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Modi eyes hat-trick, equaling Nehru feat

Counting of votes today ● Oppn hoping to prove exit polls predictions wrong

NEW DELHI, June 3: Prime Minister Narendra Modi eyes a record-equalling third straight term in power amid the INDIA opposition bloc's hope of springing a surprise as the counting of votes for the Lok Sabha election is set for Tuesday, bringing an end to a marathon polling exercise stretching over 80 days.

While most experts have long seen the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) as the favourite in the polls, a lot is at stake for the ruling combine in terms of the scale of victory it can pull off and new territories it can conquer. The opposition's stakes are higher still amid its reducing national footprint.

Exit polls have been, however, unanimous in their prediction that the NDA is closer to realising Modi's ambitious target of "400 paar" for his alliance than the INDIA bloc is to crossing even the

180 mark, one-third of the total number of seats.

Though electoral verdicts have historically been accepted, even though grudgingly, by all parties, there has been a sharper edge to the questions being raised by opposition parties this time over the polling process, including the Election Commission (EC).

In the run-up to the counting, the campaign acrimony between the two battling camps has spilled over into the post-poll trading of accusations after the exit polls predicted a massive win for the incumbent alliance, a forecast summarily dismissed by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi as "Modi media poll".

INDIA bloc leaders, who have been raising doubts over the electronic voting machines (EVMs), have accused the prime minister of sending a signal to the bureaucracy through these "fantasy" exit polls and marched to the EC, urging the poll watchdog to follow the counting guidelines.

In its counter-attack, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has accused its rivals of trying to undermine the integrity of India's electoral process and asked the EC to prevent any attempt of "violence and unrest" during the counting of votes. Modi framed the BJP's campaign around the opposition's "appeasement politics", accusing the Congress and its allies of handing over a chunk of the reservation meant for the Other Backward Classes *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

CEC Kumar dares oppn to give proof of attempts to influence poll process

NEW DELHI, June 3: Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar on Monday dared the opposition to share evidence of allegations that returning officers and district magistrates were influenced to vitiate the poll process so the panel could take action against them.

The opposition should also tell the Commission about those trying to influence the poll process before the counting of votes begins, Kumar said at a press conference. He was flanked by Election Commissioners Gyanesh Kumar and S S Sandhu.

"You cannot spread a rumour and bring everyone under a cloud of suspicion," Kumar said.

The Commission had made preparations to deal with any foreign attempt to influence the poll process but these allegations have come from within the country itself, he said in an apparent dig at the opposition.

Taking exception to allegations that district magistrates were being

influenced, the CEC said, "Those levelling allegations should say which DM was influenced and we will punish them. They should tell us before the counting process begins." Congress leader Jairam Ramesh had claimed that home minister Amit Shah had been calling district magistrates and collectors and indulging in "blatant and brazen" intimidation.

District magistrates and collectors are the returning officers of their respective districts during election.

Ramesh claimed that Shah had already spoken with 150 district magistrates or collectors. Kumar had accepted all the demands made by the multi-party delegation that met the panel on Sunday, and asserted that the issues raised by them were part of the election process going on for seven decades.

"Some demands were made by a multi-party delegation. We have agreed to all the demands," Kumar said, indicating that most of the issues raised by the multi-party delegation were part of election manuals.

"This process has been going on for 70 years... We have instructed every RO/ARO. These are our orders and they are no joke… Everyone has been instructed to follow the handbook/manuals," Kumar said.

Kumar admitted that the Election Commission had failed to counter the mischievous narratives spread during the poll process. (PTI)

HT BRIEFS

District chess

DIPHU: Karbi Anglong District Chess Association affiliated to Assam Chess Association (ACA) is organising Karbi Anglong District Open Chess Championship competition on June 8 and 9 here at Klirdap Sankar Dev Sishu Vidya Niketan, Thana Road. The fee for the competition in open category is ₹ 300, for students is ₹ 200 and students below Class –X is ₹ 100. Cash prizes along with trophies will be awarded to the winners. There will be junior and sub-junior categories in the competition. There will be altogether 5 rounds.

Medical unit

KOKRAJHAR: NTPC Bongaigaon Salakati has launched an innovative Mobile Medical Unit dedicated to enhancing maternal and child healthcare in the region. This trailblasing initiative, the first of its kind at NTPC's Assam-based power plant generating 750 MW at Bongaigaon, depicts NTPC's unwavering commitment to community welfare through its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs. The newly inaugurated Mobile Medical Unit will provide essential healthcare services to 18 villages surrounding NTPC Bongaigaon.

Drug Peddlers

GUWAHATI: In a significant operation conducted on Monday, the Special Task Force (STF) of Assam undertook a raid at Khanapara, opposite the Veterinary Clinical Complex under Dispur Police Station's jurisdiction. Acting on reliable intelligence, the STF targeted suspected drug peddlers in the area, resulting in the apprehension of several individuals and the seizure of illicit substances. The raid yielded a substantial haul, including 52 vials of suspected heroin. The total weight of the confiscated heroin amounts to 70 grams, highlighting the magnitude of the illicit drug trade in the region.

India created world record with 64.2 cr people voting in LS polls: CEC

NEW DELHI, June 3: India created a world record with 64.2 crore voters, including 31.2 crore women, participating in the Lok Sabha elections this year, chief election commissioner Rajiv Kumar said on Monday.

Addressing a press briefing, he said over 68,000 monitoring teams and 1.5 crore polling and security personnel were involved in the world's largest electoral exercise.

"India created a world record with 64.2 crore voters, including 31.2 crore women, participating in the Lok Sabha elections this year," said Kumar. On social media memes calling election commissioners 'Laapataa Gentlemen', Kumar said, "We were always here, never went missing." "Now memes can say the 'Laapataa Gentlemen' are back," he said.

Kumar said that nearly four lakh vehicles, 135 special trains and 1,692 air sorties were used for conducting the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. "Only 39 repolls took place in the 2024 general elections as against 540 repolls in 2019," he said. The CEC further said that Jammu and Kashmir recorded its highest turnout in four decades at 58.58 per cent overall and 51.05 per cent in the Valley.

"Seizures of ₹ 10,000 crore, including cash, freebies, drugs and liquor, were made during the 2024 polls as compared to ₹ 3,500 crore in 2019," he said. (PTI)

INDIA bloc, Cong should be ready to gracefully accept defeat, not question democracy: BJP

NEW DELHI, June 3: The INDIA bloc and the Congress should be ready to gracefully accept their "inevitable" defeat in the Lok Sabha poll rather than "demeaning" the dignity of democracy, the BJP said Monday, launching a fresh attack on the opposition on the eve of the counting of votes.

Addressing a press conference at the BJP headquarters here, party national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi said the Congress and other opposition parties are raising "baseless" questions on the country's election process to create "unrest" in society ahead of counting. "On the lighter note, I would ask them not to consider the entire country a 'pappu'. Don't try to hoodwink the people of India. They are wise enough to understand that you are levelling these types of allegations to satisfy your ego like a despotic prince," he charged.

"Wait for the results of the elections. Be ready to gracefully accept the defeat, rather than demeaning the dignity of democracy," he added.

Several exit polls on Saturday predicted that Prime Minister Modi would retain power for a third consecutive term with the BJP-led NDA expected to win a big majority in the Lok Sabha polls.

The Congress termed their projections "bogus" and said they were a "deliberate attempt to justify rigging" of the elections and part of "psychological games" being played by Modi to lower the morale of the INDIA bloc workers. Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi dubbed the exit polls as "Modi media poll".

Also a delegation of opposition INDIA bloc leaders, including Congress's Abhishek Singhvi, approached the poll panel on Sunday and *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

INDIA bloc leaders to meet in Delhi after poll results: Sources

NEW DELHI, June 3: Leaders of the INDIA opposition bloc would meet here on Tuesday evening or Wednesday morning to assess the Lok Sabha poll results, sources have said.

They said top leaders of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) have been asked to be in Delhi by Tuesday evening, once the counting of votes in their respective states is over. The sources said this was decided by the opposition leaders when they met at Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge's residence here on Saturday afternoon.

"INDIA leaders will obviously meet after the results are declared," Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said in a post on X while denying *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

WATERY WOES

Water logging at Anil Nagar after the heavy rain in Guwahati on Monday. HT photo

Several rivers in Assam flowing above danger level: CWC

NEW DELHI, June 3: Several rivers in Assam continue to flow above the danger level amid incessant rain, according to the Central Water Commission (CWC).

The commission's latest bulletin highlights critical water levels at various monitoring sites, indicating severe and above-normal flood situations. Three sites in Assam have severe flood situation where the water level is touching or exceeding the danger level but below the highest flood mark, while three sites have above-normal flood situation, according to the bulletin.

The CWC said more than 39,000 people displaced by flood are taking shelter in 193 relief camps in different districts. Another 82 relief distribution centres are also operational. Rescue and relief operations are being carried out by multiple agencies, including the NDRF, SDRF and local administration, while medical teams have also been deployed in the affected areas.

Damage to infrastructure, including roads, bridges and other property, has been reported from different districts.

According to CWC's bulletin, the Buridehing River continues to flow above the normal situation, registering a water level of 133.54 metres as of 11 am on Monday. This level indicates a potential risk to nearby areas, although it remains below the danger threshold, the commission said.

River Jiabharali at NT Road Crossing Jia-Bharali in Sonitpur District also remains in an above-normal flood situation, with a current water level of 77.30 metres, it added.

River Kopili in Marigaon and Nagaon districts is experiencing a severe flood situation at two locations.

At Dharamtul in Marigaon, the river is flowing at 56.42 metres, which is 0.42 metres above the danger level, with a rising trend noted. At Kampur in Nagaon, the water level is at 61.04 metres, 0.54 metres above the danger level, with a steady trend observed.

River Kushiyara at Karimganj is also in a severe flood situation, flowing at 15.53 metres, *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

'The education department has also given importance to set up model colleges across the state'

Assam govt working to develop world class educational infrastructure: Himanta

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 3: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday asserted that the state government has been working to develop a top-notch educational infrastructure that can match global standards.

He outlined several initiatives taken by the present state government in the last three years for the upliftment of education in Assam.

"Our Govt is focused on creating world-class educational infrastructure in Assam & upgrading existing institutions at par with global standards and we have undertaken a massive exercise to implement this vision, from the primary level to specialised education," Sarma wrote on micro-blogging site X.

Sarma also mentioned that at least 118 model schools were set up in the tea garden areas along with upgradation of 224 schools to the high school level. Moreover, 67 Kasturba Gandhi Valika Vidyalaya were also built in those areas.

He said that the state government also started 86 CBSE affiliated schools in the backward localities in the state to provide education to the marginalised. "The education department has also given importance to set up model colleges across the state," he added.

Notably, seven new government colleges were built and 126 teachers and at least 690 staff were hired for these educational institutions. Moreover, the Assam government has also developed six new engineering colleges and eight new polytechnics in the state.

According to Sarma, immense importance was given to higher education and in the last three-year tenure of the present government, eight colleges were upgraded to the universities *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

AAP leader Sanjay Singh demands ban on exit polls, calls them unreliable

NEW DELHI, June 3: Aam Aadmi Party leader and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh on Monday demanded a ban on exit polls in the country, claiming they have been proven wrong several times.

Several exit polls on Saturday predicted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will retain power for a third straight term, with the BJP-led NDA expected to win a big majority in the Lok Sabha polls.

During a press conference, Singh said, "Exit polls should be completely banned in the country since they have been proven wrong not once but many times. This is a wrong attempt to influence the people of the country, the administrative system, and the election commission before the poll counting." He claimed that the INDIA bloc will get 295 seats after the June 4 counting.

Since the exit polls two days ago, the BJP has been in a celebratory

mood and distributing sweets.

Singh said that the people of the country are being misled and an illegitimate attempt is being made to influence the counting of votes on June 4. "I believe that the BJP leaders might have fainted and fell down by seeing these exit polls, they themselves can't believe it. I think even god will not believe this exit poll survey that the BJP is getting 37 per cent vote share in Tamil Nadu," Singh claimed.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday asserted that all exit polls that predicted a third term for the BJP-led NDA were "fake". "Yesterday, *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

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Sensex, Nifty log biggest single-day gain in 3 yrs as exit polls predict 3rd term for Modi govt

MUMBAI, June 3: After the exit polls predicted the return of the Modi government for the third straight term, benchmark Sensex and Nifty zoomed more than 3 per cent on Monday, recording their biggest single-day gain in three years and closing at lifetime highs.

The 30-share BSE Sensex soared by 2,507.47 points or 3.39 per cent to settle at a new closing peak of 76,468.78 points with 25 of its constituents ending in the green and five in the red. During the day, the barometer jumped 2,777.58 points or 3.75 per cent to hit a record intra-day peak of 76,738.89.

The NSE Nifty climbed 733.20 points or 3.25 per cent to finish at 23,263.90. During the day, it soared 808 points or 3.58 per cent to hit a fresh intra-day all-time high of 23,338.70.

Sensex and Nifty logged their biggest single-day gains since February 1, 2021, when indices had jumped nearly 5% after the budget presentation. Interestingly, Sensex and Nifty had spurted more than 3 per cent on May 20, 2019, after the exit polls predicted a major win BJP-led NDA in the 2019 general elections.

Among sectors, PSUs, Power, Utilities, Oil, Energy, Capital Goods, and Realty indices soared up to 8 per cent. A sharp rally in blue-chip stocks Reliance Industries, ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank and State Bank of India propelled the indices to lifetime high levels. Strong GDP data also added to the buoyancy in equity markets.

Shares of all Adani Group companies continued their rally on Monday, taking their combined market valuation to ₹ 19.42 lakh crore. Adani Power surged nearly 16 per cent, Adani Ports by 10 per cent and flagship Adani Enterprises by over 6 per cent.

Exit polls on Saturday predicted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will retain power for the third straight term, with the BJP-led NDA expected to win a big majority in the Lok Sabha polls. The counting of votes will take place on June 4.

"Nifty logged its best session in over three years, as investors cheered exit polls, along with better-than-expected India Q4 GDP," said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities.

"The markets opened at new highs today largely because of exit polls predicting landslide victory for the BJP-led NDA. This will result in a positive surprise of policy continuity with higher seats for the NDA government," SAMCO MF Fund Manager & Head of Equity Research Paras Matalia said.

Among the 30-Sensex companies, NTPC, State Bank of India and Power Grid jumped over 9 per cent each. Larsen & Toubro, Axis Bank, Reliance Industries, UltraTech Cement, Mahindra & Mahindra, IndusInd Bank, ICICI Bank and Tata Steel were the other big gainers.

Sun Pharma, HCL Technologies, Asian Paints, Nestle and Infosys were the laggards.

Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, "Exit poll has activated the optimism of a memorable win for the ongoing government, PSUs had a humongous rally, in anticipation of continuation of the reform gains, triggering further re-rate."

The sustenance of the broad rally is anticipated to continue inline with the magnitude of the actual tally, as inflows pour in which were sitting on the sidelines in the last three months, Nair added.

In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge climbed 3.54 per cent and smallcap index jumped 2.05 per cent. Both the indices hit their all-time peaks in intra-day.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies jumped to ₹ 4,25,91,511.54 crore (USD 5.13 trillion). As many as 2,346 stocks advanced while 1,615 declined and 154 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The market capitalisation of NSE-listed companies stood at ₹ 422.48 lakh crore (USD 5.09 trillion).

India's economy grew by 8.2 per cent in the fiscal year that ended in March, cementing the country's position as the fastest-growing major economy in the world.

"Strong economic data like GDP growth of 8.2% in FY24, 100 days measures list and final budget will be the key points the market will observe in the coming weeks," Nair added.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Hong Kong settled with gains while Shanghai ended lower. European markets were trading in positive territory. US markets ended mostly higher on Friday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth ₹ 1,613.24 crore on Friday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.18 per cent to USD 81.26 a barrel.

Analysts said global equities began June mostly higher after a report showing that inflation in the US is not worsening led to a rally on Wall Street. European stocks rose and government bond yields dropped as investors anticipated an interest rate cut from the ECB (European Central Bank) later this week. (PTI)

Mother Dairy hikes milk prices by ₹ 2 per litre in NCR

NEW DELHI, June 3: Mother Dairy on Monday announced ₹ 2 per litre hike in milk prices in the Delhi-NCR market due to a rise in input cost over the last 15 months. The increase in prices of all variants of milk is effective from Monday (June 3) in Delhi-NCR as well as other markets where it has a presence. On Sunday, Amul announced an increase in rates.

Increases in milk prices by these two leading milk suppliers come just after the completion of the voting process of the Lok Sabha elections. In a statement, Mother Dairy said it is "increasing its liquid milk prices by ₹ 2 per litre across all operating markets from June 03, 2024 onwards." The increase in consumer price is mainly to compensate the producers for increased production costs, which have been on the rise for over one year, it said.

In Delhi-NCR, Mother Dairy full cream milk will be available now at ₹ 68 per litre, while toned and double-toned milk at ₹ 56 and ₹ 50 per litre, respectively.

Buffalo and cow milk prices have been increased to ₹ 72 and ₹58 per litre respectively.

Token milk (bulk vended milk) will be sold at ₹ 54 per litre.

Mother Dairy, which currently sells 35 lakh litre per day of fresh milk in Delhi-NCR, said it had last revised its liquid milk prices in February 2023.

"Despite paying higher prices towards milk procurement in the last few months, the consumer prices were kept intact. Moreover, the heat stress across the country has been unprecedented and it is likely to further impact milk production," Mother Dairy said.

The company highlighted that it passes an average of around 75- 80 per cent of the sales realisation from milk towards its procurement. This helps in ensuring the sustenance of dairy farming and the availability of quality milk.

"The surge in farm prices is only being partially passed on to the consumers, with an effective revision of 3-4 per cent, thereby securing the interests of both the milk producers and the consumers," Mother Dairy said.

On late Sunday, the Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF), which markets dairy products under the Amul brand, increased milk prices by about ₹ 2 per litre from Monday across the country.

The increase of ₹ 2 per litre translates to 3-4 per cent increase in MRP which is much lower than average food inflation, GCMMF said in a late night statement.

GCMMF said that since February 2023, it has not made any increase in prices of fresh pouch milk in major markets.

"This price hike is being done due to an increase in the overall cost of operation and production of milk. Our member unions have also increased farmer's price approximately by 6-8 per cent over the last one year," GCMMF said.

Amul as a policy passes on almost 80 paise of every rupee paid by consumers for milk and milk products to the milk producers. "The price revision shall help in sustaining remunerative milk prices to our milk producers and to encourage them for higher milk production," the statement had said. (PTI)

NHAI's revised toll rates come to effect across highways

NEW DELHI, June 3: The revised toll charges for motorists on national highways across the country have come to effect from Monday, an official said.

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has hiked the toll charges by an average of 5 per cent.

The hike is part of NHAI's annual exercise where the state-owned body calculates new rates factoring in several parameters, the senior NHAI official told PTI. Every year, it is implemented from April 1 but this year the implementation was deferred due to general elections. The average hike this time was 5 per cent. The revised user fee has been implemented from today, the official said.

From Monday, motorists using national highways/expressways will have to shell out more money for their road journeys.

"The fuel costs were already high. The increased toll rates will make road journeys costlier for people," said Ankur Saxena, an advertising professional who frequently travels through Delhi-Lucknow route. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Modi eyes hat-trick, equaling

(OBC) to Muslims and allegedly eying people's family assets to further its "redistribution of wealth" agenda. The issues of national and cultural pride, the government's welfare schemes and the overall political stability and economic growth also figured prominently in the speeches of BJP leaders, even though they were accused by the opposition of running a divisive and communal campaign to polarise votes.

The EC has dismissed the opposition's attack on its conduct of polls, with chief election commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar daring it on Monday to share evidence of attempts to influence the polling process. The results will show if the Congress has it in its organisation and leadership to challenge the BJP amid its reducing footprint across the country since 2014. It has failed to get even the main opposition party status in two consecutive Lok Sabha polls and has been reduced to a pale shadow of itself in a number of states, especially in the Hindi heartland.

Its leaders, including president Mallikarjun Kharge and principal campaigner Rahul Gandhi, have claimed that their alliance will get 295 seats in the 543-member Lok Sabha, marking an end of the Modi era. INDIA bloc leaders believe that their alliance has been able to shape the poll narrative around its planks of welfarism and an alleged threat to the Constitution from an all-powerful saffron onslaught, and will get popular support.

Modi will equal the country's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru's record of leading his party to three straight electoral victories if the BJP retains power. An uncertain future also hangs over the fate of the Left, besides many regional parties including the Trinamool Congress (TMC), Biju Janata Dal (BJD) and YSR Congress, which are in power in West Bengal, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh respectively.

Modi has spearheaded a concerted BJP push to gain further in strength in the two eastern states, where the party surprised everyone by emerging as the powerful second force in 2019, and the exit polls have suggested that it may topple the two regional parties from the top position in these polls.

Assembly polls were held in Odisha alongside the national election and the BJP and the BJD, which has been in power in the state since 2000 under chief minister Naveen Patnaik's leadership, are locked in a fierce battle for power. Assembly polls were also held simultaneously in the YSRCP-ruled Andhra Pradesh. Another issue that has drawn the limelight is whether the BJP will be able to emerge as a strong force in Tamil Nadu and the Left-ruled Kerala, two states where it has currently no seats but is predicted to win a few this time.

A poor show by the Left will further darken its prospects nationwide as Kerala is the only state where it remains a strong force after being knocked of reckoning in its former strongholds of Bengal and Tripura. Always confident of his return to power, Modi has already penned an article about his vision for the country, posted on X about people's support to the NDA and rejection of the opposition, and held a meeting with top officials on the "new government's agenda" for the first 100 days.

The results are also expected to spell out the people's verdict on the fate of regional stalwarts like Sharad Pawar and Uddhav Thackeray, whose parties have joined hands with the BJP and who have run an intense campaign to win over people's support for their factions.

The verdict will also be out on a number of Union ministers, including Piyush Goyal, Bhupender Yadav, Sarbananda Sonowal and Dharmendra Pradhan, all Rajya Sabha members asked by the BJP to contest the polls, and former chief ministers, such as the BJP's Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Basavaraj Bommai, Trivendra Singh Rawat and the Congress's Digvijay Singh and Bhupesh Baghel.

Besides Modi, who contested the election from Varanasi for a third straight term, senior members of his cabinet, such as Amit Shah and Rajnath Singh, are in the fray, and the margins of their win will be watched out for as well. (PTI)

IMF's second review for extended fund facility set for June 12: Min

COLOMBO, June 3: The second review of the IMF's Extended Fund Facility under the USD 2.9 billion bailout to Sri Lanka has been set for June 12, the cash-strapped island nation's minister of state for finance Shehan Semsinghe said on Monday.

Semasinghe hoped that if everything goes according to the procedure, the review should lead to the release of USD 300 million from the international lender's third tranche.

"The second review of the International Monetary Fund's extended fund facility under the USD 2.9 billion bailout to the cash-strapped Sri Lanka has been set for June 12," he said.

He said that Sri Lanka expects continued support from all countries for a successful review to unlock the third tranche.

"We look forward to the continued support of all countries for a successful review to unlock the third tranche which will further enhance economic stability, growth and reform efforts," Semasinghe said.

The island nation, in April 2022, declared its first-ever sovereign default since gaining independence from Britain in 1948. The unprecedented financial crisis led President Wickremesinghe's predecessor Gotabaya Rajapaksa to quit office in 2022.

Earlier in the month, Foreign Minister Ali Sabry had said Sri Lanka is looking at a reduction of approximately USD 17 billion from its overall debt burden in the ongoing debt restructuring process.

In March, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said it has reached a staff-level agreement with Sri Lanka for the next phase that would enable it access to USD 337 million from the nearly USD 3 billion bailout approved in 2023 for the cash-strapped country.

Two tranches of USD 330 million each were released in March and December 2023 even as the Washington-based global lender has praised Colombo for its macroeconomic policy reforms, which it said, are starting to bear fruit.

The government under President Ranil Wickremesinghe has set in place hard economic reforms as dictated by the IMF programme. (PTI)

Rupee surges 28 paise to settle at 83.14 against US dollar

MUMBAI, June 3: The rupee jumped to over two-month high closing level and settled with a gain of 28 paise at 83.14 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, tracking over 3 per cent surge in domestic equity benchmarks after exit poll results predicted a firm comeback of the ruling BJP-led government for the third straight term.

Forex analysts attributed the steep rise in the local unit to a number of positive factors such as strong domestic macroeconomic data, inflow of foreign funds and a weak American currency against major Asian rivals.

Also, they said lower level of the crude oil prices after OPEC+ grouping's decision to maintain the status quo in the oil output supported the Indian currency.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.09 and moved between the peak of 82.95 and the lowest level of 83.17 against the greenback during intra-day deals.

The unit finally settled at 83.14 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a gain of 28 paise from its previous close.

On Friday, the rupee declined 13 paise to close at 83.42 against the US dollar.

Earlier, the rupee had closed at 83.13 against the dollar on March 21 this year. It had breached the 83.00 level on March 18.

Also, the local unit clocked the highest single-day rise since November 15, 2023 when it closed 24 paise higher.

Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said the Indian rupee appreciated as domestic markets rallied after exit polls predicted a firm comeback of the BJP-led government for the third consecutive term.

"This may lead to political stability and may result in fresh foreign inflows. Strong macroeconomic data also supported the rupee... However, disappointing manufacturing PMI capped sharp gains," he said.

Besides, rise in risk appetite in global markets, a weak dollar and a decline in crude oil prices may also support the rupee even as investors are expected to remain cautious ahead of the Reserve Bank of India's monetary policy later this week.

"USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of ₹ 82.70 to ₹ 83.50," Choudhary added.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.06 per cent higher at 104.68.

Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, slipped 0.22 per cent to USD 80.93 per barrel.

On the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 2,507.47 points, or 3.39 per cent, to close at lifetime high of 76,468.78 points. The broader NSE Nifty soared 733.20 points, or 3.25 per cent, to close at its fresh peak of 22,263.90 points.

According to analysts, market participants took cues from multiple exit polls released on Saturday, predicting a third term for the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government in the Lok Sabha elections. The results will be announced after counting of votes on Tuesday.

The finance ministry on Saturday said the country's Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections grew 10 per cent to ₹ 1.73 lakh crore in May driven by an increase in domestic transactions, indicating a sustained economic momentum.

Foreign investors were net buyers of Indian equities on Friday as they purchased shares worth ₹ 1,613.24 crore on a net basis.

FIIs bought shares worth ₹ 95,467.56 crore and sold equities worth ₹ 93,854.32 crore in one of the record foreign investor activities in the cash segment.

The government data released on Friday showed India's economy growing 8.2 per cent in the fiscal year that ended in March, cementing the country's position as the fastest-growing major economy in the world. (PTI)

INDIA bloc, Cong should be

urged it to ensure that all the guidelines are followed on the counting day on June 4, including declaring the postal-ballot results before the outcome of the EVMs is announced. Trivedi charged, "It is unfortunate. Elections keep happening and governments come and go. But questions should not be raised on the integrity of the democracy and democratic systems."

The BJP leader said that the Congress and other constituents of the INDIA bloc have gone "berserk" and started raising questions on the electoral process sensing their "inevitable" defeat in the Lok Sabha polls. "They used dastardly words against our leader Prime Minister Narendra Modi. We have accepted that. They have abused the BJP. They are welcome because it's democracy. They can criticise our government. We will accept it," he said.

"But you cannot criticise the basic spirit of democracy. You are not allowed to demean the dignity of the country and disrespect democracy just for the sake of political gain. It is not acceptable," he added. (PTI)

India's manufacturing sector growth eases in May; upturn in exports strongest in over 13 years: PMI survey

NEW DELHI, June 3: India's manufacturing sector saw a slower growth rate for the second straight month in May but stayed firmly in expansion mode with global sales increasing to the greatest extent in over 13 years, a monthly survey said on Monday.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) fell from 58.8 in April to 57.5 in May, signalling a slower but substantial improvement in the health of the sector. The index had climbed to a 16-year high of 59.1 in March.

In PMI parlance, a print above 50 means expansion while a score below 50 denotes contraction.

According to HSBC Global Economist Maitreyi Das, "The manufacturing sector remained in expansionary territory in May, albeit the pace... slowed, led by a softer rise in new orders and output." The slowdown was attributed to reduced working hours amid intensive heatwave and rising production costs.

"Panelists cited heatwaves as a reason for lower work hours in May, which may have affected production volumes," Das said.

The headline figure was nearly four points higher than its long-run average. May data showed a further upturn in Indian factory production, which stretched the current sequence of expansion to nearly three years.

Despite easing to a three-month low, the rate of increase remained sharp. Growth was supported by new business gains, demand strength and successful marketing efforts, the report said.

New orders rose at a substantial pace that was nonetheless the slowest in three months. The rise was associated with marketing efforts, demand strength and favourable economic conditions, as per the report. Growth was reportedly stymied by competitions and election-related disruptions, it said, adding that in contrast to the trend for total sales, new export orders rose at a faster pace in May.

The upturn in international sales was the strongest in over 13 years as manufacturers witnessed gains from customers across several countries in Africa, Asia, the Americas, Europe, and the Middle East. The ongoing strong sales performances, combined with upbeat growth forecasts, fuelled job creation in May, the report said.

Manufacturing employment rose to one of the greatest extents seen since data collection started in March 2005, the report said, adding that jobs growth, parallel to rising material and freight costs, underpinned a quicker increase in input costs at goods producers. (PTI)

NAME CHANGE

I have Changed my name from Mohammed Abdul Goffar to Abdul Goffar by swearing a notarial affidavit at Sankardevnagar, Hojai (Assam)

NAME CHANGE

I have Changed my name from Mohammed Moinul Islam to Moinul Islam by swearing a notarial affidavit at Sankardevnagar, Hojai (Assam)

INDIA bloc leaders to meet

reports that opposition parties will hold protests if the poll results go against them. Opposition leaders have claimed that the INDIA bloc is coming to power at the Centre with more than 295 of the 543 Lok Sabha seats. On the other hand, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has asserted that it will form the government for the third time in a row. All exit polls have also given a clear majority to the BJP. The counting of the votes polled in the Lok Sabha election is scheduled to be taken up on Tuesday. (PTI)

Several rivers in Assam flowing

0.59 metres above the danger level. However, a falling trend provided some relief, though the situation remains critical. In Dharamtul, the Kopili River has reached 56.43 metres and is maintaining a steady trend. In Kampur, the river's level is 61.13 metres with a steady trend. The Kushiyara River at Karimganj shows a level of 15.48 metres and is falling.

Other rivers in Assam are also being monitored closely. The Brahmaputra at Dibrugarh and Neamatighat in Jorhat, and the Barak at Annapurna Ghat and Badarpur Ghat, are witnessing above-normal flood situations but are currently not exceeding danger levels.

An Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) bulletin on Sunday night said 5,35,246 people in 13 districts continued to remain affected by the flood. The number of affected people was 6,01,642 in 10 districts on Saturday.

Two deaths were reported in Cachar and one in Nagaon, taking the toll in flood and storm since May 28 to 18. (PTI)

Assam govt working to

and a new state university will come up in Gohpur town. The Assam chief minister further shared that the state government has also taken initiative to start National Forensic Sciences university in Assam and a yoga and naturopathy centre is being built by spending ₹ 100 crore.

AAP leader Sanjay Singh demands

exit polls were out and I can give you in writing that they are fake. In Rajasthan, there are 25 parliamentary seats but one exit poll gave them 33 seats. What was the reason that they had to release fake exit poll results?" Kejriwal asked. (PTI)

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Joyanta Basumatary anticipates sweep in Kokrajhar, expects margin of 2-2.5 lakhs votes

NDA backed UPPL candidate confident of victory

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, June 3: The countdown within the different political parties' candidates, including independent candidates and the NDA-backed UPPL candidate, Joyanta Basumatary, is evident as there are only 12 hours left until the counting of votes scheduled for June 4.

The UPPL candidate, supported by the NDA, Joyanta Basumatary, stated on Monday that the UPPL candidate in Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency and the BJP candidate in the Darrang-Udalguri constituency are poised to emerge victorious on June 4 as the NDA is expected to secure both seats in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) districts.

Interacting with reporters in Kokrajhar on Monday, NDA candidate for Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency, Basumatary, expressed confidence in his victory, stating that he anticipates winning by a margin of 2-2.5 lakhs votes. He emphasised the faith and confidence of the region's people in the UPPL party and pledged to focus on the implementation of remaining clauses of the BTR peace accord and common regional issues.

Basumatary asserted that his candidacy has garnered significant support from the people, making his victory certain.

Meanwhile, UPPL general secretary and MCLA (BTC), Madhab Chandra Chetry, expressed unwavering confidence in the victory of NDA-backed candidates. He affirmed that Joyanta Basumatary of UPPL, supported by the NDA in Kokrajhar, and Dilip Saikia of BJP from Darrang-Udalguri constituency, will undoubtedly emerge victorious. Chetry predicted the fading relevance of the BPF party in the Bodoland region, citing the faith of the region's people solely in UPPL.

He wished for a peaceful and smooth completion of the vote counting process scheduled for Tuesday across the state, including the Bodoland region.

On the other hand, BPF candidate, Kampa Borgoyary, claimed victory in the Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency, citing immense support received from citizens.

Dibrugarh grapples with waterlogging

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, June 3: The Dibrugarh Town Protection Drain (DTP) has been overflowing in some areas due to incessant rain for the last two days. Most of the streets in Dibrugarh were waterlogged, and the drains were clogged due to dumping of garbage and plastics.

The busy Mancotta road was badly affected due to the flash flood, and as a result, the traffic of Dibrugarh town has been affected. Not only Mancotta road, but all the major roads of Dibrugarh were waterlogged, and the water remained stagnant due to the overflowing of the drains. The Coal road, VKV road, Chring Chapori, PN road areas were badly affected due to the flash flood. All the 22 wards of Dibrugarh Municipal Corporation (DMC) were affected due to waterlogging, and many places remained underwater.

During the monsoon, every year the people of Dibrugarh have to face the brunt of waterlogging due to the poor drainage system of Dibrugarh town. Dibrugarh town is one of the oldest towns in Assam, but till today, the engineers could not construct a proper drainage system to flush the water from the town.

The DTP drain is an important drainage system which flushes the rainwater from the town spanning 9.5 km, has turned into a garbage dumping yard for citizens and business establishments, leading to clogged and encroachment issues.

It might be mentioned here, the drains were clogged due to dumping of plastics in many parts, and due to that, the water could not flow easily and it remained stagnant which causes pollution.

The DTO drain which originates from Seujpur (zero point), passes through densely populated areas in the heart of Dibrugarh town before reaching the Sessa river, covering a total distance of 9.5 km. A significant portion of the drain, about 5.65 km, falls within Dibrugarh town, while the remaining 3.85 km is located on the outskirts.

According to the Water Resources Department, a staggering 1612.5 square feet of the drain has been encroached upon by various entities, including business establishments, individual households, and religious and educational institutions.

"We need a scientific drainage system in Dibrugarh which could flush out the rainwater from Dibrugarh town. Every year, we have to face the waterlogging problem but the department concerned has no plan to build proper drainage," said a resident.

Assam Kaziranga University is accredited with B++ by NAAC

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 3: The Assam Kaziranga University has achieved a notable B++ rating in the recent assessment conducted by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC). This accomplishment highlights the university's commitment to excellence, reflected in its first cycle of NAAC Assessment.

The NAAC team conducted an extensive evaluation during their visit from May 9 to 11, 2024 assessing various aspects of the university including its research activities, academics, infrastructure, quality of faculty and students, amenities, and co-curricular pursuits.

In their final report, the NAAC peer team appreciates the University for attracting dedicated, young and energetic employees from different parts of the country, its collaborations with reputed national and international institutions, extracurricular activities and cultural diversity, and good hostel and mess facility to name a few.

As one of the largest private universities in North East India, the Assam Kaziranga University currently comprises eight schools, dedicated to providing quality education and fostering regional development. In light of this achievement, the university management, led by pro-chancellors Basant Khetan and Rainy Khetan, and vice chancellor Dr PK Mishra, extend sincere gratitude to all stakeholders for their contributions towards this milestone. This recognition propels the institution towards greater prominence nationally, inspiring a continued pursuit of excellence in the future.

Pijush predicts BJP victory with 12 seats

HT Correspondent

GUWAHATI, June 3: Minister Pijush Hazarika welcomed the exit poll predictions on Sunday; however, he asserted that the BJP, with its allies, will cross the 400-mark in the Lok Sabha polls. Meanwhile, the Opposition leader Akhil Gogoi turned down the claims of exit polls and said that the INDIA bloc will perform much better than the predictions of psephologists.

Hazarika told reporters, "Several exit polls have predicted a decisive win for the BJP. But I believe that the NDA will definitely cross the 400-mark on June 4. It is because PM Narendra Modi has done excellent work for the people of this country in the last one decade, and voters have blessed the BJP in the recently concluded Lok Sabha polls."

According to the state minister, Assam will bring very good results for the BJP. "We will win at least 12 seats in the state. The tally may go up to 13 as well," he added.

Meanwhile, Raijor Dal chief and Sivasagar MLA Akhil Gogoi said that the exit polls were fake and the Opposition bloc in Assam is set to win a minimum of six seats.

He said, "I have campaigned vigorously across the parliamentary constituencies in the state. It is impossible that Congress and other parties in the INDIA bloc will get one or two seats. The Opposition parties will win six seats in Assam, and the BJP will also win six parliamentary constituencies. Two seats are going to other parties."

Gogoi asserted that there was widespread anger against the BJP-led government in Assam due to price rise, unemployment, and other issues. It was reflected in the EVMs during the poll days.

He has also alleged that if Narendra Modi comes to power for another term, he will change the constitution of the country.

Career counseling session conducted in Nagaon

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, June 3: Royal Global University, Guwahati, in support of Ramanujan Senior Secondary School, Nagaon, organised a career counseling session at the auditorium of Nagaon Cultural Complex on Monday. Noted journalist, Assamese storyteller, and Sahitya Akademi awardee - Manoj Kumar Goswami, academician Dr Pradeep Mahanta, and Dr Partha Sarathi Mahanta, an acclaimed author, director, and senior cop of Assam Police, attended the program as special guests.

During the session, all of them provided crucial guidance to young students on shaping their career aspirations and identifying promising career paths for a secure and sustainable future. Dr A K Pansari, chancellor of Royal Global University, commenting on the initiative, emphasised the university's commitment towards making quality higher education accessible to all. "Through our various scholarship programs, we hope to alleviate financial burdens and allow students to focus on their academic pursuits," Dr Pansari added.

The session highlighted Royal Global University's 'Padho Kuch Bano', a specific campaign for higher education aimed at ensuring seamless access to quality global education through scholarships worth Rs 100 crores across north-east India. Interacting with participating students, noted journalist Manoj Kumar Goswami elaborated on the various opportunities available under the Royal Merit Scholarship (2024-2025) scheme. "Education is the cornerstone of progress. With these scholarships, we hope to empower students to pursue their dreams without financial constraints," Goswami said while addressing the occasion here.

Speaking on the occasion, senior cop of the state police mechanism, Dr Partha Sarathi Mahanta, said as a society, we are dedicated to creating an environment where students can thrive academically and personally. "This initiative 'Padho Kuch Bano' is aimed at providing holistic education and fostering innovation," Dr. Mahanta added.

It's pertinent to mention that Royal Global University has initiated a specific scholarship scheme under which students scoring above 96 percent in their CBSE Class 12 board examination or above 91 percent in their HS final examination from AHSEC or other boards are eligible for a 100 percent scholarship, applicable to 500 seats across various courses. Those scoring between 92 percent and 96 percent in CBSE or 87 percent and 91 percent in AHSEC or other boards can avail a 50 percent scholarship, with 1,000 seats available. Additionally, students scoring between 86 percent and 92 percent in CBSE or 81 percent and 87 percent in AHSEC or other boards are eligible for a 25 percent scholarship, covering 4,000 seats. Similarly, for postgraduate applicants, Royal Global University offers a 100 percent scholarship to those scoring above 88 percent, applicable to 250 seats. Students scoring between 84 percent and 88 percent can avail a 50 percent scholarship with 500 seats available.

AASU protest against soaring prices

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, June 3: As part of the AASU's statewide stir to protest against soaring prices of fuel, life-saving medicines, and other essential commodities, the Jorhat district unit of the students' body protested in front of the Jorhat District Commissioner's Office complex on Monday.

The protesters, holding banners, placards, and AASU flags, shouted slogans against the Food and Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Department and its minister for skyrocketing prices of all essential commodities like groceries, vegetables, medicines, LPG cylinders, life-saving medicines, petrol, and diesel fuels, etc.

Asking the Food and Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs department to "wake up from deep slumber", the protesters sought that the government take immediate steps to check the steep hike in the prices of essentials and bring it down.

Our Biswanath Chariali correspondent adds: As per the call given by the central committee of All Assam Students' Union, the Biswanath district AASU staged a demonstration on Monday at Biswanath Chariali against the failure of the state supply minister Ranjit Kumar Dass and the state government as well. The demonstrators shouted slogans and staged agitation in front of the Swahid Bhawan here. The protesters shouted slogans against the chief minister and the state supply minister to reduce the price of necessary commodities.

Barpeta Road-Pathsala double line section operational

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 3: The chief commissioner of Railway Safety (CCRS), Janak Kumar Garg, has completed the statutory inspection of the newly laid double line section between Barpeta Road and Pathsala stations on Sunday and Monday. The primary objective of this inspection was to ensure the safety, security, and operational efficiency of the newly created railway infrastructure in this section. This newly laid second line will be helpful for carrying more freights and passenger traffic through the New Bongaigaon – Agthori via Rangiya route, and the crossing time of trains will get reduced significantly.

Work on the Barpeta Road and Pathsala section has been done as part of the New Bongaigaon – Agthori via Rangiya 142.97 km long doubling project. The project includes 75 major bridges, 38 minor bridges, and construction of 19 new station buildings. The stretch between Barpeta Road to Pathsala is 21.40 km long. The section includes the construction of 1 minor and 16 major bridges. There are 5 level crossings consisting of 2 special class manned (traffic), 1 special class, and 2 'A' class manned (Engg.) level crossings in the section. The second line was commissioned along with electrification. The chief commissioner of Railway Safety (CCRS) inspected the railway bridges, track fittings, P-way assets, electronic interlocking, relay rooms, cabin, and level crossings in the section. Adding to existing passenger amenities, 3-meter-wide new foot over bridges have been commissioned at Sarupeta, Guagacha, and Barpeta Road stations with 2 bays & 10 bays new passenger platform sheds at Sarupeta and Barpeta Road respectively. One ladies/gents toilet each at Guagacha and Barpeta Road stations & 3 ladies/4 gents' toilets at Sarupeta railway station were also facilitated. Additionally, 2 new station buildings were also constructed at Sarupeta & Barpeta Road stations along with proper water supply for passengers at both the stations. Heights of the platforms were increased for ease of boarding and de-boarding of passengers from trains. Out of the total 142.97 km of the New Bongaigaon – Agthori via Rangiya doubling project, 91.21 km has already been commissioned. Earlier, a 17.53 km section between New Bongaigaon to Bijni, a 26.91 km section between Pathsala to Nalbari, an 18.99 km section between Bijni to Sorbhog, a 7.48 km section between Changsari to Agthori, and a 10.15 km section between Baihata to Changsari were commissioned on August 30, 2022, May 24, June 13, December 26, 2023, and March 20, 2024 respectively.

Biswanath district admin prepared for vote counting

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, June 3: Biswanath election district is all set for the counting of votes that were held on April 19 for Sonitpur HPC in the first phase. Two LACs, namely Biswanath and Behali (SC), come under the jurisdiction of the Biswanath election district. The election for Gohpur was conducted by the Gohpur sub-division under the Biswanath district administration, while the election of Bihpurita LAC was conducted by the Lakhimpur district administration. The district administration has issued notifications and SOPs regarding the counting process, and counting compartments have been set up for smooth counting of votes. The district magistrate cum commissioner has issued Section 144 on Monday for June 4 to control the post-counting law and order situation if any aftermath arises.

Nagaon launches Malaria Prevention Month

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, June 3: With a mission to prevent carrier-borne diseases across the district, the District Malaria Department, Nagaon, ceremonially launched 'Malaria Prevention Month', a month-long awareness campaign at a function held in Nagaon BP Civil Hospital here.

Dr Phani Pathak, joint director of District Health Services, Nagaon, inaugurated the month-long drive in the presence of several physicians, nurses, as well as other dignitaries, and spoke about how malaria, dengue, and other diseases are carried and spread by mosquitoes during the summer and monsoon seasons. Dr Pathak and other senior physicians who attended the program urged parents to keep their localities clean and to take precautionary measures against the spread of diseases. Besides, the physicians appealed to parents to keep their children away from stagnant water logging around their respective houses and urged everyone to contact the concerned ASHA workers, area nursing assistants, and health workers if any such waterborne or mosquito-borne diseases were spotted or suspected. Former joint director of District Health Services, Nagaon, Dr Dilip Kumar Sharma, additional chief medical and health officer Dr Kabita Baruah, Dr Binapani Neog, superintendent of Nagaon BP Civil Hospital, Dr Bhupen Bora, district malaria officer Santana Sharma, senior physician Dr Krishna Bora, other officials and employees from the District Malaria Department, ASHA workers, nurses, and other conscious citizens of the town participated in the program.

Sapling plantation programme

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, June 3: In a bid to foster environmental consciousness and community engagement, Demow College is gearing up to host a significant event on June 5, 2024. Organised under the auspices of the Demow College Alumni Students Organising Committee, a sapling plantation program is set to take place on the college grounds, coinciding with the global observance of World Environment Day.

ABSU launches Bodo language learning center

Initiative aims to preserve and promote Bodo language among non-Bodo speaking Bodo communities

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, June 3: "Every two weeks, a language disappears from the world. It is true that languages, sub-languages, and dialects are fast disappearing or getting subsumed into other more dominant languages," said journalist Shambhu Boro in the meeting held to inaugurate the Bodo language learning center at Bandarmari ABSU Bhawan near here on Sunday.

In his speech, journalist Boro further added, "In such a situation, it is incumbent upon native speakers to take precautionary measures to preserve and promote their language, such as establishing language learning centers. In this context, it is heartening to learn that, as part of a pilot project, a Bodo language learning center is coming up in the area, the first of its kind in our area, under the sponsorship and guidance of ABSU. This is a most welcome step since learning a language is a continuous process, hence continuous effort is a must to master it over time."

In a significant stride towards advancing the Bodo language among the non-Bodo speaking Bodo people in some particular belts outside the BTR area, the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) has taken a special initiative to teach the language to those non-Bodo speaking Bodo people through a special drive by opening altogether 15 such centers in 10 districts across the state. The target districts with the learning centers are Choraideo, Hojai, Dibrugarh, Sonitpur, Golaghat, South Kamrup, Nagaon, Lakhimpur, Guwahati, and Biswanath. As part of the noble effort of the organisation in Sonitpur district, two such Bodo language learning centers have been inaugurated respectively in Ghoramari and Bandarmari ABSU Bhawan.

However, the Bodo language learning center in Bandarmari ABSU Bhawan was formally inaugurated on Sunday by the education secretary of All Bodo Students Union Sumawsar Basumatary and adviser, Khwngkhra Swargiary in a ceremonial function organised by SDC, ABSU in association with the West Tezpur Anchalick ABSU. The event was presided over by Sonitpur district ABSU's president, Jeet Swargiary and conducted by its secretary Enosh Mochahary and graced by a host of dignitaries including retired headmaster of Khelmati ME School, Nareswar Boro, president and secretary of Bahbari Unit Boro Sahitya Sabha respectively Dhaniram Daimary and Prafulla Boro, journalist Shambhu Boro, social worker Prasanna Rabha, vice president of Sonitpur ABSU Rupam Boro, three appointed teachers for two centers namely Doly Boro, Priyanka Basumatary, Dibya Rani Basumatary, and Chandramukhi Basumatary, former deputy speaker of Sonitpur District ABSU Sunil Kumar Boro, secretary of Sonitpur district ABSU, Rupjyoti Boro, president of West Tezpur Unit ABSU Anthaw Bathaw Boro among others. Speaking on the occasion as the chief guest, ABSU's education secretary Sumawsar Basumatary urged the people of the greater area to come forward to learn the language to sustain their identity. Expressing his concern over the dying of many languages and dialects every day in the world, he said that ABSU is seriously concerned about the issue and taking several measures to keep the Bodo nation vibrant in this regard besides the effort to keep the Bodo medium alive. Earlier, ABSU adviser Khwngkhra Swargiary opened the center and appealed to the people of the area to be serious in learning their own language keeping the sense of belonging in their minds.

Margherita police crack gruesome murder case of Ledo

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, June 3: In a swift operation led by Margherita Police Station's incharge, Pratap Gogoi, three suspects have been apprehended in connection with the grisly murder of an ITI student from Ledo.

Within just two days of intensive investigation, the veil of mystery surrounding the horrific murder of the Ledo ITI student has been lifted under the diligent scrutiny of officer-in-charge Pratap Gogoi.

The victim, Aditya Bhumij, a resident of the old line of Namdang Tea Estate in Margherita under Tinsukia district, was discovered with fatal injuries near Namdang Tea Estate late Saturday night.

Initially overlooked by passersby, the bloodied body was eventually identified and reported to Margherita Police, leading to the prompt arrests of two of Aditya Bhumij's acquaintances, Ujjal Sonowal and Pranjal Jyoti Sharma, on suspicion.

Further investigation unearthed the chilling sequence of events: Aditya Bhumij had been socialising with his friends in the garden, indulging in alcohol, when a dispute arose with two individuals who attempted to offer them more drinks. Subsequently, Ujjal Sonowal and Pranjal Jyoti Sharma left the scene.

Tragically, as Aditya Bhumij made his way home, he was ambushed by Albert Chetry, Dev Paik, and Gaurav Kumar, who brutally assaulted him with stones and a sharp machete, leaving him lifeless on the roadside.

Following meticulous detective work by officer-in-charge Pratap Gogoi and his team, all three assailants were apprehended from their residences.

