

6 WORLD As China's Xi Jinping visits Europe, Ukraine, trade and investment are likely to top Rishi Sunak under pressure amid dire local election results for his party 8 NATION Amethi to not have contender from Gandhi family for first time in 25 years Mamata lashes out at governor for 'misconduct' with woman employee

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Rijiju remark on Chakma-Hajong refugees concerns ASDC

DIPHU, May 3: The Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) expressed apprehension that relocation of the Chakma-Hajong refugees to Assam would lead to demographic change in Karbi Anglong. ... In a press conference, the general secretary, ASDC, Jotson Bey said, "If the 5 lakh Chakma - Hajong refugees settling in Arunachal Pradesh are to be relocated then there is apprehension that the present demographic pattern of the district might get changed."



ASDC members sitting at a table during a press conference.

Assam CM hits back at Cong on 'mafia raj', 'washing machine' jibs Priyanka, Rahul 'irrelevant' in Assam: Himanta

GUWAHATI, May 3: Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday claimed that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi will win in Pakistan if elections are held there but in India, victory will be of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Sarma had lashed out at Rahul Gandhi and his sister Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Thursday as well, calling them "irrelevant" in Assam and "past the expiry date".



Himanta Biswa Sarma speaking at a podium.

will happen in Bharat". "In Bharat, it's 'balle balle' Narendra Modi," Sarma said, in reply to a question on Gandhi's winning chances in the two Lok Sabha seats he is contesting. Gandhi, who is already seeking to retain the Wayanad constituency in Kerala, on Friday also filed his nomination papers from Uttar Pradesh's Rae Bareilly, a traditional Congress bastion held by his mother Sonia Gandhi in the outgoing Lok Sabha. Earlier on Thursday, Sarma had hit out at the Gandhi siblings and said, "Priyanka and Rahul Gandhi are irrelevant in Assam. They are past the expiry date."

HT BRIEFS Three held

TEZPUR: The Sonitpur Police and CRPF, in a joint operation, acting on a tip off apprehended three persons from Muslim Chapor area on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra River. The area falls under the Thelamara PS in Sonitpur District on Friday. Police informed that the persons identified as Saiful Islam (35) son of Nazimuddin, Anarul Husain (32) son of Md. Ali and Hijur Rahman (24) son of Saifuruddin of the char area had been involved in many criminal acts. One pistol with two rounds of ammunition has been recovered from their possession. The operation was led by Additional SP (Crime) Sonitpur. Further investigation is on.

Poacher held

BISWANATH CHARIALI: Acting on a tip off, a joint team of Jamuguri police and forest department managed to apprehend one Hanif Ali from Bharali Chapor area under Jamuguri police station on Thursday night and recovered a suspected rhino horn from his possession. It is to be mentioned here that two of his companions managed to escape from the site. The police team has apprehended Hanif Ali on the charges of rhino poaching. The forest department has taken him into their possession for further interrogation. He has earlier records of involvement in rhino poaching. It is further pertaining to mention here that Jamuguri police had apprehended rhino poachers from Jamuguri area earlier to this. The rhino horn that has been recovered from his possession was currently being monitored, said a forest official. He further added that it will be confirmed after lab test only.

Election campaign

BOKAJAN: The Deputy Speaker of Assam Legislative Assembly and also the MLA of Boakajan LA, Karbi Anglong, Dr Numal Momin is campaigning for the 3rd phase of the Lok Sabha election. MLA Dr Momin attended public meetings in Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), Amteka campaigning for Kokarajhar BJP candidate Jayanta Basumatary. Kokarajhar will go to the polls of May 7.

One year on: Manipur is state divided, people pulled apart

IMPHAL/CHURACHANDPUR (MANIPUR), May 3: Manipur is a state divided and society was pulled apart, separating families and neighbours who had lived together for generations and upending thousands of lives. It was exactly a year ago. May 3, 2023. The date is imprinted on the collective memory of an entire people who mark the day two Manipurs came into being, divided as it were by a virtual line of control. That was the day a 'Tribal Solidarity March' organised in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status led to ethnic clashes between the Meitei and the Kuki communities. The conflict, which has impacted everyday life in myriad ways, has claimed more than 200 lives and displaced many thousands. The three main ethnic groups in the northeast state have historically clustered in different parts of the state's geography - the Meiteis in the valley, the Kukis in the southern hills and the Nagas in the northern hills. But there has never been



An absolute, hostile segregation of the communities. Until last May. Now, the Meiteis population is concentrated in Imphal Valley and the Kukis have shifted to the hills. Nothing illustrates the state's deep ethnic fault lines better than the bordering areas dividing the plain and hill districts. Converting coils, armoured vehicles, armed security personnel, sandbag bunkers... The checkpoints, be it at the border between Bishnupur and Kuki dominated Churachandpur, or Meitei controlled Imphal West and Kuki 'area' Kangpokpi, almost resemble boundaries between hostile nations. The conflict has segregated not just civil society but also police personnel and government officials. "The state has gone back at least by two decades," (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

KAAC former CEM Sum Ronghang passes away

DIPHU, May 3: Sum Ronghang, former Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) and a prominent figure in Assam's political landscape, breathed his last at Health City Hospital in Guwahati on Friday. He was 61. Ronghang, who also served as the president of the Karbi Anglong District Congress Committee (KADCC), succumbed to multiple organ failure after battling several health complications for some time. His absence from recent party activities, including the Parliamentary election, was attributed to his deteriorating health condition. Expressing deep sorrow over Ronghang's demise, Tuliram Ronghang, the current CEM of KAAC, took to Facebook to pay tribute to his fellow leader. "I'm deeply saddened by the demise of Sum Ronghang, former HAD minister, govt of Assam. He was a great leader; his contribution to the people of Karbi Anglong will be remembered forever. His passing is a big loss to our society. My heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family members. May his soul rest in peace," wrote Tuliram Rong-



Sum Ronghang began his political journey with the Congress party, contesting and winning the KAAC election from the Lamber MAC constituency. He served as a member of autonomous council (MAC) and held various executive positions within the council, including the crucial role of executive member for education. Later, he ascended to the position of CEM, contributing significantly to the development of the region. In subsequent years, Ronghang continued his political career, contesting elections and holding different (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Amit Shah morphed video Five Telangana Congress workers arrested by Hyderabad police, out on bail

HYDERABAD, May 3: The city police on Friday said they arrested five Telangana Congress party social media activists in connection with Union Home Minister Amit Shah's alleged morphed video that went viral recently. The accused were produced before a local court which granted them bail with a condition that each person will have to submit two sureties worth Rs 10,000 each and appear before the investigating officer on Monday and Friday till further orders. According to a statement issued by the police, they received a complaint on April 27 from a state BJP leader alleging that the Telangana Congress Pradesh Congress Party on its X account posted morphed or fabricated video of Amit Shah's

speech during his election campaign and public meeting at Siddipet recently, in violation of IT Act. The deliberate and mischievous act of morphing the video is aimed at misleading people and voters creating fear amongst the OBC communities, the police said, adding they registered a case under Sections 469 (forgery), 505(1)C (circulating rumour), 171G (spreading false information), among others. According to police, on April 23, during a public meeting in Medak, Amit Shah made a speech. The AI received a morphed video and uploaded it on the "@INCTelangana" handle on X besides sharing it on various WhatsApp groups while A2 to A5 saw the video and further (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Police constable hand in glove with drug mafia in Nagaon

NAGAON, May 3: Makaram Hussain, a police constable who was also being deployed as a bodyguard of a deputy superintendent of police at Nagaon police, was arrested on charge of leaking prior information about police operation or other movements to some dreaded drugs mafias in the district on Thursday evening here. Sources claimed that the arrested police constable allegedly had been taking bribe from the drugs mafias in return of the information. The matter has come into the light during a secret monitoring conducted by crime branch of Nagaon police. Subsequently, it was informed to SP Swapnanil Deka. Later, Deka instructed the official (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Rahul makes high-stakes 'chess move' in LS polls with shift from Amethi to Rae Bareilly



NEW DELHI, May 3: Rahul Gandhi describes himself as the best chess player among Indian politicians, and his latest gambit appears to be his decision to contest from Rae Bareilly instead of his home ground Amethi. Gandhi obviously hopes that the move will checkmate opponents but the BJP sees it as a cowardly retreat from the battleground. "He is an experienced player of politics and chess. The party leadership takes its decisions after much discussion, and as part of a larger strategy. This single decision has befuddled the BJP, its supporters, and its

sycophants," Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said in a post on the much-anticipated decision. "The BJP's self-proclaimed Chanakya, who used to talk about 'paramparagat seat' is now not sure how to respond," he said. The chess reference by Ramesh comes days after the Congress put out a video of Gandhi talking about his interest in the board game and its similarities with politics. In the video, when Gandhi is asked who is the best chess player among Indian politicians, he said, "Me". Gandhi filed his papers from Uttar Pradesh's Rae Bareilly constituency in the afternoon, barely an hour before nominations closed for the Lok Sabha seat on Friday. He was accompanied by Congress leaders Mallikarjun Kharge, Sonia Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra as he filed his papers around 2 pm. Gandhi had made his poll debut from Amethi in 2004 and saw relative smooth sailing in the first 10 years with the UPA being in power, while the last 10 years have been challenging. He won the 2014 polls against the BJP's Smriti Irani by over a lakh votes but she had run a spirited campaign and made inroads into the Congress citadel of Amethi. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

LS polls fight to save constitution, democracy: Mira Borthakur Goswami



GUWAHATI, May 3: The Lok Sabha elections this time is a fight to save the constitution and democracy along with ensuring the future of youth and women's security, Congress candidate for the Guwahati constituency Mira Borthakur Goswami said here. In an interview to PTI, Goswami said the Constitution has given 'us the right to raise our voice against injustice but there is an attempt to silence people by bringing about a change in it'.

People will, however, vote 'against this move in this election and will exercise their franchise in favour of the INDIA group', she asserted. The Congress leader said that the BJP government had brought in the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in a bid to settle Hindu Bengalis from neighbouring Bangladesh. "This is a dangerous proposition. Landless people of Assam displaced by flood and erosion have been demanding land and documents but they are yet to be rehabilitated," she said. According to Goswami, Union Minister Kiren Rijiju said that he had talked with Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma about settling five lakh Chakmas from Arunachal Pradesh in Assam. Sarma, however, recently claimed that he does not know what Rijiju said but the Centre has not discussed the issue of relocating Chakma or Hajong refugees in Assam with him. A leader who joined the Congress from the BJP following the CAA protests in the state in December 2019, Goswami (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Lack of opposition unity in Barpeta baffles CPI (M) LS candidate

BARPETA, May 3: Blaming Congress for "failing" to put up a united candidate in Barpeta Lok Sabha constituency, where another opposition party TMC too is contesting, CPI(M) nominee Manoranjan Talukdar feared that anti-BJP vote will be divided and it may create "some difficulties" for him. Talukdar, however, expressed optimism that he will give a "tough fight" against all opponents and will win the election from Barpeta, which has become a Hindu-majority seat after the delimitation exercise last year. "This is unfortunate and Congress is only responsible for what happened in the constituency. We had talked about contesting from Barpeta a long time ago.. A wrong message has gone because of the opposition parties fighting separately," he told PTI in an interview here. From the ruling front, AGP has nominated senior leader, former minister and sitting Bongaigaon MLA Phani Bhusan Choudhury to contest from Barpeta. Congress nominated its state Seva Dal chief Deep Bayan, while TMC has named Abul



Kalam Azad for the seat. Congress, CPI(M) and TMC are members of the United Opposition Forum Assam (UOFA), formed in the state with 16 parties in line with the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA). "The Congress gave an excuse that we needed a face to contest from Barpeta and Manoranjan Talukdar should be the face. We agreed to it and declared my candidature. Despite that, Congress gave its candidate here," said Talukdar, the lone MLA of the CPI(M) in Assam Assembly. He pointed out that 77 leading intellectuals from the state had appealed to Congress to withdraw their nominee so that only one opposition

candidate remained in the field to take on the NDA contestant, but the grand old party did not listen and decided to remain in the contest. On TMC giving a candidate in Barpeta, Talukdar claimed that the West Bengal-based party does not have any influence in Assam, organisation or office, and it has no presence at the booth level. Asked if failure to have a unanimous candidate will cost the opposition bloc, he said: "Some votes will obviously be divided because of Congress, but there will be no impact due to TMC or any other party. Due to Congress, there might be some difficulties here." The veteran Left leader, however, exuded confidence and said he will "give a tough fight and will win". Barpeta is presently represented by Congress MP Abdul Khaleque, who had resigned from the party last month after he was denied a ticket. However, he later withdrew the resignation following a meeting with Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge in New Delhi. When asked if Barpeta becoming a Hindu-majority seat has made the equation (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Sensex tumbles 700 points amid broad-based selloff; Nifty slips from record

MUMBAI, May 3: Equity benchmark Sensex plummeted over 700 points to sink below the 74,000 level and Nifty retreated from a record high on Friday as investors pared exposure to telecom, capital goods and tech stocks.

Heavy selling pressure in Reliance Industries, L&T and HDFC Bank counters also pulled indices down, traders said.

The 30-share BSE Sensex dropped 732.96 points or 0.98 per cent to settle at 73,878.15 after soaring 484.07 points earlier in the day. From its intra-day high of 75,095.18, the benchmark tumbled 1,627.45 points to the day's low of 73,467.73.

The NSE Nifty also declined 172.35 points or 0.76 per cent to 22,475.85. The benchmark hit a record 22,794.70 in the early trade, up 146.5 points or 0.64 per cent.

On the weekly front, the BSE benchmark climbed 147.99 points or 0.20 per cent. The NSE Nifty advanced 55.9 points or 0.24 per cent.

"Once again, the markets experienced significant volatility, ending the day with a loss of nearly one per cent. Despite a positive start driven by strong global cues, profit-taking in heavyweight stocks not only wiped out early gains but also pushed the index



into negative territory," said Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd.

From the Sensex basket, Larsen & Toubro, Maruti, Reliance Industries, Nestle, Bharti Airtel, UltraTech Cement, Kotak Mahindra Bank and JSW Steel were among the major laggards.

Bajaj Finance climbed nearly 1 per cent higher. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has lifted restrictions on Bajaj Finance on sanctioning and disbursement of loans through eCOM and Insta EMI Card, the company said in a regulatory filing on Thursday.

In November last year, the central bank directed Bajaj Finance to stop sanction and disbursement of

loans under its two lending products -- eCOM and Insta EMI Card -- due to the company's non-adherence to the extant provisions of digital lending guidelines.

Bajaj Finserv, Mahindra & Mahindra, State Bank of India, ICICI Bank and Infosys were among the other gainers.

"Profit-bookings and a degree of caution ahead of the release of the US non-farm payroll resulted in selling pressure in the market. However, the absence of significant negative surprises in Q4 earnings thus far, along with a decline in oil prices, might help to mitigate the downside.

"Though the correction was broad-based, the large-cap stock

was the key underperformer due to the moderation of FII's exposure to the domestic market," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge declined 0.55 per cent and the midcap index dipped 0.21 per cent.

Among the indices, telecommunication tanked 1.42 per cent, realty (1.09 per cent), services (1.01 per cent), tech (0.96 per cent), consumer discretionary (0.71 per cent), IT (0.64 per cent) and commodities (0.29 per cent).

In contrast, Healthcare and metal were the gainers.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 964.47 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data.

In Asian markets, Hong Kong settled in the positive territory, while Seoul ended lower. Markets in Tokyo and Shanghai were closed for the holidays.

European markets were trading in the green. Wall Street ended with gains on Thursday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.06 per cent to USD 83.62 a barrel. On Thursday, the BSE benchmark climbed 128.33 points or 0.17 per cent to settle at 74,611.11. The NSE Nifty went up by 43.35 points or 0.19 per cent to 22,648.20 (PTI)

Rupee rises 3 paise to end at 83.43 against US dollar

MUMBAI, May 3: The rupee appreciated 3 paise to settle at 83.43 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday, tracking a weak American currency and retreating crude oil prices.

Forex traders said a massive selling in the domestic equity market and outflow of foreign funds capped the gains in the local currency.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic unit opened at 83.40 and moved in the range of 83.34 and 83.44 against the greenback during the session.

The local unit finally settled at 83.43 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a rise of 3 paise from its previous close.

The rupee had settled 3 paise lower at 83.46 against the dollar on Thursday.

Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said the rupee gained on a weak US dollar and a decline in crude oil prices. However, weak domestic markets and FII outflows capped sharp gains.

The weak dollar was attributed to the US Federal Reserve's decision to keep the key interest rate unchanged for the sixth consecutive time, citing slower progress on the inflation front.

Choudhary further said the rupee is expected to trade with a slight negative bias on weak domestic markets and selling pressure from foreign investors. However, a weak tone and a soft

US dollar may support the rupee at lower levels. "Traders may remain cautious ahead of non-farm payrolls report and ISM services PMI data from the US today. Encouraging non-farm payrolls may support the dollar while dismal data may weigh on the greenback. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 83.20 to ₹ 83.60," he added.

India's manufacturing PMI fell to 58.8 in April 2024 from 59.1 in the previous month, a monthly survey said on Thursday.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), however, recorded the second fastest improvement in operating conditions in three-and-a-half years supported by buoyant demand.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, declined 0.10 per cent to 105.07.

Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, slipped 0.04 per cent to USD 83.64 per barrel.

On the domestic equity market front, Sensex tumbled 732.96 points, or 0.98 per cent, to settle at 73,878.15, and Nifty tumbled 172.35 points, or 0.76 per cent, to close at 22,475.85.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Thursday, as they sold shares worth ₹ 964.47 crore on a net basis, according to exchange data. (PTI)

Godrej Properties Q4FY24 results: Profit rises 14% to Rs 471.26 crore

NEW DELHI, May 3: Realty firm Godrej Properties on Friday reported its highest-ever quarterly profit as earnings jumped 14 per cent annually to ₹ 471.26 crore in the March quarter, spurred by better income and strong housing sales. Its net profit stood at ₹ 412.14 crore in the year-ago period.

Total income rose to ₹ 1,914.82 crore in the fourth quarter of last fiscal from ₹ 1,838.82

crore in the corresponding period of the previous year, the company informed in a regulatory filing.

During the 2023-24 fiscal, the company's net profit increased to ₹ 725.27 crore from ₹ 571.39 crore in the preceding year. Total income rose to ₹ 4,334.22 crore last fiscal year from ₹ 3,039 crore in the 2022-23 financial year. (PTI)

ADB open to funding space sector in India: VP Bhargav Dasgupta

TBILISI (GEORGIA), May 3: The Asian Development Bank is open to funding the space sector in India in addition to focusing on climate finance to mitigate the associated risks, said its Vice President Bhargav Dasgupta on Friday.

ADB has done some projects in satellite in the Asia Pacific region, but has not provided any assistance in the Indian space sector.

"We have not done much till now. We are always open to look at new areas...we understand it has been opened up and there is lot of interest on startup side...if we find alignment with our objectives in terms of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we will look at it," he said.

Last month, the government notified amendments to the foreign direct investment policy in the space sector to attract offshore investors in satellite manufacturing and satellite launch vehicles segments.

Talking about initiatives in India, Dasgupta said, "we are very excited about the work that is happening in the country including recently launched rooftop solar projects, large solar projects, pump hydro, and battery storage. We are talking to many sponsors in these segments and we will be happy to see how many of them we can finance."

Besides, he said there is a lot of interest in the corporate sector in energy transmission, conversion of older coal-fired power projects into green energy units.

Dasgupta, former MD and CEO of ICICI Lombard, was appointed Vice President of ADB in September last year. He is responsible for management of ADB's Private Sector Operations Department and Office of Markets Development and Public Private Partnerships.

ADB, established in 1966, is owned by 68 members, 49 from the region. It is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty.

India, a founding member of ADB, is now ADB's fourth largest shareholder and its top borrower since 2010. (PTI)

Asian shares advance ahead of US jobs report

TOKYO, May 3: Business Writer Asian shares were mostly higher Friday ahead of a report on the US jobs market, while several major markets including Tokyo and Shanghai were closed for holidays. Oil prices and US futures were higher. The Japanese yen strengthened slightly against the US dollar amid signs of heavy central bank intervention to tamp down the dollar's advance.

The financial newspaper Nihon Keizai Shimbun reported that estimates showed the government spending an estimated 8 trillion yen (about \$50 billion) this week in trying to keep the yen from slipping further against the dollar.

The weaker yen has helped boost prices for imported goods, a factor behind the Bank of Japan's recent decision to give up its negative interest rate policy and raise its benchmark rate to zero to 0.1%



from a longstanding level of minus 0.1%. It might raise rates further, Marcel Thieliant of Capital Economics said in a commentary, even if its target of 2% isn't met.

Even though the economic case for preventing the yen from sliding is much weaker, the Ministry of Finance seems to have responded with an even more forceful round of foreign exchange interventions this week than it did two years ago," Thieliant said.

While a weaker yen can be a boon to Japanese companies that earn much of their revenues overseas, significant shifts in the foreign exchange market can play havoc with corporate planning and a sharply weaker yen also boosts costs for imports of oil and other vital commodities.

The dollar was trading at 153.15 early Friday, down from 153.65 late Thursday. The euro rose to \$1.0735 from \$1.0727.

Elsewhere in Asia, Hong Kong's Hang Seng jumped 1.7% to 18,518.64, tracking gains on Wall Street. News of fresh moves by Chinese leaders to enliven the economy helped drive buying of technology shares.

E-commerce giant Alibaba climbed 3.9% and rival JD.com was up 5%. Baidu advanced 4.2%.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 gained 0.6% to 7,629.00 and the Kospi in Seoul slipped 0.3% to 2,676.63. Taiwan's Taiex picked up 0.5%. India's Sensex shed 0.9% to 73,952.37. On Thursday, the S&P 500 rose 0.9% to 5,064.20, a day after swinging sharply when the Federal Reserve said it's likely delaying cuts to interest rates but not planning to hike them. That more than halved its drop for the week. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 0.9% to 38,225.66, and the Nasdaq composite jumped 1.5%, to 15,840.96.

On Friday, the US government will report on how many jobs employers added last month, one of the most highly anticipated economic updates each month.

Economists expect it to show a slowdown in hiring.

A report Thursday showed that fewer US workers applied for unemployment benefits last week than economists expected. It's the latest signal that the job market remains solid despite high interest rates. A separate, potentially more disappointing report suggested growth in how much US workers produced per hour worked was weaker at the start of 2024 than economists expected. A measure comparing labour costs to productivity, meanwhile, rose by more than expected in the preliminary report. That could put upward pressure on inflation.

Apple climbed 2.2% ahead of its profit report, which arrived after trading ended Thursday.

DoorDash sank 10.3% after reporting a worse loss than expected, while Peloton Interactive swung from an early gain to a loss of 2.8% after it said it would cut roughly 400 jobs as part of a programme to save \$200 million in costs annually. It also said its CEO, Barry McCarthy, is stepping down. The company's stock had fallen to a record low last week.

The US economy is in a tight spot, where the hope is that it remains strong enough to stay out of a recession but not so strong that it worsens the already stalled progress on inflation. (AP)

Contd. from Page 1...

Priyanka, Rahul 'irrelevant' in

period in Assam. Now, there are no blasts, firing incidents, ULFA or NDFB which prevailed at that time," he said. The CM asserted that if getting jobs without paying bribes or bringing 30 lakh people under "Orunodoi" scheme define "mafia raj", then people will want such a "mafia raj".

The CM also hit back at the Congress' "washing machine" jibe at the BJP, alleging that the grand old party has a "big, high voltage washing machine" which was used to cleanse Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal. "They (Congress) have a big washing machine, which was used to wash Arvind Kejriwal. Four months ago, Priyanka Gandhi (Vadra) had said Kejriwal had looted money through liquor scam, and now all of a sudden, he becomes a good person? Which high-voltage washing machine does she have?" Sarma added. (PTI)

One year on: Manipur

said an official, echoing what many of his colleagues say. Police personnel and those from forces belonging to either the Meitei or the Kuki communities are also confined to their respective areas and cannot commute to the other side. Keeping vigil at these checkpoints are not just the forces but a battery of "village volunteers" mostly in their 20s and early 30s who claim to have taken up arms to ensure their families remain safe.

"There are forces but we do not trust that their presence is enough. If it was enough we would not have seen this situation in the first place. We had to take the issue in our hands to ensure our loved ones don't become part of the government statistics of casualties," a village volunteer on night vigil told PTI on condition of anonymity. The volunteer left his graduate studies midway last May and sought basic training of using weapons. Questioned about the gun he was carrying, he responded, "It is a licensed weapon. We refused to surrender it before elections." While the travel from hills to the Valley and vice-versa is restricted for people from the other community, non Kuki and non Meitei people are able to travel provided they pass certain checks. For every such check, the outsiders, essentially government officials and press reporters, have to rely on an aide who is either a Naga or a Muslim.

This PTI reporter travelled to Churachandpur and was stopped at four checkpoints. At each, volunteers asked who I was going to meet. Details, copy of the ID and local address were taken down meticulously.

Nagas and Muslims commuting between the two areas are mandated by the volunteers to make a donation, irrespective of the amount. The continuing tensions have a ripple effect, affecting people in ways big and small. With facilities in Imphal out of reach, people from Churachandpur have been travelling to Aizawl - a journey of over 12 hours - for a variety of reasons, including medical needs that cannot be met in the Churachandpur district hospital. The process to catch a flight is similar as the Imphal airport remains out of bound for the Kukis. Groceries for relief camps in Churachandpur are also transported to Churachandpur through the same route. Students are another casualty.

College students that stayed back in Churachandpur rather than seek a transfer to universities outside the state, an option provided by the University Grants Commission (UGC), have to deposit their answer sheets in sealed envelopes at the District Commissioner's Office; their fingers crossed their papers will be marked and not get lost. The DC office in tandem with Assam Rifles sends these envelopes to colleges in the Valley in helicopters. "All the teachers in the university are Meitei now and they are not marking our answer sheets submitted online giving vague responses. Our batchmates are not sharing notes and we have no way to carry forward our education in the state. The only feasible way out is to go out of the state but I do not want to abandon my family," a law student told PTI on condition of anonymity.

Meiteis, who account for about 53 per cent of Manipur's population, displaced from the hills and now living in relief camps have their own issues. Their houses no longer exist. "It takes decades to build a life, a house, livelihood...everything is gone. We just keep getting to know from our previous neighbours who are Nagas that our house is no longer there," said Sim Khang, a Meitei who used to run a transport business in Churachandpur. While over 4,200 weapons looted from the armouries in the violence-hit state continue to be untraceable, seeing young men with weapons is a common sight in the fringe areas. The state went to polls in two phases for the two Lok Sabha seats--April 19 and 26. (PTI)

KAAC former CEM Sum

portfolios. He briefly joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 2015, winning the State Assembly election as a BJP MLA from Diphu LAC in 2016 and serving as the HAD Minister. However, he returned to the Congress party in 2021, contesting in the state Assembly election but facing defeat to BJP candidate Bidyasing Englung.

Five Telangana Congress workers

shared it to their individual X handles. When notified by X about the sensitivity of the content, the video was deleted, they said. Earlier, the Delhi Police summoned Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy on May 1 for questioning in a case of a doctored video of Amit Shah. (PTI)

Police constable hand

concerned of crime branch to arrest him immediately, sources said, adding that the arrested police constable was quizzed for long period to unearth details regarding his involvement in the issue.

Earlier, during the tenure of then SP Dankarbrata Raimedhi, one police constable was also arrested for leaking prior information about police operation or movement to drugs mafias in the district.

Rahul makes high-stakes

She finally breached the fortress in 2019, beating the Gandhi family scion by over 55,000 votes. However, Gandhi's 'Plan B' seemed to have worked as he contested the polls from two constituencies and won from Kerala's Wayanad, ensuring that his stint in Parliament continued. Some of the earlier electoral gambles of Gandhi such as pitching the 2019 polls campaign of the Congress on the Rafale issue have not paid off but Gandhi has always stuck to his convictions and maintained his attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, including on the Adani issue. He has been at the receiving end of criticism from various quarters and often been dubbed a "reluctant politician" or "part-time politician", but he has remained unfazed by such criticism.

At a press briefing in Ghaziabad a couple of weeks ago, Gandhi had taken a swipe at the media for dubbing him a "non-serious" politician. He had cited his involvement with the MGNREGA scheme, the Land Acquisition Bill, the Bhatta Parsaul movement, Niyamgiri Hills matter, and had said for the media all this was "non-serious while talking about Amitabh Bachchan, Aishwarya Rai and Virat Kohli was serious".

In 2004, Gandhi announced his entry into Indian politics, contesting his first election from Amethi, the same seat that was represented by his mother Sonia Gandhi (1999-2004) and his late father Rajiv Gandhi between 1981-91. Rahul Gandhi won by an overwhelming margin of almost three lakh votes. He again won in 2009 but his margin was reduced in 2014 and was defeated by Irani in 2019. He had been criticised for not spending enough time in the constituency, allowing the BJP to make inroads into the Congress fortress.

Gandhi was appointed vice president of the Congress in 2013 and took over the reins of the party on December 16, 2017. He stepped down as its president in May 2019 after the drubbing in the Lok Sabha polls.

Since then, he has taken out to yatra -- a cross country Kanyakumari to Kashmir march on foot and a hybrid Manipur to Mumbai yatra, initiatives which were hailed by Congress leaders for galvanising cadres and enthusing supporters. Gandhi had recently said it is now his life mission to ensure justice for the SCs, STs, OBCs and the deprived people.

He has pitched the Congress campaign for the 2024 Lok Sabha on five Nyays -- Yuva Nyay, Nari Nyay, Kisan Nyay, Shramik Nyay and Hissedari Nyay. Born on June 19, 1970 to Rajiv and Sonia Gandhi, he is the elder of the two siblings and spent his formative years in New Delhi, studying at St. Columba's School and then went on to study at the Doon School in Dehradun. His father Rajiv Gandhi then entered politics and became prime minister after the assassination of Rahul's grandmother and then prime minister Indira Gandhi.

Due to constant security threats, Rahul and his sister Priyanka were home-schooled. (PTI)

LS polls fight to save

said she is happy to have joined the grand old party and is grateful to party leaders for the respect and responsibilities given to her. "I left the BJP during the CAA protests. Our constitution and democracy are in crisis, corruption is high and electoral bonds are an example of the height of corruption. In such a situation those who have left the Congress are extremely greedy people but I am not so," she said. She claimed as a Congress member she is working for the people and is confident of winning the elections, following which 'I will try my best to solve the problems of Guwahati and also raise the issues of the state in Parliament'.

Goswami, who is also the President of the Assam Pradesh Mahila Congress, alleged the ruling BJP is using women as a vote bank. "The BJP government has instilled fear in women that if they do not vote for BJP or attend election meetings, their names will be deleted from schemes," she alleged. Women, on one hand, are running after the Rs 1250 being doled out under the 'Orunodoi' scheme while on the other they are facing the impact of price rise and finding it extremely difficult to make ends meet, Goswami claimed. "They are aware the amount they are receiving under Orunodoi is not enough but still they are running after it since prices of all essential commodities have gone up," she added. Half the population in the state is women with the Congress giving tickets to two but the BJP passed the Women Reservation Bill in Parliament and gave ticket to only one in the North East, Goswami said. "I am committed to helping women participate in the decision-making process and will work for their economic safeguard and security," she added. Goswami, who is locked in a direct contest with another woman candidate Bijuli Kalita Medhi of the BJP, said though Guwahati is not a seat reserved for women, since 2009 it has been represented by them and in the last two Lok Sabha elections the fight was also between women.

"For the last 20 years, the seat has been held by the BJP. The earlier BJP MP had made some contribution towards the constituency but the sitting MP did nothing, except for laying foundation stones and had no connection with the people," Goswami said. (PTI)

Lack of opposition unity

more challenging for the opposition, especially the CPI(M), Talukdar said: "CPI(M) had opposed the latest delimitation from the beginning. BJP's agenda was to execute delimitation by dividing the constituencies communally. "We are approaching minorities and majorities both with real issues. That is the real strength and it gives us acceptance. We are being received very well here. Our approach is secular and so getting support from both sides."

From Barpeta, three Muslim majority assembly seats have been added to Dhubri Lok Sabha constituency, while three other Hindu-dominated assembly segments have been included in Barpeta, he added.

There are nearly 19.8 lakh voters in Barpeta, a religiously and linguistically sensitive place, and around seven lakh of them are Muslim electors.

On AGP's Choudhury, who is the longest-serving MLA of Assam for eight consecutive terms since 1985, Talukdar said: "It is a myth that he has a huge support base. He has influence in only two constituencies -- Bongaigaon and Abhayapuri, where Koch-Rajbongshi community is the dominant factor."

"As he is from that community, he has the support in that area. I don't consider him as a big leader. He won eight times by indulging in community-based politics. His leadership quality is not very appreciable. I have spent three years with him in Assembly and he has not spoken even three sentences in this period," the CPI(M) candidate said. AGP's support base in other areas have declined in the last few years and it has almost vanished in some locations, he claimed. "While going to different areas, we have seen that their influence on Assamese-speaking people has nosedived. AGP's strength was regionalism, but it turned into a nationalist party in 2001 after joining hands with BJP," the CPI(M) leader said. (PTI)

HIRING OF VEHICLE
Tender Notice No.: LMG/Engg/66 of 2024, dttd. 01-05-2024. E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work:
SN-1; Brief Description of Item: Hiring of (05) Five (5) light motor vehicle (Mahindra XUV500/Toyota Innova/Marinda/Scorpio or similar) for the used inspection by DENI/Lumding, ADENI/Lumding, ADENI/II/Lumding, ADENI/Halong (HGS), ADENI/Jagirao for a period of 2 (Two) years.
Tender Value: ₹ 68,64,500/-; Earnest Money: ₹ 1,33,300/-; Date & time of closing of above tender at 15:00 hrs. and opening at 15:30 hrs. on 24-05-2024. The complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available upto 15:00 hrs. of 24-05-2024 in website http://www.GeM.gov.in.
DRM (W), Lumding
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers With A Smile

BPF intensifies campaigns in Gossaigaon

HT Correspondent
GOSSAIGAON, May 3: With the third phase of the Lok Sabha elections drawing closer the Bodoland Peoples' Front (BPF) has intensified its campaigns in every nook and corner of the Bodoland Territorial Region in a bid to woo voters.

