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Amit Shah's doctored video: Telangana CM seeks more time

Modi, Home Minister resorted to a vengeful attitude: Revanth Reddy

NEW DELHI, May 1: Telangana chief minister A Revanth Reddy has sought more time to appear before the IFSO unit of Delhi Police that is probing the case of a doctored video of home minister Amit Shah's speech, a senior police official said on Wednesday.

Reddy's lawyer appeared before the Delhi Police on Wednesday after summonses were issued against the Telangana Congress chief and four members of the Pradesh Congress Committee for allegedly posting the video on X.

They were asked to join the investigation on Wednesday at 10:30 am. The official, who requested anonymity, said that Reddy has sought more time to appear before the Intelligence Fusion and Strategic Operations (IFSO) unit of the Special Cell that is probing the case. Reddy's lawyer Saumya Gupta told reporters here that the



handle through which the video was shared did not belong to Reddy. "That account is not owned by the Telangana CM," Gupta said after meeting the Delhi Police's investigating officer at the IFSO office in Dwarka.

The summonses were issued to Reddy and four Telangana Pradesh

Congress Committee (TPCC) members - Shiva Kumar Ambala, Asma Tasleem, Satish Manne and Naveen Pettem - under sections 91 and 160 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC).

According to police sources, if a person is served notice under section 160/91 of the CrPC, the per-

son can either make a physical appearance before the IO or send a legal representative.

Addressing an election rally in Nizamabad Lok Sabha constituency in Telangana on Wednesday, Reddy said a case has been registered against him in Delhi based on the complaint of the Union Home Ministry.

"I questioned the BJP. When I did that, PM Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah resorted to a vengeful attitude and registered a case against me in Delhi," he alleged. The notices had been handed over by teams of Delhi Police's Special Cell to the Chief Minister's Office and at the Congress office at Gandhi Bhavan in Hyderabad on Monday.

"You come to my state and threaten the CM, but the people of Telangana won't be scared.... "Khabardar (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

BJP cleared from South, halved in North: Cong MP Rajeev Shukla

LUCKNOW (UP), May 1: Congress MP Rajeev Shukla on Wednesday said it has become clear from the last two phases of voting in the Lok Sabha elections that "the BJP has been cleared from the South and halved in the North".

Addressing a press conference at the state Congress headquarters here, Shukla said it has become clear from the last two phases of voting that there is a "strong undercurrent against the Modi government".

The Rajya Sabha MP said Prime Minister Narendra Modi "himself does not use the slogan of 400 paar in his speeches". "Forget about crossing 400, Modi ji has now stopped even talking about Modi's guarantee and the truth is that he has again come back to his old talk of Hindu-Muslim," he added.

Shukla said it is unfortunate that national level leaders of the BJP are also spreading lies about the Congress manifesto 'Nyaya Patra'. "These people have completely destroyed purity and dignity in politics. The BJP has also forgotten the legacy of Atal Bihari Vajpayee," he



said. Escalating his attack on the Modi government, Shukla said today's BJP says that whatever happened in this country happened only after 2014. This Lucknow city was also built after 2014. All the development of this country has happened after 2014. The truth is that all former prime ministers have contributed to the development of the country, he added.

The Congress leader said that he had principled disagreements with

former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, but today the BJP does not even take the names of its own leaders like Vajpayee and Murli Manohar Joshi nor is their photo visible anywhere in the campaign.

Shukla said the BJP is neglecting its workers and distributing tickets to imported leaders.

"In Haryana, six out of 10 tickets were given to the leaders coming from outside. Even today, about 100 to 150 tickets (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

HT BRIEFS

Annual conference

MORIGAN: The existence of Assamese language will be at the hand of Assamese people only till when the culture of Saint sankardeva is alive' said the secretary of Nagaon Anchalik, Asom Sahitya Sabha Pratap Hazarika while inaugurating the delegates meeting of the annual conference of the literary body held at Kushtoli in the district. The two days long conference of the literary body was kicked off with the hoisting of sabha flag by the president of MDLB Mahendra Saikia. The ceremonial light was inflamed by retired teacher Puheswar Deka. It was followed the smriti tarpan by social worker Tilak Deka. Under the presidentship of former president district literary body Haren Bora the meeting of poet body held which was inaugurated by V.P. of poet body Rekha Gohain.

Felicitated

BOKAJAN: A total of 24 ex-servicemen were felicitated by All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHL) at Diphu Railway Station. The ex-servicemen arrived by train where they were received by the Law Secretary of APHL, Semson Teron and others. The APHL felicitated them.

Kohima police

DIMAPUR: The Kohima police launched the AVL 437 DUO vehicle emission checking machine to check and enforce vehicle emission norms. The machine, launched by Kohima SP Bharat Laxman Markad, is capable of checking both diesel and petrol variant vehicles. Kohima police PRO said in a release, Markad also flagged off three traffic patrol motorcycles for enforcement purposes. The machine and the enforcement vehicles are funded under the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP). Addressing the programme, the SP emphasised the need to curb activities that harm the environment. "Vehicle emission being one of the major causes of environmental pollution in the district," he said. Markad said the police now have the capability to check and enforce vehicle emission norms. He asked the enforcement teams to be dedicated and sincere in carrying out their assigned duties.

M'laya govt directs all departments to keep its offices safe from arson attempts



SHILLONG, May 1: The Meghalaya government has directed all department heads to keep their of-

fices and vehicles under safe custody after three fresh arson attempts were reported in Shillong

since Tuesday night, officials said. Unidentified miscreants lobbed petrol bombs at two police stations and a government office here.

Petrol bombs were hurled at the Sadar and Rynjah police stations on early Wednesday while a portion of the Meghalaya Government Construction Corporation (MGCC) was set on fire. "We have directed all heads of departments to keep the offices and vehicles under safe custody," a senior government official told PTI.

He said district deputy commissioners were directed to keep close coordination with the police for the security of vital government installations. East Khasi Hills deputy commissioner (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

TMC attacks Adhir over 'better to vote for BJP' remark

NEW DELHI/ KOLKATA, May 1: The TMC on Wednesday accused Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury of being the "B-team" of the BJP after a purported video, where he allegedly stated that voting for the BJP is better than voting for the TMC, went viral, prompting a denial from the Congress, claiming the video was "doctored".

An eight-second video clip of Chowdhury's speech during an election rally in West Bengal's Murshidabad was shared by the TMC, where the sitting Congress MP and candidate from West Bengal's Baharampur was seen saying "It's better to vote for the BJP than to vote for the TMC."

However, the authenticity of the clip could not be verified by PTI. Responding to the clip, the West Bengal Congress unit termed it as doctored and officially complained to the EC, seeking intervention and appropriate penal action.

Commenting on the purported remarks, Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said the goal of his party is to bring down the numbers of the BJP in West Bengal and that the TMC is part of the INDIA bloc.

Earlier in the day, the TMC, upset with Chowdhury's continual criticism and holding him responsible for the breakdown of seat-

sharing discussions with Congress in the state, labelled him as "anti-Bengal."

In a post on X, the TMC said after acting as the "eyes and ears of BJP in Bengal," Chowdhury has now been promoted to be the "voice of the BJP in Bengal."

"Listen to how the B-Team member is openly asking people to vote for the BJP - a party that refused to release Bengal's rightful dues and deprived our people of their rights. Only Bangla-Birodhi can campaign for the BJP, which has repeatedly insulted Bengal's icons," the TMC said.

"On May 13, people of Baharampur will give a befitting response to this betrayal!" it added. TMC Rajya Sabha MP Saket Gokhale also attacked the Congress leader over the remarks.

"Finally from the B-team horse's mouth! Congress Bengal chief Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury publicly asks people in his rally to vote for the BJP and not the TMC. While Mamata Banerjee fights against the full might of Modi-Central Agencies machinery, Bengal Congress is openly asking votes for the BJP," he said in a post on X. "In Bengal, TMC is INDIA taking on BJP. Meanwhile, Congress and CPM have chosen to become (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Tripura govt imposes restriction on sale of petrol, diesel

AGARTALA, May 1: The Tripura government has imposed restrictions on sale of petrol and diesel from Wednesday as the fuel stock in the northeastern state has come down due to disruption of goods train movement, an official said.

Goods train movement to Tripura was hit by a massive landslide in Assam's Jatinga. Passenger train movement started on April 26 after restoration work. However, train service through Jatinga still remains closed during the night.

"In view of the supply constraint of petrol and diesel due to disruption in goods train movement to the state, it has been decided to impose restriction on sale of fuel - petrol and diesel in the state from May 1

until further order", said additional secretary of food and civil supplies department, Nirmal Adhikari.

"Two-wheelers and three-wheelers would get petrol amounting to Rs 200 per day while four-wheelers it would be Rs 500 per day," said the order issued by the Food and Civil Supplies department.

Fuel pumps have been told to sell only 60 litres of diesel to a bus per day, while for minibuses it is 40 litres and for autorickshaws and three-wheelers it is 15 litres per day, it said. When contacted, Chief PRO of NFR Sabyasachi De said the railway track was badly affected due to landslides at Jatinga in Assam's Dima Hasao district recently. "After restoration (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Cong-MNF coalition to run Lai autonomous council in Mizoram

AIZAWL, May 1: After a prolonged political deadlock in Mizoram's Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC), officials on Wednesday announced the formation of a Congress-MNF coalition administration to run the 25-member council.

LADC is one of the three autonomous district councils constituted under the Sixth Schedule of the constitution for Lai people in the southern part of the state with Lawngtlai as its headquarters.

Officials said 12 MNF members have joined forces with the lone Congress member, C Laluanthanga, to form the United Legislature Party (ULP). This newly formed coalition has presented its claim to Governor Hari Babu Kamphampati to run the council.

Lalmuanthanga is expected to become the chief executive member (CEM) of the council, officials added. Previously led by the MNF, the LADC was placed under governor's rule in March following the resignation of CEM V. Zirsanga in a graft case conviction.

In February, the special court (Prevention of Corruption Act) in Aizawl had sentenced Zirsanga to four years imprisonment and imposed a fine of ₹ 4 lakh for misappropriating ₹ 1.33 crore during his stint as an executive member of the council.

Soon after that, eight MNF members defected from the party and tied up with the opposition and submitted a complaint to the governor expressing lack of confidence in the Zirsanga-led council.

Following the CEM's resignation, one of the eight MNF members returned to Zirsanga's camp thus making a situation where no single party could garner the magic number to run the council as both the ruling and opposition camps had 12 (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



Teachers of saraswati Bagdhaddni Jatuya Vidyalaya receiving the Hemkosh Pran Debananda Baruah samaj Setana Award 2024 Jayanta Baruah Chairman Sadin Pratidin gosthi at Vivekananda Kendra in Guwahati on Wednesday. HT Photo

'It is important to celebrate and exhibit our cultural traits'

Ao Nagas celebrate Moatsü fest with traditional fervor and gaiety in Kohima

HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, May 1: The Ao Naga community celebrated their all-important festival Moatsü with traditional fervor and gaiety in Kohima on Wednesday.

Traditional songs and dances were presented by various groups to mark the occasion which was followed by a traditional Moatsü feast. Adviser to information and public relations Imkong L. Imchen hosted the festival organised by the Mangmetong Senso Telongiem Kohima.

Speaking at the celebrations, Imchen said the Nagas as a tribal society have lots of rituals and beliefs which in recent times have trickled down to just the celebration of one or two major festivals of each tribe. "It is important to celebrate and



exhibit our cultural traits so as to ensure that our unique culture and traditions are not lost," he said.

Imchen said in a city like Kohima, inhabited by various tribes, the beauty of the Naga society can

be witnessed through different tribes exhibiting and showcasing their own unique culture and tradition to one another and co-existing in harmony.

"It is the responsibility of every Naga to exhibit and practice our rich cultural heritage and ensure that it is preserved in the right way for years to come," he added. Adviser to law and justice and land revenue TN Mammen, speaking on behalf of the Ao legislators, shared, in brief, the significance of the Moatsü festival in today's society. He also said the festival is the bedrock of Naga culture and traditions. Mammen also said the celebration of festivals is a social necessity and urged all to strive towards unity and lead disciplined lives just like our ancestors did. He (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

SC: Hindu marriage not valid unless performed with requisite ceremonies

NEW DELHI, May 1: A Hindu marriage is not an event for "song and dance", "wining and dining" or a commercial transaction, the Supreme Court has observed and said it cannot be recognised in the "absence of a valid ceremony" under the Hindu Marriage Act.

A bench of Justices B V Nagarathna and Augustine George Masih said a Hindu marriage is a "samskara" and a sacrament which has to be accorded its status as an institution of great value in Indian society. In its recent order passed in the matter of two trained commercial pilots, who sought a divorce decree without performing a valid Hindu marriage ceremony, the bench urged young men and women to "think deeply about the institution of marriage even before they enter upon it and as to how sa-

cred the said institution is, in Indian society".

"A marriage is not an event for 'song and dance' and 'wining and dining' or an occasion to demand and exchange dowry and gifts by undue pressure leading to possible initiation of criminal proceedings thereafter. A marriage is not a commercial transaction. It is a solemn foundational event celebrated so as to establish a relationship between a man and a woman who acquire the status of a husband and wife for an evolving family in future which is a basic unit of Indian society," the bench said.

Termining the marriage as sacred as it provides a lifelong, dignity-affirming, equal, consensual and healthy union of two individuals, the bench said a Hindu marriage facilitates procreation, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

GST revenues hit record ₹ 2.10 lakh cr in April on strong eco momentum

NEW DELHI, May 1: Goods and Services Tax collections grew 12.4 per cent to a record high of ₹ 2.10 lakh crore in April, aided by strong economic momentum and increased domestic transactions and imports, the finance ministry said on Wednesday.

The GST collections have breached the ₹ 2 lakh crore mark for the first time in April this year, it said in a statement.

"The Gross Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections hit a record high in April 2024 at ₹ 2.10 lakh crore. This represents a significant 12.4 per cent year-on-year growth, driven by a strong increase in domestic transactions (up 13.4 per cent) and imports (up 8.3 per cent)," the ministry said.

The GST revenue, which is basically taxes on goods sold and services rendered, was more than ₹ 1.78 lakh crore last month, while it stood at ₹ 1.87 lakh crore in April 2023.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in a post on X (formerly Twitter) lauded the efforts of tax officers for achieving the milestone.

"GST collection crosses ₹ 2 lakh crore benchmark, thanks to the strong momentum in the economy and efficient tax collections," she said.

Tax experts said robust GST revenues in April reflect a buoyant economy, self-compliance by businesses, timely audit and scrutiny, besides enforcement measures taken by the department. The increased collections also raise ex-



pectations of ushering in the next wave of GST reforms.

In April this year, the mop-up under Central GST (CGST) pool stood at ₹ 43,846 crore, while State GST (SGST) collection reached ₹ 53,538 crore and Integrated GST (IGST) ₹ 99,623 crore, including ₹ 37,826 crore collected through levies on imported goods.

The total cess collection was ₹ 13,260 crore, including ₹ 1,008 crore collected on imported goods.

Out of the IGST collection, ₹ 50,307 crore was settled towards CGST and ₹ 41,600 crore towards SGST. This translates to a total revenue of ₹ 94,153 crore for CGST and ₹ 95,138 crore for SGST in April 2024 after regular settlement.

"There are no dues pending on account of IGST settlement to the states," Sitharaman said in an X post. After accounting for refunds,

the net GST revenue for April 2024 stood at ₹ 1.92 lakh crore, a 15.5 per cent growth compared to the same period last year.

Deloitte India Partner Mahesh Jaising said the consistent buoyancy in GST collections has set the stage for pursuing forward-thinking reforms under GST 2.0.

PwC India Partner Pratik Jain said that with the next wave of GST reforms expected after the formation of the new government, the growth (in GST collections) may be further accelerated.

It may also enable the government to make bolder decisions like rate rationalisation or bringing other products, such as ATF and natural gas, under the GST ambit.

According to EY tax Partner Saurabh Agarwal, the GST collection underscores the steadfast resilience of the tax system amid evolving economic landscapes.

"The concerted efforts of the GST officials, including zero tolerance for non-filers, coupled with rigorous measures to combat fake invoicing and the registrations have significantly bolstered GST collections in the states' coffers," Agarwal said.

Deloitte India Partner MS Mani said significant GST collection increases have been observed across all major producing and consuming states, indicating that it is widespread and not restricted to a few industrial pockets.

Tax Connect Advisory Services LLP Partner Vivek Jalan said from July 2017, when GST started with an average monthly revenue of around ₹ 0.9 lakh crore, to April 2024, when it grossed ₹ 2.1 lakh crore, GST revenues have witnessed an approximate growth of 13 per cent per annum on average.

Considering the inflation at 5 per cent and GDP growth of 7 per cent, there has been an average buoyancy of 1 per cent on an average per annum over the last seven years, Jalan said.

Sanjay Chhabria, Senior Director, Indirect Tax at Nexdigim, said the significant rise in domestic transactions can be attributed to consumer spending being focused on beating the summer heat, with purchases like air-conditioners, beverages, as well as increased travel during long vacations from schools and colleges. "This one-time leap is a new benchmark, which reflects robust economic buoyancy and high consumer spending," Chhabria said. (PTI)

ATF price hiked marginally, commercial LPG rate reduced by ₹ 19 per cylinder

NEW DELHI, May 1: Jet fuel or ATF price on Wednesday was hiked by a marginal 0.7 per cent while rates of commercial LPG used by establishments such as hotels and restaurants was cut by ₹ 19 per cylinder in line with international prices. Aviation turbine fuel (ATF) price was hiked by ₹ 749.25 per kilolitre, or 0.7 per cent, to ₹ 101,642.88 per kl in the national capital, according to a price notification of state-owned fuel retailers. The increase reverses the marginal 0.5 per cent cut effected on April 1. Rates in Mumbai on Wednesday were increased to ₹ 95,173.70 per kl from ₹ 94,466.41. Prices differ from state to state depending on the incidence of local taxes. Alongside, oil firms also cut the price of commercial

LPG by ₹ 19 to ₹ 1,745.50 for a 19-kg cylinder. This is the second monthly reduction in rates. Prices were on April 1 reduced by ₹ 30.5 per 19-kg cylinder. Rates of the cooking gas used in domestic households, however, remained unchanged at ₹ 803 per 14.2-kg cylinder. April 1 was the first reduction in commercial LPG prices since January. Rates had gone up ₹ 14 per cylinder on February 1 and ₹ 25.5 on March 1. State-owned Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL), and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) revise prices of ATF and cooking gas on 1st of every month based on the average price of benchmark international fuel and foreign exchange rate. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Amit Shah's doctored video

(be mindful) PM ji, you may think that you can threaten by coming to Telangana. This is my place. This is my territory. You are threatening me on my soil," Reddy said at the rally on Wednesday.

The Special Cell of Delhi Police had on Sunday registered an FIR after the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), which is under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), filed a complaint about the doctored video of Shah where his statements indicating a commitment to abolish quota for Muslims on religious ground in Telangana were changed to make it seem that he was advocating scrapping of all reservations. (PTI)

BJP cleared from South

have been given to the leaders of other parties. Instead of leaders, officers are being made ministers in the cabinet. All important ministries are with former officers," he said. The Congress leader said the low percentage of votes in the last two phases of elections means the BJP workers themselves have stood against Modi's BJP.

Besides, the common voters are also angry with the Modi government regarding inflation and unemployment, he added. The Congress leader also commented on the controversy over the safety aspect of the Covishield vaccine. Shukla said the issue of the Covishield vaccine is very serious. "People's lives have been played with for election donations. The Health Ministry should come forward and give its clarification on this issue," he added. (PTI)

M'laya govt directs all

SC Sadhu under which the state capital is under, said he is coordinating with the district SP to ensure that vital installations are protected. "We are devising a plan so that the government buildings are protected. We are discussing what action we need to initiate and in terms of identifying the culprits who are perpetrating these kinds of attacks and we will update again," he said. On Tuesday, two vehicles were damaged when unidentified miscreants lobbed petrol bombs inside the police reserve compound. Last month, unidentified miscreants lobbed petrol bombs at a police station at Mawli damaging one vehicle.

The police in April arrested members of the influential Khasti Students Union for their alleged involvement in the murder of 2 persons near the Indo-Bangladesh border, hours after the organisation held an anti-CAA protest at Ichamati town. Another migrant labourer also died when unidentified miscreants attacked him and two of his colleagues in the Mawroh area of the city. The government official said a report after investigation will reveal who are the culprits involved in the spate of attacks on government installations. (PTI)

Tripura govt imposes

work, train service began through Jatinga from April 26 but train service during night is still not allowed. Naturally, the movement of goods trains remains stopped. But there has been significant progress in the restoration work at Jatinga. We are hopeful of restoring normal train service shortly," he said. (PTI)

Cong-MNF coalition to

members each, excluding the chairman. Subsequently, governor's rule was imposed, and Lavngtlai DC was appointed as the council's caretaker. (PTI)

TMC attacks Adhir over

Modi's loyal soldiers. This is disgusting and beyond shameful," he said. Later in the evening, the West Bengal Congress unit issued a denial and said the state president meant "TMC and BJP are just the opposite sides of the same coin as both are venomous and spread lies". "A doctored video has surfaced on Social Media, perhaps either by the TMC or BJP IT Cell (both are notorious in the way they perform), wherein it's being shown as if the @INCWestBengal President (@adhirrcinc is asking the voters in a public meeting to vote for BJP instead, spreading wrong perception and misinformation among the voters and listeners," the West Bengal Congress posted on X.

Condemning the TMC for spreading fake videos, the Bengal Congress unit said a section of the media has spread misinformation without any verification and urged the masses to listen to the full speech. "Sri Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury had very clearly and proudly announced and urged voters to vote for Mortuza Hossain (Bokul) and not for any TMC and BJP. What he said is - You can trust and cast your vote in favour of Bokul who will be with you throughout all the seasons. What he meant to say is TMC and BJP are just the opposite sides of the same coin, both are venomous and spread lies. Don't at all vote for them," it said.

The party said it has lodged an official complaint to EC regarding this manufactured video sought their intervention and asked them to take appropriate penal action.

"We also are seeking help from professionals to help us find out the source (the IP address) so that we can lodge a police complaint also, through our legal cell. However, for the time being, we strongly condemn this culture of spreading lies and misinformation like this (which has been a trademark of the BJP IT Cell, now seems the other party has also started playing this dirty trick), that too when the election is going on, with an obvious ulterior motive, to malign our leader(s)," it said. Ramesh, meanwhile, said the only goal of the Congress was to bring down the numbers of the BJP in West Bengal.

"I do not know the context of what Adhir ji said, but we aim to reduce the numbers of BJP in West Bengal significantly," Ramesh said. "They won 18 out of 42 seats, we have to reduce their numbers and that is the only goal. This is not an assembly election, this is a Lok Sabha election. Congress, along with Left parties, is part of the INDIA bloc, TMC leader Mamata Banerjee has also said they are part of the INDIA bloc, though we are not in a seat-sharing arrangement," he said. A triangular contest between the TMC, Congress-Left alliance, and the BJP is being witnessed in West Bengal, where the TMC has 22 out of 42 seats in Lok Sabha, BJP 17, and Congress has two MPs. (PTI)

SC: Hindu marriage not

consolidates the unit of family and solidifies the spirit of fraternity within various communities. "We deprecate the practice of young men and women seeking to acquire the status of being a husband and a wife to each other and therefore purportedly being married, in the absence of a valid marriage ceremony under the provisions of the (Hindu Marriage) Act such as in the instant case where the marriage between the parties was to take place later," the bench said.

In its April 19 order, the bench said where a Hindu marriage is not performed in accordance with the applicable rites or ceremonies such as 'saptapadi' (taking seven steps by the groom and the bride jointly before the sacred fire), the marriage will not be construed as a Hindu marriage.

"We further observe that a Hindu marriage is a sacrament and has a sacred character. In the context of saptapadi in a Hindu marriage, according to Rig Veda, after completing the seventh step (saptapadi) the bridegroom says to his bride, "With seven steps we have become friends (sakha). May I attain to friendship with thee; may I not be separated from thy friendship". A wife is considered to be half of oneself (ardhangini) but to be accepted with an identity of her own and to be a co-equal partner in the marriage," it said.

In Hindu Law, marriage is a sacrament or a 'samskara' and it is the foundation for a new family, the bench noted, and said, "There is nothing like a 'better-half' in a marriage but the spouses are equal halves in a marriage." Observing that with the passage of centuries and the enactment of the Act, monogamy is the only legally approved form of relationship between a husband and a wife.

"The (Hindu Marriage) Act has categorically discarded polyandry and polygamy and all other such types of relationships. The intent of the Parliament is also that there should be only one form of marriage having varied rites and customs and rituals," it noted. The bench said after the Act came into force on May 18, 1955, it had codified the law relating to marriage among Hindus and it encompasses not only Hindus as such but Lingayats, Brahmos, Aryasamajists, Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs also who can enter into a valid Hindu marriage coming within the expansive connotation of the word Hindu. "Unless the parties have undergone such ceremony, there would be no Hindu marriage according to Section 7 of the (Hindu Marriage) Act and a mere issuance of a certificate by an entity in the absence of the requisite ceremonies having been performed, would neither confirm any marital status to the parties nor establish a marriage under Hindu law," it said.

