

# Taiwan activates its defence forces amid China drills

Fighter jets took off from a Taiwan airbase Thursday as the self-ruled island dispatched aerial and naval forces in response to China's launch of military drills, while Taipei's coast guard warned off Chinese vessels. Beijing commenced two days of war games, dubbed 'Joint Sword-2024A', as a "strong punishment" for Taiwan's "separatist acts".

They come after the island swore in President Lai Ching-te, who said in his inaugural speech on Monday that Taiwan "must demonstrate our resolution to defend our nation".

China — which claims Taiwan as part of its territory — has denounced Lai's speech as a "confession of independence". Beijing's drills began Thursday morning and are taking place in the Taiwan Strait and to the north, south and east of the island, China's

## Chip machines can be remotely shut off: Minister

Taiwan's new technology minister Wu Cheng-wen said smart machines connected to the internet, including chip tools, can be remotely shut off in the event of a conflict on the island. Wu, stepping in to oversee science and technology as part of a new administration, was responding to a lawmaker's question about a report that some chipmakers have the ability to disable the world's most advanced chip machines remotely. BLOOMBERG

People's Liberation Army said. In response, Taiwan's armed forces dispatched "aerial, naval and land assets", Taipei's defence ministry said in a statement. AFP



# Moscow passes decree to allow seizure of US assets

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday signed a decree allowing the confiscation of assets inside Russia belonging to the United States, its citizens and companies, to compensate those hit by Western sanctions against Moscow.

The West froze around \$300 billion of Russian financial assets, mostly its central bank reserves, after Moscow ordered troops into Ukraine in February 2022. And the US Congress last month passed a bill that would allow President Joe Biden to use frozen Russian assets in the United States for a special fund to support Ukraine.

The Russian decree will give Russian companies, organisations and individuals that have been hit by sanctions the right to apply for compensation from the Russian government. The compensation would come in the form of — real estate, companies, bank accounts or sha-

## Military leadership purge continues

Russian media reported Thursday that Vadim Shamarin, deputy chief of Russia's general staff, had been arrested on large-scale bribe taking. He is the third senior military figure to be arrested on corruption charges in the past month. "It's a real fight against corruption," said Alexander Khranchikhin, deputy director of the Moscow-based Institute for Political and Military Analysis. AFP

res — of US-owned assets based in Russia.

In Europe, where the vast majority of the frozen Russian assets are located, pressure is ramping up over how to use them to support Ukraine. On Thursday, US treasury secretary Janet Yellen called for the G7 to be more "ambitious" in how it can use the funds to help Kyiv. AFP

## Russian forces take control of Andriivka

Moscow: Russia's defence ministry said on Thursday that its forces had taken control of the village of Andriivka, southwest of Bakhmut in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region. The Ukrainian General Staff said later that its troops were repelling three Russian assaults in the area of Andriivka and Novyi. Andriivka was liberated by Ukrainian troops in Sept during a counteroffensive that largely struggled to break through Russian defensive lines.

In Kharkiv, seven were killed in a printing house struck by a Russian missile on Thursday, as President Volodymyr Zelensky called out his western allies for not providing enough military support to rebuff Russian attacks. REUTERS



# Indians were highest no. of immigrants to UK in 2023

Naomi Canton

London: Indians made up the highest number of people — 250,000 — to immigrate to Britain in 2023. Of these, 127,000 Indians came to work and 115,000 came to study, and 9,000 came for other reasons. The next largest nationality to immigrate were Nigerian (141,000), Chinese (90,000), and Pakistani (83,000).

Net migration to the UK fell 10% last year to 685,000 after hitting a record high in 2022 of 764,000, the latest figures from the Office of National Statistics show. In UK, foreigners arriving to study or work are also counted in immigration numbers. Of these, 85% were non-EU arrivals, in sharp contrast to pre-2021 when EU nationals made up the largest component of long-term immigration.