The BPF are conducting several campaigning activities in the hope of garnering support for its candidate, who is contesting from the Kokrajhar Lok Sabha seat. The party took out an election rally and a joining programme at the Raimona Community Hall in Saraibil under Gossaigaon sub-division.

Former public health engineering minister, Rihon Daimary while campaigning for its candidate Khampa Borgoyari, stated that though BJP claimed to be the mastermind behind restoring peace, harmony and overall devel-

opment in BTC but in reality, it was made possible only under the noble leadership of Hangrama Mahilary and no one could deny it.

"Prior to 2003 the atmosphere in the Bodoland Territorial Region was a disturbed one. After the BPF government came into power, the region witnessed rapid development. Violence also decreased to a great extent," said Rihon Daimary.

"We have been visiting various villages to campaign for our candidate and we saw that our condition is good. The general voters as well as organisations have extended full support to BPF," Daimary said.

Taking a dig at Bodoland Territorial Council's chief executive member, Promod Boro, Daimary said that no development was seen after the formation of the UPPL government in BTC. The develop-

ment which people witnessed was BPF government's contribution.

"The Promod Boro led UPPL has nothing to do except repairing the broken one and taking credit. Besides, whatever the schemes the UPPL government announces for the general public, only its party workers reap their benefits, while the actual needy have no access to them," said Daimary.

Referring to the UPPL party's manifesto, Daimary said that party's manifesto states that 10 colleges have been provincialised, but everyone is aware that provincialisation of most of its colleges has been cancelled by the Assam government and in such cases.

Rihon Daimary, in his speech appealed to the common people to vote in favour of BPF candidate Borgoyari. Hundreds of men and women, including UPPL workers joined the BPF party at the joining ceremony.

CM Himanta Biswa Sarma attends road show in Kokrajhar



HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, May 3: Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday campaigned in support of NDA alliance candidate for Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency, Joyanta Basumatary and participated in a road show in Kokrajhar.

Sarma participated in the election campaigns at Ulubari, Bijni of Chirang, Kaliphukri in Kokrajhar district amidst a huge crowd of people. He highlighted the welfare and developmental activities initiated by government of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) and state govern-

ment under the leadership of NDA alliance in the state.

Sarma also participated in a road show, which was organised in support of Basumatary this evening. The road show, which began from the Government HS and MP School playground in Kokrajhar moved

along Vivekananda Path, Shantinagar and concluded at the DNH Himatsingka High School playground.

Hundreds of people participated in the road show. State cabinet ministers Ashok Singhal and Urkhao Gwra Brahma, Pramod Boro, the chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region and several leaders representing NDA alliance partners were present on the occasion.

CM Sarma said, "Our NDA backed candidate for Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency, Joyanta Basumatary will win the Lok Sabha polls as peoples from all corners are coming forward to extend their support to him. He will win the Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency with a margin of 3 lakh votes."

He said that the NDA alliance government in the state of Assam and BTR government is committed to work for all round development of the citizens and rendered massive services towards the welfare of the common masses.

CEM of BTR, Pramod Boro said that peoples in Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency are waiting to vote in favour of NDA alliance candidate during the third phase of the Lok Sabha elections, scheduled to be held on May 7.

Relentless rain paralyzes Dima Hasao, train services disrupted, educational institutions closed till May 4

HT Correspondent
HAFLONG, May 3: The incessant rainfall over the past few days has wreaked havoc, affecting normal life in Haflong and surrounding areas of the Dima Hasao district.

Communication links between Barak Valley, other states and within Dima Hasao have been severed, amplifying the impact of the deluge.

Severe disruptions have been witnessed in train services along the hill section, particularly between Lumding and Silchar, due to landslides.

The sinking of the earth below railway tracks between New Jainga Lamppur-Harangajao and Badarpur has exacerbated the situation.

Reports indicate water logging, muddy deposits, and submerged tunnels, leading to an indefinite suspension of train operations on this route.

On the other hand, an accident near Ditekchera, under Harangajao Police Station, claimed the life of one passenger, Debraj Deb Barman and left six others severely injured.

30 passengers with minor injuries were admitted to the Silchar Medical College Hospital. Sources said that the accident involved a bus, bearing the registration number 'AS01NC0243', which was on its way to Guwahati from Agartala.

The vehicle reportedly fell into a ditch after the driver had lost control.

In addition to transportation woes, heavy rains have disrupted electricity supply in Dima Hasao district, with a few electric poles collapsing in Maibang,

leading to power outages in the sub-division.

Damage to public health infrastructure, particularly pipelines in the Convent Road area of Haflong town, has been reported.

Flash floods were reported at Ramnagar in Haflong with the waters of the Boro lake overflowing its banks.

Several houses and approach roads in Haflong and various parts of Dima Hasao district have been damaged due to the heavy rain, leading to mudslides.

The Dima Hasao district administration has issued a notification restricting public transport movement on National Highway 27 from Haflong to Silchar due to flooding and mudslides between Jatinga and Harangajao.

All educational institutions in Dima Hasao district will remain closed till May 4 and residents have been advised against unnecessary travel for the next three days. Restoration efforts are underway, with the administration and railway authorities working tirelessly to repair the damage.

However, the restoration of train services may take several hours to days, depending on weather conditions and the extent of the damage.

Despite temporary blockades due to minor landslides, roads such as the Haflong-Lanka road and the Haflong-Lumding road remained open, providing some relief amidst the ongoing crisis.

As the situation unfolds, communities in Haflong and Dima Hasao district brace for further challenges posed by the relentless rains.

5th Birboidima Tribal Cultural Conference to be held on May 9

HT Correspondent
HOWRAGHAT, May 3: The Bakaliaghat Udali Birboidima Tribal Cultural Conference will hold its 5th annual conference on May 9 with a three-day programme at 1 Udali Yuva Sangha compound.

The cultural conference aimed at fostering brotherhood, unity, peace and progress said Birboidima Cultural Conference secretary, Thanuram Nath.

On the first day of the conference the Birboidima Tribal Cultural Conference will be hoisted by its president, Bhadreswar Hazarika. Bodo, Karbi, Dimasa and Assamese flags will be hosted by Hari Narzari, Kamsing Hanse, Jatim Phonglosa and Prasen Rajbongshi respectively.

Later, tributes will be paid to the deceased members of the organisation. Birboidima Tribal Cultural Conference's president Bhadreswar Hazarika will lead the open session. The meeting will be inaugurated by the Premananda Mosahari, recipient of the Sahitya Akademi.

The main Speaker will be writer Saidul Islam. The souvenir will be inaugurated by teacher Sahinul Sultan.

The chief executive member of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, Tuliram Ronghang is expected to attend as the chief guest and the guest of honour will be Diphu MLA, Bidya Sing Englang.

Tezpur University celebrates 'World Press Freedom Day'



HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, May 3: Vice-chancellor of the Tezpur University, Shambhu Nath Singh on Friday said that freedom without a free press is no freedom.

He said this while inaugurating the 'World Press Freedom Day' organised by the department of mass communication and journalism of the Tezpur University on Friday.

"Freedom without a free press is no freedom. It may appear to be free, but it's a curtailed freedom. Development and press freedom are intricately linked, forming the backbone of democratic societies," said Shambhu Nath Singh while citing examples of Scandinavian countries, which are doing well in the press freedom index and development.

To celebrate the day with the theme of 'A Press for the Planet: Journalism in the Face of the Environmental Crisis', the department invited journalists to share their experience through a panel discussion on the topic 'Press Freedom and Regional Media.'

Speaking on the occasion, dean of Humanities and Social Sciences, Farheena Danta urged the journalists to provide informed news with substance. She urged them to do research to bring out a different perspective of an issue.

While delivering the welcome address, Abhijit Bora, head of the department said that journalists encounter significant challenges in seeking and disseminating information on contemporary issues. Therefore, it is important for students of media to know the various challenges faced by them.

Among the panellists Pranjit Hazarika, editor of Ganakantha, Sanjeev Hazarika, president of Sonitpur Journalists' Union, Pranab Kumar Das, senior correspondent of ETV Bharat, Pulak Kumar Deka, bureau chief of News Live, Raj Kumar Mahanta, senior correspondent of Asomiya Pratidin and Ankit Gogoi, Sonitpur district information and public relations officer took part in the discussion.

A book titled 'The Art and Craft of Journalism', authored by Joya Chakraborty, Anjuman Borah, Mukitkam Hazarika and Tinam Bora of the mass communication and journalism department was released during the event. The students of the department also performed a skit on the theme of the event.

27th Sivasagar Sanmilita Rongali Bihu Sanmilian begins



HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, May 3: The 27th Sivasagar Sammilit Rongali Bihu Sammelan began at the Boarding Field in Sivasagar on Friday.

The programme commenced with a felicitation programme of 27 elderly persons of repute after a ceremonial hoisting of the 'Bihuan' by celebration committee president, Prabuddha Pd Chetia and 'Smriti Tarpan' by executive president, Buddheshwar Chutia.

Debajyoti Gogoi inaugurated the Hussori competition, where students from 20 schools will be participating. The programme also included a quiz competition on the folk culture of the state, drawing competition, competition on Mou-Kuwari, Saru Bihuwati, Bar Bihuwati and Jeng Bihu competition. Cash prize worth Rs. 3,50,000 will be distributed among winners of the various competitions.

The award giving ceremony, which will be held on May 5, will be attended by Sivasagar district commissioner Aditya Bikram Yadav as the chief guest and Sivasagar superintendent of police, Shubrajyoti Bora and ONGC Assam's Asset executive director Rajesh Tiwari as the distinguished guests. The souvenir, Barhamhuri will also be released.

Jayant Barua, editor of the Asomiya Pratidin will inaugurate the cultural programme in the evening. Pride of Assam Ranjit Gogoi and his team will perform Hussori and popular singer Jitil Sonwal will be the chief attraction of the cultural extravaganza.

CSIR-NEIST to celebrate National Intellectual Property Festival on May 6

HT Correspondent
JORHAT, May 3: The CSIR-North East Institute of Science and Technology (NEIST) will be celebrating the Rashtriya Boudhik Sampada Mahotsav or the National Intellectual Property Festival on May 6 at its premise in Jorhat.

The celebrations will begin with a special function at Dr J N Baruah auditorium wherein Nishad A Deshpande, principal scientist of CSIR-Unit of Research & Development of Information Products, will deliver a technical lecture on 'Patentability Criteria and Basic Requirements'. Further, a hands-on practical session on patentability analysis, patent search and white space analysis will be held for the benefit of CSIR-NEIST scientific fraternity.

Launched in July 2023 as a part of the celebrations of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav (AKAM) by DSIR along with Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), the main objective of Rashtriya Boudhik Sampada Mahotsav/National Intellectual Property Festival was to spread awareness about generation and protection of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) such as patents, copyrights, trademarks, geographical indications, designs, semi-conductor layout designs and plant varieties across the country. CSIR being a partner of the National Intellectual Property Festival has decided to celebrate the occasion every year across all CSIR institutes.

Tiwa writer advocates equality of women

HT Correspondent
MORIGAON, May 3: Noted Tiwa writer Mileswar Patar advocated need for equality of women in the society. The writer said this while inaugurating a seminar on 'Feminism in Assamese Literature' held as part of the annual conference of the Morigaon District Literary Body at Kushtoli Ras Mandir on Thursday. 'The women also desire to have equal rights as men. There is no reason to look at women separately. Women also have the right to lead a good dignified life just as men,' said Mileswar Patar. The two-day long annual conference began on May 1 and concluded on Thursday. It was organized by the Morigaon District Literary body in cooperation with the Kushtoli Sakha Literary Body. A cultural rally was also taken out across the Kushtoli Bazar on the occasion. Former president of Morigaon Literary Body, Bubumoni Goswami inaugurated the cultural rally. Thereafter a discussion on 'Feminism in Assamese Literature' was held under the aegis of Akash, a sub-committee of the Morigaon District Literary body led by its president Archana Sarma, which was inaugurated by the advisor of the sub-committee, Bani Barua.

Orang FD flags community role in protecting wandering animals

Children educated on characteristics of habitats of various animals, bird species during programme



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 3: The field director (FD) of the Orang National Park and Tiger Reserve, Pradipta Baruah has highlighted the important role of the people in protecting animals that occasionally stray out of the protected areas like the national park.

The field director interacted with a group of school children, who were taken on a jeep safari inside the Orang National Park as part of the 'Friends of Rhino' programme of Aaranyak in collaboration with the park authority with support from Zoo Berlin.

The field director apprised the

group of 30 school students about the rich biodiversity and importance of the national park and their responsibility towards conservation of biodiversity and nature. Accompanying the group of school children during the park safari, Aaranyak's senior official Arif Hussain apprised them about

the characteristics of habitats of various animals and bird species including the one-horned rhinos.

The students during their maiden visit inside the national park and tiger reserve were enchanted at the sights of rhinos, elephants, Asiatic buffaloes, a large number of deer, wild boar, monkeys, numerous birds, snakes, various orchids, wetlands and water bodies, rich grassland inside the park.

The students from Luit Jatiya Vidyalaya, Sengelimari and Bidyasagar Jatiya Vidyalaya, Rourmari participated in the Friends of Rhino programme along with their teachers in-charge. The programme aims to instil a sense of responsibility and motivation among young minds in the society towards conservation of the precious one-horned rhinos and its habitat.

Field officials of the Orang National Park, local EDC officials and members and local environment enthusiasts also participated in the programme to encourage and motivate the students to acquire a penchant for nature conservation.

NFR GM inspects North Lakhimpur - Dibrugarh section

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 3: Chetan Kumar Shrivastava, general manager of the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) on Friday conducted a thorough inspection of the North Lakhimpur - Dibrugarh (via Kamakhya) section under Tinsukia division. S

Uttam Prakash, divisional railway manager of Tinsukia with senior officials of the headquarter and division accompanied the general manager during the inspection. He took stock of all the developmental works, electrification in various stations in upper Assam.

He also interacted with the railway officials and inspected the safety related gears at the railway stations. Further, he counselled the railway staff at different levels for better performance in the fields of safety, security and passenger convenience.

During the inspection, the general manager inspected the plans of a new station building, crew lobby, foot over bridge, platform and other passenger amenities works at North Lakhimpur, Bordoloni, Dhemaji,

Tangani, Dhamalgaon and Dibrugarh stations. He conducted window trailing inspection from Dhemaji to Bogibeel Bridge North Block Hut and Bogibeel Bridge North Block Hut to Tangani. He inspected crucial areas such as the level crossing gates, marshalling yards, coaching yards, minor and major bridges, running room and health unit.

He also conducted a thorough inspection of the ongoing activities and examined the developmental plans for these sections. He also inspected the ongoing station redevelopment activities under Amrit Bharat Stations Scheme for providing better, additional and enhanced passenger amenities.

Later, Shrivastava held interactions with representative of unions and members of Divisional Railway Users' Consultative Committee and discuss plans for infrastructural development and business expansion in the area. His assessment of the ongoing works reflects the dedication and efforts of NFR in commitment towards providing safe, efficient and comfortable travel experiences for passengers.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body.
—Joseph Addison

MSP guarantee: Crucial poll issue

In the bustling arena of Indian politics, where myriad issues vie for attention, one has emerged as a potent force in shaping the discourse of the 2024 elections: Minimum Support Price (MSP) for farmers. This age-old concern has transcended mere policy debates to become a pivotal factor influencing electoral outcomes, particularly in states like Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, and Haryana, where agriculture forms the bedrock of the economy. At the heart of the matter lies the plight of the farming community, a diverse tapestry ranging from prosperous landowners to distressed cultivators grappling with debt and drought. The concept of MSP, enshrined in government policy, aims to provide a safety net for farmers by ensuring a minimum price for their produce, thereby shielding them from market volatility and exploitation. However, its implementation and efficacy have come under intense scrutiny, especially in the run-up to elections. The Congress, positioning itself as the custodian of farmers' rights, has spearheaded the call for a legally guaranteed MSP, drawing upon the legacy of the National Food Security Act of 2013 and the establishment of the National Commission on Farmers. With a history of championing agrarian causes, the party advocates for a robust MSP regime as a cornerstone of agricultural policy, tapping into the deep-rooted sentiment of rural India.

In contrast, the BJP-led NDA coalition treads a delicate tightrope between appeasing farmers and upholding pro-business principles. While the government has made gestures towards MSP by offering support for certain crops, criticism has mounted over its insistence on crop diversification as a precondition—a move perceived as a half-hearted attempt to placate farmers before elections. The crux of the matter lies in striking a balance between market dynamics and farmers' welfare. Critics argue that conditional support falls short of addressing systemic issues plaguing agriculture, such as price manipulation and the pervasive influence of middlemen. The nexus between these intermediaries and market administrators exacerbates the challenges faced by farmers, thwarting their quest for fair remuneration and economic stability. Amidst the clamour for MSP guarantee, questions loom large over the feasibility and effectiveness of a comprehensive legal framework. Sceptics warn of the fiscal burden and administrative hurdles, casting doubts on the credibility of such a system. Yet, proponents point to the modest allocation of MSP within the Union budget and underscore the urgent need for agrarian reforms to tackle entrenched issues in agricultural marketing. The MSP issue, therefore, transcends mere political rhetoric, demanding a collaborative effort from all electoral contestants. Beyond partisan agendas, it represents a litmus test for safeguarding the interests of millions of farmers who form the backbone of the Indian economy.