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THE HILLS TIMES
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QUOTE OF THE DAY

I never knew whether to pity or congratulate a man on coming to his senses. -William Thackeray

No surprises in Arunachal poll outcome

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has solidified its grip on Arunachal Pradesh with a resounding victory in the 2024 Vidhan Sabha elections, capturing 46 out of 60 seats. This is an increase of five seats from its 2019 performance and reflects a significant rise in its vote share to 54.57 percent, up by 3.71%. In stark contrast, the Indian National Congress (INC) suffered a significant defeat, winning only one seat and seeing its vote share plummet by 11.29 percent to a meager 5.56percent. This loss underscores the strategic missteps that have allowed the BJP to dominate the political landscape of the Northeast over the past decade. The decline of the INC in Arunachal Pradesh is a stark indicator of its broader struggles in the region. Once the dominant political force, the party's inability to maintain its foothold has been exacerbated by internal strife and ineffective leadership. In 2016, the BJP orchestrated a mass defection that toppled the Congress government, setting the stage for its current dominance. The INC's failure to field candidates in more than 20 seats in this election highlights its weakened state.

In contrast, the National People's Party (NPP) has emerged as a significant player, securing five seats and 16.11 percent of the vote share, an increase of 1.55 percent from the last election. The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) also made gains, winning three seats and 10.43 percent of the vote, while the People's Party of Arunachal (PPA) won two seats with 7.24 percent of the vote, a notable increase of 5.51 percent. Despite these gains, the INC's performance remains dismal, relegating it to fifth place in the state's political hierarchy. The historical context of Arunachal Pradesh's political landscape is crucial to understanding these shifts. The state's political journey began with the PPA's brief rule in 1979, followed by INC's long tenure starting in 1980 with Chief Minister Gegong Apang. Apang's eventual defection to form the Arunachal Congress, and subsequent alliances, highlight the volatile nature of the state's politics. The INC's reign continued with leaders like Dorjee Khandu, Jarbom Gamlin, and Nabam Tuki, until political instability and defections in 2016 led to the BJP's rise. The BJP's strategic maneuvering became evident when Pema Khandu, initially an INC leader, switched to the PPA and then to the BJP, securing his position as Chief Minister. This pattern of defection underscores the INC's failure to maintain party unity and discipline.

The 2024 election results are a testament to the BJP's political strategy. In 10 constituencies—Mukto, Bomdila, Itanagar, Sagalee, Ziro-Hapoli, Tali, Taliha, Roing, Hayunliang, and Chowkham—BJP candidates were elected unopposed. This situation raises serious concerns about the health of democracy in the state and reflects the growing influence of the "One nation, one leader" concept championed by the BJP. The BJP's political manipulation in Arunachal Pradesh is now clear, as is the INC's inability to counteract it. The need for a robust opposition in the Northeast is critical, given the region's strategic importance and ongoing social unrest. Moreover, the BJP must tread carefully and avoid playing the communal card in a region fraught with ethnic and social tensions. The INC's revitalization in the region is crucial, not just for its survival but for the health of democracy in Arunachal Pradesh and beyond.

The big transformation of campaigning in Indian general elections

By: Harihar Swarup

This correspondent has covered Lok Sabha elections right from 1962. Polls in 1962 were not delinked. The big news then was Dr K N Katju, who was chief minister of newly formed state - Madhya Pradesh - was defeated by an unknown Vadiya from Jaora constituency. Though Dr. Katju was a Kashmiri he always claimed he originally came from Jaora, a town in Madhya Pradesh.

The Lok Sabha elections moved in "swings" and "waves". From Indira Gandhi wave to Janata wave and back to "Indira Lao" and Rajiv Gandhi's "400 par" .election coverage in those days was not so complex. You talked to a few party leaders and informed persons in the constituency and you could rightly capture the mood. "Janata has upper hand in" …. Or "Odds even in"…those were the cliché headline. We did not bother about noisy news channels, social media, fake news and deep fakes. There were no paid "influencers". The campaign participants of the political parties acted as big source of information.

The 18th Lok Sabha election is a game changer. Over 50 per cent of Maharashtra candidates and one-fourth in Punjab are turn coats. A national newspaper found that two dozens of the sixth list of BJP candidates were "lateral candidates". Clearly, the current elections have obliterated the defection stigma.

Sample the new style, political diatribe from recently headlines--- blunt, below the-the-belt and rude: "Under them, even listening to Hanuman Chilisa will be a crime", said PM Modi..PM Modi is "like a poisonous snake"said Kharge.

Election time is a great leveler: "Yaddyachari Shrestha…", Bhagwad Geeta says that people follow what great men do. Narendra Modi was the one who made road shows a major campaign tool. They are less expensive and don't need much preparation. Now all others, including Rahul and Priyanka have made shows an essential part of campaign programme.. Way back in 2015, the BJP introduced an elaborate booth management system. Now most parties follow it.

"Guarantee" is an entirely novel instrument crafted by Modi. It transcends government programmes and manifestos. Sensing its success, Congress and others have borrowed it and launched their own "guarantee cards", which Election Commission has frowned upon. Kejriwal too has come with his own 10 guarantees.

Four decades ago, Indira Gandhi's famed rudraksh and her hushed visits to Anandamayi Ma were the topics of capital's drawings room gossip. Now religiosity is the hallmark of political discourse. Forget the PM as acting the chief priest at the Ram temple inauguration or Kejriwal launching his poll campaign after a ceremonial darshan at Hanuman mandir, even Rahul and Priyanka had to visit temples under the grab of publicity. These are signs of a great political compromise or sheer competitive politics. This was unthinkable the first four general elections.

Look at the PM's crusade against dynasty politics even though every regional party has "Shehazads" and "Shahenshas", and so does the Union Government (think ministers Piyush Goyal and Anurag Thakur). In all BJP allies, past and present, there are "Shahenshahs" and "Shehazdas".

While in jail Kejriwal nominated his wife as party coordinator over established leaders. Over the years, this has become the accepted norm. When the PM derided Rahul Gandhi or Abhishek Banerjee, his allies in the states squirm. Hence, the shehzada jibe is fast losing its barb. ***(IPA Service)***

A new chapter unfolds in Indian politics

DEGREE OF THOUGHT
Dipak Kurmi

As the 2024 Lok Sabha election results approach on June 4, the focus isn't solely on who wins or loses. The real story lies in the potential for unexpected alliances, significant shifts in power dynamics, and the rise of new political forces. These elements promise to reshape the political landscape in ways that are still unfolding.

The potential for a BJP victory in the upcoming election stands as a pivotal moment poised to redefine the political landscape.

However, the results remain uncertain, presenting two distinct possibilities, each carrying its own set of consequences. In one scenario, the BJP could achieve a sweeping triumph, possibly securing over 400 seats. Alternatively, a more restrained outcome may see the BJP winning a lesser number of seats.

A sweeping victory for the BJP could lead to significant repercussions. Even in a less favorable outcome, where the BJP wins fewer seats, the party might still garner support from other parties. If the BJP becomes the largest party, though with fewer seats than in the 2019 elections, it has a contingency plan to form the government with the assistance of some neutral parties.

The Congress party's strategic choices, including reducing the number of constituencies it contests, underscore the intricacies of Indian politics. Every action is a deliberate move toward a broader objective. Following the conclusion of the sixth phase of the Lok Sabha polls on Saturday, the Congress asserted that the BJP's fate is "all but sealed." According to them, the INDIA bloc has already surpassed the halfway threshold of 272 seats and is projected to secure a total of over 350 seats.

The INDIA Alliance, a major force in Indian politics, was established last year by 26 opposition parties to present a united front against Modi. However, if the BJP wins again, the alliance could encounter substantial difficulties. Parties like the Trinamool Congress and the AAP have opted out of forming coalitions for the Lok Sabha elections, which has weakened the Congress's standing. A BJP victory might prompt a reassessment of the INDIA Alliance's strategy, with some members potentially aligning with the BJP while others pursue new alliances or independent courses.

Should the BJP secure more seats, smaller parties might eagerly seek to join the alliance, driven by the desire to align with the victors. This rush to join could significantly influence the post-election landscape. However, the motivations behind this surge aren't solely political. While some parties aim to oppose Modi, others view alliances as a failed strategy and might reconsider their positions.

Parties such as the Trinamool Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Punjab have opted not to enter into partnerships. Alongside the Congress and the Left Parties, they stand ready to challenge the NDA.

This could lead to the disintegration of the newly formed INDIA coalition, as it includes many opportunistic allies who might align with any party based on their own interests. The BJP's ability to secure additional seats or attract support from other parties would not be unexpected. Such developments could reshape the political landscape, potentially causing a realignment of forces within the INDIA Alliance.

The BJP has seen the departure of key allies like SAD, Shiv Sena, and JD(U). However, JD(U) and TDP have since returned to the fold. In Tamil Nadu, the AIADMK, once an NDA ally, might rejoin the coalition depending on its poll performance.

Even the ruling DMK is weighing its post-election options, recognizing the importance of a strong working relationship with the NDA and PM Modi. These potential alliances and shifts in power dynamics could greatly influence the political landscape following the elections.

The BJP might seek backing from parties led by prominent figures like Naveen Patnaik, Jagan Mohan Reddy, K Chandrashekhar Rao, Mayawati, and others. Although not formally aligned with any coalition, these leaders wield considerable political clout and have previously supported the BJP in times of need. Their involvement in the post-election scenario could play a crucial role in shaping the political landscape.

The faction of Shiv Sena led by Uddhav Thackeray and the NCP under the leadership of Sharad Pawar were once aligned with the BJP. It wouldn't come as a shock if they extended support to the NDA.

Delhi Chief Minister Kejriwal, known for his ambition and aspirations for the prime ministership, intends to stay in the opposition. He has speculated that should Modi secure victory on June 4, individuals such as Uddhav Thackeray, Sharad Pawar, Rahul Gandhi, and Mallikarjun Kharge could potentially face imprisonment, with himself included. It's crucial to understand that these are speculative scenarios and not definitive outcomes. Multiple factors, including the election results, could shape the situation.

The outcome of the June 4 elections will serve as a barometer for the future of Indian politics, potentially either fracturing or fortifying the Indian alliance. Additionally, it will signal whether the BJP, having secured a hat trick of victories, will adopt a more haughty demeanor. A third consecutive win for the BJP could empower the party, ushering in a more assertive political environment. ***(The writer can be reached at dipakkurmiglpltd@gmail.com)***

Aid with strings? Manipur says no to EU's ADRA relief package

By: Shashanka Das

On May 30th, the Government of Manipur made headlines by firmly rejecting a €250,000 aid package (over 22.6 million Indian rupees) from the European Union, which was intended for families affected by recent hailstorms and heavy rain. The EU had announced that this aid would be channeled through the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), a humanitarian wing of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The EU claimed that the assistance would benefit "1500 most vulnerable families" in Manipur. However, the Manipur government categorically denied the need for this external aid.

In an official statement, Manipur's Chief Secretary refuted the EU's claim, stating, "This is false and untrue... all financial requirements in connection with the recent storm are being met from the available National Disaster Response Fund and the State Disaster Response Fund." He further emphasized that the state government, with the assistance of local Deputy Commissioners, security personnel, and public volunteers, has been efficiently managing the relief efforts. A sum of Rs. 30 crore has already been sanctioned to the concerned districts, negating the necessity for additional support from NGOs like ADRA.

What is ADRA?

ADRA, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency, is the global humanitarian arm of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

With operations in over 100 countries, including India, ADRA engages in various humanitarian projects, focusing on relief, healthcare, and education. While ADRA portrays itself as a neutral aid organization, its close ties with the Seventh-day Adventist Church raise questions about its underlying motives, particularly regarding proselytization.

On its website, ADRA India claims to have been delivering humanitarian and development assistance to the most vulnerable since 1992, irrespective of "ethnicity, political affiliation, gender, or religious association."

Despite these assertions, there are compelling indications that ADRA's activities are intertwined with evangelistic objectives, exploiting humanitarian efforts to propagate Christianity, particularly among vulnerable populations.

Conversion activities via humanitarian work

Ezras Lakra, the president of the Northern Indian Union of Seventh-day Adventists since 2010, has openly acknowledged the use of public service and health programs to attract interest in their religious activities. He noted that in India, "Bible study cards are offered, and the availability of prayer at the centers attracts even non-Christians."

A 2022 article in the Adventist Review highlighted how Maranatha Volunteers International, affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church, constructed churches alongside schools and water wells in India. By September 2022, 25 out of 30 planned churches were completed, with some located in Manipur. These structures, ostensibly built for humanitarian purposes, double as evangelism centers, facilitating religious conversions under the guise of development work.

In Nepal, a neighboring country with strict anti-conversion laws, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has similarly strengthened its presence through humanitarian initiatives. Following the 2015 earthquake, the Church inaugurated six new churches and converted several individuals during these ceremonies. Such activities suggest that humanitarian aid by ADRA and its affiliates is not purely altruistic but is also a strategic tool for religious expansion.

ADRA's shield for Evangelism

A revealing article by Jay Edison, a retired ADRA International director, discusses how ADRA's humanitarian efforts often bypass the scrutiny associated with overt evangelism. Edison explained that providing essential services like safe drinking water inherently embodies the church's philosophy of healthful living, subtly spreading Christian teachings. This method of indirect evangelism has proven effective in countries where direct proselytizing is forbidden, such as Russia and Kyrgyzstan.

Controversies surrounding the Seventh-day Adventist Church

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has not been free from controversy in India. In April 2024, Reverend May Wald, a pastor from the church, was arrested under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act following accusations of sexual harassment by a 17-year-old Nepali girl. This incident highlights the darker aspects of the Church's operations in the region.

In another instance, members of the Southeast India Union of Seventh-day Adventists in Chennai accused the church administration of fund misappropriation, sexual abuse, and other misconducts. Protests erupted as community members demanded accountability from the Church, which owns valuable properties and schools worth crores of rupees. Allegations of fraudulent fundraising practices and harassment have marred the Church's reputation, raising questions about its ethical standards.

Government scrutiny

In 2020, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) suspended the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) licenses of four Christian associations, including those affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This suspension reflected growing concerns about the impact of foreign evangelical donors on India's social fabric.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, based in the United States, came under particular scrutiny for its role in receiving and utilizing foreign funds, which are often used for proselytizing under the pretext of humanitarian work.

The Manipur government's rejection of EU aid via ADRA underscores the complexity and controversy surrounding the operations of faith-based humanitarian organizations in India.

While ADRA presents itself as a benevolent entity focused on relief and development, its close ties with the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the history of conversion activities suggest otherwise. The ethical implications of using humanitarian aid as a vehicle for religious expansion cannot be ignored.

As India continues to grapple with these issues, a critical examination of organizations like ADRA becomes imperative to ensure that humanitarian aid remains impartial and genuinely serves the needs of the most vulnerable. ***(The author can be reached at shashankadas0007@gmail.com)***

Will the edge of 370 take it beyond 400?

By: Priyanka Saurabh

After the conclusion of the Lok Sabha election campaign, BJP has started assessing its performance. Based on the feedback received from across the country, the BJP is hopeful that the Modi government is going to be formed once again. According to BJP sources, the party expects better performance in some states than in 2019. The counting of votes for the Lok Sabha elections will take place on June 4. Election exit polls have started coming. People have different opinions about exit polls at different places. This time the figure of 400 plus will not be achieved. Yes, the BJP will certainly form the government again. People believe that BJP will get around 370 seats.

Three days from now, we will finally know how close the BJP or NDA can reach its declared "400 plus" seat target. In India's electoral history, a party has only once surpassed that number, when the Congress won 414 seats (out of 541 seats that went to polls) in the Lok Sabha elections that were held after Indira Gandhi's assassination.

However, it will be a few days from now that we will know how close the NDA comes to its declared target of "crossing 400". In India's electoral history, a party has only once surpassed that number, when the Congress won 414 seats in the Lok Sabha elections that were held after Indira Gandhi's assassination.

The Congress won 414 out of 541 seats that went to polls. Rajiv Gandhi became Prime Minister. Rajiv Gandhi, who was hastily selected as interim Prime Minister after his mother's assassination, formed the government in 1984.

However, that massive majority did not mean that his government was free from trouble. It was beset by problems ranging from the Shah Bano verdict to the opening of the locks of the Babri Masjid temple to the Bofors scandal.

BJP started the election campaign with 'Modi Ki Guaranty'. 'Modi Ki Guaranty' was also mentioned prominently in the party's manifesto. Many BJP leaders kept talking about NDA crossing 400. Issues related to social security and poor welfare were mentioned in detail in the rallies. BJP's confidence reached its peak with the inauguration of Ram temple in January. BJP made the opposition's boycott of the Praan Pratishtha program in Ram temple an issue.

Later, leaders from many other parties left their parties and joined the BJP by making this an issue. This helped BJP to bring the Ram temple issue to the center stage across the country. For many months, the leaders of the India group have been running a campaign that the South gets a very small amount compared to its contribution to the national treasury. States like Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala have also alleged discrimination in the allocation of funds.

If the BJP gets enough votes and seats in the South, it will deflate this argument and send a message that people are not accepting such arguments. Previous elections have shown that votes in the South are different from the Hindi belt. 2024 is in many ways a test of that theory and if these numbers are correct, then this election will indeed prove to be a seismic crossover.

If the exit poll numbers turn out to be accurate on June 4, it will mean that South India is no longer a no-go area for the BJP, which has long been derided as a Hindi-Hindu-Hindutva party. So far, the BJP has managed to rule only in Karnataka, which is considered as the gateway to the South. The numbers suggest that the party could take two additional routes in the 2024 Lok Sabha election results. One is to go through Telangana and the other is to ride a pillion on the Telugu Desam bicycle in neighboring Andhra Pradesh. Apart from this, the results in Tamil Nadu and Kerala may also surprise.

When PM Modi climbed more than 100 stairs to pay tribute to Tiruvalluvar in Kanyakumari itself, it was proved that this PM would not stop. Indeed, this is the political Agnipath in which PM Modi has made a Purnahuti to ensure that the last person standing in the queue gets the full benefit of development projects. This election will be considered different in the history of democracy because, after ten years of rule, PM Modi has once again sought votes for work. Anti-incumbency seemed to have been sidelined when voters across the country were seen raising slogans of Modi Modi.

As soon as the Lok Sabha elections came, PM Modi's campaign gained such momentum that the opposition was left watching. PM Modi's plan to reach every corner of the country also became successful. The situation was such that when the election campaign ended in 2024, it became clear that this time PM Modi had set a record of campaigning. According to the data, PM Modi conducted 206 rallies, events, and road shows.

During the entire election campaign, PM Modi also gave more than 80 interviews. While refreshing our memories, let us also tell you that in the two months before the announcement of the elections, PM Modi visited all the 30 states of the country three times and dedicated the development schemes to the nation. That is, PM Modi had started his victory campaign since December last year.

POST BAG

Dengue prevention efforts necessary

Sir/Ma'am

Before the onset of the high transmission monsoon and post-monsoon seasons, the leadership of the Government Health Services in Karnataka must devise a strategy and closely monitor the dengue situation in vulnerable hotspots across the state.

Additionally, government teams need to visit locations where cases are reported, inspect for potential breeding sites, and raise awareness among residents about dengue prevention measures. The unit responsible for the National Vector-borne Disease Control Programme should ensure that crucial prevention guidelines are rigorously followed at the household level to effectively eliminate dengue.

Local communities must be urged to join the fight against dengue by monitoring and eliminating stagnant water in courtyards and discarded items. Over the past two to three years, Karnataka has seen a steady increase in dengue cases, resulting in deaths from the disease.

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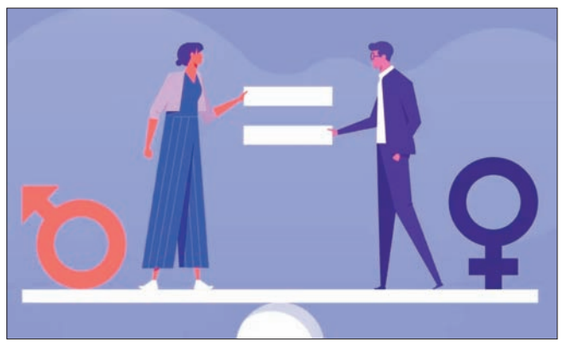
Gender equity: Lessons from global maternity benefit policies

By: Joya Saikia



In a recent landmark ruling, the Supreme Court has reaffirmed the constitutional entitlement of women employees to a two-year childcare leave, supplementing the existing mandatory 180-day maternity leave. This significant legal development signals a progressive shift towards broader protection for women in the workforce. Yet, despite this positive stride, hurdles persist in enforcing these rights effectively and overcoming the shortcomings of the current legal structure.

India's Maternity Benefit Act of 1961 often referred to as 'Act 1961,' stands as a pivotal law aimed at safeguarding the welfare of women during the pivotal phases of childbirth and childcare. This legislation governs the employment conditions of women in specific establishments, guaranteeing them paid leave and other essential benefits for both pre and post-natal periods.

Recognized as a dynamic legal framework, Act 1961 necessitates continuous evaluation and enhancement. Regular data collection and its informed utilization are imperative for shaping evidence-based policies, ensuring the Act's relevance and efficacy in meeting evolving societal needs.

Drawing insights from the UK system, it's crucial to meticulously weigh the financial ramifications of enhancing Maternity benefits. Extending paid leave duration and improving pay replacement rates could inevitably escalate expenses for employers.

To foster employer engagement, exploring viable financial incentives or governmental aids like subsidies or tax reliefs may be imperative. Undertaking thorough cost-benefit assessments, which factor in the enduring advantages of a diversified workforce and diminished gender pay differentials, can fortify the rationale for policy reforms.

Despite India's provision of a lengthier paid leave duration compared to the UK, there are valuable lessons to be gleaned from the British system for potential enhancements. India could contemplate trialing a scheme with extended overall leave duration while affording greater flexibility in how women utilize both paid and unpaid segments. Such an approach would empower women to customize their leave to suit their unique circumstances.

Furthermore, India might investigate methods to ensure a larger proportion of average earnings are encompassed within maternity pay schemes. Broadening eligibility criteria to encompass a wider spectrum of workers, especially those within the informal sector, stands out as another promising avenue for refinement.

Examining how maternity leave and pay are utilized holds paramount importance in assessing the efficacy of the UK's system. Although a substantial number of women opt for the full 52-week leave, there exists a disparity in the utilization of paid versus unpaid periods. Financial constraints often prompt many women to return to work sooner than they would prefer.

Despite the majority of women rejoining the workforce post-maternity leave, some encounter hurdles in securing comparable roles or experience setbacks in career progression due to prolonged absences.

The enduring issue of the gender pay gap in the UK underscores the importance of scrutinizing how leave patterns and reintegration experiences contribute to this gap. India stands to gain from adopting a data-centric approach to its maternity benefits framework.

Establishing robust data collection mechanisms to track leave utilization, monitor employer adherence, and identify challenges encountered by returning women can serve as a blueprint for shaping future policies. Regular cross-country comparisons, particularly with nations like the UK, can offer invaluable insights into areas necessitating improvement. Leveraging data analytics to pinpoint the distinct obstacles faced by various segments of women, including those in rural locales or informal sectors, can guide tailored policy interventions aimed at addressing their specific needs.

India stands to gain valuable insights from the United Kingdom's journey with maternity benefits. Embracing a data-driven methodology allows India to meticulously collect and analyze extensive data concerning the efficacy of diverse maternity benefit policies.

This encompasses evaluating the influence of varying leave durations, compensation rates, and supportive measures on the health, financial security, and engagement of women in the workforce. Through a data-centric approach, policymakers are empowered to craft well-informed strategies customized to the unique requirements of Indian women and the nation's economic landscape.

Another vital consideration is the exploration of flexible leave alternatives. In the UK, a range of parental leave models, such as shared parental leave, provides the opportunity for both parents to divide their leave period. This adaptability not only aids women but also advocates for shared parenting responsibilities, thus cultivating a more even distribution of household tasks and encouraging paternal engagement from the outset of a child's life.

India stands to gain from embracing such flexibility, empowering families to select arrangements that align with their specific situations and advancing a fairer distribution of caregiving responsibilities.

It's crucial to tackle cost-related worries by considering potential government assistance mechanisms to sustain maternity benefits. In the UK, maternity benefits are sustained through a blend of employer contributions and government aid, thus preventing businesses from bearing the entire financial load.

India could investigate comparable approaches, such as offering tax advantages to firms offering improved maternity benefits or providing direct subsidies to smaller enterprises. This strategy could ease the financial pressure on employers, particularly small and medium-sized businesses, making it more viable for them to provide extensive maternity benefits.

Encouraging cross-border knowledge exchange presents a promising avenue for India to glean insights from global successes and sidestep potential pitfalls. Active involvement in international dialogues, research exchanges, and joint initiatives can furnish India with fresh perspectives on optimizing maternity benefits.

Nations such as Sweden, Norway, and Germany, renowned for their comprehensive maternity and parental leave frameworks, offer instructive models on striking a harmonious balance between economic imperatives and societal well-being. Through collaborative learning, India stands to unravel the cultural and societal transformations necessary to embrace more progressive maternity policies.

