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- South Korea is suspending a military deal with North Korea

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- Modi factor, targeted campaign against AAP ensures clean sweep
- Setback for former CMs Omar, Mehbooba as both lose LS polls

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DIPHU, KARBI ANGLONG, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 5, 2024

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Modi set for 3rd term with allies' support

BJP all set to fall short of absolute majority ● INDIA bloc makes big gains ● Exit polls predictions proved wrong

NEW DELHI, June 4: Prime Minister Narendra Modi was on Tuesday poised to form the government for a third consecutive term notwithstanding crushing losses in three Hindi heartland states after a bitterly fought election that was projected as a referendum on his popularity.

The Bharatiya Janata Party, whose candidates had contested in the name of Modi, won or was ahead in 240 seats and will fall short of the 272 majority mark and need the support of allies in the party-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) for government formation, a far cry from the 303 and 282 seats it had won in 2019 and 2014 respectively to have a majority on its own.

With support from BJP's key allies N Chandrababu Naidu's TDP and Nitish Kumar's JD(U), which were leading or winning 16 and 12 seats in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar respectively, and other alliance partners, the NDA appeared to be on course to bag around 290 seats in the 543-member Lok Sabha.



The TDP also swept the assembly elections in Andhra Pradesh dislodging Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy's YSRCP.

Preparing to take office for a record equalling historic third term, Prime Minister Modi pledged to work with all states, regardless of the party in power, to build a developed India.

India's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru had served three consecutive terms.

In his first speech after the re-

rooting out corruption of all kinds," Modi said.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge termed the poll outcome as the "victory of the people and that of democracy."

"We had been saying that this battle is between public and Modi...This mandate is against Modi. This is his political and moral defeat. It is a big defeat for a person who sought votes in his own name. He has suffered a moral setback," Kharge told reporters at the AICC headquarters flanked by Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi after the good showing by the Congress.

The elections also highlighted the revival of the main opposition Congress party under Rahul Gandhi, and the unexpected role of the Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh - under Akhilesh Yadav -- as a giant slayer.

The trends and results did not throw up a landslide victory the BJP-led NDA had hoped for and what was projected by the exit polls. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

BJP improves its tally in Assam: Himanta

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 4: Although BJP could not get its majority in the Lok Sabha polls, the party has improved its performance in Assam with a jump in the vote share compared to the previous general election, said Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday. Sarma said that the vote share for the saffron party has also increased from the 2021 assembly election as well. The BJP has won nine seats in the state—Guwahati, Dibrugarh, Darrang-Udalguri, Lakhimpur, Kaziranga, Sonitpur, Diphu, Silchar and Karimganj. On the other hand, NDA partners Asom Gana Parishad's Phani Bhusan Choudhury won the Barpeta seat while UPPL won in the Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency.

Congress on the other hand retained Nagaon parliamentary constituency while Gaurav Gogoi won in Jorhat and Rakibul Hussain defeated Badruddin Ajmal in Dhubri Lok Sabha seat.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the BJP won nine seats and Congress won three Lok Sabha seats. Sarma thanked the voters for the party's



good performance in the state.

"I bow down to the people of Assam for blessing @BJP4Assam and our valued NDA partners with a massive mandate of 11 out of 14 seats in the state," Sarma wrote on micro-blogging site X.

According to Sarma, the NDA has also bettered its overall vote share to nearly 46%, a huge jump from the 39% vote share that they secured in the 2019 Lok Sabha and 44% in the 2021 assembly elections. "This we have achieved de-

spite the 40 percent minority population in the state," he added.

Sarma claimed that this win translated into a lead for the NDA in more than 90 of 126 assembly segments, a much-improved outcome compared to the performance in the 2021 Assembly elections.

He further mentioned, "Clearly, today's results are a vote for the overall transformation Assam has been experiencing in the last 3 years. With the blessings of Adamiya (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Amarsing Tisso wins from Diphu parliamentary seat



HT Bureau

DIPHU, June 4: Amarsing Tisso of the BJP has emerged victorious in the 6 Diphu (ST) Parliamentary Constituency, securing a significant victory margin of 1,47,603 votes over Independent candidate JI Kathar. Tisso garnered a total of 3,34,620 votes, solidifying his position as the elected representative.

While the victory of Tisso was evident, counting processes were still underway in four election districts such as Karbi Anglong, Bokajan, West Karbi Anglong, and Dima Hasao. As of 8 pm, BJP candidate Amarsing Tisso maintained a substantial lead of 1,46,151 votes over his closest rival, the independent candidate JI Kathar, who was backed by the All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHLIC).

In the Karbi Anglong election district, encompassing the Diphu and Howraghat LA segments, counting was conducted at ISBT, Chutianala. Similarly, in Bokajan, with a single LA segment, counting took place at the Government HS school premises.

On the other hand, the West Karbi Anglong election district, consisting of the Rongkhang and Amri LA segments, witnessed counting activities at the Hamren Government HS school. Meanwhile, in the Dima Hasao election district, comprising the Haflong LA segment, counting occurred at the DC office in Haflong.

Counting of votes for the Diphu and Howraghat LA segments at ISBT, Chutianala, commenced at 8 am. By 8 pm, Tisso secured 3,31,109 votes, while JI Kathar garnered 1,84,958 votes.

In addition to the prominent contenders, the Congress candidate Joyram Englung accrued a vote count of 1,24,019. Meanwhile, the Gana Suraksha Party (GSP) candidate John Barnard Sangma received 11,279 votes, and the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Non-aligned parties suffer as LS INDIA alliance makes a comeback in several Hindi heartland states

NEW DELHI, June 6: As the 2024 general elections became a fight between the NDA and the INDIA bloc with coalition politics regaining significance, the results also showed a sharp decline in the fortune of non-aligned parties.

Parties like the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in Uttar Pradesh, Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) in Telangana, Biju Janata Dal in Odisha and YSR Congress Party in Andhra Pradesh, which were not a part of either of the two blocs, suffered major setbacks.

The Bahujan Samaj Party fielded 488 candidates across the country, the highest number of candidates to be fielded by a party, even surpassing the BJP's 441 candidates. However, it drew a blank and got around 2.05 per cent votes.

In 2019, the BSP won 10 seats, with a vote share of 3.62 per cent.

In Odisha, Biju Janata Dal (BJD) was limited to only one seat in Lok Sabha. The party had 12 MPs in Odisha in 2019 out of the total 21 seats. Its vote share in 2024 was 1.44 per cent, slightly down from the 1.66 per cent vote share it had in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

In Andhra Pradesh, where the BJP allied with the Telugu Desam Party and Jana Sena, the YSR Congress Party was leading on four seats, significantly down from 22 seats in the 2019 polls. It polled around 2.06 per cent, down from the 2.53 per cent vote share it had last time. In neighbouring Telangana, Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) was not leading even on a single seat. The party, which came to power in

the state after spearheading the agitation for its formation, had won nine seats in Lok Sabha in 2019, with a vote share of 1.25 per cent. This time, the vote share of the BRS was 0.57 per cent.

The BJP emerged as the single largest party in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, but could not cross the majority mark.

After 12 hours of counting of votes that began at 8 am, the Bharatiya Janata Party won or was ahead in 240 seats to emerge as the single largest party, a far cry from the 303 it had won last time in the 543-member Lok Sabha to mark the return of coalition politics.

The Congress, which is part of the opposition INDIA alliance, was leading or winning 99 seats compared to (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

NEW DELHI, June 4: The INDIA alliance made a major comeback in several politically crucial Hindi heartland states on Tuesday with its constituent Samajwadi Party registering a significant resurgence in Uttar Pradesh and the bloc making steady headway in Rajasthan, Bihar, Haryana and Jharkhand.

However, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's BJP-led alliance is set to retain power for a third consecutive term but not with an overwhelming majority as predicted by various exit polls.

According to results and trends, the National Democratic Alliance is set to get 291 Lok Sabha seats while the INDIA (Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance) is expected to have a tally of 234.

The most unexpected performance put up by the INDIA was in politically crucial Uttar Pradesh where Samajwadi Party has won in 30 seats and was marching ahead in seven more while Congress came out victorious in

seven constituencies.

The BJP won in 29 seats and is leading in four while its ally Rashtriya Lok Dal won in two constituencies and Apna Dal (Soneylal) and Aazad Samaj Party (Kanshi Ram) came out victorious in one each.

The opposition bloc's performance in Uttar Pradesh is being seen as a big surprise for the BJP that had almost swept the polls in 2014 with a stunning performance of coming out victorious in 71 seats and held its ground in 2019 by winning 62.

In 2019, the Samajwadi Party won in five seats, Congress in one and Bahujan Samaj Party in 10. The Indian alliance also made significant gains in Rajasthan, Haryana, Bihar and Jharkhand but could not spring a surprise in Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Uttarakhand and Chhattisgarh.

In Rajasthan, BJP won in 14 seats, while Congress came out victorious in eight while CPI(M), Rashtriya Loktantrik Party and Bharat Adivasi Party (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

LS poll results 'moral victory' for INDIA bloc: Borah

GUWAHATI, June 4: Assam Congress president Bhupen Kumar Borah asserted on Tuesday that the Lok Sabha poll results were a "moral victory" for the INDIA bloc, maintaining that people have "rejected the politics of religious polarisation".

He also alleged that there was a "secret friendship" between BJP and AIUFD in the northeastern state, and the defeat of the AIUFD in this election would lead to the "weakening of the communal forces".

Speaking to reporters outside the party headquarters here, Borah said, "This is a moral victory for the Congress-led INDIA bloc... it is evident from the people's verdict." He claimed that the BJP's slogan of winning 400 seats and the exit polls were mere "hollow shows", and "their politics of religious polarisation, violence has been rejected by the people".

In Assam, the state chief maintained that not just the tally, the party's vote share will also increase. "We are already decisively leading in three seats and will surely win the



fourth. This will lead to an increase in our previous tally by one seat. Our vote share will also increase significantly," he claimed.

Borah said the party had to "fight against 'bahubal' (muscle power) of the ruling regime in the form of police, ED, CBI and others, and also 'dhan bal' (money power)".

"If the BJP spent ₹ 100, our candidate could spend only ₹ 10. I am the first Congress president here (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam flood: 7 dead, over 4.23 lakh people affected

GUWAHATI, June 4: The flood situation in Assam remained critical on Tuesday with seven more people losing their lives due to drowning, while more than 4.23 lakh people are reeling under the deluge across nine districts, an official bulletin said.

According to the daily flood report of the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA), four people at Sonai and one person at Silchar revenue circles of Cachar district died due to flood.

Besides, one person each died in Raha circle of Nagaon district and Dispur of Kamrup Metropolitan due to the deluge, it added. With this, the total number of people losing their lives in this year's flood, landslide and storm increased to 30. The report said that more than 4,23,000 people were hit due to the floods in Cachar, Dhemajai, Dima Hasao, Hailakandi, Hojai, West Karbi Anglong, Karimganj, Morigaon and Nagaon districts. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

4th Death Anniversary OM SHANTI



NIRMAL NUNISA

Date of birth — 13.11.1964
Date of death — 05.06.2020

We fondly remember my husband/ father/ brother/ brother in law/uncle late Nirmal Nunisa who left for his heavenly abode on the 5th of June, 2020. We pray to the Almighty for the eternal peace of his departed soul.

Family members —

Dr. Ritu Thaosen Nunisa (Wife),
Ringsmaidini Nunisa (Daughter),
Ringdao Nunisa (Son) and
Aditya Goel (Son in law)

Dr. Motilal Nunisa (Brother)
Pradip Nunisa (Brother)
Usha Hojai (Sister)
Dr. Ruplal Nunisa (Brother)
Alo Thaosen (Sister)
Dr. Bishnu Ram Nunisa (Brother)
Dr. Dhruva Hojai (Brother in law)
Ramesh Thaosen (Brother in law)
Jayanti Nunisa (Sister in law)
Prabhati Thaosen Nunisa (Sister in law)
Anima Thaosen Nunisa (Sister in law)
And all nephews and nieces

'However, this very richness, both cultural and ecological, faces unprecedented threats'

Distinct blue ant species discovered in Arunachal valley

NEW DELHI, June 4: A distinct, stunning blue-coloured ant species was discovered in Siang Valley, a "biodiversity hotspot" of Arunachal Pradesh, in a new research from India.

Accompanying the 'Abhor' expedition in 1911-12, a punitive military one against the indigenous people of Siang Valley, was a team of researchers to document its natural history and geography.

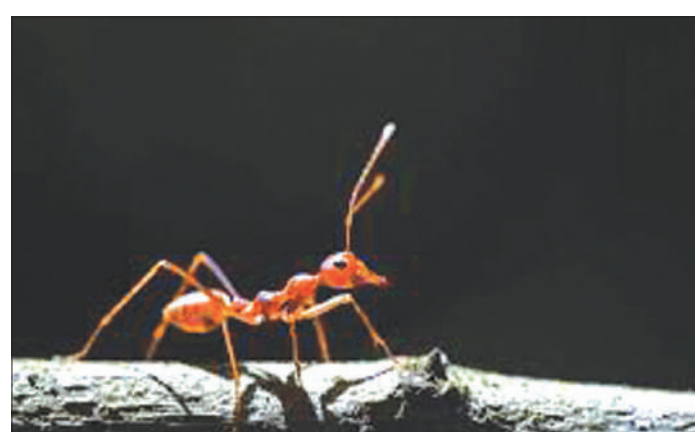
After exploring and mapping large parts of the valley, the team catalogued every plant, frog, lizard, fish, bird and mammal and insects they found. Their discoveries were published in several volumes from 1912 to 1922 in the Records of the Indian Museum.

Now, a century later, researchers from Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment

(ATREE) and a documentation team from Felis Creations Bangalore embarked on a series of journeys to the valley, a "Himalayan biodiversity hotspot", under the banner 'Siang Expedition'. They wanted to resurvey and document the region's biodiversity.

While exploring a tree hole about 10 feet up in a steep cattle track in the remote Yinku village one evening, something sparkled in the twilight. With the dim light available, two insects were sucked into an aspirator. To our surprise, we later found they were ants, the researchers explained. The findings are published in the journal ZooKeys.

Named Parapatrechina neela, the species is "nothing like the common red, black, or brown ants," according to ATREE re-



searchers. 'Neela' means blue in many Indian languages, which they said was a "fitting tribute" to the ant's unique colouration.

Parapatrechina neela, the researchers described, is a small ant

and less than two millimetres long, with a predominantly metallic blue body, except for the antennae, mandibles, and legs. The metallic blue is distinct from any other species in its rare genus, Parapara-

trechina, they said.

While blue colouration is commonly observed in some insects like butterflies, beetles, bees, and wasps, the authors said it is relatively rare in ants, with only a few out of the known 16,724 ant species and subspecies displaying the colour.

The ant's head is subtriangular with large eyes and has a triangular mouthpart (mandible) featuring five teeth, they said.

Representing the unique biodiversity of the Eastern Himalayas, the researchers said that the discovery of the 'Parapatrechina Neela' contributed to the richness of ant diversity.

They added that the blue colour of the species raised "intriguing questions" - Does it help in communication, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

New govt to inherit strong economy, focus on making India developed nation by 2047

NEW DELHI, June 4: India's world record beating economic growth rate together with robust tax revenues, a fast expanding digital and financial infrastructure and a strong manufacturing sector will give the new government a base for unleashing next generation reforms that may make the country a developed nation by 2047.

The new government will however have to tackle with problems like unemployment and rural distress, which seemed to have played a major role in voting pattern in states like Uttar Pradesh, while also keeping inflation under control. Given that no party, including BJP, have a clear majority of its own, tough reforms like big ticket privatisation and labour law reforms may take a backseat.

As per the available trends, BJP is likely to win about 240 seats in a 543-member Lok Sabha. It would have to rely on its allies like TDP and JDU to form the next government.

The new government will have to build upon the 8.2 per cent GDP growth recorded in 2023-24 and carry on with the reforms to make India a USD 5 trillion economy in the next couple of years and a developed nation by 2047. Policy experts are unanimous in their view that the government is likely to continue its focus on infrastructure-led growth, investor-friendly policies, enabling reforms, and facilitating ease of doing business.

Last week, S&P Global Ratings had said that historically India has been on a high growth path with national consensus on key economic policies.

"No matter who the incoming government is, the pro-growth



policies, sustained infrastructure investments, the drive to reduce fiscal deficit -- these things have produced very good outcomes and we believe this will continue in the coming years no matter who is in charge," S&P Global Ratings Analyst YeeFam Phua said.

EY India Chief policy advisor DK Srivastava said the Aatmanirbhar strategy, especially focusing on knowledge intensive employment generating and strategic manufacturing, will serve India well in the long run while providing policies for increasing both services and goods exports. "The new government will find a solid foundation of the economy, ready to take off with the objective of fulfilling India's aim of becoming 'vishit' in the next 25 years," Srivastava said.

Under the Modi government's 10-year tenure India has become the fifth largest economy, from 11th globally, shaking off its image as a "fragile" economy prior to 2014. The new government will have its eyes set on taking India among the top three economies in

the world. The target is "more likely" to be realised by 2027-28 fiscal, according to 16th Finance Commission Chairman Arvind Panagariya.

Currently, the size of the Indian economy is USD 3.7 trillion and it is expected to become USD 7 trillion by 2030. RBI has projected a 7 per cent growth rate for the current fiscal. Deloitte South Asia CEO Romal Shetty said India is firmly on the growth trajectory as the world's fastest-growing economy and a key player in the global supply chain.

"With the new government, we expect second-generation reforms driven by technology to make India a global hub of innovation and a thriving digital economy. We must further accelerate reforms to strengthen ease of doing business, boost inbound investment, and solidify India's position as the top destination for GCCs (global capability centres) and high-tech manufacturing, with a focus on jobs," Shetty said. In fact, reflecting the buoyant sentiments S&P Global

Ratings last week upgraded India's outlook to positive, from stable, and said it could upgrade India's sovereign rating in next 1-2 years if the government continues reforms and adheres to the path of fiscal consolidation.

Last week, Moody's Ratings also said it expects policy continuity after the general election and continued focus on infrastructure development.

Nangia Andersen India Chairman Rakesh Nangia said the investors' community expects continued policy reforms, particularly in labour laws and the privatization of state-owned enterprises.

"Investors are also keen on prudent fiscal management, focusing on reducing the fiscal deficit while promoting growth through strategic investments. This combination of reforms and fiscal discipline is expected to create a favourable environment for sustained economic growth and increased investor confidence," Nangia said.

Nangia further said that investors are also eager to see a further simplification of India's regulatory framework, more transparent and predictable policies that can enhance the ease of doing business.

"This regulatory clarity is crucial for attracting more Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and positioning India as a key manufacturing hub driven by supply chain diversification. In recent years, there has been substantial FDI inflow into sectors such as manufacturing, computer services, and renewable energy, reflecting India's growing appeal as a destination for global investment," Nangia said. (PTI)

Successful conclusion of the NE sustainable business & entrepreneurship conclave

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 4: The School of Livelihood and Rural Development (SLRD) - YesEarth, in collaboration with the Pollution Control Board, Assam, has successfully concluded the North East Sustainable Business and Entrepreneurship Conclave held on June 2, 2024. This event, part of the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Pollution Control Board, Assam, marked a significant milestone in promoting sustainable business practices and addressing environmental challenges in the region.

Held at the Taj Vivanta in Guwahati, the conclave gathered over 300 business leaders, entrepreneurs, policymakers, and sustainability advocates. The one-day event featured keynote addresses and expert panel discussions focused on sustainable business practices, climate change mitigation, and environmental stewardship. The Keynote Speakers included Arup Kumar Misra,



Chairman, Pollution Control Board; Abhijit Sharma, Mission Director, SLRD - YesEarth; Utpal Barua, Chief Administrative Officer, Adani Airports, Guwahati; Abhijit Barooah, Managing Director, Assam Air Products; Dilip Goenka, Managing Director, KD Iron and Steel; Dr. AK Mohanty, Director, ICAR ATARI; among others. Arup Kumar Misra, Chairman of the Pollution Control Board, Assam, stated, "We are transforming the Pollution Control Board, Assam, from merely a compliance monitoring and enforce-

ment agency into a facilitator for sustainable business practices."

Abhijit Sharma, Mission Director of SLRD - YesEarth, added, "Hosting the NE Sustainable Business and Entrepreneurship Conclave as part of the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the State Pollution Control Board, Assam, is a significant step towards fostering sustainable business practices and addressing urgent environmental challenges. By bringing together diverse stakeholders, we can drive meaningful change and build a sustainable future for all."

1st ZEISS Vision Center launched in Guwahati

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 4: ZEISS, a global leader in optics and optoelectronics for over 175 years, has partnered with Sapphire Eye Care to inaugurate its first ZEISS VISION CENTER in Guwahati, Assam. This state-of-the-art facility, spanning approximately 1,200 square feet, is strategically located in the heart of the city, marking a significant milestone in delivering advanced eye care solutions to the region.

Sapphire Eye Care, renowned for its high-quality eye-care products and services, enhances its offerings with the introduction of the ZEISS VISION CENTER. This new venture provides customers in Guwahati with access to world-class eye care solutions, tailored to meet personal and professional needs. The

center will feature an extensive range of ZEISS lenses, acclaimed for their precision, clarity, and advanced technology. Visitors can benefit from comprehensive eye exams conducted by certified optometrists using cutting-edge diagnostic equipment.

At the launch event, Gautam Ghosh of Sapphire Eye Care stated, "We are honored to introduce the first ZEISS VISION CENTER in Assam, right in the heart of Guwahati. This strategic expansion aligns with our vision for growth and underscores the demand for top-tier products and cutting-edge healthcare solutions in this dynamic market. The launch of this center marks a crucial moment in our journey to redefine the eyewear industry and elevate the standards of visual care in India.

We are confident that this paradigm shift with ZEISS will not only meet but exceed the expectations of our discerning customers, delivering unparalleled quality and innovation here in Guwahati."

In addition to a wide array of international frames and sunglass brands, the ZEISS VISION CENTER will offer specialized services such as individualized lenses, lifestyle-based lens solutions for all age groups, vision consultations, and highly precise eye measurements using the latest technology like ZEISS VISUFIT 1000. This center aims to serve as a hub for cutting-edge eyewear technology, professional expertise, and exceptional customer service, redefining the eyewear shopping experience by offering a blend of precision, style, and comfort to its customers.

Amazon India launches 4th edition of machine learning summer school

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 4: Bharti Airtel, India's leading telecommunications provider, has launched a range of special plans tailored for the World's Biggest T20 Cricket Tournament. These plans, starting at ₹ 499, aim to deliver an uninterrupted and immersive viewing experience by including a three-month subscription to Disney+ Hotstar, the tournament's official streaming partner in India.

Bloodbath on D-Street on vote counting day: Sensex suffers worst single-day retreat in 4 years

MUMBAI, June 4: In the biggest single-day fall in four years, benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty plunged by nearly 6 per cent on Tuesday as vote counting trends showed the BJP may not have a clear majority in the Lok Sabha polls. Reversing its Monday's sharp gains of over 3 per cent, the 30-share BSE Sensex nosedived 4,389.73 points or 5.74 per cent to close at a more than two-month low of 72,079.05. In the day trade, the barometer tanked 6,234.35 points or 8.15 per cent to hit a nearly five-month low level of 70,234.43.

The NSE Nifty tumbled 1,982.45 points or 8.52 per cent to 21,281.45 during the day. Later, it ended at 21,884.50, a sharp decline of 1,379.40 points or 5.93 per cent. Sensex and Nifty had previously declined by around 13 per cent on March 23, 2020 when lockdown was imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Heavy profit booking in PSUs, public banks, power, utilities, energy, oil and gas, and capital goods shares dragged the markets into the deep negative. "The unexpected outcome of the gen-

eral election sparked a wave of fear selling in the domestic market, reversing the recent substantial rally. Despite this, the market maintains its expectation of stability within the coalition, led by BJP as the major election winner, thereby mitigating substantial downside in the medium term. "This is likely to lead to a major shift in political policy with a focus on social economics, which will have a positive effect on the rural economy," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

Vote counting trends showed that the BJP was poised to be the single largest party but could be well short of an absolute majority, leaving it dependent on its NDA partners to form government. When the Narendra Modi government came to power on May 16, 2014, Sensex had rallied 261.14 points or 0.90 per cent to settle at 24,121.74, and Nifty jumped 79.85 points or 1.12 per cent to 7,203. The BSE benchmark had hit the 25,000-mark in intra-day trade on that day. On May 23, 2019, the Sensex declined 298.82 points or 0.76 per cent to settle

at 38,811.39, while the Nifty ended 80.85 points or 0.69 per cent lower at 11,657.05. The BSE benchmark had hit the 40,000-mark for the first time ever, while the Nifty breached the 12,000-level on that day. Among the 30 Sensex companies, NTPC plunged over 15 per cent, while State Bank of India tanked more than 14 per cent, Larsen & Toubro tumbled over 12 per cent and Power Grid dived more than 12 per cent. Tata Steel, IndusInd Bank, Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank, Axis Bank, Reliance Industries and JSW Steel were the other big laggards.

On the other hand, Hindustan Unilever jumped 6 per cent while Nestle climbed 3 per cent. Tata Consultancy Services, Asian Paints and Sun Pharma also emerged as the gainers.