The MSP guarantee has emerged as a defining issue in the 2024 polls, reflecting the deep-seated anxieties and aspirations of India's rural populace. Its resolution hinges not only on political posturing but on tangible policy reforms that prioritize the welfare of farmers. As the nation gears up to exercise its democratic mandate, the fate of the farming community hangs in the balance, underscoring the imperative for decisive action and inclusive dialogue.

Reports from Australia indicate activities of Indian spies in that country

By: Girish Linganna

After official comments made by the US and Canada officials, reports have come from Australian sources about activities of Indian spies in that country. According to a report by ABC News Australia, Australian authorities expelled Indian operatives who were caught trying to obtain classified information on critical defense projects, airport security, and Australia's trade relationships.

The foreign "nest of spies" uncovered by the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) in 2020 was alleged to have been monitoring Indian residents in Australia and building relationships with current and former politicians.

According to ABC News, in his 2021 annual threat assessment, ASIO Director-General Mike Burgess hinted at the existence of a "spy ring" without naming the country involved, stating that revealing this information would be an "unnecessary distraction".

Burgess mentioned in his March 2021 speech at ASIO's Canberra headquarters that the spies had established specific connections with present and past politicians, a foreign embassy, and a state police service.

They watched their country's community abroad and tried to get classified information about Australia's trade relationships. They requested a government employee to share details about security procedures at a significant airport.

Burgess also explained how the "Nest of spies" had effectively developed a relationship with and enlisted an Australian government employee with security clearance, who had access to "confidential information on defense technology."

National security and government sources have told ABC that India's foreign intelligence service was behind the "nest of spies." Following this discovery, the Morrison government expelled several Indian officials from Australia.

This week, The Washington Post reported that in 2020, two members of India's intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), were expelled from Australia after a counter-intelligence operation by ASIO.

New details have surfaced about New Delhi's secret activities in Australia, raising concerns

among Western allies about the actions of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government. This government faces accusations of involvement in an assassination in Canada last September.

During a November interview with ABC in the United States, Burgess did not comment on whether the foreign operations of the Indian government had raised any concerns for ASIO in Australia.

In an interview with ABC, Burgess stated, "I don't discuss the actions of any government. You shouldn't infer anything from that. However, I can assure you that if we identify any acts of foreign interference or plots, we will address them."

When questioned further about his involvement in the expulsion of Indian personnel from Australia, the ASIO director-general once again chose not to comment. "We don't discuss specific operational details, but occasionally, ASIO identifies undeclared intelligence officers operating within our borders. Through our efforts or with government assistance, these individuals often leave the country after being exposed," explained the official.

India, a member of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue alongside the United States, Japan, and Australia, plays a key role as a defense partner in the Indo-Pacific amid growing concerns over China's military expansion.

In 2022, during his Annual Threat Assessment, Burgess pointed out that even countries viewed as allies attempt espionage activities against Australia. He mentioned, "Multiple countries are trying to spy on us, and it's not just the ones traditionally seen as adversaries."

"Sometimes, espionage is carried out by nations we regard as friends—friends who are assertive and have intense intelligence needs." Government sources informed ABC that nations like Singapore, South Korea, Israel, and India are notably active in conducting espionage operations in Australia.

At the 2024 Annual Threat Assessment held at ASIO headquarters, senior diplomats and ambassadors from Singapore, South Korea, Israel, and India were among the invited guests who attended Burgess's speech. ABC reached out to the Indian High Commission and ASIO for comments, but both declined to answer specific questions regarding the "nest of spies" operation. (IPA Service)

Transforming India: The semicon ecosystem revolution

As technology permeates every aspect of our daily lives, semiconductors have emerged as the indispensable backbone of modern society. These minuscule marvels drive our gadgets, power our communication networks, and propel advancements in fields ranging from agriculture to healthcare and transportation. India, cognizant of the vast socio-economic opportunities and strategic significance inherent in this technological evolution, is spearheading the establishment of a resilient semiconductor ecosystem and nurturing a skilled workforce to fuel its growth.

India's ambition to achieve self-reliance and assert global leadership in the semiconductor domain receives substantial backing from projections indicating the creation of more than a million job openings. These opportunities span across diverse roles such as semiconductor design and manufacturing engineers, R&D scientists, operators, technicians, and skilled workers involved in chip design, semiconductor fabrication, packaging, and sales facilities. Over the forthcoming five years, this burgeoning industry promises to significantly contribute to employment growth and economic advancement in India. In the final quarter of last year, approximately 30% of the new global capability centers established in India were focused on the semiconductor sector, showcasing a burgeoning interest in harnessing local talent for activities like front-end design, performance testing, and post-silicon validation. This insight comes from the latest report by the National Association of Software and Service Companies (Nasscom) and Zinnov.

Notably, major players in chip design, such as Intel, Texas Instruments, AMD, Nvidia, and Qualcomm, have set up design and R&D hubs in India. AMD, for instance, recently inaugurated its largest global design center in Bengaluru, underscoring India's significance as a hub for semiconductor innovation and development. During March, a significant event titled 'India's Techade: Chips for Viksit Bharat' marked the laying of the foundation stone for three semiconductor projects valued at ₹ 1.25 lakh crore.

Tata Electronics, in collaboration with Taiwan's Power Chip Semiconductor Manufacturing Corporation (PSMC), is pioneering India's semiconductor industry with two groundbreaking projects. The first, a semiconductor fab plant in Dholera (Gujarat), entails an investment of ₹ 91,000 crore, while the second plant in Morigaon (Assam) involves an investment of ₹ 27,000 crore. These ventures are poised to commence chip production in 2026.

Meanwhile, Micron India, a US-based semiconductor giant, is set to inaugurate its plant in Sanand (Gujarat) with an investment of ₹ 22,500 crore, marking a significant milestone in India's quest for "Made in India" memory chips, expected by December. Additionally, Semiconductor Corporation of India (SCL) is embarking on a comprehensive expansion project at its Mohali facility with an investment of ₹ 20,000 crore, aimed at bolstering contributions to ISRO and global space research endeavors, including the upcoming Chandrayaan-3 mission.

Despite the promising growth of India's semiconductor chip ecosystem, the nation still grapples with a staggering 95% import dependency on major players like the US, Taiwan, China, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, and South Korea. In a bid to mitigate import reliance, India has taken decisive steps to bolster its domestic semiconductor industry. The unveiling of the India Semiconductor Mission (ISM) underscores this strategic endeavor, offering substantial support including 50% capital expenditure assistance to new entrants, along with production-linked incentive (PLI) and design-linked incentive (DLI) schemes, totaling an outlay of ₹ 76,000 crore. Complemented by state government incentives, international partnerships, and a concerted focus on talent development, these initiatives signal a concerted effort towards self-sufficiency.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology has laid out plans to train more than 85,000 engineers in chip design over the next five years, addressing critical skill gaps and nurturing a robust ecosystem poised for self-reliance.

As the geopolitical landscape undergoes shifts due to the China-US trade tensions, companies are increasingly exploring alternative production and sourcing options beyond China. In response to this industry migration, India and several Southeast Asian countries including Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, and Indonesia emerge as favored destinations for future front-end manufacturing activities.

India's integration into this evolving ecosystem comes at a pivotal moment, offering strategic diversification of the global supply chain. This positioning not only establishes India as a prominent hub for semiconductor design, manufacturing, and technology development but also promises to catalyze the creation of employment opportunities for the nation's burgeoning youth population.

Bengaluru and Hyderabad emerge as the primary hosts for India's semiconductor global capability centers (GCCs), collectively accommodating over two-thirds of the country's total 55 semiconductor GCCs. This concentration underscores India's significant dedication to fostering the semiconductor industry. With a robust infrastructure comprising more than 95 GCC units and a specialized workforce numbering 50,000, India showcases its strong commitment to semiconductor excellence.

Presently valued at approximately \$15 billion, India's semiconductor market is poised for remarkable growth, projected to soar to \$55 billion by 2026. Key sectors such as smartphones and wearables, automotive components, computers, and data storage collectively dominate more than 60% of this burgeoning market.

Navigating the intricacies of semiconductor manufacturing demands unparalleled precision, operating at the smallest scales imaginable. Given the interconnected nature of the global chip industry, Indian firms must forge strategic collaborations with nations like Taiwan and South Korea. These partnerships are essential for accessing cutting-edge technologies that empower them to meet the evolving demands of emerging applications. From autonomous machines to smart

devices, futuristic 6G communications, and AI-driven electronics, leveraging advanced technologies is paramount to sustaining innovation and competitiveness in the semiconductor landscape.

Addressing the skill gap is imperative for India, particularly in the realm of advanced chip design and fabrication. Despite the global semiconductor manufacturing industry boasting a talent pool of 2.3 million professionals, Indian expertise accounts for nearly 25% of senior talent within this domain. Closing this gap is essential for India to fortify its position as a key player in the semiconductor arena.

In a bid to allure and retain top talent, Indian firms are organizing roadshows in Hsinchu, Taiwan's chip manufacturing hub. According to Communications and IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, a noticeable trend is emerging: engineers returning to India from the US tend to be younger, whereas those from Taiwan, Singapore, and Malaysia are typically older, with extensive experience, often surpassing 45 years of age.

Anticipating their participation in India's burgeoning high-tech manufacturing revolution, these efforts aim to tap into the expertise and experience of seasoned professionals from across the globe. Looking ahead, the semiconductor industry in India is poised for a remarkable journey filled with promise. Its trajectory will be pivotal in sculpting the nation's advanced technological landscape, fostering economic expansion, and solidifying India's standing as a beacon of innovation on the global stage. Furthermore, this industry holds the potential to create pathways for aspiring entrants and Indian talent currently engaged in the sector worldwide, with many harboring a desire to reconnect with their roots.

India's aspiration to achieve self-sufficiency and assert prominence in the semiconductor realm is evident. Backed by a robust talent pool, abundant resources, and well-developed infrastructure, India is primed to make substantial advancements in the semiconductor domain, charting a course towards global leadership in the foreseeable future. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmigpltd@gmail.com)

Is there voter turnout manipulation in Lok Sabha election 2024?

By: Dr. Gyan Pathak

Releasing the final voter turnout on April 30, 2024 by the Election Commission of India after a delay of 11 days from the first phase of election held on April 19, and after 4 days delay from the second phase of election held on April 26 has given rise to a suspicion of voter turnout manipulation. Lack of transparency at several stages in the election machinery has been alleged, which can't be ignored, especially when a research paper of August 2023 had found evidence of voter turnout manipulation in the Lok Sabha election 2019.

Before going into details, it should be recalled that under the subtitle "Turnout Manipulation: EVM Turnout Data Discrepancy" the paper titled "Democratic Backsliding in the World's Largest Democracy", the author Sabyasachi Das, an Assistant Professor of Economics in Ashoka University had found some evidence of voter turnout data manipulation in the 2019 Lok Sabha election data.

It was written in paper that it analyzed the turnout figures for 373 constituencies out of 543 in the country. In 64 per cent of the parliamentary constituencies the turnout was revised up, and in the rest of the cases, that is, in 36 per cent of parliamentary constituencies it was revised down. The paper computed the absolute difference in vote tallies between the two reports (the initial and the final) and found the median difference 358, the 90th and 95th percentile difference 3302 and 7357, respectively.

The largest mismatch was 57,747 votes in the Gautam Buddha Nagar constituency in Uttar Pradesh. If the mismatch occurred due to some administrative errors or glitches in the EVM, then "large" discrepancies were expected to be randomly spread across parliamentary constituencies with different BJP Win margins.

The paper had found that the parliamentary constituencies that BJP barely won have 26 percentage point larger likelihood of having a "large" mismatch than parliamentary constituencies that the BJP barely lost. The result implied that the sample of closely contested constituencies that were disproportionately won by BJP also has a disproportionately higher likelihood of "large" turnout revision. The result was consistent with the manipulation hypothesis even as demonstrated in McCrary test.

It was also pointed out in the paper that there was discontinuity in turnout difference, and said that the turnout data discrepancy went up in parliamentary constituencies barely won by the BJP. The paper suggested turnout manipulation not at the Election Commission of India level

but at the local level, at the polling stations, could be either at the time of voting or counting. The paper also said that it was at least partly facilitated by weaker monitoring also during counting.

Several opposition leaders at the time of publication of the research work had asked the Election Commission of India (ECI) if they have some answer to such observation, but the ECI is yet to come out with an answer to the voter turnout data discrepancy suggesting manipulation—perhaps they don't have an answer or they deliberately not answering it for the reason best known to them only. They don't even have stated any reason for not answering this question of voter turnout manipulation.

Since EVM is a machine, the data of number of votes polled should be known with a push of button, within seconds, and that too with accuracy, and without any discrepancy. If these electronic voting machines can't do even this, a question of reliability comes into being. Moreover, if we need manual intervention to know the "real data" of voter turnout after a great delay of 11 days or 4 days, it is quite unacceptable.

Manual intervention is suggested in getting real voter turnout data. It must be read with the recent Supreme Court observation that EVMs are perfect unless there is manual intervention.

Now come to the data differences, about which Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Derek O'Brien has pointed out. He said that there was a 5 per cent jump in the numbers released on Tuesday (April 30) compared to figures shared earlier after the completion of second phase of voting on April 26. He asked, "Is it normal? What am I missing here?"

It should be noted that after the voting concluded on the 102 seats in the first phase, and 88 seats in the second phase, the ECI has said that "approximate trend" for the first phase was 60 per cent, and for the second phase was 60.96 per cent.

However, the final official figures released revealed that the voter turnout for the first phase was 66.14 per cent and for the second phase, it was 66.71 per cent.

The difference is 6.14 per cent for the first phase data, and 5.75 for the second phase data. Such a difference is unacceptably "large" suggesting something is seriously wrong in the election machinery—presently we don't know where the problem lies from EVM or booth level to the Election Commission level.

An explanation from the ECI is imperative for transparency to rule out any voter turnout manipulation suspi-

cion, as such was found in the research paper that analysed the 2019 Lok Sabha election voter turnout data.

Yogendra Yadav's comment on this huge difference is quite noteworthy who labeled voter turnout figures "unusual and worrying". He said 3 to 5% difference was not abnormal in his experience of 35 years of his watching and studying Indian elections. He has objections on high difference this time, delay, and non-disclosure of the actual number of electorate and votes polled for each constituency and its segments.

"Yes, this information is recorded in Form 17 for each booth and is available with the candidates' agent, but ECI alone can and must give the aggregate data to eliminate any possibility of fudging or discrepancy between votes polled and votes counted," Yadav said.

Voter turnout form this time has also been changed which makes it difficult to compare the data with the earlier election. It does not even give the data on total electors in the constituencies. CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury's concern regarding the absence of absolute voter numbers in each parliamentary constituency therefore can't be ignored. He questioned why this crucial information was not provided?

He said, "percentages are meaningless unless this figure is known" expressing his apprehensions about the potential manipulation of election results, emphasizing that total voter numbers could be altered during the counting process. Here, the research paper mentioned previously should be taken into account which suggested that voter turnout manipulation might have done at the booth level or counting level.

Congress and other opposition parties have also expressed their apprehensions about voter turnout manipulation. Election Commission of India must come out with clarification to restore confidence of the people that there is and there will be no election result manipulation in the Lok Sabha Election 2024. It is all the more important in the backdrop of new law brought by Modi government on appointment of election commissioners is seen as an effort by PM Narendra Modi to tame the Election commission of India under him.

The law had weaned out Chief Justice of India from the appointment committee, and Prime Minister was made all powerful on matter of appointment of election commissioners. Additionally, the two election commissioners have been made constitutionally unprotected from removal, a privilege that Chief Election Commissioner entertains. (IPA Service)

As crypto market rebounds, venture capital funds raising billions

By: Arun Kumar Shrivastava

With the rebound of the cryptocurrency market, there is a notable resurgence in fundraising activities, suggesting growing investor confidence. Paradigm, a prominent player in the crypto-focused venture capital sphere, is reportedly in discussions to secure an investment ranging between \$750 million to \$850 million. This potential funding round, if successful, would mark a significant milestone in the post-crash era, potentially signalling renewed faith in crypto-related ventures. Notably, this follows Paradigm's record-breaking \$2.5 billion fundraising effort in 2021.

The proposed fundraising by Paradigm comes against the backdrop of a challenging period for the crypto investment sector. Since the market downturn of late 2022, venture capital investments in crypto have experienced a notable decline. However, Paradigm's endeavour hints at a potential shift in sentiment, reflecting a renewed appetite for high-risk, high-reward opportunities within the crypto ecosystem. This resurgence in fundraising activities extends beyond Paradigm.

Other entities, such as Galaxy Digital's investment arm and Monad Labs, are also making waves in the fundraising arena.

Galaxy Digital seeks to raise \$100 million to fuel early-stage investments in crypto startups, while Monad Labs recently secured \$225 million in funding, with Paradigm as the lead investor. These developments underscore a broader trend of increased investor interest and capital inflows into crypto-related ventures.

The composition of investors participating in these funding rounds highlights the diverse array of stakeholders engaging with the crypto market. Institutional investors, including Coinbase Ventures and Greenoaks, are joining forces with angel investors, demonstrating a convergence of traditional finance and crypto enthusiasts in supporting innovative blockchain projects.