Embracing a collaborative approach that blends global inspiration with local nuances holds the key to reshaping perceptions of work and motherhood in India. This forward-looking strategy envisions a future where women seamlessly navigate their professional and personal roles, finding harmony rather than conflict.

By constructing a sturdy and adaptable framework that champions gender parity, India stands to unlock women's full potential across all spheres of life. This inclusive system not only recognizes women's multifaceted contributions but also propels societal advancement. Through strategic policymaking informed by a blend of domestic insights and international perspectives, India can chart a transformative path towards gender equity and economic prosperity. ***(The writer can be reached at joyasaikia1990@gmail.com)***

A woman's right to reject: A look into the declining fertility rate

By: Sushipra

The Lancet last month published its forecast for the total fertility rate (TFR) of the world as part of its comprehensive Global burden of disease (GBD) study. The total fertility rate is the average number of children born per woman.

In the report, it was pointed out that TFR worldwide has seen a steady decline in the past 70 years from 5 per woman in 1950 to 2.2 per woman in 2021. For India, it projected an irreversible fall in TFR to 1.29 in 2050 and further to 1.04 in 2100.

The fertility rate data shows that India has witnessed a steady decline in TFR in the last century from 6.18 in 1950 to 4.6 in 1980 and now to 1.91 in 2021. It is much below the replacement level (2.1) which is required by a population to replace itself exactly.

In the backdrop of these forecasts which will pose serious demographic challenges to many countries including ours, we need to have a serious look into the causes and what's required to change the trend of decline. But beyond that, more importantly, we need to look at this by keeping the women and their needs in the focal centre.

For that, first, we need to look at another distressing example which is South Korea.

A month further back, data and reports about the sharp decline in TFR in South Korea to a concerning 0.72 came out in public which saw a sharp decline from last year (0.78). This triggered discussions about the serious declining trend and the reasons for it. When we delve into what's happening there, we see a few important scenarios:

The South Korean economy has developed at breakneck speed in the past 50 years. The number of women in higher education and workforce is expanding.

The women are finding more courage to speak freely and exert choices, and they are choosing careers over motherhood or having a family.

But why this conundrum which is leading them to such a trade-off?

The answer to this question brings us to the underlying root cause of this serious issue, which has either been neglected for long or hasn't been taken too seriously. Before discussing that we must further look at the situation that's unfolding there.

The distressing social phenomenon

The South Korean society is deeply patriarchal and misogynistic. Women there face numerous challenges. They are often subjected to rigid beauty standards.

Despite being one of the most highly educated women among the OECD nations, South Korean women have to deal with one of the worst gender pay gaps.

There are dissimilar perspectives in society about family and the obligations of being a woman. There is also a serious lack of respect for working women. The data reflects more women being out of work than men at any given time, irrespective of education or eligibility. The raising of children is considered to be the sole responsibility of women. Men are averse to the idea of supporting their partner in sharing the household and childcare responsibilities.

Despite the entitlement of parental leave for both parents, data shows that just about 3 to 5% of men take it in comparison to 75 to 80% of women.

The women also feel the pressure of getting left behind since there is implicit pressure by companies to leave their jobs after their return.

The steeply falling fertility rate is now a national emergency in South Korea. The government has spent a lot of money, 379.8 trillion KRW (286 billion dollars) in the past 20 years to address the issue.

The couples having children have been showered with money, handouts, subsidised housing, hospital bills, free IVF treatments and whatnot, but nothing has worked.

A question arises again: Why isn't anything working?

The answer to this question and the first one about the conundrum faced by women in choosing a career over family and the need for such a trade-off are similar.

The answer is the deep-seated patriarchy in the society where women are treated unequally and are subjected to various regressive norms.

The policymakers haven't been sensitive to women's needs at all.

Education has evolved, with more women in higher education, but the roles of wives and mothers have not evolved with the rise in education.

And this is where the heart of the problem lies.

The women are now speaking up and rejecting the treatment and expectations they have always been subjected to.

The post opined that the women are considering giving birth to be counter-productive in a society which doesn't respect and treat its women how they should be treated. Despite growing education, gender equality has remained a big farce.

Over the years, South Korea has seen a consistent rise in demonstrations and movements by women, the 4B movement being the latest phenomenon among them.

4B is shorthand for four Korean words that start with Bi (meaning No):

• Bihon; which means no to heterosexual marriage,

• Bichulsan; which means no to childbirth,

• Biyeonae; which means no dating,

• Bisekseu; which means no to heterosexual relationships.

The women are so fed up with men and their attitude towards women, that they are now rejecting any kind of relationship involving men.

The main purpose of this piece is to highlight this serious underlying issue and bring the attention of its readers towards the possibility (even if not immediate) of a similar situation in our country in future.

A synoptic view of the Indian scenario

A brief look at the Indian scenario points out a few possible causes that have affected the IFR. The average age of first pregnancy has considerably dropped from mid-20s to mid-30s.

There also has been an increase in female literacy and participation of women in the workforce.

Women are now becoming more career-conscious and economically more independent in urban spaces. With lifestyle getting busier and stress levels getting higher, having a second child is becoming more and more unviable.

Post-independence when there was a need to restrict the population, several measures like the family welfare program including child health-related cash transfer inducements were introduced, which intended to convince the people to have no more than two children.

It required a lot of effort to induce a behavioural change but slowly that change started showing up. Infant mortality also declined substantially due to various child health-related programs and successful immunisations. Small families slowly became the norm.

From the economic perspective, the intergenerational flow of wealth has also reversed, meaning the parents receive less benefits from their children. This has also influenced their decision to have an additional child which would involve a substantial cost of bringing them up.

Now we also need to have a look at the situation of our society and its women regarding child rearing.

Indian society and its attitude towards parenting and women, much like South Korea, has also been deeply patriarchal.

The deeply problematic view on gender-specific roles has historically haunted our women. Obligations of being a woman are forced upon them by the society at large.

Women have to navigate their lives through all kinds of pressures and burdens of society including their own family. A married woman without children has often been looked at with disgust. She is shamed, denigrated and sometimes even considered inauspicious and tainted for failing to have a child.

Even the women who are having a hard time in their marriage are pressured or convinced to have children to improve their marital life as if having a child is some magic wand that will eliminate the marital issues and problems. Sadly that is not the end, but the start of a more testing time for her. The onus of responsibility of child-rearing has solely been put on women.

The lack of support from their male counterparts takes a heavy toll on women physically, mentally and emotionally.

After the birth of a child, she finds herself stuck in a more serious situation where it becomes a Herculean task for her to think about working on her future or financial and economic independence. The attitude of the males, with very few exceptions, has largely been disappointing, to say the least.

Very few understand or are sensitive to the needs of their partners in sharing household and childcare responsibilities. It is also very important to understand that even being a housewife doesn't necessarily mean that only the mother must manage all household chores along with childcare. They have every right to think about their financial independence while being mothers and housewives.

Step forward while learning from the South Korean example

There is a saying that "life is too short to learn from your own mistakes, so you must also learn from other's mistakes".

The precarious situation in South Korea gives us two very important lessons for the future

• No amount of money would work if you are not sensitive to the women's needs, both physical and emotional.

• The shackles of patriarchy need to be dismantled and the attitude of the males needs to change. Period. With the development and a steady rise in education, women are no longer willing to accept the patriarchal norms that have been imposed on them for so long.

The number of women speaking up and exerting their choices will keep rising. As a nation, if we are serious about our future and want to reverse or stabilise the trend of decline in TFR, we must learn lessons from South Korea and should take a comprehensive approach.

Keeping women in central focus while devising economic policies that include better job creation, social security, pension reforms, affordable childcare and reliable healthcare would be a start in the right direction.

The greatest focus needs to be on breaking the patriarchal norms and ensuring gender equity while reducing the gender pay gap through different policies and most importantly, male sensitisation.

The most important aspect that needs to be understood is that for women to be able to manage their careers with motherhood, it is imperative and critical for men to take greater responsibility for childcare and household responsibilities. Countries like Sweden and Denmark are a few good examples in that regard where not only the childcare and healthcare are extremely affordable, but they also conduct very large-scale male engagement initiatives to ensure better participation of males in sharing responsibilities.

The issue ultimately needs to be looked at through the perspectives of women and the solution needs to be conceptualised and implemented by involving more and more women in policy-making.Only then we can even think of reversing the concerning trend that is spreading worldwide with very serious ramifications for the future.

The hope for a promising future lies in understanding the fact that women are central to everything and there is a serious need for change in male attitudes towards women.

The ultimate truth which needs to be realised by all is that there is much more to women than just being the birth-givers.

"A woman is the foundation of a family, a society, a nation, a civilisation, of the whole existence itself!" She deserves to be truly revered by all. ***(Coutesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)***

Get glowy and dewy look this Summer

By: Shahnaz Husain

The temperature is rising and so should our look quotient. Summer is here, and with it comes some of the year's most exciting makeup trends. As the sun shines brighter and the days get longer, it's time to refresh your beauty routine with the latest beauty trends. The warmer season calls for new summer makeup trends that will help you beat the heat in style. The hottest looks for the hottest season encourage fun and experimentation for your lids, lips, and face.

Summer 2024 is going to be all about flaunting dewy, glowy skin. Think radiant, natural-looking skin finishes, bright blushes, bold brows, glossy lips, and statement eye makeup looks.

A trend of minimal (less) make-up will be the trend this summer. Heavy eye makeup may become a trend of the past. Fewer skin care products and make-up cosmetics will be used, especially in summer, in keeping with the minimal wave.

Tinted moisturisers, primers and serums are being used. The prediction is that glowing skin, created with highlighters, will be in. Leave out the glitter where highlighting is concerned, but use the highlighter on the high points of the face, like cheekbones, and brow bones.

Go for a neutral and natural blush, to emphasize the highlighted areas of the face.

There are some new popular products in skin care, like Serums and Face Oils and these will influence summer trends. A serum is in the form of a liquid and is different from a moisturising lotion.

It does not moisturise the skin but is designed for many other functions, like age control, removal of pigmented patches or spots, brightening the skin, improving skin texture, protection of the skin and hair, etc. It forms a protective layer over the skin and hair.

Products that are gentle on the skin will be trending during the summer of 2024. The skin's pH balance and normal oil-moisture barrier are very important for the good health of the skin. Skin care products that are free from parabens, sulphates and mineral oil are already preferred and people will move away from acid peel treatments.

There will be an increase in awareness of sun protection. So, an increasing rise in the use and sale of sunscreens, sunblock products and protective creams is expected.

The dramatic red for lipsticks will be very much the trend. To make sure your lips stay vibrant all day, try using a lip liner to create a base, and then fill in with your hot summer favourite shade. Nothing screams summer better than bright and bold lip shades like coral, hot pink, and orange.

For the day, go for reddish shades that move towards pink, or try fuschia, or coral red. Models are wearing chocolate brown too. For summer nude shades in lipstick will be trendy. A sheer shade is good for the day.

Black-lined eyes continue to be in and so is liquid eyeliner. In fact, liquid eyeliner is best for achieving a dramatic look for the eyes. Go for grey or brown eye shadow and apply a line of black eyeliner close to the lashes on the upper lid.

It is also expected that French Manicure may be back. But, instead of the long white tips for nails, the minimal trend may take over and a narrow tip of colour may become the new trend.

Putting the hair up will also be in vogue, especially for summer. Where hairstyles are concerned, the prediction is that the trend may be to put the hair up in buns, chignons, or even topknots. The spiky bun may also be a trend, with some ringlets framing the face.

The classic ponytail has been dictating trends for some time now. For summer the ponytail will continue to be popular. A high ponytail will be trendy, with part of the hair wound around it.

With ribbons or other hair accessories, a ponytail can provide a touch of glamour. One can have a ponytail for a formal or an informal look. The prediction is that braids are also going to be in. Micro plaits will be trendy. Colouring the hair may also have a new trend of mixing two colours. Fringes will become shorter.

Get that summer fresh look this summer with glossy skin. The trend is all about looking radiant and fresh.

However, all in all, 2024 will be a year of beauty care with products that protect and restore the good health of the skin and hair. The focus will be on healthy, organic beauty care. There will be a fresh look to make-up and grooming. ***(The author is an international fame beauty expert and is called the herbal queen of India)***

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The climate scientist and former Mexico City mayor said that her two competitors had called her and conceded her victory

Mexico elects Claudia Sheinbaum as its first woman president

MEXICO CITY, June 3: Mexico's projected presidential winner Claudia Sheinbaum will become the first woman president in the country's 200-year history.

The climate scientist and former Mexico City mayor said on Sunday night that her two competitors had called her and conceded her victory.

"I will become the first woman president of Mexico," Sheinbaum said with a smile, speaking at a downtown hotel shortly after electoral authorities announced a statistical sample showed she held an irreversible lead.

"I don't make it alone. We've all made it, with our heroines who gave us our homeland, with our mothers, our daughters and our granddaughters."

"We have demonstrated that Mexico is a democratic country with peaceful elections," she said.

The National Electoral Institute's president said Sheinbaum had between 58.3% and 60.7% of the vote, according to a statistical sample. Opposition candidate Xóchitl Gálvez had between 26.6% and 28.6% of the vote and Jorge Álvarez Máynez had between 9.9% and 10.8% of the vote. The preliminary count, which started off very slowly, put Sheinbaum 27 points ahead of Gálvez with 42% of polling place tallies counted shortly after her victory speech.

The governing party candidate campaigned on continuing the political course set over the last six years

by her political mentor President Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

His anointed successor, the 61-year-old Sheinbaum led the campaign wire-to-wire despite a spirited challenge from Gálvez. This was the first time in Mexico that the two main opponents were women.

"Of course, I congratulate Claudia Sheinbaum with all my respect who ended up the winner by a wide margin," López Obrador said shortly after electoral authorities announcement. "She is going to be Mexico's first (woman) president in 200 years."

If the margin holds it would approach his landslide victory in 2018. López Obrador won the presidency after two unsuccessful tries with 53.2% of the votes, in a three-way race where National Action took 22.3% and the Institutional Revolutionary Party took 16.5%.

Earlier, Gálvez wrote on the social platform X, "The votes are there. Don't let them hide them."

Sheinbaum is unlikely to enjoy the kind of unquestioning devotion that López Obrador has enjoyed. Both belong to the governing Morena party.

In Mexico City's main colonial-era main plaza, the Zocalo, Sheinbaum's lead did not initially draw the kind of cheering, jubilant crowds that greeted López Obrador's victory in 2018. Fernando Fernández, a chef, 28, joined the relatively small crowd, hoping for a Sheinbaum victory, but even he acknowledged there were problems.

"You vote for Claudia out of conviction, for AMLO," Fernández said, referring to López Obrador by his initials, as most Mexicans do. But his highest hope is that Sheinbaum can "improve what AMLO couldn't do, the price of gasoline, crime and drug trafficking, which he didn't combat even though he had the power."

Also in the crowd, Itxel Robledo, 28, a business administrator, expressed hope that Sheinbaum would do what López Obrador didn't. "What Claudia has to do is put professionals in every area."

Elsewhere in the city, Yoselin Ramírez, 29, said she voted for Sheinbaum, but split her vote for other posts because she didn't want anyone holding a strong majority.

"I don't want everything to be occupied by the same party, so there can be a little more equality," she said without elaborating.

The main opposition candidate, Gálvez, a tech entrepreneur and former senator, tried to seize on Mexicans' concerns about security and promised to take a more aggressive approach toward organized crime.

Nearly 100 million people were registered to vote, but turnout appeared to be slightly lower than in past elections. Voters were also electing governors in nine of the country's 32 states, and choosing candidates for both houses of Congress, thousands of mayorships and other local posts, in the biggest elections the nation has seen and ones that have been marked by violence.

The elections were widely seen as a referendum on López Obrador, a populist who has expanded social programs but largely failed to reduce cartel violence in Mexico. His Morena party currently holds 23 of the 32 governorships and a simple majority of seats in both houses of Congress. Mexico's constitution prohibits the president's reelection.

Sheinbaum promised to continue all of López Obrador's policies, including a universal pension for the elderly and a program that pays youths to apprentice.

Gálvez, whose father was Indigenous Otomi, rose from selling snacks on the street in her poor hometown to start her own tech firms. A candidate running with a coalition of major opposition parties, she left the Senate last year to focus her ire on López Obrador's decision to avoid confronting the drug cartels through his "hugs not bullets" policy. She pledged to more aggressively go after criminals.

The persistent cartel violence and Mexico's middling economic performance were the main issues on voters' minds.

Julio García, a Mexico City office worker, said he was voting for the opposition in Mexico City's central San Rafael neighborhood. "They've robbed me twice at gunpoint. You have to change direction, change leadership," the 34-year-old said. "Continuing the same way, we're going to become Venezuela."

On the fringes of Mexico City in the neighborhood of San Andres Totoltepec, electoral officials filed past 34-year-old homemaker Stephania Navarrete, who watched dozens of cameramen and electoral officials gathering where frontrunner Claudia Sheinbaum was set to vote.

Navarrete said she planned to vote for Sheinbaum despite her own doubts about López Obrador and his party. *(AP)*

Israeli strikes in central Gaza kill at least 11 as the US pushes a cease-fire plan

GAZA STRIP, June 3: Palestinian health officials said Israeli strikes killed 11 people overnight into Monday, including a woman and three children, in central Gaza.

A strike on a home in the built-up Bureij refugee camp late Sunday killed four people, including the three children. The second strike, early Monday, killed seven people, including a woman, in the Nuseirat refugee camp.

Earlier on Monday, the Israeli military said that the body of a man presumed to be a hostage was found in a community near the Gaza border that Hamas militants attacked on Oct. 7.

U.S. President Joe Biden said Friday that Israel has offered Hamas a three-phase cease-fire and hostage release deal, declaring it was time to end the fighting in Gaza and that Hamas is "no longer capable" of carrying out another large-scale attack on Israel.

Israel is expanding its offensive in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, once the main hub of humanitarian aid operations. The Israeli invasion has largely cut off the flow of food, medicine and other supplies to Palestinians facing widespread hunger. Israel faces growing international criticism over the huge cost in civilian lives and the widespread destruction caused by its nearly 8-month war with Hamas.

Israeli bombardments and ground operations in the besieged territory have killed more than 36,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between combatants and civilians.

Israel launched its war in Gaza after Hamas' Oct. 7 attack, in which militants stormed into southern Israel, killed some 1,200 people — mostly civilians — and abducted about 250. Israel says around 100 hostages are still captive in Gaza, along with the bodies of around 30 more. *(AP)*

Zelenskyy in Manila to promote peace summit, which he says China and Russia are trying to undermine

MANILA, June 3: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy met with the Philippine president on Monday in a rare Asian trip to urge regional leaders to attend a Swiss-organized global peace summit on the war in Ukraine that he accuses Russia, with China's help, of trying to undermine.

Zelenskyy arrived unannounced and under heavy security in Manila late on Sunday after speaking over the weekend at the Shangri-La defense forum in Singapore. He was given a red-carpet welcome with military honors Monday at the presidential palace before meeting with President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., after which he left the Philippines.

Marcos pledged that his country would take part in the peace summit, Philippine Communications Secretary Cheloy Garafil said.

"I'm happy to hear today from you that you'll participate in our peace steps," Zelenskyy told Marcos. "It's a very strong signal."

Zelenskyy said Ukraine needs more mental health workers for its soldiers. Marcos promised to help and welcomed a decision by Ukraine to open an embassy in Manila this year which would hasten efforts to deliver assistance.

"We have ourselves been trying to promote the continuing adherence to international law in our part of the world," Marcos said. "The issues that you are facing are similar and in parallel to ours and, therefore, the position the Philippines takes is always to promote peace."

Both leaders spoke critically of China at the Singapore forum, which was attended by top defense and government officials from around the world, including from Washington and Beijing. The talks were held amid the raging wars in Gaza and Ukraine as well as growing tensions and rivalry for influence between the United States and China in the Indo-Pacific region.

At a news conference in Singapore on Sunday, Zelenskyy accused China of helping Russia to disrupt

the Swiss-organized peace summit by pressuring other countries not to attend.

"Russia, using Chinese influence in the region, using Chinese diplomats also, does everything to disrupt the peace summit," he said, without elaborating. "This is unfortunate that such a big independent powerful country as China is an instrument in the hands of (Russian leader Vladimir) Putin." The Chinese Foreign Ministry did not respond immediately to a request for comment on Zelenskyy's allegation.

China has taken what it says is a neutral position on the war, putting it at odds with Ukraine, the U.S. and most of Europe. Its trade with Russia has grown, easing the economic impact of Western sanctions. American, Ukrainian and other intelligence agencies say there is evidence that Chinese parts are winding up in Russian weaponry, even if China is not directly arming its neighbor.

Switzerland had been hoping China would attend the peace conference in mid-June, but Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning suggested Friday that was unlikely.

At the security forum, Zelenskyy urged top defense officials to participate in the talks in Switzerland, expressing disappointment over the failure of some countries to commit to attending. Ukraine, he said, has proposals to make at the summit as a basis for peace, addressing nuclear security, food security, the release of prisoners of war and the return of Ukrainian children abducted by Russia.

He said Ukraine is "ready to hear various proposals and thoughts that lead us ... to an end of the war and a sustainable and just peace."

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin met with Zelenskyy on the sidelines of the conference and renewed U.S. commitments to Ukraine. In an address to the forum Saturday, Austin said that "Putin's war of aggression has provided us all with a preview of a world that none of us would want."

Marcos, whose country has had escalating clashes with China over disputed islets in the South China Sea, bluntly underscored the dangers of the regional flashpoint on Friday at the defense forum. He said that if "a willful act" should result in a Filipino dying in the high-seas hostilities, "that is, I think, very, very close to what we define as an act of war."

"That would certainly increase the level of response," Marcos said in response to a question.

"Illegal, coercive, aggressive and deceptive actions continue to violate our sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdictions," Marcos said, without naming China, but he added that the Philippines remains committed to a peaceful resolution of the disputes.

Austin said at the forum that the U.S. commitment to the Philippines as a treaty ally is "ironclad" but reiterated the importance of dialogue with China.

"There are a number of things that can happen at sea or in the air, we recognize that," he said. "But our goal is to make sure that we don't allow things to spiral out of control unnecessarily." *(AP)*

Earthquakes in north-central Japan collapse 5 homes that were damaged in deadly January quake

TOKYO, June 3: Earthquakes early on Monday again struck Japan's north-central region of Ishikawa, still recovering from the destruction left by a powerful quake on January 1, but the latest shaking caused no major damage. A magnitude 5.9 temblor on the northern top of the Noto Peninsula was followed minutes later by a 4.8 and then several smaller quakes within the next two hours, the Japan Meteorological Agency said. There was no tsunami.

Five houses that had been damaged in the January 1 quake collapsed in Wajiima city, but no major damage or life-threatening injuries were reported, according to Ishikawa prefecture. A quake alarm in the town of Tsubata, about 100 kilometers (60 miles) southwest of the epicenter, surprised a resident in her 60s who fell from her bed but the injury was not life-threatening, prefectural officials said.

JMA seismology and tsunami official Satoshi Harada said Monday's quakes were believed to be aftershocks of the magnitude 7.6 earthquake on January 1. Seismic activity has since slightly subsided, but Harada urged people to be cautious, especially near buildings that were damaged earlier.

Shinkansen super-express trains and other train services were temporarily suspended for safety checks but most of them resumed, according to West Japan Railway Co. The Nuclear Regulation Authority said no abnormalities were found at two nearby nuclear power plants. One of them, the Shika plant on the Noto Peninsula, had minor damage, though officials said that did not affect cooling functions of the two reactors.

Hokuriku Electric Power Co. said there were no power outages.

Monday's rattlings rekindled fear among residents who are still struggling to recover from damages from the New Year's quake. NHK public television showed a number of people who came out of their homes and temporary shelters to see if there were additional damage. "Many people who have been living at evacuation centers must have been been frightened," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi said, urging caution against potential falling rocks and landslides in areas that were shaken strongly.

Reconstruction comes slowly in mountainous areas on the peninsula, and many damaged houses remain untouched. In Wajima, which was one of the hardest-hit areas, an inn operator told NHK that he immediately ducked under the desk at the reception when the first quake struck Monday. Nothing fell to the floor or broke, but it reminded him of the January shakings and made him worry that a big quake like that had occurred even five months later. *(AP)*

France's far right may win big in the EU elections. That's worrying for migrants, Macron and Ukraine

PARIS, June 3: French far-right leader Marine Le Pen isn't on the ballot at the weekend's European Parliament election, but she's likely to emerge as one of its biggest winners.Polls expect her National Rally party to be the top vote-getter in France, trouncing President Emmanuel Macron's moderate pro-business party. And across Europe, the anti-immigration, nationalist ideas Le Pen has long championed are gaining ground.

The June 6-9 elections in all 27 EU countries will shift the makeup of the European Parliament and policy-making in the European Commission, the EU's executive arm, likely toward the right and far right. That could have lasting impact on the EU — and boost Le Pen's chances of winning France's presidency in 2027, a long-time dream.

