



Unpleasant experience

Actor Alaya F, known for speaking her mind, opens up on being body-shamed by people while she was growing up

LEISURE | P2



ICJ order on Gaza

Top United Nations court orders Israel to immediately halt its military offensive in the southern Gaza city of Rafah

INTERNATIONAL | P10



New rules for IPOs

Sebi decides to introduce audio-visual representation of disclosures made by companies in their offer documents for public issues

BUSINESS | P11



Medal assured

Team of compound archers Jyothi and Priyansh assure India of a medal at the World Cup by entering the final

SPORTS | P12

6 LS and 42 Assembly seats go to polls today

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, May 24: Amid the grueling heat and humidity, Odisha is all set for the third round of voting Saturday, covering six Lok Sabha and 42 Assembly segments, with the main contenders being the ruling BJD and the Opposition BJP.

The parliamentary constituencies going to the polls are Sambalpur, Keonjhar, Dhenkanal, Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, and Puri. A total of 64 candidates are vying for the six Lok Sabha seats, while 383 contestants are competing for the 42 Assembly segments.

In the 2019 elections, the BJD had secured Keonjhar, Dhenkanal, Puri, and Cuttack, while the BJP won Sambalpur and Bhubaneswar.

For the Assembly segments within these Lok Sabha seats, the BJD won 34 out of 42 seats in 2019, the BJP bagged six, and Congress two.

A total of 9,448,553 voters - 4,829,660 men, 4,617,602 women and 1,291 transgenders - are eligible to vote in 10,581 polling booths.

Odisha's Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) NB Dhal said voting will start at 7 am, with the closing times varying between 4 pm and 5 pm based on local conditions.

DGP Arun Kumar Sarangi said 35,000 security personnel, including 121 companies of central forces, have been deployed across the six constituencies. About 2,000 polling booths have been identified as critical, necessitating the deployment of central forces to ensure free and fair elections.

Key candidates in this round include Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan and four Odisha ministers - Prafulla Mallick, RP Swain, Ashok Panda, and Basanti Hembram.

Pradhan is contesting as a BJP candidate in Sambalpur Lok Sabha seat, facing BJD's Pranab Prakash Das.

The BJD has introduced new candidates in Cuttack, Puri, Dhenkanal, and Keonjhar, while the BJP has re-nominated Aparajita Sarangi in Bhubaneswar.

In Puri, BJP's Sambit Patra, who narrowly lost to BJD's Pinaki Mishra in 2019, is contesting again, this time against Arup Patnaik, a former Mumbai police commissioner.

In Cuttack, BJD's incumbent MP Bhartruhari Mahtab has switched to the BJP and is contesting against BJD's Santrupt Mishra, a former corporate leader. Mahtab has represented Cuttack since 1998.



WATER-STRESSED: Residents collect drinking water from a 'Nagar Nigam' tanker due to the ongoing water crisis amid extreme heat at Jhalana Doongri in Jaipur, Friday

PTI PHOTO

Matric results to be out on Sunday

Cuttack: Results of the Class X examinations conducted by the Board of Secondary Education, Odisha will be declared Sunday, an official said. The results of examinations for the High School Certificate (HSC), State Open School Certificate (SOSC) and Madhyama (Sanskrit), which were simultaneously in February and March, will be published at 10.30 am on that day, board president Srikanth Tarai said. The results will be published after approval of the Examination Committee, he said.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



They're unwilling to reveal anything. Will they announce results on June 4?

'Tax the ultra-rich'

Amid the ongoing debate in the political and social circles on wealth and inheritance tax, a paper by renowned economist Thomas Piketty has suggested that India has to levy a two per cent tax on wealth and a 33 per cent tax on inheritance to address the alarmingly growing wealth inequality in the country. The study elaborates that in the base case scenario, these interventions are likely to generate a humongous 2.7 per cent of GDP in revenues. This comes close on the heels of another study 'Income and Wealth Inequality in India, 1922-2023: The Rise of the Billionaire Raj', which revealed that economic disparities in India have reached historical highs

PNN & AGENCIES

New Delhi, May 24: India needs to impose a two per cent tax on net wealth exceeding ₹10 crore and a 33 per cent inheritance tax to deal with the problem of rising inequality in the country, a new research paper co-authored by economist Thomas Piketty has suggested.

The paper titled 'Proposals for a Wealth Tax Package to

Tackle Extreme Inequalities in India' proposes a comprehensive tax package on the ultra-wealthy to tackle the massive concentration at the very top of the wealth distribution and create valuable fiscal space for crucial social sector investments.

"Raise phenomenally large tax revenues while leaving 99.96 per cent of the adults unaffected by the tax."

"In a baseline scenario, a 2 per cent annual tax on net wealth exceeding ₹10 crore and a 33 per cent inheritance tax on estates exceeding ₹10 crore in valuation would generate a massive 2.73 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in revenues," the paper suggested. The paper said that the taxation proposal needs to be accompanied by explicit redistributive policies to support the poor, lower castes, and middle classes.

"For example, the baseline scenario would allow nearly doubling the current public spending on education, which has stagnated at 2.9 per cent of GDP over the past 15 years, well below - less than half - the 6 per cent target set by the government's own National Education Policy 2020

(NEP 2020)," it said.

The paper noted that the taxation proposal needs to be extensively debated, with a consensus on specific details of the design emerging from a broader democratic debate on tax justice and wealth redistribution in India.

Co-author Anmol Somanchi highlighted that Indian billionaires are largely an upper caste club.

"A progressive wealth tax package of the kind we propose is most likely to benefit lower castes and the middle classes at the detriment of only a tiny number of ultra-wealthy upper caste families. In that respect, besides addressing extreme wealth inequality, such taxes could also play a small role in weakening the rigid link between social and economic inequalities in India," Somanchi said.

According to him, the 2024 Lok Sabha election marks a critical juncture with heightened political and public focus on economic justice. Despite sustained attempts from certain sections at derailing this much-needed conversation, a vibrant public debate has emerged.

BJP lying about my health, says Naveen

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, May 24: Chief Minister and BJD president Naveen Patnaik Friday asserted that he is in 'very good health' and campaigning in the elections for the Lok Sabha and Assembly all over the state.

His statement followed comments of BJD president JP Nadda and other party leaders that Patnaik should be given rest in the wake of his health and old age.

"There is a limit to the amount of lies the BJP can tell people. As you can see, I am in very good health and have been campaigning all over the state for months," said 77-year-old Patnaik.

Some BJP leaders had also alleged that Patnaik was using artificial intelligence in his video messages.

Responding to the charges, the BJD president asked the saffron party leaders to use their own intelligence.

Patnaik's close aide and bureaucrat-turned-BJD leader Kartik Pandian said the com-

ments are "very unfortunate, below the belt."

He claimed that the people of Odisha would not appreciate demeaning of the 'popular' chief minister.

Meanwhile, during a media briefing, Pandian claimed that the BJD will get a comfortable majority after the third round of polling to the Odisha Assembly to be held Saturday.

"The fourth round of polling (June 1) will improve the margin," he asserted.

Pandian also claimed that since the state BJP leaders are confined to their constituencies, national leaders of the party are campaigning for them.

"By abusing the CM, they are only helping BJD improve its vote share. We are a mature democracy and one should know where to draw the lines. Just for votes, you cannot demean great leaders. History will not forgive them," he said.

Asked about the BJP's claim to form the government in the state, Pandian claimed that the saffron party is eyeing only 30 of the 147 Assembly seats.

SC quashes plea on voter data

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 24: The Supreme Court Friday refused an NGO's plea to issue the Election Commission directions to upload polling station-wise voter turnout data on its website during the Lok Sabha polls, saying a 'hands-off' approach needs to be adopted during the elections.

A vacation bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and Satish Chandra Sharma said it cannot issue any such directions at the moment as five phases of polling have concluded and two remain and it would be difficult for the poll panel to mobilise manpower.

The top court adjourned the interlocutory application (IA) filed by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) to be listed before the regular bench after the elections and pointed out that prima facie it appears the prayers in the application are similar to the main petition pending since 2019 on the issue. It said it needs to understand the ground reality and not overburden the poll panel by changing the process midway.

Medha Patkar convicted in defamation case

AGENCIES

New Delhi, May 24: More than 23 years after the complaint was registered, a Delhi court Friday convicted Narmada Bachao Andolan leader and activist Medha Patkar in a defamation case lodged against her by VK Saxena, the incumbent lieutenant governor, saying reputation is one of the "most valuable assets" and significantly impacts one's standing in society.

Holding Patkar's statements as "defamatory per se" and "crafted to incite negative perceptions," Metropolitan Magistrate Raghav Sharma convicted the activist of the offence of criminal defamation under IPC which entails a maximum punishment of simple imprisonment of up to two years or fine or both.

Saxena had filed the case in November 2000 when he was the president of the National Council of Civil Liberties over a 'defamatory' press release issued against him by Patkar.

Trickery & tropical fruit to combat monkey menace

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Lopburi, May 24: A Thai town, run ragged by its ever-growing population of marauding wild monkeys, launched an offensive against the simian raiders Friday, using trickery and ripe tropical fruit.

Several high-profile cases of monkey-human conflict recently convinced authorities in Lopburi in central Thailand that they had to reduce the animals' numbers.

If all goes well, most will end up behind bars, before starting a new life elsewhere.

The first stage of the plan, instituted Friday, is to bait cages with the animals' favourite food, then wait for hunger to get the better of their natural caution.

There was early success for the catchers on one street, with three of the macaques falling



Monkeys eat rambutan in a cage which was set to trap them in Lopburi, Friday

for the ruse and ending up trapped because they had fancied a taste of rambutan fruit. The cages had been placed on the street earlier in the week so the monkeys got used to them and

found them less threatening. There are thought to be around 2,500 monkeys running around the town. The capture of the unlucky trio and around 30 others - trapped in other parts of the

town - slightly pared down that total.

The effort will go on for five days this month, then is likely to be repeated. Some of the monkeys will be left free to maintain Lopburi's image as Thailand's monkey town. But no one is expecting it to be easy.

"With the monkey's intelligence, if some of them go into the cage and are caught, the others outside won't enter the cage to get the food because they've already learnt what's happened to their friends," said Patarapol Maneorn from Thailand's Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation.

The roaming monkeys have long been a symbol of the town, 140 km north of Bangkok, and are a major tourist draw. They've become increasingly aggressive, however, with several videos of them snatching

food from residents and causing injuries being widely shared online.

One auto parts shop now trades from behind wire. The owners erected it at the time of the coronavirus pandemic, but keeping out the light-fingered primates was also a prime concern. They say they've adapted to the monkey problem, but not everyone has.

"When there are a lot of monkeys around, customers are afraid of buying the goods at the shop. Only our regulars aren't frightened," said Supaporn Tantiwong.

The town's mayor, Chamroen Salacheep, agrees that the monkeys, while bringing in visitors, have also become bad for trade, with shops and malls seeing a drop in income and even people's homes damaged. Lopburi, he said, is almost an 'abandoned town.'

WEATHER

	BBSR	CTC
Max Temp	35.8°C	35.5°C
Min Temp	27.6°C	26.2°C
Humidity	67%	73%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil
FORECAST	PARTLY CLOUDY SKY	

leisure



ALEC BALDWIN SAVOURS SWEET OUTING WITH GRANDDAUGHTER

Hollywood actor Alec Baldwin is relishing his new role as a grandfather. He recently spent a delightful day with his daughter Ireland Baldwin, 28, and granddaughter Holland at the Museum of Ice Cream. The actor shared a series of photos on his Instagram, reports People magazine.

MADONNA 'DIDN'T KNOW' HER OWN ADDRESS IN UK

Madonna says asked eventing champion William Fox-Pitt to give her riding lessons when she lived in the UK - but she had no idea where her own house was. The two were married from 2000 to 2008 and spent most of their time together in the director's mansion in South West England.



FORTUNE FORECAST

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FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181

ARIES
You will feel like going for a little excursion to some place today. It could be to some historical place that you have not visited before. However, Ganesha suggests, in keeping with your responsibility of being a family-man, you should pay heed to the needs of your loved ones.

TAURUS
You are likely to have differences with your parents in the early hours of the day. Ganesha urge you not to quarrel or confront them. Do not retaliate in any way. Act decent and discreet. Respect their views, wishes and sentiments. Be careful. You may have health problems later in the day. If your health does deteriorate, do not take things casually.

GEMINI
You will be faced with difficult situations and circumstances today. You will become sentimental as a result. You will be able to extricate yourself only when the time is right from these adverse circumstances. You will receive co-operation from your colleagues.

CANCER
A day of challenges, but you will be ambitious and bold to surmount them. Yet you will not cross limits. Your evocation to God will repel all hurdles and grant you energy. Health will be good. A fabulous time, says Ganesha.

LEO
Your day will be filled with interesting activities. You will be able to put across and prove your point of view today. In the afternoon you will be able to finish your work. You ought to make the most of the day, says Ganesha.

VIRGO
Your thinking will be very sharp today, and at the same time you will feel passionate about work. In the afternoon, you can afford to unwind a bit. Those in the public sector will feel inspired and have an agreeable day. Your no-nonsense attitude will be very apparent, says Ganesha.

LIBRA
Ganesha says you will wish to spend the maximum time with your beloved only. After some intimate discussions with the person you will find yourself growing closer to them. Today you will be the center of attention for a lot of people today. People will be happy and impressed by your wit and ability.

SCORPIO
An eventful day lies ahead of you, says Ganesha. The first half of the day would be packed with routine activities, fighting cut-throat competition on field. However, you become a fashionista in the second half as you plan to attend a social function and take the centre stage.

SAGITTARIUS
The day has to offer a mixture of activities. Today, work comes after home & family. Your attention is diverted towards your kith and kins today. You are an important member of the family and your opinion matters to them. For some of you, evening is full of romantic conversations with your beloved.

CAPRICORN
Increase in workload will not make you tense, in fact, you will rise to the challenge and try to complete your targets as fast as you can. Your colleagues will play a major role in enabling you to dispose off the pile of files lying on your desk, predicts Ganesha. If you are a businessman, keep your eyes and ears open.

AQUARIUS
You will bring excellence to the table. But, the results may not reflect the same. The day progresses on slow pace and no major events are in store for you, says Ganesha. On the personal front, you may have some problems with your spouse, but you will learn to ignore them, sit back and unwind.

PISCES
You are likely to embark on a picnic or travel today, or will be busy planning for the same. You will not be able to concentrate on your work till noon, but later on you will find yourself making excellent progress. You will be able to meet all your deadlines and hence will be able to implement your plans for travel, says Ganesha.

Alaya recalls being body-shamed



Miyaan Chote Miyaan was also about that. Also, personally for me, I have never always looked this way. Growing up I was a healthy kid. I was overweight, and I was fat-shamed all the time.” She further pointed out, “It’s only now when I have dropped all the weight because I believe in self-care and do my workouts that I look a certain way. But, even then, despite losing all the weight now, I have people skinny-shaming me. There’s literally no end to this because I have been fat-shamed and skinny-shamed.”

Mumbai: Alaya F often speaks her mind when it comes to her views on cinema and society. The actor recently opened up on being body-shamed by people while growing up. Recalling her experiences on being judged for her appearance the actress said, “This is indeed a competitive industry. We all have our insecurities about our appearances and how we look but let’s admit that we are also way beyond how we look. My character in *Bade*

Green careers in focus at Rooting for Resilience

Organised on Bakul library premises, the event was a joint collaboration of Youth for Water, IYCN, ASAR, Sustera Foundation and Bakul Foundation of Bhubaneswar



Bhubaneswar: The Bakul Foundation library Friday hosted Rooting for Resilience, a transformative event here on its premises to create awareness about job opportunities available in climate sector, a segment expected to generate approximately 3.7 million jobs in the country by 2030. This event was a collaborative effort by the Bakul Foundation, Youth for Water, IYCN, ASAR and the Sustera Foundation. The programme brought together nearly 40 young aspirants from across Odisha. Deepa A, Sanju Soman, and Roshni from the Sustera Foundation were the key speakers at the event. They shared insights on the importance of climate jobs and the necessary skills required. “Climate-related activity is not just volunteerism; it is more than that. As we continue to see the impacts of climate change, the demand for climate change jobs continues to rise. There are many climate-related jobs, such as urban planners, environmental data analysts, and environmental technicians and engineers, that offer good remuneration and incentives,” said Sanju. Sujit Mahapatra, founder of the Bakul Foundation, played a crucial role in the success of the event. The gathering also featured a collaborative activity where participants identified the major critical climate-related challenges faced by Odisha. The event served as a signifi-

cant networking platform, showcasing the enthusiasm and potential of Odisha’s youth. It underscored the state’s vulnerability to climate change impacts and its capacity to become a hub for green jobs and enterprises. By scaling up training programmes and skilling the youth, Odisha can lead the way in the climate sector; turning challenges into opportunities, added other speakers.

Climate sector big hub for massive jobs: Sanju Soman

Twenty eight-year-old Sanju Soman, among the top climate leaders of the country, is credited with building the first ‘model wetland village’ in his home state Kerala. He has also launched Sustera Foundation, an NGO with the aim of training youngsters in climate action, capacity building of local self-government institutions, and supporting climate entrepreneurs. Sanju was in Bhubaneswar Friday to attend Rooting for Resilience, an awareness programme on opportunities in the climate sector. On the sidelines of the event, the climate warrior had a breezy chat with **Orissa POST**. Excerpts:

ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

■ What made you launch a programme like Rooting for Resilience?
■ We have not too many skilled hands available in the climate sector; as there is a perception that working in this area is all about volunteerism. But in reality, it’s a hub for massive jobs, and youths can earn lakhs by planning careers in this field. We came here to interact with youngsters and environmental enthusiasts and tell them about the opportunities available in the field. At present, we are trying to assess the situation in Odisha and impart training to the youths depending on their educational background.

■ As someone known for his work in wetland, why is conserving wetland important, and how do you see the state of wetland conservation in Odisha?
■ Wetland conservation is very important because it helps manage floods. By destroying wetlands and converting them into concrete jungles, we are only inviting floods. Also, wetland helps in methane management and provides livelihood. Chilika in Odisha is a case in point. Besides, mangrove plants in wetlands help with fish breeding. I know environmental activist Soumya Ranjan Biswal from this state who is doing a commendable job in mangrove conservation.

■ What should be the role of youths in dealing with climate change issues?
■ The biggest contribution of youths is innovation, and for a country like India, youth must show qualities like resilience in bringing about change with their ideas.

■ What can the government do in achieving climate goals?
■ I think, local government institutions like panchayats must be given power in managing climate issues because they are the ones who are connected to the ground reality. In Kerala, every panchayat has disaster management programmes, and they are adequately empowered and funded to deal with the issue.