The top court highlighted that the advantage of marriage registration is that it facilitates proof of factum of wedding in a disputed case but if there has been no marriage in accordance with Section 7 of Hindu Marriage Act, "the registration would not confer legitimacy to the marriage". It noted that under the Special Marriage Act, 1954, a man and a woman can acquire the status of being a husband and a wife as per the provisions of the said Act.

"The Special Marriage Act, 1954 is not restricted to Hindus. Any man and woman irrespective of their race, caste or creed can acquire the status of being a husband and a wife under the provisions of the Special Marriage Act, 1954 but under the provisions of the Act (Hindu Marriage Act, 1955), there should not only be compliance of the conditions as prescribed under Section 5 of the said Act but also the couple must solemnise a marriage in accordance with Section 7 of the Act," it said. Exercising its plenary powers under Article 142 of the Constitution, the apex court declared the estranged couple were not married in accordance with the law and held the marriage certificate issued to them in absence of valid ceremony under the Hindu Marriage Act as null and void. It also quashed their divorce proceedings and a dowry case lodged against the husband and his family members. (PTI)

Ao Nagas celebrate Moatsü

thanked the Mangmetong Senso Telongiem Kohima and his colleague Imchen for organising and hosting the Moatsü celebrations for the year 2024. N Meren, president, Mangmetong Senso Telongiem Kohima formally declared the Moatsü celebrations open.

IWG launches new brand 'HQ'

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 1: The first HQ centre has been set up at Level 7, Roodraksh Mall in the city. The new center comprises of impressive workspaces complete with co-working spaces, private offices, meeting rooms and creative spaces. This opening follows a partnership agreement with the property owner, who has invested in the IWG platform to create a branded flexible workspace in their building. The location comes on the heels of IWG adding 867 new locations globally in 2023 and posting its highest ever revenue in its 35-year history.

As the adoption of hybrid working rapidly accelerates across the state, the number of enquiries for space at IWG's co-working locations and flex spaces has risen sharply and this new opening helps meet this rising demand.

Situated at the heart of city, the new center will go a long way to meet the rising demand for a premium flexible working space in the area. By bringing a high-quality flexible office space to the city, IWG is enabling local professionals to experience living in a '15-minute' city, allowing workers to work close to their homes without commuting far from where they live. There are flexspaces available for people to choose - ranging from fully equipped day offices, small offices, custom offices or large suites, all of which come fully furnished and ready-to-use with high-speed Wi-Fi.

The launch of HQ in Guwahati marks yet another significant milestone for IWG as it reaffirms its com-

mitment to empowering businesses and individuals with innovative workspace solutions tailored to the demands of the modern workforce. The center will provide space for established firms and start-ups across a range of industries including IT,ITES, telecom, pharma, biotech, agritech, logistics and others.

Harsh Lambah, country manager India and vice president of sales, IWG, commented: "We are really excited to have brought the new HQ brand to the city. In fact, the city becomes the second city after Bangalore where we have introduced HQ. This further helps strengthen IWG's growing footprint in eastern India, especially the city, an important business hub that also serves as the gateway to the entire Northeast. The new center will offer a mix of flexible workspace rentals in the city including office spaces and office suites that can be rented on a long-term basis and customised as per client branding and layout.

IWG works closely with commercial property owners and developers to reimagine and revitalise traditional spaces into vibrant and productive workenvironments, while delivering enduring revenue streams for its partners. A remarkable 95% of IWG's new locations involve partnerships with property owners and investors to establish innovative workspaces. Notably, HQ emerges as one of our fastest-growing brands globally, reflecting our commitment to expanding flexible workspace solutions. The openings follow a partnership agreement with the building owner, who has invested in the IWG platform to create a branded flexible workspace in their building.

Enlightened leadership needed to resolve north-south divide on distribution of tax pool: Subbarao

NEW DELHI, May 1: Former RBI Governor Duvvuri Subbarao has opined that only enlightened leadership at Centre and state levels can resolve the complex north-south divide in deciding on the distribution of the tax pool among states, saying it is beyond the remit of the Finance Commission.

Subbarao, who held various positions including the finance secretary of Andhra Pradesh and Union finance secretary, and wrote extensively on issues in fiscal federalism in his new book titled 'Just A Mercenary?: Notes from My Life and Career' further said that horizontal sharing of the divisible pool of taxes has always been a contentious issue but will be even more so in this round.

"This (north-south divide in deciding on the distribution of the tax pool among states) is a complex political challenge beyond the remit of the Finance Commission. "Resolving it will demand enlightened leadership at central and state levels that can look beyond politics and build a consensus around an optimal way forward," he told PTI.

He pointed out that for every rupee they contribute to the centre's taxes, richer states like Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra get back less than a rupee while poorer states like Bihar and Jharkhand receive more than a rupee.

"Such cross subsidization of poorer states by richer ones is inevitable in a large and diverse country like ours and has, in fact, been an accepted principle," Subbarao said.

The 16th Finance Commission (16th FC) has been set up and the debate of economically and socially better-off southern and western states 'subsidising' the northern and eastern states has



begun again

"As you say, there is already an emerging north-south divide on the economy front. The question is, are we hitting the limits of such cross subsidization?" he asked.

According to Subbarao, many headline numbers suggest that the southern states are doing better in terms of infrastructure, private investment, social indicators and rule of law which has put them on a virtuous cycle of growth and prosperity and widened the north-south gap.

"Given their urge to move up faster, how much more of cross subsidization will the southern states countenance? And for how much longer?" he wondered.

While noting that the looming delimitation that is due in 2026 based on updated population data, Subbarao said over the last few decades, population growth rates in the southern states have declined more sharply than in the north.

"If as a consequence, the southern states lose their relative share of parliament seats, they will face the double whammy of reduced political clout combined with an open-ended commitment to cross

subsidization," he said.

Subbarao was finance secretary (2007-08) before taking over as the governor of the RBI for five years on September 5, 2008, a few days before the breakout of the Lehman Brothers crisis. Lehman Brothers crashed into bankruptcy on September 16, making it the biggest corporate failure in history.

Asked to comment on criticism that he did not buy up dollars when there were huge inflows during 2010-11, and instead allowed the rupee to appreciate, Subbarao said that was a deliberate decision informed by several considerations.

"Holding reserves is not costless, especially as our reserves are built from borrowed resources," Subbarao said, adding, RBI intervention in the market shifts the burden of adjustment from one segment of the economy to another.

He further explained that the stated policy of the Reserve Bank is to intervene in the market only to prevent volatility in the exchange rate.

"Juxtapose my alleged inaction against that policy.

"As I saw it, there was no volatility in the exchange rate dur-

ing 2010-11 to justify intervention. I felt obliged to walk the talk," he said.

Subbarao noted that if the Reserve Bank were to step in every time the exchange rate moved, they would happily outsource their external management to the Reserve Bank.

"That would be a costly moral hazard," he said.

Subbarao was at the helm of RBI during the taper tantrums in 2012-13 when the rupee crashed by 20 per cent peak to trough.

Referring to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech at the 90th anniversary celebrations of the RBI, Subbarao said, to make the rupee more internationally acceptable, the central bank should become less interventionist, besides fulfilling other conditions.

Responding to a question on freebies, Subbarao said in a poor country where millions struggle to make a decent livelihood, transfer payments to the most vulnerable segments are necessary, indeed even mandatory.

"But that has to be within limits especially as these freebies are financed by borrowing," he pointed out.

On the other hand, Subbarao said, competitive populism like what is unfolding -- political parties outdoing each other in wooing voters with freebies -- is fiscally perilous.

"I believe all political parties are guilty of this and trying to apportion blame will be a wrong start," he said.

Former RBI governor emphasised that there is a strong case for the central government that comes into office post elections to issue a white paper explaining to the larger public in plain language the costs and benefits of freebies. (PTI)

NFR cancels, reschedules, regulates trains

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 1: In view of temporary restriction on train movement from 18:00 hours to 06:00 hours between Jatinga Lampur and New Harangajao stations under Lumding division of the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR), for undertaking track safety related works and traffic block between Jatinga Lampur and New Harangajao, a few trains have been cancelled, regulated and rescheduled.

The Guwahati – Silchar Express, the Silchar – Guwahati Express, the Rangiya – Silchar Express and the Agartala – Guwahati Special scheduled to leave on May 2 and the Silchar – Rangiya Express and the Guwahati – Agartala Special scheduled to leave on May 3.

The Sealdah – Silchar Kanchunajunga Express commencing journey on May 1 will be regulated for four hours between Guwahati and Lumding. The Secunderabad – Agartala Special commencing journey on April 29 and the SMVT Bengaluru – Agartala Humsafar Express commencing journey on April 30 will be regulated suitably between Guwahati and New Halong.

The Agartala – Firojpur Tripura Sundari Express commencing journey on May 2 has been rescheduled to start at 23:10 hours instead of 15:10 hours. The Silchar – Thiruvananthapuram (Central) Express commencing journey on May 2 has been rescheduled to start at 23:50 hours instead of 19:50 hours.

CM Sarma addresses election rally at Dotma ABSU observes 34th death anniversary of Bodofa UN Brahma



HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, May 1: The All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) recalled contributions and dedication of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma, former president of the organisation on his 34th death anniversary at his burial place at Thulungapuri in Dotma in Kokrajhar district on Wednesday.

As part of the programme, ABSU president Dipen Boro hoisted the students union flag at half mast while former ABSU president and present cabinet minister, Urkhao Gwra Brahma and former general secretary of the ABSU and MLA of Kokrajhar East LAC, Lawrence Islay offered floral tributes at Bodofa's statue.

The chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region, Pramod Boro, Assam Assembly speaker, Biswajit Daimary and NDA alliance candidate for Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency, Joyanta Basumatary also paid homage to Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma. On the other hand, a huge election campaign for the UPPL candidate supported by NDA, Joyanta Basumatary was held at the Dotma HS School playground on Wednesday which was attended by thousands of people.

Meanwhile, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma addressed the meeting in Dotma.

Speaking on the occasion, the chief minister said, "There was

no lotus in Kokrajhar, but the tractor exists here. We must ensure that Narendra Modi becomes the next Prime Minister of the country for the third consecutive term. Thus, the countrymen will cast their vote in favour of NDA. We must realize casting vote in favour INDIA bloc is futile as it has no deserving candidate for the post of PM."

He also said the plough kit (BPF's symbol) has become useless and there is no valid meaning in support to them.

"BTC has witnessed peace and security after Pramod Boro becomes CEM of BTC as he has brought all the militants back home and restored the peaceful at-

mosphere in the region. Over 4,000 militants have returned home and with this the gun culture, killings and violence have come to an end. The time of seeking vote at gun point has also passed," he said.

He also assured Orunodoi schemes to all families in Dotma. He also assured jobs to one lakh youths without and 50,000 more jobs this year. Interviews for the third and fourth grade posts will be conducted to provide jobs to another 50,000 youths would be taken by September and October. This will reduce the burden of 10 lakh unemployed youths in the state.

The chief minister also ensured financial assistance to youths who do not have government jobs to open business to earn their livelihood. Again, Rs.10,000 would be distributed among women under the Lakhpati Baideo scheme, which would be increased to Rs. 25,000. The students will also be given monetary support and homeless under the PMAY houses.

CEM of Bodoland Territorial Region, Pramod Boro said, "The people in Bodoland region have chosen the NDA alliance and they have openly extended their support to the NDA alliance back candidate Joyanta Basumatary in the Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency."

The meeting was also addressed by state ministers UG Brahma and Ashok Singhal.

Sikkim Professional University hosts Sikkim State Students' Meet



HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, May 1: The Sikkim State Students' Meet of Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad has been organised at the Seminar Hall of Sikkim Professional University in Gangtok.

Attending the programme as chief guest Ashish Chauhan, national organising secretary of Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) urged various officials and workers (karyakarta) of Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) from Sikkim province for taking the programmes and policies of ABVP to the common people. Along with this, he threw light on various aspects of employment-oriented education and presented examples of many great men and called for learning from them. He also emphasized on research work.

"We should do every work with full efficiency and there should be full participation from the society," he said.

During the meeting, discussions and brainstorming took place regarding various upcoming activities of ABVP and all the participants in the meeting expressed their views and informed

about the upcoming plans. In the same programme, a meeting was organised in which various officials of ABVP, officials of various universities, teachers, professors and employees participated.

On this occasion, registrar of Sikkim Professional University, Ramesh Kumar Rawat delivered the welcome address and felicitated Ashish Chauhan by offering a Khada (Pataka) and memento.

Angangshu Sekhar Shill, regional organising secretary of ABVP, Prithvi Singh Rana, Sikkim state organising secretary of ABVP, Ganesh Neopaney, Sikkim state president of ABVP, Durgamani Dhakal, former president of Sikkim state of ABVP, Mahendra Singh Sevdha, vice president, Sikkim state of ABVP, Rakesh Kumar, professor of CAU, Ranipool, Gangtok, Sikkim, Laxman Sharma, registrar of Sikkim University, Gangtok Jyoti prakash Tamang, Bhoj Kumar Acharya, Tamang, Pradeep Tripathi, Renu Pant were also felicitated on the occasion. Students from various universities, colleges and educational institutions of the state were also honoured during the event.

NFR to operate special trains

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 1: To meet the surge of passengers the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) will operate a few special trains to meet the sudden surge of passengers.

Operations of these special trains will help passengers in travelling towards their destination for different purposes like summer holidays, exams, medical etc. Also, passengers on the waiting list of other trains in these routes can avail the facility.



Accordingly, the Agartala – Guwahati one-way special will depart from Agartala at 07:30 hours on May 2 to reach Guwahati at 22:50 hours on the same day. Another one-way special train, the Guwahati – Sealdah will depart from Guwahati at 23:55 hours on May 2 to reach Sealdah at 18:00 hours on the next day.

On the other hand, the one-way special Guwahati – Agartala will depart from Guwahati at 18:30 hours of May 6 to reach Agartala at 11:30 hours on the next day. The Dibrugarh – Kolkata Special will depart from Dibrugarh at 17:20 hours on every Saturday from May 4 till June 29 to reach Kolkata at 23:00 hours on the next day.

In return direction, the Kolkata – Dibrugarh Special will depart from Kolkata at 23:50 hours on every Sunday from May 5 till June 30 to reach Dibrugarh at 03:30 hours on Tuesday. The train will operate via Dhemaji, North Lakhimpur, Viswanath Chariali, Rangapara North, Rangiya, Kokrajhar, New Jalpaiguri, Barosi, Azimganj, Bandel etc. The train will have 2-tier, 3-tier, sleeper and general seating coaches for the convenience of the passengers.

People of the north bank of the Brahmaputra and adjoining areas of Arunachal Pradesh will also get benefitted.

International Workers' Day celebrated in state

HT Bureau

DIPHU, May 1: The All Karbi Anglong Building and Others Construction Workers Union (AKAB&OCWU) and Karbi Anglong Motor Transport Workers and Drivers Union (KAMTW&DU) on Wednesday celebrated the International Workers' Day or May Day at the building of the Diphu Municipal Board in Diphu market.

Building construction workers, daily wagers, drivers and handymen came together to celebrate the day. As part of the celebrations, the flags of AKAB&OCWU and KAMTW&DU were hoisted by the presidents of the organisations. Workers who had died were remembered by lighting candles. Participating in the celebration, Member of Autonomous Council (MAC), Krishna Bhattarai said the International Workers' Day is celebrated across the globe. It is an international event to recognise the contribution of workers and the working class to society.

Building construction workers and other labourers came together to celebrate the day to defend their rights and privileges. The rights of labourers (workers) cannot be taken away by someone, Bhattarai said.

Bhattarai expressed hope that the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) authority would see to the welfare of workers engaged in various unskilled activities.

President of AKAB&OCWU, Dilip Killing, president of KAMTW&DU, Abdul Noor and others were present on the occasion.

Our Sivasagar correspondent adds: Indian Patriotic Federation Socialist, Alok Sangha and Samajwadi Janswaraj Party (SJP) observed the 'International Workers' Day' on Wednesday in Dhai Ali Tin Ali in Sivasagar. The event was in-



augmented by journalist Syed Mustakur Rahman by lighting of a ceremonial lamp.

Smriti Tarpan was performed by reporter Irshad Ahmed. Addressing the gathering as chief guests, distinguished journalist Bhoirab Munda spoke on the history of the long and heroic struggle for justice of the working class a people. Pranab Rajguru, chief convener of SJP spoke on the objectives of the day.

Sadou Asom Nirman Shramik Santha in association with AITUC observed the day in CPI office at Station Chariali on Wednesday. A procession of the workers was taken out in the morning. The meeting, presided over by Reba Konwar was addressed by CPI state secretary Kanak Gogoi and CPI veteran Dharma Baruah, who severely criticised the government's anti-worker policies over the years. Madan Barua, secretary of the Nirman Shramik Santha spoke

on the objectives.

Our Jorhat correspondent adds: On the occasion of International Workers' Day on Wednesday several organisations of employees and workers of banks, insurance, civic body, construction workers, Anganwadi centres, BSNL, medical company representatives etc. took out a procession from the CITU office in Jorhat across the town. Holding flags, banners and placards the members of various trade unions, shouted slogans for protection of their rights and against 'anti-labour policies' of the BJP-led government, rising unemployment and steep hike in prices of essential commodities.

Later, an open meeting near the CITU office was held which was addressed by Promode Mahanta, a bank employees' body and also a union leader. He, while stating about the significance of the day, flagged the 'anti-worker and anti-farmer policies' of the government.

He urged the workers of various fields to unitedly raise their voices against the government policies and fight for their legitimate rights. Jamini Borboruah, another union leader, in his address, expressed concern about sharp increase in prices of medicines in recent times.

Our Margherita correspondent adds: The Margherita branch of Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha (ACMS) held a programme on the occasion of 'International Workers' Day' at the Ledo Tea Estate playground here on Wednesday.

The programme began with the hoisting of the union's flag by Gautam Dhanowar, president of the Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha Margherita branch, hoisting of May Day flag by all office bearers of ACMS, smriti tarpan by Ramkali Durga, advisor and Hemanti Mura, vice president of ACMS.

Workshop on environment held Brahmakumaris organises seminar in Dibrugarh

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, May 1: Eco Club and environment and climate cell of the Lokanayak Omeo Kumar Das College organized a two-day workshop on environment education programme at its campus. The programme, which began on April 29, was sponsored by the Assam Science Technology and Environment Council. The event started with a tree plantation by the president of Governing Body LOKD College, Jogendra Saikia and resource person Rajeev Gupta, scientist DRL Tezpur.

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, May 1: The Prajapita Brahmakumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya organised a seminar for media professionals in Dibrugarh on Wednesday. The topic of the seminar was 'Spiritual Empowerment of Media Persons for Solution Centric Mass Communication'.

Speaking at the programme, BK Sushant, national spokesperson and national media coordinator of Brahmakumaris, Delhi said, "The media persons have to face a lot of stress due to their job schedule, so spiritualism can help them to relax. The objective of the conference is to explore how spirituality

can empower media professionals to adopt a solution centric approach, thereby contributing to the creation of a clean, healthy and prosperous society. Through interactive sessions and insightful discussions, we aim to foster collaboration and inspire positive change in media narrative."

Nagen Saikia, former president of the Axom Xatiya Sabha, Nathmal Agarwal, zonal media coordinator, Eastern zone of Brahmakumaris, India and national coordinator of jurist wing, Dibrugarh Press club general secretary Anil Poddar and BK Binita, in-charge of Brahmakumaris, Dibrugarh among others were present during the programme.

Pranab Sinha Memorial Award conferred on Bokul Goigoi

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, May 1: The Pranab Sinha Memorial Award was conferred on nature conservationist of Gohpur, Bokul Goigoi on the occasion of the 10th death anniversary of founder president of Sonitpur Journalist Union, Late Pranab Sinha on Wednesday.

The award comprises of a citation, phulam gamosa, xoral and cash money.

Goigoi has been able to win the hearts of the people of the region through his untiring efforts towards conservation of nature. He wrote a series of journals on over 170 saplings, carrying forward a revolution by planting saplings of different species of plants at more than 10,000 places. He has attempted to sensitise the students on the need for conservation of nature through various activities.

Being present as guests of the occasion in the meeting conducted by executive member of the union, Pulak Kumar Deka, noted playwright, Aiswarya Kakati, noted writer, academician and retired professor of Tezpur College, Pranjit Hazarika, noted writers, Bhuban Chandra Gogoi and Manik Borah were present on the occasion.

After presenting the award in their speech, the guests spoke on how late Pranab Sinha contributed towards creating an environment of ethical journalism among the persons involved in the line of media and how he inspired his contemporaries to write on their respective fields thereby contributing to the Assamese literature.

Pranjit Hazarika in his speech spoke on how Sinha tried to teach the youngsters on ways to how to report an incident by maintaining the ethics of journalism. Prior to this a tribute paying programme was held, which began with district commissioner of Sonitpur, Deba Kumar Mishra lighting a lantern at the portrait of the late journalist. Mishra also led the 'Bhumi Pujan' ceremony of the proposed construction of the office of the Sonitpur Journalists Union.

TU inks MoU with ICMR for biomedical research

ICMR, TU to work on broad spectrum of research areas covering epidemiological, clinical, translational aspects of communicable, non-communicable diseases

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, May 1: The Tezpur University (TU) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), Regional Medical Research Centre, NE Region, Dibrugarh on Sunday to carry out biomedical research in priority areas.

Through the agreement both the institutions would work on a broad spectrum of research areas covering epidemiological, clinical and translational aspects of both communicable and non-communicable diseases with special emphasis on diseases of regional importance.

Biren Das, registrar of TU and Natarajaseenivasan Kalimuthusamy, director of ICMR-RMRC, Dibrugarh signed the MoU. Rajiv Behl, secretary to Government of India 's department of health research and director general of ICMR, Partha Pratim Sahu, dean of the School of Engineering and Dhanapati Deka, dean of the Research & Development from TU were present on the occasion.

Vice-chancellor of TU, Shambhu Nath Singh expressed his happiness over the



agreement.

"This agreement envisions expanding learning and research opportunities for scientific staff, faculties and students of TU and ICMR-RMRC, NE region, Dibrugarh. We are looking forward to yielding result-oriented outcomes from this agreement," Singh further said.

TU currently offers 76 academic programmes, including two-year M. Sc degree in

molecular biology and biotechnology, five-year integrated M.Sc in bioscience and bioinformatics/life sciences and PhD in molecular biology and biotechnology. The department of molecular biology and biotechnology is actively involved in key research areas such as microbial, plant, animal and environmental biotechnology, disease biology and bioinformatics and computational biology.

Form No. 3 (See Regulation-15 (1)(a)) / 16(3)	
DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL GUWAHATI Suwarna Bhawan, House No. 12, New Town Path, Near Hanuman Mandir, G.S. Road, Ulubari, Guwahati- 781007 (Assam)	
Case No.: 0A/439/2023	
Summons under sub-section (4) of section 19 of the Act, read with sub-rule (2A) of rule 5 of the Debt Recovery Tribunal (Procedure) Rules, 1993. Exh. No.: 4001	
YES BANK LTD VS MR RATAN MANDAL AND Anr	
To,	(1) MR. RATAN MANDAL C/O BIDIT DEY HOUSE NO. 353 BASISTHA NAGAR BASISTHA ROAD GUWAHATI KAMRUP (M) ASSAM - 781029 Also At, VILL CHAURAGURI GORAIMARI CHIRANG BONGAIGAON ASSAM - 783990
	(2) MRS RINKU MANDAL C/O RATAN MANDAL BASISTHA CHARIALI BYELANE 10 P.O BELTOLA BASISTHA GUWAHATI KAMRUP METRO ASSAM - 781029
SUMMONS	
WHEREAS, 0A/439/2023 was listed before Hon'ble Presiding Officer/Registrar on 01/04/2024.	
WHEREAS this Hon'ble Tribunal is pleased to issue summons/notice on the said Application under section 19(4) of the Act, (OA) filed against you for recovery of debts of Rs.3106518.76/- (application along with copies of documents etc. annexed).	
In accordance with sub-section (4) of section 19 of the Act, you, the defendants are directed as under:-	
(i) to show cause within thirty days of the service of summons Publication thereof as to why relief prayed for should not be granted.	
(ii) to disclose particulars of properties or assets other than properties and assets specified by the applicant under serial number 3A of the original application;	
(iii) you are restrained from dealing with or disposing of secured assets or such other assets and properties disclosed under serial number 3A of the original application, pending hearing and disposal of the application for attachment of properties;	
(iv) you shall not transfer by way of sale, lease or otherwise, except in the ordinary course of his business any of the assets over which security interest is created and / or other assets and properties specified or disclosed under serial number 3A of the original application without the prior approval of the Tribunal;	
(v) you shall be liable to account for the sale proceeds realised by sale of secured assets or other assets and properties in the ordinary course of business and deposit such sale proceeds in the account maintained with the bank or financial institutions holding security interest over such assets.	
You are also directed to file the written statement with a copy thereof furnished to the applicant and to appear before Registrar on 10/05/2024 at 10:30 A.M. failing which the application shall be heard and decided in your absence.	
Given under my hand and the seal of this Tribunal on this date: 02/04/2024.	
Signature of the Officer Authorised to issue summons. Registrar Debts Recovery Tribunal Guwahati	
Note: Strike out whichever is not applicable	

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself. - Leo Tolstoy

Rift between RSS and Modi

In a surprising turn of events, the longstanding alliance between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has reached a critical juncture, potentially jeopardizing the BJP's electoral fortunes in the upcoming 2024 polls. The rift, fueled by grievances over Modi's leadership style and policy decisions, has led senior RSS leaders to distance themselves from endorsing Modi as the prime ministerial candidate for a third term, even if the BJP secures a majority. Recent revelations from a high-level meeting of RSS leaders shed light on growing discontent within the organization, citing concerns over Modi's autocratic tendencies and disregard for the interests of RSS cadres and volunteers. Accusations of sidelining local leadership and prioritizing paid BJP workers over dedicated RSS volunteers have further exacerbated tensions. A key point of contention has been the handling of sensitive issues such as reservation and caste census.

