

**WORLD**

- Israeli strike kills at least 33 people at Gaza school
- Netherlands kicks off 4 days of EU elections across 27 nations

**NATION**

- NDA MPs may meet today to elect Modi as their leader
- JD(U) hopeful of 'respectable' representation at Centre

## 'Nagaon, Dhubri poll results show foundation of Assam's social fabric weak' Nothing communal in 'our own' Gaurav's victory: CM Himanta

**GOALPARA/GUWAHATI, June 6:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday claimed that the Lok Sabha election results in Nagaon and Dhubri seats pointed to the fact that the foundation of the state's social fabric was very weak.

Congress MLA Rakibul Hussain won the Dhubri seat by a record margin of over 10 lakh votes, while party MP Pradyut Bordoloi emerged victorious in Nagaon by 2,12,231 votes.

"The dangerous election results of Nagaon and Dhubri have again proved that the foundation of the social fabric of Assam is very weak... Rakibul Hussain won by over 10 lakh votes. What does this signify? It shows the danger in front of our society and 'jatiya jiban' (national life)," Sarma told reporters here.

"...You think about voting by over 10 lakh votes and not a single Hindu voted there; so how much is the danger in front of our social fabric?... This 10 lakh will become 12 lakh in next 10 years with 29 per cent growth of Muslim population," he added.

Sarma also claimed that Bordoloi, too, won from Nagaon with leads from Muslim-majority assembly segments in the seat, while the BJP took leads in all the Hindu-dominated legislative constituencies.

"Laharighat, Dhing, Rupahi and Samaguri (all Muslim-dominated seats) have made Congress victorious by 2-2.5 lakh margin (in Nagaon). So, if there is not some kind of resistance, the situation of Assam will be very dangerous," he added.

Hussain defeated sitting MP and AIUDF chief Badruddin Ajmal with an emphatic margin of 10,12,476 votes. The Congress leader polled 14,71,885 votes and the AIUDF chief managed 4,59,409 votes. "Ajmal could never win by 10 lakh votes. Rakibul Hussain winning by 10 lakh votes is a warning of a thunderbolt for our society, especially Lower, Middle and North Assam although it may be good news for the Congress. Nobody wins by such a margin even though it may be a good thing for him personally," Sarma said.

"Those who feel insecure in Dhubri constituency after the outcome of the result, we are with them... If there is no challenge from the BJP or people with nationalistic fervour, Assam will be washed away and nobody will survive," he claimed.

Addressing a press conference in Guwahati later during the day, the chief minister stressed that Ajmal and Hussain were only (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## State Cabinet reshuffle by Aug 15 New team to be created with 3 new faces for 2026 Assembly polls: CM

**GUWAHATI, June 6:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said he will reshuffle his ministry by including at least three new faces by August 15 in order to create a new team for the 2026 assembly elections.

Addressing a press conference here, Sarma said that he has not spoken about it with his central leadership and will consider the process of ministry reshuffle a month after the flood situation in the state is over.

"We will change our ministry and a new look will be given to it. We need to prepare the team for 2026 elections that will work with new energy," he added.



He, however, said that no decision has been taken yet as he has not spoken to the central leadership, which is undergoing a change at present.

"There is also a flood situation going on. So, we will start after one month. We will have a new ministry by August 15," Sarma said. To a question, he said at least three new faces will be inducted into the cabinet.

"We already have two positions lying vacant (in the ministry). Our minister Parimal Suklabaidya has won the Lok Sabha polls, so that post will also be vacant," Sarma said. Assam Excise, Transport and Fisheries minister Parimal Suklabaidya won from Silchar by a margin of 2,64,311 votes.

The chief minister said all the present ministers may not be replaced, but their departments are likely to be reshuffled. (PTI)

**HT BRIEFS**

### Roads condition

**HOWRAGHAT:** Regional Students Union, Howraghat in Karbi Anglong in a press release said that the condition of the roads in all wards of Howraghat Municipal Board is in very deplorable condition. The band condition of the roads make the daily life of the students and citizens difficult. The big potholes filled with water turn into dead traps. Sometimes people meet with accidents due to the bad roads. The students union submitted a memorandum to the chief executive member of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council and Chairman of the Howraghat Municipal Board praying for immediate repair of the roads.

### Yaba tablets

**BOKAJAN:** In a routine checking on NH-36 at Dillai Tinali under Dillai Police Station last evening the police in Karbi Anglong seized a large quantity of Yaba tablets. It was in the evening around 5:30 pm that an Alto car, AS-14 E 9137, coming from Dimapur and heading towards Manja side was intercepted and checked. During the checking the police found 20 bundles of blue coloured Yaba tablets containing 200 strips totalling 40,000 tablets. The tablets weighing 4.120 kgs was kept concealed inside the upper portion and just below the wind shield of the car.

### Orange alert

**GUWAHATI:** The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Wednesday issued orange alert as it predicted rainfall followed by lightning, thunderstorm and breezy winds are likely to take place in entire Assam and other Northeastern states for the next couple of days. IMD on its official X handle wrote, "isolated heavy (64.5-115.5 mm) to very heavy rainfall (115.5-204.4 mm) on 07th & 08th June, 2024". Meanwhile, cyclone Remal has brought heavy rainfall in Assam, resulting in extensive flooding.

## Assam flood condition improves; nearly 1.3 lakh still hit

**GUWAHATI, June 6:** The flood situation in Assam showed significant improvement on Thursday, although approximately 1.3 lakh people are still grappling with the aftermath across seven districts, an official bulletin said.

According to the latest report from the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA), more than 1,29,500 people continue to be affected by the floods in Cachar, Hailakandi, Hojai, West Karbi Anglong, Karimganj, Morigaon, and Nagaon districts.

Nagaon remains the most severely affected, with over 55,000 people suffering, followed by Cachar (51,000), and Karimganj, where 11,000 people are grappling with floodwaters.

As of Wednesday, nearly 2.5 lakh people were impacted across eight districts by floodwaters.

The total casualty count due to this year's floods, landslides, and storms has reached 34.

Authorities are currently managing 78 relief camps across five districts, accommodating 16,947 people, and operating 25 relief distribution centres across the same districts.

Over the last 24 hours, relief efforts have seen the distribution of 318.11 quintals of rice, 42.57 quintals of dal, 12.25 quintals of salt, and 1,912.9 liters of mustard oil among flood victims.

Presently, 293 villages remain submerged, and 5,702.1 hectares of crop areas have suffered damage across the state, as reported by ASDMA. Floodwaters have caused damage to embankments, roads, bridges, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## ASDC blames disunity among anti-BJP forces for election defeat



**HT Bureau**  
**DIPHU, June 6:** The Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) has attributed its defeat in the Lok Sabha election from the 6th Diphu parliamentary constituency to disunity among anti-BJP forces.

"The main reason for the defeat of the anti-BJP elements this time is the arrogant attitude of the All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHLC) and Congress, as both parties refused to come together to put up a common candidate. Therefore, it is the APHLC and Congress who have inadvertently supported the BJP," said Jotson Bey.

Regarding what they can do to regain acceptance among the people, Bey said, "First, we have to inform the people of the damage done by previous leaders like Holiram Terang and former MP and CPI (ML) leader Dr Jayanta Rongpi. Rongpi has played very dirty politics by applying his communist ide-

ologies and principles to undermine the regional party ASDC."

Bey alleged that Dr Rongpi was involved in massive corruption in the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council and claimed that after he (Bey) became the chief executive member (CEM) of KAAC, corruption was curtailed. While people are blaming the present leader for the party's downfall, it was the CPI (ML) that injected poison into the ASDC. Bey also said that factions of ASDC were formally joined together into a single organisation in 2017.

"The people this time seem to distance themselves from ASDC because of the mistakes committed by a section of the party leaders in the guise of the CPI (ML). The present sets of leaders are now bearing the brunt of people's anger for the mistakes of past leaders," he stated.

ASDC accused the APHLC of following in the footsteps of the CPI (ML) in misleading the people on various issues. Giving confidence to the party (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## JD(U) wants Agnipath scheme to be reviewed: KC Tyagi



**NEW DELHI, June 6:** BJP ally Janata Dal (United) leader KC Tyagi on Thursday said his party has demanded a review of the Agnipath scheme and will "pursue" the caste census issue which, he asserted, was a need of the time.

He also said his party's support to the BJP was "unconditional".

"There is anger among voters on the (short-term army recruitment) Agnipath scheme. Our party wants those shortcomings to be removed, on which people have objections," Tyagi told reporters here.

He said the JD(U) is not opposed to the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) but all stakeholders should be consulted on it.

"On the UCC, the chief minister (Nitish Kumar) had written to the Law Commission. We are not against the UCC. But there should be consultation with all the stakeholders, chief ministers, political parties and different sects, and a resolution should be found," he said.

Asked if his party will push for a caste census, Tyagi said, "No party in the country has denied a caste census. Bihar has shown the way, the prime minister also did not oppose... It is the demand of the time, and we will pursue it."

On its support to the BJP as a member of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), he said, "There is no pre-condition, there is unconditional support. But it is in our mind and heart that Bihar should be given special status. After bifurcation, the situation Bihar has faced, it cannot be corrected without granting it special status."

Support of allies like the JD(U) is crucial for the BJP as it could not reach the majority mark on its own in the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## People's verdict is 'insurance policy' against BJP's authoritarian politics: Gaurav Gogoi

**JORHAT, June 6:** Deputy leader of Congress in the outgoing Lok Sabha Gaurav Gogoi on Thursday described the parliamentary election results as an "insurance policy" that the people found against the alleged authoritarian politics of the BJP.

He also claimed that with the BJP failing to secure a majority on its own, its NDA allies would support the opposition INDIA bloc and vote against the saffron party on sensitive matters in Parliament. "People of India have found (in the election results) an insurance policy against the authoritarian politics of BJP," Gogoi said in an interview with PTI. The BJP was cut to size by the people in this election, the three-time Congress MP claimed.

"Prior to this, the BJP with absolute brute majority was able to bulldoze a lot of bills through the Parliament and standing committees. They will no longer be able to do that now, primarily due to two reasons," he said.

One reason is the BJP has to take the sensitivities of their NDA allies into consideration, Gogoi said.



"Concerns of the people of Andhra Pradesh, concerns of the politics of JD(U) will matter a lot more now. BJP leadership will have to take these into account if they form the government," the Congress leader said.

"The second feature of the insurance policy is the numbers of the INDIA alliance. We have strong enough opposition in the Lok Sabha to block any bill that violates the spirit of the Constitution, and on contentious issues, we will

be able to convince certain allies of BJP to vote with their conscience and defend the Constitution," he said. Gogoi, who snatched the Jorhat seat in Assam from the ruling BJP by a margin of 1,44,393 votes, asserted that JD(U) and TDP are not staunch BJP allies.

"Often they have been on the opposite side of BJP and that's why I think people will have a much more different Parliament than in past 10 years," he added. On BJP losing in key seats across the country, Gogoi maintained that people voted with a lot of thought and deliberation on who their local representative should be.

"That is where BJP lost a trick. They were too over-confident, too arrogant and could not feel the pulse of the people," he said.

Congress was highlighting the issues of the people and was also careful with choice of candidates, he said adding: "I do find that in many seats it was not the candidate or the party, but the people who were fighting on the streets, people were fighting the elections. On his victory from Jorhat, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Petrol is much cheaper in Assam than Bengal: Himanta defends price hike

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, June 6:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday defended the increased petrol and diesel prices which were hiked one day after the results of the Lok Sabha poll were announced.

Sarma asserted that fuel and diesel costs in Assam are at least ₹ 7 less per litre than those of opposition-ruled states like West Bengal.

Effective from June 6, the Assam government raised the Value Added Tax (VAT) on petrol and diesel, resulting in a rise of ₹ 1.01 per litre for petrol and ₹ 1.02 per litre for diesel.

Following this, people voiced their disapproval at fuel pumps on the increase in the price of petrol and diesel. However, CM Sarma justified the state government's decision, claiming that Assam had significantly lower prices than other states.

"We brought down the price of petrol and diesel by ₹ 3 per litre prior to the Lok Sabha elections. However, we were forced to raise the costs by ₹ 1 because of the flood and other state-wide issues," Sarma added.

According to him, despite this small hike, in comparison to Assam, Mamata Banerjee's West Bengal has far higher prices of petrol and diesel.

"Anyone who compares the cost of petrol and diesel in Assam and Bengal will find that the prices in Assam are cheaper by more than 7 rupees compared to West Bengal," Sarma stated.

## The first-term Lok Sabha members account for 52 per cent of the total members 280 elected for first time to Lok Sabha, 52 per cent of total strength

**NEW DELHI, June 6:** Actor Arun Govil, who played the role of Lord Ram in the popular TV serial Ramayan, Dalit rights activist Chandrashekar Azad and erstwhile royal Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar are among the 280 first-term members of the Lok Sabha.

Former chief ministers, Rajya Sabha members, entrepreneurs and even an ex-high court judge made their maiden entry into the 543-member Lower House of Parliament in the just concluded general elections. The first-term Lok Sabha members account for 52 per cent of the total members.

Uttar Pradesh, the largest state that sends 80 members to the Lok Sabha, has 45 first-term members in the Lok Sabha including BJP's



Govil from Meerut seat, Congress' Maharashtra, where the BJP faced electoral reverses, has 33 first-term members, including school teacher Bhaskar Bhagde, who was fielded by NCP-Sharadchandra

Pawar from the tribal seat of Dindori. Bhagde defeated BJP leader and Union minister Bharti Pawar.

Also among first-term members from Maharashtra are BJP's Piyush Goyal, who was elected to the Lok Sabha from Mumbai North; Congress leader Balwant Wankhede, who defeated BJP's Navneet Rana from Amravati; BJP's Anup Dhote, the son of former Union minister Sanjay Dhote, from Akola; and Independent candidate Vishal Patil from Sangli. Former chief ministers Narayan Rane (Ratnagiri-Sindhudurg), Trivendra Singh Rawat (Haridwar), Manohar Lal (Karnal), Biplob Kumar Deb (Tripura West), Jitan Ram Manjhi (Gaya), Basavraj Bommai (Haveri), Jagdish Shettar (Belgaum) and Charanjit Singh Channi (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## China lodges protest against PM Modi's response to Taiwan President Lai's greetings

**BEIJING, June 6:** China on Thursday protested to India over Prime Minister Narendra Modi's social media statement that he looked forward to having closer ties with Taiwan, insisting that New Delhi should resist Taiwan authorities' "political calculations."

China views Taiwan as a rebel province that must be reunified with the mainland, even by force. Modi's remarks came in response to a congratulatory message from Taiwan President Lai Ching-te on his election victory. Lai, elected as Taiwan's President last month, in a message posted on X said: "My sincere congratulations to Prime Minister @narendramodi on his election victory. "We look forward to enhancing the fast-growing #Taiwan-India partnership, expanding our collaboration on trade, technology & other sectors to contribute to peace & prosperity in the #IndoPacific," Lai said.

In his reply posted on X, Modi



said: "Thank you @ChingteLai for your warm message. I look forward to closer ties as we work towards mutually beneficial economic and technological partnership". Reacting to the messages, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said China has lodged a protest with India on this. First of all, there is no President in the Taiwan region, Mao said, when asked for her comments at a media briefing here.

"On this question, China opposes all forms of official interactions be-

tween Taiwan authorities and countries having diplomatic relations with China," she said. There is but one China in the world and Taiwan is an inalienable part of the territory of the People's Republic of China, she said. The One China principle is a universally recognised norm in international relations and the prevailing consensus, she said. India has made serious political commitments and should resist Taiwan authorities' political calculations, she said. "China has protested to India about this," she said.

Lai, 64, was sworn in as President of the estranged island of Taiwan last month after winning the Presidential poll. In his inaugural address on May 20, Taiwan President Lai called on Beijing to cease its intimidation of the self-ruled island after his Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which has championed democracy in the face of years of growing threats from China, won. (PTI)



# Stock markets extend rally to 2<sup>nd</sup> day on easing political worries

MUMBAI, June 6: Stock markets rallied for the second straight day on Thursday with the benchmark Sensex jumping nearly 693 points on easing political worries as the ruling NDA set in motion its government formation efforts.

Regaining the 75,000 level, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 692.27 points or 0.93 per cent to settle at more than week high of 75,074.51. During the day, the barometer soared 915.49 points or 1.23 per cent to 75,297.73.

The NSE Nifty climbed 201.05 points or 0.89 per cent to 22,821.40 with 38 of its constituents ending with gains. Intraday, it rallied 289.8 points or 1.28 per cent to 22,910.15. Key indices Sensex and Nifty had plunged by nearly 6 per cent on Tuesday due to below-expectation results of Lok Sabha polls. Investors lost a record ₹ 31 lakh crore in a single day due to market meltdown.

The indices recovered more than 3 per cent on Wednesday with NDA allies affirming their support to BJP to form the new government. In two days of gain, investor wealth has recovered by around ₹ 21 lakh crore. "The benchmark indices maintained their positive mo-



mentum, as the new coalition is about to swear in, which is predicted to be a stable government, Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services said. However, anxiety persists over the new Cabinet being put in place and policy measures expected to be announced in the coming budget, Nair said adding that the market is awaiting fresh signals from the RBI's comments on liquidity. Realty, IT, and oil & gas shares led the recovery while FMCG and healthcare witnessed profit booking.

Among the 30 Sensex companies, Tech Mahindra, HCL Technologies, State Bank of India, NTPC, Infosys, Larsen & Toubro, Tata Consultancy Services and Wipro emerged as the biggest gainers. Hindustan Unilever, Asian Paints, Mahindra & Mahindra, Nestle, IndusInd Bank and Sun Pharma were among the laggards. "It appears that markets have adjusted to the recent election results, and stability on the global front is further boosting positivity," said Ajit Mishra SVP, Re-

search, Religare Broking Ltd. In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge jumped 3.06 per cent, while midcap index climbed 2.28 per cent.

All the indices ended with gains, with realty soaring 4.85 per cent, industrials jumping 3.69 per cent, power by 2.87 per cent, IT by 2.86 per cent, utilities by 2.52 per cent and energy by 2.34 per cent. As many as 3,009 stocks advanced while 834 declined and 102 remained unchanged on the BSE.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is poised to form the government at the Centre for a third consecutive term after the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) won the majority in the just-concluded parliamentary polls.

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

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.09 per cent to USD 78.43 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 5,656.26 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. (PTI)

## Pixxel, Sarvam AI, Niramai among 10 Indian startups in WEF's Tech Pioneers list

NEW DELHI, June 6: Ten Indian startups including Pixxel, Niramai and Sarvam AI have made to the World Economic Forum's Technology Pioneers 2024 list published on Thursday.

The list has total 100 leading tech startups which are focused on applying new breakthroughs in AI to develop clean energy solutions, healthcare innovation and progress in biotech, space and neurotechnology. Those having been named on the list in the past include tech giants like Airbnb, Google, Kickstarter and Spotify.

Niramai is developing a novel AI-based test for detecting early-stage breast cancer, which is affordable, portable and non-invasive.

Pixxel is developing hyperspectral satellite imagery to capture geospatial data, while Sarvam AI is building foundation AI models and platforms for their use with a focus on Indian languages and use cases. Indian entrants also include Amperhour, which is creating dispatchable renewable energy generating plants, and Cropin which is developing a farm monitoring and management solution to help farmers geo-tag their farms, digitize farm records, monitor crop productivity and improve farm activity.

Entri is giving access to learning and upskilling programmes in Indian local languages, while HealthPlix is developing AI-powered electronic medical records software for the healthcare sector.

Among other Indian names on the list, International Battery Company is manufacturing large-sized rechargeable prismatic li-ion nickel manganese cobalt batteries, NxtWave is providing AI-driven, vernacular-based coding courses, and String Bio is producing next-generation ingredients for agriculture, animal feed and human nutrition from GHG gases.

The 100 Technology Pioneers include startups from 23 countries, with a third led by a woman chief executive. (PTI)

## Investors' wealth climbs ₹ 21 lakh cr in two days of stock market recovery

NEW DELHI, June 6: Dalal Street investors became richer by ₹ 21 lakh crore in two days of a sharp rally in the stock market, where the BSE benchmark surged over 4 per cent. The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 692.27 points or 0.93 per cent to settle at 75,074.51 on Thursday. In intra-day trade, the benchmark soared 915.49 points or 1.23 per cent to 75,297.73.

In two days, the BSE benchmark surged 2,995.46 points or 4.15 per cent after Tuesday's massive rout.

Thanks to the optimistic trend in equities, the market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies climbed ₹ 21,05,298.11 crore to ₹ 4,15,89,003.38 crore (USD 4.98 trillion) in two days.

"With the poll-related uncertainty now almost over and the NDA ready to form the government, the mood remained upbeat for the second straight session as Sensex crossed the psychological 75k mark on the back of a splendid all-round buying support.

"With the buoyancy returning to the market, the fear gauge volatility index also eased considerably and fell 11 per cent," said Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is poised to form the government at the Centre for a third consecutive term after the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) won a majority in the just-concluded parliamentary polls. Among the 30 Sensex companies, Tech Mahindra, HCL Technologies, State Bank of India, NTPC, Infosys, Larsen & Toubro, Tata Consultancy Services and Wipro emerged as the biggest gainers. Hindustan Unilever, Asian Paints, Mahindra & Mahindra, Nestle, IndusInd Bank and Sun Pharma were among the laggards. The NSE Nifty climbed 201.05 points or 0.89 per cent to 22,821.40 on Thursday.

"The benchmark indices maintained their positive



momentum, as the new coalition is about to swear in, which is predicted to be a stable government. However, anxiety persists over the new cabinet being put in place and policy measures expected to be announced in the coming budget," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge jumped 3.06 per cent, while the midcap index climbed 2.28 per cent. All the indices ended with gains, with realty soaring 4.85 per cent, industrials jumping 3.69 per cent, power (2.87 per cent), IT (2.86 per cent), utilities (2.52 per cent) and energy (2.34 per cent).

As many as 3,009 stocks advanced while 834 declined and 102 remained unchanged on the BSE.

"Nifty extended its recovery for a second consecutive session on Thursday after the steep fall witnessed on June 4," said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities. The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex cracked 4,389.73 points, or 5.74 per cent, to settle at 72,079.05 on Tuesday. During the day, the benchmark tanked 6,234.35 points or 8.15 per cent to hit a nearly five-month low of 70,234.43. (PTI)

## Godavari Biorefineries inaugurates bio-based chemicals plant in Maharashtra

NEW DELHI, June 6: Godavari Biorefineries Ltd, part of Somaia Group, has inaugurated a new speciality biochemical plant in Sakarwadi, Maharashtra, to produce bio-based chemicals.

The multi-purpose plant will manufacture bio-based chemicals like biobutanol, ethers and esters for use in coatings, resins, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, food and fragrances, the company said in a statement.

"At Godavari Biorefineries, we make speciality chemicals from renewable resources using green

chemistry. We work with farmers to develop sustainable agricultural value chains that serve as a feedstock for our bio-based chemicals," Samir Somaia, Chairman of Somaia Group, said.

The new plant is part of Godavari's strategy to increase its capacity for bio-based chemicals and support companies seeking to use more sustainable ingredients, according to its Chief Executive Officer Sangeeta Srivastava.

"We work in close relation and collaboration with our customers to develop and produce new bio-

based chemical building blocks...It is a journey towards net zero where we are open for new partnerships," she said.

Chemical engineer M M Sharma inaugurated the plant, highlighting the importance of research and development. He commended Godavari's efforts but said the pace of change needs to accelerate.

Godavari, which has over eight decades of experience in the sugar industry, works with farmers cultivating sugarcane and other biomass crops as feedstock for its bio-based chemicals. (PTI)

## Asian stocks rise after Wall Street barrels to records

HONG KONG, June 6: Asian markets rose on Thursday after Wall Street barrelled to records on Wednesday as the frenzy around artificial-intelligence technology kept sending stocks higher. US futures and oil prices gained.

In Tokyo, the Nikkei 225 index climbed 0.9 per cent to 38,841.75. The Hang Seng in Hong Kong added 0.8 per cent to 18,569.48 and the Shanghai Composite index was up 0.1 per cent at 3,068.31.

Australia's S and P/ASX 200 gained 0.7 per cent to 7,824.40 after data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics showed the country's trading surplus rebounded in April, with exports falling 2.5 per cent and imports dropping 7.2 per



cent. Taiwan's Taixex surged 2 per cent after contract electronics maker Foxconn's shares jumped 0.6 per cent after the company reported its revenue rose 22.1 per cent year-on-year in May, a record high for the month. In Bangkok, the SET was up 0.4 per cent.

South Korea's markets were closed for a holiday. On Wednesday, the S and P 500 climbed 1.2 per cent to 5,354.03, hitting the top of its all-time high set two weeks ago. The Nasdaq composite jumped 2 per cent to 17,187.90 and likewise set a record. The Dow Jones Industrial Average, which has less of an emphasis on tech, lagged the market with a gain of 0.2 per cent to 38,807.33.