Indians shine at Cannes

Cannes: In a major triumph for India at the 77th Cannes Film Festival, two filmmakers bagged two of the top three prizes in La Cinef competition, Thursday. Chidananda S. Naik’s *Sunflowers Were the First Ones to Know...* has won the first prize of La Cinef here. The Mysuru doctor-turned filmmaker made the film at the end of his one-year course in the television wing of Pune’s Film and Television Institute of India. *Sunflowers...* is based on Kannada folk tale about an old woman who steals a rooster. As a result of her action, the sun stops rising in the village. The third prize of the La Cinef competition Thursday went to India-born Mansi Maheshwari’s animation film *Bunnyhood*. Maheshwari, born in from Meerut and an ex-student of NIFT Delhi, made the film as a



student of UK’s National Film and Television School. The second prize was shared by *Out of the Widow Through the Wall*, directed by Columbia University’s Asya Segalovich, and *The Chaos She Left Behind*, made by Nikos Kolioukos of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. Cannes Film Festival awards a 15000 Euro grant for the first prize winner, 11,250 euros for second prize and 7,500 euros for the third prize. PTI

Bidyakanak’s 6th National Theatre Festival – Day I



Bidyakanak Srujanusthan, the host organisation of the event, presented Odia play *Magunira Shagada* on the first evening of the festival at Rabindra Mandap, Friday. Written by legendary novelist Godabarish Mohapatra, the adaptation of the Odia classic was directed by Jagadish Prasad Maharana. Eminent theatre personalities Satyabrat Rout, Manoj Pattnaik and Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi Secretary Prabodh Rath and Nalco Mahila Mandal President Sasmita Patra were among the dignitaries present on the occasion.

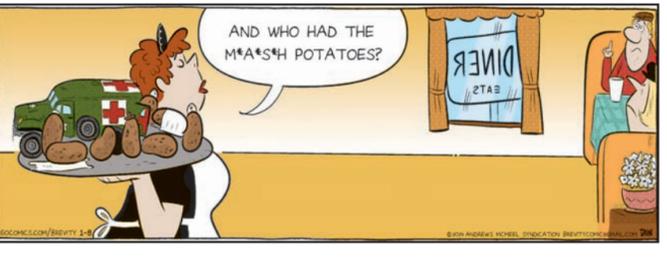
PEANUTS



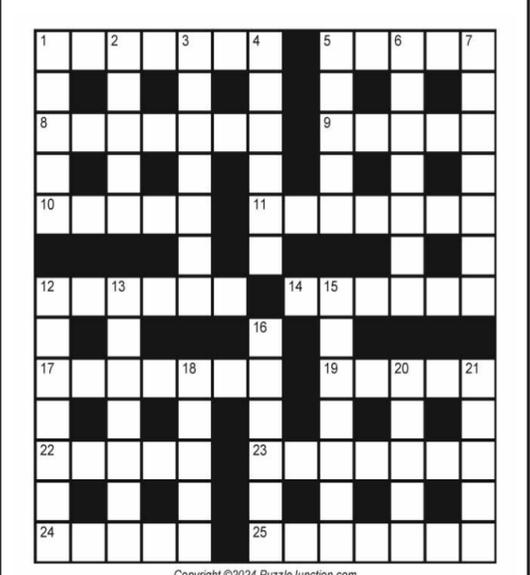
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



FUN post CROSSWORD



- Across**
1 Go-between
5 Misbehave (3,2)
8 Free time
9 Recluse
10 Religious law
11 Auto adjustment?
12 Firm
14 Fancy
17 Hot spot worker
- Down**
19 Bell sound
22 Spacious
23 Cervantes hero
24 Family member
25 Radical
- Across**
4 Razz
5 Permit
6 Cargo vessels
7 Depict
12 Old World
13 Piercing spot
15 Bill of lading
16 Unparalleled
18 Perhaps
20 Dwelling
21 Skein formers

SUDOKU

To solve the Sudoku puzzle, fill in the boxes in such a manner that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9, without repeating any.

	8	7		4				
	9							6
			7	1			3	
			9	3		4		
9		5						1
	7		1	6				
4	2							
			5					3
			8	9	6			

SOLUTIONS

CROSSWORD

Across
1 GO-BETWEEN
5 MISBEHAVE
8 FREE TIME
9 RECLUSE
10 RELIGIOUS LAW
11 AUTO ADJUSTMENT?
12 FIRM
14 FANCY
17 HOT SPOT WORKER

Down
19 BELL SOUND
22 SPACIOUS
23 CERVANTES HERO
24 FAMILY MEMBER
25 RADICAL

CROSSWORD

Across
4 RAZZ
5 PERMIT
6 CARGO VESSELS
7 DEPICT
12 OLD WORLD
13 PIERCING SPOT
15 BILL OF LADING
16 UNPARALLELED
18 PERHAPS
20 DWELLING
21 SKEIN FORMERS

SUDOKU

4	1	8	9	2	6	3	7	5
2	7	9	5	4	3	6	8	1
6	5	3	1	8	7	9	2	4
1	2	7	6	9	4	5	3	8
8	4	5	3	7	1	2	6	9
3	9	6	8	5	2	1	4	7
9	6	2	7	1	8	4	5	3
7	3	1	4	6	5	8	9	2
5	8	4	2	3	9	7	1	6

CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

downtown

CAR FEST PREP

Maharana servitors build a chariot wheel for the upcoming car festival in Puri, Friday



ELECTIONS IN MIND: Polling officials capture the moment in Bhubaneswar, Friday, as they leave for all-women booths for the third phase of elections Saturday PIC:BIKASH NAYAK

ADANI COAL IMPORTS CASE

21 int'l firms move CJ, seek speedy resolution

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 24: At least 21 international organisations have written to Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud and requested the Supreme Court to speedily resolve the pending case filed by the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), investigating Adani Group firms for alleged overvaluation of Indonesian coal imports.

The letter comes after a report by the London-based Financial Times, citing documents from George Soros-backed Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), alluded to a 'fraud' by the Adani Group by selling low-grade coal as high-value fuel in 2013.

Contending that they stand firmly against the continued use of fossil fuels, the organisations said the Financial Times report provided fresh and detailed evidence of the passing off of 'low-quality coal as far more expensive cleaner fuel' by the Adani Group in transactions with Tamil Nadu Generation and Distribution Company (Tangedco).

The 21 international organisations that have written to the CJ are Australian Centre for International Justice, Banktrack, Bob Brown Foundation, Culture Unstained, Eko, Extinction Rebellion, Friends of the Earth Australia, London Mining Network, Mackay Conservation



The letter comes after a report by the London-based Financial Times, citing documents from George Soros-backed Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), alluded to a 'fraud' by the Adani Group by selling low-grade coal as high-value fuel in 2013.

In March 2016, the DRI initiated a probe against a few Adani Group companies for alleged overvaluation of coal imports from Indonesia between 2011 and 2015

Group, Market Forces, Money Rebellion, Move Beyond Coal, Seniors for Climate Action Now, Stand.earth, Stop Adani, Sunrise Movement, Tipping Point, Toxic Bonds, Transparency International Australia, W&J Nagana Yarrbayn Cultural Custodians, and Queensland Conservation Council.

While the Adani Group has denied all allegations, the news report has been cited by

Opposition leaders, including former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi, to demand a joint Parliamentary committee probe into the alleged wrongdoing.

A spokesperson for the group said the quality of the coal was independently tested at the point of loading and discharge, as well as by Customs authorities and Tangedco officials.

"With the supplied coal having passed such an elaborate quality check process by multiple agencies at multiple points, clearly the allegation of supply of low-quality coal is not only baseless and unfair but completely absurd," the spokesperson said.

"Moreover, the payment is dependent on the quality of coal supplied, which is determined through the testing process," he said and added tests for quality of consignment in question had yielded results within permissible limits. The group also stated that the vessel cited in the report to have carried the coal in December 2013 had not been used for shipping coal from Indonesia before February 2014.

In an affidavit to the top court, the DRI had earlier reiterated its stand to resume investigations into the Adani Group for alleged overvaluation of coal imports. In March 2016, the DRI initiated a probe against a few Adani Group companies for alleged overvaluation of coal imports from Indonesia between 2011 and 2015.

MATRICULATION RESULTS MAY 26

AGENCIES

Cuttack, May 24: Results of the Class X examinations, also called matriculation, conducted by the Board of Secondary Education (BSE), Odisha will be declared May 26, an official said.

The results of examinations for the High School Certificate (HSC), State Open School Certificate (SOSC) and Madhyama (Sanskrit), which were simultaneously held in February and March, will be published at 10.30am Sunday, BSE president Srikant Tarai said.

The results will be published after approval of the Examination Committee, he said.

The results will be available on www.bseodisha.ac.in from 11.30am. The results can also be accessed by sending an SMS to 5676750 with OR10<Roll Number.

Tarai said the BSE would for the first time provide digitised pass certificates and mark sheets to the students on the day of the publication of results to help them to get admission for further studies without any delay.

These certificates will be made available online and on WhatsApp after 4pm Sunday.

Meanwhile, the Council of Higher Secondary Education (CHSE) will also declare the Class XII (Plus II) examination results of all streams— Science, Commerce and Arts— May 26.

As many as 3,84,597 students in Arts, Science, and Commerce appeared in the Class XII examinations this year held between February 16 and March 20.

“For the first time, BSE would provide digitised pass certificates and mark sheets to the students on the day of the publication of results to help them to get admission for further studies without any delay”

SRIKANT TARAI | BSE PRESIDENT

RESERVOIRS' STORAGE LEVEL DROPS TO 24%

While southern region reservoirs reveal a worrisome scenario of 14 per cent of live storage level, eastern region that includes Odisha shows slightly a better picture



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 24: Amid scorching summer, the total live storage available in 150 key reservoirs across India is 24 per cent of the total live storage capacity, marking a 21 per cent decrease recorded during the same period last year, according to official data.

The Central Water Commission (CWC) released its weekly bulletin Friday on the live storage status of 150 key reservoirs across India, revealing a significant decline in water levels compared to last year.

The southern region, encompassing Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, is the most affected. The 42 reservoirs in this region have a total capacity of 53,334 BCM, with current storage at just 7,455 BCM (14 per cent). This is significantly lower than last year's 25 per cent and the normal 20 per cent.

The total live storage available is 43,293 billion cubic metres (BCM), which is 24 per

cent of the total live storage capacity of these reservoirs. This marks a 21 per cent decrease from the 55,037 BCM recorded during the same period last year and is also below the normal storage of 45,480 BCM, based on the average of the last ten years.

The current storage represents 79 per cent of last year's levels and 95 per cent of the 10-year average normal storage.

The northern states of Himachal Pradesh, Punjab and Rajasthan have 10 monitored reservoirs with a combined live storage capacity of 19,663 BCM, but currently hold only 5,554 BCM (28 per cent). This is a decline from last year's 37 per cent and below the normal 31 per cent.

In contrast, the eastern region, which includes Assam, Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Tripura, Nagaland, and Bihar, shows a slight improvement. The 23 reservoirs in this region have a total capacity of 20,430 BCM, with current storage at 6,013 BCM (29 per cent). This is better than last year's 26 per cent and the normal 28 per cent.

Gujarat and Maharashtra are experiencing lower storage levels compared to the last year. The 49 reservoirs in this region have a combined capacity of 37,130 BCM, but are currently at 9,400 BCM (25 per cent), down from last year's 29 per cent but slightly above the normal 24 per cent.

The central states of Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh are also facing reduced storage levels. Their 26 reservoirs, with a total capacity of 48,227 BCM, currently hold 14,871 BCM (31 per cent). This is lower than last year's 38 per cent but above the normal 29 per cent.

Further analysis shows that storage levels are highly variable across different river basins. The Ganga, Subarnarekha, Brahmaputra, Barak, Brahmani, Baitarni, Narmada, Tapi and Sabarnati basins have better than normal storage.

However, the Krishna, east flowing rivers between Pennar and Kanyakumari, and Cauvery basins are deficient. The east flowing rivers between Mahanadi and Pennar are highly deficient.

Sand sculpture for voter awareness

AGENCIES

Puri, May 24: Sand artist Sudarsan Pattnaik has created a huge sand sculpture with the message 'Your Vote, Your Voice' at Puri beach ahead of the third phase of polling scheduled for Saturday.

Sudarsan has created the sculpture on 2,000 sqft area to spread awareness on voting with the message 'Chunab ka Parba, Desh ka Garv'.

He used around five quintal of mangoes on it and took about five hours to complete the sculpture.

The students of his institute joined hands to complete the sand sculpture.

The sand artist said since mangoes are favourite of all during the summer, he used the fruit in the sculpture to attract the voters to participate in the voting May 25.

So far, Sudarsan has participated in more than 65 international sand art competitions and festivals around the world and won many prizes for the country.

Kabosu, Shiba Inu who helped define 'doge' meme, dies at 18

AGENCIES

Washington, May 24: Kabosu, the dog behind the 'doge' meme, has died at the age of 18 after enjoying more than a decade of internet fame, the 'Sky News' reported Friday.

The Japanese Shiba Inu had been suffering from leukaemia and liver disease, it wrote.

"To all of you who loved Kabosu, on the morning of the 24 May, Kabosu crossed the rainbow bridge. Thank you all so much for your support over the years," Atsuko Sato, her owner, wrote on Instagram.

"She went very peacefully without suffering, as if falling asleep while feeling the warmth of my hands petting her. Thank you all so much for loving Kabosu all these years," Atsuko wrote.

"I am certain Kabosu was the happiest dog in the world. That makes me the happiest owner in the world. I would like to express my deepest appreciation to everyone who has sent us much love to us." Atsuko, a teacher in Japan,



“She went very peacefully without suffering, as if falling asleep while feeling the warmth of my hands petting her. Thank you all so much for loving Kabosu all these years”

ATSUKO SATO | KABOSU'S OWNER

adopted Kabosu in 2008 when she was sent to an animal shelter after her puppy mill shut down.

Kabosu became an Internet sensation when a 2010 photo of her with crossed paws and a slight smirk spread on Reddit and Tumblr.

A Reddit user referred to the image as 'Doge' - the intentional misspelling of dog a nod to a 2005 episode of *HomeStar Runner*.

The doge meme became popular in 2013. Coloured Comic Sans text overlays the photo, with broken English phrases like 'Wow. So scare' and 'What r u doing?' surrounding Kabosu.

In 2021 the 'Doge' meme sold as a non-fungible token (NFT) for \$4m (£3.2m).

Kabosu is also the face of the cryptocurrency Dogecoin, which was originally created as a 'joke' currency and is the sleeve sponsor of Watford Football Club. For a few days in April the Dogecoin logo was used as the icon for the Twitter home button.

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Brace up for rain as storm brews in Bay



Squally wind speed reaching 50-60 kmph gusting to 70 kmph is most likely to prevail over central Bay of Bengal May 24 evening. It would extend to adjoining areas of north Bay of Bengal with gale wind speed reaching 60-70 kmph gusting to 80 kmph from May 25 morning. It would further increase, becoming 100-110 kmph gusting to 120 kmph over north Bay of Bengal from Sunday morning and 110-120 kmph gusting to 120 kmph from May 26 evening. "The gale wind speed reaching 70-80 kmph gusting to 90 kmph is likely over adjoining central Bay of Bengal from May 26 morning for subsequent 24 hours," the weatherman said.

4 DISTRICTS ALERTED

The state government has asked the authorities of four districts to take preparatory measures as a depression in the Bay of Bengal is likely to concentrate into a severe cyclonic storm. SRC Satyabrata Sahu has alerted the Collectors of Kendrapara, Bhadrak, Balasore and Mayurbhanj, and asked them to take preparatory measures in view of the impending calamity. The district Collectors have been asked to inform the Revenue and Disaster Management department about the ground situation from time to time.

"Subsequently, it would move nearly northwards, intensify into a severe cyclonic storm and likely to cross Bangladesh and adjoining West Bengal coasts between Sagar Island and Khepupara around May 26 midnight as a severe cyclonic storm," the IMD said.

Bhubaneswar, May 24: Several parts of north Odisha will experience light to moderate rainfall as depression over central Bay of Bengal is very likely to intensify further into a cyclonic storm by Saturday, India Meteorological Department (IMD) said Friday. It said some places in Balasore, Bhadrak and Kendrapara will also witness heavy to very heavy rainfall. The severe cyclonic storm will have no direct impact on Odisha, the weatherman said. The weatherman said the depression over central Bay of Bengal moved northeast wards with a speed of 20 kmph during the past few hours and is very likely to continue to move northeast wards and intensify further into a cyclonic storm over eastcentral Bay of Bengal by May 25 morning.



POLL PREP: Late night security check near Purighat police station in Cuttack, Friday

OP PHOTO

PREVENTION OF MONEY LAUNDERING ACT

SC: Not named in offence doesn't mean one can't be prosecuted

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 24: Merely because a person has not been named in a predicate offence does not mean that he cannot be prosecuted under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), the Supreme Court said Friday while hearing a plea in a money-laundering case arising out of the alleged coal-block allocation scam. The observation came from a vacation bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Pankaj Mithal, which was hearing a petition filed by one Sudhir Gupta seeking quashing of an Enforcement



Case Information Report (ECIR) against him and the subsequent proceedings arising out of it. The bench told advocate Vijay Aggarwal, who appeared in the court on behalf of Gupta, that the Enforcement Directorate (ED) ECIR could neither be quashed nor stayed. Aggarwal told the bench that

the petitioner was arrayed as a witness in a related case lodged by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), but the ED has made him an accused in the money-laundering case. "Merely because you are not named in the predicate offence does not mean that you cannot be prosecuted under the PMLA," the bench observed. "My case is, I am a witness in the predicate offence," Aggarwal said. "We are not satisfied," the bench said, adding, "We have examined the merits also. Neither the ECIR can be quashed nor can it be stayed."

The petitioner's counsel told the bench that the matter is listed for arguments on charges before a special court in June. He sought permission from the bench to withdraw the plea with the liberty to approach the top court later. "Without expressing any opinion on the merits of the case, permission to withdraw is granted," the bench said, adding that the petitioner shall be at liberty as may be permissible under the law. Besides seeking quashing of the ECIR, the petitioner had also sought setting aside of the prosecution complaint filed by the ED.

Khimji Jewellers celebrates Cuttack store's 13th anniv

POST NEWS NETWORK

Cuttack, May 24: Adding one more feather to the cap of legacy and commitment to excellence, Khimji Jewellers celebrated its 13th anniversary of the flagship store here recently.

To commemorate this special occasion, Khimji is offering an array of exclusive discounts from May 22 to May 26. Customers can enjoy a flat 30 per cent off on making charges for gold jewellery, 20 per cent off on making charges for diamond jewellery and 20 per cent off on making charges for silver-weight items, with terms and conditions applied.

