

Cyclone Remal leaves 7 dead in Bangladesh

Dhaka, May 27 At least seven people died in Bangladesh due to the devastations of cyclone Remal, which lashed parts of the South Asian country with heavy rain and strong wind. The deaths were reported from five southern and southeastern Bangladeshi coastal districts. Apart from this, two people have been reported missing due to the severe cyclone, Xinhua news agency reported on Sunday night. Strong winds and storm surged along the coasts of southern Bangladesh and India's West Bengal after the storm came ashore at 8 p.m. local time on Sunday, Md Shamim Ahsan,

Modi government's rare extension for army chief General Manoj Pande sparks speculation



The Narendra Modi government on Sunday granted a one-month extension to army chief General Manoj Pande till June 30, triggering intense speculation about the "unusual" move. General Pande was due to retire on May 31. The announcement comes at a time two senior-most officers after him are due for superannuation in June. Sources in the army said this was only the second time such an extension had been granted to the incumbent army chief. In 1975, then army chief General G.G. Bewoor was given a one-year extension by the Indira Gandhi government so that the next in line in seniority, Lt Gen Prem Bhagat, retired from service. "The Appointments Committee of Cabinet, on May 26, 2024, approved the extension in service of Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) General Manoj C Pande for a period of one month, beyond his normal age of superannuation (May 31, 2024), i.e. up to June 30, 2024, under Rule 16 A (4) of the Army Rules 1954," the defence ministry said in a statement. General Pande took over the reins of the 1.2 million-strong force on April 30, 2022. Before that, he served as the vice-chief of the Army Staff. Earlier, he headed the Calcutta-based Eastern Command responsible for guarding India's frontier with China in the eastern sector. General Pande was commissioned into the Indian Army in December 1982 in the Corps of Engineers (The Bombay Sappers). Surprised by the extension, a senior army official said: "This is a very unusual move and has taken everyone by surprise. General Pande had already started his retiring tours to several formations, including his parent Bombay Sappers." Former colonel Ajai Shukla posted on X: "What's cooking here? The govt has approved a one-month extension in service of Army Chief, General Manoj Pande, up to June 30th. Is the govt jockeying to position someone pliable in place? (Bad). Or is the govt postponing the decision for the next govt? (Good)." In a cryptic post on X, Major General (retd) Birender Dhanoa said: "People want my views, all I have to say is that professionally one guy is as good as the next at this level. The question is how comfortable is the government of the day with whoever is appointed and how beholden will he be to follow the agenda set by others for him?"

INDIA Bloc Leaders To Meet On June 1 To Assess Lok Sabha Poll Performance

Top leaders of the opposition INDIA bloc are likely to meet on June 1 to assess their performance in the Lok Sabha elections and chalk out their strategy ahead of the results. Sources said the proposed meeting will be convened in Delhi on the afternoon of June 1 when the last phase of polling will be under

way. The opposition leaders will discuss their strategy ahead of the June 4 results and assess their performance in the seven-phase elections, the sources said. The opposition alliance has been claiming that it would be able to stop the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) from returning to power at the

Centre and cobble together a government of its own. Congress chief Mallika Rjun Kharge has convened the meeting, the sources said. The ruling alliance led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also claimed that it would form the government at the Centre for the third successive time after these elections.

France to slash jobless benefits amid mounting debt concerns



French Prime Minister Gabriel Attal has announced significant cuts to France's unemployment benefits to support President Emmanuel Macron's economic reform agenda. The proposed changes, detailed by Attal in an interview with La Tribune, include reducing the maximum duration of jobless benefits from 18 months to 15 months. Additionally, the period re-

quired for work to qualify for these benefits will be extended. The government plans to implement these changes by December 1. Prime Minister Attal noted that the reform is not primarily a cost-cutting measure but is designed to increase employment and thereby sustain the benefits system through higher workforce participation. An adviser to Attal projected that these changes could save up to €6 billion (\$3.9 billion) annually and increase the workforce by 90,000 individuals. Furthermore, the reforms will redefine the age at which workers are considered "senior," lowering it to 57 years, allowing them to qualify for improved, albeit less generous, benefits. This adjustment aims to balance the benefits provided to older workers with the need to encourage longer participation in the labour market. These measures follow a stern warning from the International Mon-