All the sectoral indices, except for FMCG, closed in the red. Adani group shares also declined. Adani Ports & SEZ tanked over 21 per cent, Adani Enterprises by nearly 20 per cent, Adani Power by 17 per cent, Adani Energy Solutions by 20 per cent and Adani Green Energy by over 19 per cent. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Modi set for 3rd term with

More than 640 million votes are to be counted in the world's largest democratic exercise. The NDA was stirred into life mostly around elections in the last 10 years as the BJP's big majority and shrinking opposition in the Lok Sabha made its allies mostly redundant but this time around, allies will matter more than ever.

The Congress, which is part of the opposition INDIA alliance, was leading or winning 99 seats compared to 52 it won in 2019 eating into BJP's share in Rajasthan and Haryana. The INDIA bloc won or was ahead in over 200 seats.

As SP chief Akhilesh Yadav kept the INDIA bloc morale high in Uttar Pradesh, the Trinamool Congress, another key ally of the opposition alliance, was leading or winning in 29 seats in West Bengal, higher than its 22 in 2019. The BJP, which had 18 seats in the last Lok Sabha election, was ahead in 12 seats.

In UP, the BJP won or was ahead in 33 seats as against its tally of 62 in 2019 and the SP's numbers went up, largely attributed to three factors - consolidation of Muslim votes in favour of SP, smart seat sharing agreements with Congress to avoid splitting of non-BJP votes and widespread discontent with the BJP government over jobs and price rise. The SP was winning or leading in 37 of the 80 seats at stake. Modi retained the Varanasi seat but with a reduced victory margin of nearly 1.53 lakh votes in Varanasi. In 2019, the margin was 4,79,505.

Rahul Gandhi, often lampooned by the BJP as 'Shehzada', won Wayanad (Kerala) and Rae Bareilly (UP) seats by a huge margin of 3,64,422 votes and 3,90,030 votes respectively.

The campaigning for the elections, which were conducted from April 19 to June 1 in seven phases, was marked by divisive communal issues and excessive reliance on Modi for getting votes. The prime minister held more than 300 rallies, travelling tirelessly almost every day to multiple locations.

The results also blew away the BJP narrative that it will score big in the southern states this time. It, however, secured a tally of zero in Tamil Nadu, and lost seats in Karnataka. The BJP did make inroads in Kerala, winning a seat for the first time in a state where the Congress and the Left are the major political force, and in Telangana where it won or was leading in 8 seats.

Popular Malayalam actor Suresh Gopi won the Thrissur seat in Kerala to help the lotus bloom. In Andhra Pradesh, BJP ally Telugu Desam Party won or was leading in 16 seats and the BJP was ahead or winning in three.

The biggest setback for the BJP, which faced a stronger challenge from the opposition, however, was in the north where, besides UP, the BJP also faced losses in Rajasthan and Haryana. West Bengal also dealt the party a raw deal, although it more than made up for the losses in Odisha. Madhya Pradesh went fully saffron with the BJP winning or leading in all 29 seats. In Gujarat, too, BJP was winning or leading in 25 of 26 seats. The situation was not as decisive in other states.

In Bihar, the BJP was ahead in 12 and its partner JD(U) in 13, a vote of confidence for its leader Nitish Kumar who swung from INDIA back to the NDA ahead of the elections. The RJD was poised to win four seats. In Rajasthan, BJP was ahead only in 14 seats, against all 25 its alliance won last time. The Congress was ahead in eight.

Haryana also threw up a shock result for the BJP, where the party was leading only in five and the Congress in five. In 2019, the saffron party had bagged all 10. It appeared that the election marked a return to regular politics, where voters were more concerned about bread and butter issues, especially in some Hindi heartland states where the opposition INDIA alliance managed to rally supporters around the issues of unemployment and price rise. Maharashtra, with 48 Lok Sabha seats, saw the Shiv Sena split down the middle since the last election.

The BJP, which won 23 seats five years ago, was down with leads in 11 seats, while its ally Shiv Sena could get seven. On the other end of the spectrum, the Congress was ahead in 12 seats, up from one, and the Shiv Sena (UBT) in 19. The NCP Sharad Pawar faction could get seven seats, giving the INDIA alliance, forged together by the common dislike of the BJP, a possible 38 seats.

However, a silver lining was provided by Union ministers Nitin Gadkari and Piyush Goyal who appeared on course to easy victories in Nagpur and Mumbai North respectively. In Odisha, the BJP was doing spectacularly well, with leads in 19 out of 21 seats, while the ruling Biju Janata Dal was down to just one. It was also ahead in the Odisha assembly elections, leading in 76 out of 146 seats, a success show in the state it had never succeeded in capturing.

In Andhra Pradesh, the Chandrababu Naidu-led TDP was ahead in 16 seats of 25, the BJP in three and the YSRCP in four. Trends for Karnataka showed potential gains for the Congress, with leads in nine seats, up from one last time.

The BJP, which got 25 seats in 2019, was ahead in 17. Tamil Nadu seemed to be scripting another story, not ceding any space to the saffron party. The ruling DMK was ahead in 22 and ally Congress in nine, a notch higher than their 2019 positions. (PTI)

BJP improves its tally

Shri@ narendramodi, Hon'ble Prime Minister, we remain committed to delivering on our promise to establish Assam among the top states in the country." AIUDF has failed to open its account this time in Assam.

Non-aligned parties suffer

52 it won in 2019 eating into BJP's share in Rajasthan and Haryana. The INDIA bloc won or was ahead in over 200 seats. (PTI)

INDIA alliance makes a comeback

scored one seat each. The BJP had won all the 25 seats in the 2019 polls.

The INDIA alliance also made inroads into Bihar with Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) winning in two seats and marching ahead in two more while Congress emerged victorious in three seats and CPI(M) in two seats. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) won in 26 seats with BJP scoring 10 and ahead in two, JD(U) winning in 11 and ahead in 1 and Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) winning four and ahead in one seat.

In 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the NDA won 39 out of 40 seats in Bihar with BJP coming out victorious in 17 seats, JD(U) in 16 and Lok Janshakti Party in six. In Haryana, both the Congress and BJP won three seats each and ahead in two each. The BJP had won all 10 seats in 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

In Jharkhand too, INDIA alliance's Congress and Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) won one and three seats respectively. The Congress is ahead in one seat. BJP's ally AJSU Party won one seat. The BJP won six seats and ahead in two more.

The BJP won 11 seats in 2019 polls while its ally All Jharkhand Students Union came out victorious in one seat. The JMM and Congress won one seat each. The NDA continued its dominance in Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Delhi and Chhattisgarh. The BJP won all 29 seats in Madhya Pradesh and all four seats in Himachal Pradesh. In Delhi, it won five seats and is ahead in two. The BJP is all set to sweep Uttarakhand as it won three seats in the state while marching ahead in the remaining two seats.

In Chhattisgarh, the BJP won eight seats and is leading in two more while Congress won one. In 2019, BJP won 28 seats in Madhya Pradesh while Congress won one. In that year, the BJP had won all four seats in Himachal Pradesh, all five in Uttarakhand, all seven in Delhi and nine out of 11 seats in Chhattisgarh. Congress won two seats in Chhattisgarh in 2019. In total, the Hindi heartland states comprise 225 Lok Sabha seats. (PTI)

Amarsing Tisso wins from

Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) candidate Jotson Bey obtained 9,633 votes. The significance of NOTA (None of the Above) votes was notable, with a total of 16,259 voters choosing this option. The electoral landscape of Diphu reflects a diverse array of political affiliations, with each candidate garnering support from distinct segments of the electorate.

LS poll results 'moral

to appeal for monetary support for candidates through social media," he said, referring to a video message by him ahead of elections. Borah claimed that there was a "secret friendship" between the BJP and AIUDF as was evident in alleged cross-voting by AIUDF legislators during Rajya Sabha and presidential polls earlier. "People have voted against such politics today," he added.

With AIUDF trailing in all the three seats it had contested, Borah claimed that it was the end of the road for the Badruddin Ajmal-led party and will also ensure the "weakening of the other communal force in the state".

On what worked in favour of the Congress in the state, the party chief said the coming together of the non-BJP parties helped significantly. Referring to Congress candidate Gaurav Gogoi marching towards victory in Jorhat constituency, Borah said, "In Jorhat, the entire state machinery was working against us. It was as if Himanta Biswa Sarma was the de facto candidate. But the people of Assam were like a sleeping lion and they woke up now." As counting of votes continued for the 14 seats in the state, the BJP and its allies were leading in 11 seats and the Congress in three. (PTI)

Assam flood: 7 dead, over

Nagaon is the worst hit with over 2.13 lakh people suffering, followed by Cachar with more than 1.19 lakh people and Hojai with around 60,500 people suffering, it added. Till Monday, over 6.25 lakh people were suffering in flood waters across 10 districts of the state.

The administration has been operating 167 relief camps in six districts, where 32,872 persons have taken shelter, and running 73 relief distribution centres in four districts. The authority has distributed 1,221.69 quintals of rice, 225.29 quintals of dal, 67.58 quintals of salt and 1,073.59 litres of mustard oil among the flood victims of the state.

At present, 459 villages are under water and 7,866.08 hectares of crop areas have been damaged across Assam, the ASDMA said.

Embankments, roads, bridges and other infrastructure have been damaged by flood waters in Morigaon, Nagaon and Cachar.

At present, Kopili and Kushiyara rivers are flowing above the danger marks at different places in Assam, ASDMA said. On account of widespread flooding, nearly 46,000 domestic animals and poultry are affected across the state, it added. (PTI)

Distinct blue ant species

camouflage, or other ecological interactions?

"Nestled within a Himalayan biodiversity hotspot, Arunachal Pradesh's Siang Valley presents a world of unparalleled diversity, much of it yet to be explored. However, this very richness, both cultural and ecological, faces unprecedented threats," said corresponding author Priyadarshan Dharma Rajan.

"Large-scale infrastructure projects like dams, highways, and military installations, along with climate change, are rapidly altering the valley. The impact extends beyond the valley itself, as these mountains play a critical role not only in sustaining their diverse ecosystems but also in ensuring the well-being of millions of people living downstream," said Rajan. (PTI)

Gaurav Gogoi sweeps Sivasagar, Demow, Sonari & Nazira LACs with clear mandate



HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, June 4: INC candidate Gaurav Gogoi secured a clear mandate from the electorates in 95 Demow LAC and 96 Sivasagar LAC segments of the Jorhat parliamentary constituency. In Sivasagar LAC, Gaurav Gogoi, the INDIA candidate, garnered 91,843 votes, while NDA candidate and sitting MP Topon Kumar Gogoi received 73,095 votes, 18,748 votes less than his rival.

Out of the 167,372 votes polled in the constituency, NOTA claimed the third-highest position with 1,094 votes, ahead of Independent candidate Raj Kumar Duwora (728 votes) and Ekam Sanatan Bharat Dal's Arun Chandra Handique (612 votes).

Joining his supporters in celebrations in Sivasagar soon after the results were out, Gaurav Gogoi thanked the new voters he termed as "Natun Asom",

who had returned home from different places to vote for change, civility, secularity, and harmony. Sivasagar MLA Akhil Gogoi, who played a key role in Gaurav Gogoi's victory, told the media here that the people voted against divisive polarising politics of the BJP, and it is a win for democracy.

In Demow LAC, Gaurav Gogoi secured 77,933 votes while Topon Kumar Gogoi got 67,879 votes,

resulting in a lead of 16,060 votes. In Nazira LAC, traditionally an INC stronghold, out of 147,131 votes polled, Gaurav Gogoi received 70,727 votes while Topon Kumar Gogoi got 70,600 votes.

The most astounding results came from Sonari LAC, the birthplace of Topon Kumar Gogoi, where he trailed miserably. Gaurav Gogoi got 71,603 votes against 61,269 votes of the NDA candidate. In Mahmora LAC, Gaurav Gogoi got 62,680 votes while Topon Gogoi received only 53,030 votes.

Topon Kumar Gogoi's defeat in his home constituency has been attributed by a conscious section of voters to his failure to utilise social media, lack of coordination between the alliance partners' workers and leaders, and verbose lectures of BJP leaders, besides the candidate's own lack of mobility among the electorates.

The counting process in Sivasagar, Nazira, and Sonari was notably peaceful due to extensive security measures in Sivasagar and Charaideo districts, along with increased voter awareness about democratic principles. (The final results for Nazira LAC were delayed due to reported glitches in EVMs.)

NFR's Dibrugarh workshop introduces new automobile carrier coaches

Innovative NMGHS coaches offer enhanced features and increased payload capacity

GUWAHATI, June 4: The NF Railway zone at its Dibrugarh workshop has already produced a few New High-Speed Automobile Carrier (NMGHS) coaches from old GSCN coaches with a side door for loading/unloading of automobiles, especially two-wheelers. Three NMGHS coaches have been produced within a short time frame after getting approval from the Railway Board. Production of another three coaches is also in progress. For the very first time in Indian Railways, these coaches for loading automobiles are being introduced with multiple improved features over the traditional type freight coaches, with improved speed and accessibility and increased loading capacity.

NMGHS coaches being developed by NF Railway were designed by the Research Design and Standards Organisation (RDSO) in consultation with automobile manufacturers, from released and unused passenger coaches. A total of three coaches have been rolled out by the Dibrugarh workshop with a higher payload capacity of 18 tonnes compared to the earlier traditional freight coach of 12 tonnes carrying capacity. The potential speed of the newly designed NMGHS coach is 110 km per



hour, along with various other improved features like wider opening, natural pipe light, pavement markers, as well as retro-reflective tape for guidance, a strong floor with chequered sheet, improved fall plate arrangement for smooth entry, as well as an upgraded end-door design with a barrel lock for ease of locking. These new coaches were designed in such a manner that even four-wheeler automobile doors can be easily opened inside the coach without any damages. These new model coaches can also be used as a par-

cel van for carrying different commodities, including packaged goods.

It may be noted here that Indian Railways has become a preferred mode of transportation for automobile manufacturers due to its cheaper, faster, and environmentally friendly option compared to road transportation. Various types of automobiles are now directly being transported through railways from the manufacturing plant to all north-east states at a much cheaper cost, benefiting the common masses.

BJP juggernaut halts at Laharighat

HT Correspondent
MORIGAON, June 4: The counting of votes for the Parliamentary Election 2024 were declared on Tuesday in the election district, declaring the winners for Jagiroad, Morigaon, and Laharighat constituencies.

In the Jagiroad constituency, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate, Suresh Bora, emerged victorious with a resounding

1,34,665 votes, leaving behind the Indian National Congress (INC) candidate, Pradyut Bordoloi, who secured 57,865 votes. The All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) candidate, Aminul Islam, garnered 4,035 votes.

The Morigaon constituency also witnessed a BJP triumph, with Suresh Bora clinching 1,07,984 votes, while Pradyut Bordoloi of the INC received

48,642 votes. Aminul Islam of the AIUDF managed to secure 2,110 votes.

However, in the Laharighat constituency, the Congress candidate, Pradyut Bordoloi, maintained a strong lead, garnering 1,72,340 votes and retaining the seat. Suresh Bora of the BJP trailed behind with 40,803 votes, while Aminul Islam of the AIUDF secured 36,186 votes.

Teachers training on capacity building in biology teaching held

HT Correspondent
BISWANATH CHARIALI, June 4: The Advanced Level Biotech Hub of Biswanath College of Agriculture organised a three-day training program on 'Capacity Building in Biology Teaching' at Biswanath College of Agriculture from May 31 to June 3 for school teachers of Biswanath district. The program, sponsored by the Department of Biotechnology, government of India, in collaboration with Samagra Shiksha, Biswanath, imparted training on recent advances in biology and biotechnology. Experts in relevant disciplines from BNCA, AAU acted as resource persons in the training program. The program was inaugurated by Dr RN Barman, associate dean, BNCA, AAU, on May 31.

Dr MK Sarma, coordinator of the Biotech Hub, delivered the welcome address. Dhruvajyoti Das, ADC (education), and coordinator, Samagra Shiksha Abhijan, Biswanath, joined the meeting as the chief guest. In his address, he praised the efforts of the

Biotech Hub and BNCA authority for organising such a capacity-building program. Bedabrat Borah, the district programme officer, Samagra Shiksha Abhijan, acted as the guest of honour. Dr RK Goswami, professor, crop physiology, delivered the vote of thanks in the inaugural program. The inaugural session was conducted by Daizi Durba Saharia, project associate of the Biotech Hub, which began with a welcome song by Bedashruti Baruah.

In the three-day program, Dr J Bhuyan, Dr RK Goswami, Dr MK Sarma, Dr H Choudhury, Dr DK Daka, Dr Buddha Bora, Dr S Zaman, Dr A Baruah, Daizi Durba Saharia, and Mridusmita Kalita delivered lectures on various topics of biology and biotechnology. The program ended with the valedictory function held on June 3, which was attended by Dr RN Barman as the chairman and Rabin Hazarika and Bedabrat Baruah, the district programme officers, SSA, Biswanath. A good interaction of the participants and the guests and resource persons

was held during the function. Apart from the guests, Dr MK Sarma, Dr RK Goswami, and Dr A Baruah also delivered brief speeches. Participants expressed satisfaction with the deliberations and asked the organisers to organise such types of training in the future also. Mridusmita Kalita offered a vote of thanks.

Briefing to the media, Dr MK Sarma, the coordinator of the Biotech Hub, informed that the organisation of the training program is part of the initiative of the DBT, government of India, in 'Capacity Building in Biology and Biotechnology' through the establishment of Biotech Hubs in the entire north east India. He assured that such training programs shall be taken up in the future also to impart advanced training on biology and biotechnology to the students and teachers of the institutions of the locality. He further added that a total of 22 teachers from various schools of Biswanath district attended the program.

BJP's Ranjit Dutta wins Sonitpur LS constituency with overwhelming mandate

HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, June 4: After the official declaration of eagerly anticipated results for the Sonitpur Lok Sabha constituency, Ranjit Dutta from the BJP won the 11th no Sonitpur HPC (erstwhile Tezpur) seat, securing 768,270 votes. Meanwhile, Premal Ganju from the INC received 410,470 votes and secured the position of the runner-up. Ranjit Dutta emerged victorious with a massive difference of 357,800 votes. The share of the people's mandate in favour of the BJP (Ranjit Dutta) in Sonitpur has risen to 60.22 percent, while the Indian National Congress (Premal Ganju) received 32.18 percent.

Independent candidate Pradip Bhandari obtained 8,094 votes, sharing 0.63 percent of the total, while Kameswar Swargiary from the Voters Party International achieved 7,254 votes, sharing 0.57 percent. Rishiraj Kaundinya from the Aam Aadmi Party secured 32,692 votes, representing 2.56 percent of the total. BPP's Raju Deuri received 19,515 votes, sharing 1.53 percent, and Alam Ali from the Bahujan Maha Party obtained 4,169 votes, representing 0.33 percent of the people's mandate. The only female contender in the constituency, Rinku Roy from the Gana Suraksha Party, secured 6,759 votes, with a vote share of 0.53 percent. Additionally, 18,459 votes were cast against NOTA, accounting for 1.45 percent of the people's mandate.

It is worth mentioning that the saffron party has won the historic Sonitpur Lok Sabha constituency seat for the third consecutive term. After receiving the winner's certificate from the returning officer Deba Kumar Mishra, winning candidate Ranjit Dutta, in the



presence of BJP supporters, minister Ashok Singhal, MLAs Prithiraj Rabha, Ganesh Limbu, Krishna Kamal Tanti, and Pramod Borthakur, stated to the media that people have chosen the BJP for its developmental activities undertaken during the period under the able leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

AGP leads in Nalbari by over 90,000 votes

HT Correspondent
NALBARI, June 4: In the ongoing Lok Sabha election vote count at Gurdon Centre in Nalbari township, the AGP candidate holds a commanding lead of over 90,000 votes in both the Nalbari and Tihu assembly constituencies, which fall under the Barpeta Lok Sabha constituency.

In the Nalbari Assembly constituency, the AGP has secured 103,958 votes, while the Congress garnered 47,786 and the CPM received 6,474. This puts the AGP ahead by 56,172 votes in Nalbari. Similarly, in the Tihu assembly constituency, the AGP secured 88,663 votes, with the Congress trailing at 54,801 and the CPM at 9,591. Here, the AGP leads by 33,862 votes over the Congress.

In total, the AGP maintains a lead of 90,034 votes over the Congress across both Nalbari and Tihu constituencies under the Barpeta Lok Sabha constituency.

Tezpur University embarks on semiconductor technology program development

HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, June 4: Tezpur University organised an insightful talk on the rapidly evolving field of semiconductor technology on Tuesday. The talk was delivered by Dr Krishna Raghav Chaturvedi, outreach manager from the American Chemical Society, ACS International India.

During the deliberation, which was attended by faculty and students of the School of Engineering and the School of Sciences, TU, the role of semiconductors in emerging technologies and their challenges and opportunities were discussed. The talk was followed by an interactive session where attendees had the opportunity to engage directly with Dr Chaturvedi.

Attending the talk, Prof Partha Pratim Sahu, dean, School of Engineering, said that the objective of the interaction was to explore pos-

sibilities of offering industry-standard skills to TU students on semiconductors. Giving an example of the recent semiconductor unit set up in Jagiroad, the dean said that the university is developing an academic program on the cutting-edge area to meet regional and national priorities. Apart from semiconductors, Dr Chaturvedi also explained to the students how to write and publish scientific research papers.

Prof Shambhu Nath Singh, vice-chancellor, TU, said that India's 'Semiconductor Mission' represents a strategic initiative aimed at establishing the country as a global hub for semiconductor design, manufacturing, and innovation. In view of the importance of the area, TU is launching an MTech program in semiconductor technology from the academic year 2024-25, Prof Singh said.

Guwahati Airport records increase passenger footfall

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, June 4: Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport, Guwahati, recorded a footfall of nearly 5.2 lakh passengers in May 2024, witnessing a sharp increase from the corresponding month of the last year, which was 15 percent higher than last year's May, with 494,057 passengers. Among them, 2.63 lakh were departing passengers, and the remaining were arrivals. On the contrary, the airport handled 3,554 scheduled flights in May.

Meanwhile, the airport handled nearly 3,342 Haj passengers in May 2024, which is significantly lower than last year's Haj season. Last year, the total number of departing Haj passengers was 5,790.

Notably, the top three domestic destinations from Guwahati are Mumbai, Delhi, and Bengaluru. Similarly, the four international destinations are Singapore, Paris, Bangkok, and Kuala Lumpur.

From student politics to CM to Union minister, Sonowal's power-packed journey

After becoming Union Minister in 2021, Sonowal was elected to the Rajya Sabha from the state

GUWAHATI, June 4: From the tumultuous world of student politics to the pinnacle of the chief minister's office, relinquishing it to the most powerful minister of his cabinet, and then chosen as a cabinet minister by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the BJP's Dibrugarh Lok Sabha candidate Sarbananda Sonowal's political journey has been predictable, though marked by some twists and turns along the way.

Sonowal all set to win Dibrugarh Lok Sabha seat having established a comfortable lead of 2,76,397 votes against his nearest rival and united opposition candidate Lurinjyoti Gogoi. Sonowal has so far polled 6,87,647 while Gogoi secured 4,11,250 votes.

As a dynamic student leader who went on to join the state's most prominent regional party, then switching to the national right-wing party, Sonowal was Prime Minister Narendra Modi's obvious choice as the chief minister of Assam when he scripted BJP's historic win for the first time in the Northeast in 2016.

However, during the 2021 assembly elections, the party opted not to project Sonowal or any other leader as the Chief Ministerial candidate.

Instead, the powerful minister in his cabinet, Himanta Biswa Sarma, was elevated to the top post after the elections.

Nevertheless, Sonowal, who is believed to have the Prime Minister's trust (as evidenced by his inclusion in Modi's

initial cabinet as the lone representative from the North East), didn't remain sidelined for long. He was soon promoted to the Union cabinet with significant portfolios including Shipping, Waterways, Port, and Ayush in the subsequent reshuffle that same year.

The Rajya Sabha MP, a law graduate, is considered by most as an honest politician who furthered the party's fight against corruption in the state and united the different communities with his off-repeated lines 'Barak-Brahmaputra-Plains-Hills', symbolising his role as the unifier of the diverse indigenous population of the state.

His tenure faced its toughest test during the widespread protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), with his former allies from the All Assam Students Union (AASU) accusing him of failing to protect the interests of the indigenous populace.

Sonowal, 62, was accused of failing to convince the BJP government at the Centre to not bring the Bill in the Parliament which they claimed compromised the interests of the indigenous population.

This was viewed by the students organization, youths and many in the state as the "ultimate betrayal" by a man who was once bestowed with the title of 'Jatiya Nayak' (Leader of the Community) after the scrapping of the controversial Illegal Migrants' Determination by Tribunal (IMDT) Act by the Supreme



Court in 2005 which Sonowal had challenged as AASU president.

Sonowal's foray into politics began with his joining the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) where he served as its president from 1992 to 1999 and also be-

came the chairman of North East Students' Organisation (NESO) from 1996 to 2000.

From AASU, he predictably went on to join the Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) in 2001, founded by his erstwhile seniors in

the students' organisation, and was elected the party's MLA from Upper Assam's Moran constituency in 2001.