The National Rally's lead European Parliament candidate Jordan Bardella is riding high on promises to limit free movement of migrants within the EU's open borders, ease up EU pressure on Russia and dial back EU climate rules. "We stand by the idea of rethinking the European model around the idea of nations. Macron's Europe is a model of the past," Bardella said at a Paris rally Sunday. Macron's pro-EU movement meanwhile is flailing, and its chief candidate Valerie Hayer has struggled to make a mark. That's troubling for Macron as he tries to lead Europe-wide efforts to defend Ukraine and boost the EU's own defenses and industry.

More popular Prime Minister Gabriel Attal is now joining Hayer at rallies, warning voters that hard-fought post-war European unity - and democracy itself - is under threat by rising authoritarianism.

"Europe is mortal, because war knocks on our door as bombs are being dropped on Ukraine, on democracy, on our values, and because we know that if Russia wins it won't stop there," Attal said at a rally last week.

He said Europe knows "it can't rely on the U.S. eternally and needs to protect itself ... because challenges are multiplying, climate change, big tech, AI, and we can only face them together, the 27 of us."

While EU voters are choosing members of the European Parliament, many are making decisions based on national concerns – and in France, many are expected to use their ballots to express frustration with Macron's management of the economy, the farm sector, or security in a country about to host the high-risk Paris Olympics.

On the left, polls show a surprising resurgence of France's Socialist Party behind its lead candidate Raphael Glucksmann, who pledges more ambitious climate policy and protections for European businesses and workers. Macron sidelined France's once-powerful Socialists and mainstream conservative Republicans when he rose to power in 2017 by staking out a middle ground. But frustration among left-wing voters with Macron's toughening security and immigration policies, and with the staunch pro-Palestinian stance of the influential far-left France Unbowed party, has driven some back toward the traditional Socialists.

Russia's president, Gulf leaders and other oil powers "can well cut supplies of gas or oil, but they can't prevent the wind from blowing in (the French Atlantic town of) Saint-Nazaire and the sun from shining in Marseille. We will earn our freedom back by completing the environmental transformation," Glucksmann told followers last week.

But it's Le Pen - runner-up to Macron in the last two presidential elections - who is expected to benefit the most from France's protest vote, as her party did in the last EU elections in 2019. She no longer calls for quitting the EU and the euro, but instead aims to scale back its powers and undo it from within. "Across Europe, national parties are rising up not to destroy the European Union, but to build a European alliance of nations capable of facing up to the industrial, environmental, migratory and technological challenges of the 21st century," Le Pen told party followers last week. *(AP)*

PM Sharif's China visit investment-oriented: Pakistan Planning Minister

ISLAMABAD, June 3: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's visit to China this week and his meeting with top Chinese leaders will be focused on investments in Pakistan and step up cooperation between the two all-weather allies for the next phase of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project, according to a senior minister.

Sharif will embark on a five-day visit to China on Tuesday at the invitation of Chinese President Xi Jinping, during which the two leaders will jointly draw a blueprint to strengthen bilateral ties further.

This will be Sharif's first visit to China after he took over as prime minister for the second term after his Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party-led coalition government came to power in March.

It will be focused on government-to-government and businessmen-to-businessmen investments in energy and agriculture sectors and Special Economic Zones, the Dawn newspaper quoted Planning and Development Minister Ahsan Iqbal as saying.

Chinese Ambassador in Pakistan Jiang Zaidong said on Monday that under the guidance of two leadership and strong support from the people of both countries, the upcoming visit of Prime Minister Sharif to China would achieve complete success and become a milestone in the development of China-Pakistan relations.

Highlighting the various components of the visit, he said the prime minister would meet and have talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping, Premier Li Qiang and the Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress Zhao Leji.

The leaders will have an in-depth exchange of views on China-Pakistan relations and issues of mutual interest, and jointly draw up a blueprint for the growth of bilateral relations, Jiang was quoted as saying by the official Associated Press of Pakistan news agency.

"China stands ready to work with Pakistan through this visit to make greater progress in our all-weather strategic cooperative partnership and take new steps in building an even closer China-Pakistan community with a shared future in the new era," he said. *(PTI)*

SKorea plans to nullify peace deal to punish NKorea over trash-carrying balloon launches

SEOUL, June 3: South Korea announced on Monday it'll suspend a rapprochement deal with North Korea to punish it over its launches of trash-carrying balloons, even after the North said it would halt its balloon campaign.

Over several days, North Korea flew hundreds of balloons to drop trash and manure on South Korea in an angry reaction against previous South Korean civilian leafleting campaigns.

On Sunday, South Korea said it would take "unbearable" retaliatory steps in response, before North Korea abruptly announced it would stop flying balloons across the border.

On Monday, South Korea's presidential National Security Council said it has decided to suspend a 2018 inter-Korean agreement aimed at easing frontline animosities, until mutual trust between the two Koreas is restored, according to the presidential office.

The security council said the suspension would allow South Korea to resume military drills near the border with North Korea and take effective, immediate responses to provocations by North Korea. It said a proposal on the suspension will be introduced at the Cabinet Council on Tuesday for approval.

Observers say South Korea needs the deal's suspension to restart blasting anti-Pyongyang propaganda broadcasts, K-pop songs and outside news from border loudspeakers.

They say such broadcasts have previously stung in the rigidly controlled North, where most of its 26 million people are not allowed official accesses to foreign news.

The 2018 agreement, reached during a brief period of reconciliation between then-liberal South Korean President Moon Jae-in and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, require the Koreas to cease all hostile acts against each other, including propaganda broadcasts and leafleting campaigns.

But the accord doesn't clearly state civilian leafleting should also be banned. That has allowed South Korean activists to continue to fly balloons to drop anti-Pyongyang leaflets, USB sticks with South Korean dramas and world news, and US dollars in North Korea.

Enraged over such leafleting campaigns, North Korea has previously fired at incoming balloons and destroyed a South Korean-built, unoccupied inter-Korean liaison office in the North.

The 2018 deal has already been in the danger of collapsing. Tension spiked after North Korea's spy satellite launch last November prompted both Koreas to take steps in breach of the accord - South Korea resuming frontline aerial surveillance and North Korea restoring border guard posts.

Since last Tuesday, a total of about 1,000 North Korean balloons carrying manure, cigarette butts, scraps of cloth and waste paper have been discovered in various parts of South Korea. No hazardous substances were found, according to South Korea's military.

On Sunday night, Kim Kang Il, a North Korean vice defence minister, said the North would stop its balloon campaign because it left the South Koreans with "enough experience of how much unpleasant they feel". He said North Korea will fly balloons again if South Korean activists restart their own balloon activities.

Experts say North Korea's balloon campaign, reportedly the first of its kind in seven years, is meant to trigger a divide in South Korea over its current conservative government's tough policy on the North. Since 2022, North Korea has dramatically ramped up its weapons tests in what analysts call an attempt to bolster its nuclear capability and increase its leverage in future diplomacy with the US. *(AP)*

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CM Prem Singh Tamang instructs party workers to abstain from anti-social activities in Sikkim

SKM urges SDF leaders, workers not to flee Sikkim fearing persecution

GANGTOK, June 3: After social media posts claimed that demoralised SDF leaders and workers were fleeing Sikkim following assembly poll defeat, fearing attacks by ruling party cadre in post-poll violence, the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) on Monday urged them to stay back, promising peace and security for all.

The SKM bagged 31 of the 32 assembly seats, the results of which were declared on Sunday. The SDF managed to win only one seat and even its party supremo and five-term former chief minister Pawan Kumar Chamling lost both the seats he contested.

"Dear esteemed leaders and supporters of the SDF party, we have come to learn that many of you have left Sikkim fearing potential attacks. We wish to emphasise that the SKM, once a victim of such violence, deeply understands the pain caused by these heinous acts. Our ethos strongly stands against indulging in any form of violence," SKM spokesperson Jacob Khaling said in a statement.

He said chief minister Prem Singh Tamang has strictly instructed all party workers to abstain from anti-social activities in Sikkim.

"We have vowed to maintain peace and harmony across our beloved state," Khaling said, urging those SDF workers and leaders who have fled the state to return.

The main opposition party must continue to engage with the public and continue public work to contribute to betterment of the people of Sikkim, the SKM leader said.

Even the chief minister, in a statement issued a few days back, batted for peace and security in Sikkim during the second SKM term.

SDF leaders could not be reached for their comment on the development. *(PTI)*

Exit polls meant to sabotage voting: NPCC

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, June 3: The Nagaland Pradesh Congress Committee (NPCC) on Monday called the exit polls on the Lok Sabha elections a means to sabotage the voting in the country.

Addressing a press conference at the Congress Bhavan Dimapur, NPCC communication department chairperson, Yanger Longkumer appealed to the people of the state not to be deceived by such falsity, but to wait for the poll results on Tuesday.

Exuding confidence that Congress candidate for Nagaland's lone Lok Sabha seat, Supongmeren Jamir will emerge winner, he reiterated AICC leadership's statement that the INDIA bloc would get 295-plus seats, which is a comfortable majority to form the government at the Centre.

On the rumours circulating in the state that the ruling Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP), which in alliance with the BJP is running the People's Democratic Alliance government in the state, and other regional parties in the state will ally with whichever bloc be it INDIA and NDA forms the government, Longkumer said any possible alliance will be decided by the INDIA bloc.

"It is not in the hands of the NDPP or other regional parties nor with the NPCC," he clarified.

Regarding the upcoming urban local body elections in the state, Longkumer said the Congress would in all the wards alone.

He said the party would continue to give priority to women and youth candidates and appealed to the aspiring candidates for ticket.

Over 2,000 personnel deployed for counting of votes in Mizoram

AIZWAL, June 3: More than 2,000 personnel would be deployed for counting of votes for the lone Lok Sabha seat in Mizoram, a senior official said on Monday.

Chief electoral officer (CEO) Madhup Vyas said a three-tier security arrangement has been made in all the 13 counting centres across the state.

There would be three counting centres in state capital Aizawl and one each in the other district headquarters, he said.

Altogether, there would be 40 counting halls with 379 counting tables. Each table would be supervised and monitored by a counting supervisor, counting agent and micro observer, he said.

The counting of votes would begin at 8 am on Tuesday, and postal ballots would be counted first, followed by votes cast in the EVMs, Vyas said.

There were five assembly segments where five rounds of counting would be held, four rounds of counting would be held in 15 assembly segments, three rounds in 18 assembly segments, and two rounds of counting would take place in two assembly segments, he said.

Media centres have been set up at all the counting venues to ensure seamless distribution of information regarding election results to the public, the CEO said.

Mizoram has only one Lok Sabha seat and 56.6 per cent of over 8.56 lakh voters exercised their franchise in the Lok Sabha polls held on April 19.

Although there were six candidates, it is believed that the fight would be mainly among ZPM, MNF and Congress.

The ruling Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) had nominated debutant Richard Vanlalhmangaiha, while the main opposition Mizo National Front (MNF) had fielded sitting Rajya Sabha member K Vanlalvena.

The Congress had fielded former state home secretary Lalbiakzam, also a newbie in politics. *(PTI)*

Drugs worth ₹ 15 crore lost in Imphal floods

IMPHAL, June 3: Manipur Chemists and Druggists Association (MCDA) has estimated that drugs worth over ₹ 15 crore were lost as almost around 95 per cent of the drugs at stock were damaged in the recent floods in Imphal.

Almost all the drug stores in Imphal were inundated in the floods that were caused as an after-effect of cyclone Remal.

Talking to the reporters, MCDA secretary Thokchom Dwijamani said that the devastating flash flood that submerged most parts of Imphal valley has damaged over 95 per cent of the medicine stocks at various pharmaceutical wholesale and retail stores in Imphal.

Dijamani revealed that as most of the drug stores are located in areas that were inundated in the floods, the owners did not get a chance to shift the medicines to safer places.

He, however, said that the public need not panic despite the significant loss as the association is trying its best to ensure the availability of medicines.

At the same time, he added that problems prevail while transporting the drugs due to the landslides at various places on national highways 2 and 37.

He then demanded compensation from the government. *(NNN)*

Holiday for education institutions in Manipur extended till today

IMPHAL, June 3: The Manipur government has ordered extension of the closure of the educational institutions across the state till Tuesday.

Following the devastating flash flood that caused widespread destruction, the state government had earlier declared holiday for the educational institutions till May 31.

Separate orders issued on Sunday by the education (school) department and the higher and technical education department said the holiday has been extended till Tuesday.

The order issued by the education (school) department said that the state government has ordered the closure of schools (government, government aided, private and central) along with all the activities related with the admission process in schools till Tuesday in view of the widespread destruction and inconveniences caused to many households and installations across the state due to incessant rain and floods that followed.

All higher education institutions of the state government, government aided and private educational institutions would continue to remain closed till Tuesday as the number of houses and roads are still flooded and even the houses where water has receded are yet to be habitable, the order of the higher and technical education department stated. *(NNN)*

Tamang meets Governor, stakes claim to form new govt

GANGTOK, June 3: Chief minister Prem Singh Tamang on Monday called on Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya and submitted a resolution passed by newly-elected MLAs of Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) electing him as their legislature party leader to stake claim to form the next government, an official said.

He was accompanied by all the newly-elected SKM MLAs during the meeting with the Governor at the Raj Bhavan.

Acharya congratulated the newly elected MLAs and wished them well. It was not immediately known when the swearing-in ceremony of the chief minister and his council of ministers would take place, the official said.

Tamang the outgoing CM had called on the Governor on Sunday evening and had submitted his resignation to clear the decks for the formation of a new government.

Acharya had asked Tamang to continue as the chief minister for the time being. The SKM won 31 of the 32 seats in the assembly elections, the counting for which was held on Sunday. The opposition SDF secured one seat. *(PTI)*

Victory rallies shouldn't hamper law and order: East Khasi Hills DC

SHILLONG, June 3: East Khasi Hills deputy commissioner and returning officer of Shillong parliamentary constituency, SC Sadhu on Monday reiterated that victory processions and rallies should not disturb law and order during the counting of votes.

Speaking to the media following an inspection at the counting centre in Shillong, Sadhu said all arrangements have been made to ensure that counting is done efficiently and in a transparent manner involving all political parties. For law and order, elaborate arrangements have been made to ensure that no unauthorized persons enter the premises of the counting.

"Though, we have relaxed the provision of the initial order of 144 CrPC with respect to rallies and processions, all other provisions of that order are still intact to ensure no forces, no persons or groups disturb the counting process," he said.

The DC said, "After issuing of the order, many stakeholders including political parties and some NGOs and traditional heads appealed to us to relax the provision on rallies and processions and after discussing with all of them, we decided to will relax it. At the same time, we appeal to them to ensure that processions and rallies should not hamper the law and order situation."

He also said that the candidates and the political parties had assured that they would take appropriate measures to ensure there no untoward incidents occur due to the rallies.

Sadhu said, "The political parties and contesting candidates have been instructed to inform us in advance what route they would to carry out the processions. They have to deploy enough volunteers and brief their teams on how to conduct these processions and rallies in a peaceful manner so as not to disturb others and maintain the law and order situation." *(NNN)*

Wall of PA Sangma Sports Complex collapses

SHILLONG, June 3: A portion of the outer wall of the PA Sangma Sports Complex in Tura, which is currently under construction, has collapsed.

"The collapse of the wall has not impacted the main structure of the stadium at all," director of the department of sports and youth affairs, Isawanda Laloo said in a statement issuedon Sunday.

She also said that the Hindustan Steelworks Construction Ltd. (HSCL), which was responsible for the construction of the entire sports complex, was directed to submit a detailed report on the incident.

Laloo said that the heavy rainfall resulted in a water catastrophe that subdued the provisional drainage systems that had been put up. The systems had been erected to regulate water collection, sanitation, and discharge from the STP tank, Indoor Hall 1, Indoor Hall 2, and the complex.

"However, because the construction of these amenities is still underway, the permanent drainage solutions are yet to be fitted. It gave an outlet to the water for a short distance, but was choked by the rain, after which the wall fell over," she added.

Stating that the collapsed wall was constructed as a temporary measure to demarcate and prevent possible encroachment of the land, she said that other constructions in that location were underway, and further updates would be provided after the office received the report from the construction company.

Further, Laloo informed that the West Garo Hills district administration took immediate measures to ensure safety of residents in the surrounding area. *(NNN)*

Centre to become hub of excellence in peace research and studies among ASEAN countries

Jahanara and Anwar Saikia Centre for Peace Studies inaugurated at USTM

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 3: The University of Science and Technology Meghalaya (USTM) has established the Jahanara and Anwar Saikia Centre for Peace Studies dedicated to peace research and studies in the northeastern region of India and its diverse communities.

The inauguration took place on June 1, led by Gauri Dutt Sharma, vice chancellor of USTM and Yasmin Saikia, the Hardt-Nickachos Chair in Peace Studies at Arizona State University, USA. The centre is named in honor of Yasmin Saikia's parents.

Saikia has generously contributed Rs 1 crore to USTM for the development of the centre, with USTM providing the land for its construction. The centre aims to become a hub of excellence in peace research and studies among ASEAN countries.

USTM chancellor, M. Hoque expressed profound gratitude to Saikia and her family for their voluntary sponsorship of the centre. Prof. The latter will serve as the founding director, with Trishna M. Thakuria as the coordinator.

During the inauguration, G.D. Sharma conveyed his confidence in the

centre's potential to enhance USTM's global competitiveness. He thanked Saikia for her noble initiative and significant support in establishing this institution.

Saikia shared insights from her experiences at leading US universities, suggesting best practices to make the centre a hub of excellence in education, research, and innovation aiming for a positive social impact. She emphasized that USTM will focus intensively on peace research and studies through this fully-fledged centre, the foundation for which was laid last year on the university campus.

It is well recognized that peace studies are highly relevant and urgently needed in today's climate of increasing unrest and intolerance, both locally and globally. Establishing a center dedicated to peace studies can play a crucial role in uniting stakeholders through collaborative efforts, working together to promote and achieve peace.

Saikia, holding the Hardt-Nickachos Chair in Peace Studies at the Center for the Study of Religion and Conflict and a professorship in history at the School of Historical, Philosophical and Religious Studies, focuses her work on the histories of memory and identity, women, war, and peace, and the histories of premodern and contemporary South Asia. She examines Muslim experiences in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, exploring the discourse of nonviolence and the practice of violence against women and vulnerable groups. Her approach to peace studies integrates cultural, historical, and individual and group agency perspectives, aiming to advance the study of peace through a humanities-oriented lens.

All set for counting of votes in Lok Sabha seat in Nagaland

KOHIMA, June 3: All preparations have been made in Nagaland for counting of votes in the lone Lok Sabha seat on Tuesday, chief electoral officer Vyasan R said.

Counting of votes will begin at 8 am across 17 different centres across the state, he said.

"We are all set for counting of votes in the lone Lok Sabha seat, where elections were held in the first phase on April 19," Vyasan told PTI.

Three-tier security arrangements have been made at the counting centres, he said.

Although zero turnout was recorded at polling stations in six districts of eastern Nagaland, counting centres have been set up in those areas as well.

Three candidates -- Congress nominee and party's state president S Supongmeren Jamir, Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party and consensus candidate of Peoples' Democratic Alliance government Chumben Murry and Independent aspirant Hayithung Tungoe Lotha -- contested the election to the lone seat in the lower house of Parliament. *(PTI)*

অসম লোকসেৱা আয়োগ
ASSAM PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION
Jawaharnagar, Khanapara, Guwahati-781022.

No. 52PSC/DR-55/1/2023-24

NOTIFICATION

It is for information to all concerned that the Assam Public Service Commission will hold the Interview/Viva-Voce for the post of **Conservation Officer (Gr.II)** in the Directorate of Archaeology , Assam under Indigenous and Tribal Faith and Cultural Department (**Advt. No.: 24 /2023, dated: 25 /08/2023**)as per programme given below at its office at Jawaharnagar, Khanapara, Guwahati-22.

Sl. No	Name of the Post & Department	Date of Interview/ Viva - Voce	Reporting Time
1	Conservation Officer (Gr.II)	15/06/2024	9:00 AM

Kindly note that the candidates appearing the interview/viva-voce **must bring the following testimonials in original along with self attested photocopies in chronological order, thereof for verification/scrutiny on the day of the interview:**

i. H.S.L.C Admit/Pass Certificate as a proof of age.
ii. H.S.L.C Marksheet and Pass Certificate.
iii. H.S.S.L.C Marksheet and Pass Certificate (If applicable)
iv. Diploma marksheet (all semester) and Pass certificate
v. CGPA Conversion Formula of the respective universities
vi. Experience Certificate (if any)
vii. Permanent Residential Certificate/Employment Exchange Registration/Voter ID.
viii. **State Government Employees of Assam must submit No Objection Certificate from their respective employer or Permanent Residential Certificate/Employment Exchange Registration/Voter ID as domicile proof.**
ix. Caste/PwBD certificate/BPL Card (if applicable).
x. Declaration Form A *("May be downloaded from APSC's website")*
xi. Any other documents that may be relevant for their candidature.

No intimation letter to the eligible candidates shall be sent separately by post. **The intimation letters shall be uploaded on 07-06-2024 in the APSC's website (www.apsc.nic.in).** The candidates shall have to download their own intimation letter from the aforesaid website.

Sd/-
Deputy Secretary,
Assam Public Service Commission
Jawaharnagar, Khanapara, Guwahati-22

Janasanyog /D/1182/ 24/4-Jun-24

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Need to work quickly on scale, scope, standards to make country 'Viksit Bharat': PM Modi

NEW DELHI, June 3: Prime Minister Narendra Modi has called for the nation to "reassess outdated thinking and beliefs" and free "our society from the pressure of professional pessimists", asserting that the foundation for a "Viksit Bharat" must be laid in the 25 years in the run up to the centenary of India's independence.

"The world of the 21st century is looking towards Bharat with many hopes. And we will need to make several changes to move forward in the global scenario. We also need to change our traditional thinking regarding reform. Bharat cannot limit reform to just economic reforms," he said in an article which he had penned on June 1 on his flight to Delhi from Kanyakumari.

He had reached Kanyakumari on May 30 on a spiritual sojourn after the Lok Sabha polls campaign ended. Modi called upon people to move forward in every aspect of life towards the direction of reform.

In the write-up, which appeared in many newspapers on Monday, Modi said India's reforms should also align with the aspirations of a 'Viksit Bharat' (developed India) by 2047, stating that reform can never be a unidimensional process for any country.

"Therefore, I have laid out the vision of reform, perform, and transform for the country. The responsibility of reform lies with leadership. Based on that, our bureaucracy performs, and when the people join in with the spirit of Jan Bhagidari, we witness a transformation taking place," he said.

The article appeared a day before the counting of votes for the Lok Sabha elections takes place, with exit polls predicting that Modi is set to retain power for a record-equalling third term with a big majority for the ruling BJP.

In a clear elucidation of his government's agenda if it is re-elected, he said, "We must make excellence the fundamental principle to make our country a 'Viksit Bharat'. We need to work quickly in all four directions: Speed, Scale, Scope, and Standards. Alongside manufacturing, we must also focus on quality and adhere to the mantra of 'zero defect-zero effect'."

He added, "As a nation, we also need to reassess outdated thinking and beliefs. We need to free our society from the pressure of professional pessimists. We must remember that freedom from negativity is the first step towards achieving success. Success blossoms in the lap of positivity."

The prime minister said his faith, devotion and belief in the infinite and eternal power of 'Bharat' are growing day by day. Over the past 10 years, he has seen the country's capability grow even more and has experienced it firsthand.

He said, "Just as we utilised the fourth and fifth decades of the 20th century to impart a new momentum to the freedom movement, we must lay the foundation for a 'Viksit Bharat' in these 25 years of the 21st century. The freedom struggle was a time that called for great sacrifices. The present times call for great and sustained contributions from everyone."

The prime minister meditated at the Rock Memorial, a monument built in tribute to Swami Vivekananda who had engaged himself in a spiritual exercise there.

Modi said India's governance model has become an example for many countries around the world, with over 25 crore people rising above poverty in just 10 years in an unprecedented development. Innovative practices such as pro-people good governance, aspirational districts, and aspirational blocks are being discussed globally today, he said, claiming his government's efforts have inspired the world by prioritizing individuals standing at the last rung of society.

The 'Digital India' campaign is now an example for the entire world, showing how people can use technology to empower the poor, bring transparency, and ensure their rights, he said, adding that inexpensive data is becoming a means of social equality by ensuring the reach of information and services to the poor".

The whole world is witnessing and studying the democratisation of technology, and major global institutions are advising many countries to adopt elements from our model," he said.

He added, "Today, Bharat's progress and rise are not just a significant opportunity for Bharat alone, but also a historic opportunity for all our partner countries around the world. Since the success of the G-20, the world has been increasingly envisioning a bigger role for Bharat."

India is now being acknowledged as a strong and important voice of the Global South, he said. "The African Union has become a part of the G-20 group at the initiative of Bharat. This is going to be a crucial turning point for the future of African countries."

India's development trajectory fills people with pride and glory, but at the same time, it also reminds the 140 crore citizens of their responsibilities, he said.

"Now, without wasting a single moment, we must step forward towards greater duties and larger goals. We need to dream new dreams, convert them into reality and begin living those dreams," he said.

"The world of the 21st century is looking towards Bharat with many hopes. And we will need to make several changes to move forward in the global scenario. We also need to change our traditional thinking regarding reform.