The rally sent the total market value of Nvidia, which has become

the poster child of the AI boom, above USD 3 trillion for the first time. Nvidia is leading the way because its chips are powering much of the rush into AI, and it rose another 5.2 per cent to bring its gain for the year to more than 147 per cent. The chip company also joined Microsoft and Apple as the only US stocks to ever top USD 3 trillion in total value. Apple regained that milestone valuation after rising 0.8 per cent on Wednesday.

The gains for tech stocks helped offset a 4.9 per cent drop for Dollar Tree, which matched analysts' expectations for profit but fell just shy for revenue. The retailer also said it's considering selling or spinning off its Family Dollar business. (AP)

## Rupee falls 9 paise against US dollar

MUMBAI, June 6: The rupee depreciated 9 paise to settle at 83.53 against the US dollar on Thursday due to foreign capital outflows and rising crude oil prices in international markets.

Forex traders said a weak American currency and firm trend in the equity markets supported the local currency even as investors remained concerned ahead of the RBI's monetary policy decision to be announced on Friday.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.40 and touched the intra-day low of 83.53 against the greenback during the session.

The local unit finally settled at 83.53 against the American currency, down 9 paise from its previous close.

On Wednesday, the rupee settled 7 paise higher at 83.44 against the dollar.

According to Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, the rupee depreciated due to a surge in crude oil prices and selling pressure from FIIs (foreign institutional investors). However, a weak US dollar and positive tone in the domestic markets supported the rupee at lower levels.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on worries over rising crude oil prices, and as FIIs continue to sell in the markets. However, positive tone in the domestic markets as NDA is expected to come back to power for the third consecutive term, raising optimism over policy continuity may support the rupee at lower levels," Choudhary said, adding that "USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of ₹ 83.20 to ₹ 83.80".

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.03 per cent lower at 104.18.

Analysts attributed the weakness in the dollar index to a sharp fall in US Treasury yields after the latest data showed job growth in May was slower than estimated, raising expectations of an interest rate cut by the US Federal Reserve.

Market participants are likely to take further cues



from the weekly employment data and trade balance numbers to be released later in the day. Besides, the decision of RBI's rate-setting panel is likely to impact investor sentiment, they added.

The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of RBI on Wednesday started its three-day deliberations to decide the next monetary policy. Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das will announce the outcome on Friday.

"The Reserve Bank of India is set to keep its repo rate at 6.5 per cent at its June 7 review. The policy is turning more restrictive as cooling inflation pushes up real rates, hurting growth," said Amit Goel, co-founder and Chief Global Strategist at Pace 360.

He further said the RBI's record dividend payment of ₹ 2.1 lakh crore to the government for FY24 may alleviate concerns about the growth outlook.

Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, advanced 0.31 per cent to USD 78.65 per barrel.

On the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 692.27 points, or 0.93 per cent, to close at 75,074.51. The broader NSE Nifty rose 201.05 points or 0.89 per cent to 22,821.40.

Foreign investors were net sellers of Indian equities on Thursday as they offloaded shares worth ₹ 6,867.72 crore on a net basis. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## Nothing communal in 'our own'

symbolic as Muslims voted in one pattern across the state.

"Earlier AIUDF and Congress both used to get Muslim votes, but this time all votes shifted to the Congress. With around 90 per cent of polled votes of Muslims in Nagaon, Barpeta and Dhubri going to Congress, it has become a Muslim party," he added. The people from the Muslim community got all the benefits of different welfare schemes, but development was not on their agenda when they voted, Sarma alleged. He estimated that Muslims constitute about 40 per cent of Assam's total population at present and they have become "completely polarised" towards one party.

"Due to Dhubri and Nagaon, Congress will not be zero in Assam for the next 100 years," he added.

According to the 2011 Census, Assam had a total Muslim population of 1.07 crore, making up 34.22 per cent of the total 3.12 crore residents of the state. There were 1.92 crore Hindus in the state, around 61.47 per cent of the total population. The CM, however, said there was "nothing worrying" about the victory of another Congress candidate and sitting MP Gaurav Gogoi from Jorhat as he is "our own" and there was nothing communal about it.

"Today if the Hindu society votes in only one side, people allege that Hindus have done communalism. This election clearly proved that Hindus are not communal and there is a need to fight against communalism in the Muslim society," he added. Stating that someone will win and someone will lose in elections, Sarma said that changes in demography in Lower, Middle and North Assam have become "very dangerous".

"Every time after elections, people calculate what BJP, AGP or Congress won. But my calculations don't stop there. I believe that this election again reminded me of the impending danger in front of Assam's future," he added.

The CM also gave an example of Guwahati Lok Sabha constituency and claimed that out of 6,43,797 votes of the losing Congress candidate Mira Borthakur Goswami, around 2.2 lakh votes came from Muslim-majority areas of Kamrup district. "In Dalgaoon constituency, Congress took a lead of 1.8 lakh votes. In Paka Betbari, Congress took a lead of 1.3-1.5 lakh votes. So, where is communalism? Who does communalism? If you go to a polling booth in a Hindu-dominated area, the votes are divided between BJP, Congress and AGP," he claimed.

The Assam CM claimed that the BJP-led NDA took a lead in 93 assembly seats, that too by huge margins, and it has never happened for any party in Assam. "In Guwahati, BJP and Congress both got votes. Jorhat proved that Assamese people are not communal, Hindus are not communal. Today, Congress won from a Hindu-dominated constituency, but has BJP won from a Muslim-majority seat?" he asked. Sarma, however, said BJP won from Karimganj as sitting MP Kripanath Mallah managed to retain his seat by just 18,360 votes with many Muslims voting for BJP due to some local issues with the Congress candidate Hafiz Rashid Ahmed Choudhury. (PTI)

## Assam flood condition

and other infrastructure in Cachar, Hojai, Morigaon, and Nagaon districts. At present, the Kopili river at Kamrup and Dharamtul, as well as the Kushiya at Karimganj, are flowing above the danger marks in Assam, according to ASDMA.

Due to the extensive flooding, over 26,800 domestic animals and poultry are affected statewide. (PTI)

## ASDC blames disunity

workers, Bey said that despite the poll debacle, the ASDC, together with its frontal organisations, will continue with the movement for an autonomous state.

The party will continue to pressure the BJP government in Assam to fulfill all the promises made before the Parliamentary election, including holding tripartite talks on the autonomous state, conducting an eviction drive in Professional Grazing Reserve / Village Grazing Reserve land in Kheroni, solving the inter-state border issue with Meghalaya state, and stopping the extension of Kaziranga National Park into Karbi Anglong.

ASDC is a regional party in Karbi Anglong. This might be ASDC's worst performance in a Lok Sabha election since 1991. The party's candidate Jotson Bey in this 2024 Lok Sabha election could gather only 9,633 votes, which is below NOTA (none of the above) which has collected 16,259 votes. The BJP has retained the seat for two consecutive terms. The BJP's Horensing Bey won the seat in 2019; this time a new face, Amarsing Tisso, has won the same.

## People's verdict is 'insurance'

a seat from where he contested for the first time after his previous Koliabor constituency was rechristened as Kaziranga in the delimitation process, Gogoi said it was a victory of the people of Jorhat.

"I give all credit to them. We had one of the highest turnouts here," he said, while also recalling that his father, late Tarun Gogoi, a former three-time Congress chief minister, had won his first election to Lok Sabha from this constituency.

Gogoi also claimed that the Jorhat campaign has given the Congress the 'template to take on money and muscle power of the BJP' in the 2026 assembly polls in Assam, as he pointed out that the entire state machinery, including the chief minister and several of his ministers, had extensively campaigned in the constituency and yet, the BJP failed to retain the seat. On his possible role in the new Lok Sabha, Gogoi said he will remain as a voice of the North East, highlighting problems, concerns, anxieties as well as aspirations of the people of the region.

"There is still a lot of misconception about North East. I feel pained that the rest of India does not understand how bad the situation in Manipur is currently. And therefore, it is my duty to be their voice," he added. He also rejected an oft-repeated allegation against him that he had been more vocal about national issues than problems of his constituency or the state. Calling it a 'false propaganda by the BJP', Gogoi maintained that the three Congress MPs from Assam in the outgoing House, including himself, were always highlighting the issues of the state, be it the opposition to CAA, matters of Assam Accord or ST status to six communities. (PTI)

## 280 elected for first time

(Jalandhar) are also among the 280 first-term members of the Lok Sabha. Actors Suresh Gopi (Thrissur), Kanganana Ranaut (Mandi), June Maliah (Medinipur), Sayani Ghosh (Jadavpur) and Rachana Banerjee (Hooghly) will also enter the Lok Sabha for the first time. Rajya Sabha members Anil Desai (Shiv Sena UBT), Misha Bharti (BJD), Bhupendra Yadav, Dharmendra Pradhan, Mansukh Mandavdya, and Parshotam Rupala (all BJP) have also moved to the Lok Sabha.

Members of the erstwhile royal families Chhatrapati Shahu (Kolhapur), Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraj Wadiyar (Mysore) and Kriti Devi Debarman (Tripura East) will be entering the Lok Sabha for the first time. Former Calcutta High Court judge Abhijit Gangopadhyay, who won the Talmuk Lok Sabha seat in West Bengal, is also set to be a first-time MP.

Entrepreneur Uday Srinivas Tangella, also known as Tea Time Uday, has been elected to the Lok Sabha for the first time from Kakinada. Among the young first-term Lok Sabha members are 25-year-old Shambhavi (LJP-RV-Samastipur), 26-year-old Sagar Khandare (Congress-Bidar), 27-year-old Priyanka Jarkiholi (Congress-Chikkodi), 26-year-old Sanjana Jatav (Congress-Bharatpur) and 31-year-old Rajkumar Roat (Bharat Adivasi Party-Banswara).

Durai Vaiko (Tiruchirappalli), K N Arun Nehru (Perambalur), S Muralosi (Thanjavur), Eatala Rajinder (Malkajgiri), Ujjwal Raman Singh (Allahabad) and Yusuf Pathan (Bahrampur) are also first-term members of the Lok Sabha. (PTI)

## JD(U) wants Agnipath scheme

Lok Sabha election. The BJP bagged 240 seats, 32 short of an absolute majority. Among its allies, N Chandrababu Naidu's Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and Nitish Kumar's JD(U), which won 16 and 12 seats in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, respectively, and other alliance partners, the NDA has 293 seats. (PTI)

**LOST**  
I have lost my Original Provisional D.El.ed cum Ordinate Certificate of Krishna Kanta Handique State Open University, bearing Roll No.: 15036010  
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Village:- Satgaon,  
P.O: Satgaon,  
P.S: Baithalangso, District:- West-Karbianglong, Assam.



### Former BJP MP criticises state leadership, calls for party unity to avoid decline in 2026 polls

## 'CM indirectly contested against Gaurav Gogoi in Jorhat'

**HT Correspondent**  
**NAGAON, June 6:** Following the sharp criticism by Khumtai BJP MLA Mrinal Saikia, former BJP four-time MP and Union minister Rajen Gohain expressed his vigor and criticised the state chief minister and his teammates, alleging that if he and his team continue to showcase such arrogance as well as autocracy, the roots of the party in the state will be smashed soon.

Referring to the chief minister's recent remarks against MLA Mrinal Saikia, the senior BJP leader of the state said his remarks hurt him a lot, saying that sincere and dedicated party workers like them who sacrificed a lot for the party earlier in the state will not let him and his associates smash the party's roots in the state at all.

"We all the senior party leaders as well as workers will get to-



gether soon to make a roadmap for rescuing the party from the possible debacle in the upcoming 2026 assembly polls," Gohain added further.

While interacting with some local media persons at his Nagaon residence, Gohain also commented on the victory of Congress candidate Gaurav Gogoi in the

Jorhat parliamentary constituency and said that instead of Topon Gogoi, the chief minister himself indirectly contested this time against Gaurav Gogoi in Jorhat. Hence, the defeat of Topon Gogoi explained many things.

"The culture of order and patience which were adopted earlier by BJP have been inherited now by the present Congress workers in the state while some BJP leaders as well as party workers who joined the party recently hijacked the earlier odd Congress culture and implemented it on the party floor for which the party has to face the ultimate results in Jorhat," Gohain asserted more.

He, however, said it is the actual time to review their faults as well as other feedback and correct all accordingly in time to hold on the public faith in the party so far.

## World Environment Day celebrated across state

**HT Correspondent**  
**NAGAON, June 6:** In order to spread awareness about the adverse impacts of climate change among rural masses, the Assam RO of NABARD organised an event to observe World Environment Day at its Derapathar Watershed Project area in Hojai district, with the theme of 'Land Restoration, Desertification, Drought Resilience'.

The event was attended by DDM, NABARD Rajendar Perna, GM of Z Black Diamond Agarwood LLP. (ZBDALLP) Bedanta Haldar, the secretary of Derapathar GP, Sujit Dey, the secretary of Gramya Unnayan Santha, Mukut Deka, the Village Watershed Committee members, and other hundred beneficiary participants.

Speaking on the occasion, Rajendar Perna, DDM, NABARD, informed the participants that as an apex development organisation, NABARD has been formulating and supporting various projects for the sustainable development of rural areas and agriculture, as well as other allied sectors, since its inception. During the event, he cited the relevance of water in day-to-day activities and conservation of soil for cultivation and plantation activities. Accordingly, in convergence with Z Black Diamond Agarwood LLP, he arranged for free distribution cum plantation of 300 saplings of Agarwood (Aquilaria Malaccensis) among the beneficiaries of the Derapathar Watershed Project.

Sajidur Rahman of Z Black Diamond LLP shared information regarding the process of artificial inoculation specialised by the Agency, including the support and scope for buy-back arrangements. As part of the event, all the invited dignitaries also planted saplings of agarwood in the fields. The beneficiaries also expressed their sincere gratitude to NABARD Assam RO as well as others for supporting them on the occasion of World Environment Day, as asserted in a press note here.

**Our Margherita correspondent adds:** Ledo Valley Lions Club on Thursday organised World Environment Day at their Margherita office with the theme 'No Life Without Trees'.

Lekhapani range forest officer Paramita Neog was present as the chief guest, along with many resource persons and distinguished individuals such as Ledo Valley Lions Club president BS Viridi, vice president Bishal Agarwal, secretary Manish Sharma, treasurer, Digboi region DC Environment Gopal Das, noted orthopedic of Margherita Dr Sandeep Prasad, physiotherapist Dr Zabeen Akhtar, Margherita Buddha Vihar head monk Gyanowada Bhikkhu, Margherita journalists Mithun Baruah, Jitu Gogoi, Dipak Kharia,



Hemanta Ghosh, among many others.

In his speech, Gopal Das emphasised that if there are trees, there will be human beings; it is difficult for us to survive without protecting our mother nature. He expressed concern that nowadays 'World Environment Day' is held only for photo sessions, where people gather only to take photos and put them on their social media, which is not a good sign at all.

Gyanowada Bhikkhu stated that World Environment Day is not just a celebration; it should be observed daily by planting saplings, providing water, and protecting them from storms and other natural calamities.

Parasmitta Neog, in her speech, urged everyone to come together to protect our mother nature; otherwise, we will have to face the anger of mother nature in the coming days.

After all the chief guests and guests present planted saplings at the compound of Ledo Valley Lions Club, Margherita.

The members of Ledo Valley Lions Club took an oath to plant more than 10,000 saplings annually at Margherita sub-division.

**Our Dibrugarh correspondent adds:** On the occasion of World Environment Day 2024, various awareness programs among children, employees, and stakeholders were organised at Brahmaputra Cracker and Polymer Limited (BCPL).

Pranjal Changmai, managing director of BCPL, along with senior officials, inaugurated the souvenir titled 'Envicare Vol. V', an initiative taken by BCPL's Environment Department for raising awareness and educating the people. Changmai emphasised on water and energy conservation in BCPL units.

A mass plantation drive was conducted at BCPL Lepetkata plant along with CISF BCPL. Plantation drives were also carried out at Duliayan plant and Lakwa plant. During the awareness session at BCPL Lepetkata, other locations including the Guwahati office, Lakwa unit, and Duliayan unit were connected through video

### ATTSA Demow branch submits memorandums

**HT Correspondent**  
**DEMOW, June 6:** The All Tea Tribes Students Association (ATTSA), Demow branch, submitted two separate memorandums to the Demow circle officer on Thursday. In the memorandums, they stated that since 2019, in Athabari Tea Estate, a rig for oil digging was installed through Oil India Limited. They alleged that several bigheas of tea plants were evicted for this purpose. Since then, the ATTSA, Demow branch, has been demanding various developments in the local areas. They stated that the development initiatives have been limited to documents, which has caused anxiety among the ATTSA, Demow branch. The memorandums outlined various demands that should be fulfilled at the earliest.

In another memorandum, the ATTSA, Demow branch, welcomed the announcement to construct the Sivasagar Medical College in the IID Centre under Demow Revenue Circle, Sivasagar district. However, they expressed concerns about the road infrastructure needed to access the medical college. Specifically, they highlighted the land acquisition process for the Maskara Tea Estate and the construction of another road. The ATTSA, Demow Branch, emphasised that, under the instruction of the ATTSA Central Committee, the land of the tea garden should not be used for road construction. Copies of the memorandum were submitted to the district commissioner of Sivasagar, the owner of Maskara Tea Estate, and the Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha, Moran branch.

## Being critical not anti-national: JNU VC at Tezpur University

**HT Correspondent**  
**TEZPUR, June 6:** Tezpur University (TU) hosted a thought-provoking public lecture on 'National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and Indian Knowledge Traditions', delivered by Prof Santishree Dhulipudi Pandit, noted academician and vice-chancellor (VC) of Jawaharlal Nehru University, on Thursday at the KBR auditorium of the University.

Prof Pandit's lecture delved into the synergies between the NEP and India's rich traditional knowledge systems (IKS). While doing so, Prof Pandit gave examples from both contemporary times and Indian traditions. "NEP focuses on a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach, and the importance of this approach was evident during this election," the vice chancellor said. The exit polls predicted something, and the result was something else. This was because the human mind can't be predicted and requires a multidisciplinary approach, she said.

Taking a dig at the colonial mindset, the JNU VC said, "Knowledge is power, and narratives are created by controlling it. Due to the colonial mindset, we have formed an inferiority complex, and it is time through NEP the focus should be on ancient Indian wisdom." Giving examples of Ahom and Chola kingdoms, she said that earlier few would have come across the glory of these kingdoms.

Linking IKS and Science, Prof Pandit said that Indian tradition advocates respect for five elements, i.e., earth, water, fire, air, and space, without which nature takes its course. Prof Pandit pointed towards the rising temperature in India and climate change.



She then urged the august gathering to decolonise one's mindset to reimagine and reconstruct our knowledge. "Education brings inclusivity, and we should study locally to understand national and global phenomena," the VC said. She further added that the north-east being a diverse region has a lot to contribute to IKS. However, the VC emphasised that while exploring India's rich traditions, one needs to be critical, and critical does not mean anti-national. She urged the new government to increase expenditure on education and to empower publicly funded educational institutions.

Earlier, delivering the welcome address, Tezpur University VC, Prof Shambhu Nath Singh, said that the university shall continue this public lecture series by inviting distinguished speakers for greater academic engagement and intellectual discourse.

## 20th annual meet of Karbi Samaj VDC organised

**HT Correspondent**  
**BISWANATH CHARIALI, June 6:** The 20th annual meeting of No 3 Barpathar Karbi Samaj Village Development Committee, which includes No 3 Barpathar branch committee, Kherbari VDC, Mora Diring VDC, AC Ghiladhari VDC's, was held on Thursday at No 3 Barpathar in Biswanath. The day-long program began with the hoisting of the institutional flag by

Kabiram Ronghang, president of the committee, followed by smriti tarpan offered by Sirsingh Teron. A plantation drive was carried out in the presence of Purna Fangshu, Nirmal Chandra Terang, Bogiram Kro, Joysingh Teron. The open session was held with Suren Fangshu in the chair. The meeting was addressed by Dr Ranjan Gogoi, Niranjani Saikia, Arun Bordoloi as guests. A total of 35 meritorious

students of the locality who have passed the recently declared HSLC and HS examinations were felicitated by the organisers with citations, packets of books, and gamosas. The meeting was attended by Harenjit Teron, Mahiram Ranghang, Dibyajyoti Barua, Ratul Nath, among others. All the proceedings were carried out by Subharam Fangshu and Bikram Kramsa.

## NEEPCO donates ambulance-cum-multi-utility vehicle

**HT Correspondent**  
**JORHAT, June 6:** NEEPCO India has donated an ambulance-cum-multi-utility vehicle on Thursday to the District Health Society (TB/NTEP) of Jorhat under the 'Moromor Jorhat' concept. The donation ceremony was conducted in the presence of ADC, Health, Pankaj Bora, and the NEEPCO representatives Arup Sakia, chief general manager, and Tailukya Bordoloi, general manager. In a handover ceremony at the office of joint director of Health Services, the CM&HOs, SDM&HOs, district TB officer, and other health staff participated. The ADC Health, in the ceremony, asked NEEPCO for Nikshay Mitra aid for TB patients of Jorhat district under its CSR activities.

## Review meeting on flood preparedness held in Haflong



**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, June 6:** The district commissioner and chairman, District Disaster Management Authority, Dima Hasao, Simanta Kumar Das, ACS, chaired a flood preparedness review meeting at the DC Conference Hall, Haflong, on Thursday with all the heads of departments of the line departments.

During the review meeting, DPO Riki Phukan presented the measures of disaster in this district during the recent storm. DPO Phukan also demonstrated the process of updating data in the portal Disaster Reporting and Information Management System (DRIMS), which is developed by ASDMA and UNICEF for better disaster-induced damage reporting and assistance.

The district commissioner instructed all departments to be in a ready position for response to meet the challenges in case there is any disaster during this monsoon. The meeting discussed important measures to be taken in case of a flood or any untoward issues during the monsoon and amenities to be made available at the relief camps. The DC also instructed the officials of Food and Civil Supplies and Public Works Department to hold a separate meeting to ensure sufficient preparedness with food supplies during disruptions of roads during landslides. The meeting concluded with a wrap-up discussion and briefing by ADC Shaurya Sharma i/c DDMA, Dima Hasao.

## Periodicity of two summer special trains extended

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, June 6:** To clear the extra rush of passengers, NFR has decided to continue the services of two pairs of special trains bearing no 06103/06104 (Nagercoil Jn - Dibrugarh - Nagercoil Jn.) & train no 06105/06106 (Nagercoil Jn - Dibrugarh - Nagercoil Jn), together will run for two trips each in both directions. These trains will run with the existing days of service, timings, and stoppages. Also, NF Railway has decided to operate a one-way summer special train between Guwahati and Howrah on June 7, 2024.

Accordingly, train no 06103 (Nagercoil Jn - Dibrugarh) special has been extended to run from June 7 till June 21, 2024, every Friday. In the return direction, train no 06104 (Dibrugarh - Nagercoil Jn.) special has been extended to

run from June 12 till June 26, 2024, every Wednesday. Train no 06105 (Nagercoil Jn - Dibrugarh) special has been extended to run from June 14 till June 28, 2024, every Friday. In the return direction, train no 06106 (Dibrugarh - Nagercoil Jn) special has been extended to run from June 19 till July 3, 2024, every Wednesday. The extension of these train services will benefit waitlisted passengers of other trains on those routes. Moreover, train no 05680 (Guwahati - Howrah) one-way special will depart from Guwahati at 05:50 hours on June 7, 2024, Friday, to reach Howrah at 03:00 hours on Saturday. The one-way special train will consist of 21 coaches for the convenience of passengers. During its journey, the train will run via Goalpara Town, New Bongaigaon New Jalpaiguri, Malda Town, and Bardhaman, etc., railway stations.

## NFREU gears up for zonal committee and general council meeting in Jorhat

**HT Correspondent**  
**JORHAT, June 6:** The 174th Zonal Working Committee and 105th General Council Meeting of the NF Railway Employees' Union (NFREU) will be held at Mariani Railway Institute, Mariani, in Jorhat district from June 12 to 14. A press note by the Furkating branch of NFREU informed that the general secretary of NFREU, Munindra Saikia, who is also the joint general secretary of the National Federation of Indian Railwaymen (NFIR), divisional secretary of Tinsukia division of the union, Devarshi M Neog, along with office-bearers and members of the zonal and divisional levels, are scheduled to attend the program. At the three-day meet, several demands and grievances of the employees would be raised and discussed to be put before the concerned authorities for early fulfillment. The key demands are: restoration of the Old Pension Scheme, reduction of patrolling beat length in the engineering department, reduction of duty hours to eight hours in all sections, filling up of all vacant posts immediately, and stopping the exploitation of employees in the name of optimum utilisation of manpower. It may be mentioned here that the NFREU, affiliated to NFIR, INTUC, and London headquartered International Transport Federation (ITF), has always raised its voice against the exploitation of railway employees and for upholding their legitimate rights.