etary Fund regarding France's escalating debt and a call for stronger efforts to control budget deficits. The French fiscal watchdog has also criticised current plans, labelling them as lacking in credibility and coherence. French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire reaffirmed that the government would continue to make efforts towards reducing the budget deficit, pledging to meet the European Union's deficit limit of 3 per cent of GDP by 2027. This fiscal responsibility is seen as crucial in maintaining economic stability and credibility within the EU. The timing of these announcements is particularly noteworthy, coming just two weeks before the European Parliament elections. Polls suggest a possible victory for Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally party, which has vocally opposed Macron's labour reforms, arguing that they unfairly disadvantage workers.

India's state sector is thriving under Modi. That's a problem

Ten years ago, when Narendra Modi - then chief minister of business-friendly Gujarat state - rode an electoral wave to the prime ministership in New Delhi, many expected that he would be far more supportive of the private sector than previous Indian leaders. As a candidate, Modi was quoted as saying: "I believe government has no business to do business," and one of the many slogans of that 2014 campaign was "minimum government, maximum governance." That seemed as close to laissez-faire Thatcherism as one could reasonably expect in India. Nobody who looked closely at Modi's tenure in Gujarat, however, believed this easy narrative. His proudest achievement there was turning around the state government's own public-sector companies, particularly in the energy sector. And that's been his focus in national office as well. In one recent interview, when asked to cite an example of how the markets should react to his expected re-election, he pointed specifically and solely to how he had revived the stock prices of public-sector companies. Modi wasn't wrong. State firms have done better than India's benchmark Sensex index for three years straight, and look likely to do so again this year. They have regularly traded at a premium to their private peers. Government officials attribute this success to administrative shifts within these creaking old behemoths. The minister in charge of India's state petroleum companies, for example, says that the Modi administration has introduced a "new era of professionalism, strategic foresight, and unwavering commitment to national interests." Most analysts are similarly optimistic, if less effusive. But what does this public-sector outperformance say about India's real

economy? Is such vibrancy really worth bragging about? Two bits of context are worth noting. First, most of India's state-owned enterprises are in legacy sectors - fossil fuels, old-style transport, 20th-century capital goods. And second, private-sector investment in India remains anaemic. Consider these three points together, and the macro picture begins to look a little worrying. If what are known in India as "public-sector undertakings" are doing well, is that because the private sector is underperforming on growth and investment? And is it good news if the best-performing companies in an economy are those that hold near-monopolies in sunset industries? Analysts at Kotak Institutional Equities have argued the latter is a real problem. "Continued large reinvestment of cash flows by PSUs into their extant businesses (mostly sunset industries) may constrain their ability to invest in more future-proof businesses - key to their longer-term viability." Defence sector challenges before the new government - whether virtuous or vicious - is at work here. State-owned companies dominate certain older sectors. They see decent cash surpluses. But, being government-controlled, they can't channel their profits into the broader financial system to find the most effective new projects. Instead, they must follow directions from New



Delhi to re-invest in their own industries. Meanwhile, private firms in India are struggling. New investment plans from the private sector shrunk by over 15 per cent in 2023-24. Manufacturing suffered the biggest hit, as fresh proposals fell by 40 per cent in value terms, from Rs 20 lakh crore in 2022-23 to Rs 12 lakh crore in 2023-24. Economists have come up with various explanations for the declines. Some argue that domestic demand is still not robust enough for the private sector to make a business case for new investment. Others point out that productivity in manufacturing has barely increased, so fresh capital has not been drawn into the sector. And pretty much everyone agrees that business-friendly reforms have not gone far enough. A more fundamental problem is that Modi has developed a battle-plan for economic growth over his past two terms - and the private sector isn't meant to lead the charge. The government actively mops up household financial savings and routes all investment through the state sector. As a share of GDP, government expenditure has increased sharply, as has India's debt. The finance ministry's think tank estimates growth in the coming year will be an optimistic 7.1 per cent-7.4 per cent, essentially thanks to public-sector capital expenditure. This strategy is, to put it mildly, not Thatcherite. It certainly won't modernize India's economy away from sunset industries. Nor will it increase productivity - that's asking too much of the public sector. Above all, it is fiscally unsustainable. Government investment has risen in every federal budget; how long can India keep that up? If Modi returns to power, his administration must adopt a different strategy. State-owned companies can't be the basis of a modern, productive economy.