The RSS leadership's inconsistent stance on these matters, coupled with Modi's failure to effectively address them, has alienated significant segments of the electorate. While RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat initially advocated for a review of reservation policies, subsequent shifts in position have left many RSS cadres disillusioned and confused. Moreover, the divergence between Modi and his deputy Amit Shah on crucial issues like the caste census has added to the party's woes. Contradictory statements from top BJP leaders only serve to undermine the party's credibility and raise doubts about its commitment to addressing social inequalities. In light of these developments, the BJP faces an uphill battle in retaining its support base and mobilizing voters for the upcoming elections. The refusal of RSS cadres to actively participate in the electoral process underscores the severity of the rift and the challenges ahead for the ruling party. As the electoral landscape evolves, it is imperative for the BJP to reassess its strategy and address the grievances of its traditional support base. Failure to reconcile with the RSS and respond to the concerns of marginalized communities could prove costly for the party in 2024.

The rift between Modi and the RSS poses a significant threat to the BJP's electoral prospects. Addressing internal divisions and redefining the party's agenda will be crucial in navigating the challenges ahead and securing victory in the upcoming polls. Furthermore, the discord within the RSS reflects broader discontent with the BJP's ideological direction and leadership style. The erosion of trust between Modi and the RSS highlights deeper fissures within the saffron ecosystem, raising questions about the party's ability to uphold its core principles and effectively govern the country. The failure to maintain cohesion within the Sangh Parivar not only undermines the BJP's electoral prospects but also threatens the stability of the broader Hindu nationalist movement. The BJP's reliance on divisive rhetoric and communal polarization appears increasingly out of touch with the electorate's priorities, particularly in the face of pressing socioeconomic challenges. The party's inability to articulate a coherent vision for inclusive growth and social justice further compounds its credibility crisis. To regain the trust of both its traditional base and the wider electorate, the BJP must engage in genuine introspection and course correction. In the run-up to the 2024 elections, the BJP's future hinges on its capacity to bridge internal divisions, reconcile with its ideological allies, and present a compelling vision for India's future that resonates with the aspirations of all its citizens.

Caught in the crossfire: Trudeau's Khalistani dilemma

In a display of brazen disregard for diplomatic decorum and international relations, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau found himself once again in the midst of controversy. His recent appearance at the Khalsa Day celebrations in Toronto on Sunday, April 28, marked yet another troubling chapter in Canada's complex relationship with Khalistani extremism. Amid the jubilant atmosphere of the event, characterized by the spirited chants of "Khalistan Zindabad," Trudeau took to the stage, greeted by a sea of supporters. His presence, however, served as more than a mere symbolic gesture. It signified a tacit endorsement of a movement that has long been deemed detrimental to the stability of the Indian subcontinent.

Trudeau's remarks, delivered in Punjabi, sought to reassure the Sikh community of his unwavering support in the face of perceived adversity. He pledged enhanced security measures and increased connectivity between Canada and India, seemingly oblivious to the underlying tensions his actions would inevitably exacerbate.

The presence of NDP's Gurmeet Singh, a known Khalistani sympathizer, further underscored the gravity of the situation. Singh's insistence on the recognition of the Sikh Genocide mirrored Trudeau's own rhetoric of solidarity, effectively legitimizing a narrative rooted in historical revisionism and political opportunism.

Equally troubling was the conduct of Canada's main Opposition leader, Pierre Poilievre, whose conspicuous display of deference towards the attendees bordered on pandering. As pro-Khalistani slogans reverberated throughout the venue, Poilievre's actions served as a stark reminder of the pervasive influence wielded by extremist elements within Canadian politics.

However, Trudeau's transgressions extend beyond mere rhetoric and symbolism. Canada's overt backing of Khalistani terrorists, as evidenced by its lenient stance towards individuals accused of anti-India activities, represents a clear violation of established diplomatic norms.

The Canadian government's failure to extradite wanted criminals and its complicity in allowing Khalistani elements to operate with impunity only serves to further strain bilateral relations with India.

The recent summoning of the Canadian Deputy High Commissioner by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs serves as a stark rebuke of Canada's cavalier attitude towards separatism and extremism.

India's "deep concern and strong protest" underscore the detrimental impact of Canada's permissive approach to Khalistani sentiments, not only on bilateral relations but also on the safety and security of its own citizens.

Trudeau's insistence on attending an event marred by the glorification of violence and the propagation of separatist ideology speaks volumes about his administration's priorities. By prioritizing domestic political expediency over international diplomacy, Trudeau risks undermining the very fabric of Canada's democratic institutions and jeopardizing its standing on the world stage.

As Canada continues to grapple with the consequences of its dalliance with Khalistani extremism, it is imperative that Trudeau and his government heed the growing chorus of voices calling for accountability and responsible governance. Failure to do so not only imperils the stability of the region but also compromises the values of tolerance and inclusivity that Canada purports to champion on the global stage. (The author can be reached at shashankadas007@gmail.com)



Modi-Shah want to get back lost support base via communal rhetoric

With voters remaining lukewarm to Narendra Modi's "Abki Par 400 Paar" campaign slogan, the prime minister's chief lieutenant, Union home minister Amit Shah has started reaching out to the smaller parties, apart from the official NDA allies, to help Modi form the government for a third consecutive time. Shah has conveyed it to his state leaders and chief ministers of the BJP ruled states to ensure that the voters come out in large numbers to prop up the voting percentage of the ruling party at the centre.

The decline of the polling percentage during the two earlier phases, especially in the second phase which witnessed a staggering 8 per cent decline in votes polled in comparison to 2019 across the country, has unnerved Modi and Shah. With around 1 crore voters, out of total 16 crores, staying away from voting, the BJP leadership is haunted by the fear that the third phase of polling would be a virtual repetition of the earlier two phases.

The third phase of the elections will be held on May 7 in 94 Lok Sabha constituencies in 12 states. In this phase, states which are crucial for BJP are Bihar (5 seats), Chhattisgarh (7 seats), Gujarat (26 seats), Karnataka (14 seats), Madhya Pradesh (8 seats), Maharashtra (11 seats), Uttar Pradesh (10 seats) and West Bengal (4 seats). SC, ST and OBC voters are dominant in these constituencies.

Incidentally, all the seats in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh going to polls in the third phase have high density of backward and EB castes. The caste structure could be understood from the popular saying: "Rome Pope ka, Madhepara Gope ka [What Rome is for Pope, Madhepara is for Yadavs]". Besides Madhepara, the other four poll-bracing constituencies are Jhunjharpur, Supaul, Araria, and Kharagpur. These areas have been traditionally anti-BJP.

In the ten constituencies in Uttar Pradesh that go to poll in the third phase, OBCs, including Yadavs, Lodhs, and Kachhi/Shakya/Murao communities, are the dominant castes and exert high level of influence as decisive polling factors. Besides, the Muslims are the most potent force demographically.

The 10 Lok Sabha constituencies scheduled for polls in this phase include Sambhal, Hathras, Agra, Fatehpur Sikri, Firozabad, Mainpuri, Etah, Budaun, Aonla, and Bareilly. Notably, the first two phases comprised eight seats each.

The third phase marks a significant

shift from the Jat belt observed in the initial two phases. In these areas, the Yadav-Muslim equation is quite strong. Incidentally, the Dalits and EBCs have suffered extreme form of upper caste repression. In earlier elections, the BJP managed to win quite convincingly. But the scenario has changed this time. BJP had won seven out of the 10 seats in 2014 and eight in 2019. Jharkhand constituencies will have election in the fourth phase.

The third phase will witness a paradigm shift in the allegiance of the voters. The farmers, Jats and Rajputs are already up in arms against the BJP, especially against Modi. The farmers have been quite angry with him for the ill-treatment and deceit meted out to them by Modi during their movement. They haven't forgotten the images of elderly farmers being assaulted and even tortured by the police. Earlier, over 700 farmers had died in the year-long agitation. Still, Modi did not guarantee them "legal MSP". Their demands are yet to be met.

It is the bitter realisation that BJP, especially Modi, is not the first choice of Dalits, poor, OBCs and EBCs, that mass made Modi turn desperate to rope in this big chunk of voters at any cost. The Dalits and EBCs, who were once considered to be the strong support groups of BJP, have shifted their allegiance to INDIA bloc.

RSS, over the years and through its various dalit organisations, has been striving hard to bring them into the Hindu fold. But as the general secretary of the CPI(ML) Dipankar Bhattacharya, [who is in Jharkhand, where the party has fielded its candidate from Koderma] said, the Dalits, tribals and EBCs have realised the futility of associating with the RSS and BJP and they are now fully on the side of the INDIA bloc.

Realising the shift in his Dalit, EBC and tribal base, Modi has now come out with a new slogan: "SC-ST aur OBC ki Sarkar". Modi, who had started his electioneering with a thrust on communal polarisation and insinuation against Muslims, has now changed the gear midway. Modi after the second phase has done another spin: focusing on the down-trodden and their welfare.

While thrust on welfare is going to be new mantra to woo the voters, Shah has indulged in the game of realpolitik. Modi and Shah strongly nurse the view that with RSS cadres and volunteers withdrawing from the electoral battle, they have to use their own instrument to retain

the power for the third term. While they have been exploring the possibility of winning smaller parties, Modi has also decided to make a tactical change in the electoral slogan. In his recent rallies in Maharashtra and Rajasthan, he had thrown the new slogan "Garibon ki Sarkar" (government of the poor) with audience to respond "Phir ek baar" (once again).

One thing is quite remarkable. Modi has virtually hijacked the five points of the Congress manifesto/NyayPatra. He has been emphasising on: "Vikas ko samarpit Sarkar (a government dedicated to development)"; "Yuvaon ko avsar dene wali Sarkar (A government that creates opportunities for the youth)"; "Mahilaon ko suvidha dene wali Sarkar (A government that gives benefits to women)", among other catchphrases.

In a late realization, the duo, Modi and Shah, have asked the party leaders to refrain from saying anything about the Congress. They are sure that push for replacing the current Constitution and instead introducing the Manusmriti as the basis for a new Constitution has alienated the Dalits, EBCs and also a large section of OBCs.

The low turnout simply manifests that the call for a high victory margin had sparked anxiety about a possible plan to scrap the Constitution and also abolish reservations.

Though Modi has been repeatedly cautioning this section and alleging that the Congress was out to finish India, the latest developments however show the strategy has indeed boomeranged on the BJP-RSS ecosystem.

Increasingly, Indian people have come to disbelieve Modi and his fabricated accusations against the Congress. For the ordinary voters, the five Nyay Patras of Rahul are more tenable and convincing than Modi's incessant tirade against the Nehru-Gandhis and the Congress.

As in earlier two phases, in the third phase too the turnout is expected to be quite low, notwithstanding Shah issuing directives to his cadres and lower-level leaders. Basically, the task of both management and taking the voters to the booths have been the primary duties of the RSS cadres and volunteers. However, the RSS cadres continue to maintain a belligerent attitude towards BJP.

All the three main states of Hindi heartland - i.e., Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand - have high levels of RSS

penetration. But this time they have been keeping away from the electioneering. They do not feel comfortable in approaching the farmers and others and request them to vote for the BJP.

Modi's blinkered claim that the Congress would snatch and redistribute the mangalsutras (gold chains) worn by Hindu women to Muslim "infiltrators" in the country has even not been appreciated by the devout Hindus. People are pointing out that workers and poor have had to pawn their mangalsutra under duress to meet their family needs, especially under Covid lockdown. Sources maintain that pawning of gold has not been a new thing. People have been mortgaging gold to meet the financial needs.

According to a RBI data, loans against gold surged by nearly 60% from September 2020 to September 2021 - from Rs 40,080 crore to Rs 63,770 crore. Reason: Modi government did not put enough money in the hands of the ordinary working class.

On the contrary, it helped big businesses hoover up public sector banks and industries, airports, shipping ports, railways, among other job-generating public infrastructure. Party sources maintain that the focus on "SC-ST-OBC ki Sarkar" was an attempt to counter the Opposition campaign about the BJP planning to end reservations, which has alienated Dalit and tribal voters.

Modi's blatant lies about Congress agenda incorporated in its election manifesto "to redistribute the Hindu property disproportionately among Muslims who have more children" is also causing serious concern over his real intentions. The claims have been thoroughly debunked as the Congress manifesto does not mention any of the fabrications aired by Modi during his serial violations of the model code of conduct. Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram has retorted: "Modi has imagined a Congress manifesto written by one of his own ghost speech writers."

Nevertheless, one immense benefit that Modi has rendered to the Congress is that unwittingly or not, he has popularised the chief talking points of the INC's people-centric, truly welfare election manifesto. Since Modi has been focussed on bad-mouthing Congress manifesto, he has done the grand old party a great favour by ensuring his own voter base is made aware of the promises made by Rahul Gandhi and his party, instead of the communal fumes on which the BJP-RSS are running at present. (IPA Service)

US worried at the possibility of harming former PM Imran Khan in prison

By: Girish Linganna

Recent discussions in the US Congress on the political situation in Pakistan have raised questions about the safety of the former Prime Minister Imran Khan presently lodged in prison. According to several sources familiar with the matter who spoke to The Intercept, the Senate Majority Leader emphasized to Pakistan's ambassador in Washington that ensuring the safety of jailed former Prime Minister Imran Khan is a top concern for the United States.

Late last month, Senate Majority Leader Schumer, a leading Democrat in Congress, issued a warning to Pakistan. This followed vigorous campaigning by the Pakistani diaspora, who are worried that the Pakistani military might harm Khan, the former prime minister removed from office in 2022.

Mohammad Munir Khan, a Pakistani American political activist, told The Intercept, "Chuck Schumer's discussion with the ambassador about Imran Khan's safety is a positive step." He added that the Pakistani American diaspora has been disappointed with Washington's inability to address and hold Pakistan's influential figures accountable for obvious human rights abuses and undermining core democratic principles.

Imran Khan, who is widely regarded as Pakistan's most popular politician, is currently in jail on corruption charges that many view as politically motivated. He was ousted from power in April 2022 through a no-confidence vote believed to be engineered by Pakistan's influential military and supported by the U.S. Since then, his party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), has been subjected to severe crackdowns, sparking global concern and condemnation from human rights organizations.

The worries about Imran Khan's safety that led to Senator Schumer's conversation with Pakistani Ambassador Masood Khan stem from increasing fears that the military might respond to Khan's enduring popularity by endangering his life while he is in prison. According to The Intercept, Schumer's office chose not

to comment on this story, and the Pakistani Embassy in Washington has not yet responded to a request for comment.

Senator Schumer, who has many Pakistani American constituents (or Voters) in New York, reached out as a new government in the South Asian country tries to secure its position despite public unhappiness with a February election that many say was fraudulent.

Besides banning the PTI party, Pakistan heavily cracked down before the February election. Despite a high voter turnout that hinted at an advantage for PTI-aligned candidates, allegations of widespread fraud were overlooked. Supported by the Pakistani military, a coalition of parties managed to establish a government under Shehbaz Sharif following the election.

The international community, with the U.S. included, observed irregularities in the voting process, and there were believable claims of vote rigging and blatant fraud during the election. Rep. Greg Casar, a Democrat from Texas, told The Intercept in March that there was clear evidence, acknowledged by the State Department, of issues with the election. At that time, Casar and other lawmakers had urged President Joe Biden not to recognize the government. However, the U.S. ambassador to Pakistan had already congratulated Sharif in early March.

Foreign policy experts in Washington have expressed concerns that the Biden administration's strategy might compromise democratic values for the sake of security. Matt Duss, executive vice president of the Center for International Policy, stated, "It seems like the administration is prioritizing its security ties with a foreign government over important issues such as democratic backsliding and human rights."

Imran Khan is reportedly facing harsh conditions in a Rawalpindi prison. Last month, his right to receive visitors was suddenly halted for two weeks, leading his supporters to worry about his well-being while in detention. Earlier this month, one of Khan's lawyers reported that his personal doctor was denied access to see him in jail. Addition-

ally, Khan's wife, who is also jailed on politically charged accusations of an un-Islamic marriage and corruption, is reportedly experiencing health issues due to her confinement conditions, her lawyer stated this week.

In a statement made from prison and later circulated on social media, Khan, who survived an assassination attempt at a political rally in November 2022, claimed there was a conspiracy to assassinate him while he was incarcerated. He indicated that his fate was controlled by Gen. Asim Munir, the influential chief of Pakistan's army. Khan stated, "Should anything happen to me or my wife, he will be the one responsible."

Schumer's conversation with the Pakistani ambassador might influence the military's decision-making regarding dealing with Khan. "Having a senior Democrat who has sway in the Biden administration issue a warning is quite meaningful," noted Adam Weinstein, the deputy director of the Middle East program at the Quincy Institute. He added that he doesn't think the military would go as far as to kill Khan in prison.

It would be a drastic measure, but the military harming or even killing an ousted leader, including someone as prominent as Khan, aligns with a pattern seen in Pakistan's history. Over the past few decades, numerous Pakistani leaders have met violent ends after clashing with the military. Some of these deaths have occurred under unclear circumstances, while others, like former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, were executed by military rulers after being removed from power.

Today, despite being officially governed by civilians, Pakistan's military is widely recognized as the dominant political force in the country. Currently under the leadership of Munir, the military's ongoing conflicts with Khan and his party have been a central political narrative in the country for more than a year.

Pakistani activists in the U.S. believe that America's ties with Pakistan provide a means to prevent Imran Khan from being harmed in prison. Mohammad

Munir Khan, a Pakistani American activist, stated, "At a minimum, Washington should make sure that Imran Khan is not physically harmed."

The U.S. has had a significant influence on Pakistan's internal politics, particularly in recent years, and played a key role in Khan's removal from power.

In August 2023, The Intercept released a classified Pakistani diplomatic cable that had been at the heart of political controversy. Previously, the details of the cable were not public. The document revealed that U.S. State Department officials had exerted significant pressure on the Pakistani government, leading to Khan's removal from power.

The cable revealed that Assistant Secretary of State Donald Lu, who oversees South Asian affairs at the State Department, warned the Pakistani ambassador in Washington that US-Pakistan relations would suffer greatly if Khan stayed in power.

According to the Pakistani cable, Lu mentioned, "If the no-confidence vote against the Prime Minister is successful, Washington will forgive everything."

Following Khan's ouster, the US has closely collaborated with Pakistan's new military-supported government. Reports from The Intercept indicate that Pakistan supplied weapons to Ukraine as part of a deal where the US facilitated a favourable loan package from the International Monetary Fund.

Before his imprisonment, Khan often mentioned the classified cypher (or code) and claimed he had a physical copy of it at a political rally. He is now serving a long prison sentence for charges concerning his management of classified information, along with numerous corruption charges that initially led to his arrest.

In the midst of a wider crackdown on his party, which has involved killings, unauthorized disappearances, and torture of PTI supporters and journalists, many believe that Khan's ongoing imprisonment is a political strategy aimed at keeping him and his movement from regaining power. After this year's election, amid concerns raised by

Casar and other members of Congress about Khan's removal and the voting process, the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee convened a hearing that included testimony from Assistant Secretary of State Lu.

As the only one testifying, Lu refuted claims of his involvement in a "regime change" in Pakistan. This was in response to accusations made by Khan and reported by The Intercept regarding his role and the contents of the diplomatic cable. Regarding the election, Lu acknowledged concerns about the conduct of the voting but did not specify any potential consequences for the alleged vote rigging.

"Our ambassador and embassy have taken actions," Lu remarked, hinting at the U.S.'s congressional message to Pakistan's new prime minister. He quickly followed up by stating, "In every interaction with this government, we emphasize the need for accountability regarding election irregularities." At the hearing, Rep. Brad Sherman, a Democrat from California, expressed concern about Khan's safety while in detention. Sherman suggested that Lu should personally visit Khan in prison, a proposal that received applause from the predominantly Pakistani audience present.

"Protecting leaders, no matter their political views, is crucial," stated Atif Khan, a Pakistani American diaspora activist. He praised Congressman Brad Sherman for promoting accountability and safety, urging the U.S. Ambassador to meet with former Prime Minister Imran Khan and ensure his welfare.

As Khan's situation remains uncertain, members of Congress have cautioned that ongoing U.S. backing for a government viewed as illegitimate by many Pakistanis could damage not only Pakistan but also the U.S. standing in a crucial area.

Supporting democracy is valuable on its own, but it also aligns with our interests," Casar, a Democrat from Texas, explained to The Intercept. "Despite any short-term military advantages, historically, it has not been beneficial for the United States to be perceived as supporting illegitimate, military-led governments in the long run. (IPA Service)

Life and agriculture in danger due to deepening water crisis

By: Lalit Garg

Due to adverse human behaviour, earth's temperature is on rise and the resulting climate change has now become a threat to every aspect of human life, as well as to water bodies and rivers. The dangerous impacts of climate change are being felt at alarming levels on total water storage in major reservoirs and river basins, including the Ganga, Indus and Brahmaputra, which could lead to serious water consequences for people. The latest figures of the Central Water Commission show the seriousness of this increasing water crisis in India. The latest figures show an alarming decline in the levels of reservoirs across the country.

According to the report dated April 25, 2024, the water available in major reservoirs in the country has declined by thirty to thirty-five per cent in proportion to their earlier storage capacity, which is a big decline compared to recent years. This point towards a drought-like situation; the root of which is said to be the effect of the El Nino phenomenon and lack of rainfall. Life cannot be imagined without water.

Apart from human-beings and animals, water is also essential for all forms of agriculture, vegetation and most industrial production processes. But today India is standing under the shadow of a serious water crisis. Unplanned industrialization, increasing pollution, shrinking deserts and glaciers, falling water level of rivers, lack of rainfall, environmental destruction, insensitivity towards rampant exploitation and misuse of natural resources are leading India to an impending major water crisis.

Water levels in 150 major reservoirs across India are currently at 31 per cent, with South India being the most affected region, with 42 reservoirs currently at only 17 per cent of the total capacity. This marks the lowest water potential observed in various regions of India. The situation is worrying in other areas too, with reservoir capacity at 34 per cent in the west and 32.5 per cent in the north.

However, the situation in eastern and central India is better; they have 40.6 percent and 40 per cent of the active capacity of their reservoirs respectively. Rainfall last year was deficient, especially in South India. The 2023 monsoon was uneventful as it was an El Nino year, which was also a climate pattern that typically causes hot and dry conditions in the region. This has created a lot of anxiety.

Currently, irrigation is also being affected, and there are growing concerns about the impact on drinking water availability and hydropower generation across the country. Looking ahead, more heat is expected in the coming months, indicating that a major water crisis is going to emerge in the coming days.

This reduction in water storage has occurred due to lack of adequate rainfall for a long period. Due to which, drought-like and unsafe conditions have arisen in many areas. Due to

which various crops are being adversely affected. One reason for this is that even today half of the cultivable land in the country is dependent on monsoon rains. In such a situation, the future of agriculture completely depends on the vagaries of monsoon.

In fact, due to continuously increasing heat the water level is shrinking rapidly. Due to its serious consequences, water shortage has become serious in states like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. The country's IT hub Bengaluru is facing a severe water crisis, which is not only affecting agricultural activities, but everyday life is also being badly affected.

In such a situation, to deal with an impending crisis, there is a need to intensify water conservation efforts from homes to all agricultural practices and industrial works. There is also an urgent need for major investment in water infrastructure and management systems to improve water storage and distribution efficiency. Along with this, there is a need to promote traditional techniques of water conservation. Also, there is a need to run public awareness campaigns to motivate the common people to promote judicious use of this valuable resource of nature.

By conserving water and ensuring adequate availability, we can improve the environment

and also solve the problem of climate change. You may wonder how much water a human being uses in his lifetime, but does he try to save that much water? Climate change has led to 134 percent increase in flood events since 2000, and 29 percent increase in drought duration.

Water is a basic requirement for the existence of life on earth. Water consumption has increased exponentially with the increase in population, but the amount of clean water on Earth is decreasing. Climate change and rising earth's temperature have made this problem a serious crisis. Like in many parts of the world, India is also threatened by an impending water crisis.

About 18 percent of the global population lives in India, but only four percent of the water resources are available to us. The efforts that have been made since ancient times to deal with the problem of water crisis in India are expected to be adopted on a large scale and to bring about a water conservation revolution.