Director of Khimji Jewellers Mitesh Khimji expressed his happiness on this occasion and said, "The 13th anniversary of our Cuttack store is a historic occasion for us. We deeply appreciate the trust, commitment and support our customers have shown over the years. To celebrate this milestone, we are pleased to offer special discounts as a token of our gratitude. At Khimji Jewellers, we are dedicated to providing exceptional value and a memorable shopping experience, ensuring our customers' needs and preferences are always at the forefront." "With a rich heritage spanning over 88 years, Khimji Jewellers has been synonymous with exquisite craftsmanship and unparalleled quality. The Cuttack store, in particular, has been a beacon of trust and elegance for over a decade, offering a wide range of jewellery to suit every occasion and preference," he added.



Railways suspends loco pilots, ALPs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 24: The drivers of Gatiman Express and Malwa Express along with their assistants have been suspended for running their trains at 120 kmph in a section where the cautionary speed limit was restricted at 20 kmph.

The incident took place recently in which the trains' crews violated the precautionary speed limit in the same section, between Jajau and Mania railway station near Agra Cantt, where a temporary speed restriction has been imposed due to an ongoing renovation work of a railway bridge. Agra division PRO Prashati Srivastava confirmed the incident and said "disciplinary action has been taken against all concerned staff".

In the first incident, the loco pilot and assistant loco pilot of



the Gatiman Express, India's first semi-high speed train which runs at 160 kmph speed between Hazrat Nizamuddin in Delhi and Virangana Lakshmi Bai Jhansi Junction in Uttar Pradesh, violated the advisory speed restriction after the train left Agra Cantt for Gwalior," said a railway source. "Just a couple of days after the Gatiman incident, drivers of another train, Malwa Express,

which runs between Katra (Jammu) and Indore (Madhya Pradesh), too committed a similar violation at the same spot and steered the train at 120 kmph," he added. The railways officials say that in a normal course, the said section allows all superfast as well as semi-high speed trains to run at 120 kmph. However, the repair work of a river bridge was recently started due to which

this restriction of 20 kmph has been imposed. "It seems that they might have forgotten to slow down the train at the caution. It is unexpected for loco pilots and it is a serious lapse as it could have risked hundreds of passengers' lives," said an official, associated with the operating department, adding the railways treats such lapses very seriously. The railways imposes speed restrictions for safe operation of the trains for various reasons such as track condition, ongoing track repair work, old railway bridges and station yard remodeling. The officials also say that before boarding the engine, the loco pilots and their assistants obtain a complete route chart along with advisories and cautionary speed limits from the concerned operating department and they are supposed to maintain the speed accordingly.

OES to honour green warriors on World Environment Day

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, May 24: On the occasion of World Environment Day June 5, the Orissa Environmental Society has decided to honour some of the distinguished persons who have made significant contributions towards environmental conservation in the state.

Former engineer-in-chief at state water resources department Ramesh Chandra Tripathy will be conferred with 'Water Man of Odisha Award'. 'Lifetime Contribution to Health Services Award' will be bestowed on eminent cardiologist and director of cardiology centre in PGIMER Capital Hospital Pravat Kumar Dash. Former professor of Botany Baman Chandra Acharya will be honoured with the 'Environmentalist of the Year



Award - 2024' for his contribution to plant sciences. Similarly, Sukant Patnaik will be felicitated with the 'Green Crusader Award' for implementing CSR activities through tree plantation. A special discussion by experts will be held on World Environment Day theme, "Land degradation, desertification and drought resilience," president of OES Sundara Narayana Patro and Secretary Jayakrushna Panigrahi informed.

About 7.5L deaths could be prevented by infection control in LMICs

About 7.5 lakh deaths associated with antimicrobial resistance (AMR) could be prevented every year in low-and middle-income countries (LMICs) by improving measures that prevent infections, according to an analysis, part of a four-paper series published in The Lancet journal.

These measures included hand hygiene, regular cleaning and sterilisation of equipment in healthcare facilities, along with providing access to safe drinking water, effective sanitation and paediatric vaccines, researchers said.

The international team of researchers estimated that each year, one in every eight deaths globally is caused by bacterial infections - about 77 lakh deaths in total, of which 50 lakh are associated with bacteria that have become resistant to antibiotics.

The authors called for support in providing sustainable

access to antibiotics to be central to ambitious and actionable targets for tackling AMR. "Access to effective antibiotics is essential to patients worldwide. A failure to provide these antibiotics puts us at risk for not meeting the UN sustainable development goals on child survival and health ageing," said series co-author, Iruka Okeke of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Okeke said that effective antibiotics prolong lives, reduce disabilities, limit healthcare costs and enable other life-saving medical actions such as surgery. "However, antimicrobial resistance is on the rise - accelerated by inappropriate use of antibiotics during the Covid-19 pandemic - threatening the backbone of modern medicine and already leading to deaths and disease which would have once been prevented," said Okeke. Existing infection prevention methods can prevent AMR-associated



deaths, according to modelling analysis undertaken for putting together the series of papers. Up to 3.37 lakh deaths a year could be saved by improving infection prevention and control in healthcare facilities including better hand hygiene and regular cleaning and sterilisation of equipment, the authors found. Around 2.5 lakh deaths could be avoided yearly by providing universal access to safe drinking

water and effective sanitation in community settings, they found. Further, 1.82 lakh deaths a year could be saved by expanding the rollout of some paediatric vaccines, such as pneumococcal vaccines which help protect against pneumonia and meningitis, along with introducing new ones, such as RSV vaccines for pregnant women, the researchers found. "Our findings highlight how public health actions to prevent

infections in the first place should be prioritised as a strategy to tackle AMR as these methods have the potential to drastically reduce the number of deaths from AMR-associated infections," said co-author Yewande Alimi of Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). "If we can focus on improving infection control methods, water and sanitation and vaccination in LMICs then it should be possible to reduce the number of deaths linked with AMR by 10 per cent by 2030," said Alimi.

Along with preventing infections in the first place, the authors also looked at evidence for preventing resistance emerging in bacteria. Antibiotic stewardship (reducing the use of antibiotics when the benefit to patients is limited) is thought to reduce the selection pressure on bacteria to develop resistance; however, there is a lack of research in this area. The currently limited evidence on the impact of antibiotic stewardship on AMR from low-and middle-income countries does not mean it is not a key intervention that needs focus but rather makes it difficult to anticipate the effects of antibiotic stewardship in those countries. "We urgently need studies to investigate the impact to help inform future policies and interventions fit for different contexts," said co-author Esmita Charani of the University of Cape Town, South Africa.

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Normal, pseudo melanistic tiger cubs walk in tandem in Similipal



Bhubaneswar, May 24: In what may come as pleasant news for animal lovers, two tiger cubs of different phenotypes - one normal and another pseudo melanistic - have been spotted roaming together within the Similipal Tiger Reserve (STR). The picture of the big cat duo captured on camera trap has gone viral online leaving the netizens in awe. Taking into X, Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (Wildlife) and Chief Wildlife Warden

Susanta Nanda Thursday wrote, "Normal & pseudo melanistic cubs of T18 moving shoulder to shoulder inside Similipal Tiger Reserve. Like a shadow..." The images taken from a camera trap planted inside STR, shows both the tigers taking steps in tandem. While both are seen walking side by side, the deep black stripes of the pseudo melanistic tiger have captured the attention of the netizens. "It is a very rare sight captured by latest cameras installed at strategic locations, giving en-

hanced surveillance," an X user wrote hailing the development, while another commented below the post that these animals must be saved at any cost. In a similar incident, four pseudo melanistic tigers were captured by a trap camera in STR, January 7 this year. Following this, PCCF Nanda wrote to National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), requesting for female pseudo-melanistic tigers to create inbreeding in STR, and boost the rare species' numbers. Nanda said tigers of such melanistic variety are rare and stay in isolation, hence the need for diversification. Giving the total numbers of melanistic tigers present in India, Union Minister of State for Environment, Ashwini Kumar Choubey had recently told in Rajya Sabha that there are a total of 10, all found in Similipal in Odisha.



DEMOCRATIC DUTY: Women polling officials leave for their respective booths in Sambalpur Friday for the elections scheduled for Saturday

One arrested for Sarasara murder

Bargarh, May 24: Police here Friday arrested a person from neighbouring Chhattisgarh for his alleged role in the organised murder of an auto-driver which occurred during polling at Sarasara village under Sadar police limits Monday. This was informed by Bargarh SP Prahlad Sahai Meena in a press meet held at the conference hall of district police headquarters, Friday. The arrested accused was identified as Durbadal Nag, a resident of Sarasara village. Another accused Ashok Mahananda is still absconding, the police said. Efforts are on to nab him, said SP Meena. A special police team is conducting raids at different places and very soon the other accused will be arrested, he said. It is pertinent to mention here that the auto driver Bishwanath Mirdha, who was carrying voters to a polling booth, was brutally murdered while voting was underway at Sarasara village May 20.

Distress sale of Mahua haunts tribals

Rayagada, May 24: The tribal dominated Rayagada district has got a special identity owing to the availability of Mahua flowers as the minor forest produce (MFP) is found in the district in abundance. However, tribals are being taken for a ride due to lack of government control on Mahua flower procurement in the district. They are being lured and tricked by the middlemen to sell off their Mahua flower stocks at throwaway prices due to lack of formal marketing facilities, adherence to MSP and storage facilities. The government has fixed the minimum support price (MSP) for Mahua flowers at ₹29 per kg and enlisted seven districts for Mahua collection and procurement. On the other hand, the state-owned Tribal Development Cooperative Corporation (TDCC) is yet to enlist Mahua flowers on its list of MFPs leading to distress sale of the forest produce by the gullible tribals. It is alleged that the traders are engaging middlemen and procuring the Mahua stocks from the tribals from their doorsteps at throwaway prices.



This year Mahua flowers have bloomed in abundance in all the tribal dominated districts of Odisha. Accordingly, the tribals expect a bumper harvest of the forest produce in the district. However, as TDCC has not enlisted Mahua as an MFP, the fear of another round of distress sale now haunts the tribals. As a result, hundreds of tribals engaged in Mahua collection live in fear of losing their livelihood. Meanwhile, tribals in the district's villages have started collection of Mahua flowers which are sold at prices ranging from ₹30 to ₹35 per kg by the traders at the local market. However, traders and middle-

men pressuring the tribals to reduce the price of Mahua has concerned the gullible tribals. According to a survey conducted by the state Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) department, Mohua flowers are produced in around 10 districts of the state. Rayagada, Kandhamal, Keonjhar, Sundargarh, Koraput, Nabarangpur, Mayurbhanj, Deogarh and Sambalpur districts produce a bumper harvest. However, the earnings of the tribals are estimated at 95.45 per cent in Bolangir district while it is only 60.23 per cent in Nuapada district. The majority earnings of the tribals and members of Dalit community from minor forest produce comes from Mahua collection. Every year around 20 quintal of Mahua is collected in the state while the tribal collectors earn on an average around ₹20 per kg from its sale. The food products manufactured from Mahua are sold around ₹140 to ₹160 per kg. Mahua is also used in preparation of liquor and has now been included in the food security list. Recently, the state government has launched efforts to market Mahua-based products in the national level through preparation of jam, jelly, cookies, halwa, gulab jamun, cake and chocolates using the flowers. Meanwhile, efforts are on to also prepare hand sanitizers and floor cleaning liquids from Mahua. When contacted, executive officer of Rayagada Zilla Parishad Nihar Ranjan Kanhar said the state government has directed the Local Area Multi Purpose Cooperative Societies (LAMPS) to oversee the collection and fix the price of Mahua flowers. However, a probe will be conducted into the allegation of distress sale of Mahua flowers and steps will be taken in this regard, he said.

Sarpanch's hubby arrested for raping, impregnating minor

Purushottampur, May 24: Police here have arrested the husband of a sarpanch in a gram panchayat under this block in Ganjam district for allegedly raping and impregnating a minor girl. After making the arrest, police Friday forwarded the accused to a special PCO court in Berhampur. The arrested person has been identified as Tutu Das, 30. As per the police complaint, Tutu lured a minor girl and raped her multiple times leading to pregnancy. When Tutu came to know about the girl's condition, he brought some medicines and gave it to her in order to abort the pregnancy. The incident came to the fore after the minor girl lodged a complaint in this regard at Purushottampur police station. Acting on the complaint, a case (350/24) was registered and after investigation Tutu was arrested, said Bipin Bihari Hota, IIC of Purushottampur PS.

Police arrest 14 during post-poll drive

Berhampur, May 24: Police have arrested 14 people from various places in Ganjam district during a special drive conducted against the anti-socials in the post-poll period, police said Friday. Out of them, 10 people were booked under the Arms Act, the police said. They were arrested Thursday during a drive and it would continue for some more days keeping in view the counting of the votes, the Superintendent of Police (SP) of Ganjam district, Jagmohan Meena, said. The arrests were made in Polasara, Gangapur, Dharakote, Kodala, Aska and Belaguntha areas. Earlier, police arrested 38 people for their alleged involvement in the poll-related violence.

Man found dead on rly tracks

Berhampur, May 24: A 42-year-old man was found dead on the railway tracks near Berhampur railway station in Ganjam district Friday morning, police said. The deceased was identified as Ramachandra Sahu, son of Jaya Sahu, a resident of Bijipur Kalua Sahi under Town police limits here. As per reports, Ramachandra had gone to Puri for some work and while returning he took a halt at Khurda Thursday night. He called his wife around 10pm there and informed her about his return. However, when he did not reach home till late, family members tried to contact him, but found his mobile switched off. The family members then got suspicious and launched a frantic search but could not trace Ramachandra. Meanwhile, the Government Railway Police (GRP) here came to know that a body was found lying on the tracks near Platform No. 2 of Berhampur railway station Friday morning and rushed to the spot. Incidentally, Ramachandra's brother-in-law Sanatan, who was searching for him, reached the spot and identified the body in police presence. However, Ramachandra's mobile phone and other belongings were found missing at the spot, said the police.



ELEPHANT CENSUS 81 jumbos present in Ghumusar forest div

Ghumusar North and South forest divisions gradually becoming safe habitats for elephants

Bhanjanagar, May 24: As many as 81 pachyderms were found present in various ranges under Ghumusar forest division in the elephant census. The headcount began May 22 in the Ghumusar North and South forest divisions in Ganjam district and concluded Friday night. By Friday evening, 62 elephants were spotted in various ranges of the Ghumusar North forest division. Similarly, 19 jumbos were found in the Ghumusar South forest division. The findings revealed that these two di-

visions have gradually become safer habitats for elephants in comparison to neighbouring forest divisions. The giant animals present here tend to return shortly after visiting adjacent forest divisions, it was learnt. According to Forest department sources, 25 elephants were seen in Mujagada range, five in Tarsingi range and 32 in Jagannathprasad range under the Ghumusar North forest division as of Friday evening. In the Ghumusar South forest division, five pachyderms were spotted in Sadhangipalli forest of Asika range and 14 in



Pandakhola forest of Sorada range. The census includes calves, mother elephants, maknas (tuskless males), and tuskers. No makna elephant was found in either of the forest divisions during the census. The division-level reports will be integrated at the Regional Chief Conservator of Forest (RCCF) level and the final state-level elephant count will be determined based on reports from all RCCFs. Contacted, Vinod Acharya, the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) of the Ghumusar South forest division, confirmed that 19 elephants were counted during the census. Similarly, Himashu Sekhar Mohanty, DFO of Ghumusar North forest division, stated that the forest division provides a safe habitat for elephants leading to an increase in their numbers. Notably, elephant census is conducted in the state every two years and the government takes steps to ensure their protection based on the results. The last census in 2017 recorded presence of 1,976 elephants in the state. While another census was to be conducted in 2019, it was cancelled in view of the Covid-19 pandemic and no census has been held thereafter. In 2017, 11 jumbos were found in the Berhampur forest division, 17 in the Ghumusar North, and 25 in the Ghumusar South forest divisions in Ganjam district. The number of elephants has significantly increased possibly due to migration from other forest divisions. On an average, over 75 elephants die annually in the state due to various causes. Since 2017 many calves have been born suggesting a potential increase in the state's elephant population. Both forest divisions are implementing measures to ensure the safety of elephants. Mohanty and Acharya are collaboratively visiting various areas to directly address the provision of food and water for the elephants.

Bhanja Bhawan to become cultural hub

DEVELOPMENTAL WORK ON THE ENTIRE COMPLEX WILL START SOON AFTER RSP GETS ITS POSSESSION

Rourkela, May 24: Soon after the legal victory, plans are afoot by steel major Rourkela Steel Plant (RSP) for development of Bhanja Cultural Complex as a multi-disciplinary cultural centre. Sources said, a blueprint is being prepared for the purpose. This centre will act as a catalyst in preserving and promoting the rich literature, art, culture and heritage of the state in particular. After a legal battle, the District Judge, Sundargarh, in his judgement dated April 30 has directed Adarsha Pathagar, the unauthorised occupant, to give vacant possession of Bhanja Bhawan and its periphery area to RSP within a period of two months, i.e. by June 30. Developmental work on the entire complex will start soon after RSP gets its possession. The au-

ditorium that is in a dilapidated condition will be given a complete makeover with the re-vamping of the lighting, sound system, air conditioning and other infrastructure, so as to make it a national level auditorium. Besides, the auditorium which has no fire safety certificate at present will be made fire safety compliant. One of the major projects to be taken up by RSP is organising an annual Odia literature festival that will witness congregation of eminent writers, poets, linguists and other creative personalities who will be deliberating on Odia literature as well as brainstorming on topics related to all round development and popularisation of Odia language, literature and culture. Special initiatives will be taken to inculcate creative writing skills in Odia language among school children. Plans also include development



of an Upendra Bhanja Art Gallery in Bhanja Bhawan that will provide a modern and stylish venue to the artists, crafts persons, photographers and students to display their creations. Besides, an art festival will be organised every year inviting local and national level artists to prepare and display their artworks. Apart from encouraging the budding artists, the festival will provide a unique platform that will give them much-needed exposure. Furthermore, a music festival

will be organised every year to mark the birth anniversary of Kabi Samrat Upendra Bhanja that will feature the folk, classical as well as contemporary music forms by locals as well as established singers in order to attract audience from every age group and taste. Eminent national level theatre academics and institutions will be invited to conduct theatre workshops in the Bhanja Bhawan every year during the summer vacations which will also train the talented youngsters in various

nuances of drama and theatre. Simultaneously, the gamut of activities of Bhanja Kala Kendra, which has been functioning as an incubator of talents will be expanded. Efforts will be made to set up research centres for Odissi dance and music in Bhanja Kala Kendra. Organisation of mega events to mark birth anniversaries of legendary litterateurs apart from folk/tribal music and art festivals are also in the pipeline as part of the plan.