"Bharat cannot limit reform to just economic reforms. We must move forward in every aspect of life towards the direction of reform. Our reforms should also align with the aspirations of a 'Viksit Bharat' (developed India) by 2047," he said. *(PTI)*

INDIA bloc will win maximum seats in UP: Akhilesh

Minister questions credibility of exit polls

LUCKNOW, June 3: A day before the votes are counted in the Lok Sabha elections, Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav invoked Mahatma Gandhi's "do or die" call for the country's future and said the youth are ready to sacrifice themselves.

At a press conference here on Monday, Yadav questioned the veracity of the exit polls which have predicted a comfortable victory for the BJP-led NDA and claimed that the agencies conducting them were only trying to create a conducive atmosphere in favour of the BJP.

He said the BJP's "corrupt policies" are not capable of protecting the nation, adding that youth are now ready to take part in a "new freedom movement".

"That is why the public, remembering Mahatma Gandhi's 'do or die' call, is now agitated and ready to fight a new freedom movement to save their own and the country's future. People are ready to sacrifice their lives like freedom fighters and youths are tying 'kafan' (shroud) over their heads and saying 'Mera Rang De Basanti Chola'," Yadav said in Hindi.

The former Uttar Pradesh chief minister said that the INDIA bloc's victory will be a victory for the country and its people.

"Our exit poll says that the INDIA bloc is winning the maximum number of seats in Uttar Pradesh. I have got an internal survey done that also shows good numbers for us," he said.

"We and you (media) were among the people to strengthen democracy. We have seen they (BJP) did not have people (in their rallies), their tents were empty...nothing was seen in their favour," Yadav said.

Questioning the exit polls, the SP chief alleged that many agencies that conducted the exit polls used to do work of booth management for the BJP.

"They (exit polls agencies) are making a 'mahaul' (conducive atmosphere) in the BJP's favour," he said.

"They (BJP) want to threaten the opposition. This has been their politics since the beginning... But this time, people are ready. Our youths and all sections of society are ready to protect the votes cast by them," Yadav said.

On the Election Commission revising polling percentages days after voting, Yadav said, "The Election Commission should reply to this. I hope the EC will follow all the rules."

Urging the poll watchdog to make adequate security arrangements for agents of opposition parties, the SP chief claimed that when the BJP appears weak, it will try to threaten the agents as the administration is with the party.

"It might happen that they will slow counting or cut the power at night," he alleged.

"The elections are over. The exit polls are showing many things. The BJP is responsible for many things. They disturbed peace and brotherhood. They conspired to end the reservation. They increased crime against women. They made a record of wrong behaviour. They triggered inflation and unemployment. The poor become poorer," Yadav added.

The SP leader blamed the BJP for paper leaks in Uttar Pradesh and also referred to atrocities on women in Hathras and Manipur. He alleged that historic corruption was done in the name of electoral bonds. Sharpening his attack on the BJP, Yadav said, "Businesses were ruined by demonetisation. Small shopkeepers were made victims of recession by corrupt GST. BJP wanted to usurp farmers' land and to bring black laws for farmers. It did not give remunerative prices for crops and pushed the country into unemployment."

"Loans worth billions of rupees of the rich were waived but farmers had to commit suicide due to loans. Savings of the middle class were rendered useless by reducing interest rates and other charges.

"The BJP government brought a deadly vaccine without testing. This will have a direct impact on the health of the public and will also affect the health of the coming generations," Yadav added.

Exit polls on Saturday predicted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will retain power for a third straight term, with the BJP-led NDA expected to win a big majority in the Lok Sabha polls. *(PTI)*

Exit polls do not reflect pulse of people: Tharoor

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, June 3: Senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor on Monday said the exit polls, which have predicted a third term for the BJP at the Centre, do not reflect the pulse of the people accurately and asserted that the opposition INDIA bloc will be getting 295 seats in the Lok Sabha elections. Congress viewed the exit polls with 'skepticism,' he said. Counting of votes polled for 543 Lok Sabha seats over seven phases will be done on Tuesday across the country. Various post-poll surveys have backed the BJP to romp home with a strong majority. Tharoor cited Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge's assertion earlier that the INDIA bloc will get more than 295 seats.The senior leader, who is the Congress-led UDF candidate for Thiruvananthapuram, said he and his party are quite relaxed going into the counting on Tuesday, and once again exuded confidence that he would emerge victorious from here for the fourth straight time.Speaking to the media after sending a copy of Mahatma Gandhi's autobiography to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a protest organised by the KPCC's Gandhi Darshan Samithi, Tharoor said the exit polls were done based on some sampling, which was not scientific. The Congress held a protest against Modi's recent remark that the "world did not know of Mahatma Gandhi till the film 'Gandhi' was made".

"We are seeing it (exit poll results) with skepticism and disbelief. We have also campaigned across the country. We also have a sense of what the pulse of the people is, and we do not believe that is reflected accurately in this poll," Tharoor, who is also the Congress Working Committee member said. *(PTI)*

BJP leaders hold meeting on eve of LS poll counting

NEW DELHI, June 3: Senior BJP leaders, including Union ministers Amit Shah and Rajnath Singh, held a meeting on Monday to discuss the party's performance in the Lok Sabha polls and its preparation for the counting of votes scheduled to take place on June 4. The meeting, presided over by BJP chief J P Nadda, was also learnt to have taken stock of the prevailing political situation following the exit polls predicting a big win for the BJP-led NDA, and the opposition INDIA bloc's series of meetings rejecting the forecast.

"A meeting was held to discuss and review the elections conducted in seven phases and also to discuss the counting of votes which is to take place tomorrow. The meeting was presided over by party national president J P Nadda," BJP national general secretary Vinod Tawde told reporters here after the meeting.

He said the meeting discussed the voting pattern observed during all seven phases of polls as to how polling took place. "This was also reviewed," he added.

Tawde said the meeting, which was attended by BJP national general secretaries and secretaries, held an "extensive discussion" on all seven phases of the Lok Sabha elections and deliberated on the deployment of party's polling agents across the country for counting of votes.

"That polling agents reach in time across all booths, their proper deployment, whether there is any problem in this – all these things were discussed," he said.

The meeting also discussed if there is "any suspicion" over counting of votes anywhere and party office bearers were asked to pay "special attention" to such a situation, he said.

Asked if the meeting also discussed BJP's plans for celebrating its victory with most of the exits polls projecting it to be getting a massive mandate for a third consecutive term, Tawde said, "There is no such discussion on this at present. We look into this only after seeing the trends, not on the basis of the exit polls' projections."

Replying to a query on formation of the party's government, the BJP leader said there was no discussion at the meeting on it. "The meeting only reviewed the elections and voting and discussed arrangements and deployment (of party workers) for counting of votes," he added.

At the meeting, senior BJP leaders are learnt to have also brainstormed over the party's strategy to take on the opposition but there was no official word from the party in this regard.

A BJP delegation had on Sunday approached the Elections Commission, accusing the Congress and its allies of trying to undermine the integrity of India's electoral process, and urged the poll body to prevent any attempts of "violence and unrest" during the counting of votes for the Lok Sabha polls on June 4. *(PTI)*

INDIA bloc going to win big in Bihar: RJD

PATNA, June 3: The RJD on Monday claimed that the INDIA bloc, helmed by it in Bihar, would notch up a tally of "25-plus" in the state with 40 Lok Sabha seats, dubbing exit polls as a "psychological trick".

RJD national spokesperson Manoj Kumar Jha made the statement at a press conference he addressed, flanked by alliance partners, less than 24 hours before the counting of votes was to commence.

"The exit polls have played a psychological trick. Huge money is involved in the exercise. We are told that besides the stock markets, the Prime Minister's Office also has a stake," Jha claimed.

Most exit polls have predicted that the NDA will retain the upper hand in the state, but fall short of the near clean sweep of 2019 when it wrested all but one seat.

Jha said, "The exit poll agencies may claim to have carried out their own surveys. But we gained a first-hand sense of the popular sentiments during the elections. Our leader Tejashwi Yadav, and the coalition represented by him, promised jobs, fresh recruitment in railways and restoration of earlier system of employment in armed forces."

"On the other hand, all that was on offer from NDA were threats of theft of buffaloes, mangalsutras, and water taps," remarked the RJD leader, in a veiled dig at PM Narendra Modi's election speeches.

Jha alleged that "manipulations" during the counting process had prevented the Mahagathbandhan, headed by the RJD, from getting a majority in the 2020 assembly polls and warned of a "pratikaar" (backlash) if similar attempts were made on Tuesday.

"There were at least 10 seats where the contest was close and where our candidates had been called to collect their certificates, only to be told later that they have lost. We expect the officials involved in the counting process to go strictly by the book and not act upon phone calls they might receive from higher-ups," alleged the RJD leader.

He claimed, "There have been a high number of votes cast through postal ballots this time. Such votes are often known to be in favour of a change. We expect that these will be counted properly, taking all parties into confidence."

"We also expect that photo copies of Form 17C will be made available to candidates and counting agents, and every round will be declared complete only after all parties have expressed their satisfaction," he added. *(PTI)*

Over 89.21 lakh votes up for counting

Delhi poll body geared for D-day

NEW DELHI, June 3: The arrangements for the D-day for counting of over 89.21 lakh votes that will begin at 8 am across the seven constituencies of Delhi have been notched up with the authorities deploying a three-tier security arrangement at the counting centres.

The officials at the Delhi poll body said that a total of 7,000 personnel would be deployed at the seven counting centres.

"We have made all the necessary arrangements for the counting tomorrow which will start at 8 am sharp. The required security deployment has been made which includes a three-tier security arrangement at the counting centre. The manpower of counting staff is trained and ready," Delhi Chief Electoral Officer P. Krishnamurthy told PTI.

"There will be a total of 7,000 personnel and each segment will have about 1,000 personnel, which includes a lot of support staff who will assist in works such as carrying the EVMs from the strong room to counting halls and back," he added.

Digital monitors will be set up outside the counting centres to share the trends and the poll body personnel will also make mic announcement on the candidates leading in the initial trends.

Around 21 to 28 rounds of counting will take place to count a total of 89,21,495 votes that were cast by 58.69 per cent electorates, which includes 59.03 per cent men, 58.29 per cent women and 28.01 third gender individuals.

The counting is expected to be completed sooner in the New Delhi constituency where only 8,45,285 votes were cast. The North-east Delhi constituency may take more time in the counting of votes as it recorded the highest number of voter turn out with 15,49,202 votes.

Seven returning officers will head a team of dozens of assistant officers and observers, who will oversee the counting of votes in their respective constituencies under CCTV surveillance of about 1,000 cameras installed at every nook and corner of the counting centre.

The strong rooms where the polled EVMs have been stored since May 25 will be opened around 6.30 am in the presence of the candidates in fray and party representatives.

After the counting begins, first the postal ballots will be counted and then the EVMs will be opened.

Each constituency will have one counting centre where the polled EVMs and VVPATs will be desealed to count the votes. These counting centres have 10 halls with about seven to 14 tables where voting of each of the assembly segments of the parliamentary constituency will be counted.

The location of these counting centres are -- SKV, Bharat Nagar in Chandni Chowk; ITI, Nand Nagri in North East Delhi; Sports Complex, CWG Village in East Delhi; Atal Adarsh Balika Vidyalaya, Gole Market in New Delhi; DTU, Shahbad Daulatpur in Northwest Delhi; NSUT, Dwarka in West Delhi; and Jijabai ITI for Women, Siri Fort in South Delhi.

A total of 162 candidates were in the fray for the May 25 Lok Sabha polls in Delhi with the maximum contesting from North East Delhi constituency, according to official data.

According to data shared by the office of the Delhi Chief Electoral Officer, 17 candidates were contesting from the New Delhi Lok Sabha seat, which was the least across the seven constituencies. There were 28 candidates in fray from North East Delhi.

Delhi Police has made elaborate arrangements at each centre to avert any untoward situation during the counting process. Around 70 companies of the force will be deployed at all the seven counting centres across Delhi on Tuesday.

Every polling station has a three layered security with two companies of the paramilitary force at the inner portion and personnel of the Delhi Armed Police (DAP) and local police at its outer layers, an officer said.

Overall 7,000 personnel have been deployed at the counting centres.

"Each counting centre will have an average of 1,000 personnel," the officer said.

He further said that the counting centres have been covered with CCTV cameras and drones to keep an eye on every corner.

"Around 200 CCTV cameras have been installed at each counting centre," the officer said.

The political parties' representatives can visit the counting centres but they will not be allowed to interfere in the counting process. *(PTI)*

El Nino ending; at least 60 pc chance of La Nina developing during July-Sept: WMO

WMO Global Producing Centres of Long-Range Forecasts give equal chances (50 per cent) to either neutral conditions or a transition to La Nina during June-August.

NEW DELHI, June 3: The 2023-24 El-Nino event, which drove record-breaking temperatures and extreme weather around the world, is predicted to transition to La-Nina conditions later this year, according to a new update from the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

The world experienced the warmest April ever and the 11th consecutive month of record-high temperatures this year. Sea-surface temperatures have been record-high for the last 13 months, according to the WMO.

The WMO said this is happening due to the naturally-occurring El Nino -- unusual warming of waters in the central and eastern Pacific Ocean -- and the additional energy trapped in the atmosphere and ocean by greenhouse gases from human activities.

Amid a prevailing but weakening El Nino, millions of people in South Asia, including India and Pakistan, endured brutal heat in April and May.

The latest forecasts from the Meteorological Department (IMD) had forecast above-normal rain in the monsoon season in India, with favourable La-Nina conditions expected to set in by August-September.

Monsoon is critical for India's agricultural landscape, with 52 per cent of the net cultivated area relying on it. It is also crucial for replenishing reservoirs critical for drinking water, apart from power generation across the country.

"Every month since June 2023 has set a new temperature record and 2023 was by far the warmest year on record. The end of El Nino does not mean a pause in long-term climate change as our planet will continue to warm due to heat-trapping greenhouse gases. Exceptionally high sea-surface temperatures will continue to play an important role during the next months," WMO Deputy Secretary-General Ko Barrett said.

The last nine years have been the warmest on record even with the cooling influence of a multi-year La Nina from 2020 to early 2023.

El Nino peaked in December 2023 as one of the five strongest on record.

"Our weather will continue to be more extreme because of the extra heat and moisture in our atmosphere. This is why the 'Early Warnings for All' initiative remains the WMO's top priority. Seasonal forecasts for El Nino and La Nina and the anticipated impacts on the climate patterns globally are an important tool to inform early warnings and early action," said Barrett, who is leading a WMO delegation at the UN Climate Change session in Germany's Bonn.

La-Nina conditions generally follow strong El-Nino events, and this is in line with recent model predictions, although high uncertainty remains regarding its strength or duration. According to the WMO, above-normal sea-surface temperatures in all areas are expected to persist outside the near-equatorial eastern Pacific Ocean.

There is, therefore, widespread prediction of above-normal temperatures over almost all land areas. (PTI)

While El Nino is associated with weaker monsoon winds and drier conditions in India, La Nina -- the antithesis of El Nino -- leads to plentiful rainfall during the monsoon. Last month, the India Mete-

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NIA charge sheets 17 hardcore ISIS operatives in India

NEW DELHI, June 3: The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Monday chargesheeted 17 hardcore agents of the proscribed global terrorist organisation ISIS for being part of a conspiracy involving radicalisation of youth and fabrication of improvised explosive devices, according to an official statement.

The NIA had originally chargesheeted three persons in March 2023 and filed its supplementary chargesheet before the special court at Patiala House in New Delhi on Monday against 17 others, of whom 15 are from Maharashtra and one each from Uttarakhand and Haryana, it said.

This takes the total number of accused chargesheeted in the case, which had exposed global linkages with foreign handlers, to 20, said the statement issued by the federal probe agency.

The accused, chargesheeted under various sections of the Indian Penal Code, Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, Arms Act and Explosive Substances Act, "were found to have been engaged in a massive ISIS conspiracy involving recruitment, training and propagation of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) ideology among gullible youth, along with fabrication of explosives and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and fund-raising for the banned outfit", it said.

The NIA, which has been cracking down on various ISIS modules active in the country with the intent to dismantle the nefarious terror network of the international organisation, had registered a case in November 2023 to probe this terror conspiracy.

Its investigation had subsequently led to the seizure of several incriminating documents and data relating to manufacturing of explosives and fabrication of IEDs, along with propaganda magazines like 'Voice of Hind', 'Rumiyah', 'Khilafat', 'Dabiq', published by the Islamic State (IS), the statement said.

The agency had further found during investigations that the accused had been sharing digital files related to IED fabrication with their contacts.

They were also found to be actively raising funds to further their terror plans as part of the ISIS agenda to spread violence in India and destroy its secular ethos and democratic systems, it said.

The accused had carried out several acts preparatory to unleashing terrorist attacks, including recruitment of vulnerable youth into the organisation, the statement said.

"They had taken 'bayath' (pledge of allegiance) from an arrested accused Saquib Nachan, a habitual offender in many previous terror cases and a self-styled Amir-e-Hind for ISIS in India," the NIA said.

The chargesheeted accused are part of Delhi-Padgha (Maharashtra) ISIS terror module case, an official said, adding the NIA is actively pursuing investigations in the case to trace further links of the accused persons. (PTI)

7 ex-HC judges write to Prez , urge her to uphold Constitution if results throw hung parl

NEW DELHI, June 3: Seven former high court judges on Monday wrote an open letter to President Droupadi Murmu urging her to follow the "established democratic precedent" and invite the largest pre-poll alliance to form the government to preempt horse trading if the 2024 general elections lead to a hung Parliament.

The retired judges also urged Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud and the chief election commissioner to uphold the Constitution by ensuring a smooth transition of power, if the present ruling dispensation loses people's mandate.

The open letter is signed by six former Madras High Court judges G M Akbar Ali, Aruna Jagadeesan, D Hariparanthaman, P R Shivakumar, C T Selvam, S Vimala and former judge of Patna High Court Anjana Prakash. They said there was "genuine concern" that if the present ruling dispensation loses people's mandate, the transition of power may not be smooth and there could be a constitutional crisis.

Concurring with the May 25 open statement of Constitutional Conduct Group (CCG) of former civil servants, the former judges said, "We are constrained to agree with the scenario envisaged in the above statement: 'In the event of a hung parliament, onerous responsibilities will be placed upon the shoulders of the President of India.

"We are sure that she will follow the established democratic precedent of first inviting the pre-poll alliance that garnered the largest number of seats. Also, that she would endeavour to preempt the possibilities of horse-trading…."

It also urged the CJI and the CEC to uphold the Constitution in such an eventuality and ensure smooth transition of power.

"We, former high court judges, having no affiliation to any political party, but strongly committed to the ideals enshrined in the Constitution, and to the values of electoral democracy, write this open letter from a deep anguish at the recent and present goings-on with regard to the parliamentary elections of 2024," the letter, issued to media on June 3, said.

"Several events over the past weeks are making for a very grim storyline; one that may possibly end in a violent conclusion. These are genuine apprehensions in the minds of the vast majority of our people. Reputed civil and human rights organisations and activists have also echoed the same apprehension," it said.

It said the Election Commission's refusal to disclose the exact number of votes cast in each booth of every constituency and to make form 17(C) of conduct of election rules available to the public, along with the minimal action taken against hate speech targeting minorities and opposition parties by senior leaders of the ruling party, are major concerns.

The letter said the Supreme Court, being the final authority to defend and protect the Constitution and democracy, should be ready to take "proactive action to prevent any potential catastrophe or to address any monstrous situations that may arise during counting and declaration of results."

"We, the people of India as citizens of a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic hereby call upon the Supreme Court to ensure the presence and attendance of the top five esteemed justices of the Supreme Court even during the period of the ongoing summer vacation and be available to respond in the event of any constitutional crisis that might emerge in the present situation," the letter said.

It said the former judges hoped that their apprehensions were wrong and the elections would end smoothly but they believed that prevention is better than cure.

"We therefore, seek in humility to remind each of the authorities and institutions charged with the integrity of the process of democratic government formation of their paramount duty to abide by and uphold the Constitution," it added. *(PTI)*

Cable cut hits Western Railway's Mumbai suburban services; issue resolved after 11 hrs

MUMBAI, June 3: Commuters in Mumbai faced significant disruptions on Monday as local train services on the Western Railway network were severely impacted by technical issues because of cable cuts at Borivali station, a bustling hub in north Mumbai known for its heavy footfall of daily commuters and office-goers.

The incident, occurring around 2 am, led to the cancellation of several suburban services and widespread delays for passengers travelling on the route.

Western Railway officials worked tirelessly to resolve the problem, which took approximately 11 hours to rectify.

A senior Western Railway official told PTI that monsoon preparatory work was responsible for the technical issues, as the cable got cut when excavation work for a drain was underway at Borivali on Sunday night.

Chief PRO of Western Railways, Sumit Thakur, announced on social media that last night, local train services from platforms no. 1 and 2 at Borivali station were affected due to a cable cut. Local train services from other platforms were running smoothly.

"Due to the promptness of the technical team

and other railway workers, platform no. 1 was restored at 12.05 pm and platform no. 2 at 1.30 pm. During this period, additional local trains were also run for the convenience of passengers," Thakur said.

To alleviate the strain on commuters, extra Metro services were plied to manage the influx of passengers resulting from the delays on the Western Railway network.

Despite the restoration of four track changing points and resumption of train operations from platform no. 1 at Borivali station by midday, some travellers reported ongoing delays of 15 to 20 minutes on the Western Railway suburban services.

Anxious passengers took to X, formerly known as Twitter, to express their grievances and post videos of the chaos at the railway station.

The Western Railway, which typically operates over 1,300 suburban services catering to a daily ridership of around 30 lakh passengers spanning from Churchgate to Dahanu, strived to mitigate the impact by running additional services.

In response to the increased demand caused by the disrupted local train services, the Maha Mumbai Metro Operation Corporation Limited deployed extra services along Metro Line 2A and Line 7, witnessing heightened overcrowding at Borivali, Kurar, and Rashtriya Udyan stations.

The Metropolitan Commissioner of Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority instructed the provision of extra services on Metro lines to ease the rush until normalcy is restored.

As the Western Railway network gradually returns to regular operations, authorities continue to monitor the situation and implement measures to ensure a smooth commuting experience for passengers in Mumbai. *(PTI)*

20 people die due to sunstroke in Odisha in 3 days

BHUBANESWAR, June 3: Twenty people died due to sunstroke in Odisha over the last three days as the state was reeling under intense heatwave conditions, an official statement said.

Since Friday, a total of 99 suspected sunstroke deaths were reported by different districts. After post-mortem and inquiry, 20 were confirmed as sunstroke deaths, while two deaths happened due to other causes, said the statement issued by the state's Special Relief Commission. An investigation is underway in the rest of the cases, it added. Prior to this, 42 suspected sunstroke deaths were reported, and of them six cases were confirmed, and it was found that another six deaths happened due to other causes, the statement said.

The deaths were mostly reported from Bolangir, Sambalpur, Jharsuguda, Keonjhar, Sonepur, Sundergarh and Balasore districts, officials said. Chief Secretary Pradeep Kumar Jena and Special Relief Commissioner Satyabrata Sahu reviewed the situation with the district collectors on Sunday. They instructed the district administrations to implement the advisory on heatwave, and take precautionary measures. The districts were also asked to ensure post-mortem examination of every suspected sunstroke death for sanction of ex-gratia. Also, a joint inquiry by the local revenue officer and the local medical officer needs to be conducted to ascertain the exact cause of each death, officials said.

Issuing an 'orange' alert, the IMD said heatwave conditions are very likely to prevail in Bargarh and Bolangir till Tuesday morning. It also issued a 'yellow' alert for Kalahandi, Nuapada and Sonepur districts. Apart from this, the IMD said that the hot and humid weather conditions are likely in Balasore, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Kendrapara, Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Puri, Khurda, Nayagarh, Ganjam and Gajapati. *(PTI)*

Lightning kills four in Odisha's Ganjam

BERHAMPUR, June 3: Four persons were killed in lightning strikes in separate places in Odisha's Ganjam district, a police officer said on Monday.

The deceased were identified as Sanyashi Sahu, Lambodar Panigrahy and Sanjay Gouda of Ganjam district and Dugun Pradhan of Khurda district, the officer said.

Sahu and Pradhan, who were selling toys at Pattapur had taken shelter near a tree in Pattapur during thunderstorm and rainfall when lightning struck them on Sunday.

"We found them unconscious and rushed them to hospital at Digapahandi, where the doctors declared them dead," said Ajay Kumar Swain, inspector in charge, Pattapur police station.

Sandhyarani Singh, inspector in charge, Badagarh police station said lightning struck Panigrahy on Sunday. He was rushed to Badagarh hospital, where doctors declared him dead, she said. *(PTI)*

Schools reopen in Kerala after summer vacation

Over 2.40 lakh students enrolled in Class 1

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, June 3: Over 2.40 lakh students enrolled in Class 1 across Kerala as the new academic year began in the state on Monday, following a two-month-long summer vacation.

In the new academic year, a total of 39,94,944 students, including 1,34,763 children in pre-primary, 11,59,652 in lower primary, and 12,09,882 students in high school, will be attending classes, state education department officials here said.