Additionally, the recent success of Berachain in securing \$100 million in Series B funding, co-led by Framework Ventures and BH Digital, further underscores the resilience of the crypto fundraising ecosystem. Berachain's modular Layer 1 blockchain, coupled with its innovative "proof of liquidity" consensus mechanism, has attracted significant interest from leading investment firms and industry veterans alike.

Despite ongoing market volatility and regulatory uncertainties, the flurry of fundraising activities in the crypto venture

capital space suggests a growing optimism surrounding the long-term potential of blockchain technology and digital assets. Meanwhile, lending platforms leveraging non-fungible tokens (NFTs) as collateral is experiencing substantial growth, a recent CoinGeko Research report said.

In the first quarter of 2024, the NFT lending sector witnessed remarkable activity, with lending volumes totalling a staggering \$2.13 billion. This figure represents a robust 43.6% increase compared to the previous quarter, signalling a burgeoning appetite for NFT-backed lending products among crypto enthusiasts and investors alike.

A closer examination of the data reveals intriguing insights into the market dynamics. January 2024 emerged as a standout month, boasting the highest monthly lending volume of \$0.90 billion. This milestone surpassed the previous record set in June 2023, underscoring the sustained momentum driving growth in the NFT lending space.

The report draws upon comprehensive data from January 2023 to March 2024, sourced from leading NFT lending platforms tracked by Dune Analytics. Among these platforms, Blend, affiliated with the Blur NFT marketplace, stands out as the dominant player, capturing an impressive

92.91% of the market share. Notably, Blend reported a monthly lending volume of \$562.33 million in March 2024, reaffirming its position as a frontrunner in the sector.

In another notable development, Stripe, a leading payment processing platform, has reentered the cryptocurrency market after a six-year hiatus. This decision marks a significant shift in the company's approach to digital assets, signalling a renewed willingness to embrace the potential of crypto payments.

The announcement, made during Stripe's Global Internet Economy conference, unveiled plans to reintroduce cryptocurrency payments, starting with support for USDC stablecoins. This move represents a departure from the company's previous stance, dating back to 2018 when it discontinued Bitcoin support due to concerns surrounding its volatility.

Looking ahead, Stripe's decision to reintegrate crypto payments underscores the potential for digital currencies to play an integral role in shaping the future of finance. As businesses and consumers alike seek alternative payment solutions, the stage is set for continued growth and innovation in the cryptocurrency landscape, with Stripe poised to play a pivotal role in facilitating this transition. (IPA Service)

Creativity and innovation for vibrant career

By: Ranjan K Baruah

We are aware that mere academic qualification is not enough to get placement or decent jobs. There are skills which are important to be employed and sustained in the competitive job market. Two words which are important when it comes to getting a job or to become an entrepreneur or to become successful in life are creativity and innovation. People who are creative and innovative are always ahead of their peers when it comes to careers.

There may be no universal understanding of creativity. The concept is open to interpretation from artistic expression to problem-solving in the context of economic, social and sustainable

development.

Therefore, the United Nations designated 21st April as World Creativity and Innovation Day to raise awareness of the role of creativity and innovation in all aspects of human development.

Creativity and innovation could be seen from different perspectives which includes its connection with self and individual growth and to a bigger term like achieving sustainable development. We shall discuss more on how it helps individuals in shaping their careers and their present and future.

We should know that the creative economy too has no single definition. It is an evolving concept which builds on the interplay between human creativity and ideas and intellectual property, knowledge and technology.

Essentially it is the knowledge-based economic activities upon which the 'creative industries' are based.

Creative industries include audiovisual products, design, new media, performing arts, publishing and visual arts – are a highly transformative sector of the world economy in terms of income generation, job creation and export earnings.

Today, the creative industries are among the most dynamic areas in the world economy providing new opportunities for developing countries to leapfrog into emerging high-growth areas of the world economy.

On World Creativity and Innovation Day, the world is invited to embrace the idea that innovation is essential for harnessing the economic potential

of nations. Innovation, creativity and mass entrepreneurship can provide new momentum towards achieving the Sustainable Goals (SDGs). It can harness economic growth and job creation, while expanding opportunities for everyone, including women and youth.

The Government of Canada's Skills for Success model defines creativity and innovation as "your ability to imagine, develop, express, encourage, and apply ideas in ways that are novel or unexpected, or that challenge existing methods and norms."

Both creativity and innovation can drive change in almost any industry, and they can both enhance our career development. Creativity usually refers to the act of generating new ideas it-

self, regardless of whether those ideas result in measurable outcomes or solutions.

Creative minds are always respected and they always bring positive impacts in the community. Innovations mean something new and out of the box. Innovation and creativity share the common quality of introducing new ways of thinking to a problem or challenge.

When we are creative and innovative we are more confident and that helps us in shaping our future. Creativity and innovation enhances our probability of getting campus placement in the corporate sector ahead of our peers. There are many ways to improve and learn these attributes.

Achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development



and the 17 SDGs - the most ambitious development agenda in human history – requires both creativity and innovation. Green technologies – those used to produce goods and services with smaller carbon footprints – are growing and providing increasing economic opportunities but many developing countries could miss them without decisive action. *(The author is a career mentor and skill trainer and currently Adviser of Skill Employment and Entrepreneurship Department of Bodoland Territorial Council, Kokrajhar and can be reached at 8473943734 or bkranjan@gmail.com)*

SSC CHSL Recruitment 2024 – CHSL Exam, Online Apply For 3712 Posts

Last Date: 07/05/2024

Staff Selection Commission (SSC) has released the official notification of Combined Higher Secondary Level (10+2) Exam 2024 for the recruitment to the 3712 Group C posts in the cadre of Lower Division Clerk/ Junior Secretariat Assistant, Data Entry Operator Grade A and Data Entry Operator (DEO) in various Ministries/ Departments/ Offices of the Government of India and various Constitutional Bodies/ Statutory Bodies/ Tribunals, etc. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online.

Name of exam: Combined Higher Secondary Level Examination, 2024

Name of posts:

Lower Division Clerk(LDC)/ Junior Secretariat Assistant
Data Entry Operator (DEO)
Data Entry Operator, Grade "A"

No of posts: 3712 posts (approx.)

Pay Scale:

Lower Division Clerk(LDC)/ Junior Secretariat Assistant (JSA): Pay Level-2 (₹ 19,900-63,200)
Data Entry Operator (DEO): Pay Level-4 (₹ 25,500-81,100) and Level-5 (₹ 29,200-92,300)
Data Entry Operator, Grade 'A': Pay Level-4 (₹ 25,500-81,100)

Eligibility Criteria of SSC CHSL Recruitment

Age Limit: Candidates age must be between 18 to 27 years as on 01-08-2024 i.e. Candidates born not before 02-08-1997 and not later than 01-08-2006 are eligible to apply.

Age Relaxation: The category-wise age relaxation is as mentioned below

SC/ST: 5 years
OBC: 3 years
PWD: 10 years
PWD (OBC): 13 years
PWD (SC/ST): 15 years
ESM: 3 years

Educational Qualification:

Data Entry Operator (DEO)/ DEO Grade 'A' in Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution and Ministry of Culture: 12th Standard pass in Science stream with Mathematics as a subject from a recognized Board or equivalent.
LDC/JSA and DEO/DEO Grade 'A' (except DEOs in Department/ Ministry mentioned above): Candidates must have passed 12th Standard or equivalent examination from a recognized Board or University.

Application Fee for SSC CHSL Recruitment

SC/ST PWD/ ESM/ Women: Nil
UR/ OBC: ₹ 100
Payment mode: BHIM UPI, Net Banking or by using Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, RuPay Credit or Debit cards or in cash at SBI Branches by generating SBI Challan

Important Dates of SSC CHSL Exam 2024

Starting date of submission of online application: 8th April 2024
Last date of submission of online application: 7th May 2024
Date of Combined Higher Secondary (10+2) Level Examination: June-July 2024

Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti Recruitment 2024 – 1377 Posts, Online Apply

Last Date: 07/05/2024

Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti (NVS) has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 1377 Non Teaching posts in the cadre of Staff Nurse, Officer, Assistant, Stenographer, Computer Operator, MTS and others in Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online.

1. Female Staff Nurse

No of posts: 121

Age Limit: Upto 35 years

Educational Qualification:

B.Sc (Hons.) in Nursing OR Regular course in B.Sc Nursing OR Post Basic B.Sc Nursing.
Registered as a Nurse or Nurse Midwife (RN or RM) with any state nursing council.
2.5 years experience in a minimum 50-bed hospital.

2. Assistant Section Officer

No of posts: 05

Age Limit: Between 23 and 33 years.

Educational Qualification:

Bachelor's Degree from a recognized university.
3 years experience in administrative and financial matters in Central gov't/Autonomous organizations under the Central Govt.

3. Audit Assistant

No of posts: 12

Age Limit: Between 18 and 30 years.

Educational Qualification:

B.Com from a recognized university.
3 years experience in accounts work in Government/Semi-Government/ Autonomous organizations.

4. Junior Translation Officer

No of posts: 04

Age Limit: Not exceeding 32 years.

Educational Qualification:

Master's Degree of a recognized University in Hindi with English as a compulsory or elective subject or as the medium of examination at the Degree level

OR

Master's Degree of a recognized University in English with Hindi as a compulsory or elective subject or as the medium of examination at the Degree level.

OR

Master's Degree of a recognized University in any subject other than Hindi or English, with Hindi medium and English as a compulsory or elective subject or as the medium of examination at the Degree level;

OR

Master's Degree of a recognized University in any subject other than Hindi or English, with English medium and Hindi as a compulsory or elective subject or as the medium of examination at the Degree level;

OR

Master's Degree of a recognized University in any subject other than Hindi or English, with Hindi and English as compulsory or elective subjects or either of the two as a medium of examination and the other as a compulsory or elective subject at Degree level;

Recognized Diploma or certificate course in translation from Hindi to English & vice versa or two years' experience of translation work from Hindi to English and vice versa in Central/State Government offices, including Govt. of India Undertaking.

5. Legal Assistant

No of posts: 01

Age Limit: Between 23 and 35 Years.

Educational Qualification:

Degree in Law from a recognized university.
3 years of experience in handling legal cases in Government Department/ Autonomous Bodies/ PSU.

6. Stenographer

No of posts: 23

Age Limit: Between 18 and 27 years.

Educational Qualification:

12th pass from a recognized board or university.
Skill test norms
Dictation: 10 mts @ 80 w.p.m.
Transcription: 50 mts (Eng.) 65 mts (Hindi) (On computer)

7. Computer Operator

No of posts: 02

Age Limit: Between 18 and 30 years.

Educational Qualification: BCA/B.Sc. (Computer Science /IT) OR BE/B.Tech (Computer Science) from a recognized university.

8. Catering Supervisor

No of posts: 78

Age Limit: Upto 35 years

Educational Qualification: Bachelor's degree in Hotel Management, OR, Trade proficiency certificate in catering with 10 years of service in defence services (for Ex-servicemen only).

9. Junior Secretariat Assistant

No of posts: 360+21

Age Limit: Between 18 to 27 years

Educational Qualification:

12th pass from a recognised board or university & possessing a minimum speed of 30 wpm in English typewriting or 25 wpm in Hindi typewriting.
Passed +2 level of senior secondary from CBSE/State Board with Secretarial practices and office management as vocational subjects.

10. Electrician cum Plumber

No of posts: 128

Age Limit: Between 18 and 40 years

Educational Qualification:

10th pass from a recognized board or university.
ITI certificate in the trade of electrician/ wireman.
2 years experience in electrical installation/wiring/plumbing.

11. Lab Attendant

No of posts: 161

Age Limit: Between 18 and 30 years

Educational Qualification: 10th pass with certificate/diploma in Laboratory technique, or 12th Class with Science stream from a recognized Board/ University.

12. Mess Helper

No of posts: 442

Age Limit: Between 18 and 30 years

Educational Qualification:

Matriculation (10th pass).
5 years experience working in a government residential organization's mess/school's mess.

13. Multi-Tasking Staff (MTS)

No of posts: 19

Age Limit: Between 18 and 30 years

Educational Qualification: Class X from a recognized board.

Other Criteria of Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti Recruitment

Age Relaxation: Category-wise age relaxation is as mentioned below:

SC/ ST: 5 years
OBC-NCL: 3 years
PwBD: 10 years
PwBD (OBC): 13 years
PwBD (SC/ ST): 15 years

Nationality: Only Indian nationals are eligible to apply.

Application Fee: Category-wise application fee is as under.

Posts	UR/ OBC/ EWS	SC/ ST/ PwBD
Female Staff Nurse	₹ 1500	₹ 500
Other posts	₹ 1000	₹ 500

Important Dates of NVS Non Teaching Vacancy 2024

Starting date of submission of online application: 22nd March 2024
Last date of submission of online application: 7th May 2024

Railway Protection Force Constable Recruitment – 4208 Posts, Online Apply

Last Date: 14/05/2024

Ministry of Railways, Government of India has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 4208 Posts of Constable (Executive) in Railway Protection Force (RPF) and Railway Protection Special Force. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online.

Railway Protection Force Constable Recruitment

Name of post: Constable (Executive)

Name of organisation: Railway Protection Force (RPF) and Railway Protection Special Force

No of posts: 4208 Posts
Male: 3577 posts
Female: 631 posts

Pay: Level 3 of 7th CPC Pay matrix with initial pay of ₹ 21,700 and Allowances.

Advertisement No: CEN No. RPF 02/2024

Helpline for candidates: For any queries related to technical issues of submission of Application of CEN (10:00 AM to 5:00 PM on all working days)

Email: rrb.help@csc.gov.in
Phone: 9592001188

Eligibility Criteria of Railway Protection Force Constable Recruitment

Nationality: A candidate must be a citizen of India.

Age Limit: Candidate age must be between 18 to 28 years as on 1st July 2024.

Age Relaxation: The category-wise age relaxation is as mentioned below
SC/ST: 5 years
OBC (Non-Creamy Layer): 3 years
+ For more details, pl check official notification

Medical Fitness: Candidates must ensure that they fulfil the prescribed medical standard for the post.

Educational Qualification: Candidate must have 10th Pass or Equivalent from recognised Board.

Application Fee for RPF Constable Recruitment

Candidates have to pay an examination fee as mentioned below as per their categories or community:

Category	Fee
SC	₹ 250
ST	₹ 250
Female	₹ 250
Ex-Serviceman	₹ 250
Minorities	₹ 250
Economically backward class	₹ 250
Others	₹ 500

Payment Mode: ONLINE fee payment only through internet banking, debit/credit cards, or UPI will be accepted. All applicable service charges shall be borne by the candidate.

How to Apply for Railway Protection Force Recruitment?

Interested and eligible candidates may apply online for these vacancy through online mode by visiting official RPF Recruitment Portal. Candidates may follow below mentioned steps to apply for RPF Recruitment.

Scroll down, go to Important Web-Links section .
Click on the "Online Application Form" and candidates will be asked to Create an Account .

In the next stage, click on "Online Application Form" Link and Login.
Fill your all personal and educational details and upload necessary documents.
Make payment of application fee as per your category and submit the form.
At the end, take a print out of the application form .

Important Dates of RPF Recruitment 2024

Starting date of submission of online application: 15th April 2024
Last date of submission of online application: 14th May 2024
Dates for Modification window for corrections in application form: 15th to 24th May 2024

UK PM Rishi Sunak under pressure amid dire local election results for his party



LONDON, May 3: British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's leadership is under severe pressure on Friday as the results of local elections and a crucial by-election poured in overnight, delivering what is being characterised as one of the worst poll outcomes for the governing Conservative Party in 40 years.

Rebels from within his party are expected to renew their attacks on the British Indian leader after the Opposition Labour Party made definitive gains, including overturning the Tory majority in the Blackpool South by-election which was necessitated following a resignation amid a lobbying row. Labour Leader Sir Keir Starmer declared the result as a "seismic" victory and an overall poll verdict in favour of the party as it comes on the eve of a general election, expected later this year.

"Blackpool speaks for the whole country... This is the one contest where voters had the chance to send a message to Rishi Sunak's Conservatives directly, and that message is an overwhelming vote for change," said Starmer of the by-election.

"The message to Rishi Sunak is clear. It's time for change, it's time for a general election," he said.

The Labour candidate in Blackpool South, Chris Webb, defeated Conservative David Jones in the constituency which the Tories had won from Labour under former prime minister Boris Johnson in 2019. The swing of 26 per cent from the Tories to Labour has been characterised as the third biggest in a by-election since 1945.

"We're probably looking at certainly one of the worst, if not the worst, Conservative performance in local government elections for the last 40 years," eminent pollster Professor John Curtice told the BBC. The by-election took place alongside local elections around England and Wales, in which voters elected their local councillors who manage day to

day issues such as waste collection, roads and local infrastructure as well as crime fighting.

The results will continue to pour in over the weekend, with the overall picture expected to be clear by Sunday. But the early indications are that Labour has taken control of a number of local authorities in the regions that had turned away from the party in favour of the Tories over its anti-Brexit stance.

Meanwhile, Tories look set to lose hundreds of seats, with the far-right Reform UK also making some impact. This will also worry the Conservatives for the general election if traditional Tory voters are seen to be drawn to this new avatar of the pro-Brexit UK Independence Party (UKIP). In another trend likely to continue to resonate during a general election, there is evidence in areas with a significant Muslim population that Labour's stance to not strongly condemn Israel in the Gaza conflict is hurting the party.