TATA INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
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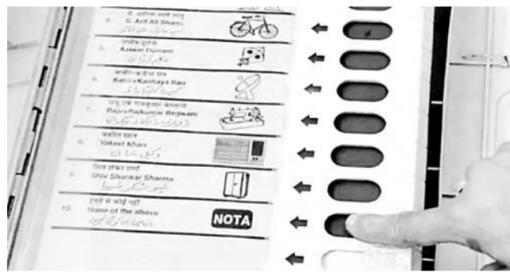
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FOCUS NOTA

THE SOS BUTTON



NOTA represents a neutral stance without any numerical value in determining the winning total. Even if it bags the maximum number of votes, the candidate with the next highest total valid votes is declared the winner

would be discussed and taken up after THIS election is over. Elections have come and gone, but our friends have hardly found time to prepare their own agenda for long-term grassroots work. To justify their activism, during the interim between two general elections, they engage in tokenism passed off as movements. Thus, those social organisations and activists who should have taken up the task of preparing the voters for a free and fair election through constant action programmes, workshops, and regular study groups have virtually acted like the B-team of this party or that party. Selective amnesia, vilification, half-truths, and false promises have virtually become their weapons, as in the case of self-seeking political parties.

Needless to say, by and large, this is the scenario, though exceptions do exist. But knowingly or inadvertently, these social organisations also help the politics of expediency to continue ad nauseam. We cannot any more push to the background the question of fair play and purity of means if we want to save this democracy. Like Gandhiji, we feel that ethics and morality in public life must get the highest priority, especially when the election process has turned into a seer travesty.

To cut the story short, NOTA's potential to influence the victory margin is not as important for us as its value as a barometer of the angst of the voters. We want to send the message to the smart alics who are holding our parliamentary democracy at ransom that we are no longer prepared to be taken for a ride. We, instead of shying away from the booth, want to register our discontent and grunt officially and legally by pressing the NOTA button on the EVM. Our slogan is NOTA (None Of The Alocs), and it is an SOS call.

The writer is a renowned poet, essayist, and columnist of Odisha

For the last few days, poor NOTA (None Of The Above) has been in the news. For all the wrong reasons, though. After the BJP candidate was elected unopposed in the Surat Lok Sabha election, the crest-fallen Congress leaders discovered the value of NOTA. Again, when the Congress candidate in Indore withdrew his nomination unceremoniously and joined the BJP overnight, the shipwrecked Congress party there appealed to voters to press the NOTA button to teach the BJP a lesson. Thus, in recent times, NOTA has acquired the image of a salvage which creates value from waste material.

But for some voters, like this columnist, NOTA is a SOS button which they have pressed for completely different reasons. The avalanche of funds and freebies descending on constituencies and the queer reflexes of turncoats have left us mystified. NOTA has become our last refuge— an SOS button for the flabbergasted.

What did the original creators of NOTA have in mind? The Supreme Court, in the case PUCV Vs Union of India, gave its verdict in favour of adding a NOTA provision to the EVM. While passing this ruling in 2013, the then Chief Justice of India, P.Sathasivam, was quoted as stating, "x x x Such an option gives the voter the right to express his disapproval of the kind of candidates being put up by the parties. Gradually, there will be a systemic change, and the parties will be forced to accept the will of the people and to select candidates who are known for their integrity."

Long before the introduction of NOTA, during and before the introduction of EVM, there was always provision for rejecting all the candidates if the voters so wished. But in none of these provisions, the secrecy of the voter was protected. NOTA was introduced to correct that mistake. This kind of protest voting is available under different

names in more than a dozen countries. Some countries, like Russia and Pakistan, which first introduced such protest voting, withdrew it later when the authorities felt it backfired. NOTA was hailed by its creators here as symbolising "maturing of India's democracy."

Unholy alliances, winning elections by hook or by crook, and Aya Ram-Gaya Ram syndrome were present even during the first general election held in 1951-52. That is why that section of the Gandhians, which shunned the temptation of power politics and decided to work as Gandhiji's 'Lok Sevak', had to boycott the election. The tragedy of the sidelining of ethics and morality during the dawn of democracy in free India has metamorphosed into a big farce. Washing machines of mainstream political parties, who have received Aya Rams with open arms, have proved to be cardboard cut-outs.

We know a lot of snags NOTA has to overcome before it becomes fully effective, as it has only symbolic value as a protest vote. It represents a neutral stance without any numerical value in determining the winning total. Even if NOTA bags the maximum number of votes,

the candidate with the next highest total valid votes, even if it is only one, will be declared the winner. Now there is an effort to give NOTA the status of a person. Another problem to be addressed is whether there will be re-election if the majority of voters in a constituency prefer the NOTA option. Let's remember that NOTA is a pioneering device. And pioneers do not hold the last word, but only the first. Corrections and improvements will follow once we accept and use it.

When the election knocks at the door, even our non-political social activist friends become hyperactive. Acting as the B-team of the party of their liking, they attack us, the NOTA voters, with such comments as "hang your high sounding jargon." It is not the time to discuss structural change, election reform, et cetera. We can defer such discussion to a later date. Now we are in the vortex of a struggle. Tell us whether you are with us or against us."

I have weathered through at least eight general elections and as many by-elections. Always such social activist friends, hell bent on bringing the party of their liking to power, assure us that long term programmes



Sailaj Rabi

THE TRAGEDY OF THE SIDELINING OF ETHICS AND MORALITY DURING THE DAWN OF DEMOCRACY IN FREE INDIA HAS METAMORPHOSED INTO A BIG FARCE



THE MOTHER

Dubious Deals

In other news from the diplomatic world, the MEA is knee-deep in an investigation over some shady real estate deals by Indian missions abroad. The MEA had told these missions, which were operating out of rented spaces, to buy land and build embassies. Some of these missions went on a shopping spree and ended up paying double or even triple the market value for the land.

All this would have stayed under wraps had it not been for the red flag waved by a team from Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) during a visit to one of these countries. The CAG discovered blatant violations of norms and confirmed that the prices paid were way above market rates. Now that it can't be brushed under the carpet, the MEA is compelled to probe the dubious land deals.

But this is not an isolated incident, sources have informed DKB. Similar stories are popping up from other countries, and the MEA is now scrambling to get to the bottom of it. It is even looking at the possible involvement of some officers in South Block. To untangle the mess, two different MEA teams have been dispatched to go through the property deals made by the missions in the last decade. A forensic examination is underway. There are whispers about a turf war within the ministry, with different factions trying to outdo each other.

Whatever it is, all eyes are now on the ministry's report on the findings which will soon be handed over to the competent authorities for action. The drama may have only just begun.

Poll season revives diplomat's contentious saga

Election season is a time when every issue, no matter how long buried, is suddenly exhumed for public scrutiny. Enter stage right: the Khobragade saga. Just when you thought this episode had quietly exited, it returns, now with an encore performance thanks to Devyani Khobragade's recent promotion to the Indian ambassador to Cambodia. This promotion, which those in the Indian Foreign Service (IFS), including experienced babus don't consider worthy, is seen as a bit of a righting of a wrong.



BABUDOM BYTES

Dilip Cherian

For those who've forgotten, Khobragade, a 1999-batch IFS officer, became the reluctant star of a diplomatic drama back in 2013 — one that brought India-US relations to a frosty low. Accusations of underpaying her domestic help in the US led to her arrest and a media frenzy. She cried foul, the US courts eventually nodded in agreement due to diplomatic immunity, and India sent her back home in a rare show of bureaucratic bravado, leaving the Americans with a diplomatic hangover.

Now just as we're in the throes of a general election, Khobragade's name pops up again. This time, it is in connection with a glitzy photoshoot in traditional Cambodian attire for the country's New Year celebrations, a sight that lit up social media like Diwali fireworks. Seasoned diplomats are treating her Cambodian posting with the kind of enthusiasm you'd expect for a cup of tepid tea — acknowledging it more as a token gesture than a triumph. But nothing like a general election to spring a surprise or two from a controversial past.

MP babus clash behind closed doors

A busy bee has informed DKB that chaos is reigning in a crucial Madhya Pradesh government department. Two IAS officers, appointed through their influential connections, are at loggerheads with the Principal Secretary. This infighting has plunged the department into disarray, rendering it incapable of dealing with important administrative matters.

These sources inform us that this internal turmoil has not yet become public knowledge, due to the Model Code of Conduct currently in place. However, the conflict between the two senior babus is expected to escalate further once the model code is lifted. Both officers are reportedly eager to make a few questionable decisions, likely driven by the prospect of backhanders. In contrast, although opposed to any such dealings, their boss, the Principal Secretary reportedly suffers from indecisiveness, leading to several amusing anecdotes.

The situation will likely deteriorate and the Principal Secretary will probably bear the brunt of the fallout. Babus in Bhopal feel it is only a matter of time before he is asked to leave his current post due to the ongoing turmoil in the department.

Share a babu experience! Follow dilipcherian@twitter.com. Let's multiply the effect

WISDOM CORNER

Both the man of science and the man of action live always at the edge of mystery, surrounded by it. **J. ROBERT OPPENHEIMER**

He who can listen to the music in the midst of noise can achieve great things. **VIKRAM SARABHAI**

We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them. **ALBERT EINSTEIN**

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

- 1895:** The trial of acclaimed Irish writer Oscar Wilde ended with him being found guilty of "committing acts of gross indecency with certain male persons"; he was sentenced to two years of hard labour.
- 1935:** American track-and-field standout Jesse Owens set three world records and equaled one other at a meet in Ann Arbor, Michigan.
- 1961:** In a speech before Congress, U.S. President John F. Kennedy committed the United States to land a man on the Moon by the end of the decade; the goal was achieved with Apollo 11 in 1969.
- 1969:** Midnight Cowboy was released in theatres, and the drama, which starred Jon Voight and Dustin Hoffman, went on to become the only X-rated film to win the Academy Award for best picture.
- 1977:** George Lucas's space opera film Star Wars (later known as Star Wars: Episode IV—New Hope) was released, launching one of the most successful and influential franchises in motion picture history.

LOL

Three very tough mice

PandaThree rats are sitting at the bar talking bragging about their bravery and toughness. The first says, "I'm so tough, once I ate a whole bagful of rat poison!"



The second says, "Well I'm so tough, once I was caught in a rat trap and I bit it apart!" Then the third rat gets up and says, "Later guys, I'm off home to harass the cat."

SPECTRUM POLITICS

An election, yes, but also a class war

About the only people in India who are convinced that the BJP has already crossed the half-way mark of 272 and touched the magic figure of 300 are the twin promoters of The West India Company, and their shareholders, stakeholders and sleeping partners. To understand how fanciful those numbers are, consider this: 430 seats have voted so far; there are still 114 to go. Which means, by their reckoning, the BJP has already achieved a 70 per cent success rate after five phases. It had an overall strike rate of 56% in 2019. Amen.

On the other hand, those who are not devotees of God's Own Party, which is a whopping 63% of the electorate—i.e. roughly two out of every three Indians in a 80% Hindu nation—are beginning to believe that their brethren in this vast and wondrous land have done something truly earthshaking in this election, silently, secretly, strongly. Inherent in these opposing forecasts for the 4th of June is a grain of truth captured succinctly by the comedian Vir Das in the land of the 4th of July: "We live in two Indias".

In the India of mainstream

TV channels, BJP had won by a big margin even before polling began; in the India of YouTube channels, it is gasping for breath after each phase. In the India of Prashant Kishor, there isn't any significant dissatisfaction or anger against Narendra Modi; in the India of Yogendra Yadav, there is a surging undercurrent of bread-and-butter issues. In the India of Vande Bharat voyagers, there is greater respect for the blue passport; in the India of the Covid lockdown walkers and cyclists, the water level has come up to the danger mark.

You are what you believe in the two Indias.

The great irony of Indian democracy—the paradox of its political marketplace—is that it is no longer the parties or their candidates which are on test; it is actually the voter and his/her wisdom. So, broadly speaking, while the urban, literate, prosperous, upper castes seem ever more susceptible to the propaganda they are exposed to, it is the rural, illiterate, poor, underprivileged, lower castes that are able to see through it. This election, in that sense, is as much a class war between two contending ideas of

India as a contest between competing political brands.

"India always surprises you in the intelligence of its electorate," the former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan bloviated recently. "Right from the first elections in the early 1950s, when we thought how can a largely illiterate population deliver good results, I think again and again we have been surprised by the maturity of the voters. I am hopeful we will see good results from their thinking." The qualities he lists for a democratic verdict—intelligence, maturity, thinking—seem to have wholly deserted one India and lodged themselves in the other. No prizes for guessing which one.

The contours of a class war have been ever present in Indian politics since the liberalisation of 1991, but they were most evident in the Karnataka Assembly elections in 2023. According to one survey, 79% of the upper and middle classes aligned with the BJP whereas 94% of the poor and very poor were with the Congress. In constituencies with a per capita GDP of ₹2.5 lakh to ₹4 lakh, BJP did well; Congress in seats with ₹1.4 lakh or less. BJP's

strike rate dropped from 55% to 25% in the most rural constituencies but by just 7% in the most urban constituencies. It is too early, but who is to say that with rising inequity and inequality, inflation and unemployment, this is not playing out in other states in the general elections, especially when threatened by a change to the Constitution guaranteeing some dignity to their lives?

"Modi ki guarantee" was a direct response to the Congress guarantees, which itself had its provenance in the Aam Aadmi Party. But the competitive welfareism that has broken out between parties—there is even a 'Naveen Guarantee' in Odisha—marks, in the words of the economist Rathin Roy, the transition of India from a development State to a compensatory State. At a more mundane level, it also points to an acknowledgement by one India of the hard reality in the other India unmovable by shameless advertisements, bottomless preening, and endless triumphalism. Then again, the Indian Political League is like the other IPL: it ain't over till the last legitimate ball is bowled.

Heavy rains and trees

Sir, The monsoon has not yet arrived, but some of the southern states, especially Kerala and Tamil Nadu, have been witnessing heavy torrents for the past few days, throwing life out of gear. Along with flash floods on streets, falling trees also cause sudden mishaps and even turn out to be life takers. Trees no doubt offer shade and do function as 'oxygen givers', but at the same time they pose heavy disaster and are a menace to the public if their growth is unchecked. Planting and saving trees is good, but when they turn out to be a threat to human life, the same protectors turn out to be killers. Definitely, the authority concerned or the organisation that took the job to plant them will have to either prune or cut them to avoid mishaps. Organisations and departments, while planting trees, must definitely bear in mind that with the planting of saplings in the name of celebrations and functions, their work is not over, truly it is their task to see that the growing saplings do not turn out to be 'death causing green monsters.'

M Pradyu, KANNUR

Matter of concern

Sir, In the ongoing general elections, polls for 543 Lok Sabha seats are being held. In Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim, Assemblies are going to the polls apart from by-elections in 25 Assembly seats. The Election Commission has fixed a maximum of ₹95 lakh for a Lok Sabha candidate and a maximum of ₹40 lakh for an Assembly candidate on pamphlets, campaign materials, and other election-related work. The quantum of hoardings, pamphlets, and flexes for advertisement is well understood by looking at the cost limit. After the elections, it becomes waste material and pollutes the environment by adding to the streets, gutters, and garbage. Consequently, they will cause immense damage to the environment. As it is, we are facing a lot of problems every day due to tonnes and tonnes of plastic waste, which is not biodegradable. As a remedy, we can get rid of the destructive effects of plastics and allied products by burying these wastes, creating artificial ponds. Hopefully, the authorities will take appropriate action.

Sanjib Kumar Das, CUTTACK

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

Readers of Orissa POST are most welcome to contribute letters (200 words), articles and columns (between 750-1250 words). Contributors are requested to send their contact numbers and full postal address/email ID. They may also send in their valuable comments, opinion and suggestions, preferably by email, to: edit@orissapost.com

OrissaPOST

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Kashmiri Pandits to vote at special polling stations

AGENCIES
Jammu, May 24: More than 26,000 displaced Kashmiri Pandit voters from across the country are eligible to vote at 34 polling stations in the sixth phase of the Lok Sabha elections in Jammu and Kashmir's Anantnag constituency Saturday.

This marks the conclusion of voting in the Union Territory, with polling already completed in the other four constituencies.

The newly created Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seat, covering the south Kashmir-Pir Panjal region, will cover the districts of Anantnag, Kulgam, Shopian, Rajouri and Poonch.

The polling parties and security forces are being dispatched for special polling stations set up for the Kashmiri Pandits in Jammu and Udhampur districts.

"Over 26,000 Kashmiri migrant voters will cast their ballots at special polling stations set up in Jammu, Udhampur and Delhi tomorrow. All arrangements have been made for free and fair polling tomorrow," Relief and Rehabilitation Commissioner Dr Arvind Karwani told this agency.

Dr Karwani reviewed the arrangements along with election officers at 21 polling booths and 8 auxiliary ones in Jammu, one in Udhampur and four in Delhi. Assistant Electoral Returning Officer (AERO) Dr Riaz Ahmed

urged the Kashmiri migrant voters to participate in the election.

"All necessary facilities, including water and shelter, have been arranged. The Election Commission has also provided a pick-and-drop facility for the voters, available from 6 am to 6 pm, focusing on areas

with higher concentrations of migrants," the AERO said. The authorities, amid tight security, handed over polling materials, including EVMs, to polling parties at Women's College in Jammu. The security forces and election parties are being deployed to their respective stations, the officials said.

The Anantnag constituency is preparing for a competitive electoral showdown with nearly 18.36 lakh voters, including 9.02 lakh women, set to vote at 2,338 polling stations.

Twenty candidates are vying for the seat, with the main contest between PDP chief and former chief minister Mehbooba Mufti and prominent Gujjar leader and former minister Mian Altaf Ahmad of the National Conference (NC).

Apni Party's Zafar Iqbal Manhas, backed by the BJP in the Pir Panjal region, hopes to challenge both the PDP and the NC.

The Democratic Progressive Azad Party (DPAP), led by former Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad, has fielded Mohammad Saleem Parray for the seat.



Over 26,000 Kashmiri migrant voters will cast their ballots at special polling stations set up in Jammu, Udhampur and Delhi tomorrow. All arrangements have been made for free and fair polling tomorrow

ARVIND KARWANI | RELIEF AND REHABILITATION COMMISSIONER

Groundwater level down in 51 out of 76 tehsils of Marathwada

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar, May 24: Groundwater level has gone down, by more than three metres in some cases, in 51 out of 76 tehsils in Marathwada region of Maharashtra, an official report has said.

The situation is somewhat better in Nanded district which had received good rainfall last year compared to the other seven districts, it said.

Chief Minister Eknath Shinde Thursday reviewed the drought situation in this central Maharashtra region by holding a meeting here.

The official report submitted



to the Chief Minister said that groundwater level has gone down by upto one metre in 18 talukas (tehsils), by between one to two

metres in 15 talukas, between two to three metres in 14 talukas and more than three metres in four talukas.