The total number of new admissions in Class 1 is 2,44,646, they said.

The exact number of children from Class 1 to 10 would be available only in the second week of June, as there are chances of more children joining schools during the period, the officials added.

Teachers welcomed the new students by decorating schools and classrooms with coloured festoons and glitter in various institutions across the state.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan inaugurated the state-level admission festival, titled 'Praveshanotsavam', at the Government Higher Secondary School at Elamakkara in Ernakulam district in the morning.

Vijayan, in his inaugural address, said the classrooms of state-run schools have become hi-tech, and they offer immense opportunities for entertainment and learning. He wished that students would make use of these facilities and opportunities to attain their goals.

The CM also stressed the role of teachers in inculcating scientific temper among students at a young age.

The government is strengthening the public education system in such a way as to enable children to face the new era and the world, he said.

Stating that diverse facilities are provided for children in the state-run schools, he said the institutions are well-equipped with hi-tech classrooms, robotic kits, and innovative curricula that promote knowledge with fun and creative skills in children.

Textbooks and uniforms were distributed in state-run schools before the beginning of the academic year, he said, adding that the transformation in schools is part of the continuation of the steps being taken by the government to change Kerala into a knowledge society.

The state's education sector comprises 13,000 schools, more than 45 lakh students, two lakh teachers, and over 20,000 non-teaching staff, the CM added.

Dances and other cultural events for students were organised as part of the inaugural event, which was also attended by General Education Minister V Sivankutty, Industries Minister P Rajeeve and other people's representatives. *(PTI)*

Follow fire protocol at hospitals: Union health secy to states

NEW DELHI, June 3: Union Health Secretary Apurva Chandra on Monday called for strict compliance with fire-safety protocols in a meeting with states and healthcare organisations, citing an increased possibility of fires in hospitals with high temperatures.

With the entire northern region reeling under a prolonged heatwave, incidents of fire, including in forests, are increasingly being reported.

Several of these fire incidents were reported to be caused by short circuits which happened due to sub-optimal electrical maintenance and/or overload of electricity lines with heavy use of air-conditioners and other equipment. "Given the potential risks associated with fire hazards in hospitals, it is imperative that strict protocols and measures be put in place to prevent, detect and respond to fires effectively.

"Establishing a robust fire safety plan and conducting fire-evacuation and safety drills will not only ensure compliance with regulatory requirements but also safeguard lives and property," Chandra said.

The Union Health Ministry has on several occasions communicated to all states and Union Territories that with the high temperature in the summer, hospital fires become a more significant threat and advised them to conduct regular preventive fire risk assessment drills to identify potentially vulnerable areas. The latest review meeting in this regard was held on May 29 under the co-chairmanship of the Additional Secretary (Public Health and Policy) and Director General of Health Services.

The meeting was attended by 15 representatives from state health departments and around 390 healthcare organisations.

In the meeting, Chandra advised the stakeholders to ensure better coordination with the local Public Works Departments and fire departments, so that fire safety 'No Objection Certificates' may be obtained on time.

A checklist on 'Prevention and Maintenance of Fire Safety' was shared with states and UTs with the request to get the same filled by all health facilities and revert on the same. All states and UTs have been asked to ensure stricter compliance with regulatory protocols and regular mock drills on fire safety after receiving feedback from macro-level assessments. *(PTI)*

Delhi hospital fire: Court rejects bail plea of on-duty doctor

NEW DELHI, June 3: A court here on Monday dismissed the bail plea of an on-duty doctor of a private hospital where a fire on May 25 killed seven newborns and injured five, saying no logical reason was given why despite being an ayurvedic doctor, the accused was working in the most critical ward of the facility. The court also denounced as "highly insensitive" the statement of the doctor that the infants were not victims of the blaze as they died due to suffocation and not burns. Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Vidhi Gupta Anand was hearing the bail plea of Dr Akash, who was on duty when the fire broke out at the hospital. He and the owner of the hospital, Dr Naveen Khichi, were sent to judicial custody for 14 days on May 30.

Rejecting the argument that Dr Akash was working at the hospital as a trainee, the court said the investigation has revealed that he provided treatment and gave prescriptions to the infants.

"Despite knowing that he was entitled to practise only in Haryana as a Bachelor of Ayurvedic Medicine and Surgery (BAMS) doctor as per the certificate of the Medical Council of Haryana, accused Dr Akash willingly started working in the most-sensitive zone of the hospital, i.e, Neo-natal Intensive Care Unit (NICU)," the court said.

"No logical reason has been given as to why despite being a BAMS doctor, Dr Akash was keen to learn practices of allopathic medicine and that too by working in the critical ward of the hospital," it added.

The court trashed the argument of the doctor's counsel that he should be lauded for his efforts to save children.

"The police investigation reveals that he had run away from the hospital when the fire began and rather than calling the police or the fire services, he called the owner of the hospital and in the entire process, almost half an hour was wasted which could have saved the lives of newborn babies," it said. The court said the statement of the accused's lawyer that the infants were not victims of the fire as they died due to suffocation and not burn injuries was "highly insensitive" and did not have any merit.

"It is without any doubt that the alleged offences are serious in nature and the investigation is at initial stages, and there are several aspects of the investigation, such as the supervisory role of the accused, collection of the prescriptions signed by him, his role in delaying the call to the police/fire services etc., which are yet to be investigated upon in detail," it added.

The court said the possibility of the doctor fleeing the process of law and influencing witnesses cannot be ruled out. It said according to judicial precedents, the accused has to approach a higher court of a sessions judge for bail. "The application for bail of the accused is accordingly dismissed," the court said. A massive fire broke out on the night of May 25 at the Baby Care New Born Child Hospital in east Delhi's Vivek Vihar that was allegedly being run illegally with an "expired" licence and without any clearance from the fire department. A case has been registered at the Vivek Vihar police station under Indian Penal Code (IPC) sections 336 (act endangering life and personal safety of others), 304A (causing death by negligence), 304 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder) and 308 (attempt to commit culpable homicide). The two doctors were arrested on May 26 and remanded in three-day police custody the next day. *(PTI)*

Railways' Gati Shakti Vishwavidyalaya signs MoU with Nokia, Plasser India, Jacobs to boost job skill

NEW DELHI, June 3: Gati Shakti Vishwavidyalaya, a Vadodara-based central university of Indian Railway, signed three Memorandums of Understanding with Nokia, Plasser India and Jacobs on Monday at Rail Bhawan here to significantly strengthen the partnership between industry and academia.

Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, who is the first Chancellor of Gati Shakti Vishwavidyalaya (GSV), thanked the three companies for coming forward for a collaboration that will benefit the students.

"I am glad that GSV is emerging as an institution at par with IITs in the country in such a short time. Today, three MoUs are being signed. It is an important milestone. I thank Nokia, Plasser India and Jacob for coming forward. Our approach is to focus on intense industry-academia partnerships. This will enable students to be job ready by their final year in the GSV institution," Vaishnaw said.

The first MoU, signed between Prof Manoj Choudhary (Vice-Chancellor, GSV) and Raghav Sahgal (President – Cloud and Network Services, Nokia), aims at focusing on collaboration with research in the domain of 5G/6G communications targeting air, land and sea transportation.

Prof Choudhary signed the second MoU with Siegfried Fink (Managing Director of Plasser India), which will provide an opportunity to collaborate in the area of track technology, promote industry experience and training for members of each party.

"It will also explore joint research opportunities in the transport and rail sector; provide internship and placement opportunities for the students of GSV," a senior railway official said.

Anil Relan (Vice President and Whole-time Director of Jacobs and Prof Choudhary inked the third MoU to enhance advancement in the field of research, teaching, and training activities pertaining to transport, rail and semiconductor sector.

"The MoU will also help in establishing center(s) of excellence in semiconductors, electronics manufacturing, and railways, including development of laboratories," the railway official said.

Besides Railway Minister, the Chairman and CEO, Railway Board Jaya Varma Sinha and senior officials were present on the occasion.

Experts from the field of rail transportation are of the view that with tremendous growth in the transportation and logistics sector as well as telecommunication sector, along with recent focus on semiconductor manufacturing in India, these MoUs are expected to create manpower for significant employment opportunities. GSV, which is an industry-driven and innovation-led university, entered into several collaborations with leading institutions and industries across the world such as AIRBUS, Delhi Metro Rail Corporation, Nippon Koei, Siemens DPIIT, Karmayogi Bharat,VLSI Society of India, and Chartered Institute of Logistics & Transport.

It has also partnered with IIM Mumbai, BITS Pilani, IIT Gandhinagar, IIT Jodhpur, NITTTR Bhopal, PGUPS Moscow, Indian Maritime University for academic support.

GSV Vadodara was established through an Act of Parliament in 2022, for creating best in class manpower and talent for the entire transportation and logistics sectors. *(PTI)*

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Singer Sonu Nigam awarded Honorary Fellowship in UK

LONDON, June 3: Bollywood singer Sonu Nigam, who was in the UK for a concert series, has been awarded an Honorary Fellowship by a leading Indian diaspora students' organisation for his worldwide impact in the field of music.

The National Indian Students and Alumni Union (NISAU) UK conferred Nigam with the Fellowship during his packed performance at Wembley Arena in London last weekend. It was presented on stage by veteran British Indian Labour MP Virendra Sharma and Professor Rachel Dwyer, Emeritus Professor of Indian Culture at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS).

"You once mentioned that music is not just your profession but your reason for being. It is this passion, coupled with your commitment to give back to the community that resonates deeply with what we stand for at NISAU," said NISAU UK Chair Sanam Arora in her speech at the ceremony.

"We strive to empower, to lead, and to inspire, principles you embody through your actions every day. You are not just a musical icon, but a bridge uniting hearts, minds and nations through music; and fostering community through your philanthropic efforts be it your fight for performers' rights or your championship of gender equality for instance through launching the world's first transgender band," she said.

The Honorary Fellowship, previously conferred upon actor Shabana Azmi, writer Javed Akhtar and spiritualist Sri Sri Ravi Shankar among others, acknowledges individuals who significantly impact Indian cultural exchange, education, and social improvement on a world stage.

"I am very touched to hear and read such kind words for me. Thank you NISAU for your love and this honour. I consider this as another precious gift from my Almighty," said Nigam on receiving the honour.

The 50-year-old multi-platinum selling Bollywood playback singer and Padma Shri concluded a UK-wide tour performing in London, Leeds, Glasgow, and Birmingham as part of a concert series celebrating 30 years of his chart-topping cinematic numbers including 'Kal Ho Naa Ho', 'Shukran Allah' and 'Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham'. ng Rajkummar Rao and Janhvi Kapoor, has garnered Rs 17.12 crore in its opening weekend, producers announced on Monday.

Directed by Sharan Sharma and produced by Zee Studios and Dharma Productions, the film premiered in theaters on Friday to a mixed reception.

In a social media post, Dharma Productions shared, "Love takes center field and makes it a dream weekend for our Mahis! Catch their winning partnership - book your tickets today. #MrAndMrsMahi in cinemas now!"

The plot revolves around Mahima, a doctor portrayed by Kapoor, who becomes a cricketer under the guidance and encouragement of her husband Mahendra, played by Rao. (PTI)

Janhvi Kapoor on foray into South cinema: It makes me feel closer to my mom

MUMBAI, June 3: Working in the south film industry makes her feel closer to her late superstar mother Sridevi, says actor Janhvi Kapoor, who is set to make her Telugu cinema debut with Jr NTR in "Devara".

The actor will star in another Telugu film with Ram Charan in his 16th movie. Kapoor, known for Hindi films such as "Dhadak", "Gunjan Saxena: The Kargil Girl", and "Mili", said it was the "right time" to make her South cinema debut.

"Somehow it makes me feel closer to my mom, to be in that environment, as well as to hear and speak in that language. It just felt like it was the right time, I felt I was gravitating towards it. "Mom has such a history with the families of NTR sir and Ram Charan sir, it's my honour that I'm able to work with both these extremely talented actors," the actor, whose latest release is "Mr. & Mrs. Mahi", told PTI.

Sridevi, who died in 2018 in Dubai at the age of 54, started her career as a child actor with M A Thirumugham's Tamil film "Thunaivan" (1969). While the late actor was fluent in Tamil, her mother tongue was Telugu.

The veteran star shared screen space with Charan's father Chiranjeevi in movies like "Jagadeka Veerudu Athiloka", "Ranuvu Veeran", "SP Parsuram" and "Mosagadu", among others. She co-starred with Telugu cinema veteran NT Rama Rao, grandfather of Jr NTR, in several films such as "Vetagaadu", "Satyam Shivam" and "Anuraga Devata".

Sridevi also acted in films such as "Anuraga Devatha", and "Simham Navvindi" among others, which were produced by NTR Jr's father Nandamuri Harikrishna.

Kapoor said she has grown up watching South movies and admires the onscreen "charisma" of actors. "I've always been a fan of their cinema. I love their conviction with which they make films and the charisma that the actors hold. Not that we don't have charisma here, (but) there's a swagger, the way they portray their heroes, they romanticise their heroines. There's a specific flavour to Telugu, Tamil and Malayalam cinema; they are all so individual," she said. "Dad has made so many remakes, so a big activity at home would be to watch Tamil and Telugu films. He was obsessed with buying their rights. It's been a big part of my upbringing to watch these films," the actor said, referring to her producer-father Boney Kapoor's filmography. (PTI)

My 'Matrix 4' character unlocked rage inside of me, says Jonathan Groff

LOS ANGELES, June 3: Actor and singer Jonathan Groff says his role in "The Matrix Resurrections" unlocked the "gay rage" inside him, which further helped him in preparing for the Broadway run of his musical "Merrily We Roll Along".

To play the part of Agent Smith in the fourth installment of the popular sci-fi franchise, the 39-year-old actor underwent months of kung fu training.

Groff, who publicly came out as gay in 2009, said film's director Lana Wachowski was surprised with his performance in an important stunt sequence.

"The Matrix Resurrections" also starred Keanu Reeves, Jessica Henwick, Priyanka Chopra Jonas and Erendria Ibarra. "Getting to play Agent Smith really unlocked rage inside of me that I didn't know was there. That's helped me so much with 'Merrily,' particularly in the first act.

Learning the kung fu was, like, months of fight training. They called me the Savage, because I was so into it. "We were shooting a big fight sequence with Keanu, and, after the first few takes, I remember Lana at the monitor, like, 'Jonathan, come over here. Who is that?' I was, like, 'I don't know.' And she was, like, 'And what is that?' I said, 'Gay rage?'," Groff told The New Yorker. For his work in "Merrily We Roll Along", the actor has received a Tony Award nomination in the best actor in a leading role in a musical category.

Featuring one of Stephen Sondheim's most celebrated and personal scores, and moving backwards in time, "Merrily" charts the turbulent relationship among three lifelong friends - played by Daniel Radcliffe, Groff, and Lindsay Mendez - and traces every milestone of their lives for nearly two decades as they navigate success, show business and unbreakable bonds. (PTI)

Important to critique, record and lift veil from journalism: Ravish Kumar

NEW DELHI, June 3: If a housing society starts to collapse, people start looking for better options and move out, says journalist and YouTube star Ravish Kumar about the debate over the decline of mainstream media and the rise of alternatives.

The schisms between different kinds of journalism and alternative platforms that have come up in the last few years are no longer a matter of discussion just for media insiders. From village squares to big city drawing rooms, the issue has been dissected thoroughly, more so in these elections. And, according to Ravish, this is being recorded whether through documentaries or song.

The journalist, who has over 10 million followers on his YouTube channel and is considered a trailblazer, is also the central protagonist of Vinay Shukla's riveting 2022 documentary "While We Watched".

"If a housing society starts to collapse, people start moving to a better one. It is not like it is no longer needed. Which is why you will find the reflection of the times in many films, songs and in other ways," Ravish told PTI in an interview.

"I don't see this documentary as the story of one journalist. I can't even see myself in it. I see different things, sometimes I remove myself and imagine a female protagonist or a journalist like Siddique Kappan (who spent two years in jail) and the story starts to appear more horrific," he said.

Vinay's documentary, which has fans such satirist-host John Oliver, won a Peabody award last month. It records Ravish's last months in NDTV India where he constantly battled staff exodus, doxing, abuse and death threats during the course of his anchoring and reporting.

The 49-year-old, one of the most recognised faces in Hindi journalism, said he sees the documentary as a sort of "intervention" as it focuses on recording the near beginning of the crisis in his profession.

He said people in journalism know the decline it has suffered and how the larger picture is disturbing.

"Many have stopped watching news on television and they are searching for alternative mediums. I am not going into the merits or disadvantages of the alternative medium but the work that's being done... for example, people who worked on the story of electoral bonds, were from alternative media," he said, adding that he worries about new journalists joining mainstream journalism.

"Vinay keeps saying that more than one film is needed to record this process in depth," he said, giving the example of senior journalist Paranjoy Guha Thakurta's songs on 'Godi media', a term that has come to be associated with those supporting the government.

"... most senior journalists, what are they doing? Their work is mostly the critique of the profession... At least, it is being recorded which is a good thing. It was time to lift the veil from this profession and I am sure something good will come out of it," he added.

Vinay, whose documentary is streaming on MUBI India, likened it to "Titanic". Instead of this being the story of Jack and Rose (Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet), his protagonists are the musicians who went down with the ship playing their violins.

"Making this film was heartbreaking for me. This film is a love letter to journalists and the profession, but not to the legacy media. Some people keep obsessing that this has happened in the last 10 years but I would say that this process began much earlier, it just became fast in the last decade," Vinay said.

In November 2022, Ravish left NDTV India after the company changed hands and went on to start his own YouTube channel.

Vinay, who with Khushboo Ranka has previously documented the rise of Arvind Kejriwal's Aam Aadmi Party in his 2016 documentary "An Insignificant Man", shadowed Ravish for more than a year, capturing him at his job, saying goodbye to his colleagues one by one, writing, anchoring and worrying about his relevance.

"Those cake cutting scenes (when journalists were leaving the organisation) are humorous but also heartbreaking... I wanted people to know that tragedy happens in today's time while a chocolate cake is being served," Vinay said.

The filmmaker said he was curious about the world of journalism and wanted to show the nuts and bolts of the profession today. "The people who are still in it and trying to do their work honestly, how it is becoming increasingly hard for them," he said.

Ravish added that he has learnt a lot from legacy media but it is not for journalists to "generate false hope" and people should be made aware about the kind of journalism that they should not accept, an issue he kept highlighting while on television.

The Magsaysay Award winner said he was familiar with filmmakers as he had seen them during his coverage of AAP and its beginning but found it strange that they wanted to record his life.

"I thought they would leave after 10 days or a month because I live a boring and lonely life so there is not much variation in it... It was a time when my family constantly worried about my safety. After a while, their presence became a comfort of sorts. Looking back, I am surprised they managed to record so much."

Ravish said he didn't worry that they were capturing him warts and all. Some days, his family would remind him to at least wear better shoes or clothes.

"But I kept doing what I was doing and also I didn't have much time to think about their cameras... Anyone could guess my frustration at that time just by looking at my face. People in the office knew how I was barely managing."

He loved watching Hindi movies but left that after 2014.

"I won't say I was watching great movies. I actually came to know about Satyajit Ray later. Before that, there was no one better than K C Bokadia ('Teri Meharbaniyan', 'Laal Badshaah' and 'Pyaar Jhukta Nahi' fame) for me," he said, tongue firmly in cheek.

"I caught up with some of Ray's films only during the pandemic. I was just buried in work and I think Vinay's film somehow has captured that intensity and anger."

He is still writing and working as an independent journalist on YouTube and jokingly refers to it as "Dublin devi ki kripa" as some of his cheques come from the Irish city. He has written books, including "Ishq Me Shahar Hona" and about things beyond politics and the state of the country, but it's now in the past.

"Vo sab chhoot gaya hai. What I do is boring but I take interest in it, sometimes beyond the scope of exhaustion with whatever my ability and resources are... I don't remember the past much but worry more about the future," he said. (PTI)

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Oman were earlier bowled out for 109 in 19.4 overs

Trumpelmann, Wiese shine as Namibia win in Super Over

BRIDGETOWN (BARBADOS), June 3: Namibia's Ruben Trumpelmann became the first player to take wickets in the first two deliveries of a T20 international as his team beat Oman via the Super Over in a thrilling T20 World Cup match here.

David Wiese and skipper Gerhard Erasmus smashed 21 runs for Namibia in the one-over eliminator with Oman managing 10 from the allotted six deliveries bowled brilliantly by the seasoned Wiese.

Asked to bat first, Oman were earlier bowled out for 109 in 19.4 overs at the Kensington Oval. In reply, Namibia were also stopped at the same team score with Jan Frylinck making 45 in 48 balls and Mehran Khan taking 3/7 to force a Super Over.

This was after Namibia's South Africa-born left-arm fast bowler Trumpelmann created history.

The 26-year-old achieved the feat when he dismissed opener Kashyap Prajapati and Oman skipper Aqib Ilyas for golden ducks on the first two balls of the match.

Khalid Kail top-scored for Oman with 34 in 39 balls.

Trumpelmann took another wicket in his second over and returned with the career-best figures of 4-21.

He trapped Kashyap Prajapati leg before wicket with an inswinging yorker on the first ball of the match and then dismissed Ilyas with one that crushed onto the batter's toes.

In the process, Trumpelmann also registered the best figures for the team in T20 World Cup history. He beat the previous record of 3/17 set by him against Scotland in the 2021 edition of the T20 World Cup held in the UAE.

After sending back Prajapati and Ilyas off successive balls, Trumpelmann dismissed opener Naseem Khushi and then returned to pick up the wicket of Kalemullah at the death for his fourth scalp.

Wiese too was among wickets, returning fine figures of 3/28 in 3.4 overs as Oman found it hard to tackle the Namibia bowlers.

However, defending a small total, Oman bowlers showed a lot of discipline and refused to go down without a fight, eventually managing to tie the game.

But, on the day, Nambia had the last laugh.

While many thought Namibia captain Erasmus would hand the ball to Trumpelmann to bowl the Super Over, he chose the 39-year-old Wiese for his years of experience and it paid dividends.

After the nervy win, Player of the Match Wiese, who was also born in South Africa, said, "Aged a couple of years tonight. Don't have a lot of years left in me (laughs). It was emotionally draining evening."

Speaking about batting and bowling in Super over, "It helped that I had a feel of the game and knew if I get a few hits out in the Super Over .... then with the ball, felt like taking the ball and executing.

"Pitch was difficult, didn't play the way we thought. But we adapted well. It was two-paced, it was a difficult wicket to get yourself in. Definitely one you needed to spend a bit of time before capitalising."

Namibia were on course to chase down the target of 110 until Mehran Khan (3/7) brought Oman back into the contest with his two wickets in the final over. *(PTI)*

NORWAY CHESS

Praggnanandhaa loses to Alireza

STAVANGER (NORWAY), June 3: The brother-sister Indian duo of R Praggnanandhaaa and R Vaishali suffered defeats in their respective section while Magnus Carlsen justified his top billing with a win over an off-colour Ding Liren to surge to sole lead on 12 points in the Norway Chess tournament here.

Fabiano Caruana also scored over compatriot Hikaru Nakamura to help Carlsen emerge as the front runner for the crown in the six-player double round-robin contest being fought for a total prize pool of USD 161000.

Pragganandhaa lost to Firouzja Alireza of France in the Armageddon tiebreaker after suffering a bit through the Classical game too while Vaishali went down to world women's champion Wenjun Ju of China who outplayed the Indian in the endgame.

With four rounds still to come in both sections, Carlsen is now followed by Nakamura on 11 points while Praggnanandhaa is still third on 9.5 points in all.

Alireza is on fourth spot with eight points in all and Caruana follows him with 6.5 points. Surprisingly, China's Ding Liren seems completely out of sorts with just 2.5 points thus far, needing a miracle to come back in the tournament.

In the women's section, Wenjun snatched the lead from Vaishali along with Anna Muzychuk of Ukraine who won a hard-fought Armageddon against Tingjie Lei of China. Both Wenjun and Muzychuk have an identical 10.5 points, a half point ahead of Vaishali.

Lei is fourth on seven points, enjoying a two-point lead over Koneru Humpy who suffered another loss at the hands of Pia Cramling of Sweden in the Armageddon.

Cramling has 4.5 points now and is still at the bottom of the tables.

Gaining a small advantage out of the opening, the world number one Carlsen capitalised on his double Bishops to launch an offensive on the king side and used another blunder by Ding Liren to finish the game with a child-like queen sacrifice.

Liren looks a far cry from the man who won the last world championship title against Ian Nepomniachtchi of Russia and needs to really gather himself to make a match of it in the next edition of the tournament against India's D Gukesh. Currently, as per FIDE, the apex governing body, there are bids from Delhi, Chennai and Singapore to hold the World Championship match.

Praggnanandhaa suffered a jolt in his quest as Alireza played a nice game under Classical to put pressure and eventually drew the contest. In the return game however, the Indian faltered and could not really stage a comeback.

In the women's section, Vaishali had her chances but Wenjun Ju was at her technical best and seized opportunities as they came her way. The minor pieces endgame had some chances but Vaishali could not sustain the pressure.