Most of the mayoral results are expected over the weekend, with London's Labour Mayor Sadiq Khan hoping to be re-elected for a third term. He was challenged by British Indian businessman Tarun Ghulati, who thanked voters for the support he received in the campaign.

"I had overwhelming support from India and all over the world and want to thank everyone for the support and blessings," he said.

Among the other mayoral polls, the Tory Mayors of Tees Valley and the West Midlands are hoping to hold on to their seats. There other mayoral contests taking place include Greater Manchester and Liverpool City Region, with the East Midlands, the North East, and York and North Yorkshire electing mayors for the first time. Besides councillors and mayors, around 37 police and crime commissioners are also being elected in some parts of England and Wales. (PTI)

Russia will face consequences for 'absolutely intolerable' cyberattack: German foreign min

SYDNEY, May 3: German's top diplomat on Friday said Russia will face consequences after accusing its military intelligence service of masterminding an "absolutely intolerable" cyberattack.

Relations between the two European countries were already tense, with Germany providing military support to Ukraine in its ongoing war with Russia.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said Russian state hackers were behind a cyberattack last year that targeted the Social Democrats, the leading party in the governing coalition.

"Russian state hackers attacked Germany in cyberspace," she said at a news conference in the Australian city of Adelaide. "We can attribute this attack to the group called APT28, which is steered by the military intelligence service of Russia."

"This is absolutely intolerable and unacceptable and will have consequences," she said.

Baerbock is visiting Australia, New Zealand and Fiji, with the trip focusing on security policy as China pushes for influence in the Pacific region.

"The defense cooperation between Germany and Australia is close and we would like to deepen it further and together expand it, because we are in a situation where we face similar threats," said Baerbock, who is the first German foreign minister to visit Australia in 13 years.

Discussions between Baerbock and Australian counterpart Penny Wong centered on the conflict in Gaza. "I think we all understand that the only path out of this cycle of violence that we see in the Middle East at such great cost is one that ultimately ensures a two-state solution," Wong said. (AP)

Xi will start the tour in Paris on Monday, meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron

As China's Xi Jinping visits Europe, Ukraine, trade and investment are likely to top the agenda

TAIPEI, May 3: Ukraine, trade and investment are expected to dominate Chinese leader Xi Jinping's first trip to Europe in five years, as the Asian giant rebuilds its foreign relations after a prolonged absence during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Xi will start the tour in Paris on Monday, meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron, who has been stressing the idea of European strategic autonomy from the U.S. On a visit to Beijing last year, Macron courted controversy by saying France would not necessarily always align with the US in foreign policy, an apparent reference to American support for the self-governing republic of Taiwan, which China claims as its own territory to be annexed by force if necessary.

After leaving France, Xi will visit Hungary and Serbia, both seen as China-friendly and close to Russian President Vladimir Putin, rebuffing Western criticism of his full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Xi's European visits will be closely followed in Washington for signs of diminishing support for its key foreign policy goals.

The Chinese leader will arrive in France just as Paris is putting the finishing touches on its preparations for hosting the Summer Olympics, an event in which China invests huge amount of national prestige.

France sees Xi's visit, which officially marks 60 years of French-Chinese diplomatic relations, as an important diplomatic moment, and wants to focus on China's

broader relations with the EU. Macron invited European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen to the talks Monday.

It comes a month before Macron, who positions himself as the diplomatic leader of Europe, hosts Biden for a similar state visit.

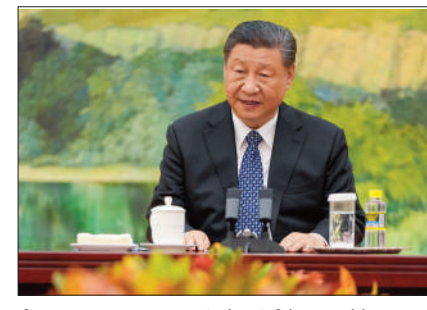
It is also a sign of "the good vibes from Macron's visit to China in April last year," said Kerry Brown, professor of Chinese Studies and director of the Lau China Institute at King's College London.

"This is a highly strategic visit to Europe by Xi. And in his itinerary you can divine the rungs of Chinese policy on Europe now, bolstering the traditional links as far as possible, and reinforcing new ones," Brown said. Xi is also visiting Budapest, where Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, in power for 14 years, is facing political challenges from the opposition over his authoritarian style.

Hungary has straddled a middle ground between its membership in the EU and NATO and an unusual openness to diplomatic and trade relationships with eastern autocracies such as Russia and China.

Orbán, a right-wing populist who has forged close ties with Russia, delayed Sweden's entry into NATO for months. China has cited NATO expansion as provoking Russia to invade Ukraine.

Hungary is the first EU member to participate in Xi's signature Belt and Road Initiative that seeks to build billions of dollars of roads, ports, power plants and other in-



infrastructure across Asia, Africa and beyond.

Orbán was the only EU leader to attend a conference in Beijing on the BRI, which has been criticized for burying participating countries in debt and failing to deliver on promised investments, something that prompted Italy to drop out last year.

Despite that, Hungary's government has deepened its economic ties with China, with the proliferation of Chinese electric vehicle (EV) battery factories across the country gaining the most attention. Near Debrecen, Hungary's second-largest city, construction is underway of a nearly 550-acre, 7.3 billion euro (\$7.9 billion) EV battery plant, Hungary's largest-ever foreign direct investment. China has also invested heavily in infrastructure to link Hungary with its southern neighbor Serbia, Xi's next stop on his European tour. In 2014, Hungary and Serbia concluded an agreement with Beijing to modernize the railway between their capitals of Budapest and Belgrade, part of a

Belt and Road plan to link up with the Chinese-controlled port of Piraeus in Greece, to the south, an entry point for Chinese goods to Central and Eastern Europe.

The more than \$2 billion project is expected to be completed in 2026, after numerous delays. In Serbia, Xi will hold talks with President Aleksandar Vucic, with whose government China has built strong relations. The two countries have a long history of friendship, particularly since 1999, when NATO bombed the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, killing three Chinese nationals, during the air war to end Serbia's brutal crackdown on ethnic Albanian separatists in Kosovo.

The U.S. apologized, saying faulty target selection was to blame, but the incident led to violent attacks on U.S. diplomatic installations in China and fueled anti-American sentiment in both countries that endures to this day.

In 2022, shortly after the Russian assault on Ukraine, Serbia took semi-secret delivery of a sophisticated Chinese anti-aircraft system flow in on six Chinese Air Force Y-20 transport planes. The arms delivery over the territory of at least two NATO member states, Turkey and Bulgaria, was seen by experts as a demonstration of China's growing global reach. China claims neutrality in the Ukraine conflict but Xi and Putin declared their governments had a "no limits friendship" before Moscow's attack on Ukraine. (AP)

Defence chiefs from US, Australia, Japan and Philippines vow to deepen cooperation



HONOLULU, May 3: Defence chiefs from the US, Australia, Japan and the Philippines vowed to deepen their cooperation as they gathered on Thursday in Hawaii for their second-ever joint meeting amid concerns about China's operations in the South China Sea.

The meeting came after the four countries last month held their first joint naval exercises in the South China Sea, a major shipping route where Beijing has long-simmering territorial disputes with a number of Southeast Asian nations and has caused alarm with its recent assertiveness in the waters.

US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin told reporters at a news conference after their discussion that the drills strengthened the ability of the nations to work together, build bonds among their forces and underscore their shared commitment to international law in the waterway.

Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles said the defense chiefs talked about increasing the tempo of their defense exercises.

"Today, the meetings that we have held represent a very significant message to the region and to the world about four democracies which are committed to the global rules-based order," Marles said at the joint news conference with his coun-

terparts.

Austin hosted the defense chiefs at the US military's regional headquarters, US Indo-Pacific Command, at Camp H.M. Smith in the hills above Pearl Harbor. Earlier in the day, Austin had separate bilateral meetings with Australia and Japan followed by a trilateral meeting with Australia and Japan.

Defence chiefs from the four nations held their first meeting in Singapore last year. The US has decades-old defence treaties with all three nations.

The US lays no claims to the South China Sea, but has deployed Navy ships and fighter jets in what it calls freedom of navigation operations that have challenged China's claims to virtually the entire waterway. The US says freedom of navigation and overflight in the waters is in America's national interest.

Aside from China and the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan and Brunei also have overlapping claims in the resource-rich sea. Beijing has refused to recognise a 2016 international arbitration ruling that invalidated its expansive claims on historical grounds.

Skirmishes between Beijing and Manila in particular have flared since last year. Earlier this week, Chinese coast guard ships fired water cannons at two Philippine patrol vessels off off Scarborough Shoal, damaging both.

The repeated high-seas confrontations have sparked fears of a larger conflict that could put China and the United States on a collision course. The US has warned repeatedly that it's obligated to defend the Philippines — its oldest treaty ally in Asia — if Filipino forces, ships or aircraft come under an armed attack, including in the South China Sea.

President Joe Biden's administration has said it aims to build what it calls a "latticework" of alliances in the Indo-Pacific even as the US grapples with the Israel-Hamas war and Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine.

Beijing says the strengthening of US alliances in Asia is aimed at containing China and threatens regional stability. (AP)

Denmark to liberalise its abortion law to allow the procedure until 18th week of pregnancy

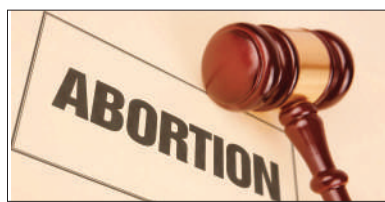
COPENHAGEN, May 3: Denmark's government said on Friday it is relaxing its restrictions on abortion for the first time in 50 years to make it legal for women to terminate pregnancies up to the 18th week from the previous 12th week.

Officials said the law will also be changed to allow girls between 15 and 17 years old to have an abortion without parental consent.

Marie Bjerre, the gender equality minister, said Denmark is strengthening women's rights while they are being rolled back in other parts of the world.

"It is about the individual woman's freedom, about the right to decide over her own body and her own life. It is a historic day for women's equality," she said. Free abortion was introduced in Denmark in 1973.

The limit was set at up to 12 weeks be-



cause "at that time all abortions were performed surgically, and at that time an abortion after the 12th week entailed a greater risk of complications," the health ministry said.

"After 50 years, it is time for the abortion rules to keep up with the times," Health Minister Sophie Lohde said.

She said neighbouring Sweden, which set the legal limit at 18 weeks of gestation in 1996, has not experienced a significant increase in the number of abortions or when they are carried out.

The three-party centre government agreed on the move with two left-leaning groups, the Socialist People's Party and the Red-Green Alliance, and two centre parties, the Social Liberals and the Alternative.

The deal is to be sealed by a vote in parliament. No date for that was announced, but it is all but certain to pass because the government has a majority.

The change is expected to enter into force on June 1, 2025. The health ministry said the legal age of consent in Denmark is 15, and a 15-year-old girl can make her own choices about her own body.

Bjerre said that she hoped that "young women can find support from their parents. But if there is disagreement, it must ultimately be the young woman's own decision whether she wants to be a mother. It is her body and her life." (AP)

Indian couple, 3-month-old grandchild among 4 killed in accident during police chase in Canada

TORONTO, May 3: An Indian couple visiting Canada and their three-month-old grandchild were among four people killed on the spot in a multi-vehicle collision when Ontario police pursued a liquor store robbery suspect driving the wrong way.

All four people were pronounced dead at the scene on Highway 401 in Whitby, about 50 kilometres east of Toronto, police said on Thursday.

Ontario's Special Investigations Unit (SIU) said that two of the victims, a 60-year-old man and a 55-year-old woman, were visiting from India. However, the SIU did not release the names of the victims.

The couple's three-month-old grandson also died in the multi-vehicle collision. Highway 401 was closed for several hours after the accident on Monday, it said. The agency said that the parents of the infant, his 33-year-old father and 27-year-old mother, were travelling in the same vehicle and were taken to hospital.

The mother's injuries are serious, the SIU said.

The 21-year-old robbery suspect was also killed in the collision, which involved at least six vehicles, CBC News reported.

Officials have said the deadly car chase started with a liquor store robbery in Bowmanville and ended around 20 minutes later after the suspect in a cargo van led Durham police on a high-speed chase against opposing traffic on Highway 401. A 38-year-old male passenger from the cargo van was also taken to the hospital to be treated for serious injuries.

The autopsies for the victims were conducted in Toronto on Wednesday.

Seven investigators, one forensic investigator and one collision reconstructionist continue to investigate this case, the statement said.

The SIU is an agency called in to investigate whenever police are involved in a death, serious injury or allegations of sexual assault.

Milica Maljkovic Birkett, a witness to the deadly police chase and had a lucky escape, said she didn't have time to think.

She was driving her regular commute on the 401, when she was suddenly face-to-face with the suspect van barreling toward her car on the wrong way.

"I was like, 'Oh my God, like what just happened? What's going on?'" Maljkovic Birkett told CBC Toronto on Thursday. (PTI)

China announced plans for a manned lunar landing by 2030

China sends a probe to get samples from the less-explored far side of the moon

TAIPEI, May 3: China on Friday launched a lunar probe to land on the far side of the moon and return with samples that could provide insights into differences between the less-explored region and the better-known near side.

It is the latest advance in China's increasingly sophisticated space exploration program, which is now competing with the U.S., still the leader in space. China also has a three-member crew on its own orbiting space station and aims to put astronauts on the moon by 2030. Three Chinese lunar probe missions are planned over the next four years.

Free from exposure to Earth and other interference, the moon's somewhat mysterious far side is ideal for radio astronomy and other scientific work. Because the far side never faces Earth, a relay satellite is needed to maintain communications.

The rocket carrying the Chang'e-6 lunar probe — named after the Chi-



nese mythical moon goddess — lifted off Friday at 5:27 p.m. as planned from the Wenchang launch center on the island province of Hainan. About 35 minutes later it separated entirely from the massive Long March-5 rocket — China's largest — that had slung it into space, as technicians monitoring the launch from ground control smiled and applauded.

Shortly afterward, launch mission commander Zhang Zuosheng took to a podium at the front of the room and said the launch had gone off exactly as planned and the spacecraft was on its

set trajectory. "I declare this launch mission a complete success," Zhang said to further applause.

The Philippine Space Agency issued a statement saying expected debris from the rocket launch was "projected to have fallen within the identified drop zones."

China in 2021 was forced to defend its handling of a rocket booster that burned up over the Indian Ocean after the administrator of the American space agency and others accused Beijing of acting recklessly by allowing its rocket to fall to Earth seemingly uncontrolled after the mission.

Huge numbers of people crowded Hainan's beaches to view the launch, which comes in the middle of China's five-day May Day holiday. As with previous recent launches, the event was televised live by state broadcaster CCTV.

After orbiting the moon to reduce speed, the lander will separate from the spacecraft and within 48 hours of

setting down it will begin drilling into the lunar surface and scooping up samples with its robotic arm. With the samples sealed in a container, it will then reconnect with the returner for the trip back to Earth. The entire mission is set to last 53 days.

China in 2020 returned samples from the moon's near side, the first time anyone has done so since the U.S. Apollo program that ended in the 1970s. Analysis of the samples found they contained water in tiny beads embedded in lunar dirt.

Also in the past week, three Chinese astronauts returned home from a six-month mission on the country's orbiting space station after the arrival of its replacement crew. China built its own space station after being excluded from the International Space Station, largely because of U.S. concerns over the Chinese military's total control of the space program amid a sharpening competition in technology between the two geopolitical rivals. (AP)

Mamata lashes out at governor for 'misconduct' with woman employee



KOLKATA, May 3: West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress leader Mamata Banerjee on Friday strongly criticised Governor C V Ananda Bose for his alleged misconduct towards a woman employee of Raj Bhavan, which came to light yesterday evening.

Addressing an election rally in Purbha Bardhaman, Banerjee expressed astonishment at the governor's behaviour towards the woman who had gone to Raj Bhavan looking for a job.

"Yesterday, a young woman who worked at Raj Bhavan came out and spoke against the governor's harassment...the tears of the woman broke my heart. I have seen her video testimony, she said.

Banerjee questioned why Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who visited Raj Bhavan last night, remained silent on the issue.

"The woman cried and walked out saying she was too scared to work at Raj Bhavan anymore. She said that she was called at odd hours and was subjected to harassment. And these are the people who talk about the dignity of our mothers and sisters?" Banerjee said.

Bose on Thursday had said he will not be cowed down by "engineered narratives" and the "truth shall triumph", hours after TMC leaders claimed that the woman had lodged a police complaint against the governor for molestation.

Banerjee also criticised the Election Commission for transferring around 1,500 police officers from West Bengal to other states for election duties, without reciprocal assistance from other states.

"No police personnel from other states have come to West Bengal, the EC had sent only central forces. But strangely, no one from state police sent elsewhere were allowed to cast postal ballots. The poll panel is not allowing this", she said, adding, "We will not sit tight. We will take it to its logical conclusion and fight to the end".

Asserting that democracy is under threat in the country, Banerjee accused the BJP of manipulating EVMs and spreading falsehoods during campaigning.

Banerjee criticised the BJP for its policies, including the NRC, CAA, and Uniform Civil Code, which she argued undermine people's rights. She also accused the BJP of hypocrisy, alleging that it failed to reinstate jobs lost under CPI(M) rule in Tripura, despite promising to do so before coming to power.