Rivers, which have been the source of pure water for centuries, are getting polluted, now climate change is having a detrimental effect on them. The water harvesting system is deteriorating, and the groundwater level is continuously depleting. Considering the very low percentage of safe and potable water on earth, water conservation or water save campaigns have become very important for all of us.

To bring more efficiency in saving water, a proper water management system should be promoted by builders in all industrial buildings, apartments, schools, hospitals etc. Atal Bhujal Yojana is running for groundwater management in 8220 gram panchayats of seven states of the

country. This is the world's largest program led by local communities. Also, efforts like tap water, cleaning of rivers, and removal of encroachments are being done under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The main means of saving water here are rivers, ponds and wells. Adopt them, protect them, give them protection, and do not abandon them to the desert.

People should start collecting rain water at the village level. Rain water can be saved by creating or renovating small or big ponds with proper maintenance. About 70 percent of the earth's surface is filled with water. But, potable water is only three percent. Out of this, we are actually able to use only one percent of fresh water.

While using water, we do not think at all about saving water, as a result of which a situation of water crisis has arisen in most of the places. Water crises and critical situations have existed from ancient times. For this reason, there has been an ancient tradition of making Nadi, Pond, Johad, Bandha, Sagar, Samand and Sarovar etc. for water conservation in the provinces like Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh etc., where nature and culture have been in harmony with one another.

The forts of Rajasthan are famous anyway, but their water management is especially worth seeing and is also exemplary. The tradition of water harvesting is linked to the social structure there and due to the religious attitude towards water, natural water sources are worshipped. (The author is a journalist, columnist who can be reached at lalitgarg11@gmail.com)

Microplastics are global travellers of pollution

By: Tribhuwan Singh Bisht

In an era marked by technological advancements and rapid industrialisation, humanity's dependence on plastic has surged, leading to an insidious consequence: The proliferation of microplastics. These tiny particles, measuring less than 5 millimetres, have stealthily infiltrated every corner of our planet, from the depths of the ocean to the heights of the atmosphere.

Microplastics originate from a range of sources, including the breakdown of larger plastic debris and the shedding of synthetic fibres from clothing and textiles. Additionally, microbeads used in personal care products and industrial abrasives contribute to the abundance of these particles in the environment.

Despite their minute size, microplastics pack a significant punch, posing substantial risks to marine life, soil health, and potentially human well-being. Understanding the journey of these microscopic pollutants through our environment is crucial not only for comprehending the scale of their impact but also for devising effective strategies to combat their proliferation.

The global journey of microplastics embarks on a global journey, propelled by atmospheric and aquatic currents that crisscross the planet. Rainfall, surface run-off, and ocean circulation serve as conduits, carrying microplastics from terrestrial environments to aquatic habitats and vice versa.

But their journey doesn't end there; wind, acting as nature's courier, transports lighter microplastics to the furthest reaches of the globe, depositing them in remote areas such as glacier zones and high mountains.

However, microplastics aren't confined to the air and water alone. The pedosphere, or soil, also plays a crucial role in their transport. Agricultural practices, including the use of plastic mulches and sewage sludge as fertilizers, introduce microplastics into the soil, where they interact with a myriad of organisms and undergo intricate processes of dispersion.

Impact on hydrosphere, pedosphere and atmosphere
The hydrosphere emerges as the primary sink for microplastics, with human activities such as tourism and wastewater discharge contributing to their accumulation. These tiny pollutants, carried by ocean currents and rainfall, find their way into aquatic ecosystems, where they can either settle in sediments or remain suspended in the water column.

Horizontal distribution, governed by water circulation and wind currents, dictates the movement of microplastics within aquatic environments. Meanwhile, vertical distribution involves processes such as turbulent mixing and biological interactions, leading to the accumulation of microplastics in sediments and deep-sea habitats. Studies have shown that approximately 7 million microplastic items are released into aquatic habitats daily via wastewater treatment plant

effluents. Furthermore, 70 per cent of microplastics present in the hydrosphere are stored in aquatic sediments, highlighting the significant role of sediments as a sink for these pollutants.

While much attention has been focused on microplastics in water bodies, the pedosphere remains an often-overlooked sink for these pollutants. Domestic and agricultural activities contribute to the contamination of soil with microplastics, with plastic litter breaking down to release these tiny particles into the environment.

Plastic mulches, fertilisers, and sewage sludge introduce microplastics into the soil, where they interact with soil organisms and undergo complex processes of dispersion and accumulation. Bioturbation, driven by soil-dwelling organisms like earthworms and arthropods, plays a significant role in the vertical mixing of microplastics within soil profiles, ultimately influencing their fate and persistence in terrestrial environments.

Data from European farms indicate an annual deposition of approximately 50,000 tonnes of microplastics into the soil. Additionally, over two decades, the concentration of plastic mulch in China's agricultural fields has increased fourfold, resulting in a corresponding increase in microplastic contamination in the soil.

As microplastics traverse the environment, the atmosphere emerges as a crucial conduit, carrying these pollutants across vast distances before depositing them back

onto the Earth's surface. Wind currents and precipitation govern the distribution and deposition of atmospheric microplastics, with remote areas such as the Arctic receiving inputs from distant sources.

Atmospheric deposition of microplastics poses emerging concerns for human health, with recent studies highlighting the presence of these pollutants in surgical masks and their potential for inhalation. Furthermore, atmospheric deposition of microplastics contributes to the contamination of terrestrial and aquatic environments, completing the cycle of microplastic pollution. In urban cities like Paris and Hamburg, daily atmospheric deposition rates of microplastics can reach up to 120 microplastics per square metre (MP/m²) and 275 MP/m², respectively.

Furthermore, coastal areas with stronger wind currents, such as Yantai in China, experience even higher atmospheric deposition rates, with values reaching up to 602 MP/m² per day.

The fate and transport of microplastics in the environment represent a complex interplay of natural processes and human activities. Addressing this pervasive threat requires a multifaceted approach, encompassing interdisciplinary research, legislative measures, and public awareness campaigns.

By understanding the pathways through which microplastics traverse the environment, we can develop effective strategies to mitigate their impact and safeguard the health of our planet for future generations. (Courtesy: [Down To Earth](#))

'Asia is world's most Disaster-hit region': Breaking down new climate report

By: Garima Sadhwani

Asia is warming faster than the global average. The warming trend has nearly doubled since the 1961-1990 period. This is what the World Meteorological Organization's (WMO) State of the Climate in Asia 2023 report, published on Tuesday, 23 April, says.

The report also states that Asia was the "world's most disaster-hit region" due to climate events in 2023. As many as 79 hydrometeorological hazard events were reported in Asia the same year.

Over 2,000 people died due to these climate disasters, and close to nine million people were affected. The Quint breaks down the key findings of the report for you.

Key findings of the report

The WMO, in the 2023 report, found:

- Heatwaves became more severe in Asia in 2023.
- Heat-related deaths were underreported.
- Close to 80 percent of the extreme weather events were floods and storms that led to the most number of deaths and financial losses.
- Droughts occurred in Southwest China nearly every month in the last year.
- At least 20 out of 22 glaciers in Asia had "continued mass loss," and snow cover extent in Asia reduced in 2023 from the 1998-2020 average.
- Sea surfaces in Asia are warming "more than three times faster than the globally averaged sea surface temperature."
- Marine heat waves, spanning several months, were observed.
- The annual mean near-surface temperature over Asia in 2023 was the sec-

ond highest on record, 0.91 °C [0.84 °C–0.96 °C] above the 1991–2020 average and 1.87 °C [1.81 °C–1.92 °C] above the 1961–1990 average."

State of the climate in Asia 2023 report

Speaking to The Quint about the report, Dr Vishwas Chitale, Senior Programme Lead, Council on Energy, Environment & Water (CEEW), said, "The report underscores a worrying trend we're seeing across Asia. These extreme climate events like floods, cyclones and heatwaves, if not met with proper preparedness and policies, have the potential to cause loss of life and economic hardship. This vulnerability highlights the urgent need for a multi-pronged approach to rapidly accelerating climate change."

Zooming in on India

Highlighting the reality of climate change in India, the report stated that:

- Severe heat waves from April-June led to at least 110 deaths in the country.
- Even as rains in the summer-monsoon were below average in India, floods and storms from July-August "resulted in more than 600 reported deaths across India, Pakistan, and Nepal."
- As many as six tropical cyclones occurred in the Indian subcontinent, causing widespread destruction across regions.
- The sea level rise in Bay of Bengal in 2023 was the second-highest in the region, "30 percent above the global average."
- The rise in temperatures most affected the northern and eastern regions of India.

The WMO further added, "In India, Yemen, and Pakistan, floods were the natural hazard event which caused the greatest number of fatalities."

The Quint had reported in June 2023 that close to 68 people in Uttar Pradesh's Ballia and 53 people in Deoria succumbed to heat-related deaths. In October the same year, the South Lhonak Glacial Lake in Sikkim had burst, which led to the Teesta river flooding and wreaking havoc across four districts in the state—killing more than 40, and causing significant economic loss.

Dr Chitale said, "Research shows the need for strengthening critical infrastructure – healthcare, transportation, and power grids – through climate-proofing measures. Upgrading standards and building codes with the changing climate in mind is essential. Additionally, we cannot ignore the rising heat stress in our cities."

What next?

After the report was released, WMO Secretary-General Celeste Saulo said, "Many countries in the region experienced their hottest year on record in 2023, along with a barrage of extreme conditions, from droughts and heatwaves to floods and storms. Climate change exacerbated the frequency and severity of such events."

Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), an organisation that was also involved in bringing out the report, emphasised on how "vulnerable countries were disproportionately impacted," like Bangladesh and Myanmar that were hit by cyclone Mocha.

The researchers suggest, "There is an urgent need to advance efforts and provide more tailored support and services to address strategies and interventions to effectively mitigate rising disaster risks." (Courtesy: [The Quint](#))

In times of climate change, 'agritech' steps in to reduce food loss, increase Indian farm incomes

By: Priyanka Shankar

Imagine you are a tomato farmer who faced drought, which has resulted in a low yield and poor quality of crop. The tomatoes need to be individually harvested and the labour cost to harvest them is high. The combined cost of storage and transportation is more than the value of the produce in the market. What would you do?

At this stage, some farmers decide to throw away the produce and accept their loss, instead of transporting it and losing more money. This food loss, not only has economic implications for the farmer, but also affects the environment as the land, water and energy (agricultural inputs) used to produce the food that is discarded, are also wasted. Second, it also leads to emissions. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization states that food loss and waste contribute up to 10% of global greenhouse gas emissions.

There are also other forms of post-harvest losses that occur during storage and transportation. Extreme weather events such as heatwaves, cyclones or flooding, intensified by climate change, also contribute to post-harvest losses. Sometimes, the supply exceeds the demand and in perishable goods that can't be stored for long, it again leads to a loss.

The 2019 State of Food and Agriculture report by the Food and Agriculture Organization notes that about 14% of the world's food, which is worth around \$400 billion every year, gets lost between harvest and the stores. Post-harvest agricultural technologies (agritech) aim to solve these issues by reducing food loss and also increasing farmers' incomes.

Increasing shelf-life

"Farmers need post-harvest technologies for both preservation and also processing, to make the produce market-ready and add value to earn an additional income," shares Nidhi Pant, co-founder of S4S Technologies, an agritech startup. The startup provides solar-powered dehydrators to women farmers, to help them increase the shelf-life of agricultural produce.

"In India we have been sun drying food for preservation, traditionally. However, direct sun drying results in the heat spreading unevenly and it takes about six to seven days to thoroughly dry the produce. In this process, it is susceptible to fungus growth and other environmental challenges. However, solar dehydrators can do this in six to eight hours. The colour, texture, aroma can be matched with the industry requirements and it is more hygienic and the nutrition is retained," explains Pant.

With its major operations in Maharashtra, S4S Technologies has reached 2,000 women farmers who use dehydrators to remove the moisture content and reduce post-harvest losses. The women also receive cutting and processing tools to help them package and sell the produce to large food agencies, restaurants and cloud kitchens and even export them to Southeast Asia. "We've been able to save 60,000 tonnes of produce annually," Pant shares.

Dehydration is not the only way to increase the shelf-life of agricultural produce. There are also cold-storage chambers which help store perishables and grains. India has 8,653 cold storages as of February 2024, which aim to minimise post-harvest losses. However, there's more to reducing losses than increasing the number of cold storage warehouses, says Karthik Jayaraman, Founder, WayCool, an agritech startup in the supply chain space.

WayCool avoids repetitive handling of the produce and minimises the storage wherever possible, by procuring from the smallholder farmers. The startup leverages artificial intelligence and machine learning to precisely calculate the demand.

"We have a network of collection and distribution centres. Using our demand-forecasting tools, we communicate to our collection centres, the exact quantity of vegetables needed. These collection centres then start procuring from the farmers. The target price is also algorithmically determined. The farmers are therefore able to plan better and it prevents the produce from rotting in the field," explains Jayaraman.

While cold storage technologies help reduce the losses, we need to look at minimising the "food miles" (the distance between the place where food is grown or made and the place where it is eaten), opines Jayaraman.

"At WayCool, we have reduced losses by about 6% with ventilated and well-managed cold storages alone. But cold storage technologies have been primarily developed for the West, where it is predominantly temperate. The grocery outlets are also air conditioned. However, India is a tropical country and we need to cool the product from 42 degrees Celsius to say 2-6 degrees Celsius. You need maximum cold temperatures during peak summer. So, apart from cold storage chambers we also need to aim for shorter supply chains," he explains.

When in transit, WayCool also takes precautions about the aeration in the vehicles. "We're constantly experimenting here because too much aeration will lead to moisture loss. The vehicles should have the right kind of ventilation. We also have a standard operating procedure to stack different vegetables. For example, tomatoes must not get crushed because when it gets transported to a high humidity area, it could lead to a fungal attack if not stacked properly," Jayaraman adds.

Streamlining supply chain

There's also a crucial challenge to tackle within the supply chain – lack of transparency about the quality of produce and the price. To fix this, agritech startup started conducting quality checks of the produce at the farm level. When the produce is graded immediately after harvest, it helps fix the price according to the quality. The farmers can then confirm if they are getting a fair price, with an app developed by DeHaat which shows the market price for each crop.

"When we're able to assess the quality of the produce at each farm and make sure the produce is of a good grade and is pesticide-free, the price is fixed based on the output and we are able to maintain transparency in the supply chain. This benefits both the retailer and the farmer," shares Amrendra Singh, co-founder of DeHaat. For the farmers there's also an assured purchase which minimises agricultural losses, he adds.

DeHaat aims to build the ecosystem and solutions around the farmer. "In India we majorly have small-holder farmers who need support at the post-harvest stage. And all innovations need to have the last-mile connectivity for the farmers, and local partnerships at the panchayat or village-level definitely help," Singh adds.

According to Hemendra Mathur, Co-Founder, ThinkAg, a non-profit working to accelerate the adoption of innovation in agriculture, large food processing companies and restaurants wanting to go net-zero could be good for the supply chain.

He elaborates, "Food companies and farmers don't interact enough, although they are part of the same supply chain. To be more climate-resilient or reduce carbon emissions in food products, it is important to establish traceability. The companies who have set net-zero goals will want to know how the farmer has produced the crop and the carbon footprint, to claim they are sustainable. Their inclination to directly work with farmers will improve." Mathur is also optimistic that in the coming years, the customers will start demanding products that are sustainably produced.

Post-harvest technology

India's food security challenges also impact the world. It is the ninth-largest exporter of agricultural products in the world but is yet to become a reliable supplier as it announces sudden overseas bans for agricultural shipments, due to shortages.

"There is huge potential for investments in the post-harvest sector," shares Mathur. He opines that state governments can immensely support agritech startups. "More than the financial support or subsidies, the agritech startups are looking to work with Krishi Vigyan Kendras, state agricultural universities and state governments to receive access to data and test pilots. More public-private collaborations will be beneficial."

The Central Institute of Post-Harvest Engineering and Technology by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research has developed technologies such as mobile cool chambers for short duration storage and transportation of fish for retail marketing, fruit graders to grade all spherical commodities and reduce handling the produce, an evaporatively cooled structure to store fruits and vegetables at a moderate low temperature, and more. Last year the government also tried gamma ray irradiation on onions, to impair the ability of onions to sprout, thereby increasing their shelf life.

Many of these technologies, however, have not reached all the farmers equally. They need to be scaled up to become accessible and financially viable to all farmers.

"Some farmers have multiple smart apps and many have started using drones for pesticide spraying. But it has to move from early adopters to mainstreaming agritech solutions; this chasm has to be crossed," shares Jayaraman, who returns to reducing food miles. "What if you could grow the right variety of crop locally? We need to support the farmers with proper varieties, to avoid post-harvest losses," he adds.

"We need to rely on biotechnology," concurs Singh. "Every year we hear from the farmers that the weather is much worse and much less predictable than the previous year. There's no choice but for everyone to adapt to the changing climate. We need climate-resilient crop varieties and precision-farming tools to do this and we need to improve the soil quality," he adds. (Courtesy: [Scroll.in](#))

Blinken said that Israel plans on opening a major humanitarian aid crossing into hard-hit northern Gaza

Blinken urges Israel and Hamas to move ahead with a cease-fire deal and says 'the time is now'

TEL AVIV, May 1: U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken was meeting with Israeli leaders on Wednesday in his push for a cease-fire deal between Israel and Hamas, saying "the time is now" for an agreement that would free hostages and bring a pause in the nearly seven months of war in Gaza.

He said Hamas would bear the blame for any failure to get a deal off the ground.

Blinken is on his seventh visit to the region since the war erupted in October in his bid to secure what's been an elusive deal between Israel and Hamas that could avert an Israeli incursion into the southern Gaza city of Rafah, where hundreds of thousands of Palestinians are sheltering.

The current round of talks appears to be serious, but the sides remain far apart on one key issue - whether the war should end as part of an emerging deal.

"We are determined to get a cease-fire that brings the hostages home and to get it now, and the only reason that that wouldn't be achieved is because of Hamas," Blinken told Israel's ceremonial President Isaac Herzog at a meeting in Tel Aviv.

"There is a proposal on the table, and as we've said, no delays, no excuses. The time is now," he said.

Blinken said the deal would allow



much needed food, medicine and water to get into Gaza, where the war has sparked a humanitarian crisis and displaced much of the territory's population.

After meeting with Herzog and also with families of Americans held by Hamas at his hotel, Blinken briefly greeted several dozen demonstrators calling for an immediate hostage release deal on the sidewalk outside.

Chanting "SOS, USA, only you can save the day" and "In Blinken we trust, bring them home to us," the protesters urged him to make their case to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Blinken will meet Netanyahu and his War Cabinet later on Wednesday.

Blinken told the families that freeing their loved ones was "at the heart of everything we're trying to do."

His comments came on the last leg of his regional visit, with previous stops in Saudi Arabia and Jordan, where he urged Hamas to accept the latest proposal, calling it "extraordinarily generous" on Israel's part.

According to the State Department, he will also visit an Israeli port where aid for Gaza is entering.

The United States has staunchly supported Israel's war since Hamas' unprecedented attack on Oct. 7 into southern Israel. But it has grown increasingly critical of the staggering toll borne by Palestinian civilians in Gaza and has been especially outspoken against Israel's plan to invade Rafah, Gaza's southernmost city where some 1.5 million Palestinians are sheltering from fighting elsewhere, saying that any major offensive there would bring potential harm to civilians and should be avoided.

Netanyahu has repeatedly vowed to invade Rafah, which he says is Hamas' last stronghold in the coastal strip, and on Tuesday he pledged to do so "with or without" a cease-fire deal.

The current deal that is being discussed - with brokering by the U.S., Egypt and Qatar - would see the release of dozens of hostages in exchange for a six-week halt in fighting as part of an initial phase, according to an Egyptian official and Israeli media.

Hundreds of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel would also be released, including some serving long sentences.

But a sticking point remains over what happens next. Hamas has demanded assurances that an eventual release of all hostages will bring a complete end to Israel's nearly seven-month assault in Gaza and a withdrawal of its troops from the devastated territory.

Israel has offered only an extended pause, vowing to resume its offensive once the first phase of the deal is over. The issue has repeatedly obstructed efforts by the mediators during months of talks.

While the talks appeared to be gaining steam, on Wednesday, an Egyptian official said that Hamas had asked Egyptian and Qatari mediators to provide clarity on the terms of the latest cease-fire proposal being discussed, a demand that could delay progress.

The official, who has close ties to the talks and who spoke on the condition of anonymity in order to freely discuss the deal, said Hamas wants clear terms for the unconditional return of displaced people to the north of Gaza and to ensure that the second stage of the deal will include discussing the gradual and complete withdrawal of all Israeli troops from the entire Gaza Strip. (AP)

Police clear pro-Palestinian protesters from Columbia University's Hamilton Hall

NEW YORK, May 1: The pro-Palestinian demonstration that paralyzed Columbia University ended in dramatic fashion late on Tuesday, with police carrying riot shields swarming the Ivy League campus, bursting into an administration building protesters took over the previous night and making dozens of arrests.

Meanwhile, clashes broke out overnight between dueling groups at the encampment at the University of California, Los Angeles. Some were armed with large sticks and beat others with them. Security was tightened Tuesday at the campus after officials said there were "physical altercations" between factions of protesters.

A statement released by a Columbia spokesman said New York City officers entered the campus after the university requested help. A tent encampment on the school's grounds to protest the Israel-Hamas war was cleared, along with Hamilton Hall where a stream of officers used a ladder to climb through a second-floor window. Protesters seized the hall about 20 hours earlier.

"After the University learned overnight that Hamilton Hall had been occupied, vandalized, and blockaded, we were left

with no choice," the school said. "The decision to reach out to the NYPD was in response to the actions of the protesters, not the cause they are championing. We have made it clear that the life of campus cannot be endlessly interrupted by protesters who violate the rules and the law."

NYPD spokesman Carlos Nieves said he had no immediate reports of any injuries. The arrests occurred after protesters had shrugged off an earlier ultimatum to abandon the encampment Monday or be suspended and unfolded as other universities stepped up efforts to end demonstrations against the Israel-Hamas war that were inspired by Columbia.

Just blocks away at The City College of New York, demonstrators were in a standoff with police outside the public college's main gate. Video posted on social media by news reporters on the scene late Tuesday showed officers putting some people to the ground and shoving others as they cleared people from the street and side-

walks. Many detained protesters were driven away on city buses.

An encampment at the college, part of the City University of New York system, has been up since Thursday. After police arrived on campus Tuesday, NYPD officers lowered a Palestinian flag atop the City College flagpole, balled it up and tossed it to the ground before raising an American flag.

Police have swept through other campuses across the U.S. over the last two weeks, leading to confrontations and more than 1,000 arrests. In rarer instances, university officials and protest leaders struck agreements to restrict to campus life and upcoming commencement ceremonies. Brown University, another member of the Ivy League, reached an agreement Tuesday with protesters on its Rhode Island campus. Demonstrators said they would close their encampment in exchange for administrators taking a vote to consider divestment in October. (AP)



Pak to block mobile sim cards of over half a million people over non-compliance to filing of tax returns

ISLAMABAD, May 1: Authorities in Pakistan have decided to block the mobile phone SIM cards of over half a million tax defaulters as part of the drive to take action against tax evaders.

The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) in an Income Tax General Order (ITGO) said the mobile SIMs of 506,671 individuals, who failed to file their tax returns for 2023, will stay blocked until restored by the FBR or the Commissioner Inland Revenue having authority over the person.

It ordered the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) and all telecom providers to immediately implement the Income Tax General Order (ITGO) no 01 of 2024 to block their SIMs and file a compliance report by May 15, Dawn News reported. An official source said the FBR has identified 2.4 million potential taxpayers who did not exist on the tax rolls. Notices were subsequently issued to these individuals.

The FBR has selected over 0.5 million individuals out of the 2.4 million for SIM blockade based on one criterion: they must have declared taxable income in one of the past three years and these individuals did not file their returns for tax year 2023.

According to the Active Taxpayers List (ATL), the FBR received 4.2 million taxpayers until March 1, 2024, against 3.8 million returns received during the same period of last year. This shows a marginal increase during the period under review. In tax year 2022, FBR received a total of 5.9 million income tax returns.

According to the FBR official, SIMs will be automatically restored for persons who file tax returns for 2023. Every Monday, FBR updates its ATL listings.

Every Tuesday, the names of persons who appear on the ATL list will be identified and submitted to the PTA and telecom companies for restoration. The officer emphasised that there would be no separate restoration procedures, and the entire process would be completed automatically. (PTI)

Singaporeans cannot disavow ethnic roots with China and India: PM Lee

SINGAPORE, May 1: Multi-faith, multi-national Singaporeans cannot disavow their diverse ethnic roots with China, India and religious affiliations, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said on Wednesday as he appealed for cohesion in his last major speech before stepping down from the leadership of the prosperous city-state in two weeks.

"Social cohesion is important and race, language, and religion are traditional fault lines that will never go away for Singapore. While huge efforts have been made to build a shared Singaporean identity, the nation will always be subject to external forces that pull different segments of its population in different directions," Lee said as he delivered the keynote address at the May Day Rally.