AN OFFICIAL REPORT REVEALS A SIGNIFICANT DROP IN GROUNDWATER LEVELS IN 51 OUT OF 76 TEHSILS IN MAHARASHTRA'S MARATHWADA REGION

THE SITUATION IS CRITICAL IN BEED AND LATUR DISTRICTS, WITH THE REGION RECEIVING 21.44% LESS RAINFALL THAN AVERAGE

CHIEF MINISTER EKNATH SHINDE REVIEWED THE DROUGHT SITUATION IN A MEETING

The problem is more acute in Beed and Latur districts where decrease in groundwater level has been reported in ten talukas each. In Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar, nine talukas

have reported falling groundwater levels.

Eight talukas of Dharashiv district have also witnessed the same phenomenon. In Nanded, only one taluka out of 16 has reported a fall in groundwater level. Marathwada comprises the districts of Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar, Jalna, Beed, Latur, Dharashiv, Nanded, Parbhani and Nanded.

The drought-prone region received 589.9 mm of rainfall in the last monsoon, 21.44 percent less than the average annual rainfall of 751 mm. As many as 1,249 villages and 512 hamlets depend on tankers for water supply at present, officials said.

SUSPICIOUS MOVEMENT ALONG IB Search operations conducted in Samba

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jammu, May 24: Security forces Friday conducted search operations at many villages along the International Border in Jammu and Kashmir's Samba district following reports of "suspicious movement" in the Bein-Lalachak forward area, officials said.

Drones were also deployed for surveillance during the operation, launched as a precautionary measure, they said.

Security forces conducted house-to-house verification in the border belt following reports of "suspicious movement" along

Drones were also deployed for surveillance during the operation, launched as a precautionary measure

the International Border (IB), the officials said.

The operation group commenced its search operation in the Bein-Lalachak forward area along the IB Friday after reports of movement of some suspicious people, they said.

The 'Black Panther' Operations Command Vehicle was also used during the searches as security personnel combed farmlands and bushy areas besides villages, the officials said. Personnel also checked identification documents of people living close to the border.

The operation is underway and many forward villages, including Manguchek, Sadechek, Regal and Chahwal, have been searched.



Shia Muslims in Budgam district of central Kashmir mourn the death of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, FM Amir-Abdollahian and others who were killed in a helicopter crash Sunday

Hope you don't disappoint me: Mehbooba to voters

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Srinagar, May 24: "Hope you don't disappoint me and give me an opportunity to be your advocate in Parliament," PDP president Mehbooba Mufti said Friday in her appeal to voters on the eve of polling in the Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seat.

The PDP chief, working to revive her party's fortunes following its alliance with the BJP in 2015, is up against National Conference's Mian Altaf and 18 others in the controversially re-



drawn constituency that votes Saturday in the penultimate round of the seven-phase elections.

"Tomorrow you all will go to vote. I request you to think before casting your vote about who

has supported you in difficult times," the former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister said in a video message on X.

Mehbooba Mufti said her family, her party and she had paid a huge price for advocating the cause of the people.

"Despite that, I rose above caste and religion, and raised my voice for justice and will continue to do so," she added.

"By supporting me and voting for me, you will definitely give me an opportunity to be your advocate in the Parliament and

portray the issues we are facing," she added.

She faces a challenge not just from prominent Gujjar leader and former minister Mian Altaf Ahmad but also from Apni Party's Zafar Iqbal Manhas, hoping to turn the tables on both the PDP and the NC after he managed to get the BJP's support in the Pir Panjal region.

The Democratic Progressive Azad Party (DPAP) of former Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad has fielded Mohammad Saleem Parray from the seat.

HC permits liquor sale in Mumbai after poll results

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, May 24: The Bombay High Court Friday permitted the sale of liquor in Mumbai after the announcement of Lok Sabha poll results June 4.

A vacation bench of Justices N R Borkar and Somasekar Sundaresan said the ban imposed by the city Collector on sale of liquor by hotels, restaurants, bars and permit rooms shall cease to have an effect upon declaration of results of elections in the city of Mumbai.

Additional government pleader Jyoti Chavan informed the bench that the Collector for



The pleas said that the sale of liquor should be permitted once election results are declared

Mumbai district suburban has already issued a letter modifying the earlier notification declaring June 4 as a dry day.

However, no such modification was issued by the Mumbai city collector. The bench then quipped that while people in the city suburbs can drink after dec-

laration of results those in the city cannot.

"Let's work it out. There has to be some parity," the high court said. The court was hearing petitions filed by the Indian Hotel and Restaurant Association (AHAR) challenging the orders passed by the Collectors of the Mumbai city and Mumbai district suburban declaring the whole day of June 4 as a dry day.

However, the collectors said no such review could be done as the orders were passed pursuant to directives from the Election Commission of India (ECI).

Mumbai city and Mumbai district suburban declaring the whole day of June 4 as a dry day. The pleas said that the sale of liquor should be permitted once election results are declared.

As per the pleas, the petitioner association had in April approached the Mumbai city collector and the Mumbai district suburban collector requesting them to review their decision declaring the whole day of June 4 as a dry day.

However, the collectors said no such review could be done as the orders were passed pursuant to directives from the Election Commission of India (ECI).

Owners knew of lapses: FIR

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Thane, May 24: The Dombivli chemical company where a blast killed nine and injured over 60

had not taken precautions

over the mixing and storage of compounds knowing well that any lapses might lead to an explosion, according to the FIR. The First Information Report (FIR) names company owners/directors Malti Pradip Mehta, Mayal Pradip Mehta and other directors, management staff and officials, who were supervising the factory. They have been booked for culpable homicide

and other charges. The FIR was registered by the Manpada police in Maharashtra's Thane district around 1.50 am Friday, nearly 12 hours after a blast

ripped through the unit of Amudan Chemicals located in Phase 2 of Dombivli MIDC area.

According to the FIR, some more people might be buried under the rubble of the factory that collapsed due to a blast in its boiler. The accused have been booked for culpable homicide (section 304), voluntarily causing hurt and negligent conduct with respect to combustible matter and explosive substances under the Indian Penal Code.

ADVISORY ISSUED IN KASHMIR AS TEMPERATURES SOAR

With the temperatures soaring, the Directorate of Health Services has issued an advisory, asking people to be vigilant about health risks associated with extreme heat

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Srinagar, May 24: Authorities in Kashmir issued an advisory Friday amid soaring temperatures in the Valley, with Srinagar recording its hottest May day in 13 years.

The maximum temperature in Srinagar Thursday was recorded at 32.2 degrees Celsius -- the same as May 25, 2013. Srinagar had recorded a maximum temperature of 32.3 degrees Celsius May 20, 2011.

Thursday's maximum temperature was 7.4 notches above normal for this time of the sea-

son. The Met office has forecast an isolated heat wave across the Valley over the next five days.

It said hot and dry weather will persist during this time, with no major rainfall activity till the end of the month.

The weather will be generally dry with the possibility of thundershowers at isolated places till May 28, the Met Office said.

During May 29-31, the weather is likely to remain partly to generally cloudy with the possibility of light rain/thunder at isolated places towards the afternoons, it added.

With the temperatures soaring,



the Directorate of Health Services has issued an advisory, asking people to be vigilant about

health risks associated with extreme heat, as the summer season has peaked in the Valley.

Suggesting that people stay hydrated, it said, "Drink plenty of water throughout the day, even if you don't feel thirsty. Avoid caffeinated beverages, as they can lead to dehydration. Persons working under the conditions of high temperature and humidity should assuredly drink cold water."

The advisory asked the people to wear lightweight, loose-fitting and light-coloured clothing. "Use wide-brimmed hats and sunglasses, shields and umbrellas to protect your skin from sunburn," it said and advised people to avoid strenuous activities during the hottest parts of the day.

The department also issued an advisory for children. "Never leave children in

parked cars, even with the windows down. Ensure they play in shaded areas and take breaks to cool down and hydrate. Dress children in appropriate clothing and apply sunscreen regularly," it said.

In an advisory to the elderly, the department said it must be ensured that they have access to cool environments.

"Watch for symptoms like dizziness, heavy sweating or lack of sweating, and in that case, seek medical attention immediately from nearby government health care facilities," the advisory stated.

By following these guidelines, individuals can significantly reduce the risk of heat-related illnesses during extreme heat events, the department added.

WATER CRISIS

Protesting women stop Vande Bharat train

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jammu, May 24: Women stopped the Vande Bharat train Thursday by staging a protest at a railway station here against water crisis compounded by heatwave conditions.

The demonstrators threatened to block all incoming and outgoing trains if the water crisis in their colony was not addressed urgently.

Scores of women and some children from the Jammu East Colony marched to the Jammu railway station to protest against the administration's alleged failure to ensure a regular water supply.

The protesters, some of them carrying buckets, stopped the Vande Bharat train at the station for a brief period before the police and railway authorities intervened.

"There has been no regular water supply to our colony for the past four months. We have approached the authorities, but nothing has been done. We have to fetch water from long distances even for cooking and drinking," said Sakshi, a protester.

Another protester claimed that life has become "unbearable" in the hot weather conditions. Police and authorities assured the protesters they would address the water supply issue in their colony. "We will ensure that your demand for water supply is addressed soon," a police official told them.

BHUBANESWAR LOK SABHA SEAT

Paika community, slum dwellers hold the key



MANMATH ROUTRAY



APARAJITA SARANGI



YASIR NAWAZ

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, May 24: Paika community and slum dwellers hold the key in the prestigious Bhubaneswar Lok Sabha constituency from where former IAS officer and sitting BJP MP Aparajita Sarangi and BJD candidate Manmath Routray are seeking votes claiming that their parties have done a lot of development work in the area.

Routray, a pilot by profession, has quit his job to contest the election against Sarangi, a former IAS officer and incumbent BJP MP for the Bhubaneswar Lok Sabha seat.

Manmath, son of Suresh Routray the Congress MLA from Jatni Assembly segment under the Bhubaneswar Lok Sabha constituency belongs to the Paika community. The Paika community has a sizeable number of voters in Khurda, Begunia and Jatni Assembly segments under the Lok Sabha constituency.

Suresh Routray a six-time Congress MLA from Jatni was expelled from the Congress and he is now campaigning for his son Manmath.

"I am seeking votes showcasing the works done by the BJD government. The state government has constructed roads, parks, bridges, water supply, patta for slum dwellers and many more," Manmath Routray said.

The BJD leader claimed that Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik will take oath of office for the sixth term and he will win the poll with a good margin.

Prasanna Patsani, who was elected from the Bhubaneswar Lok Sabha constituency in 1998, 2004, 2009 and 2014 on a BJD ticket, belonged to the Paika community. He was denied a BJD ticket in the 2019 LS elections.

Sarangi had won from Bhubaneswar Lok Sabha in 2019 defeating her BJD rival and former IPS officer Arup Patnaik by a margin of 28,839 votes.

Both BJD and BJP are taking campaign rallies in support of their party candidates.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP president JP Nadda have conducted two roadshows in Bhubaneswar in support of BJD candidate Aparajita Sarangi.

Veteran Bollywood actor Hema Malini also campaigned for Sarangi at Salia Sahi, the biggest slum in Bhubaneswar. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla have also campaigned for Sarangi.

BJD president and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik and 5T chairman Kartik Pandian held roadshows and rallies in support of party nominee Routray.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge had addressed a rally in Bhubaneswar.

Bhubaneswar is the capital but the citizens are yet to get basic amenities. A ring road is much needed for the people residing outskirts of Bhubaneswar. Drainage of rainwater is a major problem in the city, said Congress candidate Yasir said.

The seven Assembly segments under Bhubaneswar Lok Sabha constituency are —Jayadev, Bhubaneswar Central, Bhubaneswar North, Ekamra-Bhubaneswar, Jatni, Begunia and Khurda.

Bhubaneswar Lok Sabha constituency has 16,68,225 voters of which 8,01,092 are female, 8,66,563 are male and 570 transgenders.



BJD supremo and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik addressing an election meeting held at Police Line Ground in Balasore, Friday. 5T Chairman Kartik Pandian along with MP and MLA nominees are also seen

CM: BJD backed Murmu as she is 'daughter of the soil'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Baripada/Balasore, May 24: CM Naveen Patnaik Friday said President Droupadi Murmu is the "daughter of the soil" and that is why BJD supported her in the presidential elections.

Addressing an election rally in Murmu's native place of Rairangpur in Mayurbhanj district, Patnaik referred to her as his sister.

"The daughter of the soil and my sister Droupadi Murmu is the president of India. Respecting the daughter of this

soil, the Biju Janata Dal supported her in the presidential elections," Patnaik said.

At the meeting, he also took feedback from the people on different welfare schemes of his government and told them about his election promise of providing free electricity "You will not get an electricity bill from July. Are you happy?" Patnaik asked the gathering who responded with a loud 'yes'.

The BJD in its election manifesto has promised to provide free electricity to all domestic households consuming less than 100 units per month. For house-

holds consuming between 100-150 units, 50 units will be free.

The CM urged the people to support the party's Mayurbhanj Lok Sabha nominee Sudam Marndi, and the candidates for the Assembly seats under the parliamentary segment. Patnaik also claimed that leaders of the opposition BJP were resorting to "lies" and were shedding "crocodile tears" for the people.

Speaking at the rally, senior BJD leader Kartik Pandian said the government in the state is a government of tribals, farmers and the youth. The BJD govern-

ment is spending ₹13 crore for the development of Pandit Raghunath Murmu's birthplace, setting up a degree college in Tiring and building a new road for the accident-prone Bangiriposhi Ghat, he said. Patnaik is the only leader who is taking measures for the development and preservation of tribal art, culture and places of worship, he added.

Patnaik also addressed an election rally in Baripada town, the district headquarters of Mayurbhanj, and in Balasore district.

INDIA bloc getting clear mandate: Jairam Ramesh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chandigarh, May 24: The Congress Friday hit back at the BJP over its "five PMs in five years" remark against the INDIA bloc, saying the alliance which is set to get a "clear and decisive" mandate in the Lok Sabha polls will have one person as prime minister for five years.

The name of the prime minister will be announced by the INDIA bloc within three days after the result of the elections is declared June 4, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh told a press conference here ahead of the sixth round of polling Saturday. The elections are being held in seven phases and the last is June 1.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has in his poll rallies repeatedly targeted the bloc, claiming that it has plans to have five prime ministers in five years if voted to power.

The INDIA bloc is going to get a "clear and decisive mandate" June 4 and, like in 2004, history will repeat itself after 20 years, Ramesh said. The BJP was unseated from power in the 2004 general polls despite its 'India Shining' campaign and the Congress-led UPA came to power.

"Those who repeatedly raise the question who will be PM (if the INDIA bloc comes to power), I want to remind that in



2004, after the Congress and its allies got the mandate, within three days Dr Manmohan Singh's name was announced for (the post of PM)," the Congress leader said.

"This time it will not even be three days," Ramesh asserted and added that "one person will be prime minister for five years to run the government".

He said that the prime ministerial candidate will be selected in a democratic way by members of the INDIA bloc.

"Elections in our country are not a beauty contest. In our country, an election is between parties, our democracy is party-centric and not person-centric," Ramesh said.

"This is why the question that is repeatedly raised who will be prime minister is a wrong question. The right question is which party and which alliance will get the mandate," the Congress leader said at the conference in the joint capital of Punjab and Haryana.

While all 10 seats in Haryana are going to polls Saturday,

Punjab's 13 seats and the lone seat in the Union Territory of Chandigarh will see polling June 1. "Going by the indications, it became clear after the first two phases (April 19 and 26) that the INDIA bloc is going to get a clear and decisive mandate," Ramesh said.

Polling for five phases covering 428 seats has been completed and after the first two phases of the elections, which were in April, it became clear that in southern India, the BJP has been wiped out, and reduced to half in the rest of the country, he claimed.

The Congress and the INDIA bloc's performance is very strong this time in comparison with 2019 polls, he said.

There has been a change in the language the prime minister has been using in his speeches after April 19, Ramesh claimed.

He also claimed that Modi's entire campaign from April 19 has been based on "communalization" with the Hindu-Muslim rhetoric throughout. "No talk of Viksit Bharat, Modi ki guarantee or issues of farmers, the youth, women, workers, SCs, STs and OBCs," he said.

Ramesh said the prime minister has made "bogus statements" like the Congress manifesto had the imprint of the Muslim League and the Congress will give reservations on the basis of religion.

'For Cong, Jharkhand is ATM of corruption'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jamtara/Deoghar, May 24: Union Home Minister Amit Shah Friday launched a scathing attack on Congress, alleging that the grand old party sees Jharkhand as an "ATM of corruption".

He also alleged that Congress and Hemant Soren's JMM are competing with each other on corruption in the state.

"For Congress, Jharkhand is its vote bank, property, land bank and ATM of corruption... Corrupt JMM leaders, including Hemant Soren, are sitting on Congress' lap," Shah said while addressing a rally at Jamtara.

Claiming to have secured 310 seats in the first five phases of Lok Sabha polls, the BJP leader urged people to make it cross the 400-mark in order to make the country a "developed" one under Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

He claimed that PM Modi not only freed the country from Naxals, including red rebels in Jharkhand's Budha Pahad, and did "justice to tribals".

"The budget for tribals during the Sonia-Manmohan regime was barely ₹25,000 crore. PM Narendra Modi enhanced it to ₹1.25 lakh crore in 10 years," he said.

The BJP leader alleged that cattle smuggling was rampant in Jharkhand and promised to make it 'zero' like Assam.

Shah was campaigning for BJP candidate Sita Soren who is contesting from the Dumka Lok Sabha seat.

19L to decide fate of 95 candidates in Khurda

ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

Bhubaneswar, May 24: Khurda district is all set for the Phase III polls in the state Saturday even as Collector Chanchal Rana urged all the citizens to come out to participate in the world's largest democratic exercise. Around 19 lakh voters of the district will decide the fate of 95 candidates contesting in eight Assembly seats under Bhubaneswar Lok Sabha constituency, it is learnt.

According to sources, voting will take place from 7am to 6pm at 1,923 polling stations for which around 15,000 polling officers have been deployed.

Rana requested the voters to



exercise their democratic right of voting and use 'Mo Booth app' to find their names and polling stations easily. The app also has the feature of updated information on the number of voters standing in queue at a particular polling station at real time basis.

In Khurda district, eight

Assembly constituencies — Bhubaneswar-North, Bhubaneswar-Central, Bhubaneswar-Ekamra, Jatni, Begunia, Chilika, Jayadev and Khurda — and the Bhubaneswar Lok Sabha segment are going to polls Saturday.

Around 19 lakh voters in Khurda district will decide the fate of 95 candidates contesting in the eight Assembly seats and Bhubaneswar LS seat. For the purpose, 1,923 electoral booths have been set up. These include 525 Sakhi booths run only by women, eight booths run by disabled workers and 40 booths run by youth workers. There are 27 sensitive and 306 hypersensitive booths, said the Collector.