## Nagaon Medical College Hospital introduces TeleASP prog to combat AMR

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, June 6:** Addressing the pressing global concern of Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR), Nagaon Medical College Hospital (NMCH) has launched the pioneering TeleASP (Tele-Antimicrobial Stewardship Programme) in Nagaon from June 4. Led by principal Prof (Dr) Mihir Kumar Goswami, this initiative marks a significant step in combating the misuse and overuse of antimicrobials, a leading cause of drug-resistant pathogens.

Notably, the AMR, identified by the World Health Organisation as a top global health and development threat, jeopardises the efficacy of modern medicine. The indiscriminate use of antimicrobials in humans, animals, and plants has led to infections becoming increasingly difficult to treat. This crisis not only undermines medical advancements but also heightens the risks associated with essential procedures such as surgery, caesarean sections, and cancer chemotherapy.

The TeleASP program, unique in its approach, leverages the expertise of specialist doctors from NMCH's Teleconsultation HUB to guide and support peripheral healthcare workers, including community health officers and medical officers. By fostering rational prescribing practices for antimicrobials, particularly for conditions like acute diarrheal



disease, upper respiratory tract infection, and urinary tract infection, the program aims to stem the tide

## Hockey coaching camp at Barhampur Adarsh Higher Secondary School

**HT Correspondent**  
**NAGAON, June 6:** A fortnight-long hockey coaching camp is underway at Barhampur Swahid Srimtee Adarsh Higher Secondary School on the school playground starting from Thursday. The camp is organised by the school authority in association with Assam Hockey. Tapan Kr Das, the general secretary of Nagaon Sports Association as well as the general secretary of Assam Hockey, inaugurated the camp by lighting the earthen lamp at the playground on Thursday. The inaugural session was mentored by physical instructor and yoga guru Prabh Ch Bora. Mohan Bora, the state executive of Assam Hockey, Devaluti Mahanta, the principal of the school, Dipak Bora, Mantu Mahanta, and Padum Baruah attended the program as special guests.

## Guwahati Airport observes birth anniv of Gopinath Bordoloi

**HT Correspondent**  
**PALASBARI, June 6:** The 134th birth anniversary of legendary Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi was celebrated at Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport in Guwahati on Thursday. On the occasion of his birthday, wreaths were laid at the statue of Bordoloi inside the airport, and a lantern was lit. Chief airport officer Utpal Baruah laid wreaths and lit lanterns. Many senior officials from various departments of the airport were present, amongst others. Addressing the gathering, Baruah said, "We are very happy and proud to celebrate the 134th birth anniversary of the first chief minister of the state, Gopinath Bordoloi, at our airport."

of AMR. Crucially, TeleASP also seeks to raise awareness among patients, emphasising the importance of adhering strictly to medical advice and refraining from seeking antibiotics without proper consultation. By discouraging over-the-counter antibiotic use, the program strives to promote responsible antibiotic stewardship and mitigate the spread of AMR. NMCH's TeleASP initiative represents a vital step forward in the global battle against Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR), reaffirming the hospital's commitment to safeguarding public health and advancing medical care.



## QUOTE OF THE DAY

Hope is the only bee that makes honey without flowers—  
Robert Green Ingersoll

## Naidu returns as kingmaker

In the present landscape of Indian politics, Chandrababu Naidu has emerged as a pivotal figure following the 2024 elections. Unlike the youthful Jana Sena founder Pawan Kalyan, Naidu is no 'Comeback Kid.' At his age, he embodies the title of 'Mr. Negotiator.' While the Jana Sena remains a part of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), Naidu's Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and Nitish Kumar's Janata Dal (United) represent potential weak links. Naidu and Nitish Kumar share an unpredictability that poses a significant challenge to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Their historical opposition to Modi's governance, coupled with their recent political maneuvers, keeps the political climate tense. Despite aligning with the NDA, their support is far from guaranteed, creating an air of uncertainty around the Modi 3.0 government. This unpredictability demands immediate concessions from Modi, particularly the long-sought special category status for Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. Naidu's political acumen dates to the mid-1990s when he played a key role in the United Front's quest to select a Prime Minister. The bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh in 2014 and the subsequent loss of Hyderabad to Telangana dealt a severe blow to Naidu's TDP, leading to a decade of economic stagnation under the leadership of Jagan Mohan Reddy's YSR Congress Party (YSRCP).

However, recent electoral successes have rejuvenated Naidu's political standing. Promising unwavering support to Modi, Naidu's assurances are met with skepticism. His crucial role in potentially securing Modi's third term as Prime Minister is underscored by the fact that the BJP lacks a majority in the Lok Sabha. Meanwhile, the opposition INDI-Alliance remains acutely aware of Naidu's significance. His past confrontations with Modi's governance style are frequently highlighted, emphasizing his potential to disrupt political equations. The INDI-Alliance, despite its slim chances of forming a government, persistently courts Naidu. His favorable relationships with DMK Chief MK Stalin and Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Uddhav Thackeray add to his strategic importance. Naidu's recent meeting with Stalin underscores his influential position, further complicating the BJP's calculations. The TDP's demands, including key ministerial portfolios and the NDA convener post, present a dilemma for Modi. The BJP's proposal of a Minister of State and Deputy Speaker's post may not satisfy Naidu, who seeks substantial concessions for Andhra Pradesh. The state's economic distress, exacerbated by the bifurcation, necessitates significant financial aid and special category status. Naidu's negotiating prowess is well-documented.

As Chief Minister of an agrarian state grappling with economic challenges, Naidu's demands are far from trivial. The state inherited a disproportionate share of the population, debt, and liabilities post-bifurcation, with only 47 percent of the revenues. Modi's need for TDP's support is critical, unlike in 2018. The stakes are high, with Naidu capable of influencing the Modi government's stability even before it takes full shape. As a seasoned negotiator, Naidu's strategies are expected to shape the political landscape in the coming months. Whether Modi can meet Naidu's demands or face political turbulence remains to be seen. Chandrababu Naidu's role in national politics post-2024 is indisputable. His ability to negotiate and his strategic alliances position him as a kingmaker. The Modi 3.0 government's fate, to a large extent, hinges on Naidu's future moves. As the political dynamics unfold, Naidu's actions will be closely watched, with far-reaching implications for the NDA and Indian politics at large.

# 2024 verdict against Modi-Shah's politics of crony-capitalist Hindutva



Ayodhya, symbol of RSS's Hindutva renaissance, did not respond to the call of the so-called Hindu Hridaya Samrat, Narendra Modi, and instead voted for 79-year-old veteran Dalit leader, belonging to Pasi caste, Awadesh Prasad. In a single stroke, the voters of Ayodhya shattered two myths: Modi's consecration of Ram temple miserably failed to arouse Hindutva passion among the Hindus; and secondly, it also shattered the myth of Modi being the only face of Hindutva.

With these twin objectives, Modi had carried out the consecration of Ram temple in Ayodhya on January 22. But incongruously he would not have dreamed that the euphoria would vanish within four months. In the process he had even projected himself as bigger than Sri Ram (not Lord Ram). What an absurdity his clarion call - "Jo Ram ko layenge, hum unko layenge (We will bring the ones who brought Ram)" - lies shattered on the streets of Ayodhya.

There is no doubt that this electoral battle was fought against the mighty saffron rule by the constitution-armed poor people of India. In the history of independent India, this has been one of the most significant battles. The people of India managed to send the message across that their voice could not be ignored; they cannot be dissipated for promoting the class interest of the comprador bourgeoisie and crony capitalists.

People of India, especially the rural people all across the country, must be complimented for not falling into the provocative communal trap of Modi and continuing to maintain communal peace and harmony till the completion of the electoral procedure. This is also a sign of caution for the urban intellectuals and academics to refrain from treating the Dalits, poor and proletariats as naive pawns of the Hindutva project.

Their candid rejection of Modi leadership nonetheless got reflected in their not responding to his slogan of "abki baar 400 paar," with the best retort coming from Ayodhya, the sanctum sanctorum of Hindutva. Within four months of the consecration of Ram temple amidst much hype and pageantry, the BJP lost the Ayodhya seat to the Sama-

ajwadi Party candidate, Awadesh Prasad. This defeat sends a very strong and urgent message to the protagonists of Hindutva.

Modi being handed over a much-diminished mandate does not merely underline that Modi myth has been shattered; it also underscores wider implications. Modi being cut-to-size has made it explicit that the Hindus of India are tired of his communal agenda. However, BJP's 241 seat margin also means that some traction is still retained by Modi's divisive politics. Yet, Verdict 2024 also demonstrates that the fight against the rightist forces has occupied centre stage in Indian politics.

Since the 2019 victory, RSS and Modi have been trying to create an impression that Hindus are fully polarised and communalized and will go along with the BJP. This election results have completely negated that perception. There is little doubt that for winning the 2019 election, Modi and his saffron ecosystem had rode the ultra-nationalist wave in the wave of the killing of 40 CRPF soldiers. If that massacre had not happened, Modi would not have secured the landslide that he did in that election. People of the country are still remember Modi seeking vote on the name of the killed soldiers.

In this election, the people, particularly in the Hindi heartland, which is the BJP's core base, didn't see a Modi wave. The mask of nationalism and religion which the RSS and Modi have worn for long was disrobed this time. The common people, poor and proletarian had come to realise that this was merely a façade and it was meant to serve the interest of billionaires and crony-capitalists hovering up the nation's public resources.

This election also makes it clear that people are too willing to strike back; there should be someone to join shoulders with them. This was flawlessly done by Rahul Gandhi.

Reservation agenda occupied the centre stage in 2024 general elections, but it was more than that. The issue of Mandal and Kamandal had first surfaced during the rule of V P Singh. The politics gave birth to almost half of the present day politicians. But it never aroused the passion of the poor, Dalits, pro-

letariats in such a fierce manner as is seen in the present times. This time, caste and reservation ruled the roost among 90 per cent of the people, who were aware of their duties and exploitation they have endured at the hands of the Hindutva opportunists. The urban middle class as usual dismissed Rahul's crusade as an act of idiocy that would divide the society. But they did not realise that the exploited masses in search of a worthy articulator of their causes have finally got one in the form of Rahul.

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi accelerated his campaign for caste census, saying he has the clarity that he is not in pursuit of power. Instead, he is working to ensure representation for 90 percent of Indian population. At the same time, he chided the Congress for making mistakes in the past, exhorting his party to transform its politics. He needed a Congress to communicate their feelings and voices, instead of ruling India. Unfortunately, Modi could not comprehend and was caught on the wrong foot.

The result further exposed that Hindu society is not a monolithic homogenous whole, but is bitterly divided along

class and caste lines. The society has numerous subdivisions. This was a major stumbling block in the path of spread of Hindutva. Almost 95 percent of the Indian population that fall under the categories of backward communities, Dalits, Tribals, minorities and economically weaker sections among the forward castes still do not have corresponding share of representation in professions.

Rahul Gandhi's remark is worth mentioning: "Political leaders stumble through their lives chasing power, spending every minute how to gain it, but without attaining clarity of political thought."

Every political person will have a political crystallisation but many will not gain such a crystallisation. I have got the clarity that I have to work to ensure representation for the 90% of our population. And this battle has to be fought with love, respect and strength. It is also true that the Congress party in the coming days will have to transform their politics."

Modi is an insecure politician who suffers from both inferiority and a God complex. Modi claiming to be "not biological" but "sent by God" was the subject of utter ridicule all through, even among his own fan base. He in fact insulted motherhood in his pursuit to win the election. Clearly, all that has backfired.

Some experts and academics are trying to project the result as a setback and not as a defeat. They have also put out an interesting debate in public domain: Why do some Indians want Modi again? Who are the Indians who want him back? Evidently, it is the compulsion to protect the class interests that the rich, upper middle class and capitalists are projecting him as the saviour of new India.

The rightist forces strive for strong military and financial muscle. For them, true economic self-sufficiency and reducing the wealth gap would be anathema. BJP's cartelization of the economy is in conformity to the Hitler's political perception.

A closer look at the character of the Indian ruling class would make it abundantly clear that it has been basically rightist, who preferred a ruler of the iron-man image. The corporate class's dalliance with fascism is nothing new.

There are many such figures:

Hitler, Mussolini, among others. The rich and capitalists have primarily been opposed to the poor and proletariat. Ever since India achieved independence, the rich and capitalists have been using the state machinery to goad them and keep them under their control. Not allowing them to participate in election and exercise their right to vote has been the most effective instruments for the rich and capitalists.

It is worth mentioning that it was early seventies the assembly elections in Bihar along with some other states witnessed massive upsurge of the Dalits for exercising their democratic rights. Resurfacing of the Naxalite movement in Bihar owed to this. That year also witnessed large number of killings of Dalits and proletariats by the upper caste feudal landlords.

Since then, bloody clashes during the elections have become a common phenomenon. Recently, a Supreme Court bench observed that he had seen booth capturing, which was worse than alleged misuse of EVM. Unfortunately, Justice Khanna did not see the ground realities and was away from the truth. Booths were captured primarily for two reasons; first to exercise their electoral rights, and second to protect their right from, being usurped. It is something else that some political parties and their leaders resorted to booth capture for their personal gains. But in these cases too, it was the urge for power that worked.

Let me cite an example from Bihar. The CPI(ML) has won two seats, Arrah and Karakat. Both these areas had witnessed massive upsurge of peasant armed struggle in late sixties and early seventies. Hundreds of Naxal cadres were killed. For last couple of decades the areas have been witnessing the bourgeoisie peace. An impression has been gaining ground that the movement and its gains have been lost.

But this time, the CPI(ML) candidates from these seats defeated political giants. One of them, R K Singh of BJP, a former home secretary of Bihar and senior Union Minister, who symbolised the upper caste power, got defeated from Arrah. The old support base had woken up and defeated Singh, the face of rightist old feudal forces. (IPA Service)

## The blueprint for Modi government 3.0

By: Dipak Kurmi

Elections often bring unexpected outcomes, but India's true strength lies in its smooth transitions of power. With the latest results in and the victor declared, the focus shifts to fortifying democracy. For India to thrive, it needs both a stable government and a robust Opposition.

Following the seven-phase elections, the June 4 results suggest that Narendra Modi is set to continue as Prime Minister. Despite the efforts of the INDIA block, a coalition of regional parties, their chances remained slim. Election outcomes can be unpredictable, as seen in 2004 when the U.P.A. unexpectedly formed the government despite the B.J.P.'s "India Shining" campaign falling flat. Regardless of who wins, both the ruling party and the Opposition will face significant challenges. Modi has described his last decade in office as merely the beginning, promising more substantial actions in his third term. "Wait for bigger decisions in the third term. I'm already working on a roadmap that will be completed soon," he stated.

Modi's quest for a third term goes beyond cementing his legacy in every sector; it's a bold effort to outdo Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's three-term record. This ambitious goal, however, faces hurdles such as shifting public opinion and the complexities of internal party politics, both of which could greatly shape the political scene.

Despite the significant achievements of Modi's previous terms, his anticipated 'Modi 3.0' administration will face several challenges. Key among these are steering the nation through post-pandemic recovery, tackling social unrest, handling complex foreign policy matters, and fulfilling the diverse expectations of the electorate.

Modi still has several key issues from the BJP's core agenda to address. These include implementing a Uniform Civil Code, establishing

'one nation-one poll', advancing India to become the third-largest economy, and continuing to reform land and labour policies. In preparation for the next phase of governance, the Modi government has been developing a '125-day plan' over the past three months. Originally conceived as a 100-day plan, it was extended by an additional 25 days, with a particular emphasis on youth initiatives. This agenda is expected to encompass 50 to 70 key objectives, setting the direction and priorities for the new administration.

Modi might undermine his opponents and possibly dismantle the Indian coalition, potentially reshaping India's political landscape. He advocates for synchronizing all elections nationwide, from local to national levels, under the 'one nation, one poll' initiative.

While this change aims to streamline and organize the electoral system, it could also centralize power within the ruling party and decrease the frequency of elections. Modi has already taken steps to advance this proposal. A committee led by former president Ramnath Kovind has recommended holding Lok Sabha and state elections simultaneously.

However, the delimitation process, which involves redrawing the boundaries of parliamentary and assembly constituencies, must follow the completion of the decennial census. This exercise could have significant political repercussions, particularly for the Southern states.

An affidavit submitted to the Supreme Court projects that delimitation will increase the number of Lok Sabha seats from 543 to 888 and Rajya Sabha seats from 250 to 384. Modi has made provisions for sufficient seating in the new Parliament building to accommodate these changes.

Due to the South's effective population control policies, its population has decreased, which could result in the Southern states losing at least 100 seats in the delimitation process. This shift may intensify

a North-South divide, sparking disputes among regional parties in the South.

The BJP is advocating for a Uniform Civil Code to be applied to all Indian citizens, irrespective of their religion. Uttarakhand, under BJP governance, is moving forward with its implementation, with other BJP-ruled states expected to follow suit soon. However, this initiative raises concerns about possible social unrest and backlash from various religious communities.

Throughout the campaign, the Opposition voiced fears that the BJP might amend the Constitution to remove the term 'secular.' With a strong majority, a Modi-led government could potentially revise the Preamble to eliminate the words 'socialist' and 'secular,' which were introduced by the 42nd Amendment. However, this did not occur.

Modi is steering India towards becoming the world's third-largest economy with his 'Viksit Bharat' agenda, emphasizing manufacturing, technology, infrastructure, and clean energy. However, challenges related to funding, implementation, and public acceptance could pose obstacles to its success, potentially shaping the political landscape in India.

Despite facing setbacks such as arrests and crackdowns, the Opposition managed to present its most united front in years. Nevertheless, exit polls suggest that they may not significantly diminish the BJP's parliamentary majority. Congress leader Jairam Ramesh asserts that the Opposition coalition will secure more than 272 seats and will decide on a prime ministerial candidate within 48 hours.

Should the Indian coalition succeed in forming a government against considerable odds, it could mark a pivotal transformation in India's political scene. However, it would encounter hurdles, including the selection of a Prime Minister and the implementation of its ambitious agenda. (The writer is a popular columnist & views are personal)

## 2023-24 GDP figures at 8.2 percent build a stable base for future growth

By: Anjan Roy

India's latest GDP figures could not have come at a better time for the ruling party BJP. As the final phase of parliamentary voting draws to an end, the GDP figures for 2023-24 at 8.2 per cent show a hefty growth rate of the Indian economy. If the BJP led NDA wins in the polls, which is the most probable event, the financial market could be predicted to soar high.

But what is the secret behind such rosy picture when the rest of the world is not doing too fine. China for one is sliding and beset with prospects of serious financial melt-down. America is of course unabashedly healthy and defying all prediction of a recession despite rounds of interest rate hike. However, the policy interest rates in the US remain very high.

To get an insight into the growth triggers for the Indian economy, it is important to look at the dynamics of changes in overall investments, the trends in final consumption demand, exports performance and the flow of funds from overseas.

Private final consumption is a major factor in the Indian economy, which amounts to around 60% of the GDP's expenditure side. It is thus the trend in this segment which basically sets the pace of the economy. In fact, a few years back some of the leading economists had pointed out that India's growth was overmuch dependent on the trends in private consumption and it was a unstable model, being described as a "single engine ride".

There are subtle changes in the composition and triggers for the continuing strong performance of the economy. These trends show some happy dynamics which takes the economy out of a possible morass.



The current spate of growth is driven by investment. More particularly by public investment. Public investment, which is mainly government led investments in infrastructure building and in social capital, is driving the economy forward.

Public investment has grown close to 29% of GDP which is a healthy trend. This could be made possible by a number of factors including robust growth in collections of revenues and indeed the final revenue collections are in excess of budget estimates. The GST yields have persistently crossed Rs 1 lakh crore month after month. This has enabled the public finances in a comfortable sphere. The fiscal deficit remained at 5.6% despite step up in outlays.

The government finances have been further helped by a co-operating Reserve Bank. The central bank has transferred unprecedented high dividends to the central government. The central bank has transferred Rs 2.11 lakh crore to the central government. Additionally, the large surplus earned by the public sector banks could also have pushed up the central government's expenditure plans, yet remaining within prudent fiscal parameters.

Coming to the next trigger, the latest figures indicate that domestic consumption has continued to remain strong. Some of the high frequency figures indicate hectic pace of growth in certain segments like auto sales, housing loans, fuel consumption. These are mainly in

the urban sector. In the rural segment the strength of demand remains somewhat depressed, despite forecast about normal monsoon this year.

Thirdly, the exports are picking up although rather slowly. Merchandise exports have come into positive territory from negative in the previous quarter. Imports are also rising indicating strong domestic demand. Services exports are of course buoyant, though some uncertainties have emerged with the emergence of newer AI products.

For the policy makers, namely RBI and the North Block, the situation is further comfortable because of the benign inflation situation. CPI inflation was at 4.8% in April 2024, lower than 4.9% in March 2024. It has trended downward since January 2024. The downward pressure emanates primarily from petroleum related commodity groups namely, fuel and light and transport and communication services.

Given the favourable overall background, the next government has its task cut out. The emphasis should be to maintain the tempo of the economy by utilising its buoyant resources for continuing with infrastructure building programmes. If these triggers are maintained, it will in due course spill over into larger private sector investments.

Private investments come when their capacity utilisation is up and showing a rising trend. The indications from the

business confidence surveys and other indicators show that the sentiments for larger private investments are turning positive. One can expect some significant pick up in private sector investments.

Indeed, Indian private investments as well as some large major private sector companies are all set to enter India. Taking advantages of the incentive schemes of the central government, more investors are feeling upbeat about India. Significant new beginning is expected in sectors like computer chip making and in semiconductor industry.

Going is so far good, but it is important to take note of the observations of a technical nature. Some economists have pointed out that the GDP deflator, that is the way the statisticians try to eliminate the effects of rising inflation on the GDP figures to get a peek at the real GDP trends, has been rather lenient.

These economics feel that the GDP deflator used for calculating the final figures was too low for giving more weightage to the WPI inflation figures than the CPI numbers. The WPI trends have been very low and sometimes in the negative, while the CPI hovered around 5.4%. They question the use of WPI heavy delegator against the CPI led one. The former shows a far higher rate of growth than if CPI heavy deflator is used.

Nonetheless, leaving aside some of the technical issues, there is no doubt that the Indian economy is showing a bounce in its steps. The economy has shown remarkable resilience and recovered sharply in the post-COVID phase in a hostile global environment. Given these trends, one can safely predict the economy's pace to remain robust and the financial markets could show the same rising streak. (IPA Service)



# Narendra Modi's Pyrrhic victory

## Should the Supreme Court have done more to ensure free and fair elections?

By: Mohan Guruswamy

Narendra Modi won an electoral victory on June 4, which can at best be described as a Pyrrhic victory. This term owes its origin to King Pyrrhus of Epirus whose army suffered irreplaceable losses while defeating the Romans in the Battle of Asculum in 279 BC.

Closer to our times and nearer home we have the turn of events after the Battle of Gangwana between the armies of the Marwar Rathores and the combined forces of Jaipur and its Mughal overlord led by Jai Singh in 1741. In this battle the imperial army of over forty thousand massed in a field at Kunchagaon near Pushkar with its fabled artillery guns lined up to force terms on the rulers of Jodhpur and Nagaur.

As it happened it fell upon Bakht Singh of Nagaur and his cavalry numbering about a thousand to take on the imperial forces. But that didn't deter Bakht Singh and his horsemen charged into the massed imperial forces and quickly punched through Jai Singh's gun line.

The Rathores rode through the Jaipur army, cutting down thousands of men. They lost most of their men but the huge toll extracted demoralised the Mughal forces. After this victory the imperial army soon disintegrated. Jai Singh never recovered his elan and died two years later.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) might have won the 2024 elections but its apparently inexorable march towards establishing a Hinduva theocracy was halted by the combined formations committed to the letter and spirit of the Constitution.

The Hindi-Hindutva phalanx that threatened to overturn the federal character of India has been weakened. Most of all in its Gangetic heartland where the BJP led by the Modi-Yogi double engine train has been derailed by the youthful and educated duo of Akhilesh Yadav and Rahul Gandhi.

The results also cut Modi down to a more realistic size. He won in Varanasi in 2019 by 4.93 lakh votes only to have it whittled down to 1.52 lakhs yesterday. Ironically Rahul Gandhi won in Rae Bareilly by over 3.9 lakh votes after being humili-

ated in another Gandhi family bailiwick, Amethi, in 2019.

This represents a telling reversal of fortunes. Modi is irrevocably on the decline with both biological and historical times against him. His swagger at the BJP's "victory" meeting was visibly contrived and forced. He tried to weave his oratorical magic with his usual mix of hyperbole and half-truths but failed to enthrall the faithful.