"We cannot disavow our diverse ethnic roots and religious affiliations - Chinese Singaporeans with China, Indian Singaporeans with their various ancestral homes in India, Malay Singaporeans with the rest of our region, and with the global Muslim Ummah," Lee said impressing on the citizens of prosperous island state nestled in the heart of Southeast Asia.



"They can be vulnerabilities, yet we do not want to lose these rich cultural and historical heritages," the 72-year-old Lee said.

"Racial and religious harmony would continue to be a work in progress, but Singapore must also be conscious of other potential divisions.

"These include tensions between the haves and have-nots, Singaporean-born and naturalised citizens, political conservatives and liberals, and current and future generations, which can be exploited politically," Lee, who will hand over the premiership to his Deputy Lawrence Wong on May 15, said.

Singapore's system is anchored on a strong base of trust, with the

People's Action Party (PAP) government working hard to maintain it, he said.

"Therefore, at each (general) election, 15 times in a row, the PAP has won a renewed mandate, fair and square, and continued to deliver results for Singaporeans."

Former Prime Ministers Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Chok Tong built a system that would endure beyond their own terms, and Lee said his successors must do the same.

"And while the country's system will evolve with time, it must evolve in a way that continues to serve Singapore's interests. This trust between people and government is needed to sustain long-term planning, another imperative that the PAP government has always maintained," said Lee.

Looking back at his 20 years as Prime Minister, Lee spoke about the progress Singapore made under his tenure and said, Singapore has become "much better off."

"I have done my duty, and I am very happy I chose this path of public service all those many years ago," said Lee, who was also marking his 40th year in politics. (PTI)

Chinese scientist who published COVID-19 virus sequence allowed back in his lab after sit-in protest

BEIJING, May 1: The first scientist to publish a sequence of the COVID-19 virus in China said he was allowed back into his lab after he spent days locked outside, sitting in protest.

Zhang Yongzhen wrote in an online post on Wednesday, just past midnight, that the medical center that hosts his lab had "tentatively agreed" to allow him and his team to return and continue their research for the time being.

"Now, team members can enter and leave the laboratory freely," Zhang wrote in a post on Weibo, a Chinese social media platform. He added that he is negotiating

a plan to relocate the lab in a way that doesn't disrupt his team's work with the Shanghai Public Health Clinical Center, which hosts Zhang's lab. Zhang and his team

were suddenly told they had to leave their lab for renovations on Thursday, setting off the dispute, he said in an earlier post that was later deleted.

On Sunday, Zhang began a sit-in protest outside his lab after he found he was locked out, a sign of continuing pressure on Chinese scientists conducting research on the coronavirus.

Zhang sat outside on flattened cardboard in drizzling rain, and members of his team unfurled a banner that read "Research norm a scientific research work," pictures posted online show.

News of the protest spread widely on Chinese social media, putting pressure on local authorities.

In an online statement Monday, the Shanghai Public Health Clinical Center said that Zhang's lab was closed for "safety reasons" while being renovated. It added that it had provided Zhang's team an alternative laboratory space.

But Zhang responded the same day his team wasn't offered an alternative until after they were notified of their eviction, and the lab offered didn't meet safety standards for conducting their research, leaving his team in limbo.

Zhang's dispute with his host institution was the latest in a series of setbacks, demonstrations and ousters since the virologist published the sequence in January 2020 without state approval.

Beijing has sought to control information related to the virus since it first emerged. An Associated Press investigation found that the government froze domestic and international efforts to trace it from the first weeks of the outbreak.

These days, labs are closed, collaborations shattered, foreign scientists forced out and some Chinese researchers barred from leaving the country. Zhang's ordeal started when he and his team decoded the virus on January 5, 2020, and wrote an internal notice warning Chinese authorities of its potential to spread - but did not make the sequence public. (AP)

Highway collapse in China's southern Guangdong province leaves at least 19 dead

BEIJING, May 1: A section of a highway collapsed early on Wednesday in southern China leaving at least 19 people dead, local officials said, after the area had experienced heavy rain in recent days.

Eighteen cars fell down a slope after a 17.9-metre- (58.7-foot) - long section of the highway collapsed, according to a statement from authorities in Meizhou city in Guangdong province. The incident occurred around 2 a.m.

Witnesses told local media they heard a loud noise and saw a hole open up several meters wide behind them after driving past the section of the road just before it collapsed.

Video and photos in local media showed smoke and fire at the scene, with highway rails slanting downward into the flames.

Blackened cars could also be seen on the slope leading down from the highway.

Rescue workers have taken 30 people to the hospital, state broadcaster CCTV reported. (AP)

Lebanese Christian leader says Hezbollah's fighting with Israel has harmed Lebanon



MAARAB, May 1: The leader of a main Christian political party in Lebanon blasted the Shiite militant group Hezbollah for opening a front with Israel to back up its ally Hamas, saying it has harmed Lebanon without making a dent in Israel's crushing offensive in the Gaza Strip.

In an interview with The Associated Press on Tuesday night, Samir Geagea of the Lebanese Forces Party said Hezbollah should withdraw from areas along the border with Israel and the Lebanese army should deploy in all points where militants of the Iran-backed group have taken positions.

His comments came as Western diplomats try to broker a de-escalation in the border conflict amid fears of a wider war.

Hezbollah began launching rockets toward Israeli military posts on Oct. 8, the day after Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel in a surprise attack that sparked the crushing war in Gaza. The near-daily violence has mostly been confined to the area along the border, and international mediators have been scrambling to prevent an all-out war. The fighting has killed 12 soldiers and 10 civilians in Israel. More than 350 people have been killed in Lebanon including 273 Hezbollah fighters and more than 50 civilians.

"No one has the right to control the fate of a country and people on its own," Geagea said in his heavily guarded headquarters in the mountain village of Maarab. "Hezbollah is not the government in Lebanon. There is a government in Lebanon in which Hezbollah is represented."

In addition to its military arm, Hezbollah is a political party.

Geagea, whose party has the largest bloc in Lebanon's 128-member parliament, has angled to position himself as the leader of the opposition against Hezbollah.

Hezbollah officials have said that by opening the front along Israel's northern border, the militant group has reduced the pressure on Gaza by keeping several Israeli army divisions on alert in the north rather than taking part in the monthslong offensive in the enclave.

"All the damage that could have happened in Gaza ... happened. What was the benefit of military operations that were launched from south Lebanon? Nothing," Geagea said, pointing to the death toll and massive destruction in Lebanon's border villages.

Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians, caused wide destruction and displaced hundreds of thousands to the city of Rafah along Egypt's border. Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed Tuesday to launch an offensive into the southern Gaza city of Rafah despite international calls for restraint.

Geagea said Hezbollah aims through the ongoing fighting to benefit its main backer, Iran, by giving it a presence along Israel's border and called for the group to withdraw from border areas and Lebanese army deploy in accordance with a U.N. Security Council resolution that ended the 34-day Israel-Hezbollah war in 2006.

Geagea also discussed the campaign by his party to repatriate Syrian refugees who fled war into Lebanon. (AP)

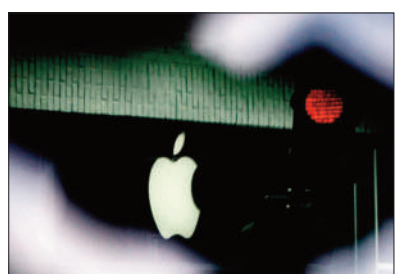
Google and Apple now threatened by the US antitrust laws helped build their technology empires

SAN FRANCISCO, May 1: The US Justice Department's double-barrelled antitrust attack on Google's dominant search and Apple's trendsetting iPhone is reviving memories of the epic battle that hobbled Microsoft before it roared back to yet again become the world's most valuable company.

The parallels to the Justice Department's landmark antitrust case in 1998 could provide a window into the potential breakthroughs that could be unleashed if regulators succeed in their attempts to crack down on Google and Apple.

Federal lawyers have even gone as far as to assert Google and Apple may never have created so many popular products or become as powerful as they are now if Microsoft hadn't been reined in a quarter century ago.

In closing arguments of a Washington, DC, trial that began last September, regulators Thursday will apply the finishing touches to a case alleging Google has turned its search engine into an illegal monopoly that stifles competition and innovation. The Apple case, which was only filed a month ago, is still years away



from its resolution. Although regulators have lodged separate complaints against Google and Apple, the two cases are shadowed by Microsoft's legal saga that began when both those were mere specks on the technology landscape.

When they went after Google in October 2020, regulators compared the lucrative deals that the company cut with Apple to lock its search engine into the iPhone and Safari web browser to the same tactics Microsoft deployed in its personal computer software to block competition.

And in the antitrust lawsuits that they filed against Apple last month, the Justice Department pointed back to complaints

that company co-founder Steve Jobs had raised in 1998 against Microsoft's "dirty tactics" while urging regulators to take steps to force the PC software maker "to play fair".

And that is what the Justice Department did in an antitrust case against Microsoft that caused massive distractions that opened the door for Google's search engine to become the internet's main gateway.

It also culminated in a series of concessions that paved the way for Apple to extend the reach of its iTunes music store that increased the popularity of the iPod that spawned the iPhone.

The Microsoft case "created new opportunities for innovation in areas that would become critical to the success of Apple's consumer devices and the company itself", the Justice Department crowed in the lawsuit that casts the iPhone as an illegal monopoly.

After years of mostly fruitless attempts to compete against Google's search engine and the iPhone under the leadership of Steve Ballmer, Microsoft began to regain its stride when Satya Nadella be-

came CEO in 2014.

Earlier this year, Microsoft's market value hit USD 3 trillion for the first time, surpassing Apple as the world's most valuable company while taking the early lead in artificial intelligence technology that's expected to reshape the world.

It's an odd juxtaposition that has thrust regulators into battling two companies they helped create when they caged a colossus now angling to seize the mantle in technology's next frontier.

But it's also a tableau that antitrust experts cite as evidence that the system is working to unlock more robust competition that hatches innovations. And then those breakthroughs sometimes serve as the building blocks for new monopolies that must eventually be challenged by regulators, even as fallen empires like Microsoft can still find ways to reinvent themselves.

"It's not about an agenda about trying to pursue and destroy companies, it's about trying to restore competition in a market," said Rebecca Haw Allensworth, a Vanderbilt University law professor who focuses on antitrust law issues. (AP)

Australian PM Albanese vows new funding to help women escape domestic violence after homicides rise

MELBOURNE, May 1: Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced new funding on Wednesday to help women escape domestic violence and a crackdown on misogynistic online content in reaction to an uptick in homicides committed by current and former male partners that he described as a national crisis.

Albanese said his government would invest 925 million Australian dollars (USD 599 million) over five years to financially support women and children escaping violence.

The government also proposed new measures to tackle factors that it says exacerbate violence against women, such as violent online pornography and misogynist content targeting children and young people.

The measures would include legislation to ban deepfake pornography and more funding for an Australian regulator to pilot age-assurance technologies to protect children from harmful online content.

Tens of thousands protested in cities around Australia over the weekend to draw attention to the deaths of 27 women so far this year, allegedly caused by acts of gender-based violence. The death toll had reached at least 28 women by Wednesday.

The government leaders will meet again in three months to discuss progress.

"I'm satisfied it's a further step forward," Albanese told reporters.

"Can we be satisfied when a woman's losing her life on average every four days? Of course not," the prime minister said.

"I'll be satisfied when we eliminate this as an issue, when we're not talking about this as an issue, when women are not feeling as though they have to mobilise in rallies," he added.

The Australian Institute of Criminology reported that in the 12 months through June 2023, 34 Australian women were killed by an intimate partner. That is the latest complete fiscal year for which the institute has data and represented a 31 per cent increase in victims from the same 12-month period a year earlier when 26 women died.

The increase defied a longer-term downward trend in Australia. (AP)

108 people died of TB in Mizoram in 2023

6 per cent are diabetic, 33 per cent use tobacco and 16 per cent are alcoholic



AIZAWL, May 1: A total of 108 people died of tuberculosis in Mizoram last year, officials said on Wednesday.

Blood samples of 17,432 people were tested last year, and of them, 2,272 were found suffering from TB, they said.

Of the 2,272 patients, 164 were diagnosed with multi-drug resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB), they said, adding that 86 per cent of the patients were successfully treated, while 108 people died.

Between January and March this year, a total of 595 people have been diagnosed with TB, out of the 3,761 samples tested.

Of them, 38 were diagnosed with MDR-TB and 57 people were found suffering from both TB and HIV-AIDS, officials said.

Of the patients, 6 per cent are diabetic, 33

per cent use tobacco and 16 per cent are alcoholic, they said.

So far this year, the Aizawl district reported the highest number of TB cases at 433, followed by Kolasib district (46) and Lunglei district (34).

West Mizoram's Mamit district recorded the least TB cases at five.

Only 187 people in the state have registered to adopt TB patients or donate for them through the 'Nikshay' platform under the PM TB Mukh Bharat Abhiyan.

The initiative was launched by President Droupadi Murmu in September 2022, aiming to augment community involvement in meeting India's commitment to end TB by 2025 ahead of the global target of 2030. (PTI)

Mizoram-Myanmar border gate to remain open



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 1: The Mizoram-Myanmar border or friendship gate at Zokhawthar village in east Mizoram's Champhai district will not be sealed from May 1 as was previously decided by the Assam Rifles, a senior official of the state home department said.

Earlier, the Assam Rifles, which guards the 510 km-long Mizoram-Myanmar border, had said that the border will be sealed from May 1 to prevent any cross-border activities.

The senior home official said that the meeting of the home department, Assam Rifles and other law enforcement agencies held on Monday discussed the matter and agreed not to seal the international border or friendship gate in Zokhawthar.

He said that the Assam Rifles were told that they should not indulge in activities that could have created panic among the civilians.

Six Mizoram districts—Champhai, Lawngtlai, Siaha, Serchhip, Saitual and Hnahthial—share a 510

km long border with Myanmar.

The Indo-Myanmar border was sealed on April 17 for 48 hours due to the Lok Sabha elections. Polling for the lone Lok Sabha seat in Mizoram was held on April 19.

Residents of border villages on both India's Mizoram and Myanmar sides protested on April 19 at the Indo-Myanmar friendship gate at the Zokhawthar village in east Mizoram's Champhai district as the border was allegedly closed even after polling was over.

The residents have demanded the authorities to open the friendship gate or the border.

Assam Rifles said in a statement issued recently that after consultation with local leaders, civil society organisations and village council leaders the friendship gate was opened from April 20 till April 30 for the movement of people requiring medical attention, essential food items and medicines.

The border will be sealed again from May 1 to prevent any cross-border activities, the statement also said.

27 Tripura gov employees suspended for violation of MCC

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 1: Acting tough on violations of the model code of conduct (MCC), the Election Commission of India (ECI) has suspended 27 state government employees across various departments for alleged violations of the MCC.

According to the office of the chief electoral officer Puneet Agarwal, decisive action was taken against the employees for their negligence of election-related duties.

In a letter directed to the higher authorities of the respective departments, Agarwal stressed the importance of taking such disciplinary action against the suspended employees within their departments. The letter of the CEO highlighted the significance of maintaining electoral integrity and adhering to prescribed protocols during the electoral process.

According to reports, Agarwal specified that any department seeking to lift the temporary suspension of its employees must first obtain consent from the ECI.

This process requires coordination through the Chief Election Officer's office in the state.

Mizo group to protest Centre's decision to fence Indo-Myanmar border

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 1: A Mizo group representing the Chin-Kuki-Mizo-Zomi tribes of India, Bangladesh and Myanmar on Tuesday said that it will stage peaceful rallies along the Mizoram-Myanmar border on May 16 to protest against the Centre's decision to fence the Indo-Myanmar border and scrap the Free Movement Regime (FMR).

The Aizawl based- Zo Re-unification Organisation (ZORO), which seeks the re-unification of all Zo people and bring them under one administrative unit, on Tuesday held a meeting and expressed strong opposition to the Centre's decision to fence the 1,643-km-long Indo-Myanmar border particularly Mizoram side (510 km) of the international border, the organisation secretary Ramdinliana Renthle said.

The meeting observed the Centre's decision to fence the Indo-Myanmar border and abolish the FMR as an attempt to di-

vide and oppress the Zo ethnic tribes living in both India and Myanmar, he said.

Renthle said that the meeting decided to organise peaceful rallies at two locations in Zokhawthar and Vaphai villages in east Mizoram's Champhai district on the Indo-Myanmar border on May 16. The organisation also appealed to the Mizo or Zo communities living in both Mizoram and Myanmar to take part in the proposed rallies to protest the Centre's decision to fence the Indo-Myanmar border and scrap the FMR, he said. It also requested the border villages on both sides to hold rallies on the same day.

The ZORO in January had held a demonstration in Aizawl and burned the effigy of Union Home Minister Amit Shah in protest against the Centre's decision to fence the Indo-Myanmar border and scrap the FMR. Mizoram shares a 510-km long border with Myanmar's Chin state and the

Mizos share ethnic ties with the Chins. More than 30,000 people from Chin state have been taking shelter in Mizoram following the military coup in the neighbouring country in February 2021.

Mizoram government, civil society organisations and student bodies have strongly opposed the Centre's decision to fence the Indo-Myanmar border and lift the FMR because they believe that it will disturb close contact between ethnic communities of the two countries. The Mizoram assembly on February 28 passed a resolution opposing the Centre's decision to fence the Indo-Myanmar border and abolish the FMR.

Earlier, chief minister Lalduhoma had said that his government has strongly opposed the idea of fencing the international border and scrapping the FMR but the Mizoram government has no authority to oppose the Centre if it goes ahead with its plan.

Coordination meeting between BSF and BGB held



SHILLONG, May 1: A Sector Commander level coordination meeting between the Border Security Force (BSF) and the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) was held at BOP Gumaghat in South West Khasi Hills on April 29.

The BSF delegation was led by Sh Manoj Kumar Barnwal, DIG, Sector HQ BSF Shillong while Md. Saiful Islam Chowdhury, Deputy director general, sector commander BGB, Sylhet, Bangladesh led the BGB delegates, according to the BSF.

During the meeting, the commanders of both the border guarding forces discussed various border-related issues such as Coordinated Border Management Plan and other matters of mutual interest.

At the end of the conference, both sides expressed satisfaction with the meaningful and cordial discussions, which reflect friendly bilateral relationships between the two countries. Both sides agreed to implement the decisions taken more expeditiously. (NNN)

Cadre of proscribed KCP arrested with weapons in Manipur

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 1: A combined team of the central and state forces arrested a cadre of an underground group in an operation in the southern part of the state with the recovery of arms and ammunition during the past 24 hours, officials said on Wednesday.

According to the police report, one active cadre of the proscribed Kangleipak Communist Party (Lamyanba Khuman) was arrested from an area of Khongjom in Manipur's Thoubal district on Tuesday.

He was later identified as Wangkhem Premjit @ Kamcha Singh (44), a resident of Luker Mayai Leikai in Imphal West District.

In the past few months, he was involved in forcefully collecting money from several businessmen and the general public in the southern part of the state.

Further, one 9 mm Pistol along with three rounds of live ammunition have been recovered from his possession.

He along with the seized weapons has later been handed over to the Khongjom police station for further action, the reports added.

Sikkim CM greets people on Labour Day



GANGTOK, May 1: Sikkim chief minister Prem Singh Tamang on Wednesday greeted the people of the state on International Labour Day. He said the day signifies the dignity of labor and recognises each individual's efforts in societal progress.

"On this propitious occasion of International Labour Day, I extend my heartfelt appreciation for the invaluable contributions of our diligent workforce. Their tireless dedication builds a brighter future for our state," he said.

Tamang said he was committed to safeguarding the rights and welfare of all workers, besides creating an environment that fosters equality, safety, and prosperity. (PTI)

Markets in Dimapur find no footfall despite shutdown lifted

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 1: Following the state government's acceptance of the 5-Point Charter of demands by the Dimapur Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) on April 29 and subsequent calling of the statewide indefinite shutter down strike from April 30, markets across Dimapur were a surprisingly deserted look.

Unlike on Monday, April 29 during the 6-hour relaxation period where roads were jammed with vehicles as people went on panic buying, on Tuesday there were hardly a handful of shoppers in most markets such as - New market, Super market and Purana bazaar. Even traffic movement was fluid with no traffic jam in any part of the city. Speaking to Nagaland Post, some of the vendors admitted that they were expecting less customers since most people stocked essential supplies in bulk on April 29 during the relaxation period from 12 noon to 6 p.m.

Meanwhile, there was a noticeable variation in prices as most of the vegetable items became dearer between DMC approved rates on April 24 and April 30. Some of the items such as potato,



tomato and cabbage hiked by ₹ 5, green chilly by ₹ 20, ladies finger by ₹ 25, cucumber by ₹ 10 to 15 and ginger by ₹ 30. Some of the shoppers expressed apprehension that once the rates were hiked and go unchecked, they will become permanent feature till the next upward revision. DMC LDA market rate & quality control Satya Narayan Yadav, told this reporter that the DMC was not responsible for the upward variation of rates but only approved the market price as quoted by the wholesalers at Marwaripatti.

Yadav further informed buyers to report any malpractices by the vendors to DMC and assured to take appropriate actions.

Housewife shot, two councillors injured in Manipur



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 1: In two separate incidents, a 41-year-old housewife was injured after being shot by miscreants and two Municipal councillors were found with injuries caused by unknown men.

All of them were attacked near an oil pump in the southern Bishnupur district of Manipur on Tuesday night, the police said on Wednesday. Umarani @ Bulli, 41, a resident of Kwakta Ward number 8 and wife of one Md Sirauddin, 44, was found lying with a bullet injury on Tuesday at around 8 pm.

She sustained a bullet injury on her right leg when armed miscreants shot her at a culvert near M's Kaoba Oil pump, Ningthoukhong Kha Khunou under the Phubakchao Ithai police station in Bishnupur district, the police said.

A few distances away from the incident site, the police said that two councillors of the Kwakta Municipal Council of Bishnupur district were also found lying unconscious with severe injuries on their bodies.

The councillors were later identified as Md Abdul Karim @ Abba, 44, and Md Nasiruddin, 46. While the bullet-injured woman was rushed to a hospital in Imphal after giving first aid at Bishnupur district hospital, the injured councillors were rushed to the same district hospital for medical treatments. No group or outfit claims responsibility for the incidents so far. Police said a case has been registered in this regard and investigations are on.

Truck loaded with cattle seized in the Assam-Meghalaya border

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 1: In early morning search operations on Wednesday at 5.30 am, a police team from Guwahati, Assam seized a truck with 24 cattle illegally. As per police information, during the Naka checking at Jorabat link road Assam Meghalaya border point based on a specific input one ultra mini truck vehicle bearing Reg. No. AS 01QC-7977 carrying cattle illegally and atrociously from Morigaon side en route to Bymihat, Meghalaya has been intercepted. Accordingly, the police recovered a total of 24 cattle along with the driver—Musharraf Ali (21yrs), S/O Zafar Ali K R/O Kusiani, PS-Mayong, District, Morigaon.

When police sought documents the driver of the vehicle was not able to produce any valid papers and stated that he had been carrying cattle from Mayong (Morigaon) towards Bymihat Meghalaya in the vehicle.

During further enquiry, the driver was not able to produce any legal documents of ownership of 24 cattle.

Accordingly, the loaded vehicle with cattle was seized at Jorabat Link Road, Assam Meghalaya Border point in the presence of witnesses and the driver was apprehended and brought to Jorabat Police Outpost, the police official said.

Time to halt the 'leadership groups' from travesty the hoi polloi 'Authority' and Hoi polloi

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 1: It appears today that the people need to rediscover the 'purpose' together by forgetting the binary of the 'authority' and the 'grass-root' for a while.

The culture of 'trickling downward' is not trickling down well, there are confusions and doubts among the grass-roots. This hazy trend is creating divisions or broadening split among the people, thereby, giving rise to the spawning of the 'leadership groups' or the power centres. As the process of division accelerates, the focus has become divergent and faint.

Such a trend has also laid grounds for the germination of the culture of making the 'purpose' convenient to the interests of the powers-that-be instead of the other way round.

This is also where the powers-that-be come into the scene with an intention more intense than the situation requires or demands. These are certain glaring reasons for con-



cern.

When the spirit of the 'purpose' of the power-centres or the 'leadership groups' is in sharp contrast, the grass-roots ought to rise to the occasion to prise the 'purpose' away from the vested interests. In doing so, not only the veneer of hypocrisy is ripped, but the sobering participation of all concerned are ensured.

In this way, the passion of the hoi polloi can be reignited, and the possibility of wrong channeliza-

Outreach on digital marketing and health at workplace

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 1: The department of computer science at the University of Science and Technology Meghalaya has recently organised two outreach programmes on "Awareness in Digital Marketing" and "World Day on Safety and Health at Workplace" on Monday April 29. The programmes were held in association with the NSS Cell at Jorbil village in Ri-Bhoi district. Students from BCA 2nd semester and MCA 1st semester actively participated in the outreach programmes. The events attracted local people, students, and teachers encouraging a comprehensive understanding of Digital Marketing as well as safety and health at the workplace. Dr. Chinmoy Bharadwaj delivered a speech on Digitalisation and analyzed the current state of Digital Marketing that plays a significant role in raising the traffic rate to a specific website. Various advantages of digital marketing were also discussed to encourage the audience. To engage participants actively, all the group members initiated a good interaction with the local people of the Jorbil Village. Altogether around 70 villagers participated in the digital marketing awareness event. This is one of the USTM initiatives to develop the nearby area by encouraging the local people to participate in Digital Marketing as well as to get the advantages of it.



court through video conferencing during the hearing of the sentencing.

