crucial role in

ensuring operational efficiency and excellence. Throughout his career, Singh has made significant contributions to achieving greater heights in the O&M (Operations & Maintenance) performance of various NTPC stations. He previously served in various capacities at NTPC Lara, including as general manager (Fuel Management) and later as GM (O&M) and head of the project of the 1600 MW NTPC Lara Super Thermal Power Station.

Singh has undergone extensive training in various domains, including safety, power plant efficiency, preventive vigilance, coal coordination, O&M practices, human resources, first aid and CPR certification, advanced leadership programs, and commercial aspects specific to NTPC. His commitment to continuous learning and development reflects his dedication to excellence in the power sector.

Morigaon District Development Committee reviews progress & plans

DC chair meeting to assess departmental works and prioritise infrastructure projects

HT Correspondent

JAGIROAD, May 29: The District Development Committee held its monthly meeting on Wednesday at the District Commissioner's Office, Morigaon. The meeting was chaired by district commissioner Devashish Sharma, who reviewed the work of each department. He examined the progress of the Public Works (Roads) Department, particularly focusing on the construction of the Gaurav Road passing in front of the District Commissioner's Office. The executive engineer of the department assured that the road construction would be completed within the next three months. Additionally,

the district commissioner assessed the preparation of a detailed project report for the footbridge to be constructed at Charan Beel.

In another segment of the meeting, the district commissioner emphasised prioritising the construction of a new circuit house and integrated District Commissioner's Office. The second half of the meeting was chaired by district development commissioner Siddharth Goswami, who reviewed the works of various departments including Industry and Commerce, Handicrafts and Textiles, Dairy Development, Education, Social Welfare, Labour, Economics and Statistics, Excise, Employment

Exchange Centre, Agriculture, Silk, Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Department, Water Resources, Irrigation, Public Works (NH), Cooperatives, Food, Public Distribution and Consumer Affairs, Panchayat and Rural Development Department, Khadi and Rural Industries, Employment Exchange Centre, and Morigaon Municipality, among others. He directed the Legal Measurement Department to conduct periodic raids at all petrol pumps in the district to prevent possible irregularities, urging every department to work in coordination. The meeting was attended by the heads of various departments.

Several villages inundated in Hojai



HT Correspondent
HOJAI, May 29: Incessant rainfall over the last three days, triggered by Cyclone Remal and the excess water released from the Neepeco-operated Kopili hydroelectric project in Umrangso, Dima Hasao, has led to the submergence of various parts of Hojai district. The overflowing Kopili river has particularly affected several villages in Hojai district, including Kurnakata, Thaplaguri, Raikata, Kanduguri, and Nabhanga.

In Kurnakata, the main road connecting Hojai to West Karbi Anglong is completely flooded. "The entire area is reeling under floods, forcing us to take shelter on the roadside. We don't have any food," said a local resident.

Villagers have appealed to the Hojai district administration to provide assistance in this hour of crisis.

Police bust major drug operation

HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, May 29: Acting on a tip-off, Chariduar Police conducted a search operation on Tuesday night at the residence of suspected drug peddler Md Shariful Islam in Gudamghat gaon under Chariduar Police



Station. The operation resulted in the recovery of forty-eight small plastic containers containing suspected brown sugar.

During the operation, the police apprehended two individuals identified as Bipul Islam, son of Md Boyanul Islam of Gudamghat gaon under Chariduar PS, and Bapon Kalita, son of Mithun Kalita of Jyotikuchi, Shankar Hotel, under Fatasil Ambari Police Station. The police seized 48 containers of suspected brown sugar, a cash amount of ₹ 17,000, and two mobile handsets from the residence. Police sources have stated that the investigation is ongoing to gather further details.

Unbridled increase of e-rickshaws sparks traffic chaos

HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, May 29: The unbridled increase of e-rickshaws is creating traffic woes for the public in Sivasagar town, as decried by the Vikram drivers and owners. The three-wheeler Vikram owners, on Tuesday, created a ruckus in front of the District Transport Office, demanding urgent action against illegal e-rickshaws in the town. The Vikram owners came in large numbers from different areas to return the Vikrams to the DTO, alleging that their means of earning, even the daily wage, is spoiled by the increasing number of e-rickshaws permitted by the DTO and the Sivasagar Municipality Board (SMB). Chitu Baruah, the leader of the Vikram association, demanded strict action against erring e-rickshaws that are operating in the town without paying the government anything, while the Vikrams pay regular pollution clearance and annual taxes.

Women spearhead effort to install solar fence amidst HEC

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 29: "This single-strand solar-powered fence that now shields our village and residences from wild elephants has given us a new lease of life and a whiff of prosperity after a prolonged period of mental agony and threat to our very existence. This fence is nothing less than the lifeline for villagers here," said Kingis Koch, a mother of two young daughters and a leading woman in remote Besorkona Kochpara hamlet in Goalpara district.

The innocuous-looking wire held horizontally high above the ground by posts of tree stems has brought smiles back to the faces of residents of the remote village.

The women of the villages used to be severely affected by an unrelenting traumatic atmosphere because of the raging human-elephant conflict (HEC) phenomenon gripping the residents. They were compelled to finish household chores, including cooking dinner, by sunset as no one knew what would befall them once the herd of wild elephants happened to enter the village after dusk.

Hell used to break loose on this village inhabited by the indigenous Koch community and located about 12 kilometers away from the sub-division headquarters at Lakhipur in Goalpara district when wild elephants entered the



village at nightfall, raiding household after household in search of food.

As the menfolk got busy trying to chase the elephants away, if possible, the women had to gather their children and the elderly in the household and run for safety, if any.

"Some of the women of the village like Kingis Koch, Nilima Koch, Menoka Koch, Pimila Koch took the lead along with the male counterparts of the villages in installing this low-cost solar fence under the guidance of Aaranyak's technical team led by Anjan Baruah. These women villagers, numbering about 18, even carried heavy tree-stem posts on their shoulders to help install the fence," said a grateful

Dr Bibhuti Prasad Lahkar, the head scientist of the elephant research and conservation division of Aaranyak.

Biodiversity conservation organisation Aaranyak, with support from USFWS and Goalpara Territorial Division of state Forest department, installed a 2.5 km long single-strand solar fence in April this year to protect Besorkona and No 1 Pukhuripara villages as part of its sustained efforts for mitigation of HEC and facilitation of coexistence. The length of the fence around Besorkona hamlet is 1.6 km.

"The low-cost solar fencing, which we now call our lifeline, not only protects our lives and homes but has empowered all the women in the village

who now carry on with their vocations of choice besides the routine household chores without any fear. We can now work freely in our horticulture homesteads and weave clothes, look after the children's health and education, thereby contributing substantially towards the improvement of household economic conditions," said Kingis Koch.

Another leading village woman, Nilima Koch, said the women of the village who used to spend sleepless nights in a raging HEC situation could very well realise how our life would be changed for the better by this solar fence and hence we worked along with our menfolk to help install the solar fence.

"It has been such a peaceful life for us since the installation of the solar fence in April this year as if we got our life back. We can now eat, sleep, and work at peace. The women in the villages have started laughing once again, their health too has improved and trauma has gone. When the woman laughs the entire family laughs," said Menoka Koch with a radiant smile.

The religious and cultural activities in the village have also resumed in the right spirit as the hub of these activities, the village Kali Temple, has now been made out of reach for wild elephants because of the solar fence.

BIRANGANA SATI SADHANI RAJYIK VISHWAVIDYALAYA
A STATE GOVERNMENT UNIVERSITY, GOLAGHAT-785621
(Co-Educational)

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Submission of online application form for UG and PG shall commence from 27th May 2024. For admission related details, kindly visit <https://admission.bssrv.ac.in> or university website www.bssrv.ac.in. For FYUGP, Candidates can also visit <https://assamadmission.samarth.ac.in>.

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QUOTE OF THE DAY

A witty woman is a treasure; a witty beauty is a power.
— George Meredith

The Battle for India's Future

As the elections near their conclusion, the political landscape is abuzz with speculations and strategies from both the ruling NDA and the opposition INDI-Alliance. Central to the opposition's campaign is the vision of an India without Narendra Modi at the helm, with the INDI-Alliance aspiring to usher in a new era reminiscent of the Nehru years. Congress leader Shashi Tharoor has emerged as a prominent voice within the INDI-Alliance, echoing Rahul Gandhi's aggressive stance. Tharoor confidently predicts the alliance's victory, suggesting they will overturn recent amendments to the anti-terror law UAPA and remove religious references in the citizenship law. These promises resonate particularly in Kerala, contrasting with sentiments in Himachal Pradesh, where voters prefer the UAPA unchanged. Tharoor's potential rise to a Union ministerial position underscores the internal dynamics of the INDI-Alliance, where his policy positions have become focal points. His advocacy for resuming trade with Pakistan and revising the UAPA has sparked significant debate. Tharoor's considerable Muslim support base likely influences his stance, especially in light of cases like that of Sidheeq Kappan, charged under the UAPA.

The prospect of a Tharoor-led policy shift has supporters of the INDI-Alliance hopeful, anticipating significant changes if they seize power. The June 4 results will be decisive in determining whether Modi continues as Prime Minister and if Tharoor's vision for the UAPA comes to fruition. The BJP's supporters, however, remain confident in Modi's enduring appeal. The opposition is banking on an "undercurrent" of support for the INDI-Alliance, contrasting the Modi wave some observers detected in West Bengal on May 28. Despite extensive campaigning by Modi, Amit Shah, and BJP President JP Nadda, who have repeatedly proclaimed "abki baar 400 paar," predicting the exact outcome remains challenging. Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal echoed this optimism while campaigning in Varanasi, Modi's constituency. After much speculation, the INDI-Alliance has projected that it will secure "above 300" seats, confidently asserting that Modi will no longer be Prime Minister by the afternoon of June 4. Modi, the most polarizing figure in the INDI-Alliance circles, appears to relish the attention. His campaign has generated intense interest, with predictions ranging from a minimal BJP presence to an overwhelming victory.

The exit polls on June 1 will provide preliminary insights, followed by a crucial INDI-Alliance meeting to strategize for a potential post-Modi India. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's decision to skip the meeting called by Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge highlights ongoing tensions within the INDI-Alliance. Banerjee's paranoia regarding Congress reflects the fragile unity of the alliance, which may struggle to remain cohesive if tasked with forming a coalition government post-elections. The disunity within the INDI-Alliance is a significant hurdle, raising questions about its ability to govern effectively if victorious. Tharoor's proposed UAPA reforms have introduced some optimism, but the alliance's stability remains uncertain. Meanwhile, the BJP's talk of a third and fourth term for Modi, alongside his rhetoric on corruption, continues to resonate with his base, causing concern among INDI-Alliance supporters. Modi's potential victory could exacerbate existing tensions on issues like reservations for SC/ST/OBC and the contentious topic of Muslim reservations. Additionally, policies like the legal MSP and the Agniveer scheme have been flagged by the INDI-Alliance as areas of concern. The June 4 results will reveal whether Modi's influence remains unchallenged or if the INDI-Alliance will manage to steer India in a new direction.

Why do people want to see Modi as Prime Minister for the third time?

The people of our vast and diverse country do not want any change in the top position of power; this is a unique example in itself. Despite all kinds of speculations, conjectures, predictions, allegations and counter-allegations during the Lok Sabha elections, the people of the country seem eager to see Narendra Modi on the post of Prime Minister for the third consecutive time. People may have different opinions on various issues but as far as the Prime Minister is concerned, the general opinion is in favor of Modi.

The question arises that why do the people of the country want to see Modi as PM for the third time? In the last election, 303 BJP MPs won. It is not possible that there should be no resentment among the voters against any of them, but the opposition parties did not pay attention to this and instead started criticizing Modi. The opposition has no agenda other than opposing Modi.

The atmosphere has become such that people are no longer concerned about who is the candidate in the Lok Sabha constituency, they have made up their mind to vote for Modi. Due to which this election has also remained Modi centric like the elections of 2014 and 2019. The election process has reached the final stage and the voters are firm on their decision that they have to vote for Modi. People are dreaming of developed India through Modi.

Every government has some merits and it is also natural that it has some shortcomings. If the opposition parties had gone to the voters with examples of the government's shortcomings, they would have probably benefited to some extent, but they only targeted Modi, which the voters did not like. There is no doubt that there is still a Modi wave in the country and people do not like to hear against Modi. This is Modi's earning.

Modi has completed ten years as PM and during this time he



has left a mark on the hearts of the countrymen with his unique style.

It is clearly visible what was the condition of the country when Modi became the Prime Minister ten years ago and what has changed in it now. The country has come out of the atmosphere of disappointment and frustration. A positive environment has been created in the country. People are full of confidence. India is famous all over the world. Thanks to Modi, there has been a radical change in the country's politics, character of power and working style of administration.

The impeccable tenure of 10 years of Modi government is commendable. 25 crore people have been taken out of poverty; this has been confirmed by various international agencies. The country has been freed from mega-scams and terror; steps have been taken towards improving the lives of the poor.

On one hand, while the leaders of opposition parties have been focusing on the development of their families, on the other hand, Modi has taken care of 140 crore people of the country under 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Vikas'. Modi ignited the spark of change in the governance system, which has made it possible to move towards inclusive, development-oriented and corruption-free

governance.

It is due to the foresight of Modi that he has succeeded in realizing the objective of Antyodaya and making the people sitting at the last corner of the society benefit from the government's schemes.

Modi has given wings to cultural development and tourism development in the country. Work has been done with dedication for every section including energy, foreign policy, security, medicine, education, economic progress, poor welfare, women's upliftment. He is working like an ascetic. He is working considering 140 crore people of the country as his idol. The country is moving forward with this spirit of his.

In the last ten years, Modi has worked in a targeted manner, due to which the condition of the common man has improved. Per capita income has increased in the country. Like the opposition parties, Modi does not give the slogan of eradicating poverty, rather he is emphasizing on increasing the income of the poor. Modi's Make in India program has taken the country up the ladder of progress. Under the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana, small farmers of the country are getting annual assistance of Rs 6,000.

Thanks to the use of drones, a new revolution has started in farming. The needy section of

the country has got relief from the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana. Ujjwala scheme has changed the lives of women. Women have openly come out in support of Modi due to the provision of cooking gas, clean drinking water, electricity, permanent houses, toilets etc.

The Total Sanitation Campaign has shown a new path. The facility of free treatment up to Rs 5 lakh under Ayushman Bharat Scheme has saved the common man from getting burdened with debt. Similarly, Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana, Atal Pension Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana, which was run with the aim of protecting the large population of the country, have provided support to the common people. Under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, the dream of crores of people of owning a house has come true.

The country's economy is strengthening rapidly. There was a time when the country's gold had to be mortgaged, but the strength of India's economy in the last ten years has set a new example. The borders of the country are safe and people within the country are living peacefully and peacefully.

Because of the work that Modi has done in the last ten years, people not only want to see Modi as PM for the third consecutive time, along with this, people also believe that the country can progress in the coming years only under the leadership of Modi. Modi has set the goal of a developed India by 2047, which has further increased Modi's attraction among the people.

People believe that in the coming times, under the leadership of Modi, the country will not only move towards development but will also be able to face various challenges. This thinking among the people has been created due to Modi's actions like abolition of Article 370 from Kashmir, giving reply to Pakistan by entering its territory, massive campaign against

corruption, which were considered not only difficult but also impossible. The expansion of the feeling of nationalism during the Modi era is a unique example.

Even the election process has not been completed yet, but Modi, who is known for working at a fast pace, has made a blueprint of what to do in his third term. This shows that Modi is full of confidence and this confidence is due to the love and affection of 140 countrymen. In a recent interview, Modi said that the blueprint for the first 100 days of my third term is ready and I am planning to add 25 more days for the youth in this plan.

According to what the Prime Minister has said, while preparing the agenda for the first 100 days of the government, he has taken suggestions from more than 20 lakh people across the country. Modi had a manifesto for five years in 2014. In 2019, Modi attracted some attention on the global picture. His vision in 2024 is big and long-term. Under this, Modi set a target of "crossing 400" for the NDA alliance in the Lok Sabha elections and he has centered his campaign around the 'Developed India' roadmap. Modi is the first Prime Minister in 75 years who is thinking so far ahead.

It is believed that in the third term, Modi will implement judicial reforms, uniform civil code, delimitation and one nation one election, decisive fight against corruption, free medical treatment for senior citizens above seventy years of age, establishment of census commission, administrative and police reforms and will work on priority to strengthen the manufacturing sector. Surely, this exercise will yield good results. The country will progress, the countrymen will be happy and India's reputation will increase in the entire world. *(The author is a renowned educationist. He has been a professor in Delhi University for 44 years)*

The Wire's misleading voter turnout report: A critical analysis

By: Shashanka Das

On May 26th, a significant inaccuracy in The Wire's reporting on voter turnout in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections was exposed, highlighting severe discrepancies and raising critical questions about the journalistic integrity of the publication. The Wire initially claimed a drastic dip of 19.4 crore voters in the first five phases of polling compared to the 2019 elections. However, this claim was based on a flawed comparison that misled the public regarding electoral participation trends.

Misleading comparisons and arithmetic errors: The Wire's original report erroneously compared the total number of registered voters in the first five phases of the 2019 elections with the actual voter turnout in the first five phases of the 2024 elections. This incorrect comparison suggested a decline from 70 crore voters in 2019 to 50.7 crore voters in 2024. However, the accurate figure for the 2019 turnout was 48.5 crore, making The Wire's analysis fundamentally flawed from the beginning.

Once the errors were identified, The Wire revised its article, claiming a dip of 1.8 crore voters in the first phase of the 2024 elections. Despite this correction, the revised analysis also contained significant errors. The Wire inaccurately reported a decrease in voter turnout when, in reality, the number of votes cast in the first phase increased from 9,13,79,409 in 2019 to 11,00,52,103 in 2024. This mistake resulted from a basic arithmetic error: the incorrect subtraction of the 2024 figures from those of 2019, leading to a negative result misinterpreted as a dip.

Inaccurate phase-wise comparisons: The fundamental issue with The Wire's approach lies in the phase-wise comparison of voter turnout between different election years. Such comparisons are inherently flawed because the constituencies included in each phase vary significantly between elections. For instance, Andhra Pradesh voted in the first phase in 2019 but in the fourth phase in 2024.

Similarly, Tamil Nadu, which voted in the first phase in 2024, participated in the second phase in 2019. These variations in con-

stituency composition render phase-wise comparisons invalid and misleading.

To provide an accurate analysis, one must compare voter turnout in the same constituencies across different election years, irrespective of the phase in which they voted. This method, while more complex, ensures a true comparison of voter behavior and trends.

The correct approach to data analysis: A more accurate approach involves comparing the total voter turnout in the same constituencies from the first phase of the 2024 elections with the corresponding constituencies from 2019. For example, in 2019, 11,00,90,908 votes were cast out of 15,75,36,275 eligible voters in these constituencies. In 2024, 11,00,52,103 votes were cast out of 16,63,86,344 eligible voters. This shows a slight decrease of 38,805 voters, not the significant dip The Wire reported.

Moreover, the case of Outer Manipur, which was split into two phases in 2024, further complicates direct comparisons. If one were to combine the votes from both phases for Outer Manipur, the analysis would show a different turnout trend. In 2019, Outer Manipur voted in a single phase, whereas in 2024, it was divided, affecting the overall turnout numbers when aggregated differently.

Implications and conclusion: The Wire's errors, whether due to misunderstanding or intentional misrepresentation, highlight the critical importance of accurate data analysis and responsible journalism. Inaccurate reporting, especially in the context of elections, can have significant consequences, including undermining public trust in the electoral process and spreading misinformation.

While errors in complex data analysis can occur, repeated and significant mistakes suggest a deeper issue that needs addressing. Journalism, particularly in the digital age, carries a responsibility to ensure the accuracy and reliability of information disseminated to the public. The Wire's case serves as a cautionary tale, emphasizing the need for rigorous data verification and methodological transparency to uphold the standards of responsible journalism.