In 2004, he went on to successfully contest the Lok Sabha polls wrestling the Dibrugarh parliamentary seat for the first

time from the Congress by defeating former Union Minister Paban Singh Ghatowar.

Sonowal left the AGP in January 2011 following differences with the party leadership and went on to join the BJP a month later in the presence of then party president Nitin Gadkari.

He went on to become the BJP state unit president in 2012 and was credited with raising the party's tally to seven from the earlier four in the 2014 parliamentary polls.

He, himself, wrested the Lakhimpur constituency from former Union Minister Raneek Narah of the Congress and was made the Union Minister of State for Sports and Youth Development.

Sonowal, who belongs to the Sonowal-Kachari tribe, had entered the state assembly twice from Majuli, the world's largest river island and the seat of Vaishnavite culture, which he upgraded as an administrative district during his tenure as Chief Minister.

After becoming Union Minister in 2021, Sonowal was elected to the Rajya Sabha from the state.

Born on October 31, 1962 in Mulukgaon in Dibrugarh district as the youngest of Jibeswar Sonowal and Dineswari Sonowal's eight offspring, Sonowal is a bachelor and a devout follower of Assam's renowned Vaishnav saints Sankardeva and Madhavdeva. (PTI)

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Give me love and work - these two only.
-William Morris

Lessons for Modi and the BJP

The recent Lok Sabha elections have delivered a sobering message to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The Hindi Belt, traditionally a stronghold for the party, has reeled in its support, undermining BJP's ambition to secure 370 seats in 2024. This region, encompassing 11 states and union territories, collectively holds 226 Lok Sabha constituencies. In 2019, the BJP won 178 of these seats, with the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) securing 204. However, the latest results reveal a significant decline in support, emphasizing that even the BJP's core voter base cannot be taken for granted. Uttar Pradesh, the largest state in terms of parliamentary representation, has issued a clear warning to both PM Modi and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. The electorate's discontent with the aggressive Hindutva agenda has been palpable. Despite the highly publicized inauguration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, there was no significant "Ram Wave" to bolster BJP's prospects. Even in the Faizabad constituency, home to the Ram Temple, BJP candidate Lallu Singh was trailing behind Samajwadi Party (SP) candidate Awadhesh Prasad by over 13,000 votes. The INDIA bloc, comprising SP and Congress, performed robustly across Uttar Pradesh. Of the 80 seats, the BJP aimed to win 74, leaving 4 for its allies. Instead, SP led in 35 seats and the Congress in 7, while BJP was ahead in only 34 seats, with allies trailing far behind.

Bihar, the second largest state in the Hindi Belt, also showed diminished support for the BJP and NDA. In 2019, the BJP secured 17 seats, with the NDA winning 39 out of 40. The current trends, however, show a decline, with BJP leading in 12 seats and its allies JD(U) and LJP(RV) leading in 14 and 5 seats respectively. The opposition, consisting of RJD, INC, and CPI(M), is leading in 8 seats. In Jharkhand, where BJP previously held 11 out of 14 seats, the party is leading in 8 seats, with its ally AJSUP leading in 1. Opposition parties JMM and INC are making gains, leading in 3 and 2 seats respectively. Chhattisgarh, in contrast, shows the BJP improving its performance, leading in 10 out of 11 seats, a notable increase from 2019. Madhya Pradesh appears to be a bright spot for the BJP, with the party leading in all 29 seats, surpassing its 2019 performance. Rajasthan, however, tells a different story. The BJP is leading in only 14 out of 25 seats, a sharp decline from its previous sweep. The Congress and its allies are making significant inroads, leading in 11 seats. In Delhi, despite an alliance between Congress and AAP, BJP retained all 7 seats. The BJP's strategy, coupled with AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal's legal troubles, ensured their dominance.

Despite Congress and AAP alliance in Delhi, BJP is set to win all the 7 seats. PM Modi seems to have succeeded in his plan to retain BJP's all 7 seats won in 2019. AAP supremo and Chief Minister of the state was put behind bars after the announcement of election on money laundering charges. The Supreme Court of India had given Kejriwal interim bail to campaign during the election. However, nothing worked for the INDIA bloc in Delhi. BJP is heading for another major loss in Haryana where there are 10 Lok Sabha seats, and all of those were won by the BJP in 2019. Counting trend at 3:40 shows that BJP was leading in only 5, while the INC was leading on another 5. There was a seat sharing arrangement between Congress and AAP, both contesting 9 and 1 seat respectively. AAP is set, not only to lose in Delhi, but the party's only candidate in Haryana is also trailing behind BJP. Chandigarh's lone seat was won by BJP in 2019, but INC was leading his time at around 3:45 PM during counting. BJP had won all 4 constituencies in Himachal Pradesh in 2019, and is set to retain all the seats this time also. Similar is the case in Uttarakhand where all 5 constituencies were won by BJP in 2019, and the party is set to retain all, as the counting trend by 3:50 shows. The Lok Sabha Election 2024 result in the BJP's citadel states of the Hindi Belt shows that PM Narendra Modi and the BJP needs to tread carefully in the future, and they can't take Hindu votes granted merely by their communal Hindutva stratagem. BJP's loss in the Hindi Belt should be a lesson to the RSS-BJP clan. The 2024 Lok Sabha election results in the Hindi Belt indicate that the BJP and PM Modi must recalibrate their strategies. The electorate's response is a clear indicator that aggressive communalism and over-reliance on religious symbolism are not enough to secure votes. The BJP's loss in its traditional bastions should serve as a critical lesson for the party and its ideological mentor, the RSS. The need for a more inclusive and development-focused approach has never been more evident.

In France, resurgent far Right beats divided Leftwing parties

It seems almost a lifetime ago. France's elections in spring 2022 saw the rise of a united-left slate, the New Ecological and Social Popular Union (NUPES), which not only repeatedly topped polls but denied Emmanuel Macron a majority in the National Assembly. Last year, his government seemed to be on the ropes, faced with a mass movement against a rise in the pension age. But as France again heads to the polls for the European elections this June 9, the Left is in a precarious position.

Firstly, the NUPES experiment - the alliance of all left-wing formations from the Parti Socialiste via the Communists, the Greens, and France Insoumise - seems to be disappearing. These parties are all running separate lists for the EU elections. Worse, this division is taking place at a time when in France, as around Europe, we are seeing rampant inflation, growing social grievances, and - above all - a massive far-right breakthrough. The question of how to form a common front faced with these pressing demands is thus a recurrent concern on the French left.

Surely, the value of left-wing unity and NUPES more specifically can be subject to a number of caveats. NUPES's limits were already apparent the day after the parliamentary elections (the only election in which these parties actually all ran together). One oft-mentioned criticism was the heavy concentration of its electorate in certain social categories - present in large urban areas but far less so among other parts of the working class in towns and rural France. This issue is especially important given that Marine Le Pen's far-right Rassemblement National has enjoyed real momentum in these areas and among these same groups; it elected eighty-nine MPs in June 2022, an unprecedented level of local representation. This gap was specifically pointed out by several figures such as France Insoumise MP François Ruffin, himself elected in a semirural northern constituency around the city of Amiens.

Still, left-wing unity does have real virtues, two of which especially stand out. The first, quite obviously, is the possibility of pulling together an electoral bloc, which, whatever its differences, has the chance of genuinely rivaling the Rassemblement National and the Macron camp in a three-horse race.

Secondly, while hardly obliterating the (entirely legitimate and indeed necessary) debates between the different left-wing formations, the NUPES project forced them to adopt a certain at-

titude faced with both Macron's agenda and the far right. This didn't mean an identical stance, but at least a "cohesive" one. The forces of the Left avoided unnecessary conflicts among themselves, instead focusing their efforts against the far right and the dangers that Macron's government poses to the French social model.

Finally, NUPES - which was not, after all, meant to remain unchangeable forever - made it possible to lay a foundation, a shared programmatic bedrock of rupture with neoliberalism, which would allow for further developments in the future. Yet today the mood is rather different. The different left-wing formations now openly voice their hostility to each other - providing a sometimes little-edifying spectacle.

This new period of recriminations has been visible in several recent clashes. For many players on the Left (if hardly all of them), these disputes really took on full force after the Hamas-led attacks on October 7 and Israel's war in Gaza in the months since then.

In essence, there are opposed sides. One, represented in the Parti Socialiste and the Greens, speaks in almost complete support for Israel's response to October 7, even as it condemns Benjamin Netanyahu's own crimes. In contrast, the France Insoumise line focuses on the ultimate causes of this conflict, in Israeli colonization.

France Insoumise also offers its own distinct reading of the latest events. For instance, it refers to the October 7 attacks as "war crimes" rather than "terrorism," to remind its audience that these events are part of a long colonial conflict, which provided the context in which Hamas unfortunately, emerged. Clearly, such approaches are open to debate: but what followed was not debate, but invective about France Insoumise's "ambiguities" and even its supposed "antisemitism."

At the center of these debates, France Insoumise and its leader, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, have been accused of all sorts of evils by various other formations, starting with the Parti Socialiste. Amidst a broader McCarthyism around this issue - fuelled by Macron and his political-media outsiders - attacks flew thick and fast, including ubiquitous accusations of antisemitism.

Rima Hassan, an activist for the Palestinian cause and candidate on the France Insoumise list for the European Parliament, has been one of the more prominent

faces of recent months. She has faced numerous attacks from all sides, including parts of the Left.

The most emblematic, but also worrying, was a police summons for supposed "glorification of terrorism," also directed at Mathilde Panot, who is president of the France Insoumise group in the National Assembly. These attacks are part of a demonization campaign that tries to tar France Insoumise with the brush of antisemitism.

Macron's camp has succeeded in setting up a poisonous debate that has erased the substantive debates that could have taken place on the events in the Gaza Strip, and indeed has hardly helped to encourage popular interest in the European election itself.

The violence of the current exchanges among the left-wing parties are a recent development. But

DEGREE OF THOUGHT Julian-Nicolas Calfuquir

it should be remembered that divisions have always existed, even during the negotiations that gave rise to NUPES. While the bulk of the left-wing electorate (around 25 percent of French voters) did unite ahead of the parliamentary elections, it's worth remembering that this base is itself riven by contradictions.

The parliamentary elections are at the heart of France's party funding system, which distributes some €66 million a year to its political parties. This forces smaller outfits to talk to each other in order to have any chance of winning seats, given that the election is based on single-member constituencies.

Still, once this hurdle has been surmounted, the deep-seated antagonisms among these parties, and even within the electorate, seem to take over. The proportional system used for the EU elections offers each of the left-wing parties the possibility of winning seats without uniting and, indeed, sets them in direct competition.

Still, perhaps best illustrating the shift in the broad-left space is the rise of the Parti Socialiste list headed by Raphaël Glucksmann. He has been a Member of the European Parliament (MEP) since the 2019 elections, when he also led the party's list. He made a name for himself in that contest with an unexpected score of 6 percent (surely a low tally, but better than anticipated given the party's deep unpopularity after François Hollande's term as president in 2012-17). Since then, Glucksmann has been in the forefront on international issues such as military aid to Ukraine and the treatment of Uyghurs in China.

Glucksmann represents a soft-

left, even centrist, line, combining both a hawkish Atlanticism on international issues, and a tepid "social" discourse. Glucksmann's current centrality in EU election debates makes him one of the main instruments with which the right wing of the Parti Socialiste - led by former president Hollande, ex-prime minister Bernard Cazeneuve, and Occitanie regional president Carole Delga - is reshaping the Left. In particular, the aim is to break the leading position that France Insoumise was able to exert over NUPES, and instead reclaim a center-left space that Macron has at least part-occupied since 2017. According to polls, Glucksmann's list is now vying with the one led by Macron's own candidate, Valérie Hayer.

Ahead of the 2027 presidential election, in which Macron cannot stand again, the reassertion of the right wing of the Parti Socialiste as a contender in the centrist political space also relies on it taking a tough line against other, further-left forces. We thus see a revived discourse of "irreconcilable" differences with Mélenchon's project - raised already by opponents of NUPES such as Hollande - and the building of a more moderate, if not avowedly neoliberal left. This was encapsulated by a dispute on May 1, when Glucksmann was booed at a rally in Saint-Étienne celebrating International Workers' Day and the struggle by workers at supermarket chain Casino. Glucksmann chose to blame France Insoumise for such unwelcome behaviour, even though it was entirely uninvolved.

These polemics moreover raise the question of whether all this was inevitable, after the brief idyll of unity that the Left saw during the 2022 election cycle. We might indeed wonder whether these debates are not in fact irreconcilable, especially seeing how readily the different left-wing forces attack each other even faced with the imposing rise of the far right.

Indeed, Le Pen's party is the force that seems to be benefiting most from the current climate of discontent and division. The Rassemblement National list headed by MEP Jordan Bardella is currently far ahead in the polls for the June 9 vote. After an impressive breakthrough during the 2022 parliamentary elections, poll after poll shows this party on the rise.

The Rassemblement National electorate is commonly said to be based in the working classes, with significant blue-collar support in small-town France in particular. Still, its latest sociological shift seems to be refining its strategy

for winning power. Indeed, the 2022 election and various opinion polls show an opening-up of certain more middle-class categories to Le Pen's charms. This is surely worrying at a time when the far right is seeking to de-demonize its image at all costs.

This cleansing of its image is based on several factors. One is the broad polarization of French political debate around the far right's chosen talking points in recent years, also thanks to the government itself.

Since the start of Macron's second term in office in 2022, and even before that, the debates relayed by the media have largely focused on issues of immigration and identity. This has allowed Rassemblement National rhetoric to be echoed far and wide - and created a space conducive to an ever more right-wing realignment of French politics.

The emergence of further-right candidate Eric Zemmour in the presidential election has also favoured this cultural battle. An unsuccessful competitor of Le Pen's Rassemblement National, Zemmour has brought the idea of the "Great Replacement" into the political mainstream. If denounced by academics as a hoax, this claim of a grand conspiracy to replace whites with Muslims and Africans has had a broad impact on the battle for public opinion. Le Pen's "normalization" strategy has thus been disconcertingly easy to pursue, with its slogans broadcast almost effortlessly.

Faced with Le Pen's rise, several recent works have proposed to analyze her base. This includes a major 2023 study by economists Thomas Piketty and Julia Cagé, theorizing the idea that "sociospacial class" division (hence the large far-right vote in low-income small towns) is more decisive than simple racism.

The work of Thibault Lhonneur and Axel Bruneau reminds us of the importance of social issues in the areas where the Rassemblement National scores best. Still, other studies - notably the ones stemming from the thesis of Félicien Faury, who highlights the centrality of immigration to the Le Pen electorate - points to the cultural battle that needs waging.

Left-wing unity may not be an end in itself. Yet, the current climate of intense recriminations and polemics aimed at demonizing other left-wingers is surely not helping. As the far right continues its march toward power, everyone on the Left agrees that curtailing its rise is urgently necessary. What they're not doing is finding ways to make that happen fast. (IPA Service)

Apprehensions and expectations of Central Trade Unions at their climax

By: Dr. Gyan Pathak

Apprehensions and expectations of India's Central Trade Unions (CTUs) have reached their climax at the completion of the Lok Sabha elections on June 1, 2024. Since the fate of trade unionism and the workers' rights amidst the rising working poverty in the country much depends on the outcome of the election result on June 4, CTUs have reiterated their demands, especially withdrawal of the four controversial labour codes, and asked the workers to be ready to continue their struggle, if the newly constituted government does not meet their demands.

CTUs have been expressing their apprehensions during the election campaigns that PM Narendra Modi led BJP government, if voted to power again, would implement the four labour codes against which they have been agitating for the last four years since 2020.

Their expectations are high from the opposition because INDIA bloc has been able to offer one-on-one close contests to PM Modi's BJP in majority of Lok Sabha constituencies, and if they happen to come to power the sword of the labour codes hanging over them might be taken away.

Barring the government supported Bharatiya Maz-

door Sangh (BMS) all the 10 Central Trade Unions are up in arms against the labour code which they call anti-worker and pro-corporate which is feared to bring economic slavery to the workers.

Even BMS is not happy with the two labour codes, in which they have proposed certain amendments. It means whichever government comes to power - either NDA led by BJP or INDIA bloc - it would have to address the concerns of the CTUs.

The joint platform of the 10 CTUs have been complaining for a long time that Modi government has been favouring BMS against all others. Union government still gives BMS weightage as the largest trade union in the country on the basis of the two decades old data of membership, which does not reflect the present reality. It is a partisan approach of the government to favour BMS which in return favours the BJP government.

In this scenario, the workers' rights are being compromised. BMS is allowed by the BJP government to represent Indian workers at every national and international forum in violation of the rightful place of the other trade unions stifling their voice.

The 10 CTUs therefore expect that the newly constituted government would stop suppressing the trade unionism in the

country through numerous ways.

CTUs have reiterated all their demands, which include putting break of indiscriminate privatization of Public Sector Undertakings for the benefit of the private corporates and businesses, which includes the banking and insurance sectors. Identification of 'scheme workers' as government employee; fixation of minimum wage at ₹ 26,000; and scrapping of the Electricity Act amendments are other major demands of the CTUs.

There was a related development in Punjab, where a joint rally of 24 trade unions was organized last week. Punjab polled on June 1. Thousands of workers gathered in Barnala for a Lok Chetna rally with the theme that people need not have high hopes on electoral democracy. Not only industrial workers, but also farmers, teachers, students, and employees of government, power, and transport sector have participated.

"After every five years, people elect governments at the Centre and in states. But do these governments fulfil the demands for the masses? For that one has to struggle. So we always struggle," said Sukhdev Singh Kokrikalan, general secretary Bharatiya Kisan Union Ugrahan.

Failing faith in election must be noted by the new government that comes

into power after the June 4 election result. The organisers of the Punjab rally have a 30-point agenda, the chief of which is the demand to end outsourcing in government offices in Public Sector Undertakings, withdrawal from the WTO, and legal guarantee for MSP for all crops among others.

The year 2023 has been the year of workers struggle in India. The joint platform of 10 Central Trade Unions - INTUC, Left's CITU and AITUC, and others such as AIUTUC, TUCC, HMS, SEWA, LFP, AICTU and UTUC - along with the farmers unions including the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) continued their yearlong agitation against what they termed as PM Modi's anti-worker, anti-farmers, and pro-corporate policies.

Bank and insurance employees' unions, electricity and transport unions, also joined in the struggle against Modi government labour and economic policies. They also campaigned during election with the slogan - Defeat BJP, Defeat Modi, Save India.

CTUs, barring the government supported BMS, have now not only reiterated their demands but also asked the workers to be ready for long struggle if the new government does not act to address their grievances. (IPA Service)

Whither the American democracy is headed?

By: Asad Mirza

The former American president Donald Trump was convicted on all 34 counts in the 'hush money case' for falsifying business records to cover a \$130,000 payment to adult actor Stormy Daniels to buy her silence regarding an alleged affair.

Immediately after the verdict was announced, several American billionaires, including those who had distanced from Donald Trump in recent years, pledged support to him or have indirectly backed him in recent days. From Bill Ackman to Stephen Schwarzman, the American billionaires including the tech czar Elon Musk supported Trump despite his conviction.

Some of the figures that have pledged support to Trump now, had publicly rejected him in the past over his role in the January 6, 2021 attack on the US Capitol Hill, but things have now changed and they seem to have flocked to him again.

The conviction or the baggage that Trump carries, ranging from the January 6 attack on the US Capitol to three other cases against him, has not stopped many Wall Street billionaires from coming to his support. While some have said they are disillusioned with President Joe Biden, other have said they are concerned about rising anti-semitism in the country under his presidency.

Last week, billionaire Steve Schwarzman, the Co-founder and CEO of Blackstone, said he will support Trump and will donate to him. Blackstone is an investment and real estate giant with a market cap of 144.27 billion, according to Yahoo Finance. It has assets under management of more than \$1 trillion.

Omeed Malik, President of 1789 Capital, has also supported Trump. He is one of the leaders of a fundraiser for New York for Trump where donations of up to \$25 million were sought, as per a report.

Robert Bigelow, the owner of Bigelow Aerospace and Budget Suites of America, has also supported Trump. He has even paid Trump \$1 million for his legal fees, as per Reuters.

Billionaire Bill Ackman, the CEO of

hedge fund Pershing Square, has said he will not vote for Biden and has indicated he is backing Trump. He denounced Biden as a wave of anti-Israel protests swept across the United States, which many criticised as being anti-semitic.

Jamie Dimon, the Chairman and CEO of JPMorgan Chase, has also indicated his support for Trump in recent days. Trump has also been increasingly finding support among venture capitalists in the Silicon Valley, which has long been a bastion of Democrats, according to The New York Times.

Prominent among the Silicon Valley supporters was Tesla and SpaceX boss Elon Musk, who has said he will support a candidate in the 2024 US presidential election. The Wall Street Journal has reported that he has become close with Trump in recent months and is holding multiple private telephonic conversations with him in a month.

Musk, a known supporter of Trump, believes the conviction was driven by political agendas rather than a genuine pursuit of justice. This sentiment echoes the reactions of many Trump supporters who view the charges related to hush money payments as a minor offence blown out of proportion.

Why this sudden support for Trump? This apparent shift of loyalty also makes us wonder to the basic logic of the decision made by these billionaires. And as usual when you start removing layers then the ultimate answer found at the base or rationale for every so-what illogical move is: Money. Trump has promised to cut taxes for the wealthy and eliminate regulations. President Joe Biden wants the opposite.

While some billionaires have cited disillusionment with Biden's policies and the rising anti-semitism in the country as reasons for ditching him to support Trump, commentators have said the major reason is Trump's proposed tax cuts.

Some of these business leaders have harshly criticised Trump in recent years. Following the January 6 attack on the US Capitol, JPMorgan Chase boss Dimon had said that he "strongly condemn the violence in our nation's capital" and "our elected leaders have a responsibility to call

for an end to the violence" and accept the election results. Blackstone boss Schwarzman called it "an affront to the democratic values we hold dear as Americans" and later said he would not back Trump.

Now, however, Schwarzman has said the US under Biden was heading in the 'wrong direction'. He further said that the 'dramatic rise of anti-semitism' made him to support Trump.

Writing in The New Republic, Timothy Noah highlighted that the issue of anti-semitism does not entirely address the support for Trump, as he has been associated with the movement for years. Whitney Tilson, who previously ran hedge fund Kase Capital Management, told Bloomberg that business leaders were supporting Trump out of self-interest.

Meanwhile, in a rather bizarre and related development as the Trump's hush-money trial inclined towards conclusion, the former US president compared himself to saint Mother Teresa further calling the charges 'rigged'. "Mother Teresa could not beat these charges. The charges are rigged. The whole thing is rigged," he said. The comments came in as he was leaving the court after the trial ended.

This sentiment brings us back home where we have our own god man, claiming he thinks that he was not biologically born. In fact, it proves the old dictum that religion continues to be the last refuge of scoundrels in power because it provides some sort of legitimacy and a cover against criticism by their opponents and world powers. It further confirms the view that political elites co-opt religion for their political gain.

However, despite the conviction, Trump, currently campaigning for re-election in 2024, remains eligible to both run for and be elected President. Trump himself has dismissed the verdict, asserting that the American people in the upcoming presidential election will deliver the true judgment. Most surveys so far have shown that Trump may win the US presidential election. The whole episode and the connected developments, makes us wonder whether the American democracy is headed? (The author is a Delhi-based senior political and international affairs commentator)

Nature's wisdom: The evergreen cycle of growth and renewal

By: Dipak Kurmi

The towering majesty of a tree casts its spell as you stand beneath it, your gaze instinctively rising to trace the intricate network of branches painting patterns against the sky. Each branch, with its singular pattern and structure, contributes to the tree's defining character and breathtaking beauty. Yet, concealed within this mesmerizing display lies a tale far more captivating - a story of growth and transformation that unfolds silently, hidden from casual observers.

The emergence of a bud from the tree's trunk marks the beginning of the narrative. Under the nurturing balance of sunlight, water, and nutrients, this bud embarks on a gradual journey of growth, evolving into a mature branch. Originating in regions of the plant abundant in meristematic cells, the genesis of a bud, or bud set, unfolds.

These specialized cells, nestled at the tips of stems and roots, possess a remarkable capacity for division and specialization, orchestrating the formation of new plant structures such as leaves, flowers, and branches. When bathed in sunlight, these meristematic cells, known as apical buds, spring into action, catalyzing fresh growth and expansion.

This is where the plant hormones auxin and cytokinin exert their influence. Originating from the shoot apex, auxin plays a pivotal role in suppressing the outgrowth of axillary buds, thereby granting dominance to the apical bud, fostering its rapid and towering growth. Aply termed apical dominance, this phenomenon ensures the robust development of the central stem, overshadowing the growth of lateral stems. In contrast, cytokinin, activated upon the removal of the shoot apex, assumes a contrasting role. It stimulates the proliferation of axillary buds by enhancing their access to vital nutrients,

encouraging their emergence and subsequent growth.

This tug-of-war between auxin and cytokinin stands as a pivotal aspect of the plant's growth strategy. It furnishes the plant with a dynamic mechanism for adaptation, enabling it to respond flexibly to environmental cues - whether by stretching skyward in pursuit of sunlight or by spreading its branches to claim more territory.

As the bud unfurls and matures, the meristematic cells within embark on a journey of division and specialization, ushering forth a diverse array of cell types that shape the burgeoning branch.