The defence counsel prayed to the judge to lessen the punishment even though the convict had made a mistake while he was drunk.

Moreover, he is a poor old man and has already spent six years in judicial custody.

The special judge after hearing the submissions of the Special Public Prosecutor and the defence counsel sentenced the rape convict to 25 years of rigorous imprisonment.

GUWAHATI, May 1: A fast track court in Manipur awarded 25-year rigorous imprisonment to a 61-year-old tribal for sexually assaulting two minor girls under Section 6 of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012.

Binny Ngangom, the Special Judge Fast Track Special Court of Ukhrul district, Manipur on Tuesday convicted K Ramyo Shimrei (61) of Lungnar Village in Ukhrul district for 25 years of rigorous imprisonment for raping two minors during a period from July 27, 2018, to August 2, 2018. The incidents happened in the Ukhrul district, according to the dossier of the court.

On the same court on April 24, 2024, convicted K Ramyo Shimrei under Section 5[I][m] r/w Sec. 6 of the POCSO Act, 2012 for committing the crime of sexual assault of two minor girls.

The convict was produced before the

judicial custody.

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BJP will neither remove reservation nor allow Cong to do so: Shah

'Congress party has one formula - speak lies loudly, publicly and keep repeating it'

KORBA, May 1: Union home minister Amit Shah on Wednesday said the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will neither remove reservation for SCs, STs and OBCs, nor will it allow the Congress to do so.

He also alleged that the Congress' formula was to speak lies loudly, publicly and repetitively, and advised party president Mallikarjun Kharge not to speak lies for a family as eventually he will be blamed for its loss in the Lok Sabha elections.

Addressing a rally in Katghora town of Chhattisgarh's Korba district to campaign for Saroj Pandey, BJP candidate from the Korba Lok Sabha seat, Shah accused the grand old party of nurturing terrorism and Naxalism to win elections.

"Congress party has one formula - speak lies loudly, publicly and keep repeating it. They say if (PM Narendra) Modi ji gets majority for the third term, he will scrap reservation. They circulated my fake video. We have been in power for 10 years, Modi ji didn't remove reservation, nor will he do it," Shah said.

"Modi ji used majority to scrap



Article 370 and triple talaq, construction of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya and introducing Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA). Neither shall we remove reservation nor allow Congress to do so. It is a guarantee of Modi ji," he said.

Targeting Congress president Kharge, Shah said, "Kharge ji, why do you lie for a family? After facing defeat on June 4, you will be

blamed for it."

"Kharge ji, you don't know they do not belong to anyone...As the Congress will suffer defeat on June 4, the brother-sister duo will remain safe, but 80-year-old Kharge ji will be blamed," he added.

Shah said if Modi becomes the PM for the third straight term, then Naxalism will be uprooted in two years in Chhattisgarh.

Targeting the previous Bhupesh Baghel-led government in Chhattisgarh, he said, "The Bhupesh Kakka government encouraged Naxalism, but after the BJP came to power in the state under Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai and Deputy CM Vijay Sharma (who also hold Home portfolio), 95 Naxalites were eliminated in four months...."

PM Modi eliminated Naxalism from Jharkhand, Bihar, Odisha, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra in five years, but Chhattisgarh was left as the Baghel-led government was in power, he said.

"Our security forces showed bravery and killed 29 Naxalites recently and yesterday (Tuesday) killed 10 Naxalites. But Bhupesh Kakka calls it a fake encounter despite Naxalites having accepted that they had suffered a huge loss. Congress people are not ashamed. Congress has been nurturing terrorism and Naxalism in this country for years to win elections," he claimed.

Voting for the Korba Lok Sabha seat will be held on May 7. (PTI)

Take swift action to cancel diplomatic passport of Prajwal Revanna: Siddaramaiah to PM Modi



BENGALURU, May 1: Karnataka chief minister Siddaramaiah on Wednesday said Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna, who is facing allegations of sexually abusing several women, used his diplomatic passport to travel abroad, and urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to take swift action to cancel it.

In a letter to Modi, he also asked the PM to take other steps such as using diplomatic and police channels of the Government of India as well as international police agencies to ensure the swift return of the "absconding" member of parliament to face the full force of the law.

The 33-year-old Prajwal Revanna is the son of H D Deve Gowda's elder son H D Revanna, who is an MLA and a former minister.

Prajwal is the BJP-JD(S) alliance's candidate from Hassan, which went to the polls on Friday.

Explicit video clips allegedly of Prajwal Revanna sexually abusing several women had started making the rounds in Hassan in recent days, following which the state government constituted a SIT to investigate the crime allegedly involving the MP.

"According to reports, sensing the impending police case and arrest, the accused Member of Parliament and

NDA candidate for Lok Sabha Prajwal Revanna has fled the country and travelled abroad on April 27 itself. It is learnt from reports that he is travelling abroad on his diplomatic passport," Siddaramaiah said.

He said that while the SIT is working round the clock to investigate the allegations of crimes against several women by Prajwal Revanna, getting him back to the country is of utmost importance so that he faces investigation and trial as per the law of the land.

"In this regard, this is to urge you kindly to move the Ministries of External Affairs and Home Affairs to take swift action to cancel the diplomatic passport of Prajwal Revanna and to take such other steps using diplomatic and police channels of the Government of India as well as international police agencies to ensure the swift return of the absconding Member of Parliament to face the full force of law," the CM said in the letter.

The SIT of Karnataka will provide all the necessary details and fulfil all the legal formalities required in this regard, he added.

JD(S) on Tuesday suspended Prajwal Revanna from the party following the allegations.

Stating that there is a serious case of alleged sexual exploitation of innumerable women by Prajwal Revanna, Siddaramaiah said the allegations that the MP and NDA candidate for Hassan Lok Sabha is facing are "horrific and shameful" and these have shaken the conscience of the country.

"Our Government has constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT), on April 28, under the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and investigation has begun in right earnest. Constitution of the SIT was done as soon as the true nature of the alleged crimes against several women emerged and the victims came forward to file complaints against Prajwal Revanna and a FIR was lodged on April 28," he added. (PTI)

Cong to be wiped out, people will fulfil Mahatma Gandhi's wish: Rajnath

NEW DELHI, May 1: The people of the country are going to fulfil Mahatma Gandhi's wish and wipe out the Congress from the politics of the country in the Lok Sabha elections, BJP leader and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Thursday. Singh was attending a nomination procession of the BJP candidate for the Northeast Delhi constituency, Manoj Tiwari.

The minister said the "massive" crowd gathered for Tiwari's nomination assured him that the people have made up their minds to re-elect him from the Northeast Delhi constituency.

In the Lok Sabha elections, the people are going to fulfil two of Mahatma Gandhi's wishes including one that India should become a strong nation of the world, he said.

"The country is marching forward with a new vision under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. India has become a strong nation of the world and its prestige has soared. Now when India speaks from international platforms, the whole world listens carefully," Singh said.

He said the other wish of Mahatma Gandhi was that Congress be disbanded after Independence.

"Mahatma Gandhi had said the Congress should be disbanded after Independence. The people of the country are going to fulfil this wish of Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress is going to be wiped out from the politics of the country," he said. BJP candidate Harsh Malhotra, who was accompanied by Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami, also filed his nomination papers after an "impressive" procession. Dhami too exuded confidence that the "huge" gathering in support of Malhotra indicated that the people were going to elect him from the seat. The Uttarakhand chief minister assailed Congress in his address accusing it of appeasement of minorities in the polls.

"The BJP is moving towards the direction of Uniform Civil Code. A bill on UCC was passed by the Uttarakhand Assembly and it has got the President's nod, while the Congress is providing reservation to Muslims in Karnataka," Dhami said. (PTI)

TMC leader Kunal Ghosh calls BJP candidate Tapas Ray 'true mass leader'

KOLKATA, May 1: TMC leader Kunal Ghosh on Wednesday shared the stage with BJP's Kolkata North candidate Tapas Ray, and called him a "true mass leader".

Ray, a four-term TMC MLA, joined the BJP in March after the party re-nominated its incumbent MP Sudip Bandopadhyay in the Kolkata North seat. The BJP then fielded Ray against Bandopadhyay.

Incidentally, Ghosh, who is the TMC's state general secretary, gave Bandopadhyay a miss at the blood donation programme where Ray was also present.

"Tapas Ray is a true mass leader. His doors are always open for party workers and people. I have known him for several decades. Unfortunately, our paths are now different as Tapas-da despite our best efforts to retain him was unsuccessful,"

Ghosh said.

"I am hopeful that the elections would be free and fair, and no unscrupulous means would be used to retain the seat. Let the people cast their votes freely," he added.

Ray thanked Ghosh and said their relationship was beyond politics.

"If you ask anybody from the TMC or any other political party, everybody will praise me. Nobody will speak ill about me. I thank Kunal for his kind words," he said.

Later, Ghosh told reporters that it was not a political function, but a blood donation programme organised by a local club.

"I consider Tapas Ray as a good human being and a good politician, and I have said it," he said. (PTI)

BJP put lives at stake for extorting political donations from vaccine manufacturer: Akhilesh

LUCKNOW, May 1: Amid a controversy over the "side effects" of Covishield vaccine, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Wednesday accused the BJP of putting the lives of people at stake for "extorting political donations" from a vaccine manufacturer.

Demanding a high-level judicial probe into it, Yadav said allowing such lethal medicines amounts to a "conspiracy to murder someone" and those responsible should be prosecuted.

"Around 80 crore Indians have been given the Covishield vaccine, which is two doses per person, and the company that made its original formula has said that it causes a risk of heart attack," Yadav said in a post on X.

"Those who have lost their loved ones due to the side effects of the vaccine or who feared the ill effects of the vaccine, their doubts and fears have now been proven right," the former Uttar Pradesh chief minister said.

Those who play with the lives of the people will not be forgiven, he said.

UK-headquartered pharma giant AstraZeneca has admitted that in "very rare cases", its Covid-19 vaccine, which is known as Vaxzevria in Europe and Cov-



ishield in India, can cause a blood clot-related side effect but the causal link is unknown, according to court papers being quoted in the UK media.

In India, the AstraZeneca vaccine was manufactured by the Serum Institute of India.

Attacking the BJP, the SP chief further said, "The ruling party has put the lives of the public at stake by collecting political donations from the vaccine manufacturing company."

"Neither the law, nor the public will ever forgive them. There

should be a judicial inquiry at the highest level in this matter," Yadav added.

SP leaders had made similar allegations on Tuesday, saying the BJP took "commission" from the manufacturer of the Covid vaccine, which they said was "forcibly" administered to people.

Uttar Pradesh Congress chief Ajay Rai had also attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the issue. "Is this Modi's guarantee?" he had asked.

SP national general secretary Shivpal Yadav had said, "It has

now been exposed that they have taken commission in vaccines too. Low quality vaccines and medicines were given to the people."

Dimple Yadav, wife of SP chief Akhilesh Yadav, said people were "forcibly" administered Covid vaccines in the country.

"A donation of Rs 200-300 crore was taken (by the BJP) and they (company) were given permission to market the vaccine. People were forcibly administered vaccines. No where in the world vaccines were administered forcibly," Dimple said, adding that corruption in vaccine manufacturing has now come to the fore.

Akhilesh Yadav, while the country was under the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, had said that he would not take the "BJP's vaccine", and that when his government comes to power, everyone would be vaccinated for free.

The Daily Telegraph reported that in a legal document submitted to the High Court in London in February for a group action brought by 51 claimants, AstraZeneca admitted that the vaccine developed with the University of Oxford to protect against COVID-19 may cause Thrombosis with Thrombocytopenia Syndrome (TTS) in "very rare cases". (PTI)

Farooq Abdullah attacks ECI over postponement of election in Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seat

RAJOURI/JAMMU, May 1: National Conference (NC) president Dr Farooq Abdullah took a dig at the Election Commission of India (ECI) for postponing polling in the Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seat to May 25.

Dr Abdullah maintained that they have the full support of people of the constituency. "See, it was not up to us (to defer the elections). The Election Commission has deferred it. Congratulations to them," Abdullah told reporters in reply to a question about the postponement of elections on the Anantnag-Rajouri seat. In reply to another question about the party's strength in the Anantnag-Rajouri seat and the prospects of its victory, he said, "I can only say this, I have full faith in the people. We have full faith in Allah."

NC candidate and former minister Mian Altaf Ahmed took also took a potshot at the ECI and claimed he had not seen such an example of the deferring of polls in the history of elections.

"There is no example in history that elections have been deferred. I have never heard such an example that elections were postponed due to a mere landslide. This has happened for the first time. It is an undemocratic step," Altaf told reporters here.

He alleged people's anger against

his candidature, Kanhaiya said such things happen during elections. "You saw what happened in Surat and Indore. You are lucky that your candidates are standing strong and you have a chance to cast your vote. There is a need to think about it. During elections, it is not a new thing that some people from a party resign or there are issues with the candidate," he said.

In his resignation letter sent to the Congress president on Saturday, Lovely had said that he found himself "handicapped" as all the decisions taken by senior Delhi unit leaders unanimously were "unilaterally vetoed" by the AICC's Delhi in-charge Deepak Babaria.

The Delhi Congress unit was against the alliance with the AAP but the party high command went ahead with it, Lovely had said, as his resignation brought to the fore the party's factional feud.

He had also criticised Kanhaiya and Udit Raj — Congress candidate from North West Delhi — for their past statements and termed them "strangers" to the party. AAP MLA Durgesh Pathak said instances of opposition candidates remind him of 80s Hindi films.

"We are seeing that the nomination of opposition candidates are cancelled or they are picked up. We used to see such things in Amitabh Bachchan's and Mithun's films of the 70-80 era," he said. (PTI)

Global plastics treaty: Modest progress in Ottawa leaves civil society disappointed

NEW DELHI, May 1: The fourth round of United Nations negotiations for an international treaty to end plastic pollution in Ottawa, Canada, ended on Tuesday with modest progress, leaving ambitious states and much of the civil society disappointed.

With the decision ignoring a discussion on the central role of plastics production in fueling the climate, biodiversity and pollution crises, they said the Ottawa negotiation caved into the interests of the fossil fuel and petrochemical industry.

Countries decided to move forward with intersessional work -- expert meetings between the official sessions of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) -- on the financial mechanism, plastic products, chemicals of concern in plastic products, product design, reusability and recyclability.

"We came to Ottawa to ad-

vance the text and with the hope that members would agree on the intersessional work required to make even greater progress ahead of INC-5. We leave Ottawa having achieved both goals and a clear path to landing an ambitious deal in Busan ahead of us," said Inger Andersen, Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP).

"The work, however, is far from over. The plastic pollution crisis continues to engulf the world and we have just a few months left before the end-of-year deadline, agreed upon in 2022. I urge members to show continued commitment and flexibility to achieve maximum ambition," she said.

Much of the civil society believes the draft text is unfit for the fifth and final negotiations in Busan, South Korea, from November 25 to December 1.

The talks wrapped up with a



hugely disappointing decision to exclude discussions on the production of primary plastic poly-

mers — a key root source of plastic pollution, the international NGO Environmental Investiga-

tion Agency said.

Member States agreed to include observers' participation

during this work. They also decided to create a legal drafting group that will conduct a legal review of the text and provide recommendations to the plenary.

However, the EIA said, the decision to exclude upstream measures from the intersessional work means it will be more daunting to include extraction or production reduction measures under the ambit of the draft plastics treaty.

"This compromise diminishes the ambition of this process as it ignores the central role of plastics production in fueling the climate, biodiversity and pollution crises. This is not only an utter disappointment, but also a missed opportunity to tackle the root causes comprehensively," it said.

The fourth session of the INC to advance a plastics treaty saw countries adopt a "weak program of formal intersessional work". Despite a handful of countries taking a stand to keep ambitious

proposals alive, most countries accepted a "compromise that played into the hands of petrostates and industry influences", a statement from the Centre for International Environmental Law (CIEL) said.

A CIEL analysis released during INC-4 found that nearly 200 fossil fuel and chemical industry lobbyists registered for the negotiations, including at least sixteen on country delegations.

"From the beginning of negotiations, we have known that we need to cut plastic production to adopt a treaty that lives up to the promise envisioned at UNEA two years ago. In Ottawa, we saw many countries rightly assert that it is important for the treaty to address the production of primary plastic polymers," says David Azoulay, Director of Environmental Health at the Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL). (PTI)

Northern plains, central India to have high number of heat wave days in May: IMD

NEW DELHI, May 1: Above normal maximum temperatures are likely over most parts of the country in May and a significantly high number of heat wave days expected over the northern plains, central region, and adjoining areas of peninsular India, said IMD chief Mrunjay Mohapatra on Wednesday.

A prolonged and intense spell of heat wave scorched swathes of east, northeast, and southern peninsular India in April, prompting health warnings from government agencies and some states to suspend in-person classes in schools.

Five active Western Disturbances led to rain, thunderstorm, and hailstorms over north and central India at regular intervals in April, preventing heat waves, the India Meteorological Department's director general told a press conference.

IMD data shows that the heat waves in April this year were far worse than in 2023, the warmest year on record so far. This trend is likely to continue in May, with around eight to 11 heat wave days predicted over south Rajasthan, west Madhya Pradesh, Vidarbha, Marathwada, and Gujarat regions, Mohapatra said.

The remaining parts of Rajasthan, east Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and some parts of Chhattis-



garh, interior Odisha, Gangetic West Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar, north interior Karnataka, and Telangana may record five-seven heat wave days in the month, he said.

Normally, the northern plains, central India, and adjoining areas of peninsular India experience around three days of heat waves in May.

Above normal maximum temperatures are likely over most parts of the country in May, except for most parts of northeast India, some parts of north and central India, and adjoining areas of northeast peninsular India where normal to below-normal maxi-

mum temperatures are likely, the IMD said. Above normal minimum temperatures are likely over most parts of the country except the northeast and some areas of northwest India, Indo-Gangetic plains, and the central region.

Normal rainfall (91-109 per cent of the long-period average) is predicted in the country in May. Normal to above normal rainfall is likely over most parts of northwest India, and some parts of central, peninsular and northeast India.

Below normal precipitation is likely in the remaining parts of the country, the IMD said. India saw two spells of heat waves in April — from April 5 to 7 and

April 15 to 30.

Mohapatra attributed the prolonged heat wave spell over east, northeast, and south peninsular India in April to the absence of thunderstorms and a persisting anticyclone at lower levels over the west central Bay of Bengal and the adjoining eastern coasts of India. This caused the sea breeze to cut off over Odisha and West Bengal on most days, he said.

The IMD said south peninsular India recorded an average maximum temperature of 31 degrees Celsius in April, which was the second-highest since 1901. The mean temperature (28.12 degrees Celsius) in April in east and northeast India was the highest since 1901, the weather office said.

The IMD chief said above normal maximum temperatures have become frequent over south peninsular India since 1980s. The region recorded 12.6 mm of rainfall in April, which was the fifth lowest since 1901 and the second lowest since 2001.

Mohapatra said the number of heat wave days this April was the highest in 15 years in Gangetic West Bengal and nine years in Odisha. Odisha also experienced the longest heat wave spell (16 days) in April since 2016.

Amid the prevailing but weakening El Nino conditions, the IMD had earlier warned of extreme heat during the

April-June period, coinciding with the seven-phase Lok Sabha elections.

Hundreds of thousands of voters had to cope with the searing heat when they stepped out to exercise their franchise in the second phase of the Lok Sabha elections on April 26. Polling for 94 constituencies across 12 states will take place on May 7.

The weather office had earlier expected four to eight heat wave days in different parts of the country in April against a normal of one to three days. Ten to 20 heat wave days are expected against a normal of four to eight in the entire April-June period.

Following a decrease in turnout in the first phase of polling, the Election Commission (EC) set up a task force to review the impact of the heat wave.

The task force includes officials of the poll panel, the IMD, the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), and the Union Health and Family Welfare Ministry.

Given the Central government's contemplation of the 'one nation, one poll' concept, the IMD chief had earlier told PTI that authorities must consider weather conditions and the climate in their planning.

'One nation, one poll' refers to the idea of holding simultaneous polls in the country to elect Lok Sabha and state assembly representatives. (PTI)

Chhattisgarh encounter: Besides Naxalites, STF jawan also fought off wild bear

NARAYANPUR, May 1: A Special Task Force (STF) jawan involved in Tuesday's encounter on the border of Narayanpur and Kanker districts of Chhattisgarh fought off not just Naxalites, but also a wild bear that attacked him.

Constable Mangal Mandavi sustained bite injuries on his leg in the face-off with the wild animal, police said. He was shifted to Narayanpur in a helicopter on Wednesday morning and admitted to the district hospital, they said, adding that his condition is normal.

Ten Naxalites, including three women, were killed in the encounter that occurred in the forest between Tekmeta and Kakur villages in Abhujmad area, a Naxalite stronghold, on Tuesday when a joint team of the STF and the District Reserve Guard, both units of the state police, was out on an anti-Naxal operation.

Talking to PTI, Mandavi said, during the exchange of fire, he and his colleagues were busy in action in the forest, surrounded by bamboo trees, when suddenly three bears came there from behind.

Sensing the presence of wild animals, his colleagues managed to

leave the place, while one bear charged towards him and caught hold of his leg when he tried to hide among bamboo trees, he said.

The bear bit his legs, following which Mandavi retaliated with a stick, prompting the bear to escape. Though Mandavi sustained injuries on his leg, he continued to fight against Naxalites.

He was shifted to Tekmeta, where he was administered preliminary treatment and he was airlifted to Narayanpur this morning, he said.

Police officials said, security personnel were asked to take extra precautions during their patrolling in the forest as they are not just fighting Naxalites, they also had to keep themselves safe from wild animals.

Two of the 10 killed cadres were prima facie identified as Joganna and Vinay alias Ashok, who were active as divisional committee members of Maoists, police had said.

This was a second major blow to the Naxalites within 15 days. The site of Tuesday's encounter was 30 km south of Kalper village in Kanker where 29 Naxalites were killed in a gunfight with security forces on April 16, said a senior police official. (PTI)

AI cannot replace doctors, says IMA chief

NEW DELHI, May 1: Artificial intelligence cannot replace doctors though this technology can assist medical practitioners, IMA chief Dr R V Asokan has said. During an interaction with PTI editors, he said the medical profession has always been the first to embrace technology but it cannot supersede the connection between a patient and a doctor. "Nobody can replace a doctor. As long as the patient is vulnerable and is in a situation where he is so helpless that no science can treat him, only that touch, that hope, that eye contact, that assurance of a doctor can work," he said.

Asokan asserted that newer technologies like artificial intelligence, telemedicine and robotic surgery will greatly enhance the medical field but "I think the doctor will always be there".

"We believe that the art of medicine is bigger than the science of medicine," he said.

Commenting on the violent attack on doctors and the need for a centralised law, he said unfortunately such instances of doctors are becoming a part of the culture.

"It has become part of the culture. It is because of the high expectations and the unmet needs... There is a law protecting the airline staff. We are asking the government that if the airline staff are so special for the country, then please give us some protection also," he said.

Asokan further said around 23 states have passed laws to deal with violence against doctors but these, he said, were ineffective on the ground. He went on to say that amendments to the Epidemic Diseases Act, were useful.

"You wanted the doctors to be protected during the corona pandemic and not on ordinary times, that also looks funny," he said.

Over punishment of doctors for medical negligence, the IMA chief said that no doctor is criminally culpable.

"We may be answerable on the law of torts or the civil law. A crime is defined as having an intent. If there is no intent then there is no crime. If it's a murder, then it's a different thing. Otherwise during the process of treatment if there is a death there is no criminal intention. You cannot accuse the doctor of a criminal intention. Something might have gone wrong. Civil law is adequate to handle that situation," he said.

Responding to a question on whether the IMA was concerned over the allegations about pharma companies influencing doctors in prescribing their respective brands and bribing them with gifts and junkets disguised as conferences, Asokan said medical professionals have to follow the etiquette that has been prescribed.

The Professional Conduct, Etiquette and Ethics Regulations, 2002 of the Medical Council of India is certainly applicable, he said. (PTI)

Kerala Mayor row: Memory card found missing from KSRTC bus, say police

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, May 1: Kerala police said on Wednesday that the memory card of the CCTV camera on the KSRTC bus, which was a vital evidence in the ongoing rift between the Thiruvananthapuram Mayor Arya Rajendran and the driver, is missing.

A team of police personnel from the Cantonment station here examined the superfast bus parked at the KSRTC depot here but failed to retrieve the memory card which was expected to be vital proof in the raging row.

The mayor and her family on Saturday night got into a heated argument with the KSRTC bus driver after blocking the vehicle at Palayam junction. The mayor alleged that the driver made sexually suggestive gestures at them.