Dedollarisation move has a major role behind surge in gold and silver prices

By: Dr. Nilanjan Banik

The price of 10 grams of 999-carat gold reached an all-time high of ₹ 75,160 on May 20. If you plan to buy silver, the story is similar, with silver prices reaching an all-time high of ₹ 90,000 a kg on May 17. In fact, although silver has got more industrial usage from the makers of electric vehicles and photovoltaic solar panels, gold and silver prices tend to move similarly.

A reason for gold continuing its upward trajectory is the new-found interest in gold by the central banks around the world. In particular, central banks from China, Russia, India, and Turkey are stacking up gold reserves. A continuing high inflation rates in the US and the Eurozone - along with a probable weakening impact of high inflation on the US\$ and the Euro - have also contributed to the rising prices of these precious commodities.

For example, inflation rate in the UK has reached a record high of 11.1% in October 2022, with an overall price increase of 22% over the past three years. For the years 2022 and 2024, the average rate of inflation in the US was 8% and 4.1%, respectively, much higher than their benchmark level of 2%.

According to the World Gold Council (WGC), demand for gold rose 18% in 2022, taking the world's gold demand to 4,741 tonnes, the highest for any year since 2011. Gold demand fell 5% in 2023 bringing the demand to 4,448 tonnes which was still robust considering the fact that the 2022 demand followed the pandemic year.

The last time demand for gold reached such levels was when uncertainty about the future of the dollar spiked in the aftermath of the 2008 US financial crisis.

Latest available figures from the first quarter of 2024, suggest that the demand for gold continues to rise. Economies such as China, Russia, France, Japan, and UK have turned out to be net sellers of the US treasury notes, and are buying gold.

Another reason for the increase in gold prices in India is the rise in gold imports. Imports

surged by 26.7% to US\$ 35.95 billion during April-December 2023 due to robust domestic demand, compared to US\$ 28.4 billion during the same period the previous year.

In addition to the demand-side factors, depreciation of Indian rupee played a spoilsport. The rupee has depreciated 0.4% against the US dollar since the start of the calendar year 2024. Through the previous financial year, 2023-24, it depreciated 1.5%. Naturally, a depreciating rupee adds to price of gold in India.

In addition to the uncertain global landscape, which is marked by conflicts such as war, a major factor could be the accelerated pace of de-dollarisation.

The argument is that China, the second largest economy after the US, is increasingly convincing the world's largest suppliers of energy, including Russia, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Venezuela to trade in Chinese Yuan. This, according to the commentators, will usher in the demise of the 'petrodollar'. It would then be a matter of time before the US economy crumbles, they argue.

In the early 1970s, during the Yom Kippur war, the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), of which Saudi Arabia is a member, implemented an oil embargo. The price of oil per barrel went up from \$3 in 1973 to \$12 in 1974, and the OPEC member countries earned dollops of money.

The then American President, Richard Nixon struck a deal with Saudi Arabia ensuring that all oil deals across the world would take place in US dollars. Other oil producing nations in the OPEC joined Saudi Arabia, depositing a large portion of their money in the US banks, thus marking the beginning of 'petrodollar'. In the world of flexible exchange rates, the US dollar became the most sought-after currency.

Fast forward, in 2024, China and Russia are now trying to break this US hegemony. Other emerging market economies such as Brazil, India, Iran, and off late France, have now agreed to trade in their own currency.

Back home, in February, the

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) added 4.7 tonnes of gold to its coffers, taking its gold reserves to an all-time high of 817 tonnes.

In August last year, BRICS leaders - an economic grouping originally comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa - met in Durban, South Africa to discuss new global reserve assets instead of the US Dollar.

Russia is already trading energy with India and China in Indian Rupee and Chinese Yuan, respectively. Saudi Aramco is building a \$10 billion oil refinery in China (transaction happening in Chinese Yuan). France and China finalized the first ever deal on 65,000 tonnes of liquefied natural gas in Yuan.

In fact, something similar happened during early part of 1970s. Prior to 1971, value of the US dollar was tied with the gold reserves. This meant that the dollar could be exchanged for gold at a fixed rate. However, because of economic pressures such as inflation and the costs of the war in Vietnam, the US government printed more money than what it had in gold reserves to back it up. 'Petrodollar' came as a respite and President Nixon abandoned the "gold standard".

However, in spite of de-dollarisation and new found love for gold and silvers in recent times, the US economy is showing no sign of weakness. Interestingly, considering the last two years, Yuan continued to depreciate against dollar.

Given that China and the US are each other's largest trading partners; it is expected that a higher bout of inflation in the US will make the Yuan appreciate. But that did not happen as the Chinese are yet to catch-up with the US in terms of productivity, and that something is not going to fall anytime soon.

The US chip embargo on China is a testimony to the fact that the US government wants to keep its economy ahead. China has a long way to go before it can catch up with the US. As per ILO estimates in 2024, China is producing an output of US\$ 23,866 per worker, much below America's average of US\$ 1,30,942 per worker. (IPA Service)

June 4 Lok Sabha results to determine the new political alignment

By: Kalyani Shankar

The 2024 Lok Sabha elections are closing, and the results will be out on June 4. The aftermath of the election is not simply about winners and losers. It is about more than just the anticipated outcomes. It includes the potential for unforeseen alliances, dramatic shifts in power dynamics, and the emergence of new political forces, all of which are yet to be unveiled.

The BJP's potential win in the election is a significant event that could reshape the political landscape. However, the outcome is uncertain, with two possible scenarios, each with implications. One scenario predicts a massive victory for the BJP, possibly even exceeding 400 seats. The other scenario suggests a more modest result for the BJP with fewer seats.

A landslide victory for the BJP could have far-reaching consequences. In a worst-case scenario, if the BJP wins fewer seats, the party could still secure support from other parties. If the party emerges as the single largest, albeit with fewer seats than in the 2019 poll, it has a plan B to form the government with the help of some neutral parties.

The strategic decisions made by the Congress party, such as reducing the number of contested constituencies, highlight the depth and complexity of Indian politics. Each move is a calculated step towards a larger goal.

As the sixth phase of the Lok Sabha polls concluded on Saturday, the Congress claimed the BJP's fate is "all but sealed," with the INDIA bloc having already crossed the halfway mark of 272 seats and is on course for a total of over 350 seats.

The INDIA Alliance, a significant player in Indian politics, was formed by 26 Opposition parties last year to fight Modi unitedly. However, if the BJP returns to power, the alliance may face a significant challenge. Some partners, such as the Trinamool Congress and the AAP, have not fully aligned with the Congress in Lok Sabha polls, weakening INDIA bloc's position. A BJP victory could lead to re-evaluating the INDIA Alliance's strategy, with some partners choosing to distance from the present INDIA bloc.

If the BJP wins more seats,

smaller parties may rush to join the alliance. This rush may be fueled by their desire to align with the winning side, which could impact the post-election scenario. However, this rush to join the coalition may be more than just motivated by political interests. Some parties want to oppose Modi, while others see alliances as a failed attempt.

This could result in the weakening of the newly formed INDIA coalition, as this alliance has many fair-weather friends who may ally with any party based solely on their self-interest. The BJP's ability to secure more seats or gain support from other parties will not be a surprise. This could impact the political landscape, potentially leading to a realignment of political forces, including the INDIA Alliance. The BJP lost some crucial allies, such as SAD, a part of Shiv Sena and AIADMK. In recent period but the Party has got back TDP before the 2024 Lok Sabha poll.

The BJP could seek support from parties led by influential leaders such as Naveen Patnaik, Jagan Mohan Reddy, K Chandrashekar Rao, Mayawati, and others. Though not aligned with any coalition, these leaders have significant political influence and have helped the BJP in the past when the ruling party needed them. Their potential role in the post-election scenario could significantly shape the political landscape.

The Uddhav Thackeray faction of the Shiv Sena and the Sharad Pawar-led NCP may also reassess the situation if INDIA bloc fares badly. Delhi Chief Minister Kejriwal is ambitious and eyeing the prime ministership.

He will remain in opposition. Kejriwal predicted that if Modi wins again on June 4, he will put Uddhav Thackeray, Sharad Pawar, Rahul Gandhi, and Mallikarjun Kharge in jail. He would also be sent back to jail. Kejriwal has taken a tough anti-BJP position and he has to stick to it for the political future of AAP.

The June 4 election results will show how the post poll scenario impacts the INDIA alliance, splintering or strengthening it. They will also indicate whether the BJP will become more arrogant with a hat trick under its belt. A third consecutive BJP win could embolden the party, to pursue its Hindutva programme with more vigour. (IPA Service)

Cyclone Remal devastates Northeastern India



By: Dipak Kurni

May 2024 will go down in history as one of the most devastating months for the northeastern states of India due to the catastrophic impact of Cyclone Remal. This powerful cyclonic storm, which originated in the Bay of Bengal, unleashed its fury across vast swathes of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, and neighboring regions, leaving a trail of destruction in its wake.

Assam bears the brunt. The state of Assam found itself in the eye of the storm as Cyclone Remal made landfall near the city of Dibrugarh. Packing wind speeds of over 200 kilometers per hour, the cyclone uprooted trees, flattened buildings, and caused widespread damage to infrastructure. Entire villages were submerged as heavy rains triggered flash floods, forcing thousands of residents to flee their homes and seek shelter in relief camps.

The Brahmaputra River, a lifeline for the region, swelled to unprecedented levels, breaching its banks and inundating vast areas of the state. Agricultural lands were decimated, with entire crops being washed away, raising concerns

about food security in the coming months.

The tea industry, a significant contributor to Assam's economy, suffered severe setbacks as numerous tea gardens were ravaged by the cyclone's wrath.

Rescue and relief efforts

As the magnitude of the disaster unfolded, the Indian government and various aid organizations swiftly mobilized resources to provide relief to the affected areas. The Indian Army, Air Force, and National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) teams were deployed to carry out search and rescue operations, evacuate stranded individuals, and distribute essential supplies to those in need.

However, the challenging terrain and widespread destruction of infrastructure posed significant obstacles to the relief efforts. Roads were blocked by fallen trees and debris, hampering the movement of aid convoys. Communication lines were disrupted, making it difficult to coordinate relief efforts and assess the extent of the damage in remote areas.

Ripple effects across Northeast India

Cyclone Remal's impact extended far beyond the borders of

Assam, with neighboring states like Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland also bearing the brunt of the storm. In Arunachal Pradesh, landslides triggered by heavy rains blocked major highways, cutting off remote villages from the rest of the state.

The picturesque town of Tawang, a popular tourist destination, was severely affected, with many historic monasteries and buildings suffering structural damage.

Nagaland, too, witnessed widespread destruction as the cyclone unleashed its fury. Entire villages were submerged, and thousands of people were displaced, seeking refuge in temporary shelters. The region's agricultural sector, a vital source of livelihood for many, suffered significant losses, raising concerns about the long-term impact on the local economy.

Rebuilding and recovery

In the aftermath of Cyclone Remal, the focus has shifted to rebuilding and recovery efforts. The state governments, in collaboration with central agencies and non-governmental organizations, have initiated massive relief and rehabilitation programs.

Temporary shelters have been established to house the displaced population, and efforts are underway to provide them with food, clean water, and medical assistance.

The reconstruction of damaged infrastructure, including roads, bridges, and buildings, has become a top priority. However, the sheer scale of the destruction and the logistical challenges posed by the remote and rugged terrain have made the rebuilding process a daunting task.

Environmental impact and climate change concerns

The devastation caused by Cyclone Remal has also raised concerns about the long-term environmental impact and the role of climate change in intensifying

such extreme weather events. Environmentalists have warned that the northeastern region of India, known for its rich biodiversity, could face severe consequences if such cyclones become more frequent and intense due to rising global temperatures.

The loss of natural habitats, deforestation, and disruption of delicate ecosystems could have far-reaching implications for the region's flora and fauna. Environmental experts have called for urgent action to mitigate the effects of climate change and implement sustainable development practices to reduce the vulnerability of these regions to future natural disasters.

Lessons learned and preparedness

The aftermath of Cyclone Remal has highlighted the need for improved disaster preparedness and resilience in the northeastern states of India. Experts have emphasized the importance of strengthening early warning systems, enhancing disaster response capabilities, and investing in robust infrastructure that can withstand the impact of such extreme weather events.

Additionally, there is a growing recognition of the need for community-based disaster preparedness programs, empowering local communities to be better equipped to respond to and recover from natural calamities.

Education and awareness campaigns are crucial in fostering a culture of resilience and promoting sustainable practices that can mitigate the impact of future disasters.

As the region embarks on the long and arduous road to recovery, the lessons learned from Cyclone Remal will be invaluable in shaping disaster management strategies and ensuring that the northeastern states of India are better prepared to face the challenges posed by a changing climate and the increasing frequency of extreme weather events. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurnimigpltd@gmail.com)

Growing excess global steel capacity has disturbing implications for environment



By: Kunal Bose

Not only does growing big volumes of excess global steel capacity unsettle the market but the phenomenon has disturbing implications for the environment. OECD says: "Back-of-the-envelope calculations will show... reduction in global excess capacity by approximately one-third would lead to a reduction in emissions... in the range of 2 to 14 per cent and also much healthier business conditions for steel producers." Alas, the pressure of overcapacity will become even more intense in the future.

According to OECD, in the face of demand growth being clouded by economic headwinds, global steel capacity is to see significant rise in three years to 2026, "with 46m tonnes addition underway and an additional 78m tonnes in the planning stage."

In case global steel production remains at around last year's level, then with new capacity coming on stream, use of capacity will continue to shrink. OECD says: "World steel production as a share of capacity fell from 78.9 per cent in 2021 to 74.5 per cent in 2022." What it also ominously says this level of capacity use is "not in line with a healthy and financially viable industry."

Alongside growing capacity within the country compromising the principle of capacity swap, Chinese steel groups are making significant investment in building mills (some wholesale shifting of plants included) in Asia, ASEAN in particular and Africa. Chinese investment in ASEAN works out to 81 per cent of the region's total capacity expansion.

Chinese aggressiveness in building capacity in Asia and Africa is evidenced by its cross-broader investments accounting for 65.1 per cent of such investments by all countries. But such Chinese moves are not necessarily a blessing for countries targeted for steel capacity creation.

For, China is installing by way of wholesale transfer of old induction furnaces, which are environment polluting and products made there from are of inferior quality in ASEAN, inviting criticism of host nations.

China in fact is facing double whammy for its steel related activities. Besides the above, the country is responsible for causing disruptions in south-east Asian market for its unbridled export of steel products, often circumventing clearly laid down fair trade rules.

Since south-east Asia happens to be a significantly large export destination for Chinese steel and exporters are taking too much liberty, it is not unexpected that Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam are rising in protest against their shenanigans.

In view of growing India focus on infrastructure, housing and manufacturing, well over a century experience of steelmaking, anticipated demand growth for the metal and plentiful availability of raw materials, particularly iron ore; it is only natural that the country will be hooked to rapid capacity growth. JSW Steel is to build a 13.2m tonne greenfield mill at coastal Paradip in Odisha at an investment of Rs 650bn (\$7.8bn).

Arceclor Mittal Nippon Steel too has received major clearances to set up a 7m tonne mill at Jagatsinghpur in the same state at an investment of \$4.68 bn. Such greenfield projects apart, all the major groups, including Tata Steel, JSPL and government owned SAIL, have major brownfield capacity expansion programmes.

Tata Steel, which has a major production footprint in Europe, will focus on brownfield capacity expansion in India following its some strategic acquisitions there. Elaborating on the company's growth strategy, Narendran says: "Basically, we want to increase capacity in India where we have been making the metal for over a century.

We have already around 21m tonnes here and soon it will be 26m tonnes as Kalinganagar mill capacity expansion to 8m tonnes from 3m tonnes is nearing completion. We are concretising a few more plans to take our India capacity to 40m tonnes by 2030."

SAIL, which has five integrated mills, will lift capacity by 15m tonnes to 35m tonnes in the first phase. "Whatever happens to steel will leave an impact on raw materials such as iron ore, coal, manganese ore and chrome ore. So when you are building new steel capacity, you have to think of corresponding step up of supply of steelmaking ingredients," says RK Sharma, director general of Federation of Indian Mineral Industries.

Not only will the industry be engaged in building new capacity but investments will be made simultaneously to go up in product value chain. While India is seeing most capacity addition through blast furnace-basic oxygen furnace (BF-BOF) route like in the rest of Asia, other regions of the world are building capacity using electric arc furnaces (EAFs), promoting circular economy. OECD says around 65 low-car-

bons steel projects based on "new innovative technologies" are being set up in different countries.

In the meantime, as the economy everywhere is gaining in sophistication and sectors from defence to aerospace to automobile to railway require growing volumes of stainless steel, its use distinction with carbon steel is getting blurred in many ways. Stainless steel, an alloy of iron, highly resistant to rusting and corrosion, is also replacing carbon steel in construction in coastal areas.

Like in carbon steel, China and India are the two leading producers of stainless steel and the former in particular though has the burden of overcapacity remains engaged in commissioning new capacity. China presently has stainless steel capacity of around 50m tonnes and capacity utilisation of 70 per cent. Despite this, the country is to bring on stream fresh capacity of 7m tonnes this year. Moreover, a further 6m tonne is in planning stage.

No doubt, such capacity build-up is based on hope that once the world economy has overcome headwinds, stainless steel demand will rise and with that better capacity use.

After all, the new areas of application of stainless steel such as alternative energy, ethanol, hydrogen production and water storage and distribution hold great promise. The consulting group GlobalData Plc says in a report that the industry's global revenue at \$195bn in 2022 will grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 5.5 per cent through 2030.

China lifted 2023 stainless steel production by 12.6 per cent to 36m tonnes. Exports, however, were down to 4.14m tonnes from 4.551m tonnes in 2022. Imports decelerations were sharp to 2.07m tonnes from 3.285m tonnes.

Chinese spurt in stainless steel production is to be seen in the context of output falling in Europe and the US in response to demand fall. This will also explain setback in Chinese exports to the US and the EU. Exports would have suffered more had it not been for 94 per cent rise in Chinese despatches to Russia since 2020.

India, which is the second largest user of stainless steel, is seeing an 8 per cent CAGR over the past one decade and the forecast is per capita consumption of the metal will rise to nearly 12 kg by 2047 from the present 2.5 kg.

In agreement with the demand forecast, Jindal Stainless managing director Abhyuday Jindal says: "India will be in the forefront of growth as we anticipate demand to scale up to 20m tonnes by 2037 from 4m tonnes last year.

While this demand growth will be supported by traditional use sectors such as transport, construction and consumer durables, more and more of the metal will find application in aerospace, defence and water management."

But why has stainless steel become the "optimal" material choice? Jindal says: "Being completely recyclable and produced through scrap route, stainless steel is more than eco-friendly. It is best cost option on life cycle costing basis."

Steelmaking is highly energy intensive and carbon intensive. A major concern for policymakers of countries where steel is made on some scale is how to make production processes less carbon intensive. Steel's environment harming problem is because of its high dependence on metallurgical coal primarily used as a reducing agent for extraction of iron from ore and also to provide carbon content needed in steel.

International Energy Agency says that for steel to be on the pathway to net zero emissions by 2050 will require perfection of technology for replacement of coal by hydrogen and carbon capture. Making steel through EAFs by recycling scrap will also help in controlling emissions.

Several Chinese government departments want the share of EAFs in total steel production to become 20 per cent by 2030. In fact, as old, polluting and unviable mills are pulled down to make room for new capacity; EAFs are built in their place in China. Since 2017, the country is annually commissioning 110m tonnes of EAF capacity as part of capacity swap campaign. But disappointingly, EAF capacity use has remained low at about 60 per cent.

In any case, the world steel industry has since 1900 recycled over 25bn tonnes of steel and in the process cut iron ore consumption by around 33bn tonnes and coal use by 16bn tonnes. The industry's energy efficiency is also on ascendance: producing one tonne of steel now requires 40 per cent of the 1960 energy level.