Among these cells, some assume the mantle of the outer layer, morphing into protective bark cells, while others contribute to the structural framework as wood cells, destined to become the conduits of xylem and phloem. With each division and differentiation, the bud extends gradually, metamorphosing into the nascent form of a twig.

The transformation begins as the twig undergoes lignification, a gradual process characterized by the deposition of lignin, a sophisticated organic polymer renowned for fortifying the plant's cell walls.

With time, this metamorphosis imbues the once pliant, verdant twig with the solidity of a hardened, russet branch. Lignin emerges as a cornerstone of the plant's defensive arsenal, fashioning a formidable bulwark within cell walls that repels invaders and pests, thereby safeguarding the plant's well-being.

This attribute also bestows upon the plant resilience against decay, thereby extending its lifespan. Furthermore, lignin plays a pivotal role in the plant's hydraulic infrastructure. By rendering the plant's vascular tissues impermeable, it staunchly guards against the seepage of water and nutrients, enabling their efficient conveyance from the roots to the leaves. This water-



proofing prowess concurrently thwarts the absorption of surplus water, shielding the plant from the perils of waterlogging and the maladies it may entail.

The branch's anatomy unveils a marvel of botanical engineering. The foundation of this intricate structure resides in the branch collar, a bulging region where the branch meets the main trunk. Within this specialized zone, vital tissues reside, pivotal in orchestrating the repair of wounds and fortifying the branch against the encroachment of pathogens.

The journey continues beyond the branch collar, leading us to the pivotal branch junction. At this critical intersection, the branch diverges from the trunk, initiating the branch's outward journey. It is from this pivotal point that the branch extends, birthing lateral shoots commonly referred to as secondary branches or twigs. These extensions branch further into delicate limbs, ultimately blossoming into the verdant array of leaves, flowers, or fruits.

In the intricate tapestry of tree biology, branching patterns stand as a fascinating phenomenon, bearing testament to the interplay of genetic predisposition and environmental influences.

Among these patterns lies the phenomenon of "alternate branching", observed in select species. Within this arrangement, branches adorn the main stem in a staggered fashion, di-

minishing overlap and fostering interstitial spaces. The outcome is a canopy structure characterized by openness - a testament to both nature's architectural prowess and the plant's adaptive strategy.

The open configuration facilitates the even penetration of sunlight, permeating through to the lower branches and the forest floor. This dual effect serves not only to optimize the tree's own photosynthetic processes by ensuring each part receives sufficient sunlight but also to nurture understorey vegetation with a gentle, filtered light.

Nonetheless, this strategic approach is not devoid of its own set of challenges.

The less rigid framework formed by the staggered arrangement of branches offers a degree of flexibility, potentially enabling greater movement during windy conditions. However, this characteristic may also elevate the tree's vulnerability to structural damage during severe storms.

The opposite branching pattern is exhibited by certain species, featuring pairs of branches emerging in balanced opposition. Trees with this distinctive branching arrangement frequently encounter heightened shading within their canopies, courtesy of the symmetrical disposition of branches. This engenders a denser, more overlapping canopy configuration, resembling a natural umbrella that

offers shade and retains moisture. The augmented density contributes to shadowing amidst opposite branches, curtailing sunlight penetration to lower branches and the inner reaches of the canopy.

This denser configuration frequently furnishes heightened mechanical stability against wind or storms. Branches inherently display negative geotropism, a trait guiding them to grow contrary to gravity's pull, extending upwards and outwards in pursuit of sunlight. This tactical adjustment empowers them to optimize sunlight exposure and assert their position in the intense competition for resources.

In dense forests, where sunlight is a precious commodity, trees employ a distinct strategy termed "self-shading avoidance". They prioritize vertical growth to diminish the shading of lower leaves, extending towards the limited light filtering through the canopy. Meanwhile, wind, the unseen artist, exerts considerable influence on tree development. Within windy locales, trees frequently adopt narrower branching angles, sculpting a sleeker silhouette that minimizes wind resistance.

These seemingly insignificant branches are, in reality, the essential arteries of trees. Analogous to the arteries in the human body, they act as vital conduits within the arboreal realm, exerting an irreplace-

able influence on the tree's vitality and welfare. Their primary role involves the transportation of water and nutrients from the roots to the leaves, facilitating the essential processes of growth and sustenance. Simultaneously, they ferry the sugars synthesized during photosynthesis back to the tree's various components, ensuring the seamless distribution of resources throughout the organism.

They also function as habitats and support systems for a myriad of organisms. Birds construct nests upon them, insects and lichen seek sanctuary on both bark and foliage, and mammals utilize branches for shelter and as conduits for traversal. This rich biodiversity fosters a miniature ecosystem within the branches, enriching the tree's well-being and interweaving with the intricate tapestry of life enveloping it.

Their branches often bear flowers and fruit, pivotal for the tree's reproduction. Flowers entice pollinators, while fruits, harboring seeds, serve as delectable morsels for animals, who then scatter the seeds in their droppings, facilitating the propagation of the tree species.

Certain seeds are ingeniously equipped with wings or fluff, granting them the ability to be whisked away by the wind, thereby enabling plants to disseminate their progeny across vast expanses.

In extraordinary circumstances, branches serve as the catalyst for new beginnings. This phenomenon unfolds through vegetative propagation, wherein fragments of branches have the potential to sprout into complete trees. This mode of asexual reproduction yields offspring that mirror the genetic makeup of the parent tree.

In their sagacity, trees assume the role of deliberate architects of their own development. They methodically discard lower branches that have ceased to contribute significantly to photosynthesis.

This strategic act of self-pruning enables trees to redirect their energy and resources towards the upper branches, which enjoy superior access to sunlight.

How does the tree execute this process? As a branch reaches the end of its productivity, the tree gradually cuts off its supply of water and nutrients. Consequently, the branch undergoes a gradual deterioration, shedding its bark and becoming fragile, susceptible to fungal invasion.

Eventually, the weakened branch detaches from the tree, leaving behind a stump that the tree seals with resins or gums. This protective seal shields the tree from potential pathogens that could infiltrate the wounded area and pose a threat to its well-being. Subsequently, as the fallen branch decomposes, it imparts its stored nutrients back into the soil, culminating in a final act of nourishment for the tree from which it originated.

The process enriches the surrounding ecosystem, nurturing fresh beginnings and underscoring the cyclical nature of existence: In every conclusion, a commencement blooms anew.

This perpetual rhythm of expansion and withdrawal mirrors life's immutable verity: Change reigns supreme. It stands as a testament to the intrinsic wisdom that life isn't solely about unyielding advancement, but also about the discernment to relinquish that which no longer serves us.

Much akin to a tree discarding an unproductive branch to conserve resources for fresh growth, we too must summon the fortitude to release what no longer aligns with our journey. As we traverse life's labyrinthine paths, let us glean insight from this timeless natural wisdom, embracing the flux that accompanies our voyage, perpetually welcoming the dawn of new opportunities and growth. *(The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)*

Why did Delhi get so hot? The answer may lie in warming of the Arabian Sea



By: Akshit Sangomla

On May 29, 2024, India Meteorological Department's (IMD) Mungeshpur automated weather station in north Delhi recorded a hard to believe temperature of 52.9°C. If confirmed, this would be the highest temperature ever recorded in India. As soon as the news broke out, it spread like wildfire.

The IMD released a statement on the evening of May 29, explaining that the anomalous temperature "could be due to error in the sensor or the local factor". The weather agency is currently investigating the event.

The rest of Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR) recorded temperatures between 45.2°C and 49.1°C. At many of the weather stations, the recorded temperatures were actually a bit lower as compared to May 28 and it even rained in the evening of May 29. IMD cites these observations for highlighting the unlikelihood of the temperature record.

Whether the record-breaking temperature in Mungeshpur is confirmed or not, north, northwest and central India have been under an intense heatwave spell for the past 15 days or so.

Gujarat and Rajasthan are the worst-affected states, having suffered from 12 and 11 heatwave days respectively between May 16 and May 26. More than 60 people have died in Rajasthan due to the intense heat, according to media reports.

There have been two spells of heatwaves in India in May. The first was from May 1 to May 7 when Odisha, Gangetic West Bengal, the southeast Peninsular region and interior parts of Karnataka experienced heatwaves on 5-7 days, according to data from the IMD.

The second spell began on May 16

and is still ongoing. During this time, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Delhi-NCR, south Haryana, southwest Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Assam recorded heatwaves.

Many other states in northwest, central and south India have also experienced heatwaves in this period. Many cities across the country such as Chandigarh have also broken their all-time temperature records in May. Chandigarh recorded a maximum temperature of 46.7°C on May 29, breaking its previous record of 46.5°C set on May 28, 1988.

In the month of May, northwest and central regions of India are generally prone to heatwaves. But the current heatwaves seem exceptionally punishing as has been witnessed in Delhi.

The immediate meteorological reason for the heat are the hot winds blowing from the Arabian Peninsula in West Asia towards Rajasthan and the rest of northwest India.

The other cause are warm winds blowing in from over the Arabian Sea, a consequence of the record-breaking warmth that the sea has absorbed in the past couple of years, building on the increasing ocean heat content in the past few decades.

"The winds are sweeping in from the warm Arabian Sea and hot West Asia. So Delhi is getting cooked," Raghu Murtugudde, professor of climate studies at the Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay and emeritus professor at the University of Maryland, told Down To Earth.

The Arabian Sea has warmed by around 1.2°C to 1.4°C in the past few decades, according to a research paper published in the journal Earth Science Reviews in March 2022. The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) stated recently that the sea surface temperatures (SSTs) in all global ocean basins have been on a record-breaking

streak for the past 13 months.

Copernicus Climate Change Service of the European Union also pointed out that "the record-high SSTs were associated with marine heatwaves around the globe, including in much of the North Atlantic Ocean, parts of the Mediterranean Sea, Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea, Indian Ocean and North Pacific Ocean."

The El Nino climatic phenomenon is another factor that is often cited as a reason for record-breaking temperatures on land and in the oceans. But the current El Nino event that began in July 2023, is in its waning phase with a good possibility of a La Nina event, which generally cools down global temperatures, to begin any time between July and September.

But how rare is this occurrence of record-breaking heatwaves over northwest India and what would be its frequency in a rapidly warming world?

"Will it happen again soon? Hard to say if such a combination will happen anytime soon in terms of warm 2023 and the continued warm 2024. Volcano, El Nino, cleaner air and global warming combined to spike the hot temperatures beyond expectations," explained Murtugudde.

"We may return to the rates of warming before 2023 especially if a strong La Nina kicks in and stays for a few years. Unfortunately, we are not good at predicting these. Hence, saying this is the new normal is a bit dangerous," he cautioned.

The heatwaves though may continue in the month of June for northwest and central India, while the southern states remain cooler because of the rains from the southwest monsoon.

The much-awaited monsoon made an onset over Kerala and most of the Northeastern states on May 30, two days earlier than normal and one day earlier than predicted by the IMD.

But the monsoon winds will probably take around a month to reach Delhi and northwest India. The normal date of monsoon onset over Delhi is June 30, if the winds do not stall — a condition that has been observed in the past few years.

IMD also expects above normal heatwave days for much of northwest and central India in June 2024, while it also predicts below normal rainfall in the same period, according to the second long range monsoon forecast issued by the weather agency on May 27. *(Courtesy: Down To Earth)*

The Earth's growing fever will have huge repercussions for human health

By: Jack Marley

Earth's growing fever has obvious repercussions for human health, like heatwaves that are hotter than our physiology can tolerate. Humanity's departure from the stable climate it inherited will yield surprises, too, though. Some of those may be existing diseases appearing in new places or spreading with greater ferocity. And some, experts fear, may be new diseases entirely.

The mosquito-borne infection malaria killed more than half a million people each year during the last decade. Most of these victims were children and almost all (95% in 2022) were in Africa.

As a source of disease, infectious mosquitoes are at least predictable in their need for three things: warm temperatures, humid air and puddles to breed in. So what difference will global heating make?

Parasites are on the march
"The relationship between climate and malaria transmission is complex and has been the subject of intense study for some three decades," say water and health experts Mark Smith (University of Leeds) and Chris Thomas (University of Lincoln).

Much of this research has focused on sub-Saharan Africa, the global epicentre of malaria cases and deaths. Smith and Thomas combined temperature and water movement projections to produce a continent-wide analysis of malaria risk.

Their results showed that the conditions for malaria transmission will become less suitable overall, especially in west Africa. But where temperature and humidity are likely to suit infectious mosquitoes in future also happens to be where lots more people are expected to live, near rivers like the Nile in Egypt.

"This means the number of people living in potentially malaria endemic areas (suitable for transmission more than nine months a year) will increase by 2100 to over a billion," they say.

Elsewhere, tropical diseases will slip their bonds as the insects carrying them survive further from the equator. This is already happening in France, where dengue fever cases spiked during the hot summer of 2022.

"It seems that the lowlands of Veneto [in Italy] are emerging as

an ideal habitat for the Culex mosquitoes, which can host and transmit West Nile virus," adds Michael Head, a senior research fellow in global health at the University of Southampton.

Research suggests that the global transmission of mosquito-borne diseases like malaria and dengue will change, says Mark Booth, a senior lecturer in parasite epidemiology at Newcastle University.

That's as clear a picture as Booth could conjure from modelling more than 20 tropical diseases in a warming world.

"For most other parasites, there was little or no evidence. We simply don't know what to expect," he says.

Some diseases will bring fresh torment for the species humans farm. Bluetongue, a virus transmitted by midges, is expected to infect sheep further afield — in

central Africa, western Russia and the US — though a subtropical Asia and Africa where it evolved, Booth says.

And the prognoses for some diseases afflicting humans will worsen. UCL academics Sanjay Sisodiya, a neuroscientist and Mark Maslin, an earth system scientist, found that climate change is exacerbating the symptoms of certain brain conditions.

"Each of the billions of neurons in our brain is like a learning, adapting computer, with many electrically active components," they say. "Many of these components work at a different rate depending on the ambient temperature, and are designed to work together within a narrow range of temperatures."

A species that evolved in Africa, humans are comfortable between 20°C and 26°C and within 20% and 80% humidity, Sisodiya and Maslin say. Our brain is already working close to the limit of its preferred temperature range in most cases, so even small increases matter.

"When those environmental

conditions move rapidly into unaccustomed ranges, as is happening with extreme temperatures and humidity related to climate change, our brain struggles to regulate our temperature and begins to malfunction."

One planet
Clearly, staying healthy isn't as simple as regulating what you eat or how often you exercise. There is a lot that is beyond your immediate control.

"Within less than three years, the World Health Organization has declared two public health emergencies of international concern: Covid-19 in February 2020 and monkeypox in July 2022," says Arindam Basu, an associate professor of epidemiology and environmental health at the University of Canterbury.

"At the same time, extreme weather events are being reported continuously across the

world and are expected to become more frequent and intense. These are not separate issues." Basu highlights

danger of new diseases emerging, particularly from pathogens that could jump between humans and animals as habitats change amid global heating.

"Close contact between humans and wild animals is increasing as forests are destroyed to make way for agriculture and trade in exotic animals continues," he says. "At the same time, the thawing of permafrost is releasing microbes hidden beneath the ice."

Since pathogens share the same ecosystems as the humans and animals they infect, a new conception of health is urgently needed. This should aim to optimize the health of people, wildlife and the environment, Basu says.

Diseases. Again, the climate crisis exposes our countless connections to everything else — and our shared frailty on the only planet known to harbour life. *(Courtesy: Scroll.in)*



The 4 men were identified as Haim Peri, Yoram Metzger, Amiram Cooper & Nadav Popplewell

Israel declares 4 more hostages are dead in Gaza, including 3 older men from Hamas video

JERUSALEM, June 4: Four more hostages kidnapped on October 7 were declared dead by the Israeli military - including three older men seen in a Hamas video begging to be released.

Monday's announcement heightens pressure on the Israeli government to agree to a US cease-fire proposal that could secure the return of the hostages still held in Gaza and end the eight-month war.

About 80 hostages in Gaza are believed to be alive, alongside the remains of 43 others.

In the days since President Joe Biden announced the cease-fire proposal Friday, Israel has seen some of its largest protests calling on the government to bring them home. Although Biden said the proposal was Israeli, the Israeli leadership has appeared to distance itself from the plan, vowing to keep conducting military operations against Hamas until the militant group is destroyed.

All four of the men declared dead Monday night — Nadav Popplewell, Amiram Cooper, Yoram Metzger and Haim Peri — were kidnapped and taken into Gaza still alive, according to the Hostages Forum, a grassroots group representing the families of the hostages.

"It is time to end this cycle of sacrifice and neglect," the group said following the announcement. "Their murder in captivity is a mark of disgrace and a sad reflection



on the significance of delaying previous deals." The group called on the government to immediately approve the new cease-fire plan.

Hundreds of people, including relatives of the captives, gathered outside Israel's Defence Ministry and military headquarters in central Tel Aviv late Monday, calling for a deal. Smaller protests took place across the country.

About 100 captives were released during a weeklong exchange of hostages for Palestinian prisoners in November. Three of the men declared dead Monday had female relatives who were released during the exchange.

Israel's military spokesman, Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, said the four hostages were killed while they were together, during the army's operation in Khan Younis in southern Gaza. He said the four were killed months ago, but that recent operations allowed the military to gather enough intelligence to con-

firm the deaths.

Their bodies are still being held by Hamas, and the cause of death was not immediately known. Hamas claimed in May that the other hostage pronounced deceased, Nadav Popplewell, died after being wounded in an Israeli airstrike, but provided no evidence. Popplewell was over 50.

"We are checking all of the options. There are a lot of questions," Hagari said. Cooper, Metzger and Peri were all age 80 or older. They appeared in a video in December released by Hamas under the title, "Don't let us grow old here." In the video, the three men appear gaunt, wearing thin white T-shirts.

"We are the generation who built the foundation for the state of Israel," Peri said, noting that all the men had chronic illnesses. "We do not understand why we have been abandoned here."

Cooper was an economist and one of the founders of Kibbutz Nir

Oz, according to the hostages forum. Metzger helped to found the kibbutz winery and Peri built the community's art gallery and sculpture garden.

Nir Oz was among the hardest-hit towns near the border with Gaza during the Hamas attack October 7, when Palestinian militants stormed Israel, killing some 1,200 people and hauling around 250 hostages back to Gaza.

The news late Monday came after an announcement earlier in the day that the body of a presumed hostage, Dolev Yehud, 35, was found in a community near the Gaza border that Hamas militants had attacked on October 7. Yehud was thought to be among scores of hostages held in Gaza until Monday, when the military announced the discovery of his body and said he had been killed in the initial attack.

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

Israel has been expanding its offensive in the southern city of Rafah, once the main hub of humanitarian aid operations. The Israeli invasion of Rafah has largely cut off the flow of food, medicine and other supplies to Palestinians facing widespread hunger. (AP)

2 Palestinians are killed in the West Bank and 11 are killed in Israeli strikes in Gaza

GAZA STRIP, June 4: The Israeli military said on Tuesday it killed two Palestinians, who it claimed were attempting to launch a shooting attack toward Israeli communities from the occupied West Bank. A surge of violence has gripped the West Bank since the October start of the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza, where Palestinian health officials said Israeli strikes killed at least 11 people overnight into Tuesday.

A cease-fire proposal announced by United States President Joe Biden has placed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at a crossroads.

The proposal offers the possibility of ending Israel's war against Hamas, returning scores of hostages held by the militant group, quieting the northern border with Lebanon and potentially advancing a historic agreement to normalize ties with Saudi Arabia.

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Israel's expanding offensive in the southern Gaza city of Rafah has largely cut off the flow of food, medicine and other supplies to Palestinians facing widespread hunger.

Israel launched the 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's military confirmed the deaths Monday of four more hostages held by Hamas. Around 80 hostages captured on Oct. 7 are believed to still be alive in Gaza, alongside the remains of 43 others. (AP)

South Korea is suspending a military deal with North Korea after tensions over trash balloons

SEOUL, June 4: South Korea on Tuesday took steps to suspend a contentious military agreement with North Korea and resume frontline military activities, as tensions between the rivals are rising over the North's recent launch of trash-carrying balloons.

North Korea didn't immediately respond, but South Korea's resumption of firing exercises or propaganda loudspeaker broadcasts will likely prompt North Korea to take similar or stronger steps along the rivals' tense border. In the past week, North Korea has used balloons to drop manure, cigarette butts, scraps of cloth and waste paper on South Korea, prompting Seoul to vow "unbearable" retaliation. On Sunday, North Korea said it would halt its balloon campaign.

On Tuesday, South Korea's Cabinet Council and President Yoon Suk Yeol approved a proposal to suspend the 2018 inter-Korean agreement on lowering frontline military tensions. It will take effect once Seoul formally notifies the North.

Cho Chang-rae, South Korea's deputy defense minister for policy, told reporters that South Korea will use all available measures to protect the public from North Korean provocations.

"The responsibility for this situation lies solely with North Korea. If North Korea launches additional provocations, our military, in conjunction with the solid South Korea-US defence pos-

ture, will punish North Korea swiftly, strongly and to the end," Cho said.

The military agreement — reached during a short-lived era of reconciliation between the Koreas — required the two countries to cease all hostile acts at border areas, such as live firing drills, aerial drills and psychological warfare. During the cabinet meeting, Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, South Korea's No. 2 official, said the 2018 deal has weakened South Korean military readiness at a time when the North's provocations pose real threats to the public. Han cited North Korea's balloon campaign, tests of nuclear-capable weapons targeting South Korea, and alleged jamming of GPS navigation signals in the South.

South Korean officials said the suspension of the 2018 deal would allow it to stage frontline military drills but didn't publicly elaborate on other steps. Observers say South Korea was considering restarting frontline propaganda loudspeaker broadcasts, a Cold War-style psychological campaign that experts say has stung in rigidly controlled North Korea, whose 26 million people are mostly not allowed access to foreign news.

The 2018 deal was already in limbo after the two Koreas took some steps in breach of it amid tensions over North Korea's spy satellite launch last November. (AP)

Indonesia's Mount Ibu erupts, spewing red lava, thick ash and dark clouds into the sky

JAKARTA, June 4: Indonesia's Mount Ibu spewed red lava and thick grey ash clouds that towered 5,000 meters (16,400 feet) into the sky during a two-minute eruption on Tuesday morning.

The eruption spewed thick ash toward the volcano's west and northwest sides, said Muhammad Wafid, chief of Indonesia's Geology Agency.

A timelapse video distributed by Indonesia's Geological agency shows red sparks at the top of the volcano followed by a thick column of ash.

The video was recorded from an observation post located next to an evacuation site in a field at Gam Ici village. Several evacuation tents were erected nearby.

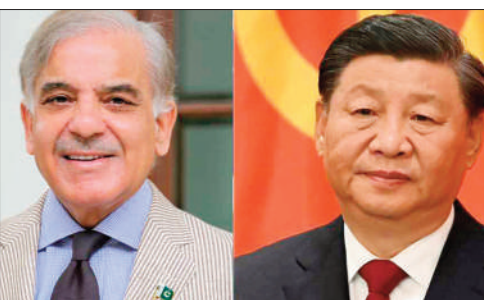
Mount Ibu has been continually erupting almost every day since early May. Indonesian authorities raised an eruption alert to the highest level following a series of eruptions, as thousands of deep volcanic earthquakes and visual activities from Mount Ibu have significantly increased.

Authorities urged people to stay at least 7 kilometers (4.4 miles) from the 1,325-meter (4,347-foot) volcano.

Indonesia, an archipelago of 270 million people, has 120 active volcanoes.

It is prone to volcanic activity because it sits along the "Ring of Fire," a horseshoe-shaped series of seismic fault lines around the Pacific Ocean. (AP)

Sino-Pak relations 'unshakable', says PM Sharif as he embarks on China visit



ISLAMABAD, June 4: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday emphasised that Pakistan's all-weather relationship with China was "unshakable" as he embarked on a five-day official visit to Beijing to further bolster bilateral ties and to launch the second phase of the multi-billion dollar CPEC projects in his country.

Sharif will be in China from June 4 to 8 at the invitation of Chinese President Xi Jinping.

The 72-year-old leader embarked on his first visit to China after he took over as prime minister for the second time after his Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party-led coalition government assumed power in March.

During his visit, Sharif will hold talks with Chinese President Xi and "jointly draw a blueprint" for the growth of China-Pakistan relations, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said in Beijing last week.

During Sharif's visit, the two countries are expected to launch the second phase of the USD 60 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

The CPEC, which connects Gwadar Port in Pakistan's Balochistan with China's Xinjiang province, is the flagship project of China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI is seen as an attempt by China to further its influence abroad with infrastructure projects funded by Chinese investments across the world.

In an interview with Chinese media here ahead of his visit, Sharif said that the two countries are "iron

brothers" and their friendship is unshakable.

"We are two iron brothers, our friendship is unshakable and our hearts beat together," Sharif was quoted as saying by Chinese state-run Xinhua news agency.

"Despite the hot weather, it still doesn't match the warmth of our hearts," the prime minister said. He asserted that China has supported Pakistan through the difficult times, and Islamabad considers Beijing as one of the "most trusted friends" around the globe. Sharif said that on his first visit to China about 40 years ago, he noticed that though underdeveloped, the country was dedicated to meeting the basic needs of its people while vigorously developing modern science and technology.