"The BJP snatched away jobs of school teachers in West Bengal. The party is now saying they will help those who lost their jobs. It had said the same thing before coming to power in Tripura when 10,000 jobs were taken away during CPI(M) rule in the state. Have those jobs been reinstated by the BJP after coming to power there", she asked.

Banerjee said in West Bengal, the CPI(M), Congress, and BJP are fighting together. "Prime Minister Narendra Modi showed his indiscretion by questioning Rahul Gandhi's decision to contest from Rae Bareilly while speaking at a public rally. Rahul Gandhi's choice seems justified. How does it matter to Modi. At some point, he (Modi) contested from multiple seats. Even BJP leaders have done the same," she said. (PTI)

Amethi to not have contender from Gandhi family for first time in 25 years

NEW DELHI, May 3: Uttar Pradesh's Amethi has long been synonymous with the Gandhis but it would be the first time in 25 years that a Gandhi family member will not be contesting election from the Lok Sabha seat.

Considered a citadel of the Gandhi family since its creation as a constituency in 1967, Amethi has been represented by a Gandhi family member for about 31 years since then.

The Congress fortress was breached in the last general election in 2019 when BJP's Smriti Irani beat Rahul Gandhi by more than 55,000 votes.

This time, Rahul Gandhi will contest the Lok Sabha election from the Rae Bareilly seat, while Kishori Lal Sharma, a close aide of the Gandhi family, has been fielded from the Amethi Lok Sabha seat.

Sharma was the key person who looked after the two prestigious constituencies on behalf of the Gandhis.

The last time a non-Gandhi was in the fray from the constituency was in 1998, when Satish Sharma, a close aide of Rajiv Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi, contested the polls but lost to the BJP's Sanjaya Singh.

Sonia Gandhi reclaimed the



seat in 1999 routing Singh by over 3 lakh votes.

In 2004, Sonia shifted to the adjacent Rae Bareilly constituency to make way for her son Rahul Gandhi.

Rahul won the constituency for three consecutive terms in 2004, 2009 and 2014.

Contesting for the fourth time in 2019, he lost to Smriti Irani, who hit the headlines as a 'giant killer'.

Amethi is one of the 80 parliamentary seats in Uttar Pradesh and comprises five assembly segments — Tiloi, Salon, Jagdishpur, Gauriganj, and Amethi.

Over the past few years, the Congress, the Bharatiya Janata Party, and the Bahujan Samaj Party have emerged as the three main players in the constituency.

Its first Member of Parliament was Vidya Dhar Bajpai of the Congress who was elected in 1967 and held the seat in the next election in 1971.

In the 1977 election, Ravindra Pratap Singh of the Janata Party became an MP from the seat defeating former prime minister Indira Gandhi's younger son Sanjay Gandhi.

Sanjay Gandhi had his electoral revenge three years later

when he defeated Singh in the 1980 general election.

Later that year, Sanjay Gandhi died in a plane crash and the seat fell vacant. In the consequent by-election held in 1981, Sanjay's brother Rajiv Gandhi scored a landslide victory from the seat, defeating his closest rival by more than 2 lakh votes.

Rajiv Gandhi went on to represent this constituency until 1991 when he was assassinated by the militant group LTTE.

The subsequent by-election held the same year was won by Satish Sharma, a close aide of Rajiv Gandhi and later Sonia Gandhi.

Sharma was re-elected in 1996 but lost to BJP's Sanjaya Singh in 1998.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha Elections, Irani won the Amethi seat with a margin of over 55,000 votes, polling 4,68,514 votes. Rahul Gandhi got 4,13,394 votes.

In 2014, Rahul Gandhi won the Amethi seat for the third time in a row, polling 4,08,651 votes to Irani's 3,00,748 votes.

BSP candidate Dharmendra Pratap Singh came third with 57,716 votes and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) candidate Dr Kumar Vishwas was in fourth position with 25,527 votes. (PTI)

Fielding Rahul from Rae Bareilly a responsibility not just a legacy: Cong

NEW DELHI, May 3: The Congress on Friday said it has taken a decision to field Rahul Gandhi from Rae Bareilly after a lot of deliberation and strategy, and that the constituency is not just a legacy but also a responsibility.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said it is a long election process and there are a few chess moves still left to play.

He also justified Priyanka Gandhi Vadra not contesting any election, saying she can reach Parliament by contesting any bypoll, but is currently taking on Prime Minister Narendra Modi to counter him on his alleged "lies" during campaigning.

"Many people have given different opinions on the news of Rahul Gandhi contesting elections from Rae Bareilly. But he is a seasoned

player of politics and chess. He makes his moves after careful consideration. The party leadership has taken this decision after a lot of deliberation and strategy," he said.

Ramesh claimed the decision to field Rahul has devastated the BJP, its supporters and sycophants.

"The poor self-proclaimed Chanakya who used to talk about 'traditional seats' is not able to understand what to do now," he said.

The Congress leader said Rae Bareilly has not only been Sonia Gandhi's seat but also Indira Gandhi's seat.

"This is not a legacy but a responsibility, a duty," he asserted.

He said as far as the Gandhi family's stronghold is concerned, not just Amethi-Rae Bareilly,

the entire country from north to south is the stronghold of the Gandhi family.

Rahul Gandhi, he said, has become an MP three times from Uttar Pradesh and once from Kerala, "but why couldn't Modi muster the courage to contest elections below Vindhyachal".

"One more thing is clear that the Congress family is the family of expectations and aspirations of lakhs of workers. An ordinary worker of Congress is superior to the big ones. Yesterday, a prominent journalist was sarcastically saying to a worker of Amethi that 'when will your turn come to get a ticket'? Look, it has come! An ordinary worker of Congress will break both the illusion and arrogance of the BJP in Amethi," Ramesh said justifying fielding of Congress workers Kishori Lal Sharma. (PTI)

Rape case filed against Prajwal Revanna, says Siddaramaiah



BAGALKOTE (KARNATAKA), May 3: Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Friday said a rape case has been booked against JD(S) leader and NDA's Hassan candidate Prajwal Revanna.

He said he has directed police to identify, trace and secure the victims in view of the alleged kidnapping of a victim at Krishnaraja Nagar town in Mysuru district. The mother of three children was allegedly abducted by Holarasipura MLA and Prajwal's father H D Revanna and his confidant Sathish Babanna from her home after her 20-year-old son complained to the police.

He said videos showed that his mother was allegedly tied and raped by Prajwal Revanna.

Police have arrested Sathish Babanna and are interrogating him in connection with the case, a police source said. H D Revanna is the son of former Prime Minister and JD(S) patriarch H D Deve Gowda.

The Chief Minister said BJP committed a wrong in Prajwal Revanna case.

"Both the BJP and the JD(S) knew about Prajwal Revanna's videos. Prajwal Revanna's case is not just sexual harassment. He has raped women. A rape case has been registered (against him)," Siddaramaiah said.

Supporting the complainants, he said, "Will a woman lie that she has been raped? Won't her life get

destroyed after the complaint? If a married woman says openly that she has been raped then we have to accept it."

He said there is a law of presumption. Women never lie (on these issues). Victims won't lie. Shouldn't this be accepted? Why did they give ticket (to Prajwal) despite knowing it? Why did they (BJP) forge an alliance (with the JD-S)?

To a question, he wondered that if the JD(S) leadership said they will cooperate with the investigation, why did Deve Gowda and his son and former chief minister H D Kumaraswamy call lawyers and discuss with them on Thursday.

The Chief Minister took a dig at Kumaraswamy saying that they have separated themselves from Revanna but during the election, he campaigned for him and said his son Nikhil and nephew Prajwal Revanna were not different.

"Whatever they do, they do it together - be it politics or misdeeds," he said.

On Prajwal staying in Germany, Siddaramaiah said wherever he has escaped, the government will ensure that he is caught and brought back.

"Whichever country he is staying in, we will get him from there. That's why I have written a letter to the Prime Minister Narendra Modi requesting him to cancel his diplomatic passport," the Chief Minister said. He said once the passport is cancelled, the Hassan NDA candidate cannot stay there and he has to return to India.

He asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi to revoke the diplomatic passport.

Questioning the JD(S) alliance partner BJP's stand on the issue, he said the party gave Prajwal a ticket and helped him flee the country.

"Can he go abroad without the knowledge of the Centre? Centre knows who and how many people are going abroad and to which country. Can anyone enter the country without sharing information? Centre is protecting Prajwal Revanna," he alleged. (PTI)

Chirag threatens legal action against Tejashwi Those who run away from battle want to lead country: Rajnath

PATNA, May 3: Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) president Chirag Paswan on Friday threatened legal action against RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav for making "false" statements about the former's stand on reservations.

At rallies, especially in the Lok Sabha constituency of Hajipur which Paswan is contesting, Yadav has been claiming that the LJP (R) chief has advocated scrapping of reservations for affluent Dalits.

When the attention of Paswan was drawn to the statement by journalists, he said, "It is false. Tejashwi Yadav is speaking lies at rally after rally. He must stop it, else I may resort to legal action".

He challenged the former Bihar

deputy chief minister to "show any statement by me in which I may have spoken, on record, in favour of scrapping quotas for rich Dalits".

Although Paswan and Yadav have been good friends for long, their relationship rooted in the close ties between their fathers, late Ram Vilas Paswan and Lalu Prasad, respectively, political rivalry seems to have got the better of personal rapport.

The LJP (R), an NDA partner, is contesting five out of the 40 seats in Bihar, and faces a straight contest with the RJD in three of these, including Hajipur, Ram Vilas Paswan's pocket borough, where the opposition party has fielded Shiv Chandra Ram, a former MLA. (PTI)

ROHTAK, May 3: Mocking Rahul Gandhi as someone who runs away from the battlefield, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday targeted him for shifting his Lok Sabha constituency to Rae Bareilly and said he could not gather the courage to contest from Amethi.

People like him want to lead the country, the senior BJP leader said in a swipe at the former Congress president at a public meeting here, claiming that many Congress leaders wanted him to contest from Amethi but he chose to run away. "I am concerned that he may be given a different name after running away from this battle," Singh said wryly.

Gandhi had lost to Union minister and BJP leader Smriti Irani in 2019 after representing the constituency in Lok Sabha for three terms. He had, however, won from Wayanad in Kerala. Singh also slammed the Congress over Pakistani leader Chaudhry Fawad Hussain's praise for Gandhi, noting Hussain had earlier supported terror attacks in India.

The country under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership has given the message that it can target its enemies inside and outside the borders, Singh said, in a reference to India targeting terror camps in Pakistan.

Noting that Mahatma Gandhi had wished after Independence that the Congress should be dissolved and not be in politics, he said people should fulfil his wish in the elections and finish off the main opposition party. (PTI)

Heavy metal contamination in fishes in Kochi backwaters pose grave health risk, says Study

Report published in the international science journal Springer said that at least three metals, zinc, cadmium, and chromium, exceeded the toxicity threshold outlined in the sediment quality guidelines, and cadmium and lead exceeded the standards

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, May 3: Heavy pollution from industries in Greater Kochi is getting into the water, which is then getting into fish and shellfish, making them dangerous to eat because they have harmful metals, according to a new study.

The study by the Department of Marine Technology, Cochin University for Science and Technology (CUSAT), and the National Centre for Coastal Research, NIOT Campus, Chennai, revealed heavy metal contamination in various species of fish and shellfish in the Cochin Estuarine System (CES) in backwaters from Aroor in Ernakulam-Alappuzha border to Eloor, the industrial belt of Kochi.

The report published in the international science journal Springer said that at least three metals, zinc, cadmium, and chromium, exceeded the toxicity threshold outlined in the sediment quality guidelines, and cadmium and lead exceeded the standards of the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India and the Food and Agriculture Organisation.

The presence of cadmium in the muscle tissues of fish and shellfish considerably increases the cancer risk in humans.

"The carcinogenic risk index indicates that cadmium may lead consumers to a chronic cancer risk," the report said.

All the dissolved metals in the backwaters in Kochi showed higher concentrations compared to all other estuaries in the world, the report said.



However, the people of Ernakulam and Alappuzha districts, who are major consumers of the catch from the backwater, can breathe easy now as the study revealed that the estimated daily intake is very low compared to the permissible intake limits, and thus the potential health hazard from most of these metals were found to be low.

But the study, titled 'Bioaccumulation of heavy metals in seafood resources from the southwest coast of India: human health risk assessment and importance of seafood security', pointed towards possible long-term risks, especially due to the intake of metals like cadmium and lead.

It also urges the administration to take immediate steps to prevent contamination of the water resources in the Cochin backwaters.

The water resources in Kochi, the commercial and industrial hub of Kerala, face increasing pressure from commercial and industrial activities, with approximately 95 per cent of red-category industries concentrated in Greater Kochi, located within the northern side of the estuary.

Furthermore, contaminants from the adjoining Periyar River exacerbate coastal water pollution, posing a threat to fishery resources and other marine life.

According to a study by the NGO Greenpeace in 2003, the lower Periyar has been described as a cesspool of toxins with alarming levels of heavy metal pollution. Various studies have underscored the severity of heavy metal pollution in the water and sediment of this area, according to the report. The Cochin Estuarine System stands out as one of the largest estuarine systems, which sustains exceptional biodiversity and functions as a crucial breeding and nursery habitat for diverse fish and shellfish species.

It constitutes the northern segment of the Vembanad estuary, designated as a Ramsar site in India, with an annual fish landing of 3906.33 tons. Fishing has been a vital source of livelihood for the residents along the estuary.

But, the contamination of the water resources in the area is posing a greater health risk to the people, as the bioaccumulation of heavy metals in fish has almost reached its threshold level.

"The health risk index indicates that consumers are in close proximity to experiencing the synergistic effects of heavy metals, and the most influential heavy metal during risk analysis was cadmium," Neethu Xavier, lead author of the paper, told PTI.

She said that the study recommended a regular monitoring programme for all the heavy metals across a broader range of fish species within the study region.

According to the study, the heavy metal zinc is most consumed, followed by copper, magnesium, nickel,

chromium, lead, and cadmium in fish and shellfish.

For the analysis, the study sourced all the study materials from the commercial fisheries catch in the area, representing native edible species with high consumer demand in Kerala.

The study, which divided the Cochin Estuarine System into three zones, found that the northern zone has the highest metal accumulation compared to the central and southern zones.

This aligns with previous findings of elevated metal concentrations in sediment and water on the northern side of the estuary, the study said.

The presence of heavy metals in fish tissues was higher during the pre-monsoon and post-monsoon periods. The contamination was reduced during the monsoon season.

During the monsoon season, substantial rainfall and an increase in the water flow reduced the metal concentration in backwaters and rivers, the study said.

"The results indicate the need for regular monitoring and risk assessment of heavy metals, especially lead, cadmium, and chromium, in seafood resources across coastal areas to ensure food security," Neethu Xavier said.

She said the study has not categorically talked about addressing the solution but broadly indicated the need for urgent action to contain the pollution of the water resources in the Cochin Estuarine System and reduce heavy metal contamination of fish and shellfish. (PTI)

Red alert sounded for Kallakkadal in coastal parts of Kerala, south Tamil Nadu

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, May 3: Central agencies have issued a red alert for 'Kallakkadal', warning of sudden sea swells causing rough waves in coastal areas of Kerala and the south Tamil Nadu coast on Saturday and Sunday. This marks the first time a red alert has been issued for the phenomenon of 'Kallakkadal' - the sudden swell of the seas causing rough waves -- by the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) and the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) in this part of the country, officials here said. The officials have urged fishermen and coastal residents to take necessary precautions in response to the alert.

"Red alert for swell surge warning has been received from NDMA-INCOIS," a Kerala Disaster Management Authority (KSDMA) official said.

The coastal areas of Kerala and southern Tamil Nadu are likely to experience the 'kallakkadal' phenomenon from 2.30 am on Saturday to 11.30 pm on Sunday, weather agencies said, while issuing the red alert.

There is possibility of extremely strong waves, rough seas and sea incursion during this period, they said. The officials, however, said it was not a tsunami-like phenomenon. Earlier in the day, the INCOIS had said there is a possibility of rough seas due to high waves of 0.5 to 1.5 metres during this period.

INCOIS, the central agency that issues weather warnings for fishermen in the country, advised people to safely moor their fishing vessels in the harbour.

In a statement, the Kerala State Disaster Management Authority (KSDMA) and other weather agencies advised people to stay away from danger zones as per the instructions of the authorities, as the rough sea conditions are likely to intensify. "Keeping a safe distance between boats can avoid the risk of collision. The safety of fishing equipment should be ensured," they said in a statement here. The agencies also advised people to avoid trips to the beach and completely stay away from activities at sea. The term 'kallakkadal' literally means a sea that comes suddenly like a thief. INCOIS has said that the swells result from strong winds in the southern part of the Indian Ocean at certain times, and that they occur suddenly without any particular indications or warning. Hence the name 'kallakkadal'. (PTI)

India retain top spot in white-ball formats

Australia reclaims world no 1 rankings in Tests

DUBAI, May 3: India have retained their top position in ODIs and T20Is but slipped to the second position in the men's Test Team Rankings in the latest ICC annual ranking update issued on Friday.

India conceded the top spot in the five-day format to Australia, the reigning World Test champion, following the annual update that drops results from the 2020-21 season and reflects all series completed since May 2021.