An environment friendly development is the commitment by growing numbers of industry constituents to use energy produced from renewable sources as a substitute for fossil fuels based energy. Alas, the industry's energy requirements are so large that fossil fuels will continue to figure prominently in generating power for steel mills. (IPA Service)

Glacial lakes in Nepal a looming threat as Himalayas feel the heat

By: Surendra Phuyal

Kinjam Sherpa is intimately connected to the high Himalayan landscape in north-east Nepal that she calls home. While she looks after a herd of yaks, her adult children work as climbing guides on peaks including Mount Everest. Despite this, Kinjam does not seem to know of the looming disaster facing Naa, the village she lives in.

Just four kilometres – or a two-hour walk – upstream of Naa is the rapidly expanding Tsho Rolpa glacial lake. Situated 4,545 metres above sea level, it is one of 21 such lakes in Nepal classified as critically dangerous: a glacial lake outburst flood, or GLOF, here would have a catastrophic impact on downstream human settlements like Naa and Beding, where people move to during harsh winter months, and on vital infrastructure.

What is a GLOF?

A Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF) is a sudden release of water from a lake formed by meltwater from a mountain glacier, which is held back by ice or a moraine (rocks and sediment carried along by the glacier).

These floods can be prompted by an earthquake, avalanche or the accumulation of too much meltwater. GLOFs are often extremely destructive, and are a growing threat in the Himalayan watershed.

When asked about the risk, the 72-year-old Sherpa says: "I don't know what should be done to prevent that. Maybe people in the higher-up know that." In fact, Tsho Rolpa and the Everest region's Imja are the only two glacial lakes in Nepal that have a risk mitigation plan. Funded by the World Bank, the Nepali government and international partners, the two-year project was completed in June 2000.

It included a five-metre-deep, 70-metre-long canal, which helped lower the

lake's water level by three metres. Additional canals were supposed to bring it down by another 15 metres-17 metres, but a lack of coordination between the funders and the government stalled this work.

According to officials involved, who wished to remain anonymous, the huge sums of money required caused the various parties to lose interest in the partnership once the immediate threat was resolved.

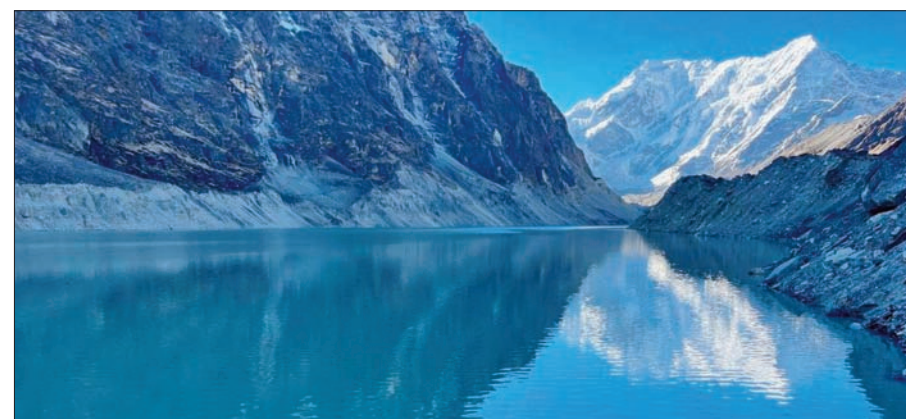
Nearly 25 years later, the risk has increased. A survey conducted by the government's Department of Hydrology and Meteorology shows that the lake has expanded. The bathymetric (depth measurement) topographic survey report, obtained exclusively by Dialogue Earth, shows that the lake's area grew from 1.55 square kilometres in 2008 to 1.65 square kilometres in 2022. Its maximum depth, however, slightly decreased, from 136.5 metres to 125.6 metres.

Glaciers feel the heat

Temperature rise in the Himalayan region has exceeded the global average. In 2019, a field expedition by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development noted that "the lake is directly fed by Tarkading Glacier, which continued to retreat at a rate of 60 metres annually from 2009 to 2019".

Furthermore, 2023 was one of the warmest years in Nepal since 1981. The Department of Hydrology and Meteorology recorded "above normal" maximum temperatures in June and July. June brought "the highest deviation among all months", climbing by more than 2C above normal maximum temperatures.

"The concern regarding possible flooding from Tsho Rolpa and impacts downstream remains high, particularly with rapid warming," says Arun Bhakta Shrestha, senior climate change specialist at International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development. "The lake [water level] lowering in



1999-2000 by three metres has not completely averted the risk. The recommendation was to lower it by 20 metres to make the lake completely risk-free."

Kayastha is not the only such lake seeing rapid expansion. Pemba Sherpa is one of Kinjam's 11 children, and a mountaineer who has scaled Everest 21 times. He tells Dialogue Earth that during a recent expedition to Ramdong Go peak, south-west of Tsho Rolpa and 5,900 metres above sea level, he passed by another glacial lake. "Tsho Nakpu is also expanding, causing huge risks to our villages downstream," he says.

There have been 24 GLOFs recorded over 450 years in Nepal, although details are low in some cases. Of those for which there are sufficient information, 16 occurred in the past 60 years. Half of these originated within Nepal, the others from the Tibetan Plateau.

To mitigate the risks, Shrestha says regular inspections are a must: "Digital cameras could be installed, linked with the telemetry system to get real-time visual information of the lake and surrounding [areas]."

The downstream communities should also be "periodically made aware of the possible risk," he adds.

Government action

Dialogue Earth consulted Dinkar Kayastha, the senior divisional hydrologist at the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology. He says the government has identified four that pose the highest GLOF risk: Thulagi in the

Gandaki Basin, and Lower Barun, Lumding and Hongu in the Koshi Basin. "Now we are working to get funding from the Green Climate Fund, so that we can lower the water levels of these lakes, too," Kayastha says. The government has sent a proposal worth \$36.1 million to the fund and "negotiations are ongoing."

The authorities are also exploring whether this funding could be used to upgrade weather-monitoring stations. This work would likely include installing automated equipment, as well as repairing or installing early warning systems at Tsho Rolpa. "Our budget estimates are ready, but we are still unsure who will be willing to fund it," says Kayastha.

Local communities

Nima Geli Sherpa is the chairperson of Gaurishankar, the rural municipality in which Tsho Rolpa is located. He says the risk of an outburst flood naturally spikes if there's a big earthquake, "or if the natural dam of the lake starts melting because of global heating."

He adds: "The early warning systems [installed more than 20 years ago] were damaged long ago, and we don't even have a good mobile phone network in the area." The area's rugged terrain and difficult weather complicate these efforts to make living near Tsho Rolpa safer.

"We have reported the matter to the government in Kathmandu countless times," says Nima Geli. "They just don't listen." During trips to Tsho

Rolpa in 2021 and 2023, two small sheds on Tsho Rolpa's shores were spotted by Dialogue Earth, but no government staff were present.

Kayastha says the government is limited in actions it can take: "All we can do is install more advanced weather-monitoring stations and early warning systems at Tsho Rolpa and the other dangerous glacial lakes. But if we are to guard the lakes 365 days [a year], we need more staff and more budget."

Six thousand households across the villages of Naa, Beding, Gongor Khola, Dongyang and Singati remain at risk. This is alongside their associated lands, forests and infrastructure, including roads and a major hydroelectric plant.

Devika Thami is the deputy chair of Bigu, a rural municipality about 30 kilometres downstream of Tsho Rolpa. Thami recently trekked to the lake, learning more of its dangers. "Because of the potential risk, we have decided to mobilise local youth. But that won't be enough," she says. "The entire government should act and make us all prepared before it's too late."

Others, meanwhile, place their faith in religion. Nima Jangmu Sherpa runs a lodge in Dongyang, which sits on the bank of the Rolwaling River, which originates at Tsho Rolpa. "As per our Buddhist traditions in this area, no animals are killed in this area. So, God will protect this area," she says. "The lake won't burst." (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

Netanyahu frequently makes claims of antisemitism. Critics say he's deflecting from his own problems

TEL AVIV, May 29: After the International Criminal Court's top prosecutor sought arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, his defense minister and top Hamas officials, the Israeli leader accused him of being one of "the great antisemites in modern times."

As protests roiled college campuses across the United States over the Gaza war, Netanyahu said they were awash with "antisemitic mobs."

These are just two of the many instances during the war in which Netanyahu has accused critics of Israel or his policies of antisemitism, using fiery rhetoric to compare them to the Jewish people's worst persecutors. But his detractors say he is over-using the label to further his political agenda and try to stifle even legitimate criticism, and that doing so risks diluting the term's meaning at a time when antisemitism is surging worldwide.

"Not every criticism against Israel is antisemitic," said Tom Segev, an Israeli historian. "The moment you say it is antisemitic hate... you take away all legitimacy from the criticism and try to crush the debate."

There has been a spike in antisemitic incidents since Hamas attacked Israel on Oct. 7, according

to researchers. And many Jews in North America and Europe have said they feel unsafe, citing threats to Jewish schools and synagogues and the pro-Palestinian campus demonstrations in the U.S., although organizers deny that antisemitism drives the protests.

The war has reignited the long debate about the definition of antisemitism and whether any criticism of Israel — from its military's killing of thousands of Palestinian children to questions over Israel's very right to exist — amounts to anti-Jewish hate speech.

Netanyahu, the son of a scholar of medieval Jewish persecution, has long used the travails of the Jewish people to color his political rhetoric. And he certainly isn't the first world leader accused of using national trauma to advance political goals.

Netanyahu's supporters say he is honestly worried for the safety of Jews around the world. But his accusations of antisemitism come as he has repeatedly sidestepped accountability for not preventing Hamas' Oct. 7 attack. Hamas killed roughly 1,200 people and took 250 hostages, which many in Israel's defense establishment acknowl-



edge they shoulder the blame for.

Netanyahu has continued to face criticism at home and abroad throughout the war, which has killed 35,000 Palestinians, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which doesn't distinguish between fighters and noncombatants. The fighting has sparked a humanitarian catastrophe, and ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan has accused Netanyahu and his defense minister of using starvation as a "method of warfare," among other crimes.

Segev, the historian, acknowledged there is a rise in "violent hate" toward Israel and, speaking

from Vienna, said he wasn't sure if speaking Hebrew in public was safe. But he said Netanyahu has long used Jewish crises to his political benefit, including invoking the Jewish people's deepest trauma, the Holocaust, to further his goals.

At the height of the campus protests, Netanyahu released a video statement condemning their "unconscionable" antisemitism and comparing the mushrooming encampments on college greens to Nazi Germany of the 1930s.

"What's happening in America's college campuses is horrific," he said.

In response to Khan seeking the arrest warrants, he said the ICC prosecutor was "callously pouring gasoline on the fires of antisemitism that are raging across the world," comparing him to German judges who approved of the Nazis' race laws against Jews. Netanyahu has compared accusations that Israel's war is causing starvation in Gaza or that the war is genocidal to blood libels — unfounded centuries-old accusations that Jews sacrificed Christian children and used their blood to make unleavened bread for Passover.

"These false accusations are not levelled against us because of the things we do, but because of the

simple fact that we exist," he said at a ceremony marking Israel's Holocaust Remembrance Day earlier this month.

Netanyahu previously made repeated allusions to the Holocaust while trying to galvanize the world against Iran's nuclear program.

Israeli leaders and the country's media also made such comparisons about Oct. 7, describing the Hamas attackers as Nazis, comparing their rampage to the historic violence inflicted on Eastern European Jews, and referring to the images of Jewish victims' burned bodies as a Shoah — the Hebrew word for Holocaust.

Israelis have been jarred by the global rise in antisemitism, and many view the swell of criticism against Israel as part of the rise. They see hypocrisy in the world's intense focus on Israel's war with Hamas while other conflicts get much less attention.

Moshe Klughaf, a former advisor to Netanyahu, said he believes the Israeli leader is genuinely concerned over rising antisemitism. "It is his duty to condemn antisemitism as prime minister of Israel and as head of a country that sees itself as responsible for world Jewry," he said. (AP)

The Israeli military's attack on Rafah, initiated on May 6, led to over one million individuals fleeing the city

Israeli strikes kill at least 37 Palestinians, most in tents, near Gaza's Rafah as offensive expands

DEIR AL-BALAH, May 29: Israeli shelling and airstrikes killed at least 37 people, most of them sheltering in tents, outside the southern Gaza city of Rafah overnight and on Tuesday — pummeling the same area where strikes triggered a deadly fire days earlier in a camp for displaced Palestinians — according to witnesses, emergency workers and hospital officials. The tent camp inferno has drawn widespread international outrage, including from some of Israel's closest allies, over the military's expanding offensive into Rafah. And in a sign of Israel's growing isolation on the world stage, Spain, Norway and Ireland formally recognized a Palestinian state on Tuesday.

The Israeli military suggested Sunday's blaze in the tent camp may have been caused by secondary explosions, possibly from Palestinian militants' weapons. The results of Israel's initial probe into the fire were issued Tuesday, with military spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari saying the cause of the fire was still under investigation but that the Israeli munitions used — targeting what the army said was a position with two senior Hamas militants — were too small to be the source.

The strike or the subsequent fire could also have ignited fuel, cooking gas canisters or other materials in the camp. The blaze killed 45 Palestinians, according to Gaza health officials' count. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the fire was the result of a "tragic mishap." Israel's assault on Rafah, launched May 6, spurred more than 1 million people to flee the city, the U.N. agency helping Palestinian refugees said Tuesday. Most were already displaced multiple times in the nearly eight-month war between Israel and Hamas. Families are now scattered across makeshift



tent camps and other war-ravaged areas.

The strikes over the past few days have hit areas west of Rafah, where the military had not ordered civilians to evacuate. Israeli ground troops and tanks have been operating in eastern Rafah, in central parts of the city, and along the Gaza-Egypt border. Shelling late Monday and early Tuesday hit Rafah's western Tel al-Sultan district, killing at least 16 people, the Palestinian Civil Defense and the Palestinian Red Crescent said. Seven of the dead were in tents next to a U.N. facility about about 200 meters (yards) from the site of Sunday's fire.

"It was a night of horror," said Abdel-Rahman Abu Ismail, a Palestinian from Gaza City who has been sheltering in Tel al-Sultan since December. He said he heard "constant sounds" of explosions overnight and into Tuesday, with fighter jets and drones flying above.

He said it reminded him of the Israeli invasion of his neighborhood of Shijaiyah in Gaza City, where Israel launched a heavy bombing campaign before sending in ground forces in late 2023. "We saw this before," he said.

The United States and other allies of Israel have warned against a full-fledged offensive in the city, with the Biden administration saying

this would cross a "red line" and refusing to provide offensive arms for such an undertaking. On Tuesday, U.S. State Department spokesman Matthew Miller gave no indication the administration sees Israel as crossing any of the red lines for Rafah, saying the offensive is still on a "far different" scale than assaults on other population centers in Gaza.

The International Court of Justice ordered Israel to halt its Rafah offensive last week as part of South Africa's case accusing Israel of committing genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza. A proposed U.N. Security Council resolution demanding a halt to the fighting in Rafah was being circulated by Algeria on Tuesday, with plans to potentially bring it to a vote this week. The U.S. has vetoed multiple Gaza cease-fire resolutions.

On Tuesday afternoon, an Israeli drone strike hit tents near a field hospital by the Mediterranean coast west of Rafah, killing at least 21 people, including 13 women, Gaza's Health Ministry said.

A witness, Ahmed Nassar, said his four cousins and some of their husbands and children were killed in the strike and a number of tents were destroyed or damaged. Most of those living there had fled from the same neighborhood in Gaza City earlier in the war.

"They have nothing to do with anything," he said. Netanyahu has vowed to press ahead in Rafah, saying Israeli forces must enter the city to dismantle Hamas and return hostages taken in the Oct. 7 attack that triggered the war. In its investigation of Sunday's deadly strike and fire, the Israeli military released satellite photos of what it said was a Hamas rocket launch position about 40 meters (yards) from an area of sheds that was targeted. (AP)

South Africans begin voting in an election seen as their country's most important in 30 years

JOHANNESBURG, May 29: South Africans began voting on Wednesday in an election seen as their country's most important in 30 years, and one that could put their young democracy in unknown territory.

At stake is the three-decade dominance of the African National Congress party, which led South Africa out of apartheid's brutal white minority rule in 1994. It is now the target of a new generation of discontent in a country of 62 million people — half of whom are estimated to be living in poverty.

Africa's most advanced economy has some of the world's deepest socioeconomic problems, including one of the worst unemployment rates at 32%.

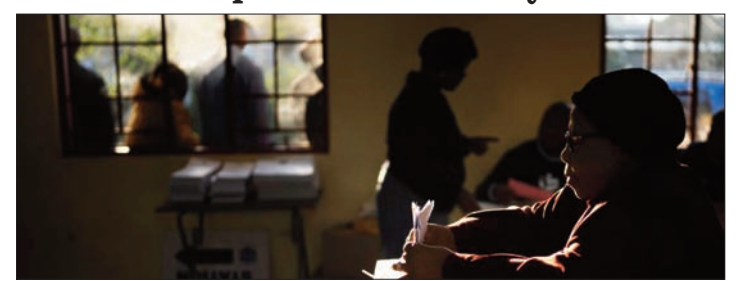
The lingering inequality, with poverty and joblessness disproportionately affecting the Black majority, threatens to unseat the party that promised to end it by bringing down apartheid under the slogan of a better life for all.

After winning six successive national elections, several polls have the ANC's support at less than 50% ahead of this one, an unprecedented drop. It might lose its majority in Parliament for the first time, although it's widely expected to hold the most seats.

Support has been fading. The ANC won 57.5% of the vote in the last national election in 2019, its worst result to date.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, the leader of the ANC, has promised to "do better." The ANC has asked for more time and patience.

Any change in the ANC's hold on power could be monumental for South



Africa. If it does lose its majority, the ANC will likely face the prospect of having to form a coalition with others to stay in government and keep Ramaphosa as president. The ANC having to co-govern has never happened before.

South Africans vote for parties, not directly for their president. The parties then get seats in Parliament according to their share of the vote and those lawmakers elect the president after the election. The ANC has always had a majority in Parliament since 1994.

The election will be held on one day across South Africa's nine provinces, with nearly 28 million people registered to vote at more than 23,000 polling stations. Final results are expected by Sunday.

Ramaphosa was due to cast his vote in the morning at a primary school in the Johannesburg township of Soweto, where he was born and which was once the epicenter of the resistance to apartheid.

There, Samuel Ratshalingwa was among the first few people in line in the chill of South Africa's early winter. "I take voting as something serious because as communities, it is difficult to complain about services when you have not voted," he said.

"Our main issue here in our community is the lack of jobs. We have to use the vote to make our voices heard about this problem."

The opposition to the ANC in this election is fierce, but fragmented. The two biggest opposition parties, the Democratic Alliance and the Economic Freedom Fighters, are not predicted to increase their vote by anything near enough to overtake the ANC.

Instead, disgruntled South Africans are moving to an array of opposition parties; more than 50 will contest the national election, many of them new. One is led by South Africa's former President Jacob Zuma, who has turned against his former ANC allies. Zuma has been disqualified from standing as a candidate for Parliament but his party is still contesting and is the wildcard. He was due to vote in a rural part of his home KwaZulu-Natal province.

The ANC says it is confident of retaining its majority. Ramaphosa has pointed out how South Africa is a far better country now than under apartheid, when Black people were barred from voting, weren't allowed to move around freely, had to live in certain areas and were oppressed in every way. (PTT)

Sweden will donate \$1.23 bn in military aid to Ukraine

COPENHAGEN, May 29: The Swedish government said on Wednesday that it will donate military aid to Ukraine worth 13 billion kronor (\$1.23 billion) in the largest help package Sweden has so far donated.

"It consists of equipment that is at the top of Ukraine's priority list," Deputy Prime Minister Ebba Busch said. It included air defense, artillery ammunition and armored vehicles.

Sweden's Defense Minister Pål Jonsson reiterated that the country has ruled out for now sending any Swedish-built JAS 39 Gripen jets to Ukraine, saying the focus on the Ukrainian side is on implementing the F-16 program.