'Do not press the result button until...' Kapil Sibal issues checklist for LS polls counting

Former union minister and Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal issued a checklist for Lok Sabha polls candidates and counting agents, to check whether the electronic voting machine (EVM) has been tampered with. Sibal told presspersons, "Voting results will be out on June 4. I want to make the public and the political parties aware of what you should do when the machines (EVMs) open. So I have made a chart for all the parties and all the counting agents. In this chart, the CU (control unit) number, BU (ballot unit) number and VVPAT ID will be present. The third column is very im-



portant- June 4 is written in the third column and the time when the machine will

Arvind Kejriwal requests 7-day interim bail extension citing 'medical tests'



Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has filed a petition in the Supreme Court, seeking an extension of his interim bail by seven days in connection to the money laundering case linked to the liquor policy scam. He was released on May 10 after the court approved his interim bail plea in order to campaign for the Lok Sabha polls. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) said that Kejriwal sought the extension as he has to undergo medical tests. Kejriwal has to surrender to the prison authorities on June 2, a day after his interim bail is set to expire. The AAP supremo was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate on March 21 in connection to the Delhi liquor policy case and subsequently lodged in Tihar Jail. While approving his interim bail plea on May 10, the Supreme Court asked the Chief Minister to surrender on June 2 and said, "Let us not draw any parallel. He was arrested in March and the arrest could have been before or after. Now, after 21 days, there won't be any difference. On June 2, Arvind Kejriwal will surrender". Under the interim bail guidelines, Kejriwal cannot visit the Delhi Chief Minister's office or even the Delhi Secretariat. He has also been asked not to comment about the case or interact with any of the witnesses. Since his interim bail, Kejriwal has been campaigning for his party non-stop. While addressing a townhall programme with the traders and industrialists in Ferozepur, he sought support from the people of Punjab and said that they need to come forward and be at forefront in the fight to save the Constitution, democracy and freedom in this country. Referring to his arrest, he said, "On March 16, the general elections were announced, and they arrested me on March 21. They arrested me, my party leaders Sanjay Singh, Manish Sisodia and Satyendar Jain, and then Modi says in Delhi let's fight the election." Targeting the BJP-led Centre, the AAP leader said that several opposition leaders have been jailed and "then they say, let's fight the election".

PM Sheikh Hasina on 'plot' to carve out new state out of Bangladesh, Myanmar

Dhaka [Bangladesh] : Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has claimed that a plot is being hatched to carve out "a Christian state like East Timor," from parts of Bangladesh and Myanmar and asserted that she "won't let this happen," as reported by The Daily Star. Hasina has further claimed that she was offered a hassle-free re-election in the January 7 polls if she allowed a foreign country to build an airbase inside Bangladeshi territory. She, however, did not name the country that had made the offer to her. Hasina, the Awami League president made the remarks while delivering her introductory speech at the 14-party meeting at the Gono Bhaban on Sunday. It was the 14-party's first meeting with the Awami League president after the country held polls, The Daily Star reported. The Bangladesh PM stressed that she faces challenges both at home and abroad and that a "conspiracy is afoot", according to a report in the local media, United News of Bangladesh. "Like East Timor... they will carve out a Christian country, taking parts of Bangladesh (Chittogram) and Myanmar with a base in the Bay of Bengal," Hasina said in her address. She noted that business activities have been going