"Today, China has become a giant through vision, hard work, and serious and untiring efforts," he said. "All doubts about the Chinese model have been rubbished by the evidence of history," he added.

He said that Pakistan is willing to promote economic cooperation with China, learn from Beijing's advanced experience in information technology and artificial intelligence, consolidate the ironclad friendship between the two countries, and achieve leapfrog development.

Pakistan is also ready to learn from China's governance experience, deepen reforms and counter-corruption, create enabling circumstances for Chinese investors, and provide policy support for investors, focusing on fields that can benefit both peoples to modernise the economy, he was quoted as saying.

Sharif said that under Xi's leadership, China has alleviated millions of its people out of poverty. He added that one of the agenda items for his visit is to learn from the Chinese model about how to alleviate poverty in Pakistan and help people stand on their own feet.

Cash-strapped Pakistan's economy is facing severe headwinds, and it has formally requested the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for the next bailout package between USD 6 and USD 8 billion with the possibility of augmentation through climate financing. (PTI)

Hunter Biden's federal firearms case is opening after the jury is chosen

WILMINGTON, June 4: Lawyers will make their opening statements on Tuesday in the federal gun case against President Joe Biden's son Hunter after a jury was seated for the trial while the first lady watched from the courtroom and the president sent a message of support.

Hunter Biden has been charged with three felonies stemming from a 2018 firearm purchase when he was, according to his memoir, in the throes of a crack addiction. He has been accused of lying to a federally licensed gun dealer, making a false claim on the application by saying he was not a drug user and illegally having the gun for 11 days.

The proceedings come after the collapse of a deal with prosecutors that would have avoided the spectacle of a trial so close to the 2024 election.

Hunter Biden has pleaded not guilty and has argued he's being unfairly targeted by the Justice Department after Republicans decried the now-defunct plea deal as special treatment for the Democratic president's son.

The trial is unfolding just days after Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican presidential nominee, was convicted of 34 felonies in New York City. The two criminal cases are unrelated, but their proximity underscores how the courts have taken centre stage during the 2024 campaign.

Jury selection moved at a clip Monday in the president's home state, where Hunter Biden grew up and where, the elder Biden often says, the family is deeply established. Joe Biden spent 36 years as a senator there, commuting daily back and forth from Washington, DC.

People just know the story of how Biden's two young sons,

Hunter and Beau, were injured in the car accident that killed his wife and baby girl in the early 1970s. And Beau Biden was the former state attorney general before he died at 46 from cancer.

Some prospective jurors were dismissed because they knew the family personally; others because they held both positive and negative political views about the Bidens and couldn't be impartial. Still, it only took a day to find the jury of six men and six women plus

four women serving as alternates, who will decide the case.

One potential juror who was sent home said she didn't know whether she could be impartial because of the opinion she had formed about Hunter Biden based on media reports. "It's not a good one," she said. Another was excused because he was aware of the case and said, "It seems like politics is playing a big role in who gets charged with what and when."

But much of the questioning focused on drug use, addiction and gun ownership, as attorneys sought to test prospective jurors' knowledge of the case, and dismiss those with strong thoughts on drug use, or who might want to regulate firearms — some of the very people Biden counts as constituents.

The panel of 12 was chosen out of roughly 65 people. Their names were not made public. They included a woman whose sister was convicted about 10 years ago of credit card fraud and drug charges

in Delaware, a man whose father had been killed in a crime involving a gun, and a woman married to a former law enforcement officer who is also a licensed gun owner.

Hunter Biden also faces a separate trial in California in September on charges of failing to pay USD 1.4 million in taxes. Both cases were to have been resolved through the deal with prosecutors last July, the culmination of a yearslong investigation into his business dealings. But Judge Maryellen Noreika,

who was nominated to the bench by Trump, questioned some unusual aspects of the deal, which included a proposed guilty plea to misdemeanour offenses to resolve the tax crimes and a diversion agreement on the gun charge, which meant as long as he stayed out of trouble for two years the case would be dismissed. The lawyers could not come to a resolution on her questions, and the deal fell apart. Attorney General Merrick Garland then appointed the top investigator, former US attorney for Delaware, David Weiss, as a special counsel in August, and a month later Hunter Biden was indicted.

Opening statements come as Garland faces members of the Republican-led House judiciary committee in Washington, which has been investigating the president and his family and whose chairman has been at the forefront of a stalled impeachment inquiry stemming from Hunter Biden's business dealings. (AP)

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Silence and heavy security in China and Hong Kong on 35th anniversary of Tiananmen crackdown

BEIJING, June 4: Checkpoints and rows of police vehicles lined a major road leading to Beijing's Tiananmen Square on Tuesday as China heightened security on the 35th anniversary of a bloody crackdown on pro-democracy protests.

China has long quashed any memory of the killings, when the Chinese government ordered in the army to end the months-long protests and uphold Communist rule.

An estimated 180,000 troops and armed police rolled in with tanks and armoured vehicles, and fired into crowds as they pushed toward Tiananmen Square.

The death toll remains unknown to this day. Hundreds, if not thousands are believed to have been killed in an operation that started the night before and ended on the morning of June 4, 1989.

The crackdown became a turning point in modern Chinese history, ending a crisis in favour of Communist Party hardliners who advocated for control instead of political reforms.

The economy boomed in the ensuing decades, turning a once impoverished country into the world's second largest economy, but societal controls have been tightened since party leader Xi Jinping came to power in 2012.

Across China, the event remains a sensitive and taboo subject that is heavily censored, and any mention or reference on social media is erased. It was just another day in the Chinese capital, with hundreds of tourists lining the streets leading to gates to enter Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City, the former imperial palace that sits across from the north side of the square.

Those who lost family members in the crackdown are generally prevented from gathering or



grieving in public.

Asked by a foreign journalist for comment on the 35th anniversary during a daily foreign ministry briefing on Monday, spokesperson Mao Ning shrugged off the event.

"The Chinese government has long since come to a clear conclusion on the political disturbance that took place in the late 1980s," she said, without elaborating.

Tiananmen Mothers, a group formed by families of the victims, made an online appeal to the Chinese government to publish the names and numbers of those who died, grant compensation to the victims and their relatives and pursue the legal responsibility of those responsible.

"The June 4 tragedy is a historical tragedy that the Chinese government must face and explain to its people, and some people in the Government at that time should be held legally responsible for the indiscriminate killing of innocents," the group said in a letter signed by 114 family members and published on its website, which is blocked in China. Tiananmen memorials have also been scrubbed out in Hong Kong — for years the only place in China where they could

take place. On Tuesday, a carnival organized by pro-Beijing groups was held in a park that for decades was the site of a huge candlelight vigil marking the anniversary.

Police used a new national security law to arrest eight people over the past week for social media posts commemorating the crackdown, including Chow Hang-tung, a former organizer of the vigil.

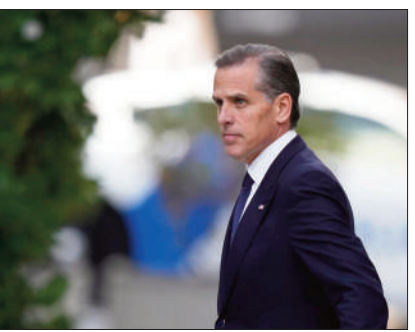
Several pro-democracy activists told The Associated Press that police had inquired about their plans for Tuesday. Officers were out in force in Causeway Bay, a bustling shopping district close to the park where the vigil was held. Police briefly detained a performance artist the previous evening in the same neighbourhood.

Some Hong Kong residents remembered the event privately, running 6.4 kilometers (4 miles) on Monday — a reference to the June 4 date — and sharing Tiananmen-related content on social media.

The British consulate posted a photo on the social media platform X showing a smartphone's flashlight turned on with "VIIIV," the Roman numerals for 6/4, printed on it.

An independent bookstore, which displayed "35/5" on its window — a roundabout reference to the date of the crackdown as May 35th — wrote on Instagram that police officers were stationed outside the shop for an hour on Sunday, during which they recorded the identity details of customers.

Hong Kong's leader John Lee did not answer directly when asked Tuesday whether residents could still publicly mourn the crackdown. He urged residents not to let down their guard against any attempts to cause trouble. (AP)



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China's spacecraft takes off from far side of Moon to bring home first samples

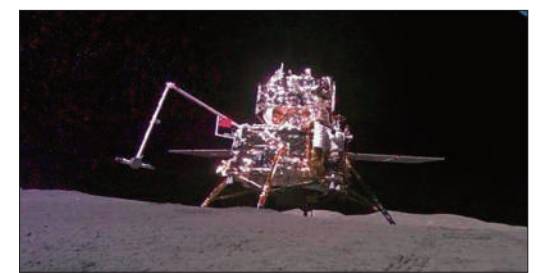
BEIJING, June 4: China's Chang'e-6 probe on Tuesday lifted off from the far side of the Moon for its journey back to Earth carrying the first rock samples ever collected from the rarely explored terrain, in an ambitious mission that underscored the country's rise as a major space power.

The ascender has entered a pre-set orbit around the Moon after taking off from the far side this morning, the China National Space Administration (CNSA) announced.

At 7:38 a.m. (Beijing Time) on Tuesday, it lifted off from the lunar surface, carrying samples collected from the Moon's far side, the state-run Xinhua news agency reported. Its return journey to Earth is estimated to take about three weeks, with a landing expected in China's Inner Mongolia region around June 25. After the sampling was completed, a Chinese national flag carried by the lander was unfurled for the first time on the far side of the Moon, the CNSA said.

The Chang'e-6 probe, comprising an orbiter, a lander, an ascender and a returner - like its predecessor Chang'e-5 - was launched on May 3.

It is tasked with collecting and returning samples from the Moon's far side, the first endeavour of its kind. China is the only country to have landed on the far side of the moon, having also done so before in 2019. India became the first country to land near the little-explored lunar south pole region last year when



its Chandrayaan-3's lander, carrying the Pragyaa rover, successfully landed there.

The lander-ascender combination, separated from the orbiter-returner combination on May 30, touched down at the designated landing area in the South Pole-Aitken (SPA) Basin on June 2 for the first time in human history. The spacecraft finished its intelligent and rapid sampling work, and the samples were stowed in a container inside the ascender of the probe as planned, the CNSA said.

During sampling and packaging, researchers conducted simulated sampling in a ground lab based on the detection data sent back by the Queqiao-2 relay satellite, providing important support for decision-making and operations in every link.

"The mission has withstood the test of high temperature on the far side of the moon," the CNSA said. (PTI)

Inter-state drug peddlers nabbed, drug worth ₹ 42 lakh seized

ITANAGAR, June 4: Arunachal Pradesh police arrested two inter-state drug peddlers and seized 348.58 gm of heroin worth Rs 42 lakh from their possession, police said on Tuesday.

Capital Region, superintendent of police (SP) Rohit Rajbir Singh said police raided the house of one Urgan Dorjee and seized heroin weighing 65 gm seized.

"During interrogation, Dorjee disclosed that one Manipuri youth named Tithai Pou Golmei (28) had supplied the drugs from Imphal and would arrive in Itanagar by bus with more drugs in the coming days," the SP said.

Accordingly, a trap was laid and police apprehended Golmei from the Lower Vivek Vihar area here and recovered heroin weighing 283.58 gm from his possession.

A case was registered against Golmei at Itanagar police station under the NDPS Act.

Both Dorjee and Golmei are habitual inter-state drug peddlers, the SP said, adding that further investigation into the case is on. (PTI)

Joint candidate of Tipra Motha, BJP Kriti Devi Debbarma wins Tripura East Lok Sabha seat

Tipra Motha to support those who will protect rights of Tripura tribals: Pradyot

AGARTALA, June 4: Tipra Motha founder Pradyot Kishore Debbarma on Tuesday said his party would support those who would protect the rights of the indigenous people of the state.

He thanked the people of Tripura for voting in favour of his sister and BJP nominee Kriti Devi Debbarma.

Claiming that the dofa (community) comes first, Debbarma said his vision was clear.

"I am only for those who want to help our people. Our vision is very clear to protect the rights of the Tiprasa people," he said.

Kriti Devi Debbarma won the Tripura East Lok Sabha seat, defeating her nearest rival Rajendra Reang of the CPI(M) by 4,86,819 votes.

"We had given a serious thought before fielding Kriti Devi



as a joint candidate of Tipra Motha and BJP for Tripura East Lok Sabha constituency. We will go to Delhi and negotiate on the constitutional solution to the problems of Tiprasa (indigenous) people," he said.

delimitation of Lok Sabha and assembly seats is likely to take place in 2025 or this year.

"Before that, we have to achieve something. Now the elections are over and we have to go to Delhi for negotiation. Issues like direct funding (to autonomous district council), the constitutional solution to the problem of tribal people and guarding the international border effectively will be on the table," he said.

The Tipra Motha, which has emerged as the main opposition party in the northeastern state by winning 13 seats in last year's assembly elections, inked an agreement with the Centre in March this year and joined the BJP-led government.

Two ministerial berths in the Manik Saha-led cabinet were given to the regional party. (PTI)

SDF supremo Pawan Chamling congratulates Tamang for SKM's landslide victory



GANGTOK, June 4: Finally breaking his silence, the Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) president Pawan Kumar Chamling on Tuesday congratulated the Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang for leading the SKM to landslide victory in the assembly elections by winning 31 out of 32 seats.

In the recently concluded elections held in Sikkim, the people have given their mandate in favour of the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) led by Chief Minister Tamang, he said in a statement. The SKM returned to power in the Himalayan state for the second consecutive term.

"I, on behalf of the SDF, would like to extend our congratulations to the SKM for their success and look forward to the fulfilment of the assurances by the government in the interest of the Sikkimese people and for the overall development of the state," Chamling said.

The opposition party chief who was the chief minister of Sikkim for 25 years, till 2019, did not react on the results for two days. Votes for the state assembly elections were counted on Sunday.

"Simultaneously, I extend my gratitude to the Election Commission of India, the chief electoral officer and his officials and all law enforcing agencies in Sikkim for the successful conduct of the assembly and parliamentary polls simultaneously.

The five-term former chief minister also expressed gratitude towards the people of Sikkim for participating in the democratic process to elect their government.

The SDF received its worst drubbing in 30 years winning just one assembly seat under Chamling's leadership with the former chief minister himself losing from both Namcheybung and Poklok-Kamrang constituencies.

It will be the first time in 40 years that the 73-year-old SDF stalwart and eight-term MLA will not be setting foot in the Sikkim legislative assembly precincts when the 11th assembly convenes in due course. (PTI)

Cong wins Nagaland's lone Lok Sabha seat

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, June 4: Congress candidate and Nagaland Pradesh Congress Committee president S Supongmeren Jamir emerged winner in Nagaland's lone Lok Sabha seat defeating the ruling People's Democratic Alliance candidate from the Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP), Chumben Murry by margin of 50,984 votes.

While Jamir polled 4,01,951 votes, Murry secured 3,50,967 votes.

Returning Officer Sushil Kumar Patel declared Meren the winner from the Nagaland parliamentary constituency.

The Congress party won the seat after 25 years since 1999.

Besides Jamir and Murry, independent candidate Hayithung Tun-goe Lotha contested the election in the state. Lotha secured 6,232 votes.

Nagaland went to polls in the first phase of the Lok Sabha election on April 19.

Expressing gratitude to the people of the state, Jamir said, "Now, we have to work to implement what we have promised."

Nagaland chief minister Neiphiu Rio congratulated Jamir on his victory.

"The citizens of the state have chosen you to be their elected representative," Rio said in his congratulatory message to Jamir.

He also extended good wishes to the new MP for carrying out his re-



sponsibility of serving the people effectively.

Welcoming the mandate of the people of Nagaland, the NDPP, in a statement, said it has graciously accepted the verdict.

"For a democracy to be strong, vibrant and successful, the people's will to participate in the democratic process of electing leaders of their choice is paramount and the people of Nagaland have ensured that democracy has once again emerged victorious," it said.

Congratulating Jamir, the NDPP said it is also expected that as the lone representative of the Naga people, he will take forward the aspirations and voice of the people in the Parliament.

However, the party said it was unfortunate that this time the electoral battle was not just political, but also involved huge social and religious aspects that went against the fabric of secularism.

Meghalaya-opppn parties win big in Shillong, Tura Lok Sabha seats



SHILLONG, June 4: In a huge setback to BJP-backed Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA), opposition Voice of the People Party (VPP) and Congress won the Shillong and Tura parliamentary seats respectively, the results of which were declared on Tuesday.

Saleng A Sangma of the Indian National Congress defeated Tura MP Agatha Sangma by a



massive margin of over 1.55 lakh votes of the total 6.74 lakh voters.

Agatha secured over 2.28 lakh votes of the 8 lakh plus eligible voters of Tura Lok Sabha constituency having 24 Assembly constituencies.

In Shillong, Ricky AJ Syngkon of the opposition Voice of the People's Party defeated three times sitting MP Vincent H Pala of the Congress

by a massive margin of over 3.7 lakh votes.

Chief electoral officer (CEO), BDR Tiwari said Syngkon secured 5071078 votes while Pala got 199168 votes.

Ampareen Lyngdoh of National People's Party secured 186488 votes, Roberjune Kharjahn from UDP secured 44563 votes, Lakshon Kma independent candidate secured 18582 votes and Peter Challam independent secured 7024 votes.

He said in Tura PC, Saleng A Sangma from INC secured 383919 votes, Agatha K Sangma of NPP secured 228678 votes, Zenith M Sangma of TMC secured 48709 votes, Laben Ch Marak independent secured 6910 votes, total 5840 votes gone for NOTA and 603 votes are rejected.

"Saleng A Sangma has defeated the NPP candidate Agatha K Sangma by a margin of 155241 votes," he said. The CEO said, "Entire voting process had gone very smoothly and very peacefully and there was no incident of re-poll anywhere. No violence was reported and the entire process had gone very smoothly."

"The state has 76.6 per cent voters, who had exercised their right to franchise. Voters' turnout was 73.78 per cent in Shillong and 81.37 per cent in Tura during the recent Lok Sabha polls. The overall voting was highest ever in any parliamentary election in the state," he added. (NNN)

SKM's Indra Hang Subba wins lone LS seat in Sikkim



GANGTOK, June 4: SKM candidate Indra Hang Subba on Tuesday won the lone Lok Sabha seat in Sikkim, defeating his nearest rival Bharat Basnett of the Citizen Action Party (CAP-Sikkim) by 80,830 votes.

The 35-year-old sitting MP polled 1,64,396 votes, while Basnett bagged 83,566.

"Congratulations to the Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri @narendramodi Ji and the NDA on their remarkable victory in the 18th Lok Sabha elections. The Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) Party fully supports the NDA for the development and prosperity of our country," SKM chief P S Tamang said on X.

Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) candidate PD Rai stood third with 77,171 votes.

BJP's Dinesh Chandra Nepal came fifth with 19,035 votes, less than what independent candidate Laten Tshering Sherpa bagged 21,263 votes.

The Lok Sabha election to the parliamentary constituency and 32 assembly seats in Sikkim was held on April 19.

The Sikkim Krantikari Morcha on Sunday returned to power in the Himalayan state for the second consecutive term by winning 31 assembly seats. (PTI)

Congress wins in both LS seats in Manipur

IMPHAL, June 4: INDIA bloc sponsored Congress candidates won both the parliamentary seats in Manipur, the counting of votes for which concluded late on Wednesday. Both the Congress candidates, Angomcha Bimol Akoijam and Alfred Kangam Arthur, defeated their nearest rival candidates of ruling BJP and NPP respectively by huge margins.

Akoijam clinched the Inner Manipur Parliamentary seat with a record-breaking margin of over one lakh votes, surpassing previous electoral records set in Manipur.

He defeated his nearest rival and BJP candidate and also state education minister Th Basantakumar by a margin of 1,09,801 votes.

In the Outer Manipur (ST) Parliamentary constituency also, Congress candidate Alfred K Arthur emerged victorious by defeating his nearest rival NPP candidate Kachui Timothy Zimik by a margin of

83,438 votes.

As per the Election Commission of India (ECI) data, Akoijam of the Congress secured a staggering 3,74,017 votes while his closest rival, Th Basantakumar Singh of the BJP, trailed behind with 2,64,216 votes.

Maheshwar Thounaojam of the Republican Party of India (Athawale) secured 135,640 votes, Rajkumar Somendro Singh (independent) received 13,050 votes, Moirangthem Totomshana Nongshaba secured 4,881 votes and Haorongbam Sarat Singh (independent) garnered 1,296 votes. A total of 3,797 votes went to NOTA.

In this constituency, the ruling BJP candidate secured the highest votes in Keirao and Heingang (chief minister N Biren Singh's home constituency) constituencies while the party candidate could not secure much votes from other constituencies represented by BJP MLAs. (NNN)

BJP's Kiren Rijiju, Tapir Gao win Arunachal LS seats

ITANAGAR, June 4: Union minister Kiren Rijiju and another BJP candidate Tapir Gao won the two Lok Sabha seats in Arunachal Pradesh, according to the Election Commission.

Both retained the seat.

Rijiju won the Arunachal West Lok Sabha seat, defeating his nearest rival Nabam Tuki of the Congress by a margin of 1,00,738 votes, the Election Commission said.

The BJP nominee polled 2,05,417 votes while Tuki, a former chief minister, bagged 1,04,679 votes. In 2019, the union minister had won the seat by a margin of 1,74,843 votes.

Rijiju, the earth sciences minister in the Narendra Modi cabinet has been representing the Arunachal Pradesh West seat since 2004, except for one term. He lost to Congress'

Takam Sanjay in 2009.

BJP MP Tapir Gao won the Arunachal East parliamentary constituency defeating his nearest rival Bosiram Siram of the Congress by a margin of 30,421 votes.

Gao secured 1,45,581 votes while Siram bagged 1,15,160 votes.

Poling in the two constituencies in the state bordering China was held in the first phase on April 19, along with assembly polls in the northeastern state.

In the assembly elections, the ruling BJP won 46 seats in the 60-member assembly followed by the National People's Party (NPEP) in five, NCP in three seats, the People's Party of Arunachal (PPA) in two seats, Congress in one and independent candidates won in three seats respectively. (PTI)

Rijiju wins Arunachal West Lok Sabha seat

Arunachal: The story of victorious Kiren Rijiju's tenacity and commitment

ITANAGAR, June 4: The political career of Kiren Rijiju, the Union minister and BJP candidate who won the Arunachal West Lok Sabha seat, is a riveting story of tenacity, commitment and leadership.

Born on November 19, 1971, in Nakhu Village of West Kameng district in Arunachal Pradesh, Rijiju has gone a long way from modest beginnings to a prominent player in Indian politics.

His career encompasses multiple significant responsibilities that demonstrate his persistent dedication to public service, as well as the advancement of his home state and the country.

After completing his undergraduate studies at Hansraj College under Delhi University, he went on to the varsity's Faculty of Law campus to obtain his law degree (LLB).

Along with developing his academic abilities, his time in school helped him develop his physical abilities, and he still enjoys playing football and badminton in particular.

Rijiju first entered politics in 2004 and won a seat in the 14th Lok Sabha, representing the Arunachal West constituency. During his term, he showed a strong attention to the interests of his citizens and a commitment to enhancing government and infrastructure. His perseverance was evident when he



joined the Congress and acted as an advisor to former chief minister Dorjee Khandu, despite a setback in the 2009 Lok Sabha elections.

With his comeback to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Rijiju's career entered a new phase.

Re-elected to the Lok Sabha in 2014, he profited from the strategic northeast focus of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and emerged

as a key player in the 'Look East' policy. His role as an important representative for Arunachal Pradesh was further cemented by his re-election in 2019.

Rijiju has held a number of important government roles during his career. In his capacity as the state minister for Home Affairs from 2014 to 2019, he played a pivotal role in tackling domestic security issues and advocating for development projects in the northeast.

His subsequent appointments to the positions of minister of state (Independent Charge) for youth affairs and sports, and minister of state (minority affairs) had shown his adaptability and dedication to a variety of responsibilities.

During his stint as law minister (2021-2023), Rijiju was well-known for his candid opinions about the judiciary and the collegium system, which generated a great deal of discussion and controversy.

Rijiju's appointment as the Union cabinet minister of earth sciences in May 2023 emphasised his significance inside the national government. It is indicative of the confidence that has been placed in him to supervise important matters of environmental science and policy, fields that are essential to India's sustainable growth. (PTI)

Setback for former CMs Omar Abdullah, Mehbooba Mufti as both lose LS polls

SRINAGAR, June 4: The defeat in Lok Sabha polls has come as a setback for the political careers of former chief ministers Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti in view of their vows not to contest the upcoming assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir till it remains a Union Territory.

While Abdullah was defeated by former MLA and terror-funding accused Sheikh Abdul Rashid by a margin of nearly two lakh votes in Baramulla Lok Sabha seat, Mufti was trounced by Gujjar leader and National Conference (NC) candidate Mian Altaf Ahmad by nearly three lakh votes in Anantnag-Rajouri seat.

With the assembly elections likely to be held before September 30 this year, the defeats have raised a question mark on the participation of Abdullah and Mufti in these elections.

Both the leaders have, at several occasions, ruled out participating in assembly elections till Jammu and Kashmir remained a Union Territory.

"I have made it abundantly clear that in the current situation that J-K finds itself in, I am not contesting the assembly elections," the 54-year-old Abdullah told PTI in an interview in April this year, adding that he had been saying this since 2020 and his position had not changed.