Several countries have said they want to donate F-16 fighter jets. On Tuesday, Belgium pledged 30 F-16 jets to Ukraine. Jonsson said Sweden "is still working on

possibly being able to contribute with the Gripen system later."

The donation also includes two Swedish-made SAAB ASCC airborne early warning and control airplanes, saying that it will have the "greatest effect on the Ukrainian air defense" because it will complement and reinforce the promised donations of American F-16 fighter jets, Jonsson said.

"You can identify incoming cruise missile, you can identify drones and identify targets both on land and at sea," he said.

"The overall assessment is that a donation of the ASC 890 radar reconnaissance and command aircraft would be the most impactful for the Ukrainian Air Force right now," Jonsson added. The support package will be the 16th from Sweden since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine began. (AP)

NKorea flies trash balloons over the South as leader Kim doubles down on satellite ambitions

SEOUL, May 29: North Korea flew hundreds of trash-carrying balloons toward South Korea in one of its most bizarre provocations against its rival in years, prompting the South's military to mobilize chemical and explosive response teams to recover objects and debris in different parts of the country.

The ballooning campaign came as North Korean leader Kim Jong Un urged his military scientists to overcome a failed satellite launch and continue developing space-based reconnaissance capabilities, which he described as crucial for countering U.S. and South Korean military activities, state media said Wednesday.

In his first public comments about the launch failure, Kim also warned of unspecified "stern" action against South Korea over an exercise involving 20 fighter jets near the inter-Korean border hours before North Korea's failed launch on Monday.

In a speech Tuesday, Kim called the South Korean response "hysterical insanity" and "a very dangerous provocation that cannot be ignored," the North's official Korean Central News Agency said Wednesday.

In another sign of tensions between



the war-divided rivals, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said North Korea also has been flying large numbers of balloons carrying trash toward the South since Tuesday night, in an apparent retaliation against South Korean activists for flying anti-Pyongyang propaganda leaflets across the border. The South's military said about 260 North Korean balloons were found dropped in various parts of the country as of Wednesday afternoon and were being recovered by military rapid response and explosive clearance teams. It advised civilians not to touch the objects flown from North Korea and to report to military or police after discovering them.

Photos released by the military showed trash scattered across highways and roads in different parts of the

country. In the capital, Seoul, military officials found what appeared to be a timer that was likely designed to pop the bags of trash midair.

In the central South Chungcheong province, two huge balloons carrying an un-popped plastic bag filled with dirt-like substances were seen at a road.

There were no immediate reports of damage caused by the balloons. Similar North Korean balloon activities damaged cars and other property in 2016.

In a statement issued over the weekend, North Korean Vice Defense Minister Kim Kang Il said the North was planning to scatter "mounds of wastepaper and filth" over border areas and other parts of South Korea, in what he described as "tit-for-tat" action against the leafletting by South Korean activists.

Kim Jong Un's comments about the satellite were from a speech at the North's Academy of Defense Sciences, which he visited a day after a rocket carrying what would have been his country's second military reconnaissance satellite exploded shortly after liftoff. (AP)

Former Thai PM Thaksin Shinawatra will be indicted for royal defamation, prosecutors say

BANGKOK, May 29: Thai prosecutors said on Wednesday former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra will be indicted for defaming the monarchy, three months after he was freed on parole on other charges.

Thaksin will not yet be indicted because he had filed a request to postpone his original appointment on Wednesday with proof that he has COVID-19, Prayuth Jeinguna, a spokesperson for the Office of the Attorney General, said at a news conference.

The attorney general's office scheduled a new appointment for Thaksin's indictment on June 18, Prayuth said, adding that Thaksin will also be indicted for violating the Computer Crime Act.

The law on defaming the monarchy, an offense known as lese majeste, is punishable by three to 15 years in prison. It is controversial not only because critics consider it harsh, but also because they charge it is used for political purposes to punish government critics.

Thaksin was ousted by a military

coup in 2006. His opponents then had accused him of disrespecting King Bhumibol Adulyadej, who died in 2016. Thaksin's ouster set off years of struggle between his supporters and his opponents, who were generally staunch royalists.

The political polarization led to unprecedented public debate about the monarchy's role, which sharpened when student-led protests for greater democracy took the streets in 2020.

Thaksin had been in self-imposed exile since 2008, but returned to Thailand in August last year to begin serving an eight-year sentence on charges related to corruption and abuse of power. He was released on parole in February from the hospital in Bangkok where he spent six months serving time for corruption-related offenses.

On his return, he was moved almost immediately from prison to the hospital on grounds of ill health, and about a week after that King Maha Vajiralongkorn reduced his sentence to a single year. (AP)



A matter of honour and privilege: UN Military Gender Advocate of the Year Awardee Major Radhika Sen

UNITED NATIONS, May 29: Major Radhika Sen, an Indian peacekeeper who will be honoured by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres with a prestigious gender advocate award here, has said it is a matter of honour and privilege to represent India at the multilateral forum.

Major Sen, who served with the United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), will receive the prestigious '2023 United Nations Military Gender Advocate of the Year Award' from Guterres on May 30 on the occasion of International Day of UN Peacekeepers.

"This is indeed a matter of honour and privilege for me that I get to not just represent my team but all the esteemed colleagues

of mine, the peacekeepers in MONUSCO, and especially my home country India," Major Sen told PTT in an exclusive interview here on Tuesday.

"Representing the country at such an international forum is a feeling beyond description," she said.

Major Sen, who served in the East of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) from March 2023 to April 2024 as the Commander of MONUSCO's Engagement Platoon for the Indian Rapid Deployment Battalion (INRDB), will be awarded by the UN chief

during a formal ceremony at United Nations Headquarters here.

She is the second Indian peacekeeper to receive the prestigious award after Major Suman Gawani, who had served with the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and was honoured in 2019.

Major Sen also met with India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj at the Indian mission.

In a post on X, the Indian envoy said: "Major Radhika Sen will be honoured with the UN

Military Gender Advocate of the Year Award on May 30th for her outstanding service in DR Congo. Her dedication and bravery highlight the invaluable role of #women peacekeepers in building a better world. We are incredibly proud of her achievements and inspired by her commitment to peace and equality." Born in Himachal Pradesh in 1993, Major Sen joined the Indian Army eight years ago. She graduated as a biotech engineer and was pursuing her Master's degree from IIT Bombay when she decided to join the armed forces. She was deployed to MONUSCO in March 2023 as the Engagement Platoon Commander with the Indian Rapid Deployment Battalion and completed her tenure in April 2024. Congratulating Major Sen for

her service, Guterres said she is a "true leader and role model. Her service was a true credit to the United Nations as a whole."

He said that in an escalating conflict environment in North Kivu, her troops actively engaged with conflict-affected communities, including women and girls. She earned their trust, doing so with humility, compassion, and dedication.

Major Sen said that the main motto of being an engagement platoon commander was to inspire people to do something different. "In any conflict area, it's always the women and girls who are disproportionately affected," she said adding that her endeavour as well as that of her team was always to reach out to them, get to know their problems and try to address them. (PTT)

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf never invited military to intervene in politics: ex-Prez Arif Alvi

KARACHI, May 29: Arif Alvi, former Pakistan President and a top leader of jailed ex-prime minister Imran Khan's party, has said that his party never invited the military to intervene in politics but admitted that it was the only stakeholder with whom a meaningful dialogue was possible as it has the power to decide.

Alvi made these remarks while speaking to reporters on Tuesday outside the Karachi Press Club. While being critical of the military's role in politics, he said that it was the only stakeholder with whom meaningful dialogue was possible.

"We never invited the military to intervene in politics," he said in response to a question. "But Imran Khan wants to talk to those who have the power to decide. Do you feel that those who have come to power through Form 47s have anything to offer? Holding talks with them would be fruitless," he said. Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf

(PTI) party believes that the Shehbaz Sharif-led government stole its mandate in the February polls and the results were changed in Form 47s to benefit the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP).

"Those who want to unite and struggle for the restoration and supremacy of the Constitution should do that. But talks should only be held with those who can offer something and bring something credible to the table," Alvi said.

When asked if such an exercise would further weaken the "broken political system," he said all this was being done in an effort "to fix the same broken political system."

The 74-year-old former president also downplayed comparisons of the current political situation with the events preceding the fall of Dhaka, saying that "it's never about the whole institution but a few individuals". (PTT)

Mizoram: Rescue operations on to find missing victims of landslides



AIZWAL, May 29: A day after 25 bodies were recovered from debris caused by massive landslides due to incessant rain across Mizoram, rescue operations continued on Wednesday to locate missing persons, an official report said.

According to the morning bulletin of the Mizoram State Disaster Management Authority (MSDMA), rescue operations began early morning to find the missing people at several locations, including the site of an abandoned stone quarry where several houses collapsed on Tuesday morning.

Several people went missing in landslides, mostly in the state capital region, which was cut off from the rest of the country for several hours and bore the brunt of the natural calamities.

In a massive landslide, at least 14 people, including two minors, were killed and

around eight others were missing as stone quarry houses collapsed in an area between Melthum and Hlimen on the southern outskirts of the Aizawl town.

"Search and rescue operations are in progress. Authorities have deployed 25 personnel from 3rd MAP, 22 personnel from 1st MAP and 10 personnel from 5th IR battalion at the site," MSDMA said in the report.

It stated that several houses and worker camps caved in due to the impact of the landslide, burying at least 22 people beneath the debris. Among the deceased are a four-year-old boy and a six-year-old girl.

"The weather is so far comfortable with no rain since morning. We hope to continue the operations without any hindrance by nature although it is cloudy now," an official of the MSDMA told PTI.

Aizawl's Deputy Commissioner Nazuk

Kumar said on Tuesday that the search operations will continue till the entire site is cleared.

At nearby Hlimen of Aizawl district, where five people were recovered and four others are still missing, the authorities continued the rescue operations in search of the people, the morning bulletin said.

A building in Aizawl's Salem Veng caved in due to a landslide, following which three persons went missing and their bodies were recovered later on Tuesday.

One person each died in Falkawn, Lungsei and Kelsih of Aizawl district when landslides buried their houses.

The MSDMA also stated that eight members of a family inside a house were swept away by a heavy landslide at Chawnputi in Aizawl district.

The state capital was cut off for the whole

day on Tuesday from the rest of the country due to landslides on National Highway-6 at Hunthar and NH-54 at Bungbanga. The road blockades were cleared in the evening and the traffic movement was restored, the officials said.

In Aizawl town, some cemeteries at Republic Veng, Kanan Veng and Kulikawn have also been swept away by landslides, and over 200 graves were damaged.

According to the India Meteorological Department's regional centre in Guwahati, light to moderate rain is very likely to occur at most places over Mizoram on Wednesday, while thunderstorms and lightning with gusty wind reaching up to 30-40 kmph speed are very likely to occur at isolated places in the hill state.

The Mizoram government has ordered the closure of all offices and PSU units on Wednesday in view of the inclement weather warning issued by the IMD on cyclone 'Remal', except those departments involved with disaster management and essential services.

General Administration Department Commissioner and Secretary K Lalhawmawia in the order also advised the private sector entities to adopt 'work from home' mode as far as possible in view of the weather warning. Mizoram Chief Minister Lalthuhoma announced Rs 4 lakh ex-gratia for the families of those killed in the stone quarry collapse and calamities caused by rain in other parts of the state.

He said the government has earmarked Rs 15 crore to tackle disasters triggered by rain, which occurred as an aftereffect of cyclone 'Remal'.

More than 150 houses have been destroyed, dozens of trees and electric poles were uprooted, several roads were blocked and over 50 dwelling units were submerged across Mizoram in a trail of destruction left by the after effect of cyclone 'Remal'. (PTI)

Hundreds reel under flood waters in Manipur

IMPHAL, May 29: Incessant rains have disrupted normal life across Manipur as hundreds of people have been affected by floods in Manipur's Imphal Valley, an official said on Wednesday.

The overflowing Imphal River has inundated several areas, with water entering hundreds of houses, affecting several thousands, who have been forced to take shelter at nearby community halls, he said.

"Due to incessant rainfall, the riverbank has been breached near Keirang, Khabam and Lairiyengbam Leikai areas in Imphal East district and water gushed into several areas, inundating hundreds of houses," he said.

Several areas in Heingang and Khurai assembly constituencies in Imphal East district have been badly affected, with floodwater at chest level in many parts.

Over 4,000 people may have been affected by the flood, though exact figures are unavailable at the moment.

Chief Minister N Biren Singh said, "Due to breach in riverbank in several areas, many people and livestock have been affected. All authorities concerned, including state government officials, security and NDRF personnel and local volunteers, are working tirelessly to provide assistance to the affected people. Those stranded are being relocated to safe areas by boats."

Floods were reported from across the state, with the hill districts being the most affected.

Imphal-Jiribam section of NH-37, the second lifeline of the people of Manipur has also been cut off after the bailey bridge on Irang River at Taobam village in Noney district collapsed amid mudslides at various places along the stretch of the highway. The bridge was a vital structure on NH 37 connecting Imphal and Silchar.

Strong water current triggered by heavy downpour led to the collapse of the bailey bridge in the afternoon on Tuesday.

The collapse of the bridge occurred at a time rescuers were engaged in clearing the debris at various places along the highway.

A loaded truck was also swept into the gorge by a heavy mudslide along the same highway near K Sinam village of Kangpokpi district on Tuesday around 9.30 am.

Fortunately, no casualty was reported. Many vehicles remain stranded on both sides, waiting for excavators to clear the debris.

In Senapati district, many rivers and streams were overflowing and flood waters entered several localities of the district.

The continuous heavy downpour also severely affected other hill districts including Churachandpur, Ukhrul, Tamenglong, Pherzawl, Chandel, Kangpokpi etc.

The heavy downpour accompanied by gusty wind also caused widespread damages to the houses and other structures across Tamenglong district, the reports said. Roofs of several houses were swept away by the gusty wind.

There were reports of overflow of smaller rivers across the valley districts amid flooding of low lying areas due to water logging.

The water logging also created traffic chaos on the streets across the capital city including those situated by the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences and the Jawahar Lal Nehru Institute of Medical Sciences.

Meanwhile, the Manipur government through the district administrations had issued an advisory to the general public on Tuesday to remain alert and take necessary precautions to avoid the loss of life and property in view of the severe cyclonic storm Remal.

The advisories stated the severe cyclonic storm Remal may be accompanied by rain and squally wind gusting up to 55 kmph over the state starting from May 26.

The Indian Meteorological Department had issued an orange alert for the entire state of Manipur.

One of the public advisory issued by Imphal East deputy commissioner advised the general public to stay informed and keep themselves updated with the latest weather forecasts and warnings issued by local, state, and national authorities.

The advisory directed the public to ignore rumors, keep their doors and windows shut and secure loose objects. They are also to prepare an emergency kit with essential items such as non-perishable foods, water, torchlights, first aid supplies, medicines, etc. for safety and survival. Children and elderly have been asked to stay indoors and not venture out until absolutely necessary.

The state government has asked the people to postpone agriculture and other related activities during the inclement weather. They are to call on emergency helpline numbers for any query or assistance. (With inputs from PTI, NNN)

Meghalaya, Nagaland students exempted from CUET in state



SHILLONG, May 29: The central government has exempted undergraduate students of Meghalaya and Nagaland seeking admissions to colleges affiliated to central universities in the two states from CUET, officials said on Wednesday.

The North Eastern Hill University in Meghalaya and the Nagaland University in Nagaland are central universities.

Meghalaya chief minister Conrad K Sangma has thanked Union education minister, Dharmendra Pradhan for exempting undergraduate students of Meghalaya seeking admission in colleges affiliated to the North Eastern Hill University, a central varsity.

"Happy to inform our students that admissions to affiliated colleges to Central University's in Meghalaya have been exempted from CUET for this academic year. I thank @dpradhanbj ji for his continuous support and understanding," the Meghalaya CM said in a post on X.

The exemption was made following the state government's petition to the National Testing Agency, which had conducted CUET for students seeking UG admissions in both the central universities in Meghalaya and Nagaland, they said.

"I am directed to inform that the University Grant Commission has already considered the request received from the state of Meghalaya and Nagaland through the NTA and allowed affiliated colleges to take admission as per prevailing practice by giving exemption from CUET for the academic year 2024-25," a senior official of the Union education ministry said in a letter issued to vice-chancellors of both the universities.

"The UGC has considered the decision taken by the ministry and agreed to allow admissions in the affiliated colleges" as per prevailing practice by giving exemption from CUET," he said.

The Central University Entrance Test (CUET) hit roadblocks in Meghalaya and Assam after it began on May 15.

Meghalaya education minister, Rakkam A Sangma said the state government has taken the CUET examination seriously and had asked the NTA to either re-conduct the examination or to exempt Meghalaya from the test. (PTI)

NFR provides assistance to stranded passengers

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 29: Train operations in Dima Hasao district in the state due to Cyclone Remal that resulted in heavy rainfall in most parts of Northeast.

Massive rainfall in some of the hilly areas of Dima Hasao district resulted into water logging on the railway tracks, yards and tunnels. As a result, the Northeast Frontier railways (NFR) had to control train services. Some trains were cancelled, some were partially cancelled and some were rescheduled.

Apart from rain, heavy cyclonic wind also uprooted trees that fell on railway track at different locations.

NFR immediately initiated efforts to provide necessary assistance and supply of packaged drinking water and food at Lumding and Guwahati Railway Stations for the stranded passengers of long distance trains going towards Agartala and Silchar.

The train coming from Lokmanya Tilak Terminus, which was enroute towards Agartala had to be brought back to the Lumding Station. On arriving at Lumding station, dinner and packaged drinking water was served to all the passengers by the railway authorities. Later the train arrived at the Guwahati Railway Station at 23:30 hours. The passengers were accommodated in 1st class waiting hall of Platform no 1 at the station by the railway authorities.

Similarly, the train coming from Sealdah, which was enroute towards Silchar also had to be brought back to the Lumding Station and all the passengers were served tea and snacks by the railway authorities. Later the train arrived at the Guwahati Station at 01:25 hours and passengers were accommodated in 1st class waiting hall of Platform no 1 of the station by railway officials.

Senior railway officials, Railway Protection Force personnel & along with officials of civil ad-



ministration, were present at the station to assist the passengers to reach their destination safely.

NFR is carrying out various works in the northeastern region as part of its disaster management activities. Assurances are being pro-

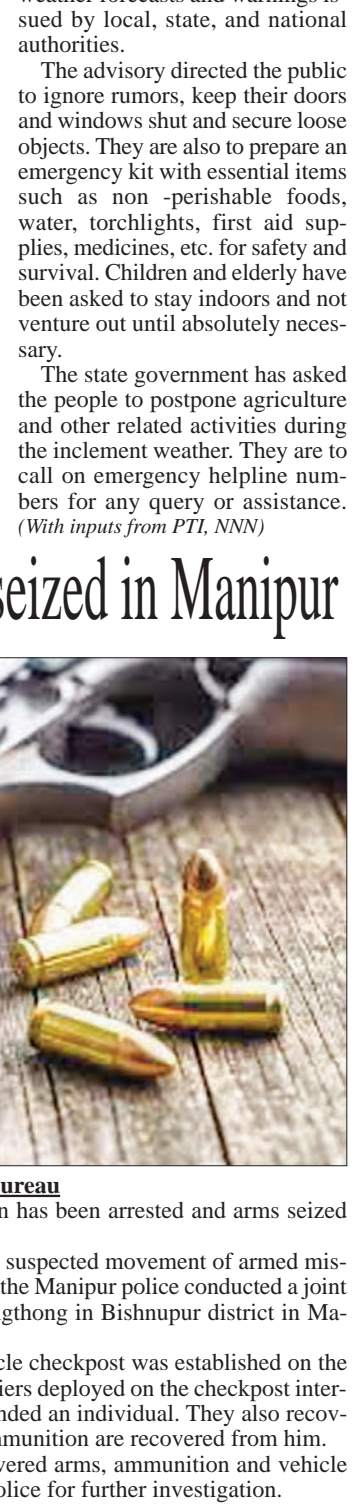
1 arrested, arms seized in Manipur

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 29: One person has been arrested and arms seized in Bishnupur district in Manipur.