For instance he claimed to have made India the world's second largest manufacturer of mobile phones. The truth in this is only skin deep. India now assembles ₹ 4.4 lakh crores of mobile phones but the value addition is only 16%, while China manufactures more than six times that with a value addition of almost 100%.

India exports as much diamonds and jewellery by its value addition is even lesser. India exports even more petroleum products (over \$70 billion), mostly from the Reliance refinery in Jamnagar but its value addition, hence the contribution to the national economy, is a thin sliver. These numbers are due to Modi's focus on the big and visible, but what is the national benefit?

Similarly, Modi highlighted the spruced up and long nosed Vande Bharat Express trains, but over 95% of passengers still travel in crowded and grimy trains piled up on each other usually without minimal facilities. But he tried to convince people that their lives had improved.

The perceived standard of living is a relative concept. How does a passenger in a typical second class bogie view the passenger zipping by in a plush Vande Bharat Express? I wrote here on April 17 that I don't see the 'Modi Express' going much further than the halfway mark. But the electronic media's relentless barrage of Modi positivism and their flood of concocted polls cooked Modi's goose by making over 400 the new norm.

Modi himself contributed to the high expectations by imperiously dismissing Rahul Gandhi to less than fifty. He accorded the same gracelessness to Akhilesh Yadav, M. K. Stalin, Mamata Banerjee and Tejaswi Yadav. They all fought back and whittled him down.

In the last 82 days Modi crisscrossed the country in his IAF Boeing 777 air-

craft addressing 206 rallies, making people like me wonder if the country was running on auto-pilot? No political leader anywhere in the world spent so much time campaigning as Modi did in a decade.

A leader's post is akin to a pulpit which is meant to preach, convince and motivate. Modi instead used his platform mostly to hurl political invective on his opponents and rivals. When he spoke of achievements he hugely exaggerated. In the end more voters saw through him than believers.

Modi's political climb has been driven by such exaggerations but results yesterday tell us that the bubble has been pricked. By its own estimations the Modi led BJP fell short of its declared goal by over 150 seats (ab ki baar char sau paar).

The BJP seat tally diminished in all its dominant states and increased only in Orissa and Telangana. The BJP is still the largest party in Parliament, but it has been cut to size. Inside the party Narendra Modi too has been cut to size.

The BJP, which despite the malign influence of the RSS, used to have a vigorous inner party democracy with debate and discussion animating it, had been stifled for a decade. Modi ran it by diktat along with a bunch of faceless and callow aides who can no longer continue to do so.

The party now knows that the path is fraught with consequences. It may not revert back to the days of Vajpayee and Advani, but the days of Modi and Shah will become the days of Modi and Shah with Nitin Gadkari, Rajnath Singh and others speaking up. It might tone down his hubris with humility?

The new NDA will now be heavily dependent on the two most notorious political about-turn artists on the national stage: Nitish Kumar and Chandrababu Naidu. Both have raged and railed against Narendra Modi individually till the recent past.

The arithmetical balance (Janata Dal-United 12, Telugu Desam Party 16) requires them to function in tandem to upset the BJP juggernaut. It is difficult to see political events that will align their actions, but they will constantly be breathing down Modi's neck. That might force Modi to be a more conciliatory person. Which might not be a bad thing for the government? (Courtesy: The Citizen)

By: Vineet Bhalla

Looking back at the recently concluded Lok Sabha election cycle, the longest in India's history, it is easy not to take notice of the role the Supreme Court has played in the conduct of the elections.

After all, the Supreme Court has adopted a hands-off approach in relation to almost all election-related cases that it heard in the last six weeks, deferring to the authority of the Election Commission of India.

However, the refusal to act in most cases impacted the election in significant ways.

There is no consensus among legal experts on whether the court's approach is desirable, especially in light of the alleged abdication by the Election Commission of its function to conduct the election in a free and fair manner.

**Hands-off approach**  
In March last year, a five-judge Constitution bench of the Supreme Court had changed the process for appointment of election commissioners in order to secure their independence. The court had created a committee comprising the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the Chief Justice of India to make appointments to the Election Commission until Parliament enacted a law on the subject.

However, in December, the Parliament passed a law that created a new committee to nominate members to the Election Commission comprising the Prime Minister, the Leader of Opposition and a Union Cabinet Minister – rather than the Chief Justice of India, as provided by the judgment.

Scroll had reported that this law went against the spirit of the judgment by bringing the matter of selecting election commissioners, which the judgment sought to shield from executive influence, back within the Centre's control.

This law was challenged in January this year. A two-judge bench of the court had refused to stay the law. In March, as per the new law, two new election commissioners were appointed by the Union government. Again, the appointments were challenged before the Supreme Court.

However, the court refused to stay the appointments as well as the law on the ground that the Lok Sabha election was about to commence.

In February, another five-judge Constitution bench of the Supreme Court had held the Union government's electoral bonds scheme as unconstitutional and quashed it. However, it decided the petitions challenging the scheme seven years after they had been filed. The bench had held substantive hearings in the matter only in October and November of last year.

The Supreme Court had refused to stay the scheme in 2021.

As a result of the court's delay in hearing the matter, the unconstitutional scheme had been in operation from 2018 onward. The ruling party at the Centre, the Bharatiya Janata Party, was the largest beneficiary of the scheme and could utilise the money it gained from the scheme on the current election, as well as the previous general election and all assembly elections since 2018.

On April 15, the Supreme Court rejected a petition seeking arrangements to be made by the Election Commission to enable internally displaced persons from Manipur settled outside the state to cast their votes in the election by setting up special polling booths in the states to which the displaced persons had moved.

On April 26, the court dismissed pleas seeking the tallying of all Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail slips to verify votes cast through Electronic Voting Machines.

On May 14, it refused to entertain a plea petition seeking to disqualify Prime Minister Narendra Modi from elections for allegedly making hate speeches and invoking religion

during campaigning.

On May 24, it declined to pass interim directions to the Election Commission to publicly release the booth-wise absolute number of voters amid the Lok Sabha elections. However, on May 25 the Election Commission ended up publishing the absolute number of votes cast in each parliamentary constituency during the first five phases of the election.

It only bucked its hands-off approach in one case, when on May 10 it provided interim bail to Delhi Chief Minister and Aam Aadmi Party national convener Arvind Kejriwal in a money laundering case. In a first-of-its-kind verdict, the court allowed Kejriwal temporary bail only to campaign for the Lok Sabha election.

However, even here, the court failed to uniformly apply this principle. It rejected the interim bail applications of former Jharkhand chief minister and the working president of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha party Hemant Soren and the AAP's Punjab MLA Jaswant Singh, both also arrested in money laundering cases. Both had sought to rely on the precedent of the bail granted to Kejriwal.

**Election Commission missing in action**  
A ripple effect of the Supreme Court's insistence on not interfering with the election com-

missioner appointment law has been the Election Commission's failure to meaningfully act against BJP leaders' repeated poll code violations. This has been flagged by retired bureaucrats as well as a former Supreme Court judge while a recent study by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies and Lokniti showed decreasing public trust over the functioning of the Election Commission.

"There was a strong case for staying the 2023 law and the installation of the present Election Commission since the law clearly breached the rationale of [the court's March 2023 judgment] that emphasised the need for an independent selection committee to ensure that independent commissioners are appointed," senior lawyer and writer Kaleeswaram Raj, who practices in the Supreme Court and the Kerala High Court, told Scroll.

Raj had been part of the legal teams that successfully challenged the election commissioner appointment process in 2023 and failed to secure a stay on the subsequently passed law.

"The country had to pay a heavy cost due to the judicial indulgence shown," he said.

Constitutional historian and former bureaucrat SN Sahu, who served as press secretary to former President of India KR Narayanan and director in Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's office, told Scroll that the judiciary ought to have promptly intervened and taken action against BJP leaders for their communal appeals for votes.

"Securing the purity and integrity of the electoral process is not the sole duty of the Election Commission," he said. According to him, when the Commission fails in its duty, "other organs of the government, including the legislature, the executive and the judiciary also have key roles to play".

Raj agreed. "The role of the Supreme Court with respect to election has been highly disappointing," he said. He added that the court had "clearly failed in carrying out its constitutional function as against the executive, Parliament and the Election Commission itself".

**Should the judiciary have stepped in?**  
Some legal experts, though, don't think that

the judiciary has the institutional capacity to fill in the vacuum of effective regulation of the election.

"Article 324 of the Constitution of India squarely vests the superintendence, direction and control of elections with the Election Commission," Ritwika Sharma, senior resident fellow and lead at the legal policy think-tank Vidhi's Centre for Constitutional Law told Scroll.

"The Supreme Court has decided on the more principled issues concerning elections and electoral reforms," she continued. "But it has remained hands-off with respect to the more practical issues concerning the conduct of elections."

Sharma warned that if model code of conduct violations begin to be taken cognisance of by the judiciary, they will enter the judicial process and get mired in inevitable delays.

"Scepticism concerning the independence of the Election Commission should not translate to placing a greater responsibility on the judiciary to address violations of the poll code, given how overburdened the judicial process is," she said.

Shubhankar Dam, chair professor of public law and governance at the University of

Portsmouth, agreed. "Courts don't want to, and shouldn't, micromanage elections," he said.

He added that "the text of the Constitution has never prevented the Supreme Court from doing anything." Nevertheless, "the main reason why it has chosen not to intervene in elections is its institutional limitations," he said.

Raj disagreed on this. "The hands-off approach has relevance only when the court's order interferes with an ongoing election," he said. "It is unconvincing when the court adopts such an approach when the direction sought for will, in no way, meddle with the polls."

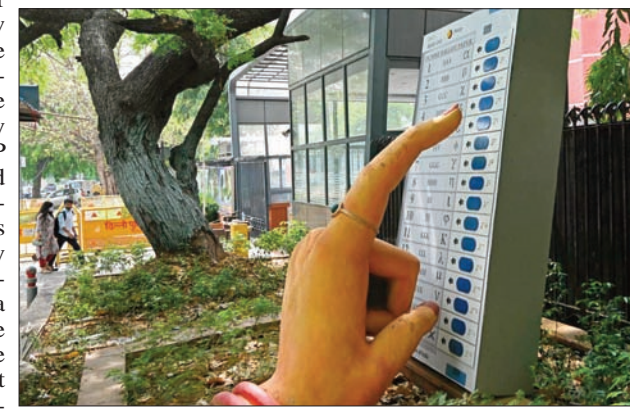
"Article 324 contemplates functional autonomy for the commission," he emphasised. "It doesn't create any embargo in the power of judicial review of the Supreme Court, as long as the court doesn't stall an ongoing election."

On the other hand, Sharma said that solutions must be sought from the Election Commission, given its vast repository of power under Article 324. She reminded that in the past as well, the commission had "taken stern action in case of violations of the model code of conduct, which it is fully empowered to do."

According to her, "despite the Election Commission not doing enough, or perhaps because of that, difficult questions must be asked of the government and the commission itself about how a free and fair election can be conducted." "More than institutional mechanisms, public opinion could drive the Election Commission to introspect and discharge its functions responsibly," she said.

Dam offered a more cynical outlook. "I am sceptical as to whether there any good solutions to this," he said.

According to him, "it is a myth that the Election Commission has suddenly become craven to the government." He said that the model code of conduct has never been properly imposed in India and that the Election Commission "has always been influenced by the ruling party." "What has changed is the way in which hate speech is amplified due to social media," he said. "Today, the impact and potential for harm of hate speech is significantly higher." (Courtesy: Scroll.in)



# Trump hangs like a Damocles' Sword over US-South Korea relations

By: Vivek Mishra & Abhishek Sharma

Under Biden's political leadership, the United States (US) reached out to its allies and partners with a reassuring slogan: 'America is Back'. The message was resoundingly meant to be for the Asia-Pacific where America's hub-and-spokes system of alliance has buttressed its reach and influence and had come under duress under the Trump administration. Both Japan and South Korea faced political pressure from the Trump administration. Trump's grand bargain included propositions of the US troop withdrawal from its allies, should they fail to pay more money for US deployment in their countries.

One of the pressing priorities of the Biden administration has been to reverse any doubt about America's alliance commitments alongside assuring its allies about its support. The attempt was to put the US diplomatic machinery back on the global map and dispel fears of American diplomatic and political retrenchment.

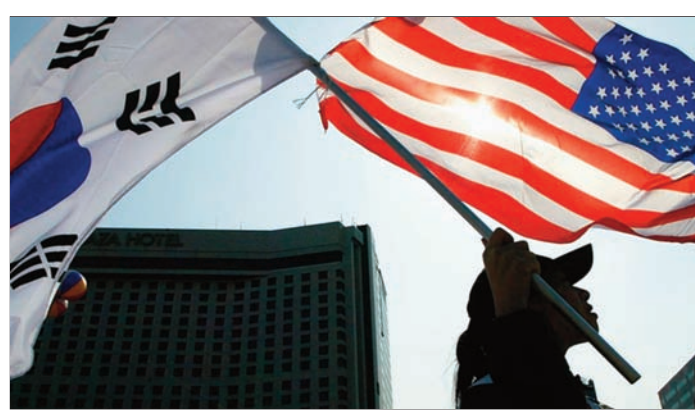
Under the Biden administration, there have been conscious efforts from Washington to allay fears of the US allies in the Indo-Pacific, of a self-centered America. South Korea is at the heart of that effort, along with other critical allies like Japan. It did not come as a surprise when President Biden invited leaders of both Japan and

South Korea to Camp David in August last year. The purpose was twofold: Assure America's two most critical allies in the Pacific of a common deterrence strategy against China and script a diplomatic détente between Tokyo and Seoul.

The US relations with South Korea, its treaty ally in Northeast Asia, suffered most under the Trump presidency, as diverging issues dictated the relations. Biden's Indo-Pacific outreach sought to assuage Seoul's concerns by working towards strengthening its presence and network in the Pacific theatre.

As the next US elections seem delicately poised with both Democrat and Republican possibilities equally alive, alarm bells are ringing again in Seoul as the fear of Trump coming back to power looms over bilateral and regional ties. Such apprehensions have raised an important question: What will be the future of US-ROK relations under the next US president?

**Allaying Seoul's fears**  
As US President Joe Biden and his political rival Donald Trump look to face off in two debates on 27 June and 10 September this year, Seoul will be keenly watching. Already, Trump's interview with the Time Magazine last month, in which he reiterated the issue of the US allies' military spending in the context of NATO and South Korea, has raised some hackles in Seoul.



On the question, 'Would you [Trump] withdraw US troops from South Korea', Donald Trump replied, 'I want South Korea to treat us properly' and further added that 'We've [US] essentially paid for much of their military, free of charge. And they agreed to pay billions of dollars. And probably now that I'm gone, they're paying very little. I don't know if you know that they renegotiated the deal I made.' These comments have widened a trust gap for many in Seoul and is reminiscent of the sentiments which Trump evoked in 2019.

The Biden administration has rushed to put in place some strong structural measures to strengthen US-ROK relations so that they remains future-proof to leadership transitions in both countries. Fearing that the negotiations would again become a point of contention between Seoul and Washington, both countries fast-tracked the Security Measures Agree-

ment (SMA) in January this year which will finalise defence cost-sharing for the 28,500 US Forces Korea (USFK) soldiers deployed in South Korea. Under the SMA, costs related to the Korean workers in the US Forces Korea (USFK), construction costs and other expenditures related to logistical support are included.

**Denuclearisation and America first**

Another significant point of contention between Washington and Seoul during Trump's tenure could be the issue of denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula. If elected, Trump would likely adopt a markedly different approach towards the DPRK, thereby impacting the broader agenda of denuclearisation.

During his presidency, Trump created history by stepping onto North Korean soil and meeting with Kim Jong Un on three occasions. While these actions showcased Trump's unpredictability and unconventional diplomatic style, they also engendered distrust in South Korea and destabilised the strategic equilibrium in the region. Given that deterrence relies heavily on signalling and state behaviour, South Korea, reliant on US extended deterrence, found itself in a precarious position.

Indeed, more openness in engaging with Pyongyang from a Trump presidency could create dissonance between the two sides. If Trump wins, he is expected to engage with Kim Jong Un again and even accept the DPRK's condition to retain its nuclear weapons. This stance will likely create a fissure in the alliance and embolden a section of conservatives who support South Korea's nuclearisation.

Biden, through his Indo-Pacific policy and other regional policies such as a tripartite alliance between the US, Japan, and South Korea at Camp David and the AUKUS agreement has tried to restore the strategic balance in the Pacific. The Yoon-Biden period in bilateral leadership has focused on removing structural inconsistencies and infusing predictability in relationships.

**Taiwan contingency**

Since Trump left the White House in January 2021, positions on either side, in China and the US, have hardened on the issue of Taiwan. While the US Senate has proposed the Taiwan Policy Act of 2022 which seeks to overhaul the US's bilateral relationship with Taiwan, China's actions suggest that it may be working against a deadline towards invading Taiwan. These circumstances have left both the security balance of the Pacific in the doldrums: conventional and strategic.

The emerging competitive mix in the region has enforced a strategic dilemma on Seoul, one of choosing between its alliance commitments and the fear of entrapment with the US alliance against China. Although under President Yoon, South Korea has leapt forward by taking a clear position, emphasising the need to maintain peace and stability in the Taiwan strait, it has still not committed any combined assistance with the US in any

Taiwan contingency, in contrast to Japan. This will likely become a point of contention as the US plans to re-strategise its assets in the Indo-Pacific aimed at deterring China. If Trump wins, the role of USFK apropos Taiwan will take centre stage shifting the alliance focus from North Korea to China.

In a recent interview, Elbridge Colby who occupied a senior position in the Trump administration voiced this opinion, even as he expressed the need to 'overhaul the USFK to China-related contingencies' rather than just North Korea. This has generated a debate among South Korean strategic experts concerning the importance of self-defence and having a re-look at the US-ROK alliance. Its historically complicated relationship with Japan has not been particularly helpful in providing strategic clarity to Seoul.

Trump and some of his decisions in dealing with South Korea like his revision of the Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (KORUS) loom large, even as Trump maintains a lead over Biden in election polls and fundraising. On the contrary, the Biden administration will bet on stability in US-ROK relations under the next Democratic presidency given some of the groundwork in this direction in the last four years, most profoundly in the areas of tech-cooperation. (Courtesy: ORF)



# The sun rises over Normandy's beaches on D-Day's 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary

**UTAH BEACH, June 6:** As the sun sets on the D-Day generation, it rose again over Normandy beaches where soldiers fought and died exactly 80 years ago on Thursday, kicking off intense anniversary commemorations against the backdrop of renewed war in Europe, in Ukraine.

Ever-dwindling numbers of World War II veterans who have pilgrimaged back to France, and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine that has dashed hopes that lives and cities wouldn't again be laid to waste in Europe, are making the poignant anniversary of the June 6, 1944, Allied landings even more so 80 years on.

As now-centenarian veterans revisit old memories and fallen comrades buried in Normandy graves, Ukrainian President

Volodymyr Zelenskyy's presence at D-Day commemorations with world leaders who are supporting Ukraine's fight against Russia's invasion — including United States President Joe Biden — will inevitably fuse together World War II's awful past with the fraught present on Thursday.

The break of dawn almost eight decades exactly after Allied troops waded ashore under hails of gunfire on five code-named beaches — Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno and Sword — kicked off a day of remembrance by Allied nations now standing together again behind Ukraine — and with World War II ally Russia not invited by host France. It cited Russia's "war of aggression against Ukraine that



has intensified in recent weeks" for the snub.

With the dead and wounded on both sides in Ukraine estimated in the hundreds of thousands, commemorations for the more than 4,400 Allied dead on D-Day and many tens of thousands more, including French civilians, killed in the

ensuing Battle of Normandy are tinged with concerns that World War II lessons are being lost.

"There are things worth fighting for," said World War II veteran Walter Stitt, who fought in tanks and turns 100 in July, as he visited Omaha Beach this week. "Although I wish there was another way to do it than to try to kill each other."

"We'll learn one of these days, but I won't be around for that," he said.

Conscious of the inevitability that major D-Day anniversaries will soon take place without World War II veterans, huge throngs of aficionados in uniforms and riding vehicles of the time, and tourists soaking up the spectacle, have flooded Normandy for the 80th anniversary.

"It's so historic and we just have to remember the sacrifices of everybody who gave us our freedom," said Becky Kraubetz, a Briton now living in Florida whose grandfather served with the British Army during World War II and was captured in Malta.

"It gives you goosebumps, everything that happened here. Imagine just jumping into the water, freezing cold," the 54-year-old said as she gazed across the English Channel, tears in her eyes. "The bravery, the courage, for people to face that is just unbelievable — very, very humbled to be here."

She was among a crowd of thousands of people that stretched for several kilometers (miles) along Utah Beach, the

westernmost of the D-Day beaches.

In a quiet spot away from the official ceremonies, France's Christophe Receveur performed his own tribute, unfurling an American flag he had bought on a trip to Pennsylvania to honor those who died on D-Day.

"To forget them is to let them die over again," the 57-year-old said as he and his daughter, Julie, then carefully refolded the flag into a tight triangle, adding that those now dying in Ukraine fighting the invading Russian army were also on his mind.

"All these troops came to liberate a country that they didn't know for an ideology - democracy, freedom - that is under severe strain now," he said. (AP)

*The school was filled with Palestinians who had fled Israeli offensives and bombardment in northern Gaza*

## Israeli strike kills at least 33 people at Gaza school the military claims was being used by Hamas

**DEIR AL-BALAH, June 6:**

An Israeli strike early on Thursday on a school sheltering displaced Palestinians in central Gaza killed more than 30 people, including 23 women and children, according to local health officials.

The Israeli military said that Hamas militants were operating from within the school.

It was the latest instance of mass casualties among Palestinians trying to find refuge as Israel expands its offensives in the Gaza Strip. A day earlier, the military announced a new ground and air assault in central Gaza, pursuing Hamas militants it says have regrouped there.

Troops repeatedly have swept back into sections of the Gaza Strip they have previously invaded, underscoring the resilience of the militant group despite Israel's nearly eight-month onslaught in the territory.

Witnesses and hospital of-

ficials said the predawn strike hit the al-Sardi School, run by the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees known by the acronym UNRWA.

The school was filled with Palestinians who had fled Israeli offensives and bombardment in northern Gaza, they said.

Ayman Rashed, a man displaced from Gaza City who was sheltering at the school, said the missiles hit classrooms on the second and third floor where families were sheltering.

He said he helped carry out five dead, including an old man and two children, one with his head shattered open. "It was dark, with no electricity, and we struggled to get out the victims," Rashed said.

Casualties from school strike arrived at the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in nearby Deir al-Balah, which had already been overwhelmed by a stream of constant ambulances since the central Gaza



in-cursion began 24 hours earlier, said Omar al-Derawi, a photographer working for the hospital.

Videos circulating online appeared to show several wounded people being treated on the floor of the hospital, a common scene in Gaza's overwhelmed medical wards. Electricity in much of the hospital is out because staff are rationing fuel supplies for the generator.

"You can't walk in the hospital — there's so many people. Women from the victims' families are massed in the hallways, crying," he said.

Hospital records and an Associated Press reporter at the hospital recorded at least 33 dead from the strike, including 14 children and nine women. Another strike on a house overnight killed six people, according to the records.

Both strikes occurred in Nuseirat, one of several built-up refugee camps in Gaza dating to the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation, when hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled or were driven from their homes in what became the new state.

Footage showed bodies

wrapped in blankets or plastic bags being laid out in lines in the courtyard of the hospital. Mohammed al-Kareem, a displaced Palestinian sheltering near the hospital, said he saw people searching for their loved ones among bodies, and that one woman kept asking medical workers to open the wraps on the bodies to see if her son was inside.

"The situation is tragic," he said.

The Israeli military said Hamas had embedded a "compound" within the school and that Hamas and Islamic Jihad militants inside were using it as a shelter where they were planning attacks against Israeli troops, though it didn't immediately offer evidence. It released a photo of the school, pointing to classrooms on the second and third floor where it claimed militants were located.

It said it took steps before the strike "to reduce the risk

of harming uninjured civilians ... including conducting aerial surveillance, and additional intelligence information."

UNRWA schools across Gaza have functioned as shelters since the start of the war, which has driven most of the territory's population of 2.3 million Palestinians from their homes.

Last week, Israeli strikes hit near an UNRWA facility in the southern city of Rafah, saying they were targeting Hamas militants. An inferno that followed ripped through tents nearby housing displaced families, killing at least 45 people.

The deaths triggered international outrage, and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the fire was the result of a "tragic mishap." The military said the fire may have been caused by secondary explosions. The cause of the explosions has not been determined. (AP)

## Netherlands kicks off 4 days of EU elections across 27 nations

**THE HAGUE, June 6:** Polls opened in the Netherlands on Thursday to kick off four days of voting in European Union parliamentary elections across the 27 member states that are expected to deliver gains for the hard right.