The PDP president has been a little more hardline in her approach on this issue.

"I am never going to participate in assembly election as long as Article 370 is not restored. Whenever I took oath as a member assembly, it was under two Constitutions - J&K Constitution and the Constitution of India - with two flags at the same time. Maybe it is foolish on my part but it is more of an emotional issue for me," Mufti said in an interview with PTI last year. While this was the first electoral defeat for Abdullah in 22 years, 65-year-old Mufti has now lost two elections back to back. She had lost the Lok Sabha polls in 2019 and 1999 as well.

This is the first loss in Lok Sabha polls for Abdullah. The other prominent loser in this election was PDP youth president Waheed Para, who is also facing terror charges. Para lost to influential Shia leader Aga Roothullah in the Srinagar Lok Sabha seat. On the other hand, Kashmir has sent three first-timers to Lok Sabha this year with Rashid, who is currently in Tihar jail in a terror-funding case, emerging as the giant slayer of Kashmir politics.

The former MLA, popularly known as Engineer Rashid, not only defeated Abdullah but pushed People's Conference President Sajad Gani Lone to the third position. Rashid (56) has been a popular figure among the people of his area in north Kashmir for raising human rights issues during his two terms as MLA from Langate in 2008 and 2014.

He had come a close third in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. Rashid was arrested in 2019 by the NIA in connection with a terror funding case and has been in Tihar jail since then. Besides Rashid, National Conference leaders Mian Altaf Ahmad and Aga Roothullah have defeated their more fancied rivals Mehbooba Mufti in Anantnag-Rajouri and Waheed Para in Srinagar, respectively. The Gujjar leader has been a minister and MLA from Kangan in Ganderbal district for several terms and his selection as candidate for the newly carved Anantnag-Rajouri seat was a masterstroke by the NC leadership. Ahmad (67), who comes from a well-respected religious family and has a huge following among the Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir, was initially reluctant to contest but was eventually persuaded by the party leadership.

The soft-spoken politician has a reputation of being an able administrator and has delivered in the past as minister in governments headed by Farooq Abdullah (1996-2002) and Omar Abdullah (2009-2014) in Jammu and Kashmir.

Roothullah, whose first step into politics was mired in controversy, will be the first Shia from Kashmir to go to the Lok Sabha since 1971. (PTI)

NOTA creates record in MP's Indore seat

INDORE, June 4: NOTA created a record with 2.18 lakh voters in Madhya Pradesh's Indore opting for the 'none of the above' option in the Lok Sabha elections, counting for which is underway on Tuesday.

Of the total voters, 14.01 per cent opted for 'None of the Above', introduced in 2013 following a Supreme Court order.

In the 2019 parliamentary polls, voters in Bihar's Gopalganj had created a record with 51,660 of them, or five per cent, opting for the NOTA option, which is placed as the last option on the electronic voting machine.

In 2014, NOTA polled 46,559 votes in the Nilgiris in Tamil Nadu by pocketing nearly five per cent of votes.

The tally of NOTA votes in Indore stood at 2,18,674 on Tuesday when BJP's sitting MP from Indore, Shankar Lalwani, won by a potentially record margin of 11,75,092 votes, as per the Election Commission of India website.

Lalwani's nearest rival from BSP, Lakshman Solanki, bagged 51,659 votes.

Notably, the NOTA call was given by Congress after its candidate Akshay Kant

Bam withdrew from the Indore poll fray at the last moment, a move that forced Congress out of the contest from this prestigious seat. Bam later joined the BJP.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, Indore recorded a 69 per cent turnout with 5,045 voters opting for NOTA.

Former Chief Election Commissioner O P Rawat had recently described NOTA as having a "symbolic" impact and had said if it gets more than 50 per cent votes in a seat, only then making it legally effective on poll results could be considered.

Rawat had also told PTI that if 99 out of 100 votes go in favour of NOTA option and someone gets one vote, even then the candidate will emerge victorious.

"More than 50 per cent of electors will have to once opt for NOTA in a seat to show the political community that they do not consider candidates with criminal background or other undeserving ones worthy of their votes. Only after this, pressure on Parliament and the Election Commission will increase and they will have to think about changing laws to make NOTA effective on the election results," he said. (PTI)



'We will see Prime Minister Narendra Modi taking oath for the third time'

Modi factor, targeted campaign against AAP ensures clean sweep for BJP in Delhi

NEW DELHI, June 4: Riding high on the 'Modi factor' and a targeted campaign against the Aam Aadmi Party over corruption allegations, the BJP is poised to emerge victorious on all seven seats in Delhi as it thwarted the challenge mounted by the INDIA bloc.

However, the victory margin of winners as compared to the 2019 polls reduced drastically in all seven parliamentary constituencies, with candidates of INDIA bloc partners - Congress and AAP - giving a tough fight in Chandni Chowk and New Delhi constituencies.

While the BJP suffered surprising reverses in its strongholds in Hindi heartland states like neighbouring Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan, the party scored a hat-trick of wins in the national capital.

The BJP's gamble of replacing all its candidates barring one paid off.

In 2019, the votes polled by the BJP were higher than the joint tally of AAP and Congress candidates put together.

The BJP's vote share declined from 56.7 per cent in 2019 to around 54 per cent this time. However, it is higher than the party's 2014 vote share of 46.6 per cent.

The loss of AAP and Congress in Delhi also puts a question mark on the effectiveness of the alliance experiment.

The leaders at Delhi BJP credited the third clean sweep in a row by the



party mainly to the 'Modi factor' and the party's sustained attack on the Kejriwal government over its alleged involvement in corruption cases.

"We will see Prime Minister Narendra Modi taking oath for the third time. Delhi has rejected the corrupt INDIA bloc alliance and even the country has done the same thing," Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva said.

Right from Prime Minister Modi to chief ministers of various states who campaigned for the BJP in Delhi, everyone trained their guns at the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) calling it "kattar beimaan" (hardcore corrupt) and mocking its "unholy" alliance

with the Congress.

On the other hand, the apparent lack of on-ground synergy between AAP and Congress workers and no joint rallies of the two parties ensured that voters were not too keen on supporting the alliance candidates, according to political observers.

A senior Delhi Congress leader claimed not only did the two sides fail to come together effectively on the ground but there appeared to be a trust deficit between the supporters and voters of the two parties.

"It was expected that Congress and AAP voters in different constituencies will vote for one another. The margin of votes with which BJP won means

it did not translate fully on the ground," he said.

The AAP-Congress combine can only draw solace from the fact that the victory margins for the BJP were thinner this time. While AAP bettered its vote share from the 2019 polls, the Congress took a hit this time.

AAP's vote share rose from 18.2 per cent in 2019 to around 24 per cent this time, while Congress' vote share of 22.6 per cent in 2019 declined to around 18 per cent this time.

The AAP failed to better its 2014 vote share of 33.1 per cent. Congress had a vote share of 15.2 per cent in 2014.

The AAP was affected in the initial phase of campaigning by the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in an excise policy-related money laundering case on March 21.

Kejriwal mounted a blazing campaign in the hot summer against the BJP as soon as he was released from Tihar jail on interim bail on May 10, drawing huge crowds at rallies and roadshows but, in the end, it proved insufficient to end the BJP's winning streak in the national capital.

AAP had claimed that sympathy for Kejriwal would impact voters, with the Delhi CM repeatedly telling people that they should vote for the INDIA bloc if they wanted him to remain out of jail.

Reflecting on the party's poll performance, AAP Delhi state convener Gopal Rai said, "We contested the

polls in adverse circumstances. The number of MPs in Punjab will increase. In Delhi, we gave a strong fight to BJP and the margins are narrow this time (as compared to 2019)."

The AAP contested a total of 22 seats: 13 in Punjab, four in Delhi, two each in Gujarat (Bharuch and Bhavnagar) and Assam (Sonitpur and Dibrugarh) and one in Haryana (Kurukshetra). The party drew a blank in Gujarat, Delhi and Assam.

The election results also set the tone for the Assembly elections next year in Delhi as the BJP, despite stamping its authority in Lok Sabha polls, has failed to dent the AAP's prospects in the national capital.

The AAP has registered landslide victories in Delhi in 2015 and 2020 winning 67 and 62 seats respectively out of 70 constituencies but has drawn a blank in Lok Sabha polls.

The results show that AAP, despite becoming a national party, still has a long way to go before it can pose a challenge to the BJP at the national level.

The Congress, on the other hand, would be happy at the fact that their candidate from Chandni Chowk JP Agarwal was able to give some early jitters to the BJP as he was leading from the seat in the initial trends.

However, the Congress will have to work harder in the lead-up to the crucial Assembly polls next year, if it wants to make a comeback in the scheme of Delhi politics. (PTI)

Constitution our guiding light: PM Modi

NEW DELHI, June 4: Preparing to take office for a record third consecutive term, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday pledged to work with all states, regardless of the party in power, to build a developed India.

In his first speech after the results of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, Modi laid out his vision for the third term saying it would be a tenure of big decisions and key emphasis would be on uprooting corruption.

"The fight against corruption is becoming tougher by the day. Corruption is being shamelessly glorified for political interest. In our third term, NDA will focus a lot on rooting

out corruption of all kinds," Modi said.

Modi's speech did not refer to its reduced numbers in Parliament but focussed on the "clean sweep" victories in assembly elections as well as Lok Sabha wins in Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

Modi also said that the Congress has been wiped out in several states and pointed out that the combined number of seats won by the opposition alliance was less than that of the BJP alone.

Modi's victory speech at the BJP headquarters, however, was thin on politics and heavy on the future

roadmap of his government, which he noted was coming for the third consecutive time, a first in six decades.

"Our Constitution is our guiding light. I want to assure that the Centre will work with all states, irrespective of the party in power there, to work towards our resolve to make India a developed country," Modi said.

The prime minister arrived at the BJP headquarters to a rousing welcome by hundreds of supporters who chanted 'Modi, Modi'. He was greeted by BJP President J P Nadda and Union Ministers Rajnath Singh and Amit Shah on the dais. (PTI)

Kangana wins over 74,000 votes

SHIMLA, June 4: Actor Kangana Ranaut, the BJP candidate from Mandi Lok Sabha seat, has defeated her rival, Congress's Vikramaditya Singh, by 74,755 votes.

Kangana polled 5,37,002 votes against 4,62,267 votes polled to King of erstwhile Rampur state, who is also the sitting state Public Works Minister and son of six times chief minister Virbhadra Singh and state Congress chief Pratibha Singh.

Kangana attributed her victory to the win of common man and the work done by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Calling her a daughter of Mandi, Kangana crusaded for "Hindutva" during her election campaign and talked about "Modi's magic".

The scions of erstwhile princely states have won from Mandi 13 out of 19 times and Rampur Royal family has won from this seat maximum six times.

Ten candidates were in fray from the Mandi Lok Sabha seat which has 13,77,173 voters. The vote turnout was 73.15 per cent. (PTI)

Verdict a setback for BJP: CPI(M)

NEW DELHI, June 4: The results of the Lok Sabha elections are a setback for the Bharatiya Janata Party, and it would have been more adverse for it if the Election Commission had ensured a level playing field, Communist Party of India (Marxist) said on Tuesday.

In statement issued on Tuesday as the results for the general elections poured in, the Politburo of the CPI(M) said it is a "stinging blow" to the image of invincibility built around Narendra Modi, and also congratulated people for standing up to safeguard Constitution.

"The results of the 18th Lok Sabha election are a setback for the BJP. It has lost its majority in the Lok Sabha which it had got in the past two Lok Sabha polls in 2014 and 2019.

This is a stinging blow to the image of invincibility built around Narendra Modi, who had boasted about winning 400 seats in this election," the CPI(M) said.

The party general secretary Sitaram Yechury said the "image of invincibility" built around Narendra Modi and his boast of

winning more than 400 seats is busted. "The credible showing of the INDIA bloc countered Modi communal electioneering and championed issues of the defence of the Constitution, democracy and people's livelihood issues.

"This verdict signals that our people are determined to fight back all attacks on the Constitution, democracy & livelihoods," Yechury said.

The Left party said the elections were held in the background of an all out attack on opposition and "misuse of central agencies" and money power.

"The Polit Bureau congratulates the people for standing up to these authoritarian attacks and safeguarding the Constitution, democracy and civil rights," it said.

"The INDIA bloc has put up a creditable show having taken up the issues of unemployment, price rise, agrarian distress and the attacks on democracy and the Constitution. They were able to a considerable extent counter the communal electioneering indulged in by Modi and the BJP," it said. The CPI (Marxist) said that the results would have been

worse for the BJP if the Election Commission had ensured a level playing field, as it slammed the poll panel for its failure to stop "communal rhetoric".

"The results would have been more adverse for the BJP and the NDA if the Election Commission had ensured a level-playing field. Its abject failure to curb the inflammatory communal rhetoric of Narendra Modi and enforce the Model Code of Conduct is a blot on the reputation of the Commission," it said.

Conceding the Left parties registered a "marginal improvement" CPI(M) said a detailed analysis will be done later.

"The CPI(M) and the Left parties have registered a marginal improvement in their tally. A more detailed analysis will be undertaken after the full election results are available.

"The verdict signals that the people are going to fight back all attacks on democracy, the Constitution and their livelihood," the party said. The CPI(M) won Sikar in Rajasthan, while it is leading in Madurai and Dindigul in Tamil Nadu, and Alathur in Kerala. (PTI)

Modi has no moral rights to continue as PM after 'diminishing popularity': Siddaramaiah

BENGALURU, June 4: Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday said Narendra Modi has no moral rights to become prime minister again as the Lok Sabha polls verdict showed that there was no 'Modi Wave' anywhere and that his "popularity has diminished".

He even quipped that the BJP candidate Lallu Singh in Ayodhya, where Modi and RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat had conducted the consecration of the Ram Temple lost the election.

Siddaramaiah said the BJP won 282 seats in 2014 and 303 in 2019, but in 2024, it is winning only around 240 seats, which means that no party got the figure of 272 to get a simple majority.

"The BJP may be single largest party, but it has not got a simple majority. There was no Modi wave anywhere, which means that it is very clear that his popularity has diminished," the chief minister said while addressing reporters.

"I don't know whether they will form the government

or step down but BJP has no simple majority to form the government headed by Narendra Modi," he said.

Siddaramaiah said that towards the end of the election campaign, Modi realised that he was losing and hence he started seeking votes in the name of caste and religion and even started targeting Muslims directly.

In Karnataka, Modi publicised that the reservation would be snatched from the backward castes and will be given to Muslims but none of the 'lies' worked for him, he said.

Siddaramaiah alleged that the prime minister sent the chief ministers to the jails, used the Directorate of Enforcement, Income Tax Department, CBI and tried everything at his disposal to threaten and abuse people and sought votes on caste and communal lines.

Stating that the poll verdict showed BJP's defeat at the national level, the chief minister said, "Narendra Modi has no moral rights to become the prime minister of this country." (PTI)

Written off by critics, Cong stages stunning fightback with social justice plank

NEW DELHI, June 4: Armed with the social justice plank and a slew of promises for welfare measures, the Congress made stunning gains with a spirited performance in the Lok Sabha polls that would not only silence its critics but also put the party on road to reclaiming its lost glory.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, former party chief Rahul Gandhi and AICC general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra spearheaded an impressive campaign, underlining the welfare guarantees the party was offering to the people, but it was the push on social justice that seems to have made the difference with the weaker sections of the society seeming to have sided with the INDIA bloc in several BJP strongholds.

The opposition INDIA bloc led by the Congress appeared set to be a formidable force in the Parliament this time, though still possibly in opposition benches.

The Congress leaders attrib-

uted the party's stunning comeback to its narrative focusing on issues of the people and its 'Nyay' guarantees.

Also, the top Congress leadership strongly raised the Congress' claim at rallies that the BJP would change the Constitution which seems to have had a strong impact on the ground.

Another crucial aspect was the INDIA bloc fighting with unity at the hustings which brought it rich returns in states such as Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra.

Addressing a press conference here, Rahul Gandhi said that all Congress leaders respected the INDIA bloc allies and wherever the alliance fought "we fought as one".

He also said the general election was a fight to save the Constitution.

"It was on my mind that the people of this country would rally together to save the Constitution. The first and biggest step towards saving the Constitution has been



taken," Gandhi said, adding that it was the poor and the marginalised who stood up to save the Constitution.

He added that the Congress and the INDIA bloc had given India a new pro-poor vision.

"The main thing this election

has said, the country has said, is that we don't want Narendra Modi, Amit Shah to be running this country," Gandhi said.

After the campaign for the Lok Sabha polls ended, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh had said the party set the narrative

during the Lok Sabha polls with a sharp campaign that was devoid of "agar-magar, kintu parantu" and pushed Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the "back foot".

Ramesh said the first shot at creating a new narrative for the

Congress was fired by Rahul Gandhi in the 'Bharat Jodo Yatra'. The yatra was held between September 2022 and January 2023.

The 144 days, 4,000-km walk from Kanyakumari to Kashmir was a very transformative movement for the Congress and for Indian politics, he said.

"He (Gandhi) constantly saying that 'main nafrat ke bazaar mein mohabbat ki dukaan kholne aaya hu' was the theme. What gave structure to the 2024 campaign was the 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' (this year) in which Gandhi had unveiled the 'paanch nyay pachchees guarantee'," Ramesh said. He said the Congress' "guarantee cards", which state the party's promises under the 'Yuva Nyay, Kisaan Nyay, Nari Nyay, Shramik Nyay and the Hissedaari Nyay' themes, made a major impact.

Political commentator and former Congress leader Sanjay Jha cited the BJP's loss in the Lok

Sabha seat of Ayodhya and said the people of Uttar Pradesh and India have rejected the politicization of religion.

"There is hope. Always. Never give up on the inherent goodness of humanity," he said.

Though, the Congress pulled off a stunning upset, the question that lingers in the mind is -- what if they had started early and not allowed to take the BJP a head-start in the campaign?

Political observers are of the opinion that it delayed seat-sharing among the INDIA bloc allies till the assembly polls in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Telangana and Mizoram in the hope that a good showing would hand it better bargaining power for seat-sharing.

However, the alliance did manage to get its act together as the elections were declared and ran an aggressive joint campaign, the results of which were seen in states such as Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. (PTI)

HC refuses to grant bail to businessman Dhall, says allegations serious

NEW DELHI, June 4: The Delhi High Court on Tuesday refused to grant bail to businessman Amandeep Singh Dhall, arrested by the CBI in a corruption case linked to the alleged excise policy scam, saying the accusations against him are serious in nature.

The high court said since many of the witnesses in this case are known to Dhall and he was also in contact with "influential leaders" of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in the Delhi government for "hatching a conspiracy", he does not satisfy the triple test for grant of bail.

"The allegations against the applicant are also serious in nature and their impact on the society and common man at large has to be considered as a factor while adjudicating an application seeking grant of regular bail," it said while dismissing his application.

Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma took strong note of Dhall's argument about undue delay in deciding his bail application which was filed in July 2023.

The judge noted that it was stated on behalf of the accused before the Supreme Court that his bail application was listed and heard on 40 occasions by the high court, but was thereafter adjourned till July 8, 2024 for arguments.



The high court, in its 34-page order, gave a list of dates on which Dhall's bail plea was listed and the orders passed by the predecessor bench and by Justice Sharma.

It said his argument that the liberty of an individual is his fundamental right and his incarceration being prolonged due to non-hearing by this court is contrary to the record.

"... rather the conduct of the applicant in moving multiple, frequent, interim applications resulted in postponement of the date of hearing in the regular bail application, though in the meanwhile, he remained in a private hospital of his choice and

government hospitals on many occasions. Therefore, the delay if any in hearing the bail application cannot be imputed to any court and be made a ground for grant of bail," the high court said.

"The regular bail application had been listed on 17 occasions. However, out of the 17 occasions when the regular bail application had got listed for hearing, on about 9 occasions, applications seeking interim bail on medical grounds, admission in private hospital, extension of period of hospitalisation in custody, etc. had also been listed for hearing, on which the counsel for the applicant (Dhall) himself had argued ex-

tensively and prayed for passing of urgent orders," the judge said.

It said out of the remaining 8 occasions, either the notice had been issued or arguments had been addressed on behalf of the applicant.

Justice Sharma said on about 20 other occasions, the matter had been listed and heard by this court.

"It is noteworthy that over the past 11 months, the applicant had moved as many as 14 applications seeking interim reliefs in the present bail application itself, and on all the hearings, arguments had been heard by this court and effective orders had been passed, and all 14 applications stand disposed of as of today," it said.

The court said though Dhall was never released on interim bail, he was provided hospitalisation and medical treatment of his choice and out of 15 months of custody, he remained hospitalised for more than 6 months.

On May 17, the Supreme Court had observed that every single day counts in matters concerning the liberty of citizens and asked the high court to decide Dhall's bail plea before closure for summer vacations.

Summer vacations in the high court started from June 3 and May 31 was the last working day. The high court had reserved its order on

the bail plea on May 29, after hearing arguments of the counsel for Dhall and CBI.

The high court said charges are yet to be framed and evidence is yet to be recorded. It said an FIR has been registered against Dhall for paying bribe to an officer of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for getting his name removed from the case.

Dhall is an accused in separate cases linked to the alleged scam being probed by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the ED.

A trial court had earlier dismissed his regular bail plea in the corruption case lodged by the CBI.

According to the probe agencies, Dhall allegedly conspired with other accused and was "actively" involved in the formulation of the liquor policy and facilitating kickbacks to the AAP and its recruitment by the "South Group" through various means.

According to the CBI and the ED, irregularities were committed while modifying the excise policy and undue favours extended to licence holders.

The Delhi government implemented the policy on November 17, 2021 and scrapped it at the end of September 2022 amid allegations of corruption. (PTI)

NIA arrests another accused involved in murder of BJP's Praveen Netti



NEW DELHI, June 4: The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Tuesday arrested another accused involved in the gruesome murder of BJP's Praveen Netti in Karnataka in July 2022.

The accused Riyaz Yousaf Haaralli alias Riyaz was arrested from Mumbai airport while he was trying to flee abroad, a statement issued by the NIA said.

Riyaz's arrest has taken the total number of accused taken into custody so far to 19 in the case.

His arrest comes less than a month after absconder, Mustafa Paichar, was nabbed along with one of his harbourers, Mansoor Pasha last month.

"The NIA on Tuesday swooped down on an absconder in the Praveen Netti murder case and arrested him from Mumbai airport while he was trying to flee abroad," the statement said.

Netturu, a BJP Yuva Morcha dis-

trict executive committee member, was brutally hacked to death by two motorcycle-borne assailants in Bellare village of Dakshina Kannada district in Karnataka by cadres of the banned Popular Front of India (PFI) in July 2022.

The attack was aimed at striking terror among a section of people in the society, NIA investigations have shown.

According to the NIA investigations, Riyaz returned to India from abroad on the directions of absconder accused Abdul Rahman. Along with Mansoor Pasha, Riyaz had provided logistical support and a safe hideout to Mustafa Paichar in Sakleshpur, Hassan District, Karnataka, the statement said.

"Paichar, the secretary of PFI Puttur district and the head of the Puttur district service team, was the chief conspirator in the case," it added.

He had assembled the hit team that targeted the victim and, after the crime, had absconded along with others, the NIA said, adding that "he was finally traced and arrested by NIA from Sakleshpur on 10th May 2024 along with Mansoor Pasha".

NIA, which had taken over the investigation on August 4, 2022, has so far filed a charge-sheet against 21 accused persons.

The agency is continuing with its manhunt to track the other absconders, the statement said. (PTI)

History-sheeter held for extorting ₹ 48 lakh

MUMBAI, June 4: The Mumbai police have arrested a history-sheeter who allegedly threatened and extorted ₹ 48 lakh from a woman by posing as a relative of underworld don Dawood Ibrahim, an official said on Tuesday. The accused, Imran Mohammed Hanif Khan alias Imran Kalia, has six serious cases to his name, the official said. The anti-extortion cell of the crime branch arrested the accused from his home on Monday evening, he said.

A woman from south Mumbai lodged a complaint against Khan alleging that he had cheated, threatened and extorted money from her, the official said. Khan posed as a relative of Dawood Ibrahim and lured her to invest in gold, he said.

The complainant woman sold her flat for ₹ 48 lakh and gave ₹ 32 lakh to Khan, who started demanding more money from her and threatened her, the official said.

The accused allegedly extorted ₹ 16 lakh more from the woman, he said. Khan has been remanded in police custody, and further probe is underway in the case, the official said. (PTI)

TDP pledges to revive shelved Amaravati capital plan

NEW DELHI, June 4: Telugu Desam Party (TDP), which is set to oust the incumbent YSRC in Andhra Pradesh's state elections, on Tuesday vowed to reinstate Amaravati as the capital city, a plan that was shelved by the outgoing state government.

As of 8.30 pm, the Election Commission data showed TDP winning 102 seats and leading in 32 more in the 175-member assembly, indicating a landslide victory. "Amaravati is the capital of Andhra Pradesh, there is no second thought about it. It will be developed," TDP's senior leader Kanakamedala Ravindrakumar told PTI.

The capital's location has been a point of contention since Andhra Pradesh's bifurcation in 2014. Hyderabad was made the common capital for Telangana and Andhra Pradesh until June 2, 2024, under the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act. YSRC chief and outgoing Chief Minister Jagannathan Reddy's plan to establish three state capitals, moving away from Amaravati, faced legal challenges.