Based on prior information about suspected movement of armed miscreants, the Indian Army along with the Manipur police conducted a joint operation between Kwakta and Sangthong in Bishnupur district in Manipur on May 27.

During the operation a joint vehicle checkpoint was established on the Kwakta - Sangthong road. The soldiers deployed on the checkpoint intercepted a passenger car and apprehended an individual. They also recovered a M-16 rifle, one pistol and ammunition are recovered from him.

The accused along with the recovered arms, ammunition and vehicle were handed over to the Manipur police for further investigation.



Boy drowns, elderly man crushed to death

HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, May 29: A seven-year-old boy has drowned in Laruri village under Meluri sub-division in Phek district in Nagaland, while a 73-year-old has been crushed to death by a falling wall at Rekiwu ward under Pfuero sub-division in the district following incessant rains and stormy winds in the state since May 27. The unfortunate incidents took place on Tuesday.

Updating on the reports of damages across the state, the Nagaland State Disaster Management Authority (NSDMA) said nine households at Chuchuyimlang village under Mokokchung district were severely affected by heavy storms. In Noksen sub-division under Tuensang district, 36 households were severely damaged by windstorms.

A delayed report received here said a house was completely damaged at Awotsakili village under Zunheboto district.

A mudslide caused by incessant rains was reported from Kikruma village under Phek district. In Kiphire district, damages to public infrastructure and households by incessant rains were reported on Tuesday.

The NSDMA asked the district disaster management authorities and the line departments to be alert and vigilant as the monsoon season approaches the state. Further, it urged the public to refrain from fishing, picnicking, etc. during the monsoon.

Executive engineer of the electrical division, Kohima, Shiludi Longkumer informed that a heavy storm accompanied by rainfall on Wednesday caused massive damage to high tension (HT) and low tension (LT) power lines at Tseminyu and Ghashasi under Zunheboto district affecting the feeders of 33Kv ITI, 33Kv Ringmain-2, 33Kv Chakhabama, 33Kv Lalmati, 11Kv Ministers' Hill, 11Kv Paramedical, 11Kv Jakhama Civil, 11Kv Jakhama Army, 11Kv Science College Jotsoma, 11Kv Zubza, 11Kv TV Centre Jotsoma, 11Kv Khuzama, 11Kv Kigwema, 11 Kv Sendenyu, 11 Kv Thizama and other numerous LT feeders.

He said while a few HT and LT lines had been restored, the power department was still carrying out restoration work round the clock on a war footing with limited manpower to restore other lines for smooth flow of power supply in the affected areas.

USTM student to represent India at BRICS Sports Games

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 29: Chinmoyee Rajkhowa, a student from the department of social work at the University of Science and Technology Meghalaya (USTM) in Ri Bhoi district in Meghalaya has been selected to represent India in the BRICS Sports Games, 2024 to be held at Kazan in Russia.

The selection was done by the All India Traditional Wrestling and Pankration Federation in a process that took place from May 5 to 7 in New Delhi. Chinmoyee will be competing in the belt wrestling in women's 64 kg category at the BRICS Sports Games.

The 2024 BRICS Sports Games will be held in Kazan from June 19 to 25 and is supported by the President and the Government of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Tatarstan. The ministry of sport of the Russian Federation and the ministry of sport of the Republic of Tatarstan are responsible for the overall management and organization of the BRICS Games.

Chinmoyee, who is currently pursuing her Masters in social work, said, "I'm really happy and feel blessed to get the opportunity to join the World BRICS Games. I am thrilled to be a part of such a prestigious event. It's like a big dream coming true and I expect everyone's love and support."

Researchers develop new method for producing bromographene



HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, May 29: A team of researchers at the Nagaland University has developed a novel and environment-friendly method for producing bromographene, a modified form of graphene, for eco-friendly chemical processes in industrial applications.

The research team was led by Dipak Sinha from the department of chemistry of the Nagaland University, Dinesh Rangappa from the department of applied sciences (nanotechnology) at the Visvesvaraya Technological University and their PhD student Suraj Kumar, Peter Ki, public relation officer of the Nagaland University said.

Kumar is a recipient of the INSPIRE fellowship sponsored by the Department of Science and Technology under the Union ministry of science and technology.

The research team introduced the new

method for preparing bromographene and their work has earned them a German utility model IPR.

Their method used a safer brominating agent called tetrabutylammonium tribromide to convert reduced graphene oxide into bromographene. This process was completed in just one hour, the fastest time reported so far, and it avoided the need for harsh conditions, making it much safer and more environment-friendly.

The new approach not only speeds up the production process, but also has one of the highest reported bromine contents, making it useful for further chemical modifications that can lead to new advancements in electronics, composites, and other high-tech materials.

By focusing on creating safer and faster production methods, the researchers from the university made a sustainable innovation in material science, promising a future where high-performance materials can be produced without compromising safety or the environment.

Graphene, a two-dimensional wonder material, gained global fame in 2010 when Sir Andre Geim and Sir Konstantin Novoselov from the University of Manchester were awarded the Nobel Prize for its discovery. It is celebrated for its potential to transform industries such as electronics, drug delivery, touch screens, paints, energy storage and water purification.

The magic of graphene lies in its exceptional strength and outstanding electrical and thermal conductivity. However, its practical use is often hindered by its poor solubility in common solvents. This limitation is overcome by bromographene, a modified form of graphene that enhances its chemical reactivity and versatility, a statement from the Nagaland University stated.

FIR against Mehbooba Mufti for 'violation' of poll code

Protest against alleged detention of her party workers and polling agents

SRINAGAR, May 29: Election authorities in Kashmir have registered an FIR against former chief minister and PDP president Mehbooba Mufti for allegedly violating the Model Code of Conduct, officials said on Wednesday.

The FIR has been registered against Mehbooba for violating Section 144 after she and her party workers held a protest sit-in in the Bijbehara area of south Kashmir's Anantnag district, the officials said.

The PDP president termed the registration of the FIR against her as "amusing".

"Amusing to find an FIR filed against me for apparently flouting MCC. This is the price PDP has paid for speaking truth to power. Our protest was against GOI in cahoots with local administration for detaining hundreds of PDP polling agents and workers in the hours leading up to voting," she said.

"Still not satisfied the same administration went onto launch Cordons and Search Operations in traditional PDP stronghold areas to terrorise our voters and prevent them from exercising their right to vote. Ulta chor kotwal ko daante (the pot calling the kettle back),"



Mehbooba said in a post on X.

The former chief minister of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir on Saturday staged a protest outside a police station in Jammu and Kashmir's Anantnag district, while polling was underway in the Anantnag-Rajouri Parliamentary seat in the sixth phase of Lok Sabha elections.

She was protesting against the alleged detention of her party workers and polling agents.

The officials said the protest was a "gross violation" of the MCC.

"The huge group of PDP workers also blocked the main road and

staged a protest at main stop Bijbehara (for) more than one hour which amounts (to) violations of the Section 144 CrPc which was imposed in the constituency," the FIR said.

Election authorities had imposed prohibitory orders under Section 144 CrPc from 6 pm on May 23 till 6 pm on May 25 in the wake of the polling in the constituency and to uphold the sanctity of democratic principles.

The prohibitory order imposed a ban on unlawful assembly as per section 144 of the IPC and any procession or rally to prevent any law and order problem. (PTI)

In Punjab, drug problem 'exists even today, increasing', says Rahul Gandhi

CHANDIGARH, May 29: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday said the drug problem in Punjab "exists even today and is increasing", and called for strict action against the menace.

Gandhi is the second senior Congress leader to raise the issue of the drug problem in Punjab, which is ruled by the AAP government, after Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge.

Addressing a poll rally in favour of Congress' Ludhiana candidate Amrinder Singh Raja Warring in Ludhiana's Dakha, Gandhi also spoke about his party's poll promises, including the Mahalakshmi scheme, loan waiver for farmers and ensuring legal guarantee on minimum support price if the INDIA bloc comes to power.

Gandhi raked up the issue of the drug menace during the rally and said, "The drug issue in Punjab exists even today and it is increasing."

"Strict action needs to be taken against it. Punjab should fight against drugs with full authority and aggression," he said.

On Tuesday, Kharge in Amritsar said the drug problem has become the biggest challenge for the future of Punjab.

"Because of this, the law and order situation is deteriorating day



by day. After selling land, farmers are sending their children abroad, fearing that they will not fall prey to drugs. Each one is forced to migrate as employment opportunities are not available," the Congress president had said.

The Congress and the AAP, which are the constituents of the INDIA bloc, are fighting the Lok Sabha polls separately in Punjab.

Taking on the BJP government, Gandhi said, "For the first time, any party and their leaders have said that they will change and scrap the Constitution if they win the election."

Holding a copy of the Constitution, he said it was not only a book but the voice of the poor.

"Be it reservation, the public sector or rights of the poor. Whatever you get it, it is from the Constitution and the BJP wants to finish the Constitution, alleged the Congress

leader.

Attacking Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Gandhi said he "lied" about giving two crore jobs every year.

The Modi government has "finished" small traders, and small-medium businesses with demonetisation and GST (goods and services tax) just to benefit, "Adani ji and Ambani ji", he said.

The situation is such that the country's youth are not getting employment, he claimed.

Slamming the Agnipath scheme, he said it was an "attack" on jawans and the army. "They are insulting jawans of the country," he alleged.

"They want to make two types of martyrs with this scheme. One martyr will get pension and martyr status while an Agniveer, who has been turned into a labourer, will get six-month training and after martyrdom, no pension, compensation and martyr status," he said.

"It is an insult to the army and we will tear up the Agniveer scheme and throw it in the dustbin on June 4," he said.

He said Modi brought "black laws" (now-repealed farm laws) for farmers and did nothing for labourers and small traders while his policies have increased unemployment and inflation.

Gandhi accused Modi of waiving Rs 16 lakh crore of 22 'arabpati' and alleged that all airports, ports, infrastructure, solar power, and defence industry were handed over to "people like Adani".

He said when the Congress-led UPA government was in power, it waived around Rs 70,000 crore of debt of farmers, he said.

As soon as the INDIA bloc government is formed, its first job will be to waive farm debt, he said, adding, "Farmers are the backbone of the country and they should be protected".

"Farmers demanded a legal guarantee on MSP (PM) Modi ji openly said that he will not give a legal guarantee," alleged Gandhi.

Referring to his party's manifesto, he said it is the voice of farmers, labourers and unemployed youth.

He said the party manifesto incorporated what he got to know from people during his 4,000 km long Bharat Jodo Yatra.

Slain singer Sidhu Moosewala's father Balkaur Singh was also present at the rally. It was the second death anniversary of Moosewala on Wednesday.

Shubhdeep Singh Sidhu, popularly known as Sidhu Moosewala, was shot dead in Punjab's Mansa district on May 29, 2022. (PTI)

JMM-led alliance patronising forces indulging in 'love jihad' in Jharkhand: Nadda



DEOGHAR (JHARKHAND), May 29: BJP president JP Nadda on Wednesday launched a scathing attack on the ruling JMM-led alliance in the state and accused it of patronising forces indulging in 'love jihad', 'land jihad' and 'infiltration jihad'.

Nadda alleged that forces supported by the ruling dispensation were committing atrocities on tribal women and grabbing their land.

The attack came a day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi claimed that the ruling alliance in the state was supporting infiltration and a big crisis loomed over Jharkhand.

"The government which rose to power on issues like 'jal, jungle, jameen' (water, forest and land) indulged in patronising forces active in 'land jihad and love jihad'. They (such forces) are manipulating tribal girls...It (government) is patronising 'jihad' by infiltrators. Sand and land loot is at its peak. Do you want such a government to continue," the BJP chief said at a poll rally in Deoghar.

He also alleged that leaders like Rahul and Sonia Gandhi indulged in Muslim appeasement by snatching tribal reservation and added "Rahul Gandhi carries a copy of the constitution but never reads it." "Rahul Gandhi should reply as to why tribal/dalit reservation was snatched four times in Andhra Pradesh and handed over to Muslims...I need a reply as to why you snatched OBC reservation two times in Karnataka and gave it to Muslims...This is unconstitutional," Nadda said.

He alleged that corrupt JMM-Congress leaders involved in looting public money will be jailed.

"Rahul Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi, P Chidambaram, Kejriwal, Lalu Prasad and DMK leaders are on bail; Hemant, Sisodia and Satyender Jain are in jail," he said and asked whether people will vote for such corrupt leaders.

He said Modi had initiated a number of development initiatives over the last 10 years.

"World's 40 per cent digital transactions now take place in India," he said and added that the country now occupies the fifth position in the global economy.

Nadda highlighted that it was due to initiatives spearheaded by Modi that India had ascended to becoming the second-largest player globally in both the steel and pharmaceutical industries, while also securing the third position in the automobile sector.

About 97 per cent of mobile sets are now being manufactured in India, he said.

Nadda was campaigning for BJP's Dumka candidate Sita Soren, Rajmahal nominee Tala Marandi and Godda MP Nishikant Dubey. Elections in these constituencies will be held on June 1.

Later, he participated in a road show in Deoghar which started at Sheo Lok premises and culminated at Veer Kunwar Singh Chowk. (PTI)

Is there any conspiracy behind deterioration of Naveen Patnaik's health: Modi

BARIPADA/BALASORE (ODISHA), May 29: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday promised that if the BJP formed the government in Odisha, it would constitute a committee to ascertain the reason behind the "sudden" deterioration of the health condition of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, hinting at a "conspiracy" behind it.

Modi asserted that after a gap of five decades, a full majority government would be formed at the Centre for the third consecutive term.

Addressing election rallies in Mayurbhanj and Balasore Lok Sabha seats in Odisha, he said, "The well-wishers of Naveen babu are worried over his deteriorating health condition. It has been worsening over the last one year. Is there a conspiracy behind this? Is the lobby that is currently running the Patnaik government on his behalf responsible for it?"

"If the BJP forms the government in Odisha after the ongoing assembly elections, it would constitute a committee to ascertain the reason behind the deterioration of Patnaik's health," Modi said.

"The mystery behind Naveen babu's deteriorating health condition should be revealed as the people of the state have the right to know the reason," the PM said.



In an apparent reference to BJD leader V K Pandian, who hails from Tamil Nadu and is considered close to Patnaik, said, "Entire Odisha wants an Odia chief minister. The people of Odisha have decided to put a full stop to the 25-year rule of the BJD in the state."

Modi asserted that under his rule, India's economy rose from the 11th position to the fifth in the last 10 years.

"Ten years ago, nobody thought terrorism could be stopped in India but we have shown it by protecting our major cities from blasts. No one thought peace would return to Jammu and Kashmir but people there are now celebrating Republic

Day and voting in large numbers," he said.

Modi asserted that India's missile progress has exponentially increased in the last 10 years and the country is now exporting BrahMos missiles to other countries and "Chandrayaan has reached a place where no country has ever reached".

Attacking the BJD government, he said, "Wherever you step in Odisha, there is natural wealth but the state remains poor because it was first looted by the Congress and then by the BJD for the last 25 years."

"People of Odisha know that voting for BJD would mean wasting their vote. They don't trust it anymore... you gave 25 years to the

During SP rule in UP, power supply uninterrupted on Ramzan not on Janmashtami: Shah

MAHARAJGANJ/BALLIA (UP), May 29: Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday slammed the Samajwadi Party over "power shortages" during its term in Uttar Pradesh, and said the supply was uninterrupted during Ramzan but not on Janmashtami.

Addressing poll rallies in the state, Shah said this Lok Sabha election presents a choice between those who constructed the Ram temple and those who opened fire at Ram bhaktas.

The home minister addressed four rallies -- first at Maharajganj, then Deoria, Ballia and Robertsganj -- canvassing for BJP and NDA candidates who are in the fray in the last and the seventh phase of Lok Sabha polls on June 1.

Speaking at his rally in Ballia -- where the BJP denied a ticket to sitting MP Virendra Singh Mast in favour of former prime minister

Chandra Shekhar's son Neeraj Shekhar -- Shah launched a broadside against Akhilesh Yadav-led Samajwadi Party, alleging mafia used to harass people during its rule.

"When the BJP came to power, Yogi Adityanath was made chief minister and he fixed the mafias," Shah said.

Uttar Pradesh also faced electricity woes during the SP government, he said.

"There was power supply only for three-four hours. There was uninterrupted supply during Ramzan but not on Janmashtami. (Ramzan me toh puri aati thi, magar Janmashtami ke din nhin aati thi. After the BJP come to power, our Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath ensured 18-hour power supply," She said.

At his poll meeting in Deoria in support of BJP candidate Shashank Mani Tripathi, Shah accused the opposition of stalling the construc-

tion of the Ram Mandir for over 70 years and said the temple could only be built because of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"This election is between those who constructed the Ram temple and those who opened fire on Ram bhaktas," he said, referring to the firing at kar sevaks in 1990 when the late Mulayam Singh Yadav was the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh.

At his Maharajganj rally also, Shah took a jibe at INDIA bloc allies Samajwadi Party and the Congress, saying they have already decided to blame Electronic Voting Machines for their defeat in the Lok Sabha polls.

"The counting is on June 4. In the afternoon the two 'shehzade' (Rahul Gandhi and Akhilesh Yadav) will hold a press conference and say we lost the election because EVM was defective," he said. (PTI)

Free ration leaving people with more food than they can consume: Rajnath

Food inflation in the country is the lowest in the world at 2.91 per cent

KARAKAT (BIHAR), May 29: Defence minister Rajnath Singh on Wednesday claimed that under the free ration scheme, people were getting more foodgrains than they could consume and they ended up selling the surplus in the market.

The former BJP president, who was addressing an election rally in Karakat Lok Sabha constituency of Bihar, also, cited figures to assert that the food inflation rate in the country was "the lowest in the world" and expressed dismay over allegations of price rise.

"Are you not getting five kilograms of foodgrains each? I know if there are four members in a family, each is getting a supply of 5 kg and those who are not able to consume it, sell off the surplus," Singh said with a chuckle, breaking into the local dialect Bhojpuri.

Claiming that the central



government has not done a favour to people by providing them with welfare measures in like toilets and pucca houses, he said BJP people are in politics with the spirit of service.

"There is so much hullabaloo around price rise. I would like to tell you that food inflation in the country is the lowest in the

world at 2.91 per cent. In the US, it is 7.79 per cent, 19 per cent in France, 8.5 per cent in Australia, 48 per cent in Pakistan and 21 per cent in Sri Lanka," he said.

The defence minister challenged the Congress and its Bihar ally RJD, to counter him on these facts.

"If there is a mistake, I will admit it since I have never tried to cheat people in my political career," said Singh.

In his nearly 30-minute-long speech, the senior BJP leader mocked the Congress, claiming that it will soon be extinct like dinosaurs, and likened the RJD to a lantern, the party's poll symbol, of which the flame had grown unsteady since "the oil was running dry".

Singh also showered encomiums on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, claiming that India was no longer looked down upon as a weak country under his rule.

"Pakistan does not dare to send terrorists any more... Russia and Ukraine agreed to halt their war to enable safe return of our students stranded there," he said. The former union home minister also lauded the government for scrapping Article 370 and bringing a law

against triple talaq.

"We do not accept any practice that hurts the honour of our sisters and daughters. We act without caring about votes," he said.

Singh also said after the elections, people should look forward to greater welfare measures from the Modi government, and remarked: "People from all social segments, if they are more than 70 years of age, will be made eligible for free medical treatment under Ayushman scheme. You never know, Modi may approve it in the first cabinet meeting itself".

Turning towards Upendra Kushwaha, the Rashtriya Lok Morcha president who is the NDA candidate from Karakat, Singh said, "I am glad that you have been allotted the gas cylinder as the poll symbol because Modi is going to distribute more gas cylinders in his upcoming tenure". (PTI)

TMC to complain to EC if Modi's meditation is televised: Mamata

BARUIPUR (WB), May 29: West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday said the Trinamool Congress will complain to the Election Commission if Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meditation in Kanyakumari is televised, claiming that it would be a violation of the election Model Code of Conduct (MCC).