Estonians can cast their ballots across six days that started on Monday, but the Netherlands is the only EU country to start its single-day vote so early, followed by Ireland on Friday and the rest of the EU nations over the weekend. Europe-wide results will be announced Sunday night after all member states have completed voting.

The Dutch voting comes six months after Geert Wilders' far-right Party for Freedom sent shockwaves around Europe by becoming the biggest party in the Dutch national parliament. Polling suggests Wilders will build on that popularity and set the tone for much of the bloc.

Since the last EU elections five years ago, populist, far-right and extremist parties are leading governments in three EU nations, are part of governing coalitions in several others, and appear to have surging public support across the continent.

The EU elections are the world's second-biggest exercise in democracy behind the election in India, and the stakes

are high.

Almost 400 million voters will be electing 720 members of the European Parliament from beyond the Arctic circle to the edges of Africa and Asia. They will have an impact on issues ranging from global climate policies and defense to migration and geopolitical relations with China and the United States.

Since the last European elections in 2019, war has broken out on the fringe of the bloc following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a country that desperately wants to join the EU.

A founding member, the Netherlands was long unwavering in its support of EU policies. Research from the Clingendael think tank, though, suggests dissatisfaction with the EU among Dutch people, and that while most believe that the Netherlands should remain in the bloc, many also believe it should be more self-sufficient.

While many voters are predicted to lurch to the right, the Christian Democrat-dominated European People's Party led by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, is currently the EU legislature's biggest bloc and is bound to be the coalition kingmaker when the dust settles on the election results. (AP)

## Yemen's Houthi rebels unveil solid-fuel 'Palestine' missile that resembles Iranian hypersonic

**DUBAI, June 6:** Yemen's Houthi rebels have unveiled a new, solid-fuel missile in their arsenal that resembles aspects of one earlier displayed by Iran that Tehran described as flying at hypersonic speeds.

The rebels fired its new "Palestine" missile, complete with a warhead painted like a Palestinian keffiyeh checkered scarf, at the southern Gulf of Aqaba port of Eilat in Israel on Monday. The attack set off air raid sirens but caused no reported damage or injuries.

Footage released by the Houthis Wednesday showed the Palestine being raised on what appeared to be a mobile launcher and rising quickly into the air with plumes of white smoke coming from its engine. White smoke is common with solid-fuel missiles.

Solid-fuel missiles can be set up and fired faster than those contain-

ing liquid fuel. That's a key concern for the Houthis as their missile launch sites have been repeatedly targeted by US and allied forces in recent months over the rebels' attacks on shipping through the Red Sea corridor. One such strike hit the Houthis even before they were able to launch their missile.

For their part, the Houthis described the Palestine as a "locally made" missile.

However, the Houthis are not known to possess the ability to manufacture complicated missile and guidance systems locally in Yemen, the Arab world's poorest country, which has been

gripped by war since the rebels seized the capital, Sanaa, nearly a decade ago. The Houthis have, however, been repeatedly armed by Iran during the war despite a United Nations arms embargo. While Iran claims it doesn't arm the Houthis, ships seized by the US and its allies have found Iranian weaponry, mis-

sile fuel and components on board.

Iranian media reported the launch of the Palestine and described it as locally manufactured, citing the Houthis. However, design elements on the missile resemble other missiles developed by Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard. That includes one called the Fattah, or "Conqueror" in Farsi.

Iran unveiled the missile last year and claimed it could reach Mach 15 — or 15 times the speed of sound. It also described the missile's range as up to 1,400 kilometers (870 miles). That's a little short of Eilat from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen, but missile can be reconfigured to boost their range. In March, Russia's state-run RIA Novosti news agency quoted an anonymous source claiming the Houthis had a hypersonic missile. "While we cannot say for sure what exact version the Palestine" corresponds to, we can say with high certainty that it is an advanced and precision-guided (Guard)-developed solid propellant missile provided by Iran," wrote Fabian Hinz, a missile expert and research fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies. (AP)

## Pak PM in Beijing for talks with Prez Xi to seek more investments, elevate ties

**BEIJING, June 6:** Visiting Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has reached Beijing for talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping and other leaders to elevate all-weather bilateral ties and prospects of more aid and investments to bail out his cash-strapped country from the current economic crisis.

Sharif, on a five-day official visit to China since June 4, toured the southern high-tech city of Shenzhen on Wednesday and addressed the investors meeting.

During his stay here, Sharif will meet Xi, Premier Li Qiang and other leaders, Pakistan's state-run APP news agency reported.

He will also attend a Pakistan-China Friendship and Business event and have meetings with the CEOs of leading Chinese companies working on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects.

Several MoUs between the two countries on cooperation in various fields are likely to be signed, the report said.

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 billion and USD 8 billion with the possibility of augmentation through climate financing.

In his address to the investors meeting in Shenzhen, Sharif assured full security to the Chinese personnel from the recurring terrorist attacks targeting them.

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

Addressing the Pakistan-China Business Forum, Sharif assured all-out facilitation to Chinese investors and security of Chinese individuals, projects, and investments in Pakistan.

He said his government had taken various measures to ensure fool-proof security to protect the lives of Chinese workers in Pakistan.

"I will spare no effort to protect the lives of Chinese workers and assure and guarantee that we will provide them security more than our children. This will never happen again," he said.

Referring to the March terrorist attack in Besham in Pakistan, in which five Chinese personnel and their Pakistani driver were killed, he said it was one of the saddest days of his life when the whole nation felt saddened.

The latest was the March suicide attack in Dasu in which five Chinese nationals and a Pakistani driver were killed. Pakistan paid USD 2.58 million as compensation to the families of those killed in the attack.

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. (PTI)

**KALTUNGO, June 6:** The 9-month-old twins cried nonstop and tugged at their mother, seeking attention but also food. They had received little in the past 24 hours, and there were signs of deeper hunger in the heads too big for their tiny bodies.

"Not much milk comes out," said their 38-year-old mother, Dorcas Simon, who struggles to breastfeed and has three other children. She laughed, as if to conceal the pain. "What will I give them when I don't have food myself?"

Here in northern Nigeria, where conflict and climate change have long contributed to the problem, her twins are among 181 million children under 5 - or 27 per cent of the world's youngest children - who live in severe food poverty, according to a new report Thursday by the UN's children agency.

The report, which focused on nearly 100 low- and middle-income countries, defines severe food poverty as consuming nothing in a day or, at best, two out of eight food groups the agency recognises. Africa's population of more than 1.3 billion people is one of the most affected mainly due to conflict, climate crises and rising food prices.

The continent accounts for one-third of the global burden and 13 of the 20 most affected countries. But it has also recorded some progress, the report said. The percentage of children living in severe food poverty in West and Central Africa fell from 42 per cent to 32 per cent over the last decade, it said, noting advances including diversified crops and performance-based incentives for health workers.

In the absence of vital nutrients, children living with "extremely poor" diets are more likely to experience wasting, a life-threatening form of malnutrition, the agency known as UNICEF said.



"When wasting becomes very severe, they are 12 times more likely to die," Harriet Torlesse, one of the report's authors, told The Associated Press.

In several Nigerian communities like Kaltungo in the northeast where Simon lives, UNICEF is training thousands of women in how to boost their families' nutrient intake with cassava, sweet potato, maize, millet and vegetables grown in gardens at home, and how to rear livestock and chickens.

More than a dozen women gathered this week in Kaltungo's Poshereng village to learn dozens of recipes they can prepare with those foods which, in the absence of rain, are grown in sand-filled sacks that require little water.

Mothers in Nigeria also face the country's worst cost of living crisis. Growing food at home saves money. Aisha Aliyu, a 36-year-old mother of five, said her latest child "used to be skinny but is growing fatter" because of what they now grow at home. Hauwa Bwami, a 50-year-old mother of five, nearly lost her grandchild to kwashiorkor, a disease with severe pro-

## Ukraine hits Russian oil facilities as Zelenskyy joins leaders at D-Day events in France

**KYIV, June 6:** Ukrainian

drones struck an oil refinery and a fuel depot in Russian border regions, officials in the targeted areas said on Thursday, in Kyiv's ongoing effort to disrupt the Kremlin's war machine and as Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy sought further Western support in Europe's biggest conflict since World War II.

Zelenskyy was due to join world leaders, including U.S. President Joe Biden, at D-Day commemorations in France on Thursday.

On Friday, he was due to meet with French officials. Zelenskyy's trip came a day after Russian President Vladimir Putin warned that Russia could provide long-range weapons to other countries so that they could strike Western targets. That threat came after NATO allies said they would allow Ukraine to use weapons they deliver to Kyiv to attack Russian territory.

Ukraine's army is fighting to hold back a recent Russian push in eastern areas that seeks to exploit Kyiv's shortages of ammunition and troops along the roughly 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line after more than two years of war.

Dmitry Medvedev, deputy head of Russia's Security Council, said that Putin's comments Wednesday in St. Petersburg, Russia, amounted to "a quite significant shift in our foreign policy."

"Let the U.S. and its allies feel the impact of direct use of Russian weapons by others," Medvedev wrote on his messaging app channel. Putin deliberately didn't name potential recipient countries of Russian weapons, Medvedev said. They could go to anyone who considers the U.S. and its allies their enemies, he said.

An overnight drone attack hit the Novoshakhtinsk refinery in Russia's Rostov region and started a fire, Rostov Gov. Vasily Golubev said. Firefighters had to pull out briefly because of a second attack, he said. The extent of the damage to the facility wasn't immediately clear. Golubev said that there were no casualties.

In Belgorod, another border region, a drone hit an oil depot overnight, Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said. It caused an explosion and a fire in one of the oil reservoirs. The blaze was quickly extinguished and there were no casualties, Gladkov said. (AP)

## SAfrica's prez attends a key meeting of his party over how to form a new govt

**CAPE TOWN, June 6:**

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa was meeting with senior officials of the African National Congress on Thursday to decide how to go about forming a government after the party lost its 30-year grip on power and left a post-election deadlock.

The party's National Executive Committee was meeting in Johannesburg to work through a split within the party's ranks over which direction to take. The African National Congress (ANC) lost its long-held majority in last week's vote but remained the biggest party, and now needs some form of agreement with others to run Africa's most industrialized country.

ANC has indicated it's lean-

ing toward a government of national unity that would bring together many of the political parties in a broad agreement, rather than a direct coalition with the main opposition, the Democratic Alliance, or DA.

"We want to bring everybody on board," ANC Secretary-General Fikile Mbalula said before Thursday's meeting, which was likely to last all day.

Mbalula said a government of national unity was being proposed to the NEC to decide on, but he expected there to be debate and disagreement.

The National Executive Committee that includes more than 80 of the ANC's top officials is expected to be the body to decide on which direction it will take. (AP)

tein malnutrition, before the UNICEF training started a year ago. Now she grows enough food that she sells to other women.

Kaltungo is in a semi-arid agricultural region where climate change has limited rainfall in recent years. Some children have died of acute malnutrition in the past because food is scarce, said Ladi Abdullahi, who trains the women.

The training "is like answered prayers for me," Simon said in her first time with the group. But it can be a painful lesson. Another trainee, Florence Victor, 59, watched helplessly as her nine-month-old grandchild succumbed to malnutrition in 2022.

Malnutrition also can weaken the immune system over time, leaving children vulnerable to diseases that can kill.

In the Sahel, the semiarid region south of the Sahara Desert which is a hot spot for violent extremism, there has been an increase in acute malnutrition — worse than severe food poverty — that has reached emergency levels, said Alfred Ejem, senior food security advisor with the Mercy Corps aid group in Africa. Because of displacement and climate change, families have resorted to "bad coping mechanisms like eating leaves and locusts just to survive," Ejem said. In conflict-hit Sudan, children are dying of severe malnutrition in large numbers.

In Nigeria's troubled northwest, the French medical organisation Doctors Without Borders said at least 850 children died last year within 24 to 48 hours of being admitted to its health facilities.

"We are resorting to treating patients on mattresses on the floor because our facilities are full," Simba Tirima, MSF's Nigeria representative, said on Tuesday. (AP)



# Deb won West Tripura LS constituency by over six lakh votes by defeating Congress' Asish Kumar Saha

## BJP's Biplab Deb keen on becoming Tripura CM again

AGARTALA, June 6: Despite his thumping victory in the Lok Sabha election, BJP leader Biplab Kumar Deb on Thursday expressed his strong desire to return as the chief minister of Tripura.

However, everything depends on the party, said Deb, who guided the BJP to capture power in Tripura ending a 25-year-long Communist rule in 2018 and became the chief minister before being abruptly removed four years later.

Tripura BJP president Manik Saha then took charge and after the 2023 assembly elections, he continues to be at the helm of the BJP-led government in the state.

Currently a Rajya Sabha MP, Deb defeated his rival Asish Kumar Saha of the Congress by over six lakh votes from the West Tripura Lok Sabha constituency. Saha was also the joint candidate of the INDIA bloc.

"A chief minister is the head of a state while a union minister works under the prime minister. I prefer to return to state politics. And, it will not be less than the post of the chief minister. I had worked in the state as head of the government, not a minister," he told PTI.

"But the party is the ultimate authority," he said.

During his tenure as Tripura CM, Deb had made headlines often because of his controversial statements - from hinting at



the existence of the Internet during the Mahabharata era to questioning whether Diana Hayden deserved to win the Miss World title and whether she or Aishwarya Rai symbolised true 'Indian beauty'.

The newly elected Lok Sabha MP detailed how he was chosen as a candidate of one of the two seats in Tripura.

"Currently, I am in national politics being a Rajya Sabha MP and election prabhari (in-charge) of Haryana. Normally, election prabhari are not given tickets to contest

elections. It was initially confirmed that incumbent MPs Pratima Bhoumik and Rebati Tripura will contest from their respective Lok Sabha constituencies," he said.

Deb said he was nowhere in the picture. "Suddenly I got a call from Union Home Minister Amit Shah. He told me I had to contest from the West Tripura Lok Sabha seat. Being a party leader, I could not turn down the party's decision... I won the election massively the way I expected," Deb said.

On his huge winning margin of over 6 lakh votes, the former chief minister said the Congress has disappeared from the state while the CPI(M) still has supporters at the grassroots level.

The Congress and the Left party fought the Lok Sabha elections together in the state.

"The CPI(M) has failed to transfer its committed vote bank to Congress as it did in last year's Assembly elections. Besides, Tipra Motha's joining the BJP-led coalition government is also a major reason behind the huge winning margin," he said.

Asserting that he will have to concentrate on the state after being elected as an MP of Lok Sabha, Deb said he will soon hold a meeting with Chief Minister Manik Saha and will work on the development of the state.

"The state has no industry and it needs jobs for the youth. The tourism, including medical and spiritual tourism, could generate employment for the young generation very fast. During my tenure as the chief minister, there was a plan to lease out the newly built IGM building to Apollo Hospitals but it did not materialize due to Covid pandemic," he said.

Deb said he will take steps to complete the facelift of Tripureswari temple, one of the 51 Shakti Peethas, in Gumati district to promote spiritual tourism. (PTI)

## NIA arrests key accused in conspiracy to exacerbate violence in Manipur



NEW DELHI, June 6: The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Thursday arrested a key accused from Imphal airport in a case relating to a transnational conspiracy by insurgents and terrorist outfits to exacerbate violence in Manipur and spread terror in the northeastern state.

Thongminthang Haokip alias Thangboi Haokip alias Roger, a member of Kuki National Front-Military Council (KNF-MC), has been arrested under various sections of Indian Penal Code and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in a case registered suo motu by the NIA on July 19 last year, the NIA said in a statement.

"The conspiracy had been hatched by Kuki and Zomi insurgents backed by terrorist organisations based in the northeastern states and in neighbouring Myanmar with the aim to exploit the current ethnic unrest in the region and wage war against the government of India through violent attacks, as per NIA investigations," it said.

The accused was found to have been involved in attacks on security forces at various places during the ongoing insurgency and violence, said the statement.

Roger was in touch with the insurgent group, Kuki National

Front-Burma (KNF-B) of Myanmar, for logistics support to aggravate the volatile situation in the state of Manipur and create terror in the minds of the people, it said.

"NIA investigations have revealed the accused had met the leaders of PDF/KNF-B (Myanmar) for supply of arms, ammunition and explosives for use in the current phase of violence in Manipur," the statement said.

He has admitted to have participated in several armed attacks against security forces and on the opposite group in the current crisis in the state.

"He has also admitted being a member of Kuki National Front-Military Council and United Tribal Volunteers (UTV)," it added.

Further investigations are continuing to identify and track others involved in the conspiracy and scuttle the terrorist outfits' plans to destroy the peace and stability of the northeastern region, the NIA said.

At least 219 people have been killed in the ethnic strife that erupted in Manipur on May 3 last year after a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe status. (PTI)

## Heroin seized, 3 arrested in Mizoram

AIZWAL, June 6: Three persons, including a woman, have been arrested and altogether 985 gm of heroin has been seized from their possession in separate incidents in Aizawl, Mizoram excise and narcotics department said in a statement.

A 35-year-old woman, identified as Lalbuatsaihi, was arrested in Durtlang locality on the northern outskirts of Aizawl on Wednesday and 131 gm of heroin seized from her possession, it said.

In Hunthar area, a 23-year-old man, identified as Lalmuansanga, was arrested and 775 gm of heroin seized from his possession, while 79 gm of heroin was seized from 43-year-old Lalsangiana in Chhinga Veng locality of the capital city.

They were booked under the Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act 1985. (PTI)

## Consultative meeting on drug abuse to be held today

SHILLONG, June 6: The Meghalaya social welfare department in collaboration with the home (police) department and the East Khasi Hills district administration will be holding a consultative meeting of MLAs and members of district councils (MDCs) with the Dorbar Shnong of the Greater Shillong Area on Friday at the State Convention Centre here as a part of the Drug Reduction Elimination and Action Mission (DREAM).

DREAM, launched in June last year, is a targeted mission to build a 'Drug Free Meghalaya', which deploys a multifaceted coordinated strategy that leverages the combined efforts of the state and local communities to eliminate the incidence of substance use in the state.

Social welfare minister, Paul Lyngdoh has appealed to the Dorbar Shnong of Greater Shillong to attend this crucial meeting on Friday. Their participation and support will be crucial in the state's collective effort to combat sub-

stance abuse and build a safer, drug free Meghalaya, he said.

The consultative meeting seeks to identify gaps in the current system, which can be achieved by partnering with communities, such as the VDPs. As per the Meghalaya Village Defence Organisation Rules 2008, VDPs assist the police in maintaining law and order, conducting patrols, and preventing crimes such as theft and burglary. Drugs also come under the ambit of their duties and functions, in which they will be adequately trained as part of this mission.

This decision was taken after a meeting led by Lyngdoh on May 28 this year as part of the initiatives of the DREAM.

DREAM has identified the need to build a robust and well-trained network of village defence parties (VDPs) equipped with necessary resources and tools to combat drug abuse and trafficking.

Composed of trusted local volunteers from within the communi-

ties, the plan is to revamp and reorganise them across the state, with a particular focus on identifying drugs and substance use hotspots, including Shillong. Empowering VDPs with these capabilities is aimed at creating a vigilant and proactive community defense mechanism that not only maintains law and order, but will also actively contribute to a drug free state.

This initiative will involve comprehensive training on drug detection and prevention, ensuring regular coordination with police and existing health service nodal persons and fostering strong community engagement through social and behavioral change campaigns and awareness programs.

This decision was taken after a meeting led by Lyngdoh on Tuesday as part of DREAM. The state's success rate in combating the drug menace has risen to 20 per cent, largely due to the support and initiatives from traditional institutions and NGOs. (NNN)

## HYC-CEC releases song on environment conservation

SHILLONG, June 6: The Hynniewtrep Youths' Council-Central Executive Council (HYC-CEC) has released 'Bei Rymaw', a song to call upon people to commit themselves towards protecting the environment as part of the organization's 10th anniversary celebration this year.

The song is a wakeup call for every member of the society to play their part in caring and protecting for the environment.

Popular song writer and artiste, Amabel Susngi who composed the duet, sang the song with Bahun Marweini. 'Bei Rymaw' highlights the mesmerizing beauty of the Khasi and Jaintia hills, eulogizing the creation story attached to the beauty of mother earth. The hills and valleys of the Khasi people are some of the most picturesque and

as a tribute to such splendor, this song was written and produced.

HYC president Roy Kupar Synrem says, "When we look at our surroundings we see that our streams are mistreated, our forests are abused and nature is tampered. We cannot look the other way and do nothing. As an organization and members of society, we feel compelled to respond to such recklessness and invite people from across the board to think and act towards conservation of nature. This song is a message to our people to take strong note of the destruction we are causing to the environment around us and be mindful of the same."

Song writer Amabel Susngi added, "The message in the song is straightforward to invite our people to think seriously about our actions. The use of the traditional instruments including ka Duitara, ka Ksing Shynrang, ka Padiah and

flash floods, which claimed the lives of people in our state and elsewhere. This song is intended to reason with people and warn against any kind of tampering", Synrem added.

The release of the song is also a part of the organization's 10 year celebration that is scheduled to be concluded on July 17, which is the organization's Foundation day. There is hope that the people will listen to the meaningful words in both Pnar and Khasi Sohra embedded in this song called 'Bei Rymaw' or 'Mei Ram-ew'.

Song writer Amabel Susngi added, "The message in the song is straightforward to invite our people to think seriously about our actions. The use of the traditional instruments including ka Duitara, ka Ksing Shynrang, ka Padiah and



To promote awareness on preserving the nature, identify the problems related to environment and take corrective measures. BSF Meghalaya observed 'World Environment Day' on June 5 with the theme 'Land restoration, desertification and drought resilience'. Free saplings were also distributed by 172 Bn to the public to highlight the importance of environmental protection on Wednesday. UB Photos

## NPF reaffirms support to Biren Singh-led BJP govt in Manipur



IMPHAL, June 6: The Naga People's Front (NPF) on Thursday reaffirmed its support for chief minister N. Biren Singh-led BJP government in Manipur, refuting claims of withdrawal.

Awangbou Newmai, state water resources minister and NPF Manipur state president, said, "Social media posts about NPF withdrawing support from the N. Biren Singh-led government are false. There's no truth to it."

"We remain staunch allies of the BJP, grateful for their support during elections and committed to continuing our partnership," Newmai emphasized. He warned, "Legal repercussions await those responsible for spreading this misinformation."

Expressing appreciation for BJP's consistent backing of their candidate, Timothy Zemik, in the Lok Sabha elections, Newmai stated, "We're actively investigating the origins of these deceitful rumours. Perpetrators will face legal action as per the law."

The NPF has five seats in the 60-member Manipur Legislative Assembly while the BJP commands 32. (PTI)

## RPP demands ex-gratia for deceased IRB personnel's family

DIMAPUR, June 6: With regard to the unfortunate demise of three IRB personnel from Nagaland during election duty recently, the Rising People's Party (RPP) demanded that the state government releases ex-gratia payments within 10 days after the counting process.

According to the ECI directive, ex-gratia payment amounting to Rs. 15 lakhs per deceased personnel/polling officers etc., should be paid on or before June 14 by the state government, the RPP said in a statement on Thursday. The RPP then said that this amount will be reimbursed by the central government at a later date. It also said no expense is to be borne by the state government. The ECI directive specifically mentioned that the state government is free to make its own ex-gratia payment from the state exchequer.

"Whether the NDPP-BJP coalition will make its own ex-gratia payments - apart from the compulsory payment of Rs. 15 lakhs per personnel, remains to be seen," it added. Apart from the urgency to make the payments on or before June 14, the RPP urged the state government to provide employment to the relatives of the deceased. (NNN)

## Minor dies in fatal attack in Manipur

IMPHAL, June 6: An 11-year-old girl was killed during a fatal attack while she was on her way to school in Thoubal district in Manipur on Thursday morning. The victim has been identified as a class-VI student of the Ibechhal Visal Academy in Khongjom. She was a resident of Sapam Maning Leikai. The accused has been identified as Sapam Sarat (45) of the same locality.

According to sources, the incident occurred around 7.30 am when the accused waylaid the girl who was riding a bicycle to her school to appear for her midterm exam. Without any provocation, the accused hit the girl on her head with an iron rod several times before attempting to flee the spot immediately. The girl fell on the ground unconscious. (NNN)

## USTM observes commendation day for recruited students

Over 500 students placed in different organisations during campus recruitment drive in current academic session

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 6: The training and placement department of the University of Science and Technology Meghalaya (USTM) on Thursday celebrated a glorious chapter of placement of its students by felicitating more than 100 students.

About 500 students have been recruited by reputed organisations in the recent campus and off campus placement drives.

The event was graced by Anita Rao, entrepreneur, soft skills trainer and former assistant registrar of the Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati, Mahbubul Hoque, chancellor USTM, Padma Shri Sarbeswar Sahariah, pro vice-chancellor of USTM, RK Sharma, advisor of USTM, Biraj Kumar Sharma, principal of the upcoming PA Sangma International Medical College and Hospital and more than thousand students at the central auditorium of USTM.