She claimed that the driver was rash and negligent, and they intervened after the bus was about to hit their car from behind.

The driver, HL Yadhu, however, had rejected the allegations levelled by her. "A 64 GB memory card with the recorded visuals should have been there on the bus. There are three cameras inside the superfast bus. But the memory card is missing," a police officer told the media.

However, the driver said the camera had been operational throughout the journey and was working even after the

controversial incident.

He also expressed doubt that someone might have removed it.

"I have expected that there are chances for the visuals to be destroyed. Some passengers had recorded the entire incident, but the mayor's husband, MLA Sachin Dev, forced them to delete everything," he told TV channels.

He also wanted authorities to recover the memory card as it is vital evidence to prove that he had not done anything wrong.

Meanwhile, Congress MLA M Vincent alleged that the memory card might have been taken away by the KSRTC authorities themselves.

"The bus has been under the custody of the KSRTC so far. The police are also acting to protect the real culprits. They have not even recorded the statements of the passengers in the bus," he alleged.

Vincent also alleged that the police had a clear directive from Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and the home department to protect the mayor and her husband.

The revelation by the police about the missing memory card comes at a time when the controversy over a misbehaviour complaint lodged by Rajendran against the KSRTC driver has taken a political colour. (PTI)

At least 100 schools receive bomb threats in Delhi NCR, found nothing after checks, say police

NEW DELHI/NOIDA, May 1: At least 100 schools in the Delhi-NCR area received bomb threats through emails on Wednesday leading to chaos and widespread alarm but "nothing objectionable" was found, officials said, requesting people not to panic.

The schools were evacuated after local police were informed about the threat emails. According to Delhi Fire Service (DFS), at least 97 calls from different schools have been received till 12 noon on Wednesday. All the calls are being attended diligently, an officer said.

Multiple private schools in Noida and Greater Noida also received the bomb threat. The Ministry of Home Affairs said it appears to be a hoax threat and that there was no need to panic.

Delhi Police said it has conducted a thorough check of all schools that received the bomb threat but found nothing.

"Some schools of Delhi received emails regarding bomb threats. Delhi Police has conducted thorough check of all such schools as per protocol," Delhi Police said in a post on X.

"Nothing objectionable has been found. It appears that these calls seem to be hoax. We request the public not to panic and maintain peace," it said.

According to Delhi police officials, the

email is suspected to have been sent from one source to schools in Delhi and adjoining Noida and Greater Noida. Sources said the content of the mail to every school is the same. The Union Home Ministry termed the bomb threat as a "hoax" and asked people not to panic. Police and security agencies are taking necessary steps as per protocol, the ministry said.

"There is no need to panic. Mails appear to be hoax. Delhi Police and security agencies are taking necessary steps as per protocol," a home ministry official said.

Noida Police said all such schools that received the emails were thoroughly checked and the bomb threat was found to be a hoax, Additional Commissioner of Police (law and order) Shivhari Meena said.

"This morning a threatening email was received by a chain of schools after which police teams responded to the situation immediately," Additional CP Meena said.

"All such schools that received the threats were thoroughly checked and sanitised. At no place any such thing (threat) has come to light and it is proved that the email was sent to trigger a rumour," he said.

Reacting to the development, Delhi Lt Governor VK Saxena wrote on X that he spoke to the police commissioner and sought a detailed report into the bomb

threats at schools in Delhi-NCR.

"Directed Delhi Police to carry out a thorough search in school premises, identify the culprits and ensure there are no lapses," he said, requesting parents not to panic and co-operate with the administration in ensuring safety of schools and the children.

"The miscreants and culprits will not be spared," he added.

Delhi Education Minister Atishi also requested parents not to panic and wrote on X, "Some schools have received bomb threats this morning. Students have been evacuated and those premises are being searched by Delhi Police. So far nothing has been found in any of the schools."

"We are in constant touch with the police and the schools. Would request parents and citizens not to panic. School authorities will be in touch with parents wherever needed," Atishi said. Visuals from Mayur Vihar's Mother's Mary school showed concerned parents assembling outside the school to pick their children.

The school administration was seen making announcements on the microphone while parents rushed to collect their wards.

"I dropped my child 10-15 minutes ago. Then I received a call from the school to take my child back due to some emergency," Vijay Kumar, a parent, said. (PTI)

Digantara partners with Australian firm, wins grant to better monitor space debris

NEW DELHI, May 1: A consortium comprising Bengaluru-based start-up Digantara and Australia's Space Machines Company on Wednesday said it has won an 8.5 million Australian dollar grant to enhance capabilities to track space debris and provide 'road-side assistance in space'.

Using the funding, Digantara's optical sensor technology will be integrated with the Australian company's orbital servicing vehicle to enhance the capability to monitor and track resident space objects in low earth orbit.

The grant, funded by the Australian Space Agency's International Space Investment India Projects programme, is aimed at

bolstering space capabilities through partnerships of space sector companies from the two countries.

The collaboration primarily focuses on enhancing Space Domain Awareness (SDA) capabilities and developing a robust in-orbit servicing ecosystem towards providing 'Roadside Assistance in Space', a Digantara statement said.

This integration of technologies is expected to transform the monitoring of Resident Space Objects (RSOs) in Low Earth Orbit (LEO), enhancing space traffic management and debris monitoring with its high sensitivity, superior tracking accuracy, and

frequent revisit rates, the statement said.

"With the support of the Australian Space Agency, this partnership merges complementary technologies to turn our shared vision of a sustainable space ecosystem into reality," Anirudh Sharma, CEO of Digantara said.

"This initiative not only redefines space operations but also highlights the collaborative spirit between India and Australia in advancing innovations in space," he said.

"Through collaborations like this, we are not only leveraging the best technologies from both nations but also strengthening the bonds of friendship and coopera-



India among top 5 developing countries in aviation emissions in 2019, study finds

NEW DELHI, May 1: In 2019, India was among the top five economically developing countries in terms of carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions from aviation, a new research has found.

Calculating "nearly real-time" aviation emissions using global flight data, researchers found that overall, the US, China and Great Britain were the topmost contributors, with 22 per cent, 14 per cent and roughly four per cent share.

However, among the economically developing countries, India was found to be the third biggest contributor with close to three per cent share in global CO2 emissions from aviation, following China at 14 per cent and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) at more than three per cent. The research team at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology also found that India's share in global CO2 emissions from domestic aviation was the third highest at 1.5 per cent.

"The countries with the highest absolute domestic aviation CO2 emissions (global percentage share in total CO2 aviation emissions in parentheses) are the USA (13.4 per



cent), China (8.9 per cent), India (1.5 per cent), Russia (1.2 per cent), and Japan (1.1 per cent)," the authors wrote.

The findings were published in the journal 'Environmental Research Letters'.

For their analysis, the researchers used the model, called AviTeam, which computes the fuel burnt for individual flights for the

entire envelope based on a given trajectory.

When the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change treaty was signed, high-income countries were required to report their aviation-related emissions. However, the low- and middle-income countries, including China and India, were not required to report these emissions,

even though they could voluntarily do so.

The researchers said the model is the first to provide information for the 45 lesser-developed countries that have never inventoried their greenhouse gas emissions from aviation.

"Our work fills the reporting gaps, so that this can inform policy and hopefully improve future ne-

gotiations," said first author Jan Klenner, a PhD candidate at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology.

"Now, we have a much clearer picture of aviation emissions per country, including previously unreported emissions, which tells you something about how we can go about reducing them," said co-author Helene Muri, a research professor at the university.

The ability to calculate nearly real-time aviation emissions could also provide an important tool as the industry makes changes to decarbonise, according to co-author Anders Hammer Stromman, a professor at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology.

"I think it very nicely illustrates the potential in this type of work, where we have previously relied on statistical offices and reporting loops that can take a year or more to get this kind of information," he said.

"This model allows us to do instant emissions modelling - we can calculate the emissions from global aviation as it happens," said Stromman. (PTI)

CARLA GUGINO TO PLAY HOLLYWOOD ICON VIVIEN LEIGH IN BIOPIC 'THE FLORIST'



LOS ANGELES, May 1: Actor Carla Gugino has been roped in to play Hollywood screen legend Vivien Leigh in the forthcoming biopic *The Florist*.

Two-time Oscar winner Leigh is renowned for playing Scarlett O'Hara, the central character in 1939's Hollywood classic *Gone With the Wind*, opposite Clark Gable. Leigh also played the landmark role of Blanche DuBois opposite Marlon Brando in 1951's *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

Nick Sandow, known for his role in 2013 drama series *Orange Is the New Black*, will direct *The Florist*, reported Variety. Screenwriter Jayce Bartok of *The Cake Eaters* fame penned the script based on a box of love letters.

The biopic will explore Leigh's struggle with bipolar disorder in the 1960s, as she prepares to lead the Broadway production of John Gielgud's Chekhov adaptation of

Ivanov. Gugino, known for her work in *Gerald's Game*, the *Spy Kids* films and *The Unborn*, said she is looking forward to playing Leigh on screen.

"I couldn't be more excited about the opportunity to excavate a woman as complex, contradictory, and compelling as Vivien. From the moment I read the script, I knew *The Florist* was a journey I had to pursue," the actor said.

According to the official synopsis, "Leigh collides with Joseph Penn - a WWII veteran and blue-collar florist who encounters Leigh on a delivery. At the same time, the star attends a local psychiatric facility for electroconvulsive therapy. Amidst the backdrop of madness, Leigh and Penn become each other's sources of truth, beauty, and love." *The Florist* will start production at the end of the summer in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. (PTI)

KOREAN HORROR BLOCKBUSTER 'EXHUMA' TO HIT INDIAN SCREENS ON MAY 3



MUMBAI, May 1: Korean mystery horror film *Exhuma*, which has emerged as a blockbuster in South Korea, is set to release in India on May 3. The film revolves around a wealthy family whose patriarch hires a shaman duo to exhume a mysterious grave.

Led by top Korean stars such as Oldboy fame Choi Min-sik, Goblin actor Kim Go-eun, *The Glory* star Lee Do-hyun and *Yoo Hai-jin* of *Confidential Assignment*, *Exhuma* has emerged as the highest grossing film of the year in Korea.

Impact Films is releasing the movie, directed and written by Jang Jae-hyun, in Indian theatres. Ashwani Sharma, founder of Impact Films, said he is confident the film will "create attendance records" in India.

"We have released several Korean titles earlier, including *Parasite*, *Broker*, etc, and we feel this film has got that emotional core and setting which can appeal to the Indian audiences," Sharma said. *Exhuma* will be available in 75 screens in major cities and towns in Korean language with English subtitles. (PTI)

SS RAJAMOULI ANNOUNCES ANIMATED SERIES 'BAAHUBALI: CROWN OF BLOOD'



NEW DELHI, May 1: Director S.S. Rajamouli has announced *Baahubali: Crown of Blood*, an animated series set in the universe of his two-part period epic *Baahubali*.

Set in the fictional kingdom of Mahishmati, the *Baahubali* movies starred Prabhas, Rana Daggubati, Anushka Shetty, and Tamannaah Bhatia. The films' box office success took Telugu cinema national and eventually global.

Rajamouli shared the title announcement teaser on his official X page on Tuesday.

It is currently unknown in what capacity Rajamouli would be associated with *Baahubali: Crown of Blood*.

Baahubali: The Beginning, the first part released in 2015, followed Sivudu, an adventurous young man who helps his love Avantika rescue Devasena, the former queen of Mahishmati now imprisoned under the tyrannical rule of King Bhallaladeva. The film ended at a cliffhanger: 'Why Kattappa killed Baahubali?' The story was then concluded in *Baahubali 2: The Conclusion* (2017).

Released in Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam and Hindi, the two films in total amassed over Rs 1,000 crore worldwide.

The *Baahubali* movies, also starring Ramya Krishnan, Sathyaraj and Nassar, also spawned the Prime Video animated series *Baahubali: The Lost Legends* (2017). (PTI)

Ayushmann Khurrana visits UNICEF headquarters in New York, shoots for campaign video

NEW DELHI, May 1: Bollywood star Ayushmann Khurrana visited the UNICEF Headquarters in New York and shot for a global campaign video on World Immunisation Week.

Khurrana, who is the National Ambassador of UNICEF for India, shared the video on World Immunisation Week, which is observed between April 24 and 30 annually, on his Instagram page.

"It was an honour to visit the UNICEF headquarters to shoot a very important global campaign on the importance of immunisation. As a National Ambassador of UNICEF for India, I have been fortunate to lend my voice towards raising awareness on very critical issues that plague people.

"To be included to do my bit to tell everyone about the benefits of immunisation is the least that I can do to push this important message across to as many people as possible," the 39-year-old actor said in a statement.

At UNICEF's New York headquarters, the "Dream Girl 2" star met senior officials and UNICEF Direc-



tor of Global Communication and Advocacy, Naysan Sabha, to discuss joint initiatives and future collaborations. Khurrana said he is proud to represent UNICEF at the global stage and hope to have a lifelong association with the organisation.

"I'm committed to be a part of as

many campaigns for UNICEF. I believe in the extraordinary and incredible work that UNICEF does, not just in my country but the world over. I'm very fortunate to be working closely alongside the India team that works tirelessly to aid my countrymen in need," he added. (PTI)

SUMMER MOVIES: 5 BREAKOUT STARS TO WATCH IN 'SING SING,' 'QUIET PLACE,' 'HORIZON' AND MORE



NEW YORK, May 1: A breakout moment in Hollywood can happen at any age and stage. This summer, there are plenty of talents to discover, from the formerly incarcerated man whose story inspired the film he stars in to the "It" bully whose childhood dream of playing an ape in a movie came true.

Clarence Maclin didn't know he had knack for acting until he was in prison, where he found the Rehabilitation Through the Arts Program and an appreciation for Shakespeare. His experience provided the inspiration for "Sing Sing," where he plays himself in a cast that includes Oscar nominees Colman Domingo and Paul Raci as well as a group of formerly incarcerated men.

"It almost was overwhelming when I had to go back and put the greens on again and go back into that mindset of being in prison," Maclin, 58, said. "However the purpose of what we were doing outweighed the apprehension."

After working on the idea for years, he loved being on set and said there

were "no butterflies" when it came to acting in front of the camera. Domingo, he said, helped him appreciate the nuance that the camera can capture.

Iranian-French artist Marjane Satrapi wins Spanish Asturias award for communication

A breakout film from last fall's Toronto Film Festival, more than a few "Sing Sing" reviews have called Maclin's performance starmaking. He's read them and still can't believe it. But mostly, he's excited to take the film on the road and get the message out.

"I've made a lot of mistakes in my life, but luckily I got an opportunity to redirect and try to correct some of those," said Maclin, who was incarcerated for more than 15 years for armed robbery. "I would like to be able to show this in every prison in the country and do a question and answer. Sometimes a little bit of hope is all you need."

"Sing Sing" opens in limited release on July 12 and an expansion will follow in August.

Nobody comes out of "Stranger Things" anonymously, but Joseph Quinn, who played Hellfire Club leader Eddie Munson, was a little surprised by the attention. On vacation with friends on a small island in Italy, one looky-loo in the morning multiplied into a big crowd by the end of the day. Still, not everyone knew who he was.

"The manager of the hotel was like 'who are you?'" Quinn recalled, laughing.

But mainly it's led to life-changing opportunities for the 30-year-old British actor who is starring alongside Oscar-winner Lupita Nyong'o in "A Quiet Place: Day One" (June 28) and later this year will be sharing the screen with Denzel Washington and Paul Mescal in "Gladiator II" (Nov. 22). He's also been tapped to help restart the *Fantastic Four* franchise in the Marvel Cinematic Universe as the Human Torch.

"When you go and you see ancient Rome and you see Denzel Washington inhabit it and watch Ridley Scott make a film, those things have a profound change in you," Quinn said. "It expands your idea of what's possible."

But first up is the highly anticipated "Quiet Place" prequel, which focuses on a new pair of characters in New York on that first day of the in-

vasion.

"The whole experience was great fun," Quinn said. "I learned a lot from Lupita and the way to conduct oneself in an environment like that. She's punctual, brave, fearless and knows exactly what she wants and what she doesn't want."

UK audiences can also see him soon in the independent film "Hoard."

Abbey Lee remembers being in New Mexico when she got an email from her agent saying that Kevin Costner wanted to send her a script and speak with her. The idea that Costner even knew who she was, she said, was shocking.

The project was "Horizon: An American Saga," his Civil War era epic about the Westward expansion in America that Warner Bros. is releasing in two parts this summer (June 28 and Aug. 16). Her character, Marigold, is a woman without a family or a home who is fighting for a better life.

"She uses sex work as a means to survive," Lee, 36, said. "Like everyone in this film, she's somewhat broken and worn down but she's also a very hopeful person and a very resilient woman with a strong will to live."

The Australia native worked as a model for years before she had a few big acting breakthroughs, notably in "Mad Max: Fury Road." Modeling gave her opportunities to travel, and get a paycheck, but it always felt like a job, she said.

"My passion is the craft of acting," she said. "You get to utilize not just your body, but your brain and your heart and your emotional capacity. And you keep changing and growing: Each role shifts your perspective on the world and your life."

Filming "Horizon," Lee fell in love with riding horses and was overwhelmed by not just the beauty of Utah but also the scope of the film.

"It's such an epic piece," she said.

Izaac Wang had been on some big films before "Didi," including "Good Boys" and "Clifford the Big Red Dog," but it wasn't until he looked at his schedule that he realized just how big of a commitment a leading role was.

"I was like 'wait, I'm working every day?'" Wang laughed. "My mom was like, 'Yeah, you're working every day.'"

In "Didi" he plays a 13-year-old Taiwanese American boy on the summer before high school in the Bay Area in 2008. The film was one of the big discoveries of the Sundance Film Festival, winning the audience award and a special jury award for its ensemble. It's getting a theatrical release from Focus Features on July 26.

Wang was born in Minnesota, moved to Los Angeles with his family when he was 3 and started acting around age 8. While he's thought about giving it up in the past, "Didi" was a turning point because it was such a fun experience. He's considering studying theater in college too.

"I love acting in general because I get to be a goofy, silly, imaginative guy," he said. "I play with my stuffed animals still. I'm 16-years-old, I still do it."

Unlike the other actors on this list, audiences will not see Owen Teague's face on the big screen. Well, not exactly. He's the star of "Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes," a new film set many years after Caesar's reign when the apes have become the dominant species. He plays an ape named Noa.

"I've wanted to play a performance capture ape since I was a little kid," Teague said. "This was one of those auditions where I was like 'God, I'd give anything to do this movie.'"

The 25-year-old from Tampa, Florida, got his first big break on the television series "Bloodline," which led to playing one of the bullies in "It" and Julia Louis-Dreyfus' son in "You Hurt My Feelings" among other credits. Teague said he worried early on that he was only playing "bad guys." "Villains are fun, he said, but he wanted the chance to do everything.

For this movie, he went to ape school and worked closely with a movement coach so that it would feel second-nature by the time they started filming. His character, Noa, is the sheltered son of their clan's leader who has to go on an eye-opening journey to save his family.

"There's a lot of pressure on him to live up to his father's expectations," Teague said. "There's this part of him that wants to know what's out there."

And he recommends seeing it on the big screen: "It's one of the most astounding things I've ever seen." (AP)

ALCARAZ REACHES QUARTERFINALS

Nadal gets emotional after a loss in his last Madrid Open appearance

MADRID, May 1: Rafael Nadal had to pause for a few moments, visibly emotional, while addressing the crowd after his loss in the fourth round at the Madrid Open. As chants of "Rafa, Rafa, Rafa" echoed around, the five-time champion in Madrid made a farewell speech following a 7-5, 6-4 loss Tuesday to the 31st-ranked Jiri Lehecka.

It was likely his last official match at the tournament in the Spanish capital.

"This is a difficult day when it arrives, but it's a reality. My body and my life had been sending me signs for some time," Nadal said. "I was able to say goodbye playing on this court, one of the most emotional ones for me. Madrid at times has been more important to me than a Grand Slam. The memories here will stay with me forever."

After the match, tournament organizers unfurled five banners for each of Nadal's titles in Madrid — 2005, 10, '13, 14 and '17. They also showed a video of his highlights, as his wife and sister shed tears in the stands.

"It's been a gift what you've done for me during the 21 years that I've played



here," said the 37-year-old Nadal, a winner of 22 Grand Slam singles titles. "All I can say is thank you."

Nadal had not lost to a player ranked outside the top 20 on clay since falling to Pablo Cuevas in 2016 at Rio de Janeiro.

He was seeking his 60th win in Madrid and the 100th ATP 1000 quarterfinal of his career.

Earlier, the player who Spanish fans hope will take over Nadal's reign, Carlos Alcaraz, needed nearly three hours to beat Jan-Lennard Struff 6-3, 6-7 (5), 7-6 (4).

Both Spaniards are coming off injuries and are trying to get back in shape ahead of next month's French Open. The 20-year-old Alcaraz missed tournaments in Monte Carlo and Barcelona. Nadal was coming off two matches in Barcelona after not playing competitively in nearly three months. He arrived in Madrid saying he wasn't fully fit and was worried about his condition, but in the end he won three consecutive matches without showing significant physical limitations.

"Just two days before I left for Barcelona I really didn't know if I was going to be able to play again in an official match," Nadal said, "and in the end I've played two weeks."

The second-seeded Alcaraz was coming off two comfortable victories in Madrid but struggled on Tuesday. He squandered four match points against the

24th-ranked Struff while serving at 5-3 but converted on his first opportunity in the deciding tiebreaker at the Caja Magica center court.

"I wasn't at my best physically toward the end of the match, but I'm happy that in the end I found my game," Alcaraz said. "I fought for every ball and didn't let down despite some difficult moments when things didn't go my way."

Alcaraz is trying to become the first player to win three straight Madrid Open titles. He also needed three sets to beat Struff in last year's final. The world No. 3 will next face seventh-seeded Andrey Rublev at the clay-court tournament.

Top-seeded Jannik Sinner defeated 16th-seeded Karen Khachanov 5-7, 6-3, 6-3 to reach the Madrid quarterfinals for the first time. He is the only player to make it to the quarterfinals at all four ATP 1000 events this season.

"I made a couple of mistakes in the first set when he broke me, but this can happen," Sinner said. "In the second set I tried to stay focused. Immediately, I broke him, and the confidence level raised a bit." (PTI)

Top-seeded Bopanna-Ebden pair knocked out of Madrid Masters



MADRID, May 1: Top-seeded Indo-Australian pair of Rohan Bopanna and Mathew Ebden bowed out of the ATP Mutua Madrid Open after a shocking first-round loss to the unheralded duo of Sebastian Korda and Jordan Thompson here.

Bopanna and Ebden, who are the reigning Australian Open men's doubles champions, went down 7-6 (4) 7-5 in a contest that lasted one hour and 17 minutes.

Squaring off for the first time, the American-Australian duo matched Bopanna and Ebden shot for shot.

Korda and Thompson displayed a strong service game and saved the lone break point they conceded in the opening set.

"I was surprised by the four spinners as well. I had Rinku (Singh) in there and only two spinners."

"In my initial squad, I had the extra quick because I think, because of the inconsistency that we have seen with everyone bar Jasprit Bumrah with the ball, especially in the power-play, I wanted the extra cover of that quick," he said.

"And if they want to play three spinners in the game, one of them has to be prepared to bowl in the powerplay, and I don't see any of those guys doing it consistently, so I think they've backed themselves into a corner slightly," Finch told 'Star Sports'.

Former West Indies fast bowler Ian Bishop added that four spinners in a squad of 15 is more of a luxury than necessity.

"I guess spin will play a part in the tournament. The only concern I have is that the pitches for the World Cup may be slightly different from the ones we have seen in bilateral series or domestic tournaments. So I think it's a luxury to have four spinners rather than it being a necessity," said Bishop. (PTI)

The duo made the men's doubles semi-finals at Wimbledon and the final of the US Open in the same season.

Earlier this year, the Bopanna also became the oldest world number one in doubles thanks to the Australian Open triumph. (PTI)

Archer Dhiraj aims for team qualification at Paris Olympics



NEW DELHI, May 1: Dhiraj Bommadevara, the only Indian archer to qualify for the individual event of the Paris Olympics, says locking a quota in the team events at the quadrennial extravaganza is next on their radar.

The 22-year-old recurve archer qualified for the Summer Games in the men's individual event owing to his silver medal at the Asian Qualifying Tournament in Bangkok last year.

"We are trying hard to convert the individual quota into a team quota, so we are working consistently towards it, planning for it and taking part in as many tournaments as possible," Dhiraj was quoted as saying in a SAI release.

"Our first priority is to get the team quota. We will go to Paris 2024 with a simple mindset just to give our best. The rest is not in our hands. No expectation on results. We have to be prepared for everything and perform accordingly."

The Indian men's recurve team has been in good form. Last week, the trio of Dhiraj, Tarundeep Rai and Pravin Jadhav had stunned reigning Olympic champions South Korea to land a historic World Cup gold medal after 14 years.

The World Cup in Antalya,

Turkey in June is the final qualifying event for the Paris Olympics.