Modi is scheduled to meditate at Rock Memorial, a monument built in tribute to Swami Vivekananda, in Kanyakumari following the culmination of the Lok Sabha polls campaign on May 30, according to BJP leaders.

"We will complain. He can meditate, but it cannot be aired on television," she said, claiming that this will amount to "violation of the MCC." "Does anyone have to get cameras for doing meditation?" she asked, claiming that it was a way of canvassing during the silence period between the end of campaign and the poll date.

According to BJP leaders, Modi will meditate from May 30 evening to June 1 evening at Dhyana Mandapam, the place where Vivekananda — a spiritual icon admired by Modi — is believed to have had a divine vision about 'Bharat Mata'. Speaking at an election meeting on the same ground where the PM held a rally on Tuesday in favour of Jadavpur constituency's BJP candidate, the Trinamool Congress chief claimed that Modi goes into meditation for 48 hours before the final phase of polling in every election.

The Prime Minister had undertaken a similar meditation exercise in a Kedarnath cave after the 2019 election campaign.

"If they (BJP) return to power this time, there won't be any political party, elections, independence, religion, humanity or culture," she said.

The TMC supremo sought to dismiss Modi's claim that the BJP will achieve the best results in Bengal this election, asserting, "This means they have lost; they will get rosogolla (zero) in Bengal."

She said the TMC will support the opposition INDIA alliance in forming a government in Delhi and urged the people not to vote for the CPI(M) or Congress in Bengal.

"That will help the BJP," she said, in the campaign meeting at Baruiপুর before the seventh phase election to nine Lok Sabha seats in West Bengal.

"Had I not come out of the Congress and formed the Trinamool Congress, then even today we would not have been able to defeat the CPI(M) in Bengal," she said. Asserting that she fought against the CPI(M) for 34 years to oust its government from Bengal, she said, "If we could achieve that, we can also defeat the BJP, and we will do it." Banerjee alleged that the CPI(M) and BJP have entered into a tacit understanding in some constituencies for the ongoing polls.

Explaining that she decided to hold this campaign meeting here to respond to the comments made by Modi on Tuesday at the same location, Banerjee emphasised that people of all castes and creed were her brothers and sisters.

"I will not accept the judgment on OBC reservation", she said, reiterating her stand over a Calcutta High Court order striking down the OBC status of several classes in West Bengal granted from 2010, finding that such reservations to vacancies in services and posts in the state were not in consonance with the provisions of law.

She claimed that people of all religions will be affected by the judgment. Accusing the Mamata Banerjee government of appeasement politics, Modi, addressing a poll meeting earlier in the day in Kakdwip, said, "Reservations were looted in West Bengal and false OBC certificates were issued to Muslims." He also claimed that the TMC was misleading Muslims by spreading false information regarding the court's verdict.

Accusing the BJP of embarking on a slander campaign against the TMC, Banerjee claimed that her party has had to fight against Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), Enforcement Directorate (ED) and Income Tax (IT).

The Chief Minister said the CBI has sent a notice to TMC MLA from Canning Purba, Saokat Molla, to appear before it on Wednesday itself.

"Amid the elections, the CBI has asked Saukat to come and meet its officials," she said.

The TMC MLA had earlier been summoned by the CBI in 2022 for questioning in connection with a case of alleged coal theft from the mines of Eastern Coalfields Limited. (PTI)

TMC issuing false caste certificates to Muslims: Modi

KAKDWIP (WB), May 29: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday alleged that the Trinamool Congress government in West Bengal was giving away the rights of "original" OBCs to Muslims by issuing "false caste certificates".

Addressing an election rally at Kakdwip in Mathurapur Lok Sabha seat, he accused the TMC of not allowing the implementation of development schemes in West Bengal with its mantra "eta hotey debona" (will not let it happen).

"To appease a section, the TMC government is openly attacking the Constitution, which has given reservations to Dalits and backward castes... an open loot of reservations happened in West Bengal... false OBC certificates were issued to Muslims," he alleged. "The Calcutta High Court has cancelled these false certificates but the TMC cannot accept this verdict. They are misguiding the Muslims," he added. (PTI)

Delhi records its highest ever temperature

Mungeshpur bakes at 52.3 deg C

NEW DELHI, May 29: Delhi's Mungeshpur area Wednesday logged a maximum of 52.3 degrees Celsius, the highest ever temperature recorded in the city, officials said. On Tuesday, the weather station in the northwest Delhi locality recorded 49.9 degrees Celsius.

A day later, the temperature rose further with the weather station recording a maximum temperature of 52.3 degrees Celsius at 4.14 pm, according to the website.

An IMD official told PTI, this is the highest ever maximum temperature recorded so far in Delhi.

Explaining the reason behind the rising mercury, IMD regional head Kuldeep Srivastava said the city's outskirts are the first areas to be hit by hot winds from Rajasthan.

"Parts of Delhi are particularly susceptible to the early arrival of these hot winds, worsening the already severe weather. Areas like Mungeshpur, Narela and Najafgarh are the first to experience the full force of these hot winds," he said.

Mahesh Palawat, the vice president of Meteorology and Climate Change at Skymet Weather, said, "In open areas with vacant land,



there is increased radiation. Direct sunlight and lack of shade make these regions exceptionally hot."

"When wind blows from the west, it affects these areas first. As they are on the outskirts, temperatures rise rapidly," Palawat added.

Open areas and barren land are contributing to higher temperatures due to increased radiation, said IMD's Charan Singh.

With temperatures soaring, the city peak power demand rose to an all-time high of 8,302 MW at 15:36:32 hours on Wednesday, according to power discom officials.

It is the first time in the history of the national capital that its power demand has crossed the 8,300-MW mark. Power distribution companies had estimated the demand to peak at 8,200 MW this summer. (PTI)

Prajwal will be arrested at Airport upon his return: Karnataka home minister

BENGALURU, May 29: Karnataka home minister G Parameshwara on Wednesday said suspended JD(S) leader Prajwal Revanna, who is facing charges of sexually abusing several women, will be arrested as soon as he arrives at the airport here.

The statement comes two days after Prajwal released a video statement promising that he would appear before the Special Investigation Team (SIT), probing the cases against him, on May 31.

According to official sources, the Hassan MP has booked a return flight ticket to Bengaluru from Munich on May 30, and is expected to land in the city in the small hours of May 31.

Addressing reporters here, Parameshwara said, "All necessary measures have to be taken, as a warrant has been issued against him (Prajwal). He has to be arrested. SIT is waiting, they will arrest him and will take his statement, and their (SIT) process will start."

Asked if Prajwal would be arrested at the airport on landing, he said, "it (arrest) has to be done there (at airport), as a warrant has been issued. So he will have to be arrested."

Prajwal (33), the grandson of JD(S) patriarch H D Deve Gowda



and the NDA candidate from Hassan Lok Sabha segment, is facing charges of sexually abusing women.

He reportedly left for Germany on April 27, a day after Hassan went to polls, and is still at large. A 'Blue Corner Notice' seeking information on his whereabouts has already been issued by Interpol, following a request by the SIT via the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). A Special Court for Elected Representatives issued an arrest warrant on May 18 against Prajwal Revanna, following an application moved by the SIT.

To a question on the arrest of two persons by SIT in connection with the pen drive circulation case, the Home Minister said more than the question of Congress, BJP and

JD(S), whoever is involved in this case, will be arrested.

"Already 11-12 people have been arrested, whoever they (SIT) feel are involved in the case, during the investigation, they will arrest them and inquire them," he added.

The cases of sexual abuse came to light after several pen drives allegedly containing explicit videos involving Prajwal were reportedly circulated in Hassan, ahead of Lok Sabha polls there on April 26.

To a query regarding the case in which money to the tune of crores was embezzled at a state-run corporation under Scheduled Tribes Welfare department, and an official committed suicide in connection with the case, the Home Minister said CID probe is on.

"The department has lodged a complaint. ₹ 187 crore (misappropriated), out of that ₹ 94 crore or so has been transferred (without authorisation). Each one gives a different figure. Someone mentioned ₹ 84 crore, while others said ₹ 97 crore. It will be known from the investigation. Truth will come out," he said.

Reacting to reports that money was transferred to accounts of various IT companies, he said, "It is said that prima facie the money has gone to eight to ten accounts. It will be known from the investigation."

On BJP demanding the resignation of Scheduled Tribes Welfare Minister B Nagendra, Parameshwara said, "they (BJP) will keep asking for resignation for every incident. Let the investigation happen. It is alleged (in the death note of the officer) that the Minister gave oral orders on transferring the funds, truth will be known from the probe."

When pointed out that Congress while in opposition had sought then Minister K S Eshwarappa's resignation following the suicide of a contractor naming him, he said, "in that case the Minister Eshwarappa was named, that's not the case here. We will have to wait for the probe." (PTI)

Delhi breaches power demand of 8,300-MW first time ever

NEW DELHI, May 29: Delhi's peak power demand reached the all-time high of 8,302 MW on Wednesday afternoon as the city logged its highest-ever temperature of 52.3 degrees Celsius at the Mungeshpur weather station.

Officials said this is the first time in the city's history that the power demand has breached the 8300-MW mark and the mercury crossed 52 degrees Celsius.

Power distribution companies had estimated the demand to peak at 8,200 MW this summer, but according to the State Load Dispatch Centre, Delhi, it clocked 8,302 MW at 15:36:32 hours on Wednesday.

The previous peak power demand was recorded just a week ago, when it touched 8,000 MW on May 22.

The city has been braving a prolonged spell of heatwave conditions with the maximum day temperatures in many parts including Najafgarh, Mungeshpur and Narela touching almost 50 degrees Celsius.

Delhi's demand usually peaks during June-end and early July, a trend that was broken last year when it peaked in August, according to discom officials.

A discom official said, "Air conditioning can contribute to 30-50 per cent of a household or commercial establishment's yearly energy expense."

With the peak demand reaching 8302 MW mark on Wednesday, it was the 12th day in a row when it has crossed the 7000-MW mark.

Until previous year, the all-time high peak power demand of city was 7695 MW, recorded on June 29, 2022, discom officials said.

Last year's peak power demand was 7,438 MW. A BSES spokesperson said BRPL and BYPL discoms successfully met as the city's power demand on Wednesday.

He said around 2,100 MW of green power will play an important role in powering Delhi as its demand rises in the summer months this year. The BSES discoms invested substantial resources to strengthen the network and undertook extensive preventive checks like thermo scanning to help identify potential hot-spots and take remedial measures to prevent any snags, he said.

The fact that the Delhi's power distribution network has been able to sustain this prolonged high demand for power shows its robustness, discom officials said.

A Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited (TPDDL) spokesperson said that the persistent heat wave across North India is leading to a sharp demand surge for electricity in the national capital. (PTI)

Tele-MANAS helpline received over 10 lakh calls since launch: Health ministry

NEW DELHI, May 29: The National Tele-Mental Health Programme has reached a major milestone, receiving over 10 lakh calls on its toll free number so far, averaging 3,500 calls per day, the health ministry said on Wednesday.

Launched by the government in October 2022 to enhance mental health service nationwide, the programme operates 51 Tele-MANAS cells across all states and Union territories.

The Tele-MANAS (Tele Mental Health Assistance and Networking Across States) toll-free helpline numbers 14416 or 1-800-891-4416 offer multi-language support and have been pivotal in facilitating communication between callers and mental health professionals, a health ministry statement said.

The helpline has seen a steady increase in the number of callers, growing from around 12,000 in December, 2022 to over 90,000 in May 2024. This shows the rise in awareness and utilisation of mental health services in the country,

the ministry said in its statement. "This increase in engagement also underscores the importance of continued investment and expansion of mental health initiatives to ensure that everyone has access to the support they need," it added.

To ensure ongoing care and support for those accessing mental health services, the platform, which links existing mental health resources to establish a comprehensive digital network. It also incorporates call-backs for follow-ups.

The government's dedication to expanding mental health services, particularly targeting vulnerable populations represents a significant milestone in India's ongoing efforts to combat the mental health crisis and ensure support for all individuals and households across the country, the statement said.

The ministry also said that integration with initiatives like e-Sanjeevani will further enhance accessibility and effectiveness of the Tele-MANAS platform. (PTI)

BJP leader moves Kerala HC against CM Vijayan's daughter

KOCHI, May 29: BJP leader Shone George has filed an application in the Kerala High Court, alleging that Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's daughter's now defunct company Exalogic "parked" huge sums in an account in Abu Dhabi and that Canadian company SNC Lavalin routed funds to the USA through it.

Vijayan is accused of being part of the alleged corruption in awarding a contract to Canadian firm SNC Lavalin when he was Kerala Power Minister in 1996, which had allegedly caused loss to the state exchequer.

Vijayan and two others were discharged in the case by a special court in Thiruvananthapuram in 2013, a verdict upheld by the Kerala High Court in 2017 when the CBI filed an appeal against the discharge.

The agency then filed an appeal in the Supreme Court against the high court's order and the matter is still pending before the apex court.

The application by Shone George, a lawyer and son of veteran politician P C George, has been moved as part of his plea in the HC seeking an investigation into Vijayan's daughter Veena T's company under the Companies Act and ac-



tion against it by the Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO).

Later, the Centre had told the high court that a probe under the Companies Act had been initiated and the SFIO was also looking into the mat-

ter. In his application, George has claimed that according to "reliable information" received from a person working abroad, a huge trail of money "emanating from the transactions" under investigation by the SFIO "were parked by the culprits in an account

maintained with the Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank in the UAE in the name of Exalogic Consulting".

He has further claimed that the said account "was operated by Veena T and one Suneesh M during the year 2016 to 2019 and huge funds from SNC Lavalin and PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) were routed through the said account to various accounts maintained in banks in the USA".

George had filed the plea seeking the SFIO probe into Veena's firm Exalogic following the controversy which erupted in Kerala after a Malayalam daily reported last year that Kochi-based mining company CMRL had paid a total of ₹ 1.72 crore to the chief minister's daughter between 2017 and 2020.

The news report cited the ruling of an interim board for settlement and said that CMRL previously had an agreement with Veena's IT firm for consultancy and software support services.

It also alleged that although no service was rendered by her firm, the amount was paid on a monthly basis "due to her relationship with a prominent person". (PTI)

HC agrees to hear on Friday Kejriwal aide Bibhav Kumar's plea

Arrest in Malival assault case

NEW DELHI, May 29: The Delhi High Court will hear on Friday a plea by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's close aide Bibhav Kumar against his arrest for allegedly assaulting AAP Rajya Sabha MP Swati Malival earlier this month.

The petition was mentioned for urgent listing before a bench of Acting Chief Justice Manmohan and Justice Manmeet PS Arora which agreed to hear it on May 31.

Kumar, in his plea mentioned by advocate Rajat Bhardwaj, sought his arrest to be declared illegal, in gross violation of the provisions of Section 41A of the Code of Criminal Procedure, and against the mandate of law.

He also sought appropriate compensation for his "illegal" arrest and initiation of departmental action against the "erring" officials who were behind the decision to arrest him.

On Monday, Kumar's bail plea was dismissed by

a sessions court, which said there appeared no "premeditation" by Malival in lodging the FIR against him and that her allegations could not be "swiped away".

Malival has alleged that Kumar assaulted her at the chief minister's official residence on May 13.

Kumar was arrested on May 18 and he was sent to police custody for five days the same day by a magisterial court, which observed that his anticipatory bail plea had become infructuous because of his arrest.

Last Friday, he was sent to four-day judicial custody.

The FIR against Kumar was registered on May 16 under various Indian Penal Code (IPC) provisions, including those related to criminal intimidation, assault or criminal force on a woman with the intent to disrobe, and attempt to commit culpable homicide. (PTI)



Monsoon onset over Kerala, Northeast likely by Thursday

Kerala has been receiving heavy rains for the past few days

NEW DELHI, May 29: Spurred on by Cyclone Remal, southwest monsoon is expected to hit the Kerala coast and parts of northeast by Thursday, a day ahead of the date forecast by the weather office.

"Conditions continue to become favourable for the onset of the southwest monsoon over Kerala during the next 24 hours," the India Meteorological Department said on Wednesday.

On May 15, the weather office had announced the onset of monsoon over Kerala by May 31.

Weather scientists said that Cyclone Remal, which ripped through West Bengal and Bangladesh on Sunday, had pulled the monsoonal flow to the Bay of Bengal, which could be one of the reasons for early onset over the north-east.

Kerala has been receiving heavy rains for the past few days resulting in a surplus May rainfall, the weather office data showed.

The normal monsoon onset date for Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, and Assam is June 5.

"The conditions also continue to become favourable for further advance of Southwest Monsoon into some more parts of South Arabian Sea, remaining parts of Maldives, Comorin, Lakshadweep, southwest and central



Bay of Bengal, northeast Bay of Bengal and some parts of Northeastern states during the same period," the IMD said.

The IMD declares onset of monsoon over Kerala if anytime after May 10 over 14 stations there and neighbouring areas receive 2.5 mm or more rainfall for two consecutive days, the Outgoing Longwave Radiation (OLR) is low, and the direction of the winds is south-westerly.

Monsoon is critical for India's agricultural landscape, with 52 per cent of the net cultivated

area relying on it. It is also crucial for replenishing reservoirs critical for drinking water, apart from power generation across the country.

June and July are considered the most important monsoon months for agriculture because most of the sowing for the Kharif crop takes place during this period.

El Nino conditions are prevailing at present, and La Nina may set in by August-September, scientists say.

El Nino - the periodic warming of surface waters in the central Pacific Ocean - is associated with weaker monsoon winds and drier conditions in India. La Nina - the antithesis of El Nino - leads to plentiful rainfall during the monsoon season.

The IMD is also anticipating the development of a positive Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) or cooler-than-normal Indian Ocean in the east compared to the west, which helps bring rain to several states in southern India.

The IOD is currently "neutral" and is expected to turn positive by August.

Another factor is the below-normal snow cover in the northern hemisphere and Eurasia. Historically, there has been an "inverse relationship" between the levels of snow here and the monsoon. (PTI)

India successfully test-fires Rudra air-to-surface missile

NEW DELHI, May 29: India on Wednesday successfully test-fired a Rudra air-to-surface missile from a Su-30 fighter jet of the Indian Air Force (IAF) off the coast of Odisha.

The defence ministry said the flight-testing of the RudraM-II missile met all the trial objectives.

RudraM-II is an indigenously-developed solid-propelled air-launched missile system meant for air-to-surface role to neutralise several types of enemy assets.

A number of state-of-the-art indigenous technologies developed by various DRDO (Defence Research and Development Organisation) laboratories have been incorporated in the missile system.

"The DRDO successfully flight-tested the RudraM-II air-to-surface missile from Su-30 MK-I platform of the Indian Air Force off the coast of Odisha at around 1130 hours on May 29," the ministry said.

"The flight-test met all the trial objectives, validating the propulsion system and control and guidance algorithm," it said.

The ministry said the performance of the missile has been validated from the flight data captured by range tracking instruments like electro-optical systems, radar and telemetry stations deployed at various locations, including the on-board ship.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh congratulated the DRDO, the IAF and the industry on the successful test-flight of RudraM-II.

"The successful test has consolidated the role of the RudraM-II system as a force multiplier to the armed forces," he said.

Secretary, Department of Defence R&D and Chairman, DRDO Samir V Kamat complimented the DRDO team for their untiring efforts and contribution culminating into the successful flight test, the ministry said in a statement. (PTI)

'High profile persons present in Porsche at the time of crash'

MUMBAI, May 29: Maharashtra Congress president Nana Patole on Wednesday claimed some "high profile" persons, including an MLA's son, got drunk at a pub and travelled in the Porsche car which fatally knocked down two IT professionals in Pune ten days back.

According to police, a teenage son of a builder was driving the car after consuming alcohol in Kalyani Nagar area.

Speaking to reporters, Patole also claimed a car race was going on at the time of the accident.