The ceremony included the distribution of certificates to these students, recognizing their hard work and dedication that led to their securing prestigious job offers.

Addressing the proudly placed students, Padma Shri Sarbeswar Sahariah said, "This is a proud moment for all of us. This is just the beginning, we have a long way to go."



Chancellor M Hoque said that selecting a good organisation to work with is very important. He congratulated and encouraged the students asking them to keep in mind that when they join an organisation, they should not behave like an employee but as a family member to become successful.

Chief guest Anita Rao delivered an insightful speech telling the outgoing students about how they should prepare for the transition from a university graduate to a fresh

recruit in a workplace.

Welcoming the gathering, Nurmahmud Ali, director of training and placement division, USTM, said, "We have established robust connections across a wide range of industries, including FMCG, banking, insurance, IT, EdTech, pharmaceutical, automobile, manufacturing, healthcare, educational institutions, legal firms, NGOs, and many more. We have more than 150 recruiters."

He stated that more than 500 students

have been placed in the campus recruitment drive in this academic session. The highest salary package offered till now stands at 13.58 LPA by Federal Bank.

Sharing her feelings, USTM student Rakhee Ray, recruited by ITC said, "I am grateful to the training and placement division of USTM as the director himself contacted ITC Ltd. I had requested him to help me get my summer internship in ITC. Then I got recruited by ITC Ltd I did both my bachelor's and master's in USTM and it was a good experience overall."

Mofida Yasmin, MBA student, who got placed in SBI General and Bandhan Bank, shared her experience stating, "My experience at USTM was wonderful as I not only got the opportunity to study, but also exposure to the industry through internships, workshops, sessions etc. This support system helped me secure jobs in two companies."

Vikrant Sharma, a civil engineering student said, "The faculty members and the training and placement team helped shape my career journey. The immense support received from everyone at the University helped me secure a position at Indigi Consulting and Solutions Pvt. Ltd."



## Swearing over the weekend, possibly on Sunday NDA MPs may meet today to elect Modi as their leader



**NEW DELHI, June 6:** Newly elected MPs of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance are expected to meet on Friday to elect Narendra Modi as their leader, paving the way for him to take oath as prime minister for a third term.

Sources said after Modi's election as the leader of NDA MPs, senior members of the alliance like TDP's N Chandrababu Naidu and JD(U)'s Nitish Kumar will join the prime minister for a meeting with President Droupadi Murmu to

present her the list of parliamentarians supporting him.

He may be sworn in over the weekend, possibly Sunday, they added. The NDA has 293 MPs, comfortably above the majority mark of 272 in the 543-member Lok Sabha.

Senior BJP leaders, including Union ministers Amit Shah and Rajnath Singh, held deliberations through the day on Thursday as the party set in motion government formation efforts.

They met at BJP president J P Nadda's residence in what was seen as part of the party's exercise to reach out to allies over issues like their share of ministerial berths and pick the probables from within their party for the coalition government.

Preparing to take oath for a third straight term as the head of a coalition government, Modi had on Wednesday chaired a meeting of the ruling alliance's members who unanimously elected him as its

leader.

Leaders of the BJP's ally Janata Dal (United) also held deliberations with party president and Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar.

Though the regional party has not said anything officially on the issue, sources said it is looking to get some key ministerial berths to reclaim some of the lost ground in Bihar where it has performed well after being seen to have fallen way behind the BJP and the RJD over the last few years in political strength.

With 12 MPs, the JD(U) is the second biggest BJP ally after the Telugu Desam Party's 16. The new BJP-led government will depend critically on these two parties for survival.

BJP leaders are in touch with allies over ministerial berths and other issues.

Naidu is keen that the Centre provide Andhra Pradesh financial assistance in building its capital in Amravati. He also wants the new government to take steps to fulfil the Centre's commitment to the state when Telangana was carved out of it, sources said. (PTI)

## JD(U) hopeful of 'respectable' representation at Centre May demand up to 3 cabinet berths

**PATNA, June 6:** The JD(U), the support of which along with the TDP is crucial for the new NDA government, will likely make a bid for "up to three" cabinet berths, a senior leader of the Nitish Kumar-led party said on Thursday.

With 12 MPs, the JD(U) is the second biggest BJP ally after the Telugu Desam Party's 16, and leaders of the saffron party are in touch with allies over ministerial berths and other issues.

"We are now eyeing up to three cabinet berths..." the JD(U) leader said.

Another top party leader said it is hopeful of a "respectable" representation in the Union Council of Ministers.

"The matter of cabinet berths will be decided by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and our party chief Nitish Kumar ji. But, it should be respectable," Shrawan Kumar, JD(U) leader and Bihar Rural Development Minister, told PTI.

He also said the matter of representation in the Union cabinet should be decided keeping the 2025 Bihar assembly polls in mind.

In 2019, a "token representation" of just one berth had been turned down by Nitish Kumar.

JD(U) sources said the party is keen on portfolios such as railways, rural development, agriculture, water resources and heavy industries.

Among the frontrunners for ministerial berths in the party include its Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Jha, Rajiv Ranjan Singh 'Lalan', Kaushalendra Kumar, Rampriti Mandal and Lovely Anand, they said.

Earlier in the day, party leader K C Tyagi told re-



porters in New Delhi that it has demanded a review of the Agnipath scheme, and will "pursue" the caste census issue.

He also said his party's support to the BJP was "unconditional".

"There is no pre-condition, there is unconditional support. But it is in our mind and heart that Bihar should be given special status. After bifurcation, the situation Bihar has faced, it can not be corrected without granting it special status," Tyagi said.

The backing of allies like the JD(U) is crucial for the BJP, as it could not reach the majority mark on its own in the Lok Sabha election.

The BJP bagged 240 seats in the 543-member Lok Sabha, 32 short of an absolute majority, while the NDA secured 293 seats. (PTI)

## SP leadership hailed for INDIA bloc's performance in UP

**NEW DELHI, June 6:** Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Thursday thanked the Samajwadi Party leadership over the INDIA bloc's performance in the Lok Sabha elections in Uttar Pradesh, saying the two parties' workers unitedly fought the polls and became the sentinels of democracy.

The BJP-led NDA suffered a jolt in UP, where it won just 36 seats as against the INDIA bloc which bagged 43 -- a significant contribution to the overall tally of the opposition alliance.

In a post in Hindi on X, Priyanka Gandhi congratulated SP chief Akhilesh Yadav, his wife Dimple Yadav and SP Rajya Sabha MP Ram Gopal Yadav.

She also congratulated the "hard-working" workers of the SP for the results in UP.

"We all together fought a historic battle under difficult circumstances. On the ground, the workers of the Congress and the SP courageously raised their voice for the issues of the people, social justice and the Constitution. Despite all the threats and repression, they united and became the sentinels of democracy and stood at every booth," the Congress general secretary said.

"Due to the hard work of all of you, the public has shown confidence in our unity and our commitment towards the issues," Priyanka Gandhi said, and thanked the SP leaders and workers.

The Akhilesh Yadav-led SP, which leads the INDIA bloc in UP, alone got 37 seats this time, becoming the single largest party in the politically crucial state. The BJP managed to win 33 seats as against the 62 it had won in 2019. (PTI)

## 2024 election verdict against popular faces of BJP: CPIML leader

**NEW DELHI, June 6:** The Lok Sabha election mandate is against the BJP and its popular faces Narendra Modi, Amit Shah and Yogi Adityanath, CPIML leader Dipankar Bhattacharya has said.

In an interview with PTL, the CPI (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation (CPIML) general secretary also said though the results in Bihar were below the INDIA bloc's expectation, the state played an important role in setting a narrative centred around issues like employment, and caste census.

"I think the mandate has a very clear direction. It is against the Modi regime. It is against the BJP as a party, but more particularly I think it is against the known faces of the BJP," Bhattacharya said.

Targeting the BJP, he said the poll campaign was centred around Modi.

"In many places Modi went and said I am your PM. So, it's a mandate against Modi, Shah, and Adityanath in particular, especially if you look at the Uttar Pradesh results. I think this is the demand of the country that these people have lost the mandate in particular...there is no way that they should be at the helm of the government," he said.

Bhattacharya said the BJP was clueless during the elections, and none of their "jumlas" (rhetoric) worked.

"The BJP expected this election to be all about the Ram temple, and then they realised the Ram temple is just no longer an issue at all... They were absolutely clueless. No jumla worked," he said.



"The issues of livelihood, the issues of people's rights, liberties, the concern about the future of the Constitution, all these things came to the fore. So, there was a clear people's agenda in this election, and I think Bihar played a pioneering role in shaping this agenda," he asserted.

Asked about the opposition alliance's performance in Bihar, he said the INDIA bloc "underperformed", even as they increased their tally compared to 2019.

"My personal expectation was that we should advance from our 2020 performance (in the Bihar assembly election), which was close to a 50-50 kind of thing. So, I was hoping we would get more than 20 seats," he said.

"Looking back, I still feel it was perfectly possible... With a slightly better, more rational kind of allocation of seats in north Bihar, I think we could have done much better," he said.

The BJP and JD(U) won 12 seats each in Bihar, while NDA allies

too," he said.

The CPIML Liberation was represented earlier in Lok Sabha by Rameshwar Prasad who had won Arrah as a candidate of the Indian People's Front, which was the mass front of the CPIML between 1982 to 1994.

While it could not win Arrah again for over 30 years, Jayanta Rongpai won four times from the Autonomous District constituency of Assam between 1991 to 2004. He fought thrice as the candidate of the Autonomous State Demand Committee, and once as the candidate of CPIML.

Bhattacharya said the performance of the JD(U) was surprising, noting it continues to be popular among the extremely backward classes, and women.

Asked if he expected Nitish Kumar to push demands like caste census as a part of the NDA government, he said, "he should... Because he was taking credit for it".

He, however, said the most important thing for Kumar to realise was that the people's mandate was against Modi, Shah and Adityanath.

"So, these three people in particular cannot be at the helm of the government. So, if Nitish Kumar is part of this new arrangement, I think he should try and assist on this," he said.

"I would appreciate it if there is a non-BJP speaker, whether from JD(U) or from the TDP, but that will at least restore some semblance of decency and democracy within Parliament," he added. (PTI)

## TN BJP condemns public slaying of goat carrying Annamalai's photo



**CHENNAI, June 6:** The BJP's Tamil Nadu unit on Thursday responded strongly and demanded action after a video went viral in which some men are purportedly seen slaying a goat, around whose neck a photo of the party's state president K Annamalai is tied.

It was immediately not known where the purported incident happened or who had posted it. The veracity of the clip could not be ascertained immediately.

Responding, Annamalai said if the "DMK" workers were angry against him, they could as well come at him.

Tamil Nadu BJP vice-president and party spokesperson Narayanan Thirupathy uploaded the video on his social media platform X, condemning it.

The state BJP reposted it on its official X handle.

"Killing a goat in the middle of the road and shouting against @annamalai\_k and celebrating his (LS polls) defeat clearly shows that the political parties are afraid of the

growth of @BJP4India in Tamil Nadu, and exposes the lowest level of politics that the opposition political parties can stoop (to)," he said.

"Further, it can be heard on the video that small children were made to shout slogans against @annamalai\_k. Instigating hate and anger in children is highly condemnable and exposes the opposition's silly, filthy politics. We expect strict action and arrest of these criminals," Thirupathy added.

Annamalai, talking to reporters in Coimbatore, said "If the DMK workers are so angry with me, I am here in Coimbatore... The innocent goat could have been spared."

In the April 19 Lok Sabha polls in Tamil Nadu, the ruling DMK-led bloc won all 39 seats in the state as well as the lone neighbouring Puducherry segment. Annamalai, who led the BJP-led alliance in Tamil Nadu in a spirited fight, lost out to DMK's Ganapathy P Rajkumar in Coimbatore. (PTI)

## Congress accepts verdict of people in Odisha Assembly election: Ajoy Kumar

**BHUBANESWAR, June 6:** Senior Congress leader Ajoy Kumar on Thursday said the party has humbly accepted the verdict of the people of Odisha in the recently concluded assembly election.

The Congress won 14 seats in the 147-member Odisha Assembly.

"We humbly accept the verdict of the people of Odisha in the recently concluded election. But, we want to warn the people that they are going to lose their 'jal' (water), 'jungle' (forest) and 'pani' (water) as the BJP is set to form government in the state," Kumar told a press conference here.

He assured the people of Odisha that the Congress will fight inside and outside the assembly for next five years to protect the people of Odisha and their resources.

"Our 14 newly elected MLAs will fight like 140 MLAs and they will stand tall before the people of Odisha and protect them," Kumar said.

The Congress had won nine seats in the 2019 Odisha Assembly election.

The senior Congress leader alleged that the BJP will exploit the tribal land and natural resources of Odisha.

Commenting on the results of the Lok Sabha elections, the Congress leader said, "The people of



our country have shown BJP their place. The Congress has fought this election not only against the BJP but also against the central agencies like ED, CBI, IT, etc. If there would have been a level playing field for Congress, we would have got 400 seats in Lok Sabha polls."

Asked about the poor show of Congress in the Odisha assembly elections, Kumar said that many Congress candidates have been defeated in the election by small margins. All such leaders will be given responsibility in the organisation while action will be taken against the leaders who have sabotaged the party, he added. (PTI)

## UP public established ideal that real issues are paramount: Priyanka

**NEW DELHI, June 6:** Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Thursday hailed the people of Uttar Pradesh, saying they gave a solid message to the whole country of saving the Constitution and re-established the old ideal that public issues are paramount.

The BJP-led NDA suffered a jolt in Uttar Pradesh, where it won just 36 seats as against the INDIA bloc which bagged 43 -- a significant contribution to the overall tally of the opposition alliance. In a post in Hindi on X, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said, "My

salute to all my colleagues of UP Congress. I saw you working hard in the sun and dust, you did not bow down, you did not stop, you showed courage to fight in the toughest of times."

"Atrocities were committed against you, fake cases were filed against you, you were put in jail, you were repeatedly put under house arrest but you did not get scared. Many leaders left in fear, you stood firm," she said.

Gandhi further said she was proud of the vigilant people of Uttar Pradesh, who understood the depth and truth of this country and gave a

solid message to the whole of India of saving the Constitution. "You have re-established an old ideal in today's politics - that the issues of the people are paramount, the price of ignoring them is heavy," she said.

The election is of the people, the people fight it and the people win, Gandhi said.

The Akhilesh Yadav-led Samajwadi Party, which leads the INDIA bloc in Uttar Pradesh, alone got 37 seats this time, becoming the single largest party in the politically crucial state. The BJP managed to win just 33 seats. (PTI)

## Gandhi, Ambedkar, Shivaji statues shifted within Parliament premises

**NEW DELHI, June 6:** Statues of Mahatma Gandhi, B R Ambedkar and Chhatrapati Shivaji among others have been removed from their original place within the Parliament premises and shifted to a lawn near the old building as part of a landscaping exercise, a move that drew sharp criticism from the Congress on Thursday.

All the statues, including those of tribal leader Birsu Munda and Maharana Pratap, are now at the same place - the lawn between the old Parliament building and the Parliament library.

Reacting to the development, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said on X, "Statues of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, Mahatma Gandhi, and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar have just been removed from their places of prominence in front of the Parliament House. This

### Cong slams move



is atrocious."

Attacking the BJP, Congress's media and publicity department head Pawan Khera said when Maharashtra voters did not vote for BJP, the statues of Shivaji and Ambedkar were removed from their original place in Parliament.

When they did not get clean

sweep in Gujarat, they removed the statue of Mahatma Gandhi from its original place in Parliament, he said.

"Just think, if they had been given 400 seats, would they have spared the Constitution?" Khera said in a post in Hindi on X.

The Parliament premises will

support a new look when the 18th Lok Sabha convenes for its maiden session in June as work is underway to integrate the entire complex, comprising four different buildings.

As part of the redevelopment of external areas, the statues of national icons, including those of Gandhi, Shivaji and Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, were to be moved to a lawn near Gate No 5 of the old Parliament building, which has been named as Samvidhan Sadan.

This would pave the way for the creation of a vast lawn in front of the Gaja Dwar, which is used by the President and the Prime Minister to enter into the new Parliament building.

The lawn can also be used for official ceremonies such as the President's address to the joint sitting of Parliament, usually during the Budget Session. (PTI)

## Official notification handed over to Odisha Governor Process for govt formation begins

**BHUBANESWAR, June 6:** The process of the formation of a new government in Odisha began on Thursday with election officials presenting the gazette notification declaring the poll results to Governor Raghubar Das at Raj Bhavan here, an official said.

Odisha's chief electoral officer Nikunja Bihari Dhal presented the gazette notification to the governor. The notification was regarding the election of new members of the next assembly and it will pave the way for the formation of the House, he said. The governor's secretariat has intimated it to the state parliamentary department.

The CEO was accompanied by representatives of the Election Commission of India (ECI) and other senior officials. The ECI notification and Odisha gazette notification regarding the newly elected MLAs were handed over to the governor, the official said.

The Governor congratulated the ECI, the CEO and the entire election machinery in the state for conducting free, fair and peaceful elections. The development came after BJD supremo Naveen Patnaik resigned as the chief minister of Odisha, ending his 24-year rule.

The BJP crossed the majority mark in the 147-member assembly, winning 78 seats, while the BJD bagged 51 and the Congress 14. One CPI (M) candidate and three Independent nominees also emerged victorious. (PTI)



*Better than normal storage is found in Ganga, Brahmaputra, Narmada, and Sabarmati basins*

## Water levels drop nationwide, southern region hit hardest

**NEW DELHI, June 6:** The monitoring data from 150 main reservoirs revealed a total live storage of 39.765 billion cubic meters (BCM), which constitutes just 22 per cent of the total live storage capacity of these reservoirs, according to official data.

Last week, the total capacity was 23 per cent of the storage capacity of these reservoirs. As the temperature rose, a week-on-week decline has been seen in the reservoir level for the past three months.

The southern region continues to be hit hard at just 13 per cent capacity.

The region, including Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu, has 42 reservoirs with a total capacity of 53,334 BCM. The current storage is alarmingly low at 7,114 BCM (13 per cent), significantly down from last year's 23 per cent and the ten-year average of 19 per cent.

The Central Water Commission (CWC) released its weekly reservoir bulletin on Thursday, according to which there is a total live storage of 39.765 BCM, which constitutes just 22 per cent of the total live storage capacity of these reservoirs.

The total live storage capacity of the monitored reservoirs is 178.784 BCM, approximately



69.35 per cent of the nation's overall live storage capacity of 257.812 BCM.

This week's live storage stands at 79 per cent of the storage available during the corresponding period last year (50.549 BCM) and 93 per cent of the ten-year average (42.727 BCM).

In the northern region, including Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, and Rajasthan, the 10 reservoirs have a combined live storage capacity of 19,663 BCM. The current storage is 5,888 BCM (30 per cent of capacity), a drop from last year's 39 per cent and the ten-year average of 31 per cent.

In the eastern region, which includes Assam, Jharkhand, Odisha, and West Bengal, the 23 reservoirs monitored have a capacity of

20,430 BCM, with current storage at 5,035 BCM (24.6 per cent). This is an improvement over the last year's 21 per cent but slightly below the normal of 24.8 per cent.

The western region, encompassing Gujarat and Maharashtra, has 49 reservoirs with a total capacity of 37,130 BCM. They are currently at 8,359 BCM (23 per cent), down from 25 per cent last year but above the 21 per cent ten-year average.

In the central region, covering Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh, 26 reservoirs have a capacity of 48,227 BCM, with current storage at 13,369 BCM (27.7 per cent). This is less than the last year's 35 per cent and just below the normal of 27.9 per cent.

The bulletin also gave a detailed analysis, noting that better than normal storage is found in basins such as the Ganga, Brahmaputra, Narmada, and Sabarmati.

Close to normal storage is observed in the Indus, Godavari, and other rivers. Deficient storage is reported in the Mahanadi, Krishna, and Cauvery basins.

Highly deficient conditions prevail in the east flowing rivers between Pennar and Kanyakumari, and between Mahanadi and Pennar.

Out of the 150 reservoirs, 47 have more storage than the last year, while 59 have storage levels above the ten-year average.

Conversely, 19 reservoirs have storage levels less than or equal to 20 per cent compared to the last year, and 13 have storage levels less than or equal to 20 per cent of the ten-year average.

Additionally, 39 reservoirs have storage less than or equal to 50 per cent of the last year, and 28 have storage less than or equal to 50 per cent of the ten-year average.

Assam, Odisha, Jharkhand, and Gujarat showed better storage compared to the last year.

Conversely, states including Himachal Pradesh, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and several southern states are experiencing lower storage levels. (PTI)

**Why civic chief was not suspended for 'inaction'? : HC**

**Rajkot fire tragedy**

**AHMEDABAD, June 6:** The Gujarat High Court on Thursday came down heavily on the state government over the Rajkot game zone fire that killed 27 persons last month, and sought to know why the then chief of the local civic body was not suspended for not taking action against the facility that was being run without permission.

The high court expressed anger after learning that though a demolition notice was served to the TRP Game Zone, where the devastating fire took place on May 25, by the Rajkot Municipal Corporation (RMC) in June last year, no action was taken for one year against the facility by the civic body, whose commissioner was Anand Patel at that time.

A special bench of Justices Biren Vaishnav and Devan Desai of the high court was hearing a suo motu PIL it had taken up on May 26, a day after the fire accident at TRP Game Zone in Rajkot.

During a hearing held on Thursday, RMC's lawyer G H Virk, through an affidavit, informed the court that no periodic checks were carried out by the RMC's fire department at the TRP Game Zone and there was no compliance of the safety measures in accordance with the Fire Safety Act.

It was also revealed during the hearing that the game zone owners never applied for any fire NOC and the facility was running without any police permission, which is mandatory under section 33(w) of the Gujarat Police Act.

The court was also apprised of the RMC's Town Planning Department knew about the illegal structure and a notice for demolition was given in June 2023. Prior to that, a notice was also given in April 2023 to remove the unauthorised construction under the provisions of the Municipal Corporation Act.

"So you fired the Town Planning Officer. But why was the then municipal commissioner not suspended? The responsibility lies at the top. A demolition order was passed in June 2023. Then what happened after that? You rested in peace till 27 lives were lost. You did nothing for one year," said Justice Vaishnav.

He even asked why Indian Penal Code (IPC) section 302 (murder) should not be invoked against IAS officer Patel, who was the commissioner at the time of the incident and then transferred without a posting by the state government.

In the RMC's defence, Virk told the bench that Patel was unaware of the unauthorised structure because fire officers of the RMC never marked any communication regarding the game zone to Patel ever since it came up on a piece of land in 2021.

Advocate General Kamal Trivedi assured the bench that action will be taken once the state government-appointed Special Investigation Team (SIT) submits its final report. (PTI)

**SC asks Haryana to facilitate flow**

**Delhi to get 137 cusecs surplus water from HP**

**NEW DELHI, June 6:** The acute shortage of drinking water has become an "existential problem" in Delhi, the Supreme Court observed on Thursday and directed the Himachal Pradesh government to release 137 cusecs of surplus water to the national capital on Friday and Haryana to facilitate its flow.

The apex court also said there should be no politics over water.

A vacation bench of Justices P K Mishra and K V Viswanathan noted that the Himachal Pradesh government is willing to release 137 cusecs of surplus water available with it for Delhi.

One cusec (cubic foot per second) is equal to 28.317 litres of liquid flow every second.

"Since Himachal Pradesh has no objection and is ready and willing to release the surplus water available with it, we direct that Himachal Pradesh shall release 137 cusecs of surplus water available with it from the upstream so that the water reaches Hathnikund barrage and reaches Delhi through Wazirabad," the bench said.

Considering the urgency in the matter, the bench directed Himachal Pradesh to release the water on June 7 with prior intimation to Haryana.

It said the Upper Yamuna River Board (UYRB) shall measure the excess water which comes to Hathnikund for its onward supply to Wazirabad and Delhi.

"As and when the surplus water is released with prior intimation to Haryana by the state of Himachal Pradesh, the state of Haryana shall facilitate the flow of surplus water so released by Himachal Pradesh to Hathnikund and to Wazirabad so that it reaches Delhi uninterrupted and is made available for the citizens of Delhi for drinking water," the bench ordered.

"A status report be submitted before this court on Monday (June 10)," it said.

It also asked the Delhi government to ensure water received for the parched national capital is not wasted.

The apex court said the Delhi government and the respondents, including Haryana and Himachal Pradesh, shall file their compliance affidavits by Monday.

The bench, which was hearing a plea filed by the Delhi government seeking a direction to Haryana to release the surplus water provided by Himachal Pradesh to the national capital to mitigate its ongoing water crisis, posted the matter for further hearing on June 10.

While hearing the matter on June 3, the apex court had asked for an emergent meeting of the UYRB on June 5 to address the issue.