BJP state president and MLA nominee for Chandbali Assembly constituency Manmohan Samal along with Odia cine artiste and BJP leader Sidhant Mohapatra and former state president of the party Samir Mohanty during a roadshow at Kheranga Bazar in Chandbali, Friday



Congress' Morada Assembly nominee Prabhas Mohapatra addressing an election meeting at Morada in Mayurbhanj district, Friday

national



The manner in which the Samajwadi-PDA family, along with the INDIA bloc, is destroying the BJP, clearly shows that the INDIA alliance is going to create history by winning 27 out of the 27 Lok Sabha seats in the sixth and seventh phases of elections (in UP)

DD TO LAUNCH AI ANCHORS

In a first for an Indian government channel, Doordarshan is all set to unveil two Artificial Intelligence (AI) news anchors for its farmer-focused channel DD Kisan May 26. Named AI Krish and AI Bhoomi, the virtual anchors will front a relaunch of the channel after nine years on air, showcasing a new look and updated content aimed at the country's agricultural community, according to agriculture ministry



of the day quote

The migratory leaders who come to West Bengal to seek votes should be given the right lesson. They don't have the slightest idea of the tradition and culture of the state

For Congress, Jharkhand is its vote bank, property, land bank and ATM of corruption... Corrupt JMM leaders, including Hemant Soren, are sitting on Congress' lap

INDIA bloc alliance wants to rob the reservation of Dalits, Advasis and backward communities for Muslim appeasement

X POST OF THE DAY

SC refused the plea to direct ECI to publish voter turnout. It's a slap on the citizens of India. We are so 'unworthy' we can't even know how many people voted in which phase! 'To the people, For the People, By the People' has turned out to be a joke in New India.

SHORT TAKES

Bibhav sent to 4-day custody

New Delhi: A Delhi court Friday sent Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's close aide Bibhav Kumar to four-day judicial custody in connection with the alleged assault on AAP Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal. Kumar, the personal assistant to Kejriwal, allegedly assaulted Maliwal at the Chief Minister's official residence May 13. He has been under police custody since Saturday. Metropolitan Magistrate Gaurav Goyal allowed the prosecution's plea seeking Kumar's judicial custody for four days.

Three-year-old girl raped, murdered

New Delhi: A three-year-old girl was allegedly kidnapped, raped and killed by her neighbour in southwest Delhi, police said Friday. The girl's body was found dumped in a drain and the accused was arrested after a brief exchange of fire, they said. According to police, the incident occurred Wednesday evening when the victim's family reported the kidnapping of their daughter from the Kapashera area.

Four killed in road accident

Ludhiana: Four people including two children were killed after their van rammed into a roadside tree here Friday, police said. The incident took place near the Powat village when the driver of the van, carrying 17 passengers, lost control of the vehicle after a motorbike suddenly came onto the road, they said.

India likely to send tigers to Cambodia

New Delhi: India is likely to send four tigers to Cambodia by November-December to help reintroduce the big cats into its forests, sources said Friday. New Delhi signed a pact with Phnom Penh for the world's first transnational tiger reintroduction in November 2022.

6th phase polls: Nation votes today

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

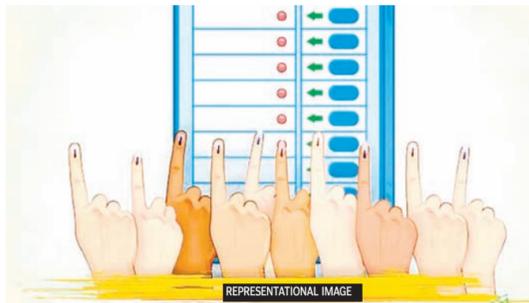
New Delhi, May 24: Voting for the sixth and penultimate phase of Lok Sabha polls will be held Saturday in 58 constituencies in six states and two Union territories, including all the seven seats in Delhi and the Jangal Mahal region in Bengal.

Besides the national capital, polling will be held Saturday in 14 seats in Uttar Pradesh, all 10 seats of Haryana, eight seats each in Bihar and West Bengal, six seats in Odisha, four seats in Jharkhand and one seat in Jammu and Kashmir. Simultaneously, polling will be held for 42 Assembly constituencies in Odisha.

Over 11.13 crore voters - 5.84 crore male, 5.29 crore female and 5120 third gender - are eligible to exercise their franchise. The Election Commission (EC) has deployed around 11.4 lakh polling officials at 1.14 lakh polling stations.

Among the prominent candidates are Union ministers Dharmendra Pradhan Rao Inderjit Singh and Krishan Pal Gurjar, BJP's Maneka Gandhi, Sambit Patra, Manohar Lal Khattar and Manoj Tiwari, PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti and Deependra Singh Hooda, Raj Babbar and Kanhaiya Kumar of Congress.

The poll panel also urged voters to come out in greater numbers and vote with responsibility and pride. It particularly reminded voters in urban centres like Delhi, Gurugram and Faridabad about their "right



and duty to vote and break the trend of urban apathy". The fifth phase saw a voter turnout of 62.2 per cent in the 49 seats that went to polls May 20.

In West Bengal, voting will be held in the tribal belt Jangal Mahal region, spanning five districts. A hotspot for identity politics, the region sends eight representatives to Lok Sabha from Tamuk, Kanthi, Ghatal, Jhargram, Medinipur, Purulia, Bankura, and Bishnupur seats. Out of the eight seats, the BJP won five and TMC bagged three in the 2019 polls.

Soumendu Adhikari, the brother of Suwendu Adhikari, has been fielded from Kanthi, considered the backyard of the senior BJP leader. In Tamuk, former judge of Calcutta High Court Abhijit Gangopadhyay is fighting on a BJP ticket against TMC's young turk Debangshu

Bhattacharya, known for composing the "Khela Hobe" song for the party in the 2021 Assembly polls.

An interesting fight is on the cards in Delhi with the BJP and the INDIA bloc partners pitted in a direct, one-on-one contest in all the seven seats. This is the first time the AAP and the Congress have fielded joint candidates against the BJP. While the AAP is contesting on four seats, the Congress has fielded candidates on the remaining three seats.

The seats going to the polls in Uttar Pradesh are Sultanpur, Pratapgarh, Phulpur, Allahabad, Ambedkar Nagar, Shravasti, Domariyaganj, Basti, Sant Kabir Nagar, Lalganj, Azamgarh, Jaunpur, Machhlishahr and Bhadohi.

Jaunpur will witness former Maharashtra minister Kripashankar Singh of the BJP take on Samajwadi Party can-

WITH LARGE PARTS OF INDIA SWELTERING UNDER A HEAT WAVE, THE EC HAS DIRECTED ELECTION OFFICIALS AND STATE MACHINERIES TO TAKE ADEQUATE MEASURES TO MANAGE THE ADVERSE IMPACT OF HOT WEATHER

CYCLONE REMAL WB braces for midnight hit



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata/New Delhi, May 24: A depression in the Bay of Bengal is likely to concentrate into a severe cyclonic storm and make landfall along the adjoining coasts of West Bengal and Bangladesh around May 26 midnight, bringing heavy rain in the coastal districts of the state and in north Odisha, the Met department said Friday.

This is the first cyclone in the Bay of Bengal this pre-monsoon season and will be named Remal, given by Oman, according to a system of naming cyclones in the north Indian Ocean region.

The system is likely to intensify into a severe cyclonic storm and make landfall between Sagar Island in West Bengal and Khepupara in Bangladesh, the IMD said in a bulletin. The cyclone could reach a wind speed of 120 kilometres per hour (kmph) Sunday.

The Met office has warned of extremely heavy rainfall in the coastal districts of West Bengal and north Odisha May 26-27.

Extremely heavy precipitation may hit parts of northeast India May 27-28.

Storm surge of up to 1.5 metre is expected to inundate low-lying areas of coastal West Bengal and Bangladesh at the time of landfall.

The weather office warned fishermen not to venture into the sea in north Bay of Bengal till May 27 morning. The Met issued a red alert for West Bengal's coastal districts of South and North 24 Parganas district May 26 and 27.

It warned of 100 to 110 km per hour wind speed gusting to 120 kmph in South 24 Parganas and 90 to 100 kmph gusting to 110 kmph in North 24 Parganas May 26-27, accompanied by extremely heavy rainfall at one or two places on both days.

An orange alert was issued for Kolkata, Howrah, Nadia and Purba Medinipur districts by the Met, warning of 80 to 90 kmph gusting to 100 kmph wind speed, accompanied by heavy to very heavy rain at one or two places on the two days.

SNIPPETS

Global order under stress: Jaishankar

NEW DELHI: India's growing "weight" will ensure that the overall balance in the world order remains in favour of freedom, openness, transparency and a rules-based order, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said Friday, amid increasing global concerns over China's bullying behaviour. In a virtual address at the Nikkei Future of Asia Forum, Jaishankar, delving into geopolitical challenges, also talked about the disregard for international law and agreements in Asia and the Indo-Pacific as well as use of "economic coercion", in remarks seen as an oblique reference to Beijing's actions and policies.

MEA issues show-cause notice to Prajwal

NEW DELHI: The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has served a show-cause notice to suspended JD(S) MP Prajwal Revanna asking why his diplomatic passport should not be cancelled as sought by the Karnataka government in view of allegations of sexual abuse against him, people familiar with the matter said Friday. Official sources Thursday had said the MEA is processing the Karnataka government's request to cancel Prajwal's diplomatic passport. Currently, he is believed to be in Germany.

NIA arrests one more in cafe blast case

NEW DELHI: The National Investigation Agency (NIA) Friday arrested one more accused in the March 1 Bangalore's Rameshwaram Cafe blast case, the fifth person to be held in the matter. Thirty-five-year-old Shoaib Ahmed Mirza alias Chhotu, a resident of Hubballi city in Karnataka, was previously convicted in a Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terror conspiracy case, the agency said.

Man gets life sentence for slitting wife's abdomen

BUDAUN (UP): A fast-track court here Friday sentenced a 38-year-old man to life imprisonment for slitting his pregnant wife's abdomen to find the gender of their unborn child. According to the police complaint, in September 2020, Pannalal attacked his wife Anita, who was eight months pregnant with their sixth child, and cut her abdomen open with a sickle. The accused wanted a boy as the couple already had five daughters, the police said. Anita survived the attack but the child had to be aborted, they said. The doctors later informed the family that the aborted fetus was a boy, the police said.



A helicopter carrying 7 people including pilgrims makes an emergency landing after developing a technical snag, 100 meters away from Kedarnath's helipad, in Rudraprayag district

B'DESH MP MURDER: POLICE ARREST BUTCHER

KOLKATA: The West Bengal CID arrested one person from the state's Bongaon area in North 24 Parganas district for his alleged involvement in the "murder" of Bangladesh MP Anwarul Azim Anar, an officer claimed Friday. The arrested man, a Bangladeshi citizen and a butcher by profession, has admitted during interrogation that he helped the other accused in chopping the victim's body before disposing of the parts in different locations, the officer claimed. West Bengal Police confirmed the murder of Anar, an Awami League MP from Jhenaidah-4 segment in Bangladesh, Wednesday after the victim went missing from Kolkata May 13. "The accused is a butcher by profession. He had entered India illegally and was staying in Mumbai hiding his identity."



PUNE CAR CRASH

Two cops suspended for dereliction of duty

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Pune, May 24: An attempt was made to establish that the Porsche that knocked down and killed two persons in Kalyani Nagar area here was not driven by a 17-year-old, and the driver employed by his family even tried to take the responsibility, the Pune police chief said Friday as two officials were suspended for lapses committed during the probe.

A local court remanded the six accused arrested in the case, including the teenager's father Vishal Agarwal, in judicial custody even though police sought their further custody.

Late in the evening, the probe was transferred to the crime branch from the Yerawada police station where the initial case was registered.

Elsewhere, the Madhya Pradesh-based parents of the two IT professionals who were killed in the accident May 19 demanded that the Supreme Court monitor the probe and the trial be held in their state.

There was enough evidence showing that the teenager was driving the car, police commissioner Amitesh Kumar told reporters.

Swathes of India reel from scorching heat for 8th day on trot

OFFICIAL DATA SHOWED THAT AT LEAST 23 PLACES IN PUNJAB, HARYANA, RAJASTHAN, UTTAR PRADESH, GUJARAT, AND MADHYA PRADESH RECORDED MAXIMUM TEMPERATURES OF 45 DEGREES CELSIUS OR ABOVE FRIDAY

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 24: The mercury surged to 49 degrees Celsius in Rajasthan's Phalodi -- the highest temperature recorded in the country this year -- as a sweltering heat wave stewed northwest India and some parts of the central region Friday.

The extreme heat will continue in parts of Delhi, Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, west Uttar Pradesh and west Madhya Pradesh until May 28.

In Rajasthan, Phalodi logged a maximum temperature of 49 degrees Celsius Friday, the highest recorded so far this year. Jaisalmer and Barmer in the desert state sizzled at 48.3 degrees and 48.2 degrees. Akola and Jalgaon in Maharashtra reached 45.8 degrees and 45.4 degrees. Madhya Pradesh's Ratlam



and Rajgarh recorded a high of 46.2 degrees and 46.3 degrees.

Maximum temperatures settled at 45.4 degrees in Haryana's Sirsa, 44.8 degrees in Punjab's Bathinda, and 45.5 degrees in Gujarat's Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar. The Met office is-

sued a 'red' warning for Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, west Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat, emphasising a "very high likelihood" of heat illness and heatstroke in all ages. It said warm night conditions could further exacerbate

India reported 3,812 deaths due to heatwaves between 2015 and 2022, with Andhra Pradesh alone logging 2,419 fatalities, the government told Parliament in July last year

heat-related stress in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, and Rajasthan over the next four days. High night temperatures are considered dangerous because the body doesn't get a chance to cool down.

Increasing nighttime heat is more common in cities because

of the urban heat island effect, in which metro areas are significantly hotter than their surroundings.

The punishing heat is straining power grids and drying up water bodies, triggering drought-like conditions in parts of the country.

According to the Central Water Commission, water storage in 150 major reservoirs in India plunged to their lowest level in five years last week, exacerbating water shortages in many states and significantly affecting hydropower generation.

India reported 3,812 deaths due to heat waves between 2015 and 2022, with Andhra Pradesh alone logging 2,419 fatalities, the government told Parliament in July last year. People are less productive during hot weather, and children struggle to learn.

international



We are ready for serious expansion of the cooperation with India in the field of using nuclear energy for peaceful purposes
ALEXEY LIKHACHEV | DIRECTOR GENERAL OF ROSATOM STATE ATOMIC ENERGY CORPORATION, RUSSIA

RARE INDIAN BANKNOTES ON SALE

A pair of rare 10-rupee banknotes that were recovered as they floated away from a shipwreck on their way from Bombay to London in 1918 are to be auctioned next Wednesday and are estimated to fetch between GBP 2,000 and 2,600. The two 10-rupee banknotes were recovered from the wreck of the SS Shirala, which was sunk by a German U-boat July 2, 1918, and bear the date of 25 May 1918 on them



of the day quote

We do not approve of this, nor do we want to participate in financial or arms support (for Ukraine), even within the framework of NATO
VIKTOR ORBAN | PM, HUNGARY

We will continue to build security alliances and stage joint combat drills to defend our territorial interests
GILBERTO TEODORO | DEFENSE SECRETARY, PHILIPPINES

We are receiving frightening and disturbing reports from northern Rakhine state in Myanmar of the impacts of the conflict on civilian lives and property
LIZ THROSELL | SPOKESPERSON, UN HUMAN RIGHTS

SHORT TAKES

Blaze claims 14

Hanoi: An overnight fire in an apartment building on a narrow alley in Vietnam's capital killed 14 people and injured six others, state media said Friday. The apartment building in central Hanoi could only be accessed through an alley just 2 metres wide, preventing firefighters from reaching it, and firefighters eventually contained the fire by using hoses, state media said. The fire started around 12:30 am and was accompanied by several explosions, the Vietnam News Agency said. It took an hour to extinguish.

PIO jailed in S'pore

Singapore: An Indian-origin Malaysian woman was sentenced to three weeks in jail in Singapore related to 14 charges of 68 Electronic Road Pricing (ERP) offences and five illegal parking offences between October 2019 and February 2020. Deivanai Karunanithi, 28, had modified one of her motorcycle's licence plates, to evade road usage charges by the ERP system installed across the roads here to monitor traffic as part of a road-tax collection. It is the first case in which the Land Transport Authority has charged an individual for using a foreign-registered vehicle with a false licence plate to prevent unlawful activities from being detected, Channel News Asia reported.

New Prez in Chad

Dakar: Chad swore in Mahamat Deby Itno as the president after holding elections earlier this month, completing a disputed transition to democratic rule after he seized power three years ago. Deby Itno, also known as Mahamat Idriss Deby, took power Thursday after his father Idriss Deby Itno was killed fighting rebels in 2021 after ruling the country for three decades. The long-delayed May 6 election came after three years of military rule. His main rival, Succès Masra, who contested the results earlier this month, resigned from his post as prime minister Wednesday.

Pak to pay millions

Islamabad: Pakistan has decided to pay \$2.58 million to the families of five Chinese nationals killed in March when a suicide bomber targeted their vehicle in the troubled northwestern province of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. The five Chinese and their Pakistani driver were killed when a suicide attacker crashed his explosive-laden car into a vehicle in the Bisham area of the restive Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province March 26 when they were being driven to a construction site of Dasu Hydroelectric power station in Kohistan district of the same province.

Hundreds feared dead in landslide

MASSIVE LANDSLIDE FLATTENS A VILLAGE IN A REMOTE, MOUNTAINOUS PART OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Melbourne, May 24: More than 100 people are believed to have been killed Friday in a landslide that buried a village in a remote, mountainous part of Papua New Guinea, and an emergency response is underway, the South Pacific island nation's leader and news media said.

The landslide hit Kaokalam village in Enga province, about 600 kilometers northwest of the capital, Port Moresby, at roughly 3 am, Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) reported.

Residents said estimates of the death toll were above 100, although authorities have not confirmed that figure. Villagers said the number of people killed could be much higher.

Prime Minister James Marape said authorities were responding and he would release information about the destruction and loss of life when it was available.

"I am yet to be fully briefed on the situation. However, I extend



my heartfelt condolences to the families of those who lost their lives in the landslide disaster in the early hours of this morning," Marape said in a statement.

"We are sending in disaster officials, PNG Defense Force, and the Department of Works and Highways to start relief work, recovery of bodies, and reconstruction of infrastructure," he added.

Australia, a near neighbor and Papua New Guinea's most generous provider of foreign aid, said the government stood ready to help.

"We send our heartfelt sympathies to the people of PNG following the landslide at Kaokalam village," Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong posted on social media.

"The loss of life and destruction is devastating," she added. "As friends and partners, Australia stands ready to assist in relief and recovery efforts."

Videos on social media showed residents pulling out bodies buried under rocks and trees.

Elizabeth Laruma, who runs a women's business association in Porgera, a town in the same province near the Porgera Gold Mine, said houses were flattened when the side of a mountain gave way.