India (120) are just four points behind Australia (124) and 15 points clear of third-placed England. South Africa are the fourth team above the 100-point mark with 103 points.

India slipped mainly because their 2-1 series win in Australia in 2020-21 has dropped from the rankings.

The order of teams ranked from third to ninth remains the same. Only nine teams are now ranked as Afghanistan and Ireland have yet to play sufficient Tests, while Zimbabwe too are out as they have played only three Tests over the past three years.



Teams need to play a minimum of eight Tests over a three-year period to get on the rankings table.

India, however, remain atop the

ODI and T20I rankings after the annual updates, that weight matches completed prior to May 2023 at 50 per cent and subsequent

matches at 100 per cent. India may have lost the ODI World Cup final to Australia but have increased their lead over them

from three to six points, leading the table with 122 points. There are no changes in the top 10 but Ireland have overtaken Zimbabwe to 11th position.

Third-placed South Africa have closed the gap with Australia from eight to four points, while Sri Lanka are just two points behind fifth-placed England.

The T20I rankings see Australia move ahead of England to second place but they are seven points adrift of India, who lead with 264 rating points.

South Africa are just two points behind England after leapfrogging two places from the sixth position that they had before the update. New Zealand also have 250 points like South Africa but behind on fractions, while the West Indies are at 249 points, which means that just three points separate third-placed England from sixth-placed West Indies.

In other movements, Pakistan have dropped two places to seventh, while Scotland have overtaken Zimbabwe to 12th position. (PTI)

RCB, GT eye mandatory win to keep playoff hopes alive



BENGALURU, May 3: From a maths perspective, Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Gujarat Titans can still reach the IPL playoffs, but they need to ward off inner gremlins on Saturday to notch a mandatory win to keep that dream flickering. The Royal Challengers are the bottom-dwellers with six points from 10 matches, while the Titans are placed eighth with eight points from 10 matches.

However, the floundering outings of Chennai Super Kings and Delhi Capitals (10 points each) have fuelled the hopes of these two teams of sneaking into the middle tier of the points table and from there to the knockouts.

But both RCB and GT will know that keeping their own house in order is a better option than depending on other teams to stay afloat as the IPL group stage is entering its business end.

In that context, the Faf du Plessis-led side will feel a tad more confident than their opponents after registering wins in their last two matches.

They have also found new heroes across these two games – Will Jacks powered his way to a match-winning century against GT, while Cameron Green finally lived up to his tag of all-rounder with crucial runs and wickets against Hyderabad.

RCB would hope for an encore from them at the home venue as well.

At the top, Virat Kohli continues to be a run-making presence as he recently became the first batter to go past 500-run mark in this edition of the IPL, and RCB will certainly like a few more from his willow.

However, the Royal Challengers will ask for some more consistency from their bowlers. The likes of Mohammed Siraj, who has been drafted into India's T20 World Cup squad, Yash Dayal, Karn Sharma and Swapnil Singh were on the money against SRH.

But against GT at Ahmedabad, they returned to their profligate ways, allowing them to whittle a 200-run total.

They will have to tidy up their act at the unforgiving M Chinnaswamy Stadium, as despite all their inconsistencies GT have the tools to punish them.

But to the Titans' dismay, those tools have malfunctioned more often than not, and it aptly mirrored in their two successive defeats against Delhi Capitals and RCB.

Shubman Gill and Bhargava Sai

Sudharsan have run an exclusive store of runs for Gujarat, amassing over 700 runs between them.

Other than them, the likes of Wriddhiman Saha, David Miller, Rahul Tewatia, Vijay Shankar and Shikhar Dhawan have not managed to even touch 200 this season, imparting a brittle look to GT's middle and lower order.

Their bowling group too has been vastly underwhelming, and none reflected it more than Rashid Khan.

The star spinner has taken just eight wickets across 10 matches while giving eight runs an over, a significantly higher economy rate than his overall 6.7 in IPL since 2017.

In IPL 2023, Rashid had given away 8.24 runs an over but the Afghan took 27 wickets from 17 matches. This year, the wicket column too remained barren.

The pace bowlers offer a similar storyline. In the absence of Mohammed Shami, who is recuperating after a surgery, the Titans' most experienced duo of Umesh Yadav and Mohit Sharma have gone for plenty.

Mohit has taken 10 wickets in as many matches, the highest so far this season for GT, but leaked nearly 11 runs an over, while Yadav's economy stands at 10.5 for seven wickets.

The back-up options such as Sandeep Warrier, Noor Ahmad, R Sai Kishore and Azmatullah Omarzai too have not covered themselves with glory either, conceding way too many runs for minimal returns.

Teams (from):
RCB: Faf du Plessis (c), Glenn Maxwell, Virat Kohli, Rajat Patidar, Anuj Rawat, Dinesh Karthik, Suyash Prabhudessai, Will Jacks, Mahipal Lomror, Karn Sharma, Manoj Bhandage, Mayank Dagar, Vijaykumar Vyshak, Akash Deep, Mohammed Siraj, Reece Topley, Himanshu Sharma, Rajan Kumar, Cameron Green, Alzarri Joseph, Yash Dayal, Tom Curran, Lockie Ferguson, Swapnil Singh, Saurav Chauhan.

GT: Shubman Gill (c), David Miller, Matthew Wade, Wriddhiman Saha, Kane Williamson, Abhinav Manohar, B Sai Sudharsan, Darshan Nalkande, Vijay Shankar, Jayant Yadav, Rahul Tewatia, Noor Ahmad, Sai Kishore, Rashid Khan, Joshua Little, Mohit Sharma, Azmatullah Omarzai, Umesh Yadav, Shikhar Khan, Sushant Mishra, Kartik Tyagi, Manav Suthar, Spencer Johnson, Sandeep Warrier, BR Sharath.

Match starts at 7.30 PM. (PTI)

Hardik and Virat will make for great combination when chasing: Sreesanth

NEW DELHI, May 3: Former India pacer S Sreesanth on Friday backed Hardik Pandya's selection in the T20 World Cup squad, saying the all-rounder's presence alongside Virat Kohli will make for a "great combination" when chasing tricky totals.

The out-of-form Pandya's inclusion in the 15-member India squad raised eyebrows but the selectors went by his past record and his ability to quickly change the complexion of a game with both bat and ball.

If his selection in the squad was not enough, many were surprised by his appointment as vice-captain for the ICC showpiece in the USA and the West Indies.

But Sreesanth, one of India's best outgoing bowlers in the post-Kapil Dev era, supported the move.

"We have seen what he can do on the field minus this year's IPL. The way he's been batting and the way he's been bowling, for the country, he even led the country in one series and we won," Sreesanth remarked

during a discussion on Star Sports. "It was asked to Rohit about that and he said sometimes I'm the captain and sometimes I'm not. But that doesn't change the team's aura and atmosphere.

"So, it's one good thing that Hardik Pandya comes in and bats, especially when he's chasing and Virat is on the other side, I think the combination they create is great."

Pandya's last appearance for India came during the ODI World Cup match against Bangladesh in October 2023.

He recovered from an ankle injury well in time ahead of the IPL 2024 and was named as the captain of five-time champions Mumbai Indians in place of Rohit Sharma -- a move that attracted a lot of criticism.

Speaking about Pandya's bowling, Sreesanth said, "Hardik can take the new ball or the old ball, especially against Pakistan, but it's not only against Pakistan, we are going to play a lot of different teams.

"So, it's an opportunity for

Hardik to forget what he's done in this IPL and maybe, you never know, there are a few matches left and he may just come up."

Former Australia all-rounder Tom Moody also supported Pandya's selection in the Rohit-led team, saying he currently stands head and shoulders above other contenders.

"Name me three other people who can do what Hardik Pandya is doing. That's the bottom line. That skill of being a genuine all-rounder who can bat in your top six and potentially bowl four overs for you is very rare in India at the moment," Moody said.

"Yes, there are a few others that play domestic cricket and are okay, but not in international cricket, which is of a different standard. So, I think he stands head and shoulders above anyone who is competing for that particular role.

"I think (chief selector) Ajit Agarkar has recognised that that is the case and we have to give him a longer rope with regards to his re-

covery, with regards to his form, and everything else, because he is a very precious commodity in this country," Moody added.

The Aussie also said Shivam Dube should bowl a lot at training so that he is ready for the job when required during a match. Moody described his selection as a "smart move".

"I'd be incredibly surprised if Dube hasn't been doing his bowling workloads, which is basically, not bowling out in the middle in competition but bowling at practice and bowling in pre-games, getting his number of balls up per week to make sure that his body is conditioned to bowling.

"Even though he might not have to bowl in match situation, but he's got the bowling, so it's not like he hasn't bowled for two months and then suddenly called upon to bowl in a World Cup tournament.

"So, he'll be up and ready physically for the opportunity. So, to me Shivam Dube is a smart pick," Moody said. (PTI)

India to host SA women for a Test, three ODIs, T20Is in June-July



BENGALURU, May 3: India will play host to South Africa women's team for one Test, three ODIs and three T20Is across June and July.

The one-dayers and T20Is will be played in Bengaluru, a Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) official informed, while the Test match will be played at Chennai.

The ODIs will be held at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium from June 16, while the one-off Test will start at the MA Chidambaram Stadium from June 28.

The teams will then return to Bengaluru for the T20Is on July 5, 7 and 9 and they will precede the women's T20 World Cup to be played in Bangladesh in September-October.

The white-ball format matches were originally a part of the ICC Future Tours Programme (FTP) in late 2023, but they had to be pushed ahead because of the 50-over ICC Men's World Cup held in India last year between October and November.

However, the Test match is an addition to the fixture and a part of the initiative by BCCI and Cricket South Africa (CSA) to give more impetus to women's cricket in the traditional format.

It may be recalled that India had played a Test each against England and Australia at Mumbai in December last year.

India had beaten England by a massive 347 runs, the largest in women's Test cricket, and Australia by eight wickets in those matches. (PTI)

My role is to carry on till 13th -14th over : Nitish Reddy

HYDERABAD, May 3: Entrusted with the task of shepherding Sunrisers Hyderabad's middle-order, young Nitish Reddy has been doing the job with aplomb at a time when he is seen by many as a future India all-rounder, thanks to his ability to bowl lively medium pace.

Opting to bat in the IPL game against table-toppers Rajasthan Royals here on Thursday, Reddy (76 not out) and Travis Head (58) produced explosive fifties, while Heinrich Klassen made an unbeaten 19-ball 42 to power SRH to 201 for three. Experienced seamer Bhuvneshwar Kumar then did the star turn with a sensational final over as SRH pulled off a heist, stunning RR by just one run in a last-ball thriller to keep their playoff hopes alive.

Nitish, 20, stated that his role was to rebuild the innings after quick wickets. "From the last two matches, we are losing quick wickets and I have to go. My role is to carry on till the 13th and 14th over so that Klaasen gets a license to bang. There is no point in Klaasen and Samad coming early, but not getting to score

freely," said Nitish at the post-match press conference. The all-rounder hailed Bhuvneshwar after the veteran pacer bowled a brilliant final over to help Hyderabad seal a dramatic win.

Nitish said he was hopeful that Bhuvneshwar would be able to defend 13 runs in the last over.

"I was looking at who was going to bowl. When I saw Bhuvneshwar was going to bowl, I got the confidence that he was going to pull it off. "During his prime, he had done it so many times. I did not think we were going to win, I thought either we'd lose or tie. But that last-ball wicket, I felt so happy," Nitish said.

During his explosive knock, Nitish smashed RR's in-form Yuzvendra Chahal for two fours and two sixes in the 13th over. Nitish said that he backed himself to attack the seasoned leg-spinner.

Reddy also said the victory against RR, following losses to Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Chennai Super Kings, is important.

"Beating RR will boost our confidence, they are at the top of the points table," he concluded.

Not in my best form: Parag Rajasthan Royals batter Riyan Parag returned to the top five in the Orange Cape race after striking his fourth fifty of the season.

The 22-year-old Parag slammed 77 off 49 balls but could not help his side chase down the target set by SRH. Despite his breakout season with the franchise, Parag said he was not in his best form since he could not finish the game.

"I got a lot of areas to improve. I am not in my best form, I would have finished the game otherwise.

"I got a lot of areas to perfect. I try to learn from my mistakes and not repeat them. Is it my best innings? No. I would say that if I get a hundred," Parag told reporters.

The Assam player said the loss was "dramatic", adding that his team made a few errors.

"It is never good to end on the losing side. We did a lot of things right. We will focus on them more rather than dwelling on our mistakes. We are at a good position in the points table. Just one bad game I guess. (PTI)

Mohun Bagan eye historic treble in ISL summit clash vs Mumbai City FC

KOLKATA, May 3: Mohun Bagan will look to cap off their fairytale season with a historic treble as they face Mumbai City FC in the ISL summit clash at Salt Lake Stadium, with 62,000 partisan fans expected to cheer their guts out and paint the stands in green and maroon, creating an electrifying atmosphere here on Saturday.

The season began with the Mariners winning the Durand Cup for the first time after 23 years. Having slipped to fifth in the table at midway stage, Antonio Habas took over from Juan Ferrando and led them to their maiden League Winners Shield.

Two weeks after they defeated Mumbai City FC 2-1 to win their maiden Shield, the two teams will return to the same venue of Salt Lake Stadium with an aim to complete a rare double in the ISL and a hat-trick of titles in one season.

As per noted football statistician Hari Prasad Chattopadhyay, the last time Mohun Bagan won three titles or more was more than 23 years back when they had won the erstwhile National Football League (NFL), Federation Cup, Calcutta Premier Division League, Sikkim Gold Cup and Bordoloi Trophy. The coach was India captain Sunil Chhetri's father-in-law Subroto Bhattacharyya.

Mumbai City FC have done it before in 2020-21 and the stage will be set for Mohun Bagan to follow suit.

"Statistics have no relevance. We have to continue playing well and complete the circle," the 66-year-old Spanish tactician said in the pre-match media interaction.

Three years back, Mohun Bagan had squandered a 1-0 lead to suffer a 1-2 defeat against the same team at the ISL final held in Margao, which was played behind closed doors due to the COVID-19 pandemic. But revenge is not on Habas' minds.

"I'm not about revenge; that's stuff you see in movies or with the mafia. It's just another game against tough opponents, and it's going to be a great show for the ISL," Habas said. (PTI)

MUMBAI, May 3: From hitting massive sixes, to scoring tons of runs, to producing breakthroughs, charismatic all-rounder Sunil Narine has been KKR's go-to man for more than a decade in the IPL, and co-owner Shah Rukh Khan was effusive in his praise for the all-rounder, calling him the "Superman" and the real energy behind the team's success.

Riding on Narine's blazing innings, including a century and two half-tons and nearly a dozen wickets, KKR are currently second on the table. The two-time champions could well break the decade-long jinx of not winning an IPL title if Narine's charisma continues to shine through this season.

"In our house, we call him Superman, the god particle. He's a boss on the field, a player, a bowler, a batsman, a wicket-keeper, a fielder. He's an 'anything' player," Shah Rukh told Star Sports show 'Knight Club presents - King Khan's Rules' about the 35-year-old stalwart, who played a pivotal role in KKR lifting the trophy in 2012 and 2014.

Narine, the highest wicket-taker in the



IPL among overseas spinners, had taken 21 and 24 respectively in the 2012 and 2014 editions, paving the way for the purple and gold jerseys to clinch the two IPL titles.

"He's so spirited, so lovely. We're very

fortunate to have players, Indian or foreign, who have deep feelings for the team... Sunil, like I said, he's an 'anything' player."

The Bollywood star added that Narine and country-mate Andre Russell were piv-

otal to the club's ethos, saying any one of them getting injured feels like a body blow to the side.

"Imagine KKR without these guys. When they get injured, it feels awful to wonder how we'll manage without them. It's so crucial. They've been with us for so many years, and I think the way they have supported the team, they're like part of the family," said Shah Rukh.

Russell is a cut above the rest when it comes to hairstyle, and Shah Rukh said the cricketer is a "fashionista".

The mohawk he made popular when he came into the IPL continues to trend even now, though more than a decade has elapsed since the fancy cut was first made popular by the West Indian.

"Such a wonderful person to be around, and such a great cricketer. He reminds us of the first big man like Universe Boss, Mr. Gayle. He's like that, and I love the fact that he's very fashion-conscious. He likes to dress well, do his hair.

"Last night, I asked him, 'Do you have some two-colour shoes?' He said no, but he has designer spikes. So I said, 'Are they

Gucci designer spikes?' Wow! Yes, well, I love the way he's a fashionista."

Russell has forged a strong bond with Rinku Singh and Shah Rukh says their camaraderie reminds him of Jai-Veeru in the iconic movie 'Sholey'.

"Rinku and I have such a strong bond, like the Jai-Veeru friendship. They're so different, yet they love each other and help each other as cricketers and as people. They're so different, yet they love each other and help each other as cricketers and as people."

Team mentor Gautam Gambhir, who returned to the side this season after a stint with Lucknow Super Giants, will always remain KKR's icon, given that he guided the team to two IPL titles and helped them qualify for the playoffs five times.

"The great thing about Gautam Gambhir being back with us is that I never felt like he left us. Whether he's in our team or mentoring someone else, there's never any animosity or competition with him."

Part 1 of Knight Club presents - King Khan's Rules will air at 6.15pm this evening. (PTI)