The UYRB was set up in 1995 as one of its main functions being to regulate the allocation of available flows amongst the beneficiary states and also monitor and review the progress of all projects up to and including Okhla barrage in Delhi. The beneficiary states include Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi.

During the hearing on Thursday, the bench observed that a meeting was convened on June 5 and issues concerning water crisis faced by Delhi were discussed.

"The above discussions recorded by the board would clearly reveal that the members/stake holders participating in the meeting have not contradicted or disputed that there are extraordinary heat wave conditions in Delhi which is facing acute shortage of drinking water," the bench noted.

It said though the board recorded that Haryana was also facing similar heat wave conditions, there was no material before the court that there was acute drinking water crisis in Haryana. (PTI)

## Ghatkopar hoarding was installed on weak foundation: Report

**Billboard collapsed in Ghatkopar could withstand a wind speed of only 49 kmph**

**MUMBAI, June 6:** A hoarding that collapsed in Mumbai last month claiming 17 lives was installed on a weak foundation, as per a report submitted by a technological institute to police, officials said on Thursday.

While ideally any hoarding structure in the city should be able to withstand wind speeds of 158 kilometres per hour, the billboard that collapsed in Ghatkopar could withstand a wind speed of only 49 kmph, according to the report submitted on Wednesday.

On the day of the incident, the wind speed was 87 kmph, an official said.

As many as 17 persons died and 74 others were injured after the illegal hoarding, measuring 120 feet x 120 feet in size, crashed onto a nearby petrol pump during a dust storm and unseasonal rains here on May 13, as per officials.

After the tragedy, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) asked the Veermata Jijabai Technological Institute (VJTI) to find out reasons behind the hoarding crash.

The institute on Wednesday sub-



mitted the report to the Mumbai crime branch, which is probing the hoarding collapse incident, a senior police official said.

"The hoarding was installed on an inadequate and a weak foundation," the official said citing the report. Technical experts of VJTI had collected samples of the foundation and piling of the structure after the incident, he said.

"Considering the withstand capability of the hoarding, it establishes that it was deliberate negligence on part of the persons concerned (accused) and not an act

of God," the official told PTI. Bhavesh Bhide, director of an advertising firm which had installed the hoarding, was arrested after the incident.

The accused had opposed his arrest saying the high velocity of the wind that led to the hoarding collapse was an "act of God" and was not in his control.

A Special Investigation Team (SIT), probing the hoarding collapse, had arrested Bhide and structural engineer Manoj Sanghu, empanelled by the BMC, who had given a stability certificate to the

**'Kejriwal not suffering from life-threatening ailment'**

**Court takes note of extensive campaign**

**NEW DELHI, June 6:** The extensive campaigning tours and related events undertaken by Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal indicate that he does not appear to be suffering from any serious or "life threatening" ailment, a Delhi court has held while denying him interim bail.

In yet another setback to Kejriwal, the court on Wednesday dismissed his application for interim bail on medical grounds in the money laundering case linked to the alleged excise policy scam, as reported by the PTI.

"The extensive campaigning tours and related meetings/events undertaken by Arvind Kejriwal as highlighted during the course of arguments indicate that he does not appear to be suffering from any serious or 'life threatening' ailment so as to entitle him to the benefit," Special Judge Kavari Baweja said.

The judge also extended Kejriwal's judicial custody till June 19.

The court is scheduled to take up on June 7 his application seeking default bail in the case.

In the order, the judge further held that grant of interim bail for conducting tests in order to determine if high ketone levels or the stated weight loss could have caused Diabetic Ketoacidosis "stands on an even weaker footing than a medical ground".

"Apparently, as per the Applicant himself, he seeks interim bail for 'diagnosis' of an anticipated ailment which, cannot be said to be a valid ground for the relief prayed for, particularly when this concern can be addressed while the Applicant is in custody... There appears to be no reason as to why such diagnostic tests of the Applicant cannot be got conducted while he is in custody," the judge said.

The judge, however, directed the Tihar jail authorities to take care of his medical needs in judicial custody.

"Since the health concerns of the

accused must be addressed immediately, the Medical Board of AIIMS, which was directed to be constituted vide order dated April 22, 2024 of this court, is hereby directed to be revived and/or re-constituted, if deemed fit by the Director, AIIMS, New Delhi, having regard to the nature of ailments the Applicant is stated to be suffering from," the judge said.

The Medical Board shall, besides complying with the earlier order dated April 22, also examine the applicant and prescribe such diagnostic tests as deemed appropriate within three days, the judge said.

"The jail authorities shall ensure that the prescribed recommended tests/evaluations of the applicant are conducted without any delay. Upon receipt of the Test Reports, the Medical Board shall prescribe the further necessary treatment as may be required and the Jail Authorities shall ensure that the treatment so prescribed by the Medical Board is provided to the Applicant forthwith, under intimation to this court," the judge said.

During the hearing on Saturday, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) had opposed the application, saying he campaigned throughout the Lok Sabha elections but "now when he has to surrender, he suddenly claims to be ill".

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener surrendered on Sunday at the Tihar jail as the tenure of his interim bail granted by the Supreme Court expired on June 1.

The case relates to alleged corruption and money laundering in the formulation and execution of the Delhi government's now-scrapped excise policy for 2021-22.

The judge had observed that the application was for the grant of interim bail on medical grounds and not for the extension of the interim bail granted by the Supreme Court. (PTI)

**Kangana Ranaut allegedly slapped by CISF constable**



**CHANDIGARH, June 6:** Newly-elected BJP MP Kangana Ranaut on Thursday was allegedly slapped by a CISF woman constable at the Chandigarh airport when she was on her way to Delhi.

The constable has been suspended and an FIR lodged against her, officials said.

The Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) constable allegedly assaulted Kangana while frisking her at the airport before she boarded her flight.

"Kangana was slapped," one of the actor's aides claimed.

"From what it appears, she was slapped for the Khalistani comments she made during the farmers' agitation but we do not know the whole incident yet," the aide said. Kangana was elected to Lok Sabha from Mandi constituency in Himachal Pradesh where she defeated her nearest Congress rival by over 74,000 votes. (PTI)

### ADVERTISEMENT

Applications are hereby invited from intending candidates for vacant post of Amtereng Karbi Langpi High School (Amtereng) West Karbi Anglong with self attested photo copies of all educational certificates, caste certificate and other relevant documents.

**No. of post: 1**

**Name of the post: General B Sc. (Bio) P.C.B.**

**Salary: Salary as per KAAC grant-in-aid rules.**

**Note: Medium of the institution is Assamese.**

**Terms and condition**

1. Last date of application submission 14/06/2024

2. Date of interview : 19/06/2024

**For more queries contact –  
Headmistress – 76359-16628  
President – 94359-47178.**

Sd/-  
Headmistress  
Amtereng Karbi Langpi High School,  
Amtereng, West Karbi Anglong.

### Teacher Required

Applications are hereby invited from intending candidates for vacant post in Chinthong High School (Kungripi), West Karbi Anglong with self attested photo copies of all educational certificates, caste certificate and other relevant documents.

**Number of posts: 1**

**Name of the post: General B.Sc. (Bio) P.C.B.**

**Qualification: B Sc. Passed**

**Salary: As per KAAC grant-in-aid rules.**

**Terms and condition**

1. Last date of application submission is on 15-06-2024

2. Date of interview is on 20-06-2024 (from 10.30 a.m.)

Sd/-  
Headmaster  
Chinthong High School (Kungripi)  
Amtereng, West Karbi Anglong  
Contact No. 94015-89177.

### NAME CORRECTION

I, Safia Khatun of the below mentioned address do hereby solemnly affirm and declare that I am a permanent resident of above noted address and citizen of India by birth.

That my son's actual and correct name is Sohail Tanveer Hayat.

That my son's name has been wrongly recorded in his Birth certificate vide Regd. No. B-2020: 18-01046-000125 dtd.09-01-2020 issued by Registrar Birth & Death Kharupetia Primary Health Centre as Seif Al Din in place of Sohail Tanveer Hayat. That through this affidavit I intend to rectify my son's name in the aforesaid Birth Certificate as Sohail Tanveer Hayat in place of Seif Al Din.

Sd/-  
Safia Khatun  
W/O-Jainal Abdin,  
R/O-Vill. No.5 Barujahar,  
P.O- P.S- Dalgaoan,  
Dist. Darrang (Assam)

**SUPPLY AND FILLING OF SAND IN BG LOCOMOTIVE**

E-Tender Notice No. Sr. DEE/LMG/10 of 2024-25; dated: 05-06-2024. E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: SN.1; Tender No: EL/LMG/23-24/OP/14-RT; Name of work: Supply and filling of sand in BG Locomotive at Lumding Station and New Guwahati Yard for a period of 03 years (1995 days). Tender Value: ₹46,20,240/-; Earnest Money: ₹92,400/-; E-tender will be closed at 11:00 hrs. on 27-06-2024 and Opened at 11:30 hrs. on 27-06-2024. The complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available upto 11:00 hrs. on 27-06-2024 on website <http://www.irps.gov.in>. Sr. DEE/G&Op, Lumding

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NEW DELHI, June 6:

One can't change the past, only celebrate it because of their choices and actor Mona Singh says she is just grateful for her career of 20 years, a journey she started with the superhit TV show "Jassi Jaissi Koi Nahin", for giving her "these beautiful glory days".

That three of her web series Prime Video's "Made in Heaven" season two, "Kaala Paani" on Netflix, and SonyLIV's "Kafas" released to acclaim last year when she completed two decades in the industry made the milestone year "extra special".

Singh, who also has films such as "3 Idiots", "Laal Singh Chaddha", and the upcoming "Munjya" to her credit, said she is happy to play characters with different shades across mediums.

"The next step is always forward, the past is gone. You can't change it, you can celebrate it because of the choices that you have made. I'm very happy these 20 years in this industry have been so fruitful. The industry has been so giving and accepting. I love the fact I am still around and I'm now

exploring OTT and films.

"All the releases that I had last year just made 2023 extra special. All three were loved and what was even better was that all characters were so different from one another. I'm just so grateful about these beautiful glory days that I'm witnessing. It is true that good things come to those who wait," Singh told PTI in an interview.

She's now having fun exploring the horror comedy genre with "Munjya", a film set in Pune and the Konkan region, directed by Aditya Sarpotdar.

"I am so happy about the fact that I'm getting to explore all different genres as an actor. This was a first for me and we shot in some very beautiful, pristine locations in the Konkan region. The script is amazing and so funny."

Rooted in Marathi folklore, "Munjya" follows the story of the eponymous mythical creature and how he wreaks havoc in the life of Bittu, played by Abhay Verma of "The Family Man" fame.

In the film, Singh plays Pummy, a single working mother who is overly protec-

tive of Bittu.

The 42-year-old said she and Sarpotdar worked closely to add "more layers" to her character in "Munjya", which she described as a "sweet, family story".

"She runs a salon, she's independent, fierce, and very possessive about her son. She doesn't want her son to go out and explore the world because she is possessive about him as a single mother."

Singh became one of the favourite faces on Indian television during heyday as the nerdy, dependable and erudite Jasmeet Walia aka Jassi in the early 2000s.

She has fond memories of the show and also remembers feeling scared before her onscreen "makeover" in the much loved Sony TV show.

The Chandigarh-born actor said even her fans were "shocked" when her bespectacled Jassi got contact lenses and her braces and fringes went away. She was, however, happy that the makeover was shot organically. (PTI)

## Love the fact I am still around: actor Mona Singh on her 20-year journey



*'Bunty aur Babli 2' opened many doors for me, says Sharvari*

MUMBAI, June 6: "Bunty Aur Babli 2" may have failed at the box office but actor Sharvari credits her debut film for opening many doors in the industry.

The actor, who will be seen next in Aditya Sarpotdar's horror comedy "Munjya", has fond memories of working on the 2021 debut which featured Rani Mukerji and Saif Ali Khan. The film was a sequel to Yash Raj Films' "Bunty Aur Babli" in 2005, originally starring Mukerji and Abhishek Bachchan.

"That film opened so many doors for me. People in the industry didn't know me before this. They didn't know who Sharvari was. You cannot term anything as a failure if you're getting work from that. I have been getting work from my first film. I will always be grateful to it, no matter what it did at the box office. I just want more work," Sharvari told PTI in an interview.

The actor, who will now be a part of YRF's upcoming spy univwith Alia Bhatt said both success and failures are great teachers.

"I don't come from a film background. For me, the dream was to get my first film and it's always like that. This (Munjya) is my second film. There's always a dream for a third film a fourth film. But to get that first film when you're not from this industry means the world," Sharvari said. (PTI)

*'Gullak' actor Jameel Khan says he is keen to play a negative role*

MUMBAI, June 6: Actor Jameel Khan, who plays the family patriarch of the Mishra family in "Gullak", hopes that his popular performance does not stereotype into playing father roles.

Khan most recently earned praise for his portrayal of APJ Abdul Kalam in Rajkumar Rao-starrer biopic "Srikanth". He is now keen to explore characters that are different from Santosh Mishra of "Gullak".

"I would like to play any role, small, big, or medium, whatever gives me creative satisfaction and has a lot of meat or shades, and is not unidimensional. That's my wish, and one will get to see me play such characters in my future projects," Khan told PTI in an interview. (PTI)



## Kabir Khan, Kartik Aaryan on conversation over star fee, overhead costs: It's a healthy discussion

NEW DELHI, June 6:

There is and should be a healthy discussion around controlling a film's budget, according to "Chandu Champion" actor-director Kartik Aaryan and Kabir Khan, who believe the debate about the rising star fee and overhead costs is going in the right direction. With back-to-back poor performances of big movies, there is a lot of chatter in Hindi cinema around the remuneration taken by some of the big stars whose entourage also costs money to producers. Aaryan, one of the top stars in the industry today, said a film's mathematics should add up at the end of the day. "There are so many rights of a film when it releases. So you get an 'x'

amount of money out of it. If your star value and the entire project's value gives profit to the entire team, I think then the math adds up. If it doesn't, then you have to, you should take a cut... It's a healthy discussion," Aaryan told PTI in an interview here.

Khan, known for directing big budget blockbusters such as "Ek Tha Tiger" and "Bajrangi Bhaijaan", both starring Salman Khan, said this discussion has been prompted by the shift in industry dynamics after the pandemic.

"It's a healthy debate and it's getting a positive response from actors, directors, and producers. The audiences, their viewing patterns changed, their habit

of coming to theatres got diminished. So there was this whole debate about that if that's diminishing, what are the other avenues where we can earn money from?"

"OTT stepped in as another large part of the revenue. But what happens is that at whatever point, the industry faces a little tough time and sees that maybe the recovery is not happening the way it used to, obviously there will be an attempt to control the budgets," the filmmaker told PTI.

"I feel the same way. I've been all-in in all my films. My whole thing is that mathematics has to add up. That's the main thing. That's also what sir was saying," Aaryan echoed. (PTI)

## To be an actor living in these times truly a great joy: Lee Jung Jae on 'The Acolyte', 'Squid Game'

NEW DELHI, June 6: South Korean superstar Lee Jung Jae, known globally for his role in the Netflix hit "Squid Game" and now "Star Wars: The Acolyte", says it's a joy to be an actor in the age of social media as he gets to interact with audiences in real time from around the world.

Lee said the world has changed a lot since his debut in the 1990s. He started out as a model and ventured into acting with TV drama "Sandglass". He got his breakthrough with the 1998 movie "An Affair".

"Squid Game", which premiered in 2021 and became an instant global phenomenon, is a gift that keeps on giving for the 51-year-old, who is now travelling to the galaxy far, far away with "The Acolyte", streaming on Disney+ Hotstar in India.

"For actors, a huge joy is how the world has changed and from country to country, it feels so much closer now. We have so many new types of media and social networks which allow us to feel close to our fans, even though we may be far away physically. I think to be an actor living in these times is truly a great joy," Lee told PTI in an Zoom interview via an interpreter from Seoul.

"If I think of the early '90s when I first started out as an actor, I don't think I ever felt that close to my fans. Now, I get to share my joy in real time

in a very close way with my fans. The world has changed so much... That we have this one series that we worked on and through that I get to meet so many audiences around the world, gives me a lot of happiness," he added.

Lee, whose films such as "The Housemaid" and "Hunt" (his directorial debut), have travelled to the Cannes Film Festival over the years, has also featured in popular Korean drama "Chief of Staff".

But it was "Squid Game" that earned him international popularity, acclaim and accolades. In the Netflix survival thriller, the actor starred as the main protagonist Seong Gi Hun, a down-on-his-luck gambler who gets recruited to be part of a deadly competition. The series brought him awards such as a Primetime Emmy Award, a Screen Actors Guild Award, and a Critics' Choice Television Award.

"The Acolyte" creator Leslye Headland has spoken about how she found Lee to be perfect for the series while watching "Squid Game".

In his new show, Lee plays Sol, a respected Jedi master, who must investigate a shocking crime spree which pits him against a dangerous warrior from his past (played by Amanda Stenberg). As more clues emerge, they travel down a dark path where sinister forces reveal all is not what it seems.

Playing a Jedi master, a rank given

to prominent leaders and scholars in the "Star Wars" universe, was a lot of fun and a great experience for Lee.

"Being an actor is sometimes not easy but it has some great benefits and one of them is that I get to play so many characters and by doing that, I get to study many real life people and indirectly experience life in their shoes."

"Having the experience of playing a Jedi master in the 'Star Wars' universe is one of them. I had a lot of fun while preparing for the character and while working on the show and now (talking to journalists) through these interviews," he added.

Besides Lee and Stenberg, "The Acolyte" stars Manny Jacinto, Dafne Keen, Charlie Barnett, Jodie Turner-Smith, Rebecca Henderson, Dean-Charles Chapman, Joonas Suotamo, and Carrie-Anne Moss.

Headland directed the first two episodes while director Kogonada took on the responsibility for episodes three and seven. The fourth and fifth episodes were helmed by Alex Garcia Lopez, with the sixth and the eighth episodes were directed by Hanelle Culpepper.

Award-winning composer Michael Abels, known for his work on "Get Out" and "Us", scored "The Acolyte". (PTI)

## Anil Kapoor to host 'Bigg Boss OTT3' on JioCinema

NEW DELHI, June 6: "Bigg Boss OTT3" will premiere on JioCinema Premium from June 21 with actor Anil Kapoor as the new host. Kapoor, who famously played a reality show host in Danny Boyle's Oscar-winning film "Slumdog Millionaire", said he cannot wait to bring his flavour to the unscripted reality show that features contestants living isolated from society for a period of time with cameras watching their every move. "Bigg Boss OTT" and I are a dream team! We're both young at heart; people often say, jokingly, that I'm reverse ageing, but Bigg Boss is seriously timeless. It feels a bit like going back to school, trying something new and exciting. Having said that, I've always approached all my projects with sincerity and a commitment to hard work and I'm going to bring that same energy to Bigg Boss," Kapoor said in a statement. (PTI)





# It certainly is about mindset: Ponting on talent-rich India's global trophy drought

**NEW DELHI, June 6:** The all-conquering Australia under Ricky Ponting's leadership knew the art of peaking at the right time in global events and the two-time World Cup-winning captain reckons India will need to do the same besides overcoming some mental demons to win an elusive ICC trophy. Cricket's powerhouse India, who last won an ICC trophy in 2013, began their T20 World Cup campaign on an emphatic note in New York on Wednesday, beating Ireland by eight wickets.

Speaking to PTI from New York, the 49-year-old Australian great said India are well-placed to end their barren

run in ICC events and need to find a way to deal with the enormous pressure that comes with representing a cricket-crazy nation.

"You've got to try and keep a clear mind where you can focus on the task at hand rather than thinking too far ahead or worrying about any sort of external pressures," said Ponting. "There's no doubting the talent (in India squad), but we also shouldn't forget that the World Cups are not easy to win. There are all the best players in the world together at one time in different contrasting conditions.

"So look there's definitely a

mindset thing to it. How you deal with pressure, how you cope with pressure, how you think your way through certain situations is the difference between winning and losing a T20 game," said Ponting, who led Australia to ODI World Cup titles in 2003 and 2007 besides winning the trophy as a player in 1999.

Ponting stressed on the importance of raising the game in the back half of the tournament. "...one thing you know about World Cups, you have to have your best players playing well at the right time. Australian teams are playing their best cricket right at the back half of the tournament and



peaking again at the right time in a major event," he said.

Six months ago, Australia peaked at the right time to lift

the ODI World Cup trophy under Pat Cummins' captaincy. The Rohit Sharma-led India are among Ponting's top four

teams in the ongoing showpiece as they have all bases covered. Opening with Virat Kohli, which was the case against Ireland, is a no brainer for Ponting and he would also want to see more of Kuldeep Yadav, who was not picked for the opening game.

India may not have the power-hitters that Australia, England and South Africa possess but Ponting believes they have enough for the conditions in the Caribbean where the knockouts will be held.

"I mean, it's not so much about power hitting, it's about strike rates as well," he said when asked if India did not match up to rival teams in the

striking department.

"If you look at the strike rates of the Indian batters, they'd probably match up pretty well against players from other countries. I know Australia will have Marsh and Stoinis and Maxwell and Cameron Green and these sort of guys in the middle order there, and South Africa will have Stubbs, Klassen and David Miller.

"So they have got a lot of power, but then you look at the Indian lineup, Surya, although he's not an out and out power player, his strike rate and his scoring ability all around the grounds is as good as anybody in world cricket. (PTI)

## Tireless Mbappé leads France to 3-0 win over Luxembourg; Spain, Belgium, Denmark also win

**METZ, (FRANCE), June 6:** Kylian Mbappé scored late in his first game since joining Real Madrid to help France build momentum for the European Championship with a dominant 3-0 win over Luxembourg on Wednesday.

Mbappé, whose Madrid move was finally confirmed Monday, was a constant threat for Luxembourg's hard-working defenders, but the France captain had to wait until the 85th minute before he could crown his performance with a goal.

Bradley Barcola made his France debut as a substitute and promptly won the ball, ran to the penalty and drew in more defenders before laying the ball off for Mbappé to tuck inside the left post.

In Copenhagen, Christian Eriksen scored late to give Denmark a 2-1 win over Sweden.

Mikel Oyarzabal scored a hat trick after the break to help Spain rout Andorra 5-0.

Belgium earned a 2-0 win over Montenegro with Kevin De Bruyne scoring on his 100th appearance for the Red Devils. But a host of halftime changes almost cost the team. Leandro Trossard only sealed the win with a penalty in stoppage time.

Slovakia, Belgium's Group E opponent at the Euros, enjoyed a 4-0 win over minnow San Marino.



Though France's star-studded team found it tough at times to break through Luxembourg's defense, coach Didier Deschamps will have been impressed with his team's relentless pressure and off-the-ball play.

Only the final touch was missing at times, but Deschamps has a chance to fine-tune the side in its

final tournament warmup against Canada in Bordeaux on Sunday.

Antoine Griezmann was back after missing the March internationals with an ankle injury. Randal Kolo Muani made a rare start with Ousmane Dembélé unavailable through illness.

France probed and harried but had to wait nearly the whole of the

first half for the opener. Mbappé drew two defenders to the end line and crossed for Kolo Muani to head past Anthony Moris in the 43rd minute.

Marseille defender Jonathan Clauss finally made it 2-0 with a strike in off the underside of the crossbar.

Les Bleus are in Group D with

the Netherlands, Poland and Austria.

Christian Eriksen sealed Denmark's 2-1 win over neighbor Sweden with a long-range strike in the same stadium where he collapsed after a cardiac arrest at Euro 2020.

The 32-year-old Eriksen, who had been tormenting the Swedish defense throughout, took the ball past a defender and then unleashed a fierce shot inside the far post in the 86th. It was his 41st goal in his 129th appearance for Denmark.

Morten Hjulmand likely preserved the win by getting back with a timely challenge to deny Emil Holm when it seemed the Sweden substitute would score.

Pierre-Emile Höjbjerg scored in the second minute to get Denmark off to a great start, but Alexander Isak leveled seven minutes later.

Sweden missed out on Euro 2024 qualification, while Denmark is in Group C with England, Serbia and Slovenia.

The Danes' final warm-up will be against Norway on Saturday.

Erling Haaland scored a hat trick to give Norway a 3-0 win over Kosovo. Neither country has qualified for Euro 2024.

Once Real Betis forward Ayoze Pérez opened the scoring, it was only a matter of how many goals Spain would score against Andorra. (AP)

## Tall order for Praggnanandhaa as he takes on Caruana in penultimate round

**STAVANGER (NORWAY) June 6:** Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa will take on Fabiano Caruana of the United States in the ninth and penultimate round of Norway chess tournament now underway here.

It's been an event of ups and downs for the Indian super-talent as he won two games under Classical and two matches under Armageddon to reach the third spot with just two rounds to come.

The highlight has been his two victories in Classical over world No. 1 Magnus Carlsen of Norway and No. 2 Caruana earlier in the tournament and the downside has been three losses under Armageddon.