Ravindrakumar accused the YSRC government of stalling Amaravati's construction and other projects initiated by TDP's N Chandrababu Naidu. He also alleged human rights violations by the YSRC. The election results suggest a strong endorsement of TDP's development agenda. (PTI)

Fire breaks out in Gurugram banquet hall, no casualties reported

GURUGRAM, June 4: A fire broke out in a banquet hall located behind the Ambience Mall in the wee hours on Tuesday, an official said. More than 20 fire engines were pressed into service and the blaze was brought under control after about five hours, he said.

While no casualties were reported in the incident, goods worth lakhs gutted in the fire, he said.

According to the police, the fire broke out at A-Dot banquet hall near the city's posh society Ambience Island at around 4:30 am on Tuesday. As soon as the information was received, more than 20 vehicles from five fire stations reached the spot. Firefighters started trying to extinguish the fire, but the LPG cylinders kept inside the banquet hall started bursting intermittently, due to which the fire brigade personnel had to face a lot of trouble", they added.

According to fire brigade personnel, more than 100 cylinders burst within the banquet hall.

"Fire tenders from Sector 29, Udyog Vihar, Bhim Nagar, Pataudi and Sector 37 fire station were called to extinguish the fire on the spot. The cause of the fire is not yet known but is suspected to be a short circuit. The banquet hall was completely gutted in the fire", said Gulshan Kalra, a senior fire officer. (PTI)

Light rains hit parts of Delhi, maximum temperature recorded at 43.8

NEW DELHI, June 4: Light rains hit parts of the national capital on Tuesday evening, providing some relief from the scorching heat.

The weather department said thunderstorms with light to moderate intensity rain and winds with speed of 20-30 Km per hour would occur over and adjoining areas of few places of Delhi (Burari, Badli, Model Town, Azadpur, Pitampura, Delhi University, Civil Lines, Punjabi Bagh, Kashmiri Gate, Patel Nagar, Budha Jayanti Park, Delhi Cantt, Safdarjung, Vasant Vihar, Lajpat Nagar, Kalkaji, Tughlakabad, IGNOU), during the next two hours.

The maximum temperature in the national capital was recorded at 43.8, 3.8 notch above the season's average. The minimum temperature in Delhi settled at 30.4 degrees Celsius, three notches above the season's average. The weather office predicted a generally cloudy sky with the possibility of rain, thunderstorms or dust storms and heat wave conditions on Wednesday. The maximum and minimum temperature in the city will likely settle around 43 and 31 degrees Celsius, the weather department said. The relative humidity oscillated between 43 per cent and 33 per cent, the meteorological department said. (PTI)

Over 400 Agniveer recruits join army at passing out parade in Ladakh

LEH, June 4: As many as 402 well trained Agniveer recruits were inducted into the Ladakh Scouts regiment of the Army at a passing out parade here on Tuesday, a defence spokesperson said.

The ceremony conducted in consonance with the highest traditions of the Army was reviewed by Chief of Staff, headquarters 14 Corps, Maj Gen Dinesh Kumar Singh and was attended by a spectrum of distinguished military officers, civil dignitaries and parents of Agniveers, the spokesperson said.

He said six young Agniveers were awarded medals during the parade for their outstanding achievements in training. "Gaurav Padak" was presented to the proud parents whose wards have joined the regiment as Agniveers, the spokesperson said, adding that it was indeed a proud moment for the kin of the recruits, who had arrived from far flung

areas to witness the grand ceremony.

In his address to the young recruits, Maj Gen Singh congratulated them for the impressive parade and urged them to devote their life in service to the nation, as proud soldiers of the Army.

He also complimented the parents for motivating their wards to join the Army and instilling a sense of pride in them for the nation. The reviewing officer also complimented the Ladakh Scouts personnel for their outstanding performance in all spheres and praised their exceptional valour and sacrifice while upholding sovereignty of the Nation.

He exhorted the young soldiers to continue to strive hard in pursuit of excellence in all spheres and take a solemn vow to defend the sovereignty of the nation against all odds in the true spirit exemplified by the ethos of the Army. (PTI)

One of six cubs dead at Kuno Park

SHEOPUR (MP), June 4: One of the six cubs born to South African cheetah 'Gimini' earlier this year was found dead on Tuesday at the Kuno National Park (KNP) in Sheopur district of Madhya Pradesh, an official said.

The cub was found dead close to its mother, an official release said.

Around 4 pm, a team of veterinarians saw one of the cubs lying still close to its mother while the remaining five cubs were playing around. Following this, the cub was approached for further investigation, but was found dead, it said.

The cause of the cub's death will be known once the post-mortem of the carcass is conducted, it said.

Gimini had given birth to six cubs on March 10 this year. (PTI)

Former TN minister Senthil Balaji's remand extended



CHENNAI, June 4: A sessions court on Tuesday extended former Tamil Nadu Minister V Senthil Balaji's remand till June 10. The DMK leader was arrested by the ED in June last in a money laundering case.

Principal Sessions Judge S Alli, before whom Senthil Balaji was produced by the prosecution through video-conferencing from the Central Puzhal Prison here, also extended his judicial custody till June 10. When the case came up for hearing, Senthil

Balaji filed two petitions.

One petition sought a direction to the City Union Bank, Karur to furnish the list of bank employees more specifically the clerk, cashier and manager employed there between 2012 to 2022 as the ED had heavily relied on the counter foil challans issued by the bank, which has been allegedly utilised for depositing the cash by the petitioner and his wife.

In another petition, he sought a direction to the bank to furnish the copy of the PAN cards of the depositors, the counter foil challans for the period from the year 2016 to 2022. The judge posted to June 10, the hearing on these petitions.

Meanwhile, the Enforcement Directorate filed its counter affidavit to the petition filed by Senthil Balaji, which sought to defer the proceedings in the case till the City Union Bank produces the original counter foils/challans used for making deposits in his account and in the account of his wife.

Balaji was arrested on June 14 by the ED in connection with a money laundering case linked to cash-for-jobs scam when he was the Transport Minister during an earlier AIADMK regime. (PTI)

Veteran journalist BRP Bhaskar no more



THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, June 4: Veteran journalist and columnist Babu Rajendra Prasad Bhaskar, popularly known as BRP Bhaskar, who had been a formidable presence in the national media for several decades, passed away at a private hospital here, hospital sources said. He was 92 and had been battling age-related ailments for some time.

Bhaskar had an illustrious career spanning over seven decades in various prominent national media groups, including The Hindu, The

Statesman, Deccan Herald, United News of India (UNI) and so on.

Born in Kollam district of Kerala as the son of M K Bhaskar and Meenakshi on March 12, 1932, BRP began his journalism career by penning articles under his nickname in a newspaper owned by his father.

His formal media career began with his joining The Hindu in 1952.

After working in some other media groups, including The Statesman, BRP joined the na-

tional news agency UNI in 1966.

He served as the bureau chief of the UNI in Jammu and Kashmir and Kolkata.

The veteran journalist also acted as the media advisor for the state-based Asianet news channel for a few years.

BRP retired from his active career in the 1990s but continued to intervene in various social issues as a human rights activist. He was also the winner of the prestigious Kerala Sahitya Academy Award.

BRP's wife and daughter predeceased him.

Condoling BRP's demise, Governor Arif Mohammed Khan recalled that he enriched national media scene with a deep commitment to ethics, professionalism, and democratic ideals.

"Heartfelt condolences on the sad demise of Shri BRP Bhaskar, senior journalist. He enriched the national media scene with a deep commitment to ethics, professionalism and democratic ideals. His guiding role in early years of Malayalam TV has been memorable. May his soul attain Mukti," Khan said in a social media post.

In his condolence message, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan recalled that BRP Bhaskar was a journalist who contributed immensely to both English and Malayalam media.

He was a prominent presence in both print and electronic media, Vijayan said, adding that the veteran's contributions in the area of media studies were also remarkable. (PTI)

19-year-old man injured

NEW DELHI, June 4: A 19-year-old man was injured in a shoot-out with the police in east Delhi's Ghazipur area, officials said on Tuesday.

Ayaan, who is facing several cases of murder and attempt to murder in Delhi, received a bullet injury on both of his legs and was admitted to LBS Hospital, they said.

According to a senior police officer, acting on a tip-off, a team of Special Cell led by Inspector Shiv Kumar laid a trap near the DDA Park in Ghazipur on Tuesday at 12.30 am.

"On seeing the police party, Ayaan, who was travelling on a scooter, opened a spree of fire at them. The police officers, in retaliation, shot three gunshots, hitting Ayaan in his legs," the officer said.

On April 20, he had allegedly attempted to kill a man, identified as Prashant, Harsh Vihar, police said. In another incident, on May 29, he opened fire at another victim, Suraj, in the Welcome area, they said.

The officer said Ayaan was recuperating in the hospital. He will be taken into custody once he gets discharged from the hospital. (PTI)

INFRASTRUCTURE FACILITIES OF COVERED SHED

E-tender Notice No. Sr.DEE/LMG/09 of 2024-25 dated: 31-05-2024. E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works:
Tender No. EL/LM/23-24/18-RT. Name of work: At Lumding division, Infrastructure facilities of covered shed for 140 Tones Breakdown Crane of ART /Lumding (Electrical portion).
Tender value: ₹38,25,845.15/-
Earnest Money: ₹76,500/-
Date & time of closing of tender 11.00 hrs. on 24-06-2024 and opening of tender 11.30 hrs. on 24-06-2024. The complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available up to 11:00 Hrs. on 24-06-2024 on website www.ireps.gov.in Sr. DEE/G&OP/Lumding



Keith Urban, Doja Cat, Big Sean, Gwen Stefani and more to perform at iHeartRadio Music Festival



NEW YORK, June 4: Big Sean, Camila Cabello, Doja Cat, Hozier, Keith Urban, Gwen Stefani, New Kids on the Block and Paramore are among the performers this fall at the 2024 iHeartRadio Music Festival in Las Vegas, which will be broadcast live.

The lineup for the two-day event, which will take place Sept. 20-21 at the T-Mobile Arena, also includes Sha-boozey, The Black Crowes, Thomas Rhett and best new artist Grammy winner Victoria Monét.

Ryan Seacrest will host, and fans can hear it all via iHeartMedia radio stations or watch it streaming on Hulu.

The general public can buy tickets starting June 14 on AXS.com, with Capital One cardholders able to get ac-

cess beginning June 12 at 1 p.m. ET/10 a.m. PT.

"The iHeartRadio Music Festival is the one time each year when the best-in-class superstar artists from all genres of music come together to share one stage for a weekend of live music," Tom Poleman, chief programming officer, and John Sykes, president of entertainment enterprises of iHeartMedia, said in a joint statement.

Earlier this year, New Kids on the Block released their first new album in 11 years, "Still Kids," a matured take on their cheery pop sound. Cabello will be coming off the release of her fourth studio album, "C.XOXO," with its internet-pop lead single, "I LUV IT" featuring Playboi Carti. (AP)

Michael Stuhlbarg boards Luca Guadagnino's 'After The Hunt'

LOS ANGELES, June 4: The actor and filmmaker have previously collaborated on movies such as "Call Me by Your Name" (2017) and "Bones and All" (2022).

According to Deadline, "After The Hunt" already has stars like Julia Roberts, Ayo Edebiri and Andrew Garfield on board.

The film is described as an intense dramatic thriller which follows a college professor "who finds herself at a personal and professional crossroads when a star pupil levels an accusation against one of her colleagues, and a dark secret from her own past threatens to come to light".

Guadagnino is directing the movie from Nora Garrett's script.

Brian Grazer and Allan Mandelbaum of Imagine Entertainment are attached to produce the film alongside Guadagnino via his Frenesy banner. Imagine Entertainment's Karen Lunder will executive produce it alongside Nora Garrett.

"After The Hunt", which hails from Amazon MGM Studios, will hit the screens next year. (PTI)



Taraji P Henson to host BET Awards 2024 for third time



LOS ANGELES, June 4: "Empire" star Taraji P Henson is set to return as host for the upcoming BET Awards 2024.

According to Deadline, this will be Henson's third time hosting the ceremony after 2021 and 2022. Rapper Fat Joe was trusted with the emcee-ing duties last year.

"I am thrilled to be returning as the host of the 'BET Awards' for the third time. I am also looking forward to celebrating my peers and the impact of our culture on entertainment," the 53-year-old actor said.

At the award ceremony, to be

aired live from Peacock Theater in Los Angeles on June 30, singer-songwriter Usher will receive the Lifetime Achievement BET Award. He has also been nominated for four BET Awards.

GloRilla, Latto, Muni Long, Sexy Red, Sha-boozey, and Victoria Monet are among some of the artists who will perform at the event. BET Awards were established in 2001 by Black Entertainment Television network to celebrate black entertainers and other minorities in the fields of music, film, sports and philanthropy. (PTI)

Idris Elba helps uncover the WWII soldiers of color who never got their due

NEW YORK, June 4: One of Idris Elba's grandfathers fought in World War II, but he doesn't know what he endured. No pictures or stories survive. "That part of my family's history has been erased somewhat," says Elba.

That helped fuel the actor's push to narrate and executive produce the four-part National Geographic docuseries "Erased: WW2's Heroes of Color," which premieres Monday, days ahead of the 80th anniversary of D-Day, when the Allies landed on the coast of France, on June 6. Episodes will also later be available on Disney+ and Hulu.

More than 8 million people of color served with the Allies, and the series digs deep to focus on how some fared at D-Day, Dunkirk, Pearl Harbor and the Battle of the

Bulge.

It tells the story of the 320th Barrage Balloon Battalion, the only all-Black combat unit to fight on the D-Day beaches, and Force K6, a little-known Indian regiment of mule handlers from the British army trying to evacuate at Dunkirk.

The series uses archival footage, descendant interviews, soldier journals and actor portrayals — a mix that Elba says he found visceral and moving.

"It really did actually impact me just in the narration booth, watching the imagery, looking at the faces, wondering about my own personal connect. Could my grandfather be one of the people in one of the pieces? That was what I thought about. So, it did definitely resonate with me."

The series also highlights stories

like that of Doris Miller, a mess attendant aboard the USS West Virginia who after the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor raced to an unattended anti-aircraft gun and fired at the planes until forced to abandon ship. He had never been trained to use the gun because Black sailors serving in the segregated steward's branch of the Navy were not given the gunnery training received by white sailors. Miller's bravery earned him the Navy Cross.

"It just feels like a privilege and an honor to be able to shed some light on their stories," says director Shianne Brown, who helmed the D-Day episode.

Her episode highlighted Waverly Woodson, Jr., a medic who was wounded by shrapnel during the landing but nevertheless spent the next 30 hours treating the wounded

and the dying on Omaha Beach. He would note: "There's no such thing as a color barrier in action."

Brown says that observation proved so powerful. "If your leg has just been blown off, you need a medic to help you. At that moment, you're not going to say to Waverly, 'No, I don't want you to treat me.'"

Woodson is being posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. The announcement was made Monday by Sen. Chris Van Hollen of Maryland. Woodson died in 2005. The series points out that many soldiers of color who fought the Nazis in Europe went home — the Indians back to British colonization and Black Americans to bitter racism — and began agitating for change because of what they'd witnessed and earned. Civil rights icon Medgar Evers, after all,

was at D-Day.

"A lot of these men and women never felt like they were human before going to Europe and then being treated like a normal human being by the white population," says Brown. "I can't even imagine how that would have felt for them. You've been fighting against Hitler and the Nazis and against fascism and hate, and you go home and you experience racial terror."

The filmmakers found very little footage of non-white soldiers in the archives and so were moved when they finally came across images of a Black unit marching in central England before D-Day or Black soldiers cheering the fall of the Nazis. "It was just very odd to see a Black man in Nazi Germany," says Elba.

Elba urged the directors and edi-

tors to try to put the audience into the action, like the films "Saving Private Ryan" or "Dunkirk." That meant filming recreations of bombings in villages in France, wading into the ocean with heavy gear and soldiers enduring beach strafing.

"I was really encouraging of the filmmakers to really go for it," he says. "Giving you a little glimpse of, from a fictional perspective, what it might have looked like and how heroic these soldiers were."

At the same time, the filmmakers wanted to show how horrible and frightening combat can be, the randomness of casualties and the agonizing wait before deployment. "We don't want to glorify what's going on, but we actually wanted to paint the heroism in a way that was relatable to the way we've seen films of this nature," Elba says. (AP)

ELLE FANNING TO STAR IN 'PREDATORS' NEW MOVIE 'BADLANDS'



LOS ANGELES, June 4: Actor Elle Fanning is in talks to play the lead role in the upcoming "Predator" movie, titled "Badlands".

Dan Trachtenberg, who helmed the franchise's 2022 entry "Prey", a prequel set in the 18th century, will tackle the new film from 20th Century Studios, reported entertainment news outlet The Hollywood Reporter.

Trachtenberg has co-written the film's script with Patrick Aison, who had also worked on "Prey", featuring Amber Midthunder.

As per Variety, Trachtenberg has come on board to helm the movie for 20th Century Studios from a script he co-wrote with Patrick Aison.

Badlands comes following the success of Trachtenberg's Prey-- the Predator prequel which was a critical hit and broke records with its release on Hulu. The 2022 film was nominated for five Primetime Emmys, winning one for sound editing; Prey 2 is in early development, with its star Amber Midthunder potentially returning. Badlands was announced in February, with the film expected to begin production later this year. Plot details have not been disclosed yet.

Meanwhile, Fanning recently wrapped a three-season run as executive producer and star of The Great, where she starred as Russian monarch Catherine the Great and earned her first Emmy nomination (for outstanding lead actress in a comedy series).

Over the course of her 20-year career, Fanning's resume ranges from playing Disney princess Aurora in the Maleficent movies to ripped-from-the-headlines drama in The Girl from Plainville and the family comedy We Bought a Zoo, as well as auteur-driven fare like Nicolas Winding Refn's The Neon Demon, Mike Mills' 20th Century Women, and Sofia Coppola's Somewhere and The Beguiled. (PTI)

Yusuf Pathan: Powerhouse all-rounder braces for long innings in politics

KOLKATA, June 4: Right from his international debut during India's 2007 T20 World Cup final triumph against Pakistan, Yusuf Pathan has proven to be a "big match player".

On Tuesday, one half of Baroda's famous Pathan brothers, the other being charismatic former pacer Irfan, is emerging as a big match player on the way more complex political turf.

The Trinamool Congress candidate is leading seasoned Congressman and five-time MP Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury by over 75,000 votes in what is being seen as a shocker from the Baharampur Lok Sabha seat in Murshidabad district of West Bengal. He could well turn out

to be a giant-slayer going by the current trend.

"Uparwale ka rahem, karam boleyn (Call this God's mercy, blessings), I always feel that I am for big matches, moments," Yusuf had said after accepting TMC's offer to switch to politics.

"I just have to bat for them. I don't want to become a politician. I want to keep my image of a sportsman intact. But after winning, I will work for my constituency and will make sure that I spend at least eight days in a month there," he had promised.

The 41-year-old is a first-timer when it comes to politics, his life so far has been defined by cricket where he earned the reputation of being a powerful

and clean striker of the ball.

Yusuf's switch to politics was, therefore, a surprise call, or in hindsight, a masterstroke by chief minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee.

The duo had celebrated together at the Eden Gardens with team owner Shah Rukh Khan when Yusuf's IPL franchise Kolkata Knight Riders triumphed in 2012 and 2014.

In a constituency which has over 66 per cent Muslim population, Mamata chose to pit Yusuf against the heavyweight Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury.

Just a week before TMC released the list of its candidates, Mamata approached Yusuf and he was in two minds before fi-



nally agreeing, a fight former India captain Sourav Ganguly described as akin to facing Australian pacer Brett Lee.

Besides Chowdhury, Yusuf had to take on BJP's Nirmal Chandra Saha, a known doctor from the region and also deal

with the "outsider" barbs from the opposition.

But the former all-rounder took it upon himself and often repeated TMC's mantra of "Khela Hobo" (I'm up for a fight).

That he always had a stomach for a fight was evident from his cricket career because compared to his younger brother, Yusuf was a late bloomer but when he did make his place in the side, he became an impact player much before the term became a regular in cricketering lexicon.

Four years after that momentous T20 World Cup triumph, Yusuf was seen lifting Indian maestro Sachin Tendulkar on his

shoulders in India's victory parade after winning the 2011 ODI World Cup. The dynamic all-rounder is one of the few cricketers to have won both the T20 and ODI World Cups, not to mention three IPL titles for two different franchises.

Born on November 17, 1982, Yusuf's journey to cricketering stardom is a story of perseverance and dedication, deeply rooted in his formative years in Vadodra.

Growing up in the bustling neighborhood around the city's famous Jama Masjid, Yusuf and his younger brother Irfan were exposed to the challenges and struggles of life from an early age. (PTI)

Germany warm up in 0-0 draw with Ukraine; England, Croatia ease to 3-0 prep wins

NEWCASTLE, ENGLAND, June 4: Host Germany and England kicked off the true buildup to the European Championship with their first warmup games on Monday, only after Real Madrid capped the club season by signing Kylian Mbappé.

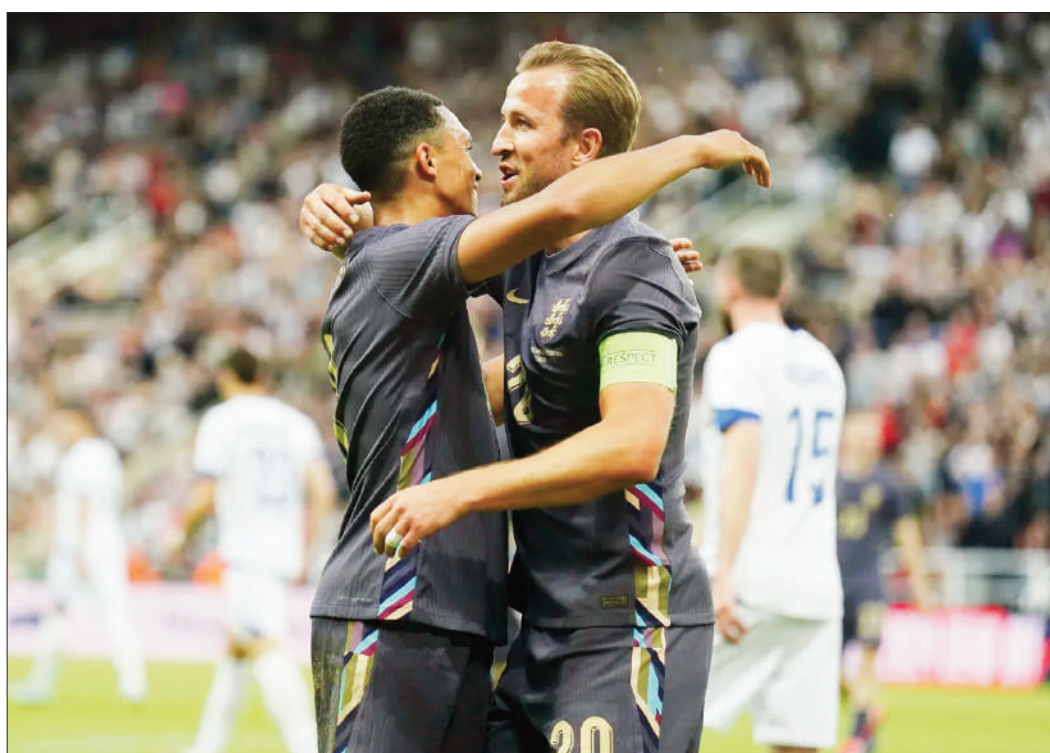
About 90 minutes after France captain Mbappé finally confirmed he was joining the new Champions League winner, Germany put national team action on midsummer's center stage in an enterprising 0-0 draw with Ukraine.

England got off to a slow start before a second half surge in a 3-0 win over Bosnia-Herzegovina, including a national record-extending 63rd goal for Harry Kane, who went on as a substitute.

Croatia, another of the European powers, eased to a 3-0 win over North Macedonia.

All three Euro 2024 contenders were without their Madrid stars — Toni Kroos, Jude Bellingham and Luka Modrić — who are resting this week after their title win on Saturday against Borussia Dortmund.

It was a night for untested lineups to search for some rhythm in their play and debuts given to several emerging talents ahead of rosters being finalized on Friday.



Germany's 21-year-old forward Maximilian Beier almost scored with his first shot in international soccer, striking the underside of the bar in the 60th minute. It was one of 26 attempts on the Ukraine goal by coach Julian Nagelsmann's team. The roster deadline is one week before Germany opens its

home tournament against Scotland in Munich on June 14.

Scotland stepped up its preparations with a modest 2-0 win against Gibraltar, which extended its run of losses to 13 games. Albania, which is in the same Euro 2024 group as Croatia, cruised past Liechtenstein 3-0. Hoffenheim forward Beier

somehow did not score as a second-half substitute in his Germany debut. After immediately rattling the crossbar, Beier was denied three minutes later by goalkeeper Anatoliy Trubin's diving save, then he sent a stooping header wide of the goal. Nagelsmann also gave a debut to Bayern Munich's 20-

year-old midfielder Aleksandar Pavlović. The head of Germany's federal government, Chancellor Olaf Scholz, was at the game in Nuremberg, which is not among the 10 Euro 2024 venues.