Results men: Magnus Carlsen (Nor, 12) beat Ding Liren (Chn, 2.5) 3-0; Hikaru Nakamura (USA, 11) lost to Fabiano Caruana (Usa, 6.5) 1-1.5; Firouzja Alireza (Fra, 8) beat R Praggnanandhaa (10) 1.5-1.

Women: R Vaishali (Ind, 10) lost to Wenjun Ju (Chn, 10.5) 0-3; K Humpy (Ind, 5) lost to Pia Cramling (Swe, 4.5) 1-1.5; Anna Muzychuk (10.5 beat Tingkie Lei (Chn, 7) 1.5-1). *(PTI)*

Rahane underlines importance of fitness

Mumbai begin off-season camp

MUMBAI, June 3: Mumbai skipper Ajinkya Rahane on Monday underlined the importance of working on fitness and exhorted the players of his state side to utilise the off-season training camp for getting better.

The Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) launched the three-month long camp on the theme titled 'Home of the Champions' for the upcoming season.

Rahane, who led Mumbai to their record-extending win in the Ranji Trophy last season, said work behind the scenes is critical for players to deliver on the field.

"It will inspire many youngsters to do well for Mumbai and carry the legacy forward and do well for Mumbai in all age groups (teams)," Rahane told media.

"Working on fitness and on your own game plan, because this is the time when you can actually focus on what areas you want to improve as an individual," Rahane said when asked about what kind of work he would want the players to focus on.

"Once the season starts, it is all about what the team requires from you. These 2-3 months is all about getting better as individuals in terms of fitness and skills," he added.

Rahane praised the governing body's decision to appoint former bowler Dhawal Kulkarni as the bowling mentor for all teams across age groups (both men and women).

"It is a very good gesture from MCA. He has played Mumbai for so many years, he has represented India and I am sure that will be of help," he said.

"He has the ability of spotting the talent from various age groups and develop them. I am sure he will find good bowlers for Mumbai and India," Rahane added.

The India batter will also be playing County cricket in England to give himself match-time during this period.

"For me, it's very important to keep playing and that is what I was looking for," Rahane said, confirming that he is set for a stint with Leicestershire.

"Playing matches at this stage is important. I will work on my fitness for a month and will go to Leicester for County matches," he said.

"For me it is all about having those matches under my belt before our domestic season starts otherwise it becomes too long a gap and you hardly get anytime to (address) whatever areas you want to improve," Rahane added.

Meanwhile, addressing various age group players during the inauguration of the camp, India batter Sarfaraz Khan highlighted the importance of being focused and not give in to frustrations.

"I would get frustrated in between thinking I was not getting that opportunity (to play for India), but my father would tell me to focus on performing — to think as if I am playing for India even if I am playing Ranji Trophy and thus I would only focus on performing," he said. *(PTI)*

Swiatek and Gauff sprint into the French Open QFs

PARIS, June 3: After the French Open marathon came the sprints, defending champion Iga Swiatek swept into the quarterfinals at Roland Garros in just 40 minutes after a crushing 6-0, 6-0 win against Anastasia Potapova. U.S. Open champion Coco Gauff took only 60 minutes to rout unseeded Italian Elisabetta Cocciaretto 6-1, 6-2.

The 20-year-old American looked set for an even quicker victory when she led 5-0, but Cocciaretto fought back, getting a hearty cheer from the crowd after winning the next game.

Swiatek wound up with 48 points to just 10 for Potapova. The match ended when Potapova hit a forehand into the net on the first match point.

"I was just really focused and in the zone," Swiatek said. "It went pretty quickly, pretty weird."

Their match started at around 11 a.m. on Court Philippe Chatrier.

That's just eight hours after men's defending champion Novak Djokovic finished his five-set, 4 1/2-hour marathon against Lorenzo Musetti just after 3 a.m. in the latest finish in tournament history.

Swiatek said late finishes don't just end with the match and are not healthy.

"Usually it takes us, like, four hours to even chill, and you need to do recovery, media. It's not like the work ends with the match point," she said. "I was always one of the players that said that we should start a little bit earlier."

Gauff thinks the issue needs to be addressed.

"It's a complicated thing," she said. "But I definitely think for the health and safety of the players it would be in the sport's best interest to try to avoid those matches finishing, or starting, after a certain time."

Gauff says there's also a fine balance to be struck.

"Obviously I don't want to complain too much about it because we are very blessed and privileged to be playing for a lot of money. There's people working real jobs under worse conditions for less money and just trying to get by," she said. "It's just tough for me knowing where some of my family come from and where things are, and I think about the people hearing this. Yes, if I was a person working, I would be upset to hear, you know, players complain."

Potapova attributed her crushing defeat to the constant rain delays in recent days sapping her energy.

"Unfortunately in the last couple of days I started feeling not well, eating not well. Last night I did not get an hour of sleep. It's very tough to be honest. Especially when you want to play good you have to try to keep everything inside," she said. "But unfortunately if you keep it inside it doesn't go away, it just keeps growing. The stress inside my body kept growing and unfortunately today was the day when it exploded."

Saturday didn't help much.

"Yesterday I spent all day on site because I had doubles. We came at 9:00 (a.m.) and at 7:00 p.m. it got (postponed). I spent all day here without hitting a ball," she said. "That's not the preparation for the fourth round of a grand slam against the world number one."

Swiatek remains on course for her third consecutive French Open title and fourth overall. The top-ranked Pole plays Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova after the fifth-seeded Czech beat unseeded Serb Olga Danilovic 6-4, 6-2.

Gauff faces No. 8-seeded Tunisian Ons Jabeur, who advanced to her second straight French Open quarterfinal after beating unseeded Dane Clara Tauson 6-4, 6-4.

In the men's draw, two-time Grand Slam title winner Carlos Alcaraz and 2021 French Open runner-up Stefanos Tsitsipas set up a quarterfinal showdown, while No. 10 Grigor Dimitrov got to the final eight in Paris for the first time in 14 appearances and will meet No. 2 Jannik Sinner next.

Dimitrov eliminated No. 8 Hubert Hurkacz 7-6 (5), 6-4, 7-6 (3), and Australian Open champion Sinner recovered from a terrible start to beat unseeded Corentin Moutet 2-6, 6-3, 6-2, 6-1. Sinner got broken in each of his first three service games — after holding in 41 of 43 during his first three matches — and fell behind 5-0 just 22 minutes in, before getting going.

The third-seeded Alcaraz beat No. 21-seeded Canadian Felix Auger-Aliassime 6-3, 6-3, 6-1.

Auger-Aliassime appeared to struggle with his left leg and called a trainer at the changeover at 3-2 down in the second set, then left the court for a medical timeout.

Tsitsipas beat unseeded Italian Matteo Arnaldi 3-6, 7-6 (4), 6-2, 6-2, and the ninth-seeded Greek celebrated enthusiastically with the Court Suzanne Lenglen crowd.

"Now me and the crowd are on this, so it felt amazing," said Tsitsipas, who was close to finding himself in a two-set deficit but saved four set points in the second. "I felt there was power within me to turn this game around."

What about playing Alcaraz?

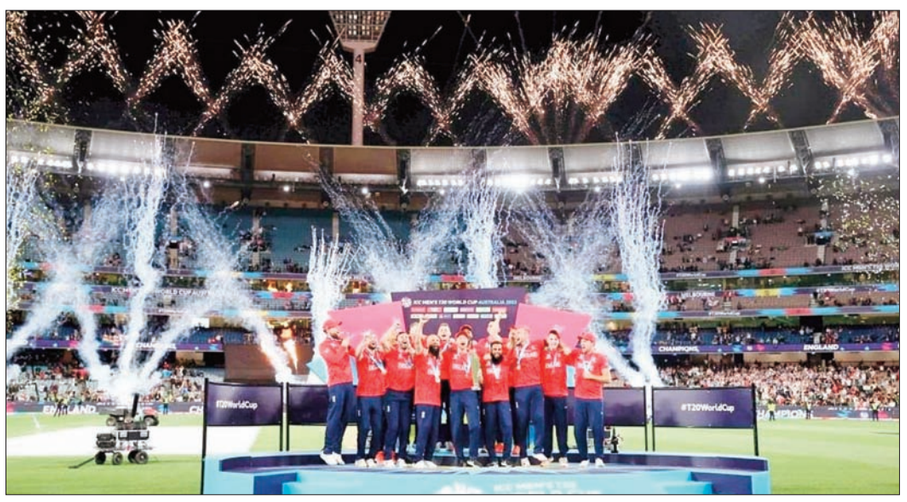
"He has said in the past that he likes to play against me," Tsitsipas said. "I hope he likes it a little bit less." *(AP)*

Elena Timina to coach Bengaluru Smashers in UTT

MUMBAI, June 3: Four-time Olympian Elena Timina, who led Goa Challengers to victory last season, will guide the Bengaluru Smashers in the upcoming edition Ultimate Table Tennis. Each of the eight franchises selected both a foreign and an Indian coach a the coaches draft event here on Monday. The draft saw significant selections as Ahmedabad SG Pipers opted for the experienced Francisco Santos, marking his fifth UTT participation. Dabang Delhi TTC and Jaipur Patriots chose Indian coaches Sachin Shetty and Somnath Ghosh, respectively. Four Indian coaches will make their UTT debut this season: Jay Modak with Ahmedabad SG Pipers, Anshuman Roy with Bengaluru Smashers, former national champion Subhajit Saha with Goa Challengers, and Subin Kumar with Chennai Lions. *(PTI)*

England have become a dominant force in limited overs cricket

Holders England hope to set tone against Scotland



BRIDGETOWN (BARBADOS), June 3: Deprived of ideal preparation by rain, defending champions England will hope to get their act right straightaway when they face Scotland in their T20 World Cup opener here on Tuesday.

Phil Salt will look to continue his red-hot form of the Indian Premier League in the T20 showpiece, even as pacer Jofra Archer's return adds firepower to the English bowling attack.

Rain played spoilsport in the preceding four-match T20I series at home against Pakistan, but England will still enter the tournament as one of the strong contenders to lift the title for an unprecedented third time.

In what will be their first ever meeting against the Scots in the shortest format, the Jos Buttler-led England will be the overwhelming favourites to emerge winners at the Kensington Oval, which offered a two-paced wicket for the game between Namibia and Oman on Sunday evening.

Placed in Group B, England have traditional rivals Australia, Namibia and Oman for company besides Scotland.

To reach the Super Eight stage, teams will have to finish in the top two of a group.

In white-ball cricket, it hasn't been smooth sailing for England since their five-wicket-victory over Pakistan in the final of the last T20 World Cup in Melbourne in 2022.

A year after their success in Australia, Buttler's men endured a disastrous campaign at the ODI World Cup in India, finishing seventh after winning three and losing six of their nine matches including a painful defeat to Afghanistan.

Their poor run in the white-ball game continued with a series of defeats to West Indies in both the 50-over and 20-over format.

In the rain-marred rubber against Pakistan recently, England regained some of their lost ground with a 2-0 series win.

Now focussed on their opener against Scotland, England have fond memories of playing at the Kensington Oval as it is at this very venue the team won its first-ever T20 World Cup title back in 2010 under Paul Collingwood's captaincy, beating Australia by seven wickets in the summit showdown.

In the last 14 years since that triumph, England have become a dominant force in limited overs cricket, winning the 2019 ODI World Cup before their glory Down Under two years ago.

Playing in their third consecutive T20 World Cup, Scotland are no match to their fancied opponents on paper but they will nonetheless look to make an impression after having breezed through the European qualifiers.

Scotland won all six of their matches in the qualifiers to finish top of the standings, which guaranteed them a ticket to the the West Indies and the USA for the marquee tournament.

Teams (from):

England: Jos Buttler (c), Moeen Ali, Jofra Archer, Jonathan Bairstow, Harry Brook, Sam Curran, Ben Duckett, Tom Hartley, Will Jacks, Chris Jordan, Liam Livingstone, Adil Rashid, Phil Salt, Reece Topley, Mark Wood

Scotland: Richie Berrington (c), Matthew Cross, Brad Currie, Chris Greaves, Oli Hairs, Jack Jarvis, Michael Jones, Michael Leask, Brandon McMullen, George Munsey, Safyaan Sharif, Chris Sole, Charlie Tear, Mark Watt, Brad Wheal.

Match starts at 8pm IST.

Afghanistan eye winning start

In the day's other match, Afghanistan will be the overwhelming favourites against Uganda at the Providence in Guyana. The Africans are making their maiden appearance in the tournament.

Afghanistan did extremely well in the last ICC tournament, beating the likes of England, South Africa and Pakistan in the ODI World Cup in India last year, and they will certainly take heart from that showing in this tournament.

Teams:

Afghanistan: Rahmanullah Gurbaz (wk), Ibrahim Zadran, Azmatullah Omarzai, Najibullah Zadran, Mohammad Ishaq, Mohammad Nabi, Gulbadin Naib, Karim Janat, Rashid Khan (c), Nangyal Kharoti, Mujeeb Ur Rahman, Noor Ahmad, Naveen-ul-Haq, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Fareed Ahmad Malik.

Uganda: Brian Masaba (c), Simon Ssesazi, Roger Mukasa, Cosmas Kyewuta, Dinesh Nakrani, Fred Achelam, Kenneth Waiswa, Alpesh Ramjani, Frank Nsubuga, Henry Ssenyondo, Bilal Hassun, Robinson Obuya, Riazat Ali Shah (vc), Juma Miyaji, Ronak Patel.

Match starts at 6am IST. *(PTI)*

India batter Kedar Jadhav announces retirement

PUNE, June 3: India and Maharashtra batter Kedar Jadhav on Monday announced his retirement from international cricket, four years since his last appearance for the national team.

The 39-year-old, who made his international debut for India in November 2014 during an ODI against Sri Lanka at Ranchi, went on to play 73 one-dayers as well as nine T20Is.

Perceived close to former India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni, Jadhav borrowed from the iconic wicketkeeper-batter's style to announce his retirement with a similar play of words.

"Thank you all For your love and support throughout my Career from 1500 hrs. Consider me as retired from all forms of cricket," (sic) wrote Jadhav on X.

Interestingly, Jadhav is currently captaining Kolhapur Tuskers in the Maharashtra Premier League which got underway in Pune on Sunday and his post does not specify whether the announcement covers this engagement.

Jadhav scored 1,389 runs at an average of 42.09 with two centuries and six fifties for India in 73 ODIs. He also made 122 runs in the six innings of the nine T20 Internationals that he played.

Arguably, Jadhav's biggest moment under the sun came during the Pune ODI against England in January 2017, when he got his second ODI ton. He smacked a brutal 76-ball 120 with 12 fours and four sixes to fire India to a three-wicket win in a high-scoring contest. *(PTI)*

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Top seeded Indian pair one of favourites to win gold at Paris Olympics

Satwik-Chirag aim for title defence at Indonesia Open

JAKARTA, June 3: Keeping the Olympics in mind, star Indian shuttlers Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty will seek consistency as they gear up to defend their doubles title at the Indonesia Open Super 1000 tournament, beginning here on Tuesday.

The top seeded Indian pair, who are one of the favourites to win a gold at the Paris Olympics, have enjoyed a good run this season with four final appearances and two wins (French Open Super 750 and Thailand Open Super 500.)

But they found it a tad difficult to negotiate the variety of serves dished out by the Indonesians and Chinese at the Thomas Cup and made early exits from the All England Open and the Singapore Open last week.

Satwik and Chirag, who created history by winning India's first BWF Super 1000 title here last year, will look to address the slight drop in their level this week when they begin their campaign against Man Wei Chong and Kai Wun Tee of Malaysia.

With the Paris Games less than two months away, the Olympic-bound shuttlers will have just a couple of tournaments -- Australian Open and Canada Open-- to polish their skills and eliminate any lingering rust before the quadrennial extravaganza.

Pressure will also be on two-time Olympic medallist PV Sindhu to build her confidence ahead of the Paris Games.

The runner-up finish in Malaysia would have boosted her morale, but the meltdown in the decider, after leading 11-3 to eventually lose the final against China's Wang Zhi Yi, is worrisome.

While top stars such as An Se Young, Chen Yu Fei, Akane Yamaguchi and Carolina Marin skipped the Malaysia Open, the quartet will be vying for top honours this week.

And should Sindhu win her opening round against Wen Chi Hsu from Chinese Taipei, she would be up against familiar foe Marin, who had beaten her in the pre-quarterfinals last week.

India's top player in men's singles HS Prannoy and Lakshya Sen will also hope for a deep run into the event to receive the ideal boost in the build-up to the Paris Games.

However, it will be a tough test of their temperament as some big guns stand in their way in the Super 1000 tournament.

Lakshya, who sneaked into the Olympic qualification with back-to-back semifinal finishes at French Open and All England Championships, will begin his campaign against Japan's Kanta Tsuneyama. If all goes well he will once again square off against reigning Olympic champion and top seed Viktor Axelsen in the quarterfinals.

The Dane had got the better of Lakshya last week.

Prannoy, who has been troubled by health issues this season, will be eager to find his footing. He takes on compatriot Priyanshu Rajawat in the first round.

Former world No.1 Kidambi Srikanth, Kiran George and Rajawat are also in the fray and will be keen to have a good run.

While Srikanth will face Chico Aura Dwi Wardoyo, George is pitted against China's Weng Hong Yang.

In women's doubles, Tanisha Crasto and Ashwini Ponnappa, who have qualified for the Olympics, will begin their campaign against the Canadian pair of Jackie Dent and Crystal Lai while Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand take on Cheng Yu-Pei and Sun Yu Hsing of Chinese Taipei. *(PTI)*

Season's 'ultimate' performers to be decided

World Athletics unveils new global championship

MONACO, June 3: The international athletics body on Monday launched a new season-ending championship that will offer a record prize money of USD 10 million and pit the world and Olympic champions and Diamond League winners against each other to decide the season's ultimate performers.

The tournament is named the 'World Athletics Ultimate Championship' and it aims to reach a broader audience.

Track and field sports global governing body World Athletics (WA) called it a "groundbreaking" championship that will "transform the athletics calendar and define which athlete is the best of the best."

The championship, offering the the highest prize money in track and field history, will conclude the 2026 track and field season.

Budapest will host the inaugural edition from September 11-13 and the championship will be held every two years.

The gold medallists in the championship will receive USD 150,000.

"With only the best of the best on show and cutting straight to semi finals and finals, we will create an immediate pressure to perform for athletes aiming to

claim the title of the ultimate champion," said World Athletics President Seb Coe.

"The World Athletics Ultimate Championship will be high on action and excitement for fans, setting a new standard for track and field events.

"Featuring athletics' biggest stars, it will be a must-watch global sports event and means track and field will host a major global championship in every single year, ensuring for the first time that athletics will enjoy a moment of maximum audience reach on an annual basis."

Taking place over three evening sessions, each under three hours in duration, the championship will showcase the best of athletics, including sprints, middle and long-distance races, relays, jumps, and throws.

Athletes will represent their national teams to ensure that "individual success is underpinned by national pride".

The apex body said athletes will "also benefit from greater promotional rights, allowing them to commercially activate and enhance their personal profiles."

Chosen following a competitive process – which saw interest from a number of major global cities – Budapest will welcome nearly 400 of the world's top athletes for the inaugural championship.

"By embracing innovation and breaking away from traditional models, we are looking to reach a broader audience, particularly younger fans, and elevate the entire sport," said World Athletics CEO Jon Ridgeon.

"There will be a strong focus on television audiences, with an aim to reach the biggest global audience possible.

"We also want to enhance the viewing experience, both at home and in the stadium, so we are looking at what new competition innovations can be introduced, all of which will be thoroughly tested in advance.

"We truly believe this will be a game changer for our entire sport."

Budapest also hosted the World Championship last year. *(PTI)*

Esha stays in medal contention in Munich World Cup

MUNICH, June 3: India's Ramita Jindal gave a good account of herself but still finished sixth in women's 10m air rifle, while Esha Singh qualified in sixth place in 25m sports pistol to keep her medal hopes alive in the ISSF World Cup here on Monday.

Ramita, who finished second in the Olympic Selection Trials and should be on the flight to the Summer Games in Paris, was the third one to get eliminated in the eight-shooter final. She shot two poor scores -- 9.9 and 9.8 -- in the finals, paying the price for lapse in concentration. In a battle of teenagers, 17-year-old World Championship silver medallist Huang Yuting (252.7) of China won against 16-year-old Korean Ban Hyojin (252.7) off the last shot by the slimmest of margins. Ramita had earlier made the finals after being placed fourth with a score of 633.0 in the qualification round where Yuting had broken the Qualification World Junior Record with a score of 635.3.

The other Indians in the fray Tilottama Sen and Elavenil Valarivan had finished 34th and 53rd respectively in qualification.

Multiple Asian Games medallist Esha Singh, who is also bound for Paris in 25m sports pistol, made the final after aggregating 584 at the end of the rapid round, where she scored 291 on Monday.

She had notched up 293 in the precision round on Sunday.

The final will be held on Tuesday. *(PTI)*

All Assam Inter District Chess Championship concludes

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, June 3: The 47th All Assam inter district Chess championship which began from June 1 at Paraghar Chaliha Auditorium, Digboi for women's and under 17(open and girls) concluded successfully on Monday.

The championship is being organised by Gurukul Chess Academy, Digboi in collaboration with parents group of chess Academy, Digboi,Senior Chess players of Digboi and Rotary Club Digboi under the aegis of All Assam Chess Association.

Pallab Sharma vice president of All Assam Chess Association Tinsukia district committee said said that in this championship more than 141 chess players participated from 11 districts of Assam.

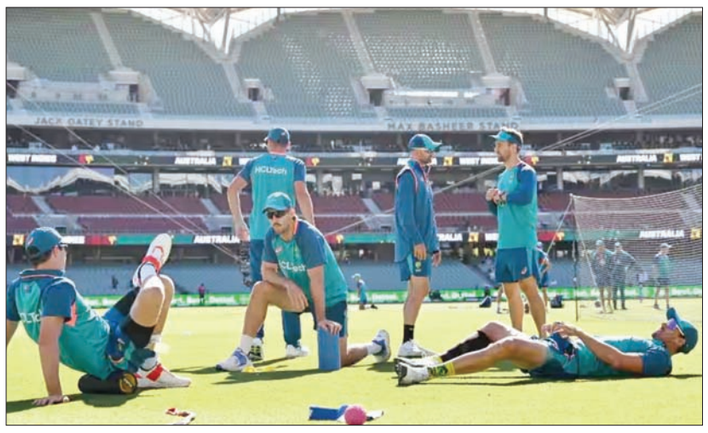
The qualified chess players shall be selected for state level later they will be send to National level said Pallab Sharma.

On the concluding day many distinguished and resource persons of Assam were present such as renowned chess player Dr Noni Gopal Singh, noted social worker of Digboi Diganta Saikia, Digboi Rotary Club president Trilok Gupta, AJYCP Central Committee assistant secretary Surojit Moran, All Assam Chess Association Tinsukia district committee vice president Pallab Sharma, All Assam Chess Association Dibrugarh District Committee president Probin Gogoi among others.

The winners and runners-up of the chess championship were awarded with cash along with trophy.

Oz at T20WC: Luggage woes, delayed flight

Cruise along city's coastline eases Australia's woes



BRIDGETOWN (BARBADOS), June 3: Lost luggage, flight delays and gusty winds on landing here summed up the Australian cricket team's rather tumultuous arrival here for the T20 World Cup but all-rounder Ashton Agar said a cruise along the city's stunning coastline was all it needed to calm the players.

Australia will open their campaign against Oman on June 5 (June 6 at 6am IST).

Pace spearhead Pat Cummins and fellow fast bowler Mitchell Starc had come back to Australia after the IPL for a short break and while heading to the West Indies, the former lost his luggage which eventually did reach him, according to a report in 'cricket.com.au'.

"Flight delays also affected Starc and Maxwell, as the pair had to spend a night in Los Angeles and then another night in Miami en route to Barbados after their own brief trips back to Australia following the IPL," the website reported.

Marcus Stonis also had to miss a practice match after his kit was delivered late to him.

However, Agar said a cruise on Saturday has managed to bring in a sense of calm for the side, which had to put support staff on ground during its practice games due to lack of first-choice players at that time.

"A lot of the boys are coming off a long time in India in the IPL, maybe 48 hours at home for a couple of them, so to do something like that is so refreshing," Agar told reporters.

"I think mentally once you've done that, you go into the sessions ready to go, because you've already enjoyed what the Caribbean has to offer.

"We were sitting on the roof of the catamaran as we were coming back last night and 'Stoin' (Stoinis) actually mentioned that, 'I don't know if many other teams would be like this'," he added.

Agar said one of the memorable moments was watching the sunset.

"You've got all the boys sitting on the roof watching the sun go down, having a drink together, having a genuinely good time and enjoying each other's company.

"It was pretty easy to forget you're here for a World Cup," he quipped.

Agar did show up for an optional training session though.

"Before a tournament where you're not going to train too much when the matches come thick and fast, you want to get all your drills in," said Agar.

"You want to make sure you're good to go, your mechanics are working well, nailing that four-to-six metre length, getting my shoulder on the right path," he asserted. *(PTI)*

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