Carlsen, on 14.5 points, leads the fray with three victories in the Classical and he is followed by American Hikaru Nakamura who is a full point behind. Praggnanandhaa, on 12 points, is third in the standings ahead of Firouzja Alireza of France who has 11 points. Caruana, on nine points, is the next in standings ahead of World champion Ding Liren of China, who seems poised to finish last.

While it looks like a direct contest between Carlsen and Nakamura for the top spot, Praggnanandhaa would like to hold on to his new status of world No. 10 that he achieved with some handy rating gains thus far.

In the final round, post his game against Caruana, Praggnanandhaa is set to meet Naka-

mura and two draws will likely attest his place in the top-10 world rankings.

Carlsen has to meet Alireza in the next round followed by Caruana in the finale, and the only person who can overtake him is Nakamura who still has a terribly off-form Ding Liren of China in the next round as white.

In the women's section, Wenjun Ju is ahead on 14.5 points and has a 1.5 points lead over Anna Muzychuk of Ukraine. R Vaishali and Tingjie Lei of China share the third spot on 11.5 points apiece. Koneru Humpy is a distant fifth on 8.5, having a 2.5 points lead over last placed Pia Cramling of Sweden.

In the penultimate round, Vaishali will take on Lei as black, while Humpy has the white pieces against Ju. Muzychuk meets veteran Cramling who has done recently being 61 years.

Things are unlikely to change much in this section unless Humpy can find her magical touch and beat Wenjun in the \$1.61,000 prize-money event.

Pairings (Round 9): Fabiano Caruana (Usa, 9) vs R Praggnanandhaa (Ind, 12); Firouzja Alireza (Fra, 11) vs Magnus Carlsen (Nor, 14.5); Hikaru Nakamura (Usa, 13.4) vs Ding Liren (Chn, 4.5).

Women: Tingjie Lei (Chn, 11.5) vs R Vaishali (Ind, 11.5); Koneru Humpy (Ind, 8) vs Wenjun Ju (Chn, 14.5); Pia Cramling (Swe, 5.5) vs Anna Muzychuk (Ukr, 13). (PTI)



## You are a legend of this game, Croatia's Luka Modric hails Sunil Chhetri

**KOLKATA, June 6:** Croatia captain and Real Madrid superstar Luka Modric hailed India skipper Sunil Chhetri, who is set to bring curtains to his stellar career with a match against Kuwait here on Thursday, as a "legend of the game" while urging his teammates to make his final game "unforgettable".

Chhetri will make his final appearance for India on the international stage when he takes the field in the FIFA World Cup Qualifying clash against Kuwait to be played here at the Salt Lake Stadium.

In a video message shared by Indian team's coach Igor Stimac, Modric said, "Hi Sunil, I just want to say hello and wish you all the best in your last game for the national team."

"Congratulations on your career, you are a legend of this game and to your teammates. I hope you make his last game special and unforgettable," said Modric, the 2018 Ballon d'Or winner.

"Good luck and win for your captain. All the best and best re-

gards from Croatia," said Modric who finished runner-up in the 2018 World Cup and grabbed the bronze medal in 2022. Stimac thanked Modric for the warm gesture.

"Thank you Luka. We will do everything in our power to make our country and our captain proud." With 94 goals so far, the 39-year-old Chhetri is set to retire as the fourth highest in the all-time list of goal-scorers in international football behind Cristiano Ronaldo (128), Ali Daei (108) and Lionel Messi (106). (PTI)



## Made every effort to pitch ball on scrambled seam but it was swinging so much: Arshdeep

**NEW YORK, June 6:** Pacer Arshdeep Singh said he only focussed on sticking with his plan even as controlling the ball on the drop-in pitch in cloudy conditions was a big task for India quicks in their eight-wicket win against Ireland, in their T20 World Cup opener here.

Though India had an easy outing at the Nassau Country Stadium on Wednesday, dismissing Ireland for 96 in 16 overs and overhauling the target in 12.2 overs, Arshdeep conceded that controlling the swing was an onerous task and he banked on team-mate Jasprit Bumrah's advice to overcome the issue.

"I made every effort to pitch the ball on the scrambled seam but the ball was swinging so much that it was hard to get it on the scrambled seam. Yes, there were a lot of wides from me," conceded the left-arter, who bowled five wides but also took the prized wickets of openers Andy Balberine and skipper Paul Stirling in the

third over.

"Jassi bhai (Bumrah), with his loads of experience, keeps telling us not to go after wicket. Just keep it simple, keep bowling in the right areas and whatever result comes it's good... whether you are able to stop the flow of runs or get wickets," said Arshdeep during the post-match press conference.

"Control means one should not get greedy, not to go after getting wickets. It was cloudy and the ball was swinging. At the start, the plan was to take advantage of that by bowling in the right areas and if they (Ireland) take risks then fine, but it will also give us better a chance to take wickets," the left-arter said.

"The plan was to keep it simple and aim straight for the wicket to get more LBWs, clean bowled and caught-behind decisions, keep all the options open. And, if they go for a big slog or try going down the wicket, then it's okay, but yeah we will keep



bowling the same way." With the pitch here becoming a hot topic of debate because of below-par scores, Arshdeep said for a bowler like him, he would rather focus on his process rather than look at the scoreboard.

"I guess, as bowlers, we back ourselves to defend anything and we make every effort to ensure whatever be the score that is our par score. (We) follow the

process and not look too much at the scoreboard."

"I have come here after playing the IPL, where 240 were par scores. When we talk about pitches, the main focus is what we can control because the pitch is the same for both teams. So, whichever team applies better and bowls better lengths will get better results." Arshdeep also denied there

were talks in the dressing room regarding not going all out in the outfield in order to avoid injuries.

"No, nothing of this sort has been talked about. When the competition is on, you don't think what sort of conditions there are. If there is a catch to be taken, you have to put your body on the line. We don't think too much on those lines. The effort is to put as much preparation as possible, and that is what gives success."

The lanky pacer said the team would approach the match against Pakistan here on Sunday in the same manner.

"It's the same. Any team that is in front of you nothing changes. Our process remains the same, length will remain the same. As far as planning goes, we have to see what batter plays well in which position. It doesn't matter what team is playing against you, we only think how best we can perform and give our best," he said. (PTI)

**BRIDGETOWN (BARBADOS), June 6:** Australia all-

rounder Marcus Stoinis on Thursday said low scores and slow pitches seem to be "the theme" of the ongoing T20 World Cup but he is hopeful that wickets will improve as the tournament progresses.

Australia defeated Oman in their tournament-opener here by 39 runs after posting a relatively high score, by tournament standards so far, of 164/5 with Stoinis smacking a 36-ball 67 and grabbing three wickets to be the player of the match.

Speaking to the media in the post-game press conference, Stoinis was asked if the low scores in the tournament, a far cry from the regular 200-plus totals that fans witnessed during last month's IPL, have shocked him. "Yeah, it wasn't a shock I think from watching the games so far, it seems like that's going to be the theme of the tournament. But it's one thing watching it from the side and then another thing to adapt yourself while you're out there.

"So, it was fine. It just took some getting used to, I guess," he said. The US leg of the tournament is already drawing criticism for uneven bounce of the Nassau County ground's pitch where

India and Ireland played out a low-scoring game on Wednesday.

The Irish were bowled out for 96 and India skipper Rohit Sharma and Rishabh Pant took hits on their bodies due to the uneven bounce.

The 34-year-old Stoinis said he expects the tracks to become better for batters as the tournament progresses.

"Yeah, it is a bit difficult, the ball in the second inning, it is a bit sticky. And the spinners also gripping the ball sometimes, the ball is getting low," he said.

"And when I played Maxwell, one or two balls maybe the wicket holds the ball and it spins. So, it is still a bit difficult, but compared to the previous match it's better.

"Today it's a better wicket. I hope the more matches we play in this wicket; the more wickets will go better," he added.

Stoinis, who plays for Lucknow Super Giants in the IPL, said he has become a better player over the years due to his continuous IPL exposure.

"I think I've been going to the IPL for 10 years now so it always feels at the end of IPL when you finish IPL, you're a better player so regardless of the 100 or not I think it's a nice way to lead into a World Cup," he said. (PTI)



## Pant will continue at No 3 for India in T20 World Cup: Rathour

**NEW YORK, June 6:** India will continue with wicketkeeper-batter Rishabh Pant at No. 3 in the T20 World Cup following his gritty performance against Ireland, said batting coach Vikram Rathour, who also expressed his delight at having a fully-fit Hardik Pandya back in the fold.

Both Pant and Pandya, who returned to top-flight cricket in the IPL, are making a comeback to international cricket after a long gap.

The duo delivered the goods in India's eight-wicket thrashing of Ireland in their opening game here on Wednesday.

On a challenging pitch with uneven bounce, run-scoring was difficult but Pant unleashed a few stunning shots, including a reverse-scoop over the Irish wicketkeeper's head for a match-winning six in his unbeaten 36.

The Ireland match was Pant's first game for India since December 2022 when he was involved in a horrific car accident.

"Yes, he has been batting really well. The two games (warm-up and Ireland) he has played, he has looked really, really good,"



Rathour told the media after the match here at the Nassau County Cricket Stadium.

"Yes, at the moment he is our No. 3 and it helps that he is a left-hander," Rathour added, in a way cementing the combination of

skipper Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli at the top.

Both Pant and Pandya made their way back into the India squad for the T20 World Cup after proving their fitness and form in the IPL.

Even though he did not garner big numbers as an all-rounder in a turbulent season as captain for Mumbai Indians, India chief selector Ajit Agarkar had said that there is no one in the country who could match Pandya's skills as an all-rounder.

On Wednesday, Pandya was quick and precise with his line and length to produce 4-0-27-3 in his first match since October 2023 -- also in a World Cup.

Pandya had hobbled off the pitch in Pune playing against Bangladesh after twisting his ankle, which left India without an all-rounder and also disrupting the balance of their playing XI, with incoming Suryakumar Yadav failing to make an impact in the 50-overs quadrennial showpiece.

"Hardik looked really good. Hardik has been -- I mean, even in the practice game and even in the practice -- bowling really well," Rathour said.

"He looks fit enough to go through four overs and he's been bowling with some pace and some accuracy, so yeah, it's great," he added. (PTI)

## Ireland bank on stalwarts to fire against newcomers Canada in T20 World Cup

**NEW YORK, June 6:** Ireland will bank on their experienced batters Andy Balbirnie, Paul Stirling and Harry Tector to recover from the pummeling given by India and get their T20 World Cup campaign back on track when they face a dangerous Canada here on Friday.

Ireland went down by eight wickets against India on Wednesday, while Canada will be eager to recover after a seven-wicket loss to co-hosts USA.

Playing in their eighth T20 World Cup, Ireland have often struggled to make an impression in the event despite several of their key players playing in English county. In fact, they have made it to the 'Super 8' only once in 2009.

Balbirnie and captain Stirling, who have a combined experience of more than 250 T20s, were unable to give the side a decent start on a difficult pitch at the Nassau County Stadium, even as rival skipper Rohit Sharma and Rishabh Pant showed the way with their batting master-class while guiding India to a huge win.

Tector, a veteran of 77 T20s, too failed to kick on as Ireland were bowled out for a sub-100 total by the disciplined Indian bowlers, and they require an urgent turnaround.

Ireland will be playing their second match at this venue inside two days and they will be keen to execute the learnings from that.

World Cup newcomers Canada, on the other hand, too are coming off a big defeat against the United States in a high-scoring Group A match in Dallas.

Canada, can, however derive strength from their T20 World Cup Qualifier match against Ireland in 2019. In that match, the Maple Leafers inflicted a crushing 10-wicket defeat on the Irishmen.

In skipper Navneet Dhaliwal, Canada have a veteran top-order batter who was a part of that 2019



victory, and a lot will be riding on him. Canada will also take heart from the defeat against the USA because they had posted an imposing 194 against them and would look for an encore.

**Squads:**  
**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.

**Canada:** Saad Bin Zafar (captain), Aaron Johnson, Ravinderpal Singh, Navneet Dhaliwal, Kaleem Sana, Dillon Heyliger, Jeremy Gordon, Nikhil Dutta, Pargat Singh, Nicholas Kylan, Rayyan Khan Pathan, Junaid Siddiqui, Dilpreet Bajwa, Shreyas Movva and Rishiv Joshi.

Match Starts at 8 pm.

**Scotland vs Namibia**  
**Bridgetown (Barbados):** Namibia were superb in the 'Super Over' win over Oman in their T20 World Cup opener and that trial by fire would have given them the confidence to take on Scotland, who will be playing their second game here after their opener against England was rained off.

The Scots did show their capa-

bilities against the defending T20 World Cup champions, but rain had the last laugh and both teams were forced to share points.

While Namibia would rely heavily on veterans Gerhard Erasmus, the skipper, and all-rounder David Wiese, who have been at the forefront of the country's cricketing charge.

They are carrying the experience from the two previous T20 World Cups. Additionally, Namibia also have won their last three T20s against Scotland, something that will give them a positive frame of mind.

**Squads:**  
**Namibia:** Gerhard Erasmus (c), Zane Green, Michael Van Lingen, Dylan Leicher, Ruben Trimpelman, Jack Brassell, Ben Shikongo, Tangeni Lungameni, Niko Davin, JJ Smit, Jan Frylinck, JP Kotze, David Wiese, Bernard Scholtz, Malan Kruger, PD Bli-g-naut.

**Scotland:** Richie Berrington (c), Matthew Cross, Brad Currie, Chris Greaves, Oli Hairs, Jack Jarvis, Michael Jones, Michael Leask, Brandon McMullen, George Munsey, Safyaan Sharif, Chris Sole, Charlie Tear, Mark Watt, Brad Wheel.

Match starts at 12:30 am (Friday). (PTI)

## Borkan Terang wins badminton tournament



**HT Bureau**  
**DIPHU, June 6:** Borkan Terang of Karbi Anglong Sports Association Badminton Academy (KASA Badminton Academy) won the cham-

ampionship in Boy's single category for Under 9 in the Yonex - Sunrise 3rd All Assam Ranking Badminton Tournament held at Kanaklata Indoor Stadium, Guwahati from June

2 to 6. He won the championship by defeating Karnav Mohon, Dibrugarh. The tournament was organised by Assam Badminton Association (ABA), affiliated to Badminton Association of India.

In the final matches Borkan lost in the first set 13-15, while in second and third sets he won with 15-10 and 15-13 points respectively.

KASA Badminton secretary Kensing Engti thanked coach Sahil and Amrit for the achievement.

Engti said, "Without coach Sahil and Amrit this achievement by Borkan would not have been possible. I extend my sincere thanks to the Chief Executive Member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) and president, KASA, Tuliram Ronghang for building sports infrastructure and promoting sports among the young. His initiative of building sports culture in the district is slowly and steadily turning into reality."

## Rohit unsure about what to expect from Nassau track; Bumrah has no complaints

**NEW YORK, June 6:** India captain Rohit Sharma has been left flummoxed by the disconcerting bounce on offer at the Nassau County ground's drop-in track but his pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah was glad to find conditions that favoured bowlers ahead of the marquee T20 World Cup game against Pakistan here on Sunday.

Rohit scored 52 off 37 balls before being forced to retire hurt in the team's opening win against Ireland after a delivery from pacer Josh Little bounced a tad extra and hit him on the bicep of his right arm.

"Yeah, just a little sore (the arm). I said it at the toss as well. Quite unsure of what to expect from the pitch. Not aware on what it is to play like on a pitch that's five months old," Rohit said at the presentation ceremony on Wednesday.

But the variable bounce, which led to the ball kicking from length, did seem to bother him.

"I don't think the wicket settled down even when we batted second. There was enough for the bowlers," the Indian skipper said about his pace quartet, which bowled out Ireland for 96 in 16 overs.

With three of his four pacers having considerable

Test experience, the conditions were tailor-made for them.

"Try to hit those lengths consistently. That's what pretty much what you have got to do. All these guys have played a lot of Test cricket. Arshdeep is the only guy who hasn't. His two wickets upfront set the tone for us," Bumrah, who had figures of 2/6 in 3 overs, had no complaints with the conditions.

"Coming from India, with the ball seaming around, I wouldn't complain when there's help for bowlers. In this format, you have to adapt to the conditions, you have to be proactive," he said.

"Trying to stick to the plans and trying to go back to what has worked for me. You always want to cover all the bases in these conditions. You've got to be prepared, very happy with the outing today," he added.

Having brought four spinners, Rohit isn't sure if they would be required in New York at least.

"Don't think we can play four spinners here (laughs). When we picked the team, we wanted to have the balance. If conditions are there for seamers, we wanted to have that. Spin will play a part later on (West Indies). (PTI)

## 'Poor' drop-in pitches in NYC slammed

**NEW DELHI, June 6:** Former BCCI chief curator Daljit Singh is shocked by the "poor quality" of drop-in pitches being used for the T20 World Cup games in New York, including the ones featuring India.

India play three World Cup games in New York including the blockbuster clash against Pakistan on June 9. In their tournament-opener against Ireland, uneven bounce and cracks attracted a lot of attention.

India skipper Rohit Sharma was forced off the field after being hit by a Josh Little ball that took off from length, raising concerns about the safety of the players.

"It is a poor pitch. Drop-in pitch needs to be installed well in advance. To create density, you need to play on it and use different rollers and then increase the density," Daljit, who worked with the BCCI for more than two decades, told PTI.

"It seems they just installed it without doing any of that, poor quality and preparation I would say," he said.

The ICC had transported 10 made-in-Australia drop-in pitches to New York in the first week of May. All 10 wickets, four for the main square and six practice wickets, have been prepared by Adelaide Oval curator Damian Hough.

"Installation of the pitches should have been done three months ago. They had to increase the density with heavy rolling, light rolling, cross rolling and diagonal rolling."

"Then take a break for a few days and then repeat the same for increasing the density, it doesn't look good. There is uneven bounce, this is not an ideal pitch for T20s."

"More time should have been given to mature the pitch. It is not mature enough for the World Cup," said Daljit, also a former first-class cricketer.

The construction at the makeshift New York facility started in January and considering the harsh winter there, it would have been difficult for the organisers to install the pitches much in advance. (PTI)

## Sarabjot shoots gold at Munich World Cup



**MUNICH, June 6:** Sarabjot Singh on Thursday opened India's account at the ISSF World Cup here with a gold medal in the men's 10m air pistol event, emerging triumphant in a field that featured a reigning world champion and a four-time Olympian.

The 22-year-old Indian shot 242.7 in the eight-man final, leaving behind his nearest competitor Bu Shuaishang of China by 0.2 points.

Germany's Robin Walter won bronze.

Sarabjot had on Wednesday shot a top score of 588 to qualify for the decider. The final had in its line-up the reigning world champion Bowen Zhang of China and four-time Olympian Yusuf Dikec of Turkey, besides Bu and Walter.

Under the circumstances, Sarabjot delivered a fine pillar-to-post victory for his second individual

ISSF World Cup medal, after his breakthrough gold last year in Bhopal.

The young Indian was the strongest off the blocks shooting three high 10s off his first five single shots to take an early lead.

His consistent shooting continued and he never gave up the lead until Walter caught up with him at the end of the 14th single shot.

A clutch 10.8 for his 15th looked to have settled the final as Walter wilted with an 8.6. After Zhang bowed out in fifth, Walter upset Dikec for the bronze.

Going into the final two shots, 1.4 separated Sarabjot from Bu, who was still then enjoying the chase as the pressure told on Sarabjot.

In the end, Sarabjot, who had topped the selection trials for the Paris Olympics, did well to hold on for a morale-boosting win.

Sarabjot had won a bronze in 10m air pistol event at the Asian Shooting Championships 2023 in Changwon and had secured the first pistol quota for India in the Paris Olympics.

At the Asian Games last year, Sarabjot won the gold medal with the men's 10m air pistol team and silver in the 10m air pistol mixed team event. (PTI)

## Water sports facilities in MP

**BHOPAL, June 6:** Madhya Pradesh chief minister Mohan Yadav on Thursday promised to develop facilities required for water sports activities in Indore and Ujjain cities in addition to state capital Bhopal to facilitate sports persons in winning a medal in the next Olympic Games.

He was addressing an event linked to the 'Jal Ganga Samvardhan' campaign that was launched in the state from June 5 on the occasion of the World Environment Day. The programme was organised on the banks of the scenic Lower Lake in Bhopal.

"Water sports activities will be encouraged in the state and facilities will be developed in Indore and Ujjain along with Bhopal with an aim to win a medal in the Olympic Games," Yadav said.

He said the Jal Ganga Samvardhan campaign will continue after the Ganga Dussehra festival for the conservation of the water bodies.

Under the campaign, 5.50 crore saplings will be planted in the state with people's cooperation.

All the local bodies in the state will organise programmes for the conservation and cleaning of the water bodies in their respective areas, he said.

Yadav also praised the Bhopal Municipal Corporation (BMC) for initiating programmes with people's participation for the conservation of the Lower Lake. (PTI)

## Babar under pressure, India favourites in T20 WC clash against Pakistan: Rashid Latif

**NEW DELHI, June 6:** Babar Azam has a long way to go before becoming a captain who can handle pressure, said former Pakistan skipper Rashid Latif, declaring that India would be favourites against his country owing to a more balanced squad when the two sides clash in the T20 World Cup on Sunday.

The India-Pakistan showdown, to be held in New York, is one of the most eagerly-awaited games of the ongoing tournament being co-hosted by the USA and the West Indies.

"...the focus is on the game on June 9 against India. Babar (Pakistan captain) will be under a lot of pressure because of the game against India rather than performing in the World Cup," the 55-year-old former wicketkeeper-batter told PTI videos in an exclusive interview.

"But he has to learn to carry pressure, he should learn that from Virat and Rohit. They know how to carry the game. As a batter Babar is one of the best but as a captain and leader, there's a lot that he needs to learn," he added.

Latif said India have superior spinners and based on current form, Rohit Sharma's men are favourites for a win on Sunday.

"Kuldeep Yadav is that one player who if remains fit for India throughout the World Cup, he can cause trouble for batters. He is India's key bowler and also a key to success. Given the current form and stats definitely India has an advantage ahead of June 9," he said.

Latif also pointed out that the Pakistan's preparedness is nowhere close to being as good as it was during its strong performances in the 2021 and 2022 editions, when the team reached the finals.

"The Pakistan team plays well in the ICC tournaments but the team doesn't look as prepared as they were in 2021 and 2022. The damage happened after the last ODI World Cup with changes in captaincy, the selection committee, and players," he explained.

"The team doesn't know who their openers will be and what they have tried has failed miserably," he pointed out.

Latif lamented the decline of Pakistan's bowling, especially the pacers. He blamed poor fitness for it.

"A lot of bowlers like Shaheen, Naseem, Rauf, Shadab came back from injury and now Imad Wasim is injured. The biggest issue has been the fitness of the bowlers," he said.



"Former greats like Wasim Akram, Waqar Younis, Mohammad Asif were way fitter than them and never used to miss any Tests or ODIs. But these guys,

despite playing shorter formats, don't have adequate fitness," he added.

He also criticised the selection of bowlers who play similar roles in the

side.

"...they bring back Mohammad Amir and Imad Wasim. Earlier when these two bowlers used to play for Pakistan and in the PSL, they used to bowl the early overs between 1-4.

"Now, Rauf and Shaheen perform the same role, if you have four bowlers with the same role, who will bowl in the middle overs?" he asked.

He lauded India for getting their bowling combination right.

"Look at India, they have got Kuldeep, Axar, Jadeja and Chahal who can bowl in the middle and also the early overs. Pakistan couldn't develop Abrar Ahmed much. If Shadab Khan goes for runs in the middle overs, Pakistan doesn't have a lot of cover," he said.

Latif also questioned the timing of South African Gary Kirsten's appointment as Pakistan coach.

"The timing of his joining is very wrong. He joined the team on May 19 after the IPL season for Gujarat Titans ended," Latif pointed out.

"He only knows players by their names, but when you are going to the World Cup then you at least need to have spent at least a year with the play-

ers. He did not get this time and the Pakistan board is to blame for that," he said.

Talking about Virat Kohli, Latif said, "Virat has a lot of fans in Pakistan and also the players playing are his fans. Like I also say this whenever Sachin used to play earlier, I never wanted him to get out.

"The world was paying to watch him but but I was sitting behind the stumps and enjoying it for free," he recalled on a lighter note.

"Virat Kohli is a different player...Virat is a different player after this IPL...It will be really interesting to see where he bats in this World Cup."

Kohli opened with Rohit in India's opener against Ireland.

Latif said even Babar can grow in stature but he needs a better team around him.

"Babar is a great player but doesn't have a lot of players to support him. Virat definitely has an advantage because the players are around him. But Pakistan lacks that cushion.

"Babar only has Rizwan and occasionally the support of Fakhar Zaman. Babar's quality is way above his teammates and I think this acts as a disadvantage for him." (PTI)