"It has occurred when people were still asleep in the early hours, and the entire village has gone down," Laruma told the Australian Broadcasting Corp.

"From what I can presume, it's about 100-plus people who are buried beneath the ground."

The landslide blocked the road



I extend my heartfelt condolences to the families of those who lost their lives in the landslide disaster in the early hours of this morning
JAMES MARAPE | PM, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

between Porgera and the village, she said, raising concerns about the town's supply of fuel and goods.

Village resident Ninga Role, who was away when the landslide struck, expects that at least four of his relatives died.

"There are some huge stones and plants, trees. The buildings collapsed," Role said. "These things are making it hard to find the bodies."

Belinda Kora, a Port Moresby-

based ABC reporter, said helicopters were the only way of accessing the village, which is in the mountainous interior region known as the Highlands, with the main road closed.

Papua New Guinea is a diverse, developing nation of mostly subsistence farmers with 800 languages. There are few roads outside the larger cities.

With 10 million people, it is also the most populous South Pacific nation after Australia, which is home to some 27 million.

Telecommunications are poor, particularly outside Port Moresby where government data show 56 per cent of the nation's social media users reside. Only 1.66 million people across the country use the internet and 85 per cent of the population lives in rural areas.

2ND DAY OF DRILLS

China continues to intimidate Taiwan

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Taipei, May 24: Taiwan tracked dozens of Chinese warplanes and navy vessels off its coast Friday on the second day of a large exercise China's People's Liberation Army held in response to the inauguration of the island's new leadership.

China has issued elaborate releases to media showing Taiwan being surrounded by forces from the ruling Communist Party's military wing, the People's Liberation Army. A new video Friday showed animated Chinese forces approaching from all sides and Taiwan being enclosed within a circular target area.

Despite that, there was little sign of concern among Taiwan's 23 million people, who have under threat of Chinese invasion since the sides divided during a bitter and bloody civil war in 1949.

The defense ministry said it tracked 49 warplanes and 19 navy vessels, as well as Chinese coast guard vessels, and that 35 of the planes flew across the median of the Taiwan Strait, the de facto boundary between the sides, over a 24-hour period from Thursday to Friday.

Marine and coast guard vessels, air and ground-based missile units have all been put on alert, particularly around the Taiwan-controlled island chains of Kinmen and Matsu located just off the China coast and far from Taiwan's main island, roughly 160 kilometers across the Taiwan Strait.

"Facing external challenges and threats, we will continue to maintain the values of freedom and democracy," Taiwan's new President Lai Ching-te told sailors and top security officials Thursday as he visited a marine base in Taoyuan, just south of the capital, Taipei.

ICJ orders Israel to halt Rafah assault

REUTERS

The Hague, May 24: Judges at the top United Nations court ordered Israel Friday to immediately halt its military assault on the southern Gaza city of Rafah, in a landmark emergency ruling in South Africa's case accusing Israel of genocide.

While the International Court of Justice, or World Court, has no means to enforce its orders, the case was a stark sign of Israel's global isolation over its devastating campaign in Gaza, particularly since it began its offensive against Rafah this month.

Reading out the ruling, World Court President Nawaf Salam said the situation in the Palestinian enclave had deteriorated since the court last ordered Israel to take steps to improve it. Conditions had been met for a new emergency order.

"The state of Israel shall (...) immediately halt its military offen-



SOUTH AFRICA HAILS 'GROUNDBREAKING' DECISION
PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY SAYS ORDER SHOWS INT'L CONSENSUS TO END WAR

HAMAS CALLS ON UN SECURITY COUNCIL TO ENFORCE RULING
ISRAELI OPPOSITION LEADER CALLS RULING A 'MORAL DISASTER'

sive, and any other action in the Rafah governorate, which may inflict on the Palestinian group in Gaza conditions of life that could bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part," he said.

"Israel had not provided sufficient information about the safety of the population during the evacuation process or the availability of food, water, san-

itation and medicine for the 800,000 Palestinians that had already fled Rafah so far," Salam said. "Consequently, the court is of the view that Israel has not sufficiently addressed and dispelled the concerns raised by its military offensive in Rafah."

The ICJ ordered Israel to open the Rafah crossing between Egypt and Gaza to allow in humanitar-

ian aid. Israel must provide access to the besieged enclave for investigators, it added, and report back on its progress within one month.

The World Court order was adopted by the panel of 15 judges from around the world in a 13-2 vote, opposed only by judges from Uganda and from Israel itself.

It was handed down a week after it was requested by South Africa as part of its case accusing Israel of violating the Genocide Convention enacted in the wake of the Holocaust.

The ICJ, based in The Hague, is the highest UN body for hearing disputes between states. Its rulings are final and binding but have been ignored in the past, as the court has no enforcement powers.

Israel has repeatedly dismissed the case's accusations of genocide as baseless, arguing in court that its operations in Gaza are self-defence and targeted at Hamas militants who attacked Israel October 7.

In Mexico, political murders mock democracy

FROM SEPT TO MAY, ACROSS MEXICO, 34 CANDIDATES OR ASPIRING CANDIDATES HAVE BEEN ASSASSINATED

REUTERS

Acapulco, May 24: Guarded by more than a dozen police officers equipped with semi-automatic rifles and donning a helmet and bulletproof vest, Ramiro Solorio looks more like he is leading an armed raid than running for local political office.

But in parts of Mexico, where scores of local political candidates have been murdered ahead of national elections on June 2, the risk of violence and assassination are so high that many feel they have no choice but to campaign alongside armed



guards or wear flak jackets and move around in armored cars. "We are afraid of being murdered," Solorio, 55, said, as he greeted residents in one of Acapulco's poor outskirts, the underbelly of this glitzy tourist

spot, where streets stink with overflowing garbage and pools of stagnant water. He is protected by 15 members of the National Guard after federal authorities found significant risks to his safety.

More political candidates - six - have been killed in the state of Guerrero, where Acapulco is located, than in any other in Mexico.

Security analysts say the killings are mostly linked to drug cartels seeking to influ-

ence local elections.

Lopez Obrador has dismissed data showing an increase in attacks as "sensationalism." The president defends his record on security,

pointing to a 5% fall in homicides last year compared with 2022. But murders still hover around 30,000 a year and more people have

been killed during his presidency than during any other administration in Mexico's modern history.

The coexistence between the government and crime is a reality. I vow to clean up local government and restore law and order
RAMIRO SOLORIO | POLITICIAN

UKRAINE WAR

Putin seeks ceasefire on current frontlines

Freezing the conflict along current lines would leave Russia in possession of substantial chunks of Ukrainian regions

REUTERS

Moscow, May 24: Russian President Vladimir Putin is ready to halt the war in Ukraine with a negotiated ceasefire that recognises the current battlefield lines, four Russian sources told Reuters, saying he is prepared to fight on if Kyiv and the West do not respond.

Three of the sources, familiar with discussions in Putin's entourage, said the veteran Russian leader had expressed frustration to a small group of advisers about what he views as Western-backed attempts to stymie negotiations and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's decision to rule out talks.

"Putin can fight for as long as it takes, but Putin is also ready for a ceasefire - to freeze the war," said another of the four, a senior Russian source who has worked with Putin and has knowledge of top level conversations in the Kremlin.

He, like the others cited in this story, spoke on condition of anonymity given the matter's sensitivity.



REUTERS

For this account, Reuters spoke to a total of five people who work with or have worked with Putin at a senior level in the political and business worlds. The fifth source did not comment on freezing the war at the current frontlines.

Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov, in response to a request for comment, said the Kremlin chief had repeatedly made clear Russia was open to dialogue to achieve its goals, saying the country did not want "eternal war."

The appointment last week of economist Andrei Belousov as Russia's defence minister was seen by some Western military and political analysts as placing the Russian economy on a permanent war footing in order to win a protracted conflict.

It followed sustained battlefield pressure and territorial advances by Russia in recent weeks. However, the sources said that Putin, re-elected in March for a new six-year term, would rather use Russia's current momentum to put the war behind him.

of the day quote

We are bidding for two nickel cobalt mines. We are looking to all these critical mines activity in India... we have expertise



SATISH PAI | MD, HINDALCO INDUSTRIES

India is a strategic location for us, helping us to deliver great services to our customers across the world. We will continue to expand our presence here over the coming years -- leveraging India's diverse and skilled talent pool to drive innovation, service excellence, and value for our customers



MIKE NORRIS | CEO, COMPUTACENTER

Despite the layoffs, the appeal of IT jobs has risen. This strong interest in IT could also be due to the extensive skill specialisation, training, and experience typically necessary for these roles



SASHI KUMAR | HEAD OF SALES, INDEED

Q4 RESULTS

Hindalco profit rises

New Delhi: Aditya Birla Group's metal flagship Hindalco Industries Friday reported a 31.6 per cent rise in consolidated net profit at ₹3,174 crore for the quarter ended March 31, 2024, on the back of stronger margins and volumes across aluminium and copper business segments. The company had posted a net profit of ₹2,411 crore in the January-March period of FY23. Hindalco Industries said in a filing to BSE. Total income during the quarter under review rose to ₹56,356 crore over ₹56,209 crore in the year-ago period.

Suzlon profit down

New Delhi: Renewable energy solutions provider Suzlon Energy Friday reported nearly 21 per cent decline in consolidated net profit to ₹254 crore in the March quarter mainly due to certain exceptional items. The company reported a consolidated net profit of ₹320 crore in the year-ago period, a BSE filing said. Total income rose to ₹2,207.43 crore in the quarter from ₹1,699.96 crore in the same period a year ago. The consolidated net profit in the 2023-24 fiscal year also declined to ₹660 crore from ₹2,887 crore a year earlier.

NTPC profit rises

New Delhi: State-owned power giant NTPC Friday posted a 33 per cent rise in its consolidated net profit to ₹6,490.05 crore in the March 2024 quarter, mainly on the back of higher revenues. The company had reported ₹4,871.55 crore consolidated net profit in the quarter ended March 2023, a BSE filing said. Its total income rose to ₹48,816.55 crore in the quarter from ₹44,744.96 crore in the same period a year ago. The consolidated net profit in the fiscal 2023-24 increased to ₹21,332.45 crore from ₹17,121.35 crore in the year-ago period.

EaseMyTrip in red

New Delhi: Travel booking platform EaseMyTrip Friday reported a loss of ₹15.07 crore for the March quarter on a consolidated basis, as against a profit after tax (PAT) of ₹31.05 crore a year ago. For the full financial year ended March, the company reported a PAT of ₹103.46 crore down from ₹134.10 crore in the previous fiscal, the company said in a regulatory filing. Its total income for the fourth quarter of FY24 rose to ₹172.55 crore, as against ₹120.79 crore in the year-ago period.



The use of the dividend -- whether it is saved or used for additional spending -- could provide a signal around the government's fiscal priorities

JEREMY ZOOK | DIRECTOR, FITCH RATINGS

HIGHLY VOLATILE TRADE

Markets dip after scaling new peaks

Markets were on a record-breaking rally for the second straight day ahead of the results of Lok Sabha polls June 4

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, May 24: Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty scaled new peaks Friday in intraday deals before closing marginally lower due to profit booking in FMCG, IT and healthcare stocks.

A weak trend in global equities weighed on the sentiments, but renewed foreign capital inflows and stable crude oil prices in international markets supported the markets, traders said.

In a highly volatile trade, the 30-share BSE Sensex dipped 7.65 points or 0.01 per cent to settle at 75,410.39. During the day, it rallied 218.46 points or 0.28 per cent to hit its all-time intra-day high of 75,636.50.

The NSE Nifty breached the 23,000 mark for the first time in early trade.

During the day, the benchmark climbed 58.75 points or 0.25 per cent to hit its lifetime peak of 23,026.40. However, it pared all the gains and ended with a marginal decline of 10.55 points or 0.05 per cent at 22,957.10.

"Markets ended flat in a sluggish trading session as investors preferred to stay on the sidelines due to weak global cues. As it was the last trading day of the week, investors didn't want to increase exposure to equities and rather followed global cues," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

On the weekly front, the BSE



Benchmarks logged their best week since early February, driven by gains in financials and metal stocks

benchmark zoomed 1,404.45 points or 1.89 per cent. The NSE Nifty climbed 455.1 points or 2 per cent. The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies stood at ₹4,19,99,274.85 crore (\$5.05 trillion). The market capitalisation of listed companies on the NSE stood at ₹416 lakh crore (\$5.01 trillion).

From the Sensex firms, Tech Mahindra, Asian Paints, Tata Consultancy Services, Mahindra & Mahindra, Titan, JSW Steel and ITC were among the major laggards. On the other hand, HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, Larsen & Toubro, NTPC, Axis Bank and UltraTech Cement were the major gainers.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) turned buyers Thursday after days of offloading equities. They bought equities worth ₹4,670.95 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data.

Adani Ports to replace Wipro in Sensex

Gautam Adani-owned Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone (APSEZ) will replace IT major Wipro in the 30-share BSE Sensex from June 24, according to an official announcement Friday. This marks the first inclusion of any Adani Group firm in Sensex. The group has 10 listed firms with a combined market valuation surpassing ₹17 lakh crore. Notably, both APSEZ and Wipro are constituents of NSE's Nifty index. Moreover, the group's flagship firm Adani Enterprises is also a part of the 50-share Nifty. The changes will be effective from June 24, 2024, Asia Index, a joint venture between S&P Dow Jones Indices and BSE, said in a statement adding that the replacement is a part of periodic review. In addition, Tata Group company Trent Ltd will enter S&P BSE Sensex 50, while Divi's Laboratories will be dropped from the index. In S&P BSE 100 index, REC, HDFC Asset Management Company, Canara Bank, Cummins India and Punjab National Bank (PNB) will be included, while Page Industries, SBI Cards and Payment Services, ICICI Prudential Life Insurance Company, Jubilant FoodWorks and Zee Entertainment Enterprises (ZEEL) will move out.

FOREX KITTY AT NEW HIGH OF \$648.7BN

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, May 24: India's forex reserves jumped \$4.549 billion to a new all-time high of \$648.7 billion for the week ended May 17, the Reserve Bank said Friday. This is the third consecutive week of increase in the overall kitty, which had increased by \$2.561 billion to \$644.151 billion in the previous reporting week ended May 17.

For the week ended April 5, the reserves had hit an all time high of \$648.562 billion following multiple weeks of increases.

In the week ended May 10, foreign currency assets -- a major component of the reserves -- increased \$3.361 billion to \$569.009 billion, the data released Friday showed.

Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound, and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves.

Gold reserves increased \$1.244 billion to \$57.195 billion during the week, the RBI said.



The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were up \$113 million to \$18.168 billion, the apex bank said.

India's reserve position with the IMF was down \$168 million to \$4.327 billion in the reporting week, the apex bank data showed.

Sebi mandates AV disclosures for IPOs

To restrict the impact of influencers in the IPO market, regulator Sebi ordered all IPO-bound companies to make videos informing investors and dishes out half-baked ideas on social media



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 24: Markets watchdog Sebi Friday decided to introduce audio-visual (AV) representation of disclosures made by companies in their offer documents for public issues, a move that will help investors have an easier understanding about the key features of an offer.

Such AV will be prepared and placed in the public domain for all main board public issues. The same will initially be in bilingual format -- English and Hindi.

This framework will be applicable to all DRHP filed with Sebi on or after July 1 on voluntary basis and from October 1 onwards on mandatory basis, the regulator said in a circular.

It is expected that the AV will provide ease in understanding the salient features and also provide reference to various disclosures of the proposed public issue.

"It has been decided that salient disclosures made in the Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP), Red Herring Prospectus (RHP) and Price Band Advertisement for public issues shall also be made available in Audio Visual format (AV) for ease in understanding the features of public issues," Sebi said.

The regulator said that the duration of each bilingual version of the AV will be approximately 10 minutes. The total duration of the AV should be equitably distributed among the material disclosures made under

various sections of the public issue offer document. These include risk factors, capital structure, objects of the offer, business of the issuer, financial information, litigations and material developments.

The content of the AV must be factual, non-repetitive, non-promotional and should not be misleading in any manner.

As per the regulator, the AV is required to be published by the issuer/lead manager of the offer within 5 working days both at the stage of submission and resubmission of DRHP. The AV should also be made available on digital/social media platforms of the Issuer and Association of Investment Bankers of India (AIBI).

"The web link of the said AV shall be made available on the websites of stock exchanges and the concerned lead managers and shall also be accessible from the QR code pertaining to the public issue," Sebi said.

The regulator said that the issuer and all lead managers to the public issue will be responsible for the content and information made available in the AV.

Companies looking to raise capital through public issues are required to file a DRHP with Sebi and stock exchanges. The disclosures in DRHP are appropriately updated in line with the observations issued by the regulator and the bourses. Later, RHP was filed with Sebi and the Registrar of Companies (RoC).

In a separate circular, Sebi has tweaked the staggered delivery period in commodity Futures Contracts.

Merger failure: Zee seeks \$90mn from Sony

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 24: Zee Entertainment Enterprises has sought a termination fee of \$90 million (around ₹748.7 crore) from the Sony Group for calling off the \$10 billion merger deal in January this year.

It has sought termination fees from two Sony Group entities -- Sony Pictures Networks India (SPNI), now known as Culver Max Entertainment, and Bangla Entertainment (BEPL), according to a regulatory filing from Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd (ZEEL) Thursday.

ZEEL has, on account of Culver Max's and BEPL's breaches under the Merger Cooperation agreement (MCA), terminated the MCA by issuing a letter dated May 23, 2024.

The company has sought a termination fee from Culver Max and BEPL under the provisions of the MCA, it said.



"Culver Max and BEPL have failed to comply with their obligations under the MCA. Therefore, the company has terminated the MCA and called upon Culver Max and BEPL to pay the termination fee i.e. the aggregate amount equal to \$90 million in accordance with the MCA," it said.

Earlier January 22, 2024, Sony Group Corporation (SGC) had

said that ZEEL did not satisfy the merger conditions and initiated arbitration proceedings before the Singapore International Arbitration Centre (SIAC) claiming \$90 million as termination fee.

This was contested by ZEEL before the SIAC, which denied any interim relief to the Sony group against the Indian broadcaster.

ZEEL had moved the National

Company Law Tribunal seeking implementation of the proposed merger and later withdrew its plea.

"We hereby wish to inform you that the company has, on account of Culver Max's and BEPL's breaches under the MCA, terminated the MCA by issuing a letter dated May 23, 2024, and sought a termination fee from Culver Max and BEPL in accordance with the provisions of the MCA," the filing said.

ZEEL and SPNI had entered into an agreement to merge December 22, 2021.

On August 10, 2023 the Mumbai bench of NCLT approved the scheme of merger of ZEEL with Sony group entities Culver Max Entertainment and BEPL, which could have created a \$10 billion media entity.