through the Bay and the Indian Ocean since ancient times. "Many have their eyes on this place. There is no controversy here, no conflict. I won't let that happen. This is also one of my crimes (in their eyes)," she said. About the proposal for an airbase, the premier said, "The offer came from a white man." "It may appear that it is aimed at only one country, but it is not. I know where else they intend to go," she said, adding that this is why the Awami League government is always in trouble. "There will be more trouble. But don't worry about it," she added, according to The Daily Star. "If I allowed a certain country to build an airbase in Bangladesh, then I would have had no problem." Moreover, PM Hasina alleged that the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) had conspired to prevent the elections. She further said, "If inflation can be reduced now, people would be relieved. Production is sufficient. There is no shortage." Hasina emphasised that the foreign exchange reserves of many countries are decreasing, including Bangladesh. "There is no need to worry about the reserves if there is food stock in times of emergency," she said. Following the introductory speech, Hasina held

a closed-door meeting with the partners of the 14-party alliance. She said that conspiracies were being hatched to topple the government and she might have to face the same consequences her father, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, had faced, The Daily Star reported, citing sources. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was assassinated on August 15, 1975 along with most of his family members except for his two daughters, including Sheikh Hasina who had been staying abroad at that time. Meanwhile, Hasina said that conspiracies did not bother her and she would never bow down to pressure. Additionally, she emphasised that Bangladesh will not purchase anything from countries that impose sanctions on it, a top leader of the 14-party alliance cited Hasina, reported The Daily Star.



Severe cyclone Remal leaves trail of destruction; 2 killed

Severe cyclone Remal, which crossed Bangladesh and the adjoining West Bengal coast on Sunday night, left a trail of destruction in three coastal districts of the eastern Indian state, killing two people and displacing around 200,000 people. One Md Sajid, 50, was killed when a concrete chunk fell on him at Entally in Kolkata as the storm battered the region with winds speeding up to 110-120 km per hour and reaching up to 135 km per hour when the landfall started around 9:30pm. An 80-year-old woman identified as Renuka Mondal died at Frazerganj in South 24 Parganas when an uprooted tree fell on her. The storm hit the land between Sagar Islands in Bengal's South 24 Parganas district, which was the hardest hit, and Khepupara in Bangladesh near Mongla. Reports of destruction poured in from places such as Sagar Island, Diamond Harbour, Jharkhali, Hingalganj, and Sandeshkhali in South 24 Parganas and North 24 Parganas even as operations resumed at the Kolkata airport at 9am on Monday a day after it was shut down at noon on Sunday. The closure led to the cancellation of 394 flights. Local train services from Kolkata also resumed from 9am on Monday, said an Eastern Railways

official. North 24 Parganas district magistrate SK Dwivedi said there were no reports of deaths. "Only trees and electric poles were uprooted. Some houses were damaged. Work has already begun to remove the uprooted trees and restore the electric poles. Around 30,000 people were evacuated and brought to safer places including cyclone shelters. "Dwivedi's South 24 Parganas counterpart, Sumit Gupta, said over 150,000 people were shifted to safer places. "...maximum damage [was reported from]...pockets such as Sagar, Namkhana, Basanti, Kultali, Patharpur, Tima, and Gosaba..." "Kolkata received around 140mm of rain from 8:30am on Sunday until around 5:30am on Monday. An official in East Midnapore said around 28,000 people were evacuated. "...the storm uprooted trees, blew tin shades of kaccha houses...the rain damaged



the mud huts." The storm passed over by night but strong winds continued to batter the region on Monday morning. Dum Dum recorded a windspeed of 91km per hour around 5:30am on Monday, Canning (South 24 Parganas) 78 km per hour, and Sagar Island around 63 km per hour. India Meteorological Department (IMD) officials in Kolkata said around 9:30pm that the landfall process began and that it would take at least four hours for the storm to pass. "[The] forward sector of the wall cloud region is entering into land. The landfall process is continuing over coastal areas of Bangladesh and West Bengal. It will continue for [the] next three hours. Gale wind speed reaching 110-120 km per hour gusting up to 135 km per hour is prevailing along and off Bangladesh and West Bengal," said an IMD bulletin at 10:30pm. The eye of the cyclone (the central cloud-free region with calm winds) started entering the land around 11:30pm. IMD officials said that the cyclone was barreling through Bangladesh while losing steam in districts such as Nadia and Murshidabad in West Bengal, which were likely to get heavy to very heavy rain on Monday. A red warning has been issued for the two districts.