He reiterated the demand for a CBI probe and asked police to "reveal" the names of persons present in the car. (PTI)

RESTORATION/MAINTENANCE OF TELECOM GEARS

E-Tender No. SNT-19-LMG-2024-25, Dated: 27-05-2024. E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following work. Name of work & Place: Restoration/Maintenance of Telecom Gears in Chaparmukh Jn.-Furkating Jn., Chaparmukh Jn.-Senchoa Jn.-Slighat Town & Senchoa Jn.-Mairabari section of Lumding Division for a period of one year. Tender Value: ₹17,49,176.85. Bid Security: ₹35,000.00. E-tender will be closed at 15:00 hrs. on 18-06-2024 and opened at 15:30 hrs. on 18-06-2024. For details visit: www.igps.gov.in Sr. DSTE, Lumding

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers with a Smile

Kajol, Prabhudeva to reunite for action thriller 'Maharagni - Queen of Queens'

NEW DELHI, May 29: Twenty seven years after "Minsara Kanavu", actors Kajol and Prabhudeva are set to share screen space in action thriller "Maharagni - Queen of Queens".

The upcoming film marks the Hindi directorial debut of Telugu filmmaker Charan Tej Uppalapati, a press release said.

Naseeruddin Shah, Samyuktha Menon, Jisshu Sengupta, Aditya Seal, Pramod Pathak and Chhaya Kadam of Cannes Grand Prix winner "All We Imagine As Light" fame also round out the cast of the pan India film.

The production on the first schedule of "Maharagni" was recently completed and the makers on Tuesday unveiled the official teaser of the film.

Uppalapati has also written the film, which is produced by Harman Baweja and Venkata Anish Dorigillu under the labels of Baweja Studios and E7 Entertainments. "Maharagni" has been a labour of love, said the director.

"Collaborating with actors like Kajol, Prabhudeva, Naseer sir, Samyuktha Menon and Jisshu Sengupta has elevated the project to new heights. Their unmatched charisma and acting abilities breathe life into the characters, and I can't wait for the audience to witness this on screen," Uppalapati said in a statement.

Baweja said this is a "special project" for Baweja Studios.

"We are excited to collaborate with Eternal 7 and have an extraordinary cast featuring Kajol, Prabhudeva, Naseeruddin Shah and Samyuktha Menon. Kajol's talent and authenticity make her perfect for this role. At Baweja Studios, we believe in telling powerful stories, and I am thrilled to bring this project to life with such a stellar team," he said. (PTI)



Priyanka Chopra Jonas reaches Australia to shoot for 'The Bluff'

LOS ANGELES, May 29: Actor Priyanka Chopra Jonas is set to begin filming for her upcoming Hollywood project *The Bluff* in Australia. The *Bluff*, which hails from Russo Brothers' banner AGBO Studios and Amazon MGM Studios, will see Priyanka play the role of a former female pirate.

According to an Instagram reel shared by the 41-year-old actor on Monday, she was accompanied by her daughter Malti Marie Jonas (two) on the journey. "Touch-down...*The Bluff*. With the best travel partner ever," Priyanka, who is based out of Los Angeles, captioned the post.

Set in the 19th century Caribbean, *The Bluff* follows a former female pirate, essayed by Chopra Jonas, who must protect her family when the mysterious sins of her past catch up to her. The movie will be directed by Frank E Flowers, who has co-written it with Joe Ballarini.

Chopra Jonas also serves as a producer on the film alongside AGBO's Anthony and Joe Russo — executive producers of her Prime Video show *Citadel*. *The Bluff* will stream on Prime Video. (PTI)

So happy I don't have words for it: Chhaya Kadam on Cannes win for 'All We Imagine...'



NEW DELHI, May 29: One of the most photographed moments from the Cannes red carpet this year was the jig by the "All We Imagine As Light" team at the premiere. It was a sign the film, the first in 30 years by an Indian director to be selected for competition at the gala, would win big, says actor Chhaya Kadam. And it did. Payal Kapadia's meditative film about two Mumbai nurses went on to bag the Grand Prix, the second highest honour at Cannes after the top prize Palme d'Or (won by Sean Baker's "Anora"). "I am so happy I don't have the words for it," Kadam told PTI over the phone from Cannes.

The red carpet moment is etched in her memory, and in Indian cinema history. Kadam, who plays one of the three leads of the movie alongside Kani Kusruti and Divya Prabha, doesn't remember who started dancing first. "I'm not sure at this point, but it was probably me," she said.

"Someone from Mumbai called and joked, 'You were dancing as if you were in your own courtyard'. I was like, 'Kyun nahin?' Just to be part of the main competition after 30 years is a huge achievement, not to count the award that we won. Why follow protocol? Hum apni khushi aise hi dikhaate hain, kood kood kar. (That's how we show our joy, by breaking into a dance)," Kadam said. According to the actor, who began her career in theatre, their red carpet dance was a celebratory moment with people around them joining in to celebrate their moment of happiness. (PTI)

Actor Fahadh Faasil reveals ADHD diagnosis at 41

KOCHI, May 29: Noted South Indian actor Fahadh Faasil said he was clinically diagnosed with Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) at the age of 41.

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder that affects the brain's ability to regulate attention, behaviour, and impulse control. It is common in children but can also affect adults. Speaking after dedicating Peace Valley Children's Village at nearby Kothamangalam on Sunday, the Aavesham actor said that while roaming around the children's village, he asked a doctor whether it was easy to cure ADHD.

"He told me it can be easily cured if it is diagnosed at a young age. I asked whether it can be cured if it is diagnosed at the age of 41. I am clinically ADHD diagnosed," said the Kumbalangi Nights actor. (PTI)



WANTED TO SHOW THE REALITY OF PUNJAB THROUGH 'JAGGI': DIRECTOR ANMOL SIDHU

NEW DELHI, May 29: Punjab of Hindi films is different from reality, says "Jaggi" filmmaker Anmol Sidhu, who believes native storytellers need to step up and present the true picture of the state.

Sidhu's "Jaggi" has been hailed by critics as an incisive take on the hyper and toxic masculine culture among the youth of Punjab. The film, which won awards in the Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles and Inaugural Cinevesture International Festival, is now screening on streaming platform MUBI.

"You will see the reality of Punjab in Chandigarh, in the Panjab University. And then you come to the rural areas where you see a different Punjab. Bollywood makes films about Punjab where people are dancing in fields. You will have comedy scenes and that makes you think that Punjab is like that."

"In fact, my family members often ask me why don't I make films like Bollywood. But my attempt with 'Jaggi' was to show the reality of Punjab," Sidhu told PTI in an interview.

There has been an influx of stories that have started to offer a more nuanced portrayal, often addressing social issues such as drug problem and socio-political issues in the state with movies such as "Udta Punjab", "Meel Patthar" and OTT shows like "Kohrra" and "Tabbar".

Sidhu has an interesting take on this as he believes that the makers of these films and shows are not actually from Punjab.

"It is not the people of Punjab that are making films about the state. It is people from outside who have found out different stories of the state. 'Kohrra' is a good show but it is not made by someone who comes from Punjab."

"There are only a handful of storytellers from Punjab like Gurvinder sir or Jatinder Mauhar, who are trying to show something different. I believe filmmakers from Punjab should make cinema that reflects the reality of the state. Even actors from Punjab, they still don't get work that they deserve," he added.

Ramnish Chaudhary, who plays the lead role of Jaggi, said he never imagined that the film will have such a journey. "I didn't even anticipate it going to any film festival... We created the character together. I surrendered myself to Anmol's vision," Chaudhary said. "Jaggi" marks the feature directorial debut of Sidhu, who earlier made the short film "The Last Tree" in 2020.

The film, crafted with a hands-on approach, addresses issues of toxic masculinity and challenges stereotypical depictions of Punjabi machismo, chronicling the distressing story of its titular character.



Navigating between the past and present experiences of the central character, the film first delves into the severe bullying and repeated sexual assault that Jaggi faces in his school in rural Punjab. It then shifts focus to the present with Jaggi on the verge of getting engaged and how his past experiences still haunt him.

With the movie, Sidhu said the aim was to highlight the issues of sexual repression and the severe gender segregation prevalent in his community.

"Honestly, I was not aware of terms like hyper masculinity when I made the film. When I was writing the film, my

understanding of life in Punjab was simple that a girl and a boy can't meet in private. And because of this, young people have a lot of frustration."

What happens in the case of extreme sexual frustration is what Sidhu has tried to show in "Jaggi".

"It is all about the frustration in young men and how they take it out on small kids or those who are weak. I imagined how a person's life would be affected if such a thing happens to him?"

Sidhu believes the easy access to adult videos as well as the songs and movies coming out of Punjab have contributed to the problem of sexual frustration

among the youth.

"Right now, the kind of songs that are coming out of Punjab, they have a really bad influence over the public. Everyone wants to follow the singers and do stuff like them."

"Jaggi" is made in a DIY fashion.

"There was no proper financing that we received for this film. The producer used to give us his salary, which was ₹10,000, that he would receive at the end of the month. And that helped us a lot, for travel and food. Things happened slowly over time. The camera that I used, I had taken from my friends," he said.

We learnt on the job and did everything, including dubbing and editing, on our own," he added.

With the film becoming available on MUBI, Sidhu believes he can now move forward in life.

"I feel the journey is now coming to an end. We started on this movie in March 2020... After the film was made, we faced difficulties in showcasing it. For about a year, it didn't go to any film festivals... I used to feel that if it is not screened anywhere, then what will happen to it?"

"But I believe that every film comes with a journey. This film had its own journey and finally it is coming to MUBI." (PTI)

Djokovic begins his bid for a 25th Grand Slam title

PARIS, May 29: Ignore the straight-set score: Novak Djokovic was not quite at his impervious best in the first round of the French Open, and his 6-4, 7-6 (3), 6-4 win over Pierre-Hugues Herbert was not enough to alter the defending champion's "low expectations" at this tournament.

"I don't want to get too excited," Djokovic said. "I thought it was a good performance for me. Solid. Of course, I could have done better, I think, on return games, but also credit to him for serving very well, for changing things up."

It's been a rougher-than-usual season so far for Djokovic, and while there were some signs of breaking out of his 2024 funk during the course of the contest at Court Philippe Chatrier, he still has room for improvement as he attempts to become the first player in tennis history to claim 25 Grand Slam singles trophies. There's no doubt he cares about such things.

"Grand Slams are the ones that are basically getting me up from the bed every day. Knowing that I have to hit the practice courts, I always think about what I can do in Grand Slams," he said. "So here I am. Hopefully I can have another deep



run." That's what Herbert expected to see. "I knew, from the beginning," Herbert said, "that I'm going to have in front of me the Novak of the Grand Slams." ... It's just the intensity of concentration."

Djokovic is a three-time title winner at Roland Garros who needs to return to the final to retain his No. 1 ranking. But he arrived in Paris without having done that at any tournament this year. He is 0-3 in semifinals —

including a loss last week at the lower-tier Geneva Open on red clay — and this victory across 2 1/2 hours only served to make his overall record 15-6.

So when he spoke at a news conference on Sunday,

Djokovic described his mindset heading into the French Open this way: "Low expectations and high hopes." Then he pointed out, "Anything but a title, for me, is not satisfactory," which is understandable given his remarkable resume.

"In the moments when it mattered, I think I delivered. Played a great tiebreak. Stayed focused," Djokovic said about Tuesday's performance. "I'm glad that I started the way I started, the way I felt on the court. Comparing to the previous weeks of tournaments I played, I felt good. Better. So I'm moving in a positive direction. Yeah, it's just the beginning." He seemed a bit edgy at moments against Herbert, a 33-year-old Frenchman who owns a career Grand Slam in doubles but never has been past the third round at any major in singles and is currently ranked 142nd.

The home crowd tried to push Herbert, repeatedly calling out his name, even imploring him in English at one point by chanting, "Let's go, Pierre-Hugues! Let's go!" They jeered Djokovic late in the third set when he went to the sideline to towel off after he slipped, stumbled and tumbled onto the clay chasing a ball. (AP)

Still plenty of fear for Real Madrid coach Ancelotti despite Champions League final successes

MADRID, May 29: Carlo Ancelotti is going into his eighth Champions League final, having won all but one of them.

He is the most successful coach in the competition thanks to four titles. He also lifted two European trophies as a player. There is no lack of experience for the veteran Italian manager. But there is still plenty of anxiety and fear for Ancelotti ahead of yet another big game. "It's the same as it was the first time," the 64-year-old Ancelotti said as Real Madrid entered the final week of preparations ahead of Saturday's final against Borussia Dortmund in London.

"First there is the joy of being here, then the concerns will come and the fear will come," he said. "But before they come we have to enjoy this week and I'm going to enjoy it. The cold sweat will arrive Saturday afternoon, it's normal, I'm already prepared for it. And this team gives me a lot of confidence, I see them focused on the match, they are in Champions (League) mode."

Ancelotti won the Champions League with Madrid in 2002 and 2003, and with AC Milan in 2003 and 2007. He lost the 2005 edition with AC Milan in a final in a penalty shootout against Liverpool after squandering a 3-0 lead.

His European triumphs as a player came with Milan in 1989 and 1990. He was also in the squad with Roma when it reached the 1984 final but he sat out injured. Ancelotti said he will stick to his routine before the final at Wembley Stadium.

"I'm a bit superstitious but it's very normal. I was told that it's bad luck not to be superstitious," he said. "I like to eat broccoli, salmon and pasta, and that's what I'll eat."

Then I'll have an hour's nap, if I'm able to. And then I'll start thinking about the match. Before the talk with the players, my heart will start to rise to 110 or 120 beats. It'll stay up there until the start of the game, and when it starts it will go back to its normal rhythm."

Ancelotti said some of his most memorable Champions League highlights are linked to his time with Madrid, including the incredible run in 2022, when it had to rally several times to make it to the final. He also mentioned the late comeback in the semifinal against Bayern Munich a few weeks ago, when Joselu scored in the 88th minute and in stoppage time.

Ancelotti said this season was especially difficult because of the long list of injuries to some of the team's key players, including serious knee problems to Thibaut Courtois, Eder Militao and David Alaba. Also missing time because of injuries were Vinicius Junior, Jude Bellingham, Eduardo Camavinga and Aurelien Tchouameni. "Attitude and commitment have been the key to overcoming all the problems we've had," Ancelotti said. "That's what allowed us to have a fantastic season." Madrid, which also won the Spanish league and the Spanish Super Cup, is trying to win its sixth European Cup in 10 seasons, matching a feat the club also achieved from 1955-65.

Ancelotti said he prides himself more about the way he has managed his locker rooms than his teams' tactics over the years.

"Personal relationships are more important than professional relationships," he said. "I'm not a psychologist but I'm experienced as I've worked for many years in locker rooms." (AP)

Sreebhumi FC, Nita Football Academy earn promotion to IWL

NEW DELHI, May 29: Sreebhumi FC and Nita Football Academy earned promotion to the Indian Women's League after finishing first and second, respectively, in IWL 2 on a dramatic final day of the league. The former sealed the IWL 2 title with a 2-0 victory over Pudhuvai Unicorns at the Duler Stadium, Mapusa, on Tuesday, May 28, 2024.

Five teams — Sreebhumi FC, Nita Football Academy, Garhwal United FC, Pudhuvai Unicorns, and FC Tuem were in contention to win the league on the final day.

Both Sreebhumi and Nita FA finished the Final Round of the league with 10 points from five matches, after defeating Pudhuvai Unicorns and SAG Football Academy, respectively, on the final day. However, the former were crowned champions due to a superior head-to-head record.

Shruti Kumari of Garhwal United FC was the top scorer of the league, as she scored 10 goals from nine appearances, while Mousumi Murmu and Sikha

Malik were the key scorers for Sreebhumi and Nita FA, netting seven goals each.

Sreebhumi have been near perfect in their IWL 2 campaign, having lost only one match (1-4 against Garhwal United) in the Final Round. They scored 34 goals in their nine matches across the Group Stage and the Final Round. Meanwhile, Nita FA scored 21 goals.

Sukla Dutta, the Sreebhumi head coach, who earlier this year, won the SAFF U19 Women's Championship with the Young Tigresses in Bangladesh, credits her players at Sreebhumi for the IWL 2 title.

"The aim was to make the team champions. I must admit that the girls played with the right motivation and performed according to our plans. They dished out outstanding performances throughout the tournament and I am truly proud and happy for them," said Dutta. "Once I came here, I closely watched all the teams in the fray. My target was to reach the final." (AGENCIES)

Olympic boxing medalists in Paris promised cash prizes by rogue governing body

GENEVA, May 29: The boxing governing body declared rogue by the International Olympic Committee said Wednesday it will pay \$50,000 in prize money to each gold medalist at the Paris Games.

The cash promise is doubly confrontational for the IOC, which has severed ties with the International Boxing Association and does not approve of governing bodies paying prize money to Olympic medalists.

The IBA said it has a \$3.1 million prize money fund for each male and female boxer who reaches the quarterfinals in 13 total weight classes, plus their coaches and national teams.

The coach and national team of each Olympic boxing champion will both get \$25,000, and the scale of payments goes down to \$10,000 in total for each quarterfinalist.

The source of the money is unclear but the IBA led by its Russian president Umar Kremlev has been supported by the country's state energy firm Gazprom. The IBA promised \$200,000 for gold medalists at its 2023 world championships and committed to future increases.

"As IBA president, I will always fight for our athletes' well-being, and this step is consistent in terms of the existing commitments we have already taken," Kremlev said in a statement.

The Olympic body did not support a pledge in April by World Athletics to pay \$50,000 prize money to each of the 48 gold medalists in track and field in Paris. It has promised also to pay silver and bronze medalists in 2028 at the Los Angeles Olympics.

The IOC has de-recognized the IBA, which will not be involved in organizing bouts in Paris for the

second straight Summer Games. The IOC cited its concerns about the boxing body's governance, reliance on funding from Gazprom, and the integrity of judges and bouts at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics.

Those games were organized when the boxing body was led by a longtime IOC member, C. K. Wu.

Paris medalists are set to be rewarded at "a special awards ceremony," IBA said, after "successful passing of respective anti-doping procedures."

The IOC was contacted for comment.

Prize money to Olympic medalists has traditionally been paid by state governments and national teams though not directly from money sourced to the IOC, which prefers governing bodies invest in developing their sport below the elite level.

World Athletics said its \$2.4 million prize fund for champions in Paris would come from its share of the IOC's revenues. Track's \$39.5 million payment for the Tokyo Olympics held in 2021 was the largest amount of a \$540 million fund allocated by the IOC.

Boxing's share of Olympic revenues from Tokyo was due to be more than \$17 million but was held back by the IOC, which had to oversee running the qualifying and finals tournament bouts.

The IBA also will not get money from the IOC's Paris revenues and a rival organization of national federations, called World Boxing, is being established to become the recognized governing body of Olympic boxing.

"We are setting a clear example for many," the IBA's chief executive Chris Roberts said, "on how international federations should be treating their champions." (AP)

Vaishali beats Humpy to move into sole lead at Norway chess

STAVANGER (NORWAY), May 29: India's R Vaishali came up with a stupendous effort to beat compatriot Koneru Humpy and jump into sole lead in the women's section of the Norway chess tournament here.

With each victory under classical time control worth three points, Vaishali got an early advantage moving to four points after the second round and her first-round loss against Wenjun Ju of China under faster time control does not matter so much right now.

India's third and latest Grandmaster among women, Vaishali with four points is at the helm followed by the Chinese duo of Tingjie Lei and Ju, Anna Muzychuk of Ukraine and Pia Cramling of Sweden share the fourth spot in the six-players double round robin event, while Humpy currently is languishing at the bottom on 1.5 points.

In the men's section, World number one Magnus Carlsen emerged as the sole leader on another day that had only Armageddon to decide the winners.

The Norway Chess features a distinctive format where drawn classical games lead to Armageddon tiebreakers to ensure a winner after every round. While 10 minutes are provided to white, black gets 7 minutes to determine the winner of the contest. Black pieces win if the game ends in a draw. Carlsen proved superior than Hikaru Nakamura of United States in the Armageddon. It is no secret anymore that the world's best player and five times world champion does not enjoy Classical chess as much as before.