However, if the Indian men's team is unable to make the cut there, it is still in prime position to qualify for the Olympics owing to the rankings. The top-two ranked team in the world get direct entry for the Games. India are ranked second so far behind Korea.

Dhiraj was also a part of the silver-winning men's team at the Asian Games last year.

Despite doing well at in World Cups, World Championship and other marquee events, Indian archers have yet to get their hands on an elusive medal at the Olympics.

"We are trying to achieve better versions of our past. We're not comparing with any other nation. Our priority is only to get better and improve from lessons learnt."

Talking about the impact of the compound team's performances he said, "Our compound team is the best in the world. Its performance helps us push ourselves. Both the compound bow and the recurve bow competitions are equally tough."

"How Jyothi (Surekha) didi handles her pressure in various categories — individual, mixed or team event — is really commendable and inspiring," he added. (PTI)

Can Arshdeep and Siraj pass the acid test in Americas

NEW DELHI, May 1: Four spinners in India's T20 World Cup squad suggest that the Indian selectors are expecting slow turners in the Americas but have they missed a trick by picking only three pacers in the final 15?

Also questionable is the choice of pacers.

Before the IPL began, Jasprit Bumrah was the lone certainty in the pace department while the other contenders had to prove themselves in the league.

As it turned out on Tuesday, the selectors chose to play safe and picked Mohammed Siraj and Arshdeep Singh to support the one-of-a-kind Bumrah in the ICC event beginning June 1.

The likes of Sandeep Sharma, Avesh Khan and T Natarajan, who all have impressed with their death bowling skills in this IPL, were ignored.

Both Siraj and Arshdeep, who have played 10 and 44 T20 Internationals respectively, have not had the best of times in the IPL but they have got the nod on the basis of their past performances for India.

The duo has the ability to swing the new ball but in the shortest format, how one handles batters' onslaught in the death overs is equally important if not more. That is one aspect of the game in which both Arshdeep and Siraj have been off the mark in the IPL.

Siraj has leaked run at 9.50 runs



per over while Arshdeep has been unusually expensive, leaking 9.63 runs per over though he has 12 wickets to his name in nine games. He picked up 10 wickets during the 2022 T20 World Cup.

In the left-arm pacer's case, his form in the death overs has been worrying but the selectors have also considered his healthy record in national colours, having taken 62 wickets at a striking average of 20.87 and a decent economy rate of 8.63. Siraj has an economy rate of 8.78 in 10 T20 Internationals.

In former chief selector MSK Prasad's opinion, taking three pacers to the World Cup will be enough and he is also fine with the chosen men.

"The pitches over there are expected to assist the slower bowlers and that is why they have gone with four spin options."

"In the playing eleven, I see only two specialist pacers playing alongside Hardik Pandya," Prasad, who is currently a strategic consultant with Lucknow Super Giants, told PTI.

"I would like to start with Bumrah and Siraj but the management can rotate between Siraj and Arshdeep depending on the composition of opposition batters."

Prasad described it as a "balanced squad" even though he felt K L Rahul deserved a place.

"On the batting front, it is unfortunate that someone of K L Rahul's quality has missed but I am sure he will make a strong comeback," said the former India wicketkeeper, who would also like to see both Kuldeep Yadav and Yuzvendra Chahal in the playing eleven.

However, all don't agree with

Pandya and all other MI players fined for slow over rate offence against LSG



LUCKNOW, May 1: Mumbai Indians captain Hardik Pandya has been fined Rs 24 lakh after his team's second slow over-rate offence in the Indian Premier League during their match against Lucknow Super Giants here.

All the other players, including the Impact Player, were each individually fined either Rs 6 lakh or 25 per cent of their respective match fees, whichever is lesser.

MI lost the match by four wickets at the Ekana Stadium on Tuesday.

"Mr Hardik Pandya, Captain, Mumbai Indians has

been fined after his team maintained a slow over-rate during Match 48 of the TATA Indian Premier League (IPL) 2024 against Lucknow Super Giants on April 30, 2024," the IPL said in a statement.

"As it was his team's second offence of the season under the IPL's Code of Conduct relating to minimum over-rate offences, Pandya was fined INR 24 Lac.

"The rest of the members of the Playing XI, including the Impact Player, were each individually fined either INR 6 Lac or 25 per cent of their respective match fees, whichever is lesser," it added. (PTI)

Happy that the title is finally out: R Vaishali on officially becoming GM

CHENNAI, May 1: A Grandmaster much before the title was officially bestowed on her by FIDE recently, Indian chess player R Vaishali has revealed that there was a time she was unsure of being able to achieve the feat but managed to pull through owing to a good support structure.

Vaishali completed the requisite 2500 ELO points Llobregat Open tournament in Spain to become only the third Indian woman after Koneru Humpy and Harika Dronavalli to become a GM.

However, the title was officially given to her only recently following the FIDE Council meeting during the Candidates Tournament in Toronto last month.

"After completing the (Women's GM) title, I knew it would be changed to GM someday. I did not think about the title so much," she told PTI in an interview.

"Yeah, it took some time to get it official, but I'm happy that the title is finally out. I was okay with it (the delay)," she added.

The 22-year-old is basking in the glory of her solid performance in the Candidates tournament, where she won five consecutive games to finish joint second.

She became a Woman Grandmaster in 2018 after completing her final norm during the Riga Technical University Open in Riga, Latvia.



Having had to wait six years to finally earn the GM tag, Vaishali said she became a bit unsure of the GM tag after her ratings stagnated due to lack of competition during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"In between, I could not play any tournament for two years due to the (COVID-19) pandemic. But, I was working throughout, trying to improve my game. I completed my International Master (IM) cycle post-pandemic (in 2021)," she recalled.

"Although I was improving my game slowly, my rating became stagnant. There were some low moments when I felt I might not get the title, but people believed in me and helped me to attain it," she said.

Vaishali is the elder sister of R Praggnanandhaa, the 18-year-old who has been making waves for quite a while. Together, they became the first brother-sister duo to qualify for Candidates' event this year.

Talking about her relationship with Praggnanandhaa, Vaishali stated, "We talk a lot about our games, which is natural since we have been playing together since our childhood."

"He helps me a lot with my game. It's great to have such a strong player at home with whom I can discuss more about the game at any time."

When asked about the support she and her brother get from their parents, Vaishali described them

as their "biggest strength".

"Our parents are the biggest strength for both of us. My mother accompanies us to our tournaments on most of the occasions. She takes care of almost everything, and we just keep focusing on our game," she revealed.

"Our father takes care of things like logistics, planning and finances. In fact, both of them take care of most of our needs, which indeed helps us focus more on our game. Really grateful to them."

Away from chess, Vaishali is currently pursuing the PG Diploma course in Human Resource Management.

However, she has no qualms admitting that she has no academic aspirations and is focussed on professional chess with this month's Women's Masters in Norway being her next assignment.

"I am in the final year of my Human Resource Management course after having completed my B.Com. But, I don't have any academic aspirations. I just want to complete this PG and focus on playing chess full-time and professionally."

"I will be playing the Women Masters in Norway at the end of this month. It's an exciting event as I would be competing in a new format especially the time control, besides a couple of other tournaments as well," concluded Vaishali. (PTI)

Mayank Yadav doubtful for remainder of IPL; all set to get BCCI pace bowling contract

NEW DELHI, May 1: Pace sensation Mayank Yadav's participation in the remainder of the IPL round-robin stage seems doubtful after he sustained a suspected abdominal muscle "tear" during the game against Mumbai Indians, making it his second injury breakdown in past four weeks.

However, there is a silver lining for the 21-year-old Delhi man as he is all set to be given a pace bowling contract by the BCCI alongside Umran Malik, Vidwath Kaverappa, Vyshak Vijaykumar, Yash Dayal and Akash Deep.

The contract will place Mayank under the supervision of NCA's Sports Science and Medical team, who will take charge of his injury management and fitness programme from his IPL franchise Lucknow Super Giants.

"Mayank has a tear but it is more likely a grade I tear. It will be cutting it fine but in case LSG qualifies for the play-offs, he might just be able to play the knock-out games. But it is like hoping against hope and right now he is doubtful for the remaining IPL games," a BCCI source informed PTI on condition of anonymity.

Mayank, who burst into the scene with 155 click deliveries and back-to-back 'Player of the Match' awards at the start of the IPL, broke down in the third match and was ruled out for four weeks.



He made a comeback against Mumbai Indians on Tuesday after passing fitness tests but was forced back into the dugout after bowling 3.1 overs in which he gave away 31 runs.

Had Mayank been fit all this while, there was a possibility of him being a left-field selection in the T20 World Cup but right now, handling him with care is the primary job of the Indian cricket es-

tablishment.

"He will soon be handed a pace bowling contract and once he is in BCCI Pathways structure, his growth will be systematically monitored."

"The national selection committee and the Indian team management would like to gradually blood him and ensure that he can maintain peak fitness," the BCCI source added. (PTI)

Questions arise regarding Pandya's performance, commitment towards Indian cricket: Pathan



NEW DELHI, May 1: Hardik Pandya's commitment towards Indian cricket has been questionable over the years with someone like Jasprit Bumrah being more capable of playing the role of Rohit Sharma's deputy in the upcoming T20 World Cup in the Americas, reckoned Mumbai Indians skipper's bete noire Irfan Pathan on Wednesday.

Pathan, the player of the final during the 2007 T20 World Cup has been a vocal critic of Pandya for the longest of time and has been consistent in taking potshots at the India all-rounder, who is also from Baroda.

"Post T20 World Cup, there was a new plan; they aimed for a younger team with Pandya and Surya as potential captains. Yet, questions arise regarding Pandya's performance consistency and commitment to Indian cricket," Pathan opined on Star

Sports Press Room Show, Ticket to World Cup.

Pandya hasn't played any domestic cricket for Baroda close to five years now and Pathan isn't amused by his absence.

"Regular participation in domestic cricket is essential for serving Indian cricket throughout the year. Injuries are inevitable, but proper planning involving consistent match play, including domestic cricket, is vital for a player's return.

"But then there's this one player who returns from injury without fulfilling the same requirements. That shouldn't happen because it sends the wrong message to the rest of the team," Pathan was scathing in his accusation of Pandya being given special treatment.

"When they see one player receiving special treatment, it disrupts the team environment.

Cricket isn't like tennis; it's a team sport where equality is vital. Every player should be treated fairly and equally.

"Regardless of whether you're a newcomer or a seasoned player like Rohit Sharma or Virat Kohli, cricket is a team sport first and foremost," said Pathan, who has more than 300 wickets and over 2700 runs across formats in international cricket.

He believes Pandya doesn't deserve to be India's vice-captain.

"So, now, coming back to your question about Hardik Pandya being vice-captain, I understand the rationale behind it due to the importance of continuity in leadership.

"However, considering the current performance, the selectors opting for continuity may be understandable. Yet, I believe someone like Bumrah wouldn't have been a bad choice either." (PTI)

Gujarat Titan's fate in IPL to decide when will Kirsten begin Pakistan assignment

LAHORE, May 1: Gary Kirsten, Pakistan's new head coach in the white-ball formats, could join the national squad directly in Ireland if his IPL team Gujarat Titans does not qualify for the Play-offs stage of the popular T20 League.

A Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) official said Kirsten, while signing the contract, had made his commitment with the IPL franchise for this season very clear. Kirsten is associated with Gujarat Titans as batting coach and mentor.

The official added that in case Gujarat make the IPL playoffs, then Kirsten will join the team in England for the last two T20 internationals.

"If Gujarat don't qualify for the play-offs which will become clear by around May 16 or 17, or perhaps before that Kirsten will then join the Pakistan team directly in Ireland before series against England," the official said.

The IPL playoffs are from May 21 to 24 with the title clash scheduled for May 26.

Pakistan's four-match T20 series in England is scheduled to be held from May 22-30 before the teams reach USA for the World T20 Cup.

The PCB recently hired Kirsten on a two-year contract and there are high hopes that the South African will make the team more productive.

Having worked between 2008 and 2012 with the Indian team that won the 2011 World Cup, Kirsten only agreed to sign the contract with the PCB after he was assured there would be no interference in his work and the players he backed for continuity would be supported by the selectors.

"Kirsten made it clear to the PCB Chief, Mohsin Naqvi that he believes in first assessing a player and once he is convinced he is match-winning material for the team he likes to back him completely even if the player (s) go through a rough patch," the source said.

"Kirsten is also in touch with some people to bring them on the support staff for the national team," he said. (PTI)

Sunrisers Hyderabad seek perfect chase against Rajasthan Royals



HYDERABAD, May 1: An erratic Sunrisers Hyderabad would look to fix their chasing troubles and get their campaign back on track when they host the high-flying Rajasthan Royals in the Indian Premier League here on Thursday.

A lot more is at stake for the Sunrisers than the Royals, who have virtually qualified for the playoffs. In ominous form till few days back, SRH dropped out of the top four on the points table after suffering back-to-back losses against wooden spooners Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Chennai Super Kings where they failed to chase down totals.

With five wins and four losses, the 2016 champions sit on the fifth spot with 10 points.

The Pat Cummins-led side's top and middle-order batters have failed collectively while chasing, forcing head coach Daniel Vettori to admit that the idea of going all out with the bat in the second innings might not be the right thing to do.

SRH have breached the 250-run mark thrice this season but all while batting first. In contrast, they haven't managed to chase a total in excess of 200 even once.

"We have been successful setting totals and now we have to look at how well we are in chasing," head coach Vettori had conceded after the loss to RCB. "We're pretty well-suited to chasing, but it hasn't really come off yet. So yeah, it is something (we need) to work on," skipper Cummins had said after he lost to CSK.

SRH are too dependent on the explosive starts provided by Travis Head and Abhishek Sharma. And, while the duo gets going it's great but when they flop, SRH will want to do a better job at re-building their innings. It's also about time Aiden Markram steps up and justifies his spot in the playing XI, having had an underwhelming season thus far.

Runaway leaders Rajasthan Royals, on the other hand, will look to continue their near flawless run. The inaugural edition's champions have shown then are perfectly equipped to compete anywhere.

They are perched atop the table with 16 points -- four points ahead of second placed Kolkata Knight Riders. They are all but through to the knockout stage.

The Royals boast of a formidable top order, comprising Jos Buttler, Yashasvi Jaiswal, and skipper Sanju Samson, with all three of them in good nick.

The West Indian duo of Shimron Hetmyer and Rovman Powell and youngsters Riyan Parag and Dhruv Jurel have also shown they can hit top gear.

They have an equally potent bowling attack comprising Yuzvendra Chahal, the experienced Trent Boult, Avesh Khan and Sandeep Sharma.

The Royals (from): Rajasthan Royals: Sanju Samson (c), Jos Buttler, Shimron Hetmyer, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Dhruv Jurel, Riyan Parag, Donovan Ferreira, Kunal Rathore, Ravichandran Ashwin, Kuldeep Sen, Navdeep Saini, Sandeep Sharma, Trent Boult, Yuzvendra Chahal, Avesh Khan, Rovman Powell, Shubham Dubey, Tom Kohler-Cadmore, Abid Mushtaq, Nandre Burger, Tanush Kotian, Keshav Maharaj.

Sunrisers Hyderabad: Pat Cummins (c), Abdul Samad, Abhishek Sharma, Aiden Markram, Marco Jansen, Rahul Tripathi, Washington Sundar, Glenn Phillips, Sanvir Singh, Heinrich Klaassen (wk), Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Mayank Agarwal, T. Natarajan, Anmolpreet Singh, Mayank Markande, Upendra Singh Yadav (wk), Umran Malik, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Shahbaz Ahmed, Travis Head, Jaydev Unadkat, Akash Singh, Jhathavedh Subramanyan.

Match starts 7:30pm IST. (PTI)

National Women's Hockey League

Haryana and Maharashtra emerge triumphant

RANCHI, May 1: Haryana blanked Manipur 8-0 and Maharashtra defeated Mizoram 3-0 to emerge winners on the second day of the first phase of the National Women's Hockey League, here on Wednesday.

In a lopsided contest, Pooja (2) struck early as Hockey Haryana's relentless onslaught was ensued by Ritika (17, 29), Manju Chorsiya (20) and Bhteri (37) until the third quarter. In the final quarter, Shashi Khasa (49, 50, 56) demonstrated her splendid skills to produce a quick hat-trick that exposed the weak Manipur defence.

Every goal scored during the clash was a field goal.

In the subsequent encounter, Maharashtra did not find it tough prevailing against Mizoram.

Hockey Maharashtra opened their account when Tanushree Dinesh Kadu (13) successfully converted a penalty corner.

Riding on the momentum, Monika Tirkey (26) netted the second for Maharashtra through another penalty corner before skipper Ashwini Kolekar (50) scored the winner through a clinical field goal. (PTI)

Four Indian boxers march into semi-finals

ASTANA (KAZAKHSTAN), May 1: Indian pugilists Aryan, Yashwardhan Singh, Priyanshu and Sahil marched into semifinals with confident wins at the Asian U-22 & Youth Boxing Championships 2024 in Astana on Wednesday. Aryan gave India a perfect start with a 5-0 unanimous decision win against Uzbekistan's Jurav Shakarboy in the 51kg category. His win was followed by Yashwardhan (63.5kg), who made a remarkable comeback after going down in the first round to grab a 4-1 victory over Iran's Mirahmadi Babahaidari. Priyanshu (71kg) and Sahil (80kg), on the other hand, didn't break sweat as they wrapped the bout with referee stop the contest (RSC) decision against Chinese Taipei's Wu Yu En and Turkmenistan's Yklymov Abdyrakhma respectively.

The youth semi-finals will be played on Friday.

Aryan (92kg), Nisha (52kg), Akansha Phalasal (70kg) and Rudrika (75kg) will be in action later today in their respective youth quarter-finals bouts. (PTI)

India eye unassailable lead in third women's T20I against Bangladesh

SYLHET, May 1: A dominant India will have sights set on an unassailable 3-0 lead in the five-match series when they take on a hosts Bangladesh in the third women's T20 International at Sylhet on Thursday.

Having done exceedingly well to not just to turn up but trump their opponents on all fronts in the preceding two matches, India will enter the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium with aim to follow the same script. The bowling unit has been functioning cohesively, having restricted Bangladesh to modest totals with spinners Deepti Sharma, Radha Yadav, and Shreyanka Patil being economical.

In the pace department, Renuka Singh Thakur has started with the ball in the opener while Pooja Vastrakar has also been handy.

Dayalan Hemalatha, making her return to international cricket after an absence of nearly 17 months, displayed her explosive batting during the powerplay in the last game, crafting an unbeaten 24-ball 41.

The likes of Shafali Verma, Yasitika Bhatia, Harmanpreet Kaur, and Richa Ghosh have got runs under their belt. However, star opener Smriti Mandhana would hope to find form.

India have relied on a collective team effort throughout this series and they will be seeking more of the same in the remaining games.

The series assumes more importance as the T20 World Cup is to be held in Bangladesh later this year. (PTI)

I want to be on that flight to Paris, says Krishan Pathak

BENGALURU, May 1: Krishan Pathak finds himself in a bizarre situation. He will have to battle it out with his friend and mentor PR Sreejesh for the lone goalkeeper's slot in India's hockey squad for the Paris Olympics.

In Olympics, a country can carry only a 16-member squad as against 18 players in other tournaments, and that restriction often forces the coach to sacrifice one goalkeeper to include another player in a different position.

It happened in the Tokyo Olympics as Sreejesh did the custodian's duty during India's bronze-winning run, while Pathak watched the action from the gallery.

But this time, Pathak is not ready to give up the slot without a fight.

"The coach hasn't told us the team composition for the Olympics. My aim is to be ready 100 percent when the call comes. There is a healthy competition going on within the squad to earn a place in the Olympics-bound team.

"Every player feels that he can be part of that squad. I am no different, and I want to be on that flight to Paris," Pathak told PTI during the team's training camp at the SAI centre here.

Pathak shares a deep connection with Sreejesh. In fact, the veteran was India's goalkeeping coach during the 2016 junior World Cup, where Pathak showcased his talent to a broader world for the first time.

The 27-year-old insisted that the competition for an Olympic berth has not affected their personal equation.

"It's dream for me to work with and play alongside Sree bhai. We are very comfortable with each other. We share a lot of information, especially when one of us commits mistakes. We point that out to each other. "Whenever I commit a mistake, he will come and tell me what went wrong and how to rectify it. Similarly, I will do that when Sree bhai makes a mistake. We have a great bonding between us -- on and off the field," detailed Pathak.

Drop-in pitches being transported for installation at New York venue

NEW YORK, May 1: The drop-in pitches prepared for the upcoming T20 World Cup are being transported from Florida to New York in semi-trailer trucks for installation at Nassau County International Cricket Stadium, the ICC said on Tuesday.

Among other matches, the venue will also host the marquee India-Pakistan group stage fixture on June 9.

Ten drop-in pitches have been prepared in Florida since late December, employing proprietary techniques honed over a decade at Adelaide Oval, the ICC said in a press release.

The development of the pitches has been undertaken by Adelaide Oval Turf Solutions, led by renowned Adelaide Oval head curator Damian Hough.

"The pitches, cultivated with native Tahoma 31 Bermuda grass, have been meticulously nurtured in Florida by Adelaide Oval Turf Solutions and US-based sports turf experts LandTek Group, undergoing continuous care and maintenance over the past three months."

Four pitches will be set up at the Nassau stadium, with an additional six designated for neighbouring practice facilities.



The Adelaide Oval Turf Solutions team will remain in New York to assist local grounds crews in pitch maintenance throughout the tournament to ensure world-class pitches.

The drop-in square -- the type used around the world including at Adelaide Oval and Eden Park -- has been curated in Florida and transported by road to New York via a convoy of more than 20 semi-trailer trucks.

The outfield was laid last week by LandTek who have worked with the New York Yankees and New York Mets as well as Inter Miami CF on their stadium and training fields.

ICC Head of Events Chris Tetley said: "The installation of these pitches is one of the final

pieces in a project that is unprecedented in international cricket.

"We have taken a considered and well-planned approach to this project, using the very best in the business in Damian Hough to ensure we have the best possible playing surface for eight World Cup matches in New York."

The tournament will be held from June 2-29 in the USA and West Indies.

Adelaide Oval head curator, Damian Hough said: "We are excited to see the arrival of the pitches here in New York. Florida proved to be the ideal nursery for the pitches with good weather, and working alongside great partners like LandTek has been fantastic and everything is coming together as it should."

The matches in New York will take place at a state-of-the-art 34,000-seat modular stadium located at Eisenhower Park in Nassau County, east of Manhattan.

Nine teams will feature in New York including India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Canada, Ireland, Bangladesh, South Africa, the Netherlands, and the USA, with the first match taking place on June 3 between 2014 champions Sri Lanka and South Africa. (PTI)



The immediate assignment in front of him is the FIH Pro-League matches, starting at Antwerp, Belgium from May 22.

India will face some top-flight teams like Germany and Belgium in that tournament. Pathak wanted to assert his claim for an Olympic berth through some strong outings in the Pro-League.

"We've played eight Pro-League matches in Ranchi and Rourkela. Now, we have some more Pro-League matches coming up ahead of the Olympics. We will meet some of those teams in the Olympics too. That familiarity will help us.

"As a goalkeeper, I will look to source as much knowledge from the Pro-League matches about our possible opponents in the Olympics," he added.

The Kapurthala man was all praise for Indian national team coach Craig Fulton, saying that the South African is helping the players to achieve their optimum potential ahead of the quadrennial showpiece.

"When he spots a weakness, he starts working on it immediately. He hates wasting time. When we went to Australia recently, our attack and defence were not working as we lost the series 0-5.

"Now, in this camp we are working on those aspects under Fulton, who believes in immediate course correction. I think it will reflect in Paris," he explained.

Pathak, now, might be engaged in an intense race for a place in India's squad for the Olympics. But he has seen and tamed bigger challenges after losing his parents early in his life.

He draws strength from that tough period as a teenager.

"It was a very difficult phase. I don't know how I survived that period as it put a lot of pressure on me. There was a certain loneliness inside me then as suddenly I was without my parents, even though my brother and uncle supported me a lot," he said.

Pathak said his single-minded dedication for hockey too played a big part in him getting out of that dark space.

"Eventually, it was up to me to get out of that phase. Hockey saved me during that time as I channelled all my thoughts towards the sport, so that I could forget all those bad moments.

"I keep reminding myself about those days of struggle, so that I remain focused on life and sport," he said.

His hard work eventually came to a fruition in the Hangzhou Asian Games when he stood on the podium with a gold medal around his neck.

But even on that grand day, Pathak had a cavernous cut inside his heart.

"It was the proudest moment in my life. The only regret was that my parents were not there to see the moment as I always wanted to show them my achievements.

"I really miss my mom and dad. But I am sure that they are proud of me wherever they are," he choked with emotion.

Pathak also recently achieved the feat of completing 100 international matches for India, and he feels that it is the time to climb to the next level.

"It's a proud achievement for me after a topsy-turvy journey. I never thought of achieving it as I come from a family which has no hockey background. After playing so many matches, I am finding more about my own game now.

"I feel that now I am better at handling pressure and giving tips to the team from the goalkeeper's position. I am hoping to build on that in future," he signed off. (PTI)