Both Germany and Ukraine start their tournament in Munich. Ukraine begins against Romania on June 17, three days after Germany meets Scotland in Bayern's home stadium.

Scotland took time to find an edge against minnow Gibraltar, missing a slew of first-half chances, and got second-half goals from Ryan Christie and Ché Adams. They have more responsibility after regular No. 9 Lyndon Dykes was ruled out of Euro 2024 last week after being injured in training.

Harry Kane has 62 more goals for England than Cole Palmer but the emerging Chelsea playmaker scored the first of what should be many for the Three Lions. Palmer has been a penalty specialist for his club and was able to take a 60th-minute spot kick to open the scoring as Kane was still on the bench. Trent Alexander-Arnold in midfield for England has been an experiment Liverpool fans want to see, and the long-time right back was advanced in the Bosnian penalty area to score with a volleyed shot in the 85th. (AP)

NEW DELHI, June 4: World number four Rohan Bopanna has picked N Sriram Balaji, who impressed with his performance at the French Open, as his partner for the Paris Olympics and All India Tennis Association (AITA) is unlikely to have any objection to the choice made by the veteran player.

The 44-year-old Bopanna wrote to AITA and also marked TOPS in the mail, conveying his decision - a development confirmed by the national federation.

Balaji and his Mexican partner MA Reyes-Varela Martinez had tested the formidable combo of Bopanna and Australia's Matthew Ebden before losing the men's doubles third round on Monday.

Balaji played well from the baseline with a strong serve backing his game and was equally impressive at the net -- a performance that would have convinced Bopanna that the player from Coimbatore is the best option for him when he returns to Roland Garros for a final shot at an Olympic medal next month.

Bopanna, only the third Indian to win a Grand Slam title, came close to winning a medal at the Rio Games but he and Sania Mirza had lost the mixed doubles bronze match to the Czech combination of Radek Stepanek and Lucie Hradecka.

"I have sent an email to AITA," Bopanna told PTI from Paris, adding that he will comment on his choice only after hearing back from the national federation.

Yuki Bhambri, India's number two doubles player at number 52, was also in contention.

The 31-year-old Bhambri made a first round exit from the French Open with French partner Albano Olivetti but has en-

joyed success on clay this season, winning the ATP 250 tournament in Munich and ending runners-up at another ATP 250 event in Lyon with the same partner.

When contacted, AITA Secretary General Anil Dhupar said he does not have any objection to Bopanna playing with Balaji, ranked 84, at the Paris Olympics.

"Rohan has written to us that he wants to play with Balaji. Balaji is a good player. He played well in Pakistan also, rising to the occasion. He also did well on clay at ongoing French Open. Balaji is a big server. If Rohan wants to play with him we have no objection to that," said Dhupar.

"Let ITF publish the final list after the conclusion of French Open. Let's see if Sumit Nagal also makes it. We will have a selection committee meeting and Bopanna's decision will be conveyed to the panel which shall take a final call."

The selection panel is headed by former Davis Cupper Nandan Bal, who also hinted that they would support Bopanna.

"In my personal opinion, we should give Rohan what he wants. At the end of the day, it's his last shot at an Olympic medal and if he feels that it is better to play with Balaji, he would be sure of the choice," Bal told PTI from Mumbai. "Still we will discuss the combination whenever AITA convenes the meeting."

Former Davis Cupper Balram Singh, Mustafa Ghouse, and Sai Jai Lakshmi are the other members of the selection panel.

Bal said the AITA Secretary General indeed gives his input to the panel but "does not interfere in the proceedings and the decision is taken independently by the panel." (PTI)

Bravo's inclusion as bowling coach was a fantastic move: Afghan coach Trott

PROVIDENCE (GUYANA),

June 4: Afghanistan chief coach Jonathan Trott on Tuesday said the decision to rope in Dwayne Bravo as the team's bowling coach for the ongoing T20 World Cup worked wonders as the West Indian has made his job easier.

Riding on left-arm pacer Fazalhaq Farooqi's (5/9) fiery spell after Rahmanullah Gurbaz (76) and Ibrahim Zadran's (70) solid opening partnership, Afghanistan routed debutants Uganda by 125 runs here.

Speaking to the media after his side's first win, Trott credited the contribution of Bravo, who according to him, has brought about a change in the approach of Afghanistan bowlers.

"DJ (Dwayne Bravo) coming into the side, fantastic. Having quality coaches also with huge experience as players (is great), but also vast franchise experience in this format of the game," Trott said in the post-match press conference.

"(It's) only a brilliant thing to have a player like him coming to the side as coach and it makes your job a lot easier but it also makes the coaching more enhanced, especially with the

bowlers.

"We've seen the start of his first game with us and we saw the bowlers bowl really well, so credit to Dwayne. So (a) nice start for the boys."

Uganda, who were bowled out for 58 in 16 overs, might have been outplayed by the Afghans in their first-ever T20 World Cup match but captain Brian Masaba was more focussed on the positives.

"Pretty special moment for us, hearing our national anthem and seeing our flag at the World Cup," Masaba said after the match. "First game at the World Cup, (a) lot of nerves, so good to get that out of the way."

"Something I will cherish for the rest of my life. We will look to come out and play better next game. They got off to a pretty good start and then it was about fighting back. It was very important how we fought back and full credit to the boys for that," he added.

While Uganda will take on Papua New Guinea in their second Group C match here on Thursday, Afghanistan will be up against New Zealand at the same venue on Saturday. (PTI)

Coco Gauff and Iga Swiatek will meet in the French Open semifinals

PARIS, June 4: Coco Gauff and defending champion Iga Swiatek will meet in the French Open semifinals after victories Tuesday. No. 3 seed Gauff came back to defeat Ons Jabeur 4-6, 6-2, 6-3 to reach the final four at a third consecutive Grand Slam tournament. No. 1 Swiatek followed in Court Philippe Chatrier with a 6-0, 6-2 victory against Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova to stretch her Roland Garros winning streak to 19 matches as she seeks a third trophy in a row in Paris and fourth in five years.

Gauff won her first major title at the U.S. Open in September, then made it to the semifinals at the Australian Open in Janu-

ary. The 20-year-old American was the runner-up to Swiatek at the French Open in 2022.

"It's good to just keep going and not think about this match as something huge — just another match — to not put too much baggage on your shoulders," Swiatek said. "But I guess Coco is not easy. She really likes playing on clay, especially here. I'll just focus on myself and I'll prepare tactically and we'll see."

Overall, Swiatek has won 10 of 11 meetings against Gauff, including a 6-4, 6-3 semifinal win on clay last month en route to the Italian Open title.

Other than a tough three-set triumph over

four-time major champion Naomi Osaka in the second round last week, Swiatek has been at her dominant best in this French Open, showing why she has led the WTA rankings nearly every week since April 2022 and is a popular pick to leave with another title.

Take away the 17 games Osaka managed, and Swiatek has dropped a total of only 11 games in her other four matches so far. Swiatek followed up her 6-0, 6-0 shutout of Anastasia Potapova in the fourth round by grabbing the initial seven games against Vondrousova.

"I felt," Swiatek said, "like I was in the zone." And make no mistake: Vondrousova

is no slouch. In addition to being a Grand Slam champion, she was a finalist at Roland Garros in 2019, won a silver medal at the Tokyo Olympics and is currently ranked No. 6.

But she never stood a chance against Swiatek, who compiled 25 winners to just 10 unforced errors. Swiatek, a 23-year-old from Poland, faced just one break point — and, naturally, she saved it.

"Everything worked. I feel like I've been serving better than in previous rounds, so that gave me an extra boost of confidence," Swiatek said. "I could just play my game and really go with my tactics and not really overthink anything." (AP)

Gambhir is a shrewd tactician, will make a good coach for Indian team: Lalchand Rajput

MUMBAI, June 4: Former India coach Lalchand Rajput says Gautam Gambhir is the right candidate to take Indian cricket forward since he is a shrewd tactician, a no-nonsense guy and someone who adds value to the set up being a two-time World Cup winner.

Although it is not known if Gambhir has officially applied for the India coach post, it is being speculated that he may replace Rahul Dravid in the high-pressure position after the T20 World Cup. The deadline to apply for the job ended on May 27.

"Gambhir is a no-nonsense guy, he has played cricket the hard way and he reads the game well and that has been seen for KKR (Kolkata Knight Riders) as well," Rajput, who coached India to T20 World Cup win in 2007, told PTI in an exclusive interaction on Tuesday.

Rajput cited the example of Kolkata Knight Riders' winning run at the IPL.

"KKR was the same team last year and you see the difference

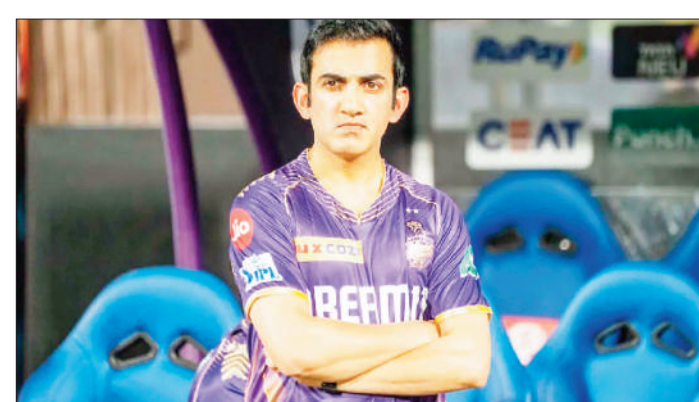
that he made this year. He is a shrewd tactician as well," said Rajput, the director of cricket for Jabalpur Lions in the upcoming Madhya Pradesh T20 League (MPT20) the Scindia Cup.

Rajput said Gambhir's experience as a two-time World Cup winning Indian player would also come handy.

"I am sure with all his experience — he has won two World Cup (wins) as a player — that will really add value. He is a good candidate, but it all depends upon BCCI who they want. He will be the right candidate to take Indian cricket forward," Rajput added.

The former India opener drew comparisons between India's squads from the 2007 World T20 winning side with the current squad in the Americas, saying having experienced players in the side is paramount.

"You got to have some experience as well. We can't just go with the fairly new (side) because in World Cup, pressure is also there," he said.



"You should have some senior guys and along with that the juniors because they have to complement each other. Even if you look at our 2007 squad, there were seniors like (Virender) Swagat, Gambhir, Irfan Pathan, Harbhajan (Singh), RP Singh, Yuvraj Singh..."

"Yes, there were youngsters like Rohit Sharma, Robin Uthappa and even Dinesh Karthik — there was a good mixture (and) it complemented well," he said.

a little bit (off), then you can't play both Hardik Pandya and Shivam Dube."

Looking at the balance, Virat Kohli opens, then you can have Suryakumar (Yadav) at No. 3, then No 4. can be Pant. At five, Hardik Pandya, No. 6 will be Shivam Dube," he added.

Rajput urged the Indian team to think positively and not about the end result as they chase an elusive ICC trophy.

"The main thing is that you don't have to take any pressure because in T20 format you got to go there and express yourself."

Rajput said Madhya Pradesh having its own league, starting June 15, would bring more opportunities to the players of the state.

"The tournament is very good because every state association has got their own premier league. It gives the opportunity for the players to showcase their talent," he said. "It gives the players to get an opportunity to perform so that they can be picked for the IPL as well," Rajput added. (PTI)

T20 WC: India open against gutsy Ireland in renewed quest for World Cup glory

NEW YORK, June 4: Sceptics call them 'old wine in new bottle' but a clutch of superstar Indian cricketers would leave no stone unturned to break away from their archaic template when they take on a plucky Ireland in their opening game of the T20 World Cup here on Wednesday.

The team knows that it is a touch undercooked with a lot of confusion still persisting about what would be the best combination on a drop-in virgin strip. As is clear from the games so far, scoring won't be a walk in the park like it was during the Indian Premier League the last couple of months.

But the bigger concern is the baggage of being favourites who don't really make it count in the end.

Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli have individually laid their hands on global silverware but an assortment of some other 'once in generation' cricketers, including Jasprit Bumrah and Ravindra Jadeja, have not and they would be eager to finally lift one.

This Indian cricket team wouldn't want to be the Brazil football team of 1982 and 86 when global stars like Socrates, Zico, Careca, Falcao and Alemão couldn't win the FIFA trophy.

The most poignant sight of last year's ODI World Cup was a forlorn Rohit, after the final, desperately trying to hide his well-wed eyes from the TV cameras as he quietly climbed the steps of the Narendra Modi Stadium dressing room.

There was also Kohli, who after scoring those 765 invaluable runs, could only get a fleeting blank gaze towards the podium



where the trophy was kept.

The best players sometimes don't add up to become the best team and while India have put faith in their most experienced lot, it can't be simply wished away that this current batch has faltered at the final two hurdles way too many times.

At 37, this could safely be termed as Rohit's last World Cup in the white-ball format as one doesn't have to be Nostradamus to predict that he won't be around for the next T20 World Cup in India and the 50-over World Cup in South Africa in 2027.

A very gutsy Irish team with some quality T20 players like Paul Stirling, Josh Little, Harry Tector, Andy Balbirnie, awaits India in

the lung-opener.

On a slow track and a sub-standard outfield at the Nassau County ground, how India plays against Irish left-arm spinner George Dockrell will be interesting. Where India hold the advantage is their spinners who are way better compared to what the Irish team have though the pace attack, aside from Bumrah, looks a bit weak in absence of the redoubtable Mohammed Shami.

Often having too many options isn't the best option just like Indians have at the top. To fit in skipper Rohit and team's most elite batter in Kohli, they have to probably sacrifice Yashasvi Jaiswal.

Rishabh Pant's batting at No.3 in the prac-

tice game was like a breath of fresh air and Hardik Pandya's bowling form will indicate how India fares in this competition.

At the Cantigue Park nets on Monday, Pandya spent considerable time bowling to Kohli, Suryakumar Yadav and Rohit.

If he can bowl at least three overs every day, the Indian team can also look to play Shivam Dube and include an extra spinner in the line-up.

Like earlier days, Ireland isn't exactly a minnow in this format and very recently, they have beaten Pakistan in their own den in the run-up to the World Cup.

Little has more than little experience of playing IPL for Gujarat Titans and the troika of Balbirnie, Stirling and Tector can more than chance their arms.

The 'Green Shirts' will be the banana peel that Rohit and his men can ill-afford to slip on before they meet the more famous 'Green Jerseys' at the weekend.

Teams:

India: Rohit Sharma (captain), Virat Kohli, Rishabh Pant (wk), Suryakumar Yadav, Hardik Pandya, Shivam Dube, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Jasprit Bumrah, Arshdeep Singh, Mohammed Siraj, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Sanju Samson, Yuzvendra Chahal.

Ireland: Paul Stirling (captain), Mark Adair, Ross Adair, Andy Balbirnie, Curtis Campher, Gareth Delany, George Dockrell, Graham Hume, Josh Little*, Barry McCarthy, Neil Rock (wk), Harry Tector, Lorcan Tucker (wk), Ben White, Craig Young.

Match Starts: 8 pm. (PTI)

Gavaskar picks Kohli to open for India against Ireland, wants Jaiswal at No 3



NEW YORK, June 4: Bating legend Sunil Gavaskar feels Virat Kohli should open alongside skipper Rohit Sharma in India's T20 World Cup game against Ireland on Wednesday with Yashasvi Jaiswal dropping down to the number three position.

There has been a lot of debate around Kohli's batting position in the T20 World Cup.

Kohli has been India's designated number three batter in the white-ball format for a long time. He heads to the marquee event on the back of an excellent IPL season.

"Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli to open the batting along with Yashasvi Jaiswal at three, Gavaskar said on 'Star Sports' while giving his preferred line-up for the game here.

Opening for the Royal Chal-

lengers Bengaluru, Kohli piled up 741 runs in 15 matches at an average of 61.75 and a strike rate of over 154. He struck a century and five fifties during the prolific run.

Gavaskar picked the flamboyant Rishabh Pant ahead of Sanju Samson for wicketkeeping duties and Mohammed Siraj ahead of left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh.

"Suryakumar Yadav at four, Rishabh Pant at five. At number six, I would have Hardik Pandya, number seven would be Ravindra Jadeja, number eight, not necessarily in that batting order, Shivam Dube. Number nine Kuldeep Yadav, number 10 Jasprit Bumrah and number 11 will be Siraj," he said.

After the game against Ireland, India will take on arch-rivals Pakistan here on Sunday.

GM Arjun Erigaisi breaks into world top-5 in FIDE rating list



NEW DELHI, June 4: Grandmaster Arjun Erigaisi's strong showing in the French Team Chess Championship has helped him reach the fifth spot in the FIDE standings, making him the highest ranked Indian by live rating.

Arjun, with a ELO rating of 2769.7, has so far added 8.7 points to his tally, behind Magnus Carlsen of Norway, USA's Hikaru Nakamura and Fabiano Caruana and Ian Nepomniachtchi of Russia.

He had briefly reached a career-high live rating of 2771.2 earlier this week and is the only Indian since Vishwanathan Anand to do so.

The 20-year-old, who is representing Metz Fischer Chess Club, has won four of the five matches he has played so far including victories over compatriot P Harikrishna and Germany's Vitaly Kunin. Two more rounds are remaining in the competition.

Arjun has been in fine form over the past few months, finishing second in the TePe Sigeman Chess Tournament and joint-fifth in the Sharjah Masters Open Tournament. He also won the Menorca Open crown in April by edging out GMs Kirill Alekseenko and Maksim Chigarev. (PTI)

Lakshya Sen enters second round of Indonesia Open

JAKARTA, June 4: Star Indian shuttler Lakshya Sen entered the men's singles second round of the Indonesia Open Super 1000 tournament with a straight-game win over Japan's Kanta Tsuneyama here on Tuesday.

Sen took just 40 minutes to get the better of Tsuneyama 21-12 21-17 in an opening round clash.

Sen, who sneaked into the Olympic qualification with back-to-back semifinal finishes at French Open and All England Championships, will next be up against the winner of the match between seventh seed Anthony Sinisuka Ginting of Indonesia and Japan's Kenta Nishimoto.

However, it was curtains for Kiran George from the men's singles event, but not before giving a tough fight to Hong Yang Weng of China 21-11 10-21 20-22.



The Indian mixed doubles pair of B Sumeeth Reddy and Sikki Reddy had to battle hard before prevailing 18-21 21-16 21-17 over the American pair of Vinson Chiu and Jennie Gai in the opening round.

But a Herculean task awaits the Indian pair as it will take on the winner of the match between top seeds Si Wei Zheng and Ya Qiong Huang of China and Indonesian combination of Rehan Naufal Kusharjanto and Lisa Ayu Kusumawati in the next round.

Later in the day, the Indian women's doubles pair of Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand will be up against Chinese Taipei's Yu-Pei Cheng and Yu Hsing Sun, while former world no.1 HS Prannoy will lock horns against Priyanshu Rajawat in an all-Indian men's singles opening round contest. (PTI)

So unfair, Sri Lanka players criticise their T20 WC schedule citing lengthy travel time

NEW YORK, June 4: Sri Lanka captain Wanindu Hasaranga and spinner Maheesh Theekshana have lambasted the scheduling of their team's matches in the ongoing T20 World Cup, saying the roster is "unfair" and has already forced them to cancel one practice due to the long travel time.

Sri Lanka lost their group D opener to South Africa and Theekshana spoke out on the scheduling which he believes has negatively impacted the team.

"So unfair for us, we have to leave every day (after the match) because we are playing (at) four different venues," Theekshana said.

"The flight we took from Florida, from Miami, we had to wait like eight hours in the airport to get the flight. We were supposed to leave at 8pm but we got the flight at 5am. It's really unfair for us, but it doesn't matter when you play," he added.

South Africa, on the other hand, will be playing two more games here while India, who will start against Ireland on Wednesday, will also play three matches in the city before

their last group match in Florida.

"...even from the hotel, it (the practice venue) is one hour and 40 minutes. Even today (for the match against South Africa), we had to wake up around 5am to come here," Theekshana pointed out.

And that's why the island nation was forced to cancel a training session ahead of the South Africa match.

"Yeah, that's why," Theekshana said. Theekshana refused to take names but did mention that a few teams "have got the opportunity to stay in the same place but their hotel is only 14 minutes to the ground."

"I can't say the (names of) teams that are playing in the same venue, so they know what the conditions are like. They're playing practice games at the same venue. No one will get that.

"We played the practice games in Florida, and our third game is in Florida. There's some things that I think that everyone will rethink about next year because I know that this year, nothing will change," he said. (PTI)

T20 form 'best in a decade' following IPL success, says Cummins

BRIDGETOWN (BARBADOS), June 4: Australia pace spearhead Pat Cummins feels his T20 game is at its best in a decade as he heads into the World Cup high on confidence after a successful Indian Premier League campaign.

Cummins reached Bridgetown on Saturday. He enters the World Cup after a hectic IPL campaign where he led the Sunrisers Hyderabad to a runner up finish.

"Probably as well as I have for the last 10 years really," Cummins told cricket.com.au of his T20 bowling.

Having never played in the Caribbean, the Australian Test and ODI captain had his first-ever training session in the West Indies on Monday.

But Cummins is confident of how he's placed ahead of the World Cup, having continuously played T20 cricket since March in the IPL.

"We played 17 games straight (at the IPL). For the most part, international T20s are after the Test series, and you've got to try and hit a yorker or a slower ball, and then go back to a Test series," Cummins said.

"So just getting the pace of the game and executing some of those balls that you need more in T20 cricket than in other formats, I feel really well placed."

Cummins feels that sticking to the same format significantly impacts the tactical side of bowling.



"A lot of T20 bowling in particular is about thinking through your sequencing of which ball to bowl or when, and I think over the course of the season you get to learn pretty quickly what's working and what isn't," he said.

"Even if it doesn't work first game, and you feel like it's never going to work every game, but you know that if you zoom out over the course of the tournament it's going to work for you. So it's nice coming in here with that confidence." (PTI)

All-round Afghanistan trounce Uganda by 125 runs for winning start in T20 World Cup

PROVIDENCE (GUYANA), June 4: Pacer Fazalhaq Farooqi produced a fiery spell after Rahmanullah Gurbaz and Ibrahim Zadran struck half centuries in a solid opening partnership as Afghanistan began their T20 World Cup campaign with a comprehensive 125-run victory over debutants Uganda here.

Kolkata Knight Riders opener Gurbaz (76 off 45 balls) and his partner Zadran (70 off 46 balls) registered the second highest opening partnership (154) in the men's T20 World Cup as Afghanistan posted a challenging 183/5 after being asked to bat.

Left-arm pacer Farooqi (5/9) then knocked the wind out of the Ugandan batting line-up with his maiden five-wicket haul. The debutants were shot out for 58 in 16 overs.

"The kind of start we wanted as a team. Does not matter who we play, it is about the mindset," skipper and country's biggest cricket icon Rashid Khan said after the match.

"The hard work we have done in the last few weeks, the way the openers started and the way our bowlers bowled - it was a great overall team effort," Rashid, who polished off the tail, added.

"That is the beauty of this team. We have so many options and that makes it easy as a captain," world's premier T20 spinner gushed.

Seamer Farooqi was twice on the brink of claiming a hat-trick. He was lethal with the new ball.

After being hit for a four off his first delivery, he bowled a brilliant inswinger which clipped Ronak Patel's bat before crashing onto the stumps. He then trapped Roger Mukasa leg before wicket with a similar delivery.

"I have missed it (getting the hat-trick) a few times (smiles). Something that is not under my control and if I get a chance again, I will try to get that hat-trick," Farooqi said while collecting his 'Player of the Match' award.

Naveen-ul-Haq also picked up two wickets in his first over, leaving Uganda in dire straits at 18/5.

Farooqi then returned in the 13th over to snare three more wickets to register his career-best figures in T20 Internationals.

He first deceived Riazat Ali Shah with a slower delivery to bowl him out before forcing skipper Brian Masaba to nick the ball with an eager Gurbaz collecting it.

He missed out on a hat-trick again but claimed is fifth victim in the last ball of the over.

"I kept it simple and wanted to hit the



wickets. Playing franchise cricket helps you improve and helps on the big stage as well.

"Playing with so many big players, it helps in dealing with pressure and in bowling in the right areas," said Farooqi, who has played for SRH in previous editions of IPL.

Earlier, with the ball coming onto the bat nicely and a fast outfield, Afghanistan's openers started strong.

Gurbaz assumed the role of the aggressor first as he smacked the second ball of the innings for a six. Zadran quickly followed suit, hitting four consecutive boundaries in the sixth over off Dinesh Nakrani.

By the end of the first powerplay, Afghanistan were scoring at an impressive rate of 11 runs per over.

Gurbaz, who four boundaries and many sixes, raced to his fifty off just 28 balls in the ninth over.

While Zadran, who sent the ball to the fence nine times and over it once, reached his half century in the 12th over.

Uganda's poor fielding only added to their woes.

Gurbaz was dropped off a no ball in the 14th over which yielded 25 runs as the Afghanistan raced to 150.

It looked like the duo would bat the full 20 overs but Uganda bowlers fought back and kept the total under 200.

Afghanistan's next challenge will be infinitely tougher against a formidable New Zealand side.

"Big game for us. It is about keeping things simple," said Rashid. (PTI)