However, two years after that Sony Corporation announced the termination of the agreement January 22, 2024.

Strong macroeconomic buffers to help steer global tensions

THE FINANCE MINISTRY REPORT SAID THAT DOMESTIC MANUFACTURING WILL LIKELY RECEIVE STRONGER EXTERNAL SUPPORT IN THE UPCOMING MONTHS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 24: Strong macroeconomic buffers of India should help the real sectors of the economy navigate challenges posed by geopolitical tensions and continue growth momentum during the current fiscal, said a finance ministry report released Friday.

According to the report, formal

jobs are rising, as indicated by the growing net payroll additions under the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation.

While the urban unemployment rate declined y-o-y during the quarter ending March 2024, the labour force participation rate and worker-to-population ratio have improved, it said.

Along with growth and employment, the other macroeconomic indicators are also improving, said the April edition of the monthly review by the Department of Economic Affairs.

"Retail inflation clocked 4.83 per cent in April 2024, the lowest in the past 11 months. On the external front, despite global challenges, India's foreign exchange reserves are comfortable, and the Indian rupee has been one of the most resilient vis-à-vis the US dollar in recent months," it said.



From the fiscal angle, it said, robust trends in the capital spending of the general government during April-February of FY24, combined with the fiscal consolidation plans reflected in the Budget for FY25, have laid to rest concerns about debt sustainability.

Thus, the major pillars of

challenges. Nonetheless, the expectation is that the macroeconomic buffers nurtured and strengthened during the post-Covid management of the economy will help the Indian economy navigate these challenges reasonably smoothly," it said.

Modestly improved economic activity and consumer sentiment in Europe and a steady US economy have aided India's exports in April, it said, adding, there are reports that show that the number of organisations in the US and Europe that are focusing on reindustrialisation has increased.

Factors like the ongoing recovery in the hotel and tourism industry, increased credit flow to transport and real estate segments, policy support and robust investments in physical and digital infrastructure and logistics will help the services sec-

tor, it said. The strong export growth in April 2024 indicates that the momentum in services trade has been carried forward into FY25, it added.

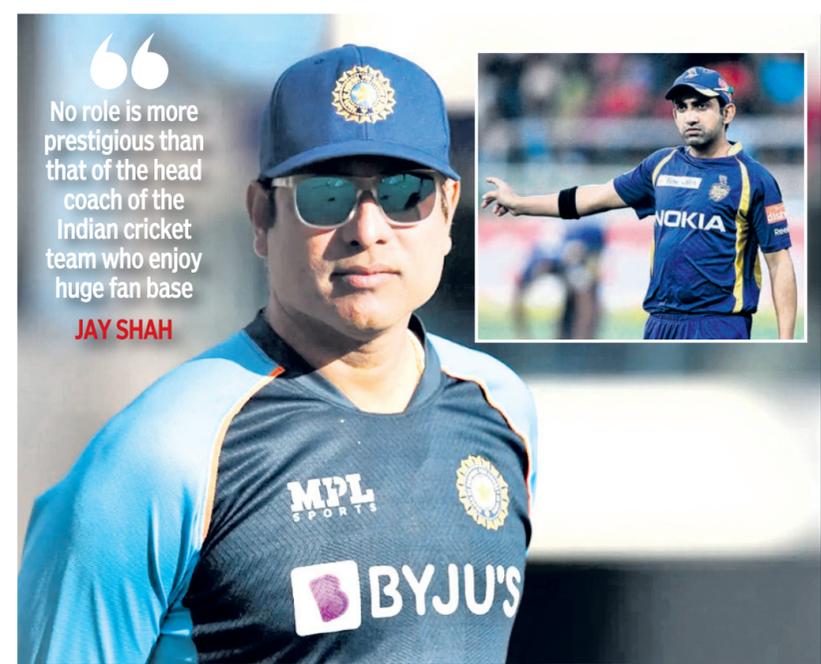
On the future inflation path, the report said, government initiatives to stabilise the prices of essential food items, including their open market sale, stock monitoring and trade policy measures are helping to stabilize food prices.

The harvest for the rabi marketing season for 2024-25 is expected to temper the prices of key items like wheat and chana.

"The prediction of a normal southwest monsoon also augers well for food production and easing of price pressures. With the assumption of normal monsoon, the RBI forecasts a 4.9 per cent retail inflation for FY25's first quarter," it said.

BCCI rebuffs Aussie claims

NEITHER PONTING NOR LANGER WAS APPROACHED FOR JOB OF HEAD COACH FOR THE INDIAN CRICKET TEAM, SAYS JAY SHAH



“No role is more prestigious than that of the head coach of the Indian cricket team who enjoy huge fan base”
JAY SHAH

of Indian domestic cricket will be one of the important criteria for appointing the next coach. He said the understanding would be crucial to 'truly elevate Team India to the next level'. The BCCI has set May 27 as the last date for filing applications for the job. Shah however, refused to state whether anyone has applied so far.

Shah asserted that the position of India's head coach as the 'most prestigious job' in international cricket. He said the position demands high level of professionalism given the kind of support the national side enjoys.

"When we talk about international cricket, no role is more prestigious than that of the head coach of the Indian cricket team. Team India commands the largest fan base globally, enjoying support that is truly unrivalled," Shah said.

Sources meanwhile added that BCCI is also trying to convince VVS Laxman who is currently working as 'Head of Cricket' in the NCA. Laxman had earlier expressed reluctance to take up the role of head coach of the Indian team, but even then the BCCI is hopeful, given the goodwill he enjoys among the current players.

Laxman's stint at the NCA ends this September and the BCCI wants to retain the 49-year-old in one position or the other. Laxman appears to be the obvious successor to Dravid, given the fact that he has worked as interim coach when the latter was on leave.

Even if Laxman does not agree, the BCCI plans to use him as a consultant whenever India play red ball cricket, sources in the board said Friday.

Compound team seal medal spot at Archery World Cup

Deepika's dream comeback continues as she enters semifinals in recurve segment



JYOTHI SUREKHA VENNAM
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Yecheon (South Korea), May 24: Jyothi Surekha Vennam and Priyansh advanced to the compound mixed team final, confirming India's second medal, while Deepika Kumari brightened the country's gloomy recurve campaign, reaching her second successive Archery World Cup semifinals after her comeback in the Stage 2 of the event, here Friday.

The compound women's team of Jyothi, Parneet Kaur and Aditi Swami had assured India's first medal by making the final Wednesday.

The Indian compound mixed team, No. 2 in world rankings, dropped just two points from 16 arrows to eliminate the host country's duo of Han Seungyeon and Yang Jaewon 158-157 in a tight semifinal. The Indians will now face USA's Olivia Dean and

Sawyer Sullivan in the gold medal match Saturday in a clash of the top-two world ranked nations.

The fourth-seeded Indian duo earlier ousted Vietnam 159-152 in the first round of 16, missing the target only once from 16 arrows. Jyothi and Priyansh then thwarted some strong resistance from formidable Mexico, seeded fifth, to win 156-155 in an intense quarterfinal.

Former World No. 1 Deepika, who is making a return to the international circuit after embracing motherhood in December 2022, secured four back-to-back wins to enter the last four stage and remained the only Indian recurve archer in the medal hunt. Deepika will face home favourite and World No. 2 Lim Siyeon in Sunday's semifinal, four weeks after the rising South Korean 20-year-old won the Shanghai Stage 1 gold by in a ruthless straight sets victory.

Starting at fourth in the qualifications, Deepika overcame early jitters when she pipped Slovenian teenager Tinkara Kardinar in the shoot-off after being 1-3 down in a dramatic first round clash. Deepika then went on to defeat Loc Thi Dao of Vietnam (6-2), Lisa Barbelin of France (6-0), Elif Berra Gokkir of Turkey (6-4) in her journey to the semifinals.

In the men's individual recurve section, veteran Tarundeep Rai and Mrinal Chauhan suffered first round exits, while Dhiraj Bommadevara and Pravin Jadhav fell short in the second round.

The recurve mixed team of Deepika and Tarundeep Rai, who have more than 34 years of combined international experience between them, also returned empty-handed after going down in the quarterfinals. They lost 2-6 to Spain.

AGENCIES

Mumbai, May 24: BCCI secretary Jay Shah rejected Friday claims that the board has approached any former Australian cricketer to be India's next head coach and hinted that Rahul Dravid's successor could be an Indian by saying that he should have a 'deep understanding' of the game's structure in the country.

Dravid has reportedly told the BCCI that he is not interested in a third stint. Later former Australian players like Ricky Ponting and Justin Langer claimed that they have turned down approaches for the high-profile position.

"Neither I nor the BCCI have approached any former Australian cricketer with a coaching offer. The reports circulating in certain media sections are completely incorrect," Shah said in a statement. "Finding the right coach for our national team is a

meticulous and thorough process. We are focused on identifying individuals who possess a deep understanding of the Indian cricket structure and have risen through the ranks," Shah said.

World Cup-winning former batting star Gautam Gambhir, who is currently mentoring Kolkata Knight Riders, is speculated to be among the top contenders for the post right now. The BCCI secretary also said that having in-depth knowledge

SHORT TAKES

ICC names Afridi as ambassador for WC

Dubai: Maverick former all-rounder Shahidi Afridi, who played a vital role in Pakistan's T20 World Cup triumph in 2009, was roped in Friday as the tournament ambassador for the ICC's shortest format showpiece event in the Americas, beginning June 2. Afridi thus joined an illustrious group of ambassadors, including India's Yuvraj Singh, Chris Gayle of the West Indies and sprint legend Usain Bolt. "The ICC Men's T20 World Cup is an event that is very close to my heart. I'm thrilled to be part of this edition (as ambassador)," Afridi said in an ICC media release.

Commentators for T20 WC announced

Dubai: The ICC announced Friday some of the biggest names in cricket and broadcasting, including former India coach Ravi Shastri and the legendary Sunil Gavaskar, as part of a robust commentary panel for next month's T20 World Cup. Dinesh Karthik has also been named in the commentary panel. Leading the commentary team are stalwarts such as Shastri, Nasser Hussain, Ian Smith, Mel Jones, Harsha Bhogle and Ian Bishop.

Barca sack Xavi

Barcelona: Barcelona said Friday that coach Xavi Hernandez is leaving the club at the end of the season. The Spanish club made the announcement Friday after a meeting between club president Joan Laporta, Xavi and several other senior figures at the team's training ground. The club said Laporta 'has informed Xavi Hernandez that he will not be continuing as first team coach in the 2024-25 season'. Xavi's last game in charge will be Sunday's away match against Sevilla.

Pioli quits Milan

Milan: AC Milan coach Stefano Pioli is leaving the Italian club at the end of the season after a near five-year stint that included the 2022 Serie A title. Milan announced Pioli's departure Friday. Pioli's stepping down had been widely expected and the club are already involved in the search for a successor. The club thanked Pioli for 'securing an unforgettable league title and re-establishing AC Milan's consistent presence in the top European competition'.

Hockey teams suffer embarrassing losses

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Antwerp (Belgium), May 24: The Indian men's and women's teams suffered embarrassing losses to hosts Belgium in matches of the FIH Pro League played late Thursday night. The men's team lost 1-4 while the women's squad went down 0-2 against their Belgian counterparts.

Defensive lapses cost the men's hockey team as they suffered a heavy loss. After a barren first quarter, Belgium took the lead in the 22nd minute through a field goal by skipper Felix Denayer.

Four minutes after half time, the home side doubled their lead through a penalty corner conversion by Alexander Hendrickx. The Indian defence was relentlessly caught off guard by the brisk passing and skillful play of the Belgians as they extended their lead in the 49th minute through another fine field goal by Cedric Charlier.

Young striker Abhishek pulled one back for India from a field effort but Belgium looked too strong as they sealed the affair in the final minute of the game when Hendrickx sounded the board from a penalty stroke.

The Indian defence looked in disarray from the word go as they failed to counter the speedy Belgian forwards. Had it not been for veteran custodian PR Sreejesh, the margin of defeat

could have been bigger. India too had their chances and secured their first penalty corner in the 18th minute but skipper Harmanpreet Singh's flick was saved by Belgium goalkeeper Loick van Doren.

Two minutes later, India secured back-to-back penalty corners but an off-colour Harmanpreet failed to utilise the chances.

Meanwhile the women's squad lost their second match on the trot. The Indian women, under new coach and captain in Harendra Singh and Salima Tete, were earlier thrashed 0-5 by Argentina in their opening match Wednesday.

Both the Belgium goals came from field efforts through Alexia T Serstevens in the 34th minute and Dewaet Louise two minutes later in the third quarter.

Contrary to the result, the Indians started the match on an aggressive note and won an early penalty corner, but couldn't capitalise on it.

However, the visitors continued to press Belgium, who initially struggled to keep possession and relied on counter-attacks. India's defence stood tall in the first two quarters, denying the hosts any scoring opportunities.

However, after the change of ends, the Belgian eves started dominating the show and scored twice in quick succession to seal the match. They then defended resolutely to hold on to the lead.

'Left' becomes right for SRH

SUNRISERS HYDERABAD TO FACE KKR IN IPL-2024 FINAL

AGENCIES

Chennai, May 24: Left-arm spinners of Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH), Shahbaz Ahmed (3/23) and Abhishek Sharma (2/24) bowled much better than their famed counterparts of Rajasthan Royals (RR), Ravichandran Ashwin (0/43) and Yuzvendra Chahal (0/34) to help their team reach the title round here Friday. The two left-arm spinners bowled brilliantly not just choking the runs, but also picked wickets at regular intervals to derail the batters of RR. In fact left turned out to be the right way for SRH to seal their spot in the final. They won the match by runs 36 and sent RR home.

After being put in by RR skipper Sanju Samson, the Sunrisers scored 175 for the loss of nine wickets in their 20 overs. Heinrich Klaasen (50, 34b, 4x6) top-scored for SRH and there were useful contributions from Rahul Tripathi (37) and Travis Head (34). On a spinning pitch, it was the pacers of RR who shone as Avesh Khan (3/27) and Trent Boult (3/45) shared six wickets among themselves. Ashwin and Chahal went for 77 runs from their eight overs and failed to get a single wicket. On the other hand Shahbaz and Abhishek conceded just 47 in their eight overs and picked up five wickets. That probably was the turning point of the match.

Both Shahbaz and Abhishek



Shahbaz Ahmed celebrates with teammates after dismissing a RR batter Friday

did not try anything fancy. They bowled the right and let the pitch do the rest. Batter after batter of RR perished in their effort to force the game. Yashasvi Jaiswal (42) played a good innings at the top of the order. However, the moment, Shahbaz dismissed him the RR batting collapsed like a pack of cards save Dhruv Jurel (56 n o, 35b, 7x4, 2x6). He made a valiant effort, but on a day when Samson (10), Riyan Parag (6), Ashwin (0), Shimron Hetmyer (4) and Rovman Powell (6) all failed, it turned out to be too much for Jurel.

SRH skipper Pat Cummins

(1/30) and left-arm pacer, again left-arm, T Natarajan (1/13) also contributed to their team's fabulous win. SRH now will hope that the law of average catches up with their rivals in the final, Kolkata Knight Riders. They have lost both the group matches to KKR. A victory Sunday for SRH would be doubly sweet as it is most important match of the tournament.

BRIEF SCORES: SRH 175 for 9 (Heinrich Klaasen 50, Avesh Khan 3/27, Trent Boult 3/45) beat RR 139 for 7 (Dhruv Jurel 56 n o, Shahbaz Ahmed 3/23, Abhishek Sharma 2/24) by 36 runs.

Stimac seeks memorable farewell for iconic Chhetri

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, May 24: Indian football team head coach Igor Stimac expects fans from all over the country to throng to the Salt Lake Stadium in Kolkata during the country's World Cup qualification match June 6 against Kuwait. Incidentally it will be the last international match for talismanic captain Sunil Chhetri.

The match will mark the end of Chhetri's glittering 19-year international career during which he became India's top goal-scorer with 94 strikes. He will leave the scene as India's most-capped player after competing in 151 matches at the end of his swansong contest. A win against Kuwait will



Sunil Chhetri (right) during a training session in Bhubaneswar OP PHOTO

also put India in a strong position to make it to the third round of the World Cup qualifiers for the first time in its history.

"Having in mind the importance of the game - with us being perhaps only a win away from qualifying for the third round for the first time, and it being Sunil

“I am sure our supporters from all over India will be at the stadium to bid adieu to Chhetri. I am sure it will be an emotional moment”
IGOR STIMAC

Chhetri's farewell game - we expect the Salt Lake Stadium to be packed," Stimac stated Friday in a release issued by the All India Football Federation (AIFF).

"I am sure that our supporters will reach Kolkata from all parts of India to help our boys win the game and say thanks and goodbye to Sunil. I am very confident it's going to be emotional and hopefully, we will find a way to celebrate together after the final whistle," he added.

Nadal gears up for last hurrah

AGENCIES

Paris, May 24: Rafael Nadal will bring down the curtain on his 19-year French Open career hoping that he wins another title at the Roland Garros. The great Spaniard, a 22-time Grand Slam champion, won his first title at Roland Garros as a teenager in 2005. A week on Monday, he will celebrate his 38th birthday. However, to stay alive in the tournament, Nadal has beat World No. 4 Alexander Zverev in the first round.

"I'm going to play the tournament thinking that I can give my all, 100 per cent," explained Nadal after his arrival here. "And if 100 per cent is not enough to win a match, I'll accept that. But I don't want to step onto the court knowing that I have no chance," Nadal stated.

SINDHU IN SEMIS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kuala Lumpur, May 24: Double Olympic medallist PV Sindhu took a giant stride towards securing a title at the Malaysia Masters badminton tournament after progressing to the semifinals with a hard-fought win over top seed Han Yue of China here Friday. World No. 15 Sindhu recovered from a mid-game slump to outwit Han, ranked sixth, 21-13, 14-21, 21-12 in a 55-minute quarterfinal battle to avenge her loss to the Chinese in their last meeting at the Asia Badminton Championships last month.

Sindhu will now square off against Thailand's Busanan Ongbamrunphan for a place in the final.

In other results, Ashmita Chaliha's fine run ended in the quarterfinals with a 10-21, 15-21 loss to sixth seed Zhang Yi

PV Sindhu beat Han Yue 21-13, 14-21, 21-12
Ashmita Chaliha lost to Zhang Yi Man 10-21, 15-21

Man of China. Sindhu gave a good account of herself during the 55-minute match as she broke off from 3-3 in the opening game to take a 11-5 cushion at the break. The Chinese slowly made her way to 13-16 but Sindhu reeled off the remaining five straight points to take the opening game.

Han zoomed to a 5-0 lead after the change of sides. She continued to dominate the proceedings as Sindhu struggled. The result was she jumped to a massive 15-2 advantage and despite some fightback from the Indian, Han comfortably took the match to the decider. However, Sindhu reigned supreme in the third game.