Carlsen drew in the Classical for the second day in the running and then romped home in the



faster time control over Nakamura. The lone Indian aspirant Praggananandhaa had a tough day in office as he lost to reigning World champion Ding Liren of China in the tiebreaker. After drawing the first game confidently, Pragg somehow could not resist the perseverance of Liren who was like a man on a mission.

Later this year, Ding Liren is set to play a match against D Gukesh of India for the world championship crown.

Carlsen took his tally to three points in all and came across as the sole leader after the second round thanks to all results going his way. India's Praggananandhaa lost to Liren in the faster game, which left him with 2.5 points out of the opening round.

Having Carlsen in front on three points, Praggananandhaa is close behind on 2.5 along side Firouzja Alireza of France, Nakamura, and Liren. Fabiano Caruana is currently at the bottom on two points. Firouzja and Caruana also drew their classical game after a complex struggle but the former's abilities in speed chess shone through in the Armaged-

don game as he bagged crucial 1.5 points. The highlight of the day was Vaishali's fine victory over Humpy in an actual game. Humpy is known to be the queen of Indian chess for over a decade now and she was also ranked number two in the women's candidate that finished recently.

Playing the white side of an Italian opening, Vaishali did not get much with her first move advantage and cashed in when the strongest ever Indian woman player made an error to find her queen entrapped. Vaishali also became the first player to score a victory in either section.

The other two classical matches between Lei Tingjie and Pia Cramling along with Ju Wenjun and Anna Muzychuk ended up in hard-fought draws.

The Chinese duo of Wenjun and Tingjie emerged victorious in their respective Armageddon games. Results men: Magnus Carlsen (Nor, 3) beat Hikaru Nakamura (USA, 2.5) 1.5-1; Ding Liren (Chn, 2.5) beat R Praggananandhaa (2) 1.5-1; Firouzja Alireza (Fra, 2.5) beat Fabiano Caruana (Usa, 2) 1.5-1. (PTI)

India train in 'Big Apple': Getting used to cooler temperatures, playing white-ball games in morning

NEW YORK, May 29: After two months of intense competitive cricket under night lights, the Indian cricket team, sans Virat Kohli, began its preparations for the T20 World Cup with a morning training session here, keeping in mind the 10.30am starts for all its preliminary games.

Kohli took a break for personal work after his RCB's IPL ouster and in all likelihood, he will join the squad by Friday.

But it is not clear if he would be able to take part in the only warm-up game against Bangladesh on Saturday after a long flight. Having played 90 per cent of the matches under lights in the scorching Indian summer, the idea would be to

adjust to pleasant mornings where temperatures will hover between 25 to 27 degree celsius with very less humidity. A white kookaburra in slightly windy mornings could be a challenge and to be prepared for that, the severely jet-lagged bodies need to get used to morning conditions.

And this is why the support staff, before initiating the skills training (net sessions) on the practice pitches at Nassau County ground on the outskirts of the city, have decided to help the player acclimatise with the conditions. With 14 players checking in, there was light jogging, routine shuttle runs, and a bit of foot volley to get into the groove.

"They have been away two and half months from us and getting to know where they stand and what needs to be done before the World Cup is the goal. The (first) goal is to spend 45 minutes in the heat to get going," Strength and Conditioning coach Soham Desai told bcci.tv. "We came in the day before yesterday and we just eased into our routines here, the players are just getting used to the time zone. Today we are having our first ground session," he added.

As far as the players are concerned, there is an element of curiosity about playing cricket in New York. The Indian teams, over the years, have played primarily in Florida at the Fort



Lauderhill ground during their tours of the West Indies.

"First time we are going to play cricket in New York, it's going to be fun," all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja said.

"We have not yet played cricket, came here for a team activity today. Hopefully, it will be good. The weather is really good, so we are looking forward to it." Skipper Rohit Sharma's deputy Hardik Pandya seemed excited with the "bright sunshine" and "good vibes" while Suryakumar Yadav wanted to know more about the diaspora's cricket interests.

"I heard cricket is growing here in the US. So we are really excited and the first day here was amazing, so very excited

for the few days coming up," Surya stated.

India, the 2007 T20 World Cup champions, will start their campaign here on June 5 against Ireland, followed by the big game against arch-rivals Pakistan on June 9.

They take on hosts USA on June 12 before the cricket caravan moves to familiar Lauderhill in Florida for the game against Canada on June 15.

India are supposed to be clubbed A1 irrespective of where they finish in the group and will then proceed to the Caribbean islands for the Super 8 phase of the tournament where they would meet Australia, New Zealand and Sri Lanka. (PTI)

Last Dance: Final chance for Kohli, Rohit to give India a World Cup after 13 years

BENGALURU, May 29: It's tough to find two cricketers who are so different from each other yet so closely intertwined by the same thread of fate as Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma.

Rohit's initiation into top-flight cricket came at the idyllic Belfast in 2007 and Kohli's a year later at the more conventional Dambulla. Another intriguing chapter of this journey together will potentially come to an end next month in the stunning Caribbean Isles.

The next T20 World Cup is in 2026, to be jointly hosted by India and Sri Lanka, but Rohit would be touching 40 then and Kohli would be 38. The 50-over version is a further one year away.

It's hard to see them playing in any of those, considering the increasingly strike-rate oriented nature of the game.

So, both Rohit and Kohli will want to leave the stage with the winner's medal around their neck next month. Should they achieve that, it would be their second each after the 2007 T20 World Cup (Rohit) and the 2011 50-over showpiece (Kohli).

And it will be a perfect send off for two players who have had an immeasurable impact on India's white-ball fortunes in the last 17 years.

However, the Kohli-Rohit story is not one of bromance.

It's based more on mutual respect and the awareness that they should not step into each other's space.

Kohli has talked about the ad-

miration he has had for Rohit since the very beginning of their careers.

"I was filled with curiosity about a player. People kept on saying - 'This is one player who is rising rapidly'. I used to wonder that even though I am a young player, no one talks about me, then who is this player."

"But when he (Rohit) stepped out to bat, I was all quiet. It was amazing to watch him play. In fact, I haven't seen a player time the ball better than him," Kohli had said in 'Breakfast With Champions'.

Contrasting in nature, their batting has been high art for the masses to which they added a dash of modernity later.

Of the two, Kohli is the more all-format batter, who has adapted more fluently with the changing face of the game.

He has scored in every corner of the cricketing world in a show of consistency that was rarely witnessed after the halcyon days of Sachin Tendulkar.

While Rohit built his own edifices in white-ball formats, the Mumbai-man remained a reluctant visitor in Test cricket's elite corridors for the better part of his career.

A move up to the opener's role helped Rohit unshackle himself a bit in Tests in the later part of his career.

But for now, Kohli and Rohit will have to lean on their vast experience in T20 cricket to fuel India's run in the World Cup.



Rohit will certainly open and if his approach in last year's World Cup and in the just-concluded IPL can be taken as a sign, the skipper will continue his selfless, aggressive approach.

Herein, Rohit has an inherent advantage. His natural big-hitting abilities will help him pursue his batsmanship without many improvisations.

That one-legged pull of his is a

cosy meeting point between elegance and malevolence.

But Kohli's game is slightly different. He can pull off those occasional big hits - a swat-flick six or a flat-bat smash over bowler's

head. A quick rewind to his pick-up shot off Pakistan pacer Haris Rauf during the 2022 T20 World Cup will vouch for that.

Still, there is a sore point. Kohli has often struggled to

score off spin, especially against the left-arm variety. His career strike-rate against slow bowlers hovers around mid-120s in T20s.

Several times, it has impeded his progress in the middle innings but during this year's IPL, he seemed to have found a solution.

He brought out the slog-sweep against spinners, and it had a healthy influence on his strike-rate as Kohli made 260 runs from 188 balls and struck 15 sixes against them.

His strike-rate against spin touched 139, a marked improvement from his overall IPL strike-rate of 124.

"It was me mentally putting myself in that situation. I did not practice that at all," he explained.

"I know I can hit it because I have played that shot a lot in the past. So, I just felt like I needed to take a bit more risk," Kohli said of his new approach against spin.

This might come in handy for him in the T20 World Cup where the pitches are expected to become progressively slow, increasingly bringing spinners into the game.

Beyond the realm of cricket, the two veterans' final charge at an ICC trophy - personally and for the team -- would be a captivating sight.

For the fans, this World Cup would be about drinking it in as much as they can because once this duo leaves the stage, there will be an immense emptiness. (PTI)

Sindhu enters second round, Lakshya loses in Singapore Open



SINGAPORE, May 29: Former champion P.V. Sindhu progressed to the women's singles second round but Lakshya Sen went down fighting to world number one Viktor Axelsen at the Singapore Open Super 750 badminton tournament here on Wednesday.

Sindhu had last won a BWF title at Singapore two years back and she entered the tournament after signing off with a runner-up finish at Thailand Open last week.

Up against world no. 21 Line Hojmark Kjærskeld of Denmark, the Indian registered a 21-12 22-20 win in a 44-minute opening round to set up a mouth-watering battle against Rio Olympic champion

Carolina Marin of Spain.

World No. 3 Marin has an overwhelming 11-5 record against the Indian. The last time the two clashed, it turned out to be an ill-tempered match at Denmark Open which saw both players receiving yellow cards for verbal exchanges.

World no. 14 Lakshya, who will be making his Olympic debut at the Paris Games, fought hard but lost steam after the change of ends in the decider to go down 13-21 21-16 13-21 in 62 minutes against Axelsen, who won his first title of the season at Thailand Open last week.

Kidambi Srikanth's opening round match ended in agony as he retired after lagging 14-21 3-11

against Japan's fifth seed Kodai Naraoka.

In other results, B Sumeeth Reddy and N Sikki Reddy lost 18-21 19-21 to Malaysia's Goh Soon Huat and Lai Shevon Jemie in mixed doubles, while Venkat Gaurav Prasad and Juh Dewangan lost 8-21 8-21 against Mads Vestergaard and Christine Busch in another match.

Sindhu held a 3-0 head-to-head count against Line but things started on an even note as the two were tied 8-8 at one stage before the Indian grabbed a two-point advantage at the break with a fine drop shot.

The Indian moved to 16-11 with some quick points as Line made two many unforced errors during the testing rallies. Sindhu soon held eight game points and converted it with a straight return.

After the change of sides, Sindhu continued the momentum to open up a 5-1 lead before taking an 11-7 cushion at the interval, with Line finding the net.

However, the Dane slowly clawed back at 14-14 and stood four points away from taking the match to the decider, but Sindhu stepped up the pace in time to dash her hopes as she reeled off six straight points to seal the win.

Lakshya looked a tad sluggish as he fell behind 1-4 against Axelsen, who rode on his attack to dominate

the rallies. The Indian struggled with his length and also his defence lay in tatters against the Dane, who grabbed a massive 11-3 lead at the break.

Axelsen soon took 10 game points and though Lakshya saved three of them, he missed a net shot to hand the opening game to the Dane.

Lakshya showed better initiative in the second game as he tried to close out the net and go for attacking returns at the backline. He drew parity at 9-9 after being 6-9 at one stage.

The momentum shifted after the interval with Lakshya stepping up as he grabbed 14-12 lead.

The Indian's smashes started finding their mark as he moved to 18-14. The Dane seemed a bit frustrated and made poor judgements as Lakshya grabbed five game points and roared back into the match with a superb net dribble.

Lakshya dominated the front court battle to open up a 6-3 lead. The Dane clawed back at 7-7 as he started to dominate the net now. Two miscued lifts and a wide push handed Axelsen a one-point advantage at the interval.

All fell apart after the resumption as Axelsen grabbed 8 off the next 9 points to move to 19-11 and then grabbed eight match points with a smash. Axelsen closed out the match with a body return. (PTI)

Ankushita, Nishant seal quarterfinal spots

BANGKOK, May 29: Former world youth champion Ankushita Boro (60kg) and Nishant Dev (71kg) registered comfortable victories to reach quarterfinals of the second Boxing World Olympic Qualifiers here on Wednesday.

National champion Arundhati Choudhary (66kg) also registered a convincing win to advance to the pre-quarterfinals.

Boro was up against Asian champion Rimma Volosenko of Kazakhstan. But the Indian wasn't bothered by the stature of her opponent as she went for her punches from Round 1 and never really looked in trouble throughout the bout to earn a 4-1 verdict.

World championships bronze medalist Nishant was clinical in his 5-0 demolition of Thailand's Peerapat Yeasungnoen to reach the last eight stage.

Earlier in the day, Choudhary began her 66 kg campaign with a clinical round 1 against Stephanie Pineauro of Puerto Rico.

She was slightly conservative in round 2, consolidating her position before dominating the next round to get an unanimous 5-0 verdict in her favour.

Narendra Berwal (+92kg) also put up a strong fight against Ecuador's Gerlon Gilmar Congo Chala but it wasn't enough to advance to the next round. (PTI)

Indian junior men's hockey team suffers heart-breaking loss to Germany



MÜNCHENGLADBACH (GERMANY), May 29: The Indian junior men's hockey team went down 2-3 to Germany in a match that went down to the final minute on its Europe tour.

Yogender Rawat and Gurjot Singh scored for the India on Tuesday.

The first quarter had plenty of action with both teams finding themselves with opportunities to take the lead through penalty corners. As neither team got past each other's defence, the quarter remained goalless.

Five minutes into the second quarter, the Germans broke the deadlock with a field goal to take the lead. India continued to prove the resilience that they have displayed in every game of the tour as they equalized through a penalty corner via defender Yogender to end the first half with

the score reading 1-1.

India won another penalty corner a few minutes into the third quarter and forward Gurjot made full use of it to put his team in the lead. But Germany didn't stay quiet for too long as they equalized just minutes later with a penalty corner, taking the game into the final quarter with nothing to separate the two sides.

The visitors had a chance to regain their lead early in the final quarter but were unable to find the back of the net on the penalty corner.

The Germans were awarded a penalty corner in the final moments of the game and they capitalized on it to seal the game 3-2 just in the nick of time.

India will play their final match of the Europe tour against Germany in Breda, Netherlands on Wednesday. (PTI)

Nothing new, it's just a shame: ABD laments racial quota chatter around SA T20 World Cup squad

NEW DELHI, May 29: A B de Villiers is not surprised that just days before South Africa renews its quest for an elusive World Cup, the talk back home is all about racial quota in the team.

It's a rinse-and-repeat sort of situation and de Villiers, who retired in 2018, is glad that he is a mere spectator to the situation now.

"...it's a shame going into a tournament to have the focus on that. I mean it's nothing new, it's just a shame," lamented one of the greats of South African cricket.

"Luckily this time around, I've had nothing to do with anything over there. I'm just a spectator," the 40-year-old said in an interaction with PTI facilitated by 'Jio Cinema'.

The cause of outrage is the presence of just one black player in the squad for the T20 showpiece that will take place in the Americas from June 1. Considered the perennial bridesmaids, who tend to choke in crunch situations, South Africa somehow are always in the pre-tournament favourites bracket without actually living up to the tag.

And having a deeply divisive topic take centre-stage just days before they begin their campaign is a far-from-ideal build-up for a country that has a troubled past when it comes to race relations. The Proteas will start off against the Netherlands in New York on June 8.

Over the course of a season, six



players of colour are required to be in the South Africa playing eleven including two from the black African community as per the policy introduced in 2016.

With Kagiso Rabada being the only black African in the T20 World Cup squad, the national team is set to miss its target. Another black-African, Lungi Ngidi, is part of the travelling reserves.

The other players of colour include Reeza Hendricks, Bjorn Fortuin, Keshav Maharaj, Tabraiz Shamsi and Othniel Baartman.

"There are controversial moments back home as per usual with the South African squad just before a World Cup," de Villiers said.

"I think it's a good team. It's a

shame about Lungu... (he) lost a bit of form, had a couple of injuries. Otherwise, he most probably would have been in the squad and there wouldn't have been any controversial stuff back home," he added.

At the moment, Cricket South Africa doesn't have a committee of selectors and the team is picked by head coaches Shukri Conrad (Tests) and Rob Walter (white-ball cricket).

"Sometimes these things happen and it puts you under a bit of pressure as a selection panel and as a coach and a captain," de Villiers said.

"From what I remember is with the quota system, it's an average team, an average number over the

season and they don't really look at every series, but as journalists sometimes enjoy steaming up things a bit," he tried to put things in context.

Following the selection of the squad earlier this month, former Sports Minister Fikile Mbalula and former CSA and ICC president Ray Mali questioned the composition of the side.

"Only one African player selected in the Proteas Team for the upcoming T20 World Cup 2024 Team. Definitely a reversal (reversal) of the gains of transformation and doesn't reflect fair representation of all South Africans in the national cricket team," Mbalula wrote on X. On SABC Sport, Mali said the game is heading backwards in the country.

"I believe a lot has been achieved, but I believe we have gone backwards in terms of cricket - we have taken a step backwards instead of going forward," said Mali.

But de Villiers was a bit more empathetic towards those who made the choices and said he does not see anything sinister in the process.

"Maybe they are short. Maybe they are well within their right to do whatever they were needed to do in this World Cup.

"Keeping in mind there were a couple of injuries, a couple of out of form players. It's never easy," he said.

On the upside, South Africa's

IPL stars have displayed ominous form in the preceding T20 league and that would surely give them confidence to go the distance in the World Cup too.

Talking about the recently-concluded IPL, de Villiers said the Impact Player rule, which helped teams amass 250-plus totals as many as eight times this season, needs to be revised.

"...what I really didn't enjoy about the rule is actually subbing players who have already taken part in the game. That part of the rule doesn't make sense. I feel it needs to be a fair swap.

"If someone hasn't taken part in the game, he needs to be swapped. If you feel that you are going to lack in the bowling or batting department, it'll just make it a bit harder to strategise and it'll be more of a risk to swap someone."

He also wants more than two fielders outside the ring in the powerplay.

"I still feel T20 cricket needs to be a batters game, that's why the fans come to the parks. They want to see the ball flying all over the park and into the night sky," he said.

"But I still you still want to see the bowlers outsmart batters sometimes...in the first six overs by maybe easing up on the restrictions.

"Whether that's four or five outside, I don't know exactly but at least the bowler can plan," he reasoned. (PTI)

India bids to host Gukesh-Liren World Chess Championship match

NEW DELHI, May 29: India has submitted its bid to host the much-anticipated World Chess Championship clash between teen sensation D Gukesh and defending champion Ding Liren of China in November-December this year. The 17-year-old Gukesh became the youngest ever challenger for the world title by winning the Candidates Tournament last month. He will face Liren between November 20 to December 15 in Chennai if the All India Chess Federation (AICF) manages to claim the hosting rights. "We have received the bid from India," Chess' global governing body FIDE CEO Emil Sutovsky told PTI.

As of now, FIDE hasn't received any other bids but the deadline to enter the race is May 31. It is learnt that Singapore is expected to compete with India but has not yet officially submitted the bid documents.

"As of now no other country has bid for it but the deadline is till end of this week. Post that we will have a FIDE Council meeting next week. And after that due procedure will be followed and we will decide about the hosting rights," Sutovsky added.

If AICF wins the bid, it will have to shell out close to ₹ 71 crore. The basic criteria outlined by FIDE for a prospective bidder for the 2024 edition is a budget of ₹ 8.5 million (₹ 71 crore approx) and a facilitation fee of USD 1.1 million (₹ 9 crore) for the global body.

The duration of the tournament is 25 days and approval of regulations will be completed by July 1. The total prize money awarded by FIDE would be around USD 2.5 million (₹ 20 crore plus) after the fund was increased from the USD two million (₹ 17 crore) in 2023.

Gukesh's historic achievement at the Candidates has spurred a renewed wave of interest in chess. The Chennai-based teen, who has been mentored by five-time world champion Viswanathan Anand, bettered Russian legend Garry Kasparov's 40-year-old record to become the youngest Candidates champion. The Russian game was 20 when he qualified in 1984 to clash with compatriot Anatoly Karpov.

India last hosted the prestigious showpiece back in 2000 when Viswanathan Anand claimed the first of his five world titles by winning the event played in a tournament format with 100 players.

Anand defeated Alexei Shirov in the final. (PTI)