The main reason for immigration to the UK among non-EU nationals is now work, rather than study; 423,000 non-EU nationals came to UK to work in the year ending Dec 2023, an increase of 53% from the year before when there were 277,000. Of these, 219,000 were dependant applicants and 204,000 were for main applicants, meaning the number of non-EU nationals arriving as dependants of those on long-term work vi-



**SUNAK HITS CAMPAIGN TRAIL:** British PM and Conservative Party leader Rishi Sunak interacts with the staff at a distribution centre in Ilkeston in the East Midlands on Thursday. Sunak and his Labour Party rival Keir Starmer kicked off their campaigns for July 4 election, each arguing that only they can snap the country out of its economic and political malaise. Bloomberg said net migration to the UK fell last year but remained at historically high levels, underlining the challenge facing Sunak as tries to show he is cracking down on overseas arrivals

sas has overtaken the number of main applicants. This is mainly due to the rise in dependants accompanying those on health and care visas. There were 279,131 visas granted to dependants of people on work visas in 2023, which was 80% higher than 2022; of these, 203,452 went to dependants of health and care workers.

According to home office stats, there were 337,240 work visas granted to main applicants in 2023, of which 146,477 were for health and care visas (91% more than the previous

year when there were 76,724.) Of these, 89,236 visas were granted for care workers; 18,664 Indians received care worker visas, making them the largest recipient and over half of nurse visas (11,322) went to Indians.

A total of 114,409 graduate visas (allowing students to work after they graduate) were granted to main applicants in 2023; of these, 50,053 went to Indian nationals, making them the largest nationality. Indians also received the highest number of study visas.

## Cyclone 'Remal' warning issued for Bengal and Assam

A low-pressure area brewing over Bay of Bengal is likely to intensify into severe cyclonic storm on Sunday in south Bengal, including Kolkata, bringing heavy thunder-showers and squally winds gusting up to 80 kmph. Assam will also witness heavy to very heavy rain and strong winds on Sunday and Monday, report **Aheli Banerjee & Prabin Kalita**. The cyclonic storm is to be named 'Remal'. Met office said the system is likely to move northwards, developing into a depression by Friday and a cyclonic storm by Saturday morning. Landfall can happen any time on Sunday night.



# At 62.2%, Phase 5 sees lowest overall turnout in this LS poll

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**New Delhi:** Although Phase 5 of Lok Sabha poll, which concluded on May 20, saw the lowest overall voter turnout among the five rounds of polling completed thus far, it was also the first phase to witness a higher female voter turnout as compared to the polling percentage among men.

As per the final turnout figures for Phase 5 (based on only EVM votes) released by the Election Commission on Thursday, the overall turnout was 62.2%, way lower than the 69.2% polling recorded in Phase 4, 65.7% in Phase 3, 66.7% in Phase 2 and 66.1% in Phase 1. The 63% polling percentage among women, however, gave the Election Commission — which has been focusing on improving women's participation in elections with a slew of initiatives — a reason to cheer as it was nearly 1.5 percentage points higher than the male voter turnout.

EC added that with repolls held on Thursday in two polling stations of Kandhamal parliamentary constituency in Odisha, the turnout figures will be updated further on the voter turnout app.

The turnout across all genders — male, female and third gender — was the lowest in Phase 5. Among the five phases completed so far, Phase 4 has fared best in terms of turnout with 69.6% polling among males, 68.7% among women voters and



The turnout in Phase 5 was way lower than that in Phase 4 (69.2%), Phase 3 (65.7%), Phase 2 (66.7%) and Phase 1 (66.1%)

34.2% among third gender electors.

As per statewide turnout figures for Phase 5, West Bengal recorded the highest polling at 78.4%, followed by Odisha at 73.5%, Ladakh at 71.7% and Jharkhand at 63.2%. At 59.1%, Baramulla in J&K has recorded the highest polling since 1989. In fact, the turnout in Baramulla was higher than that recorded in the same phase in UP, Maharashtra and Bihar.

Female voter turnout surpassed men's poll percentage in five of the eight states/UTs that went to polls on May 20; the five states/UTs being Bihar, Jharkhand, Ladakh, Odisha and UP. Women's voting percentage was also higher than men's in 11 of the 21 states/UTs covered in the Phase 1, 6 of the 13 states/UTs in Phase 2, 4 of the 11 states/UTs in Phase 3 and 4 of the 10 states in Phase 4.

Constituencywise, Aram-

bagh in West Bengal saw the highest polling in Phase 5 at almost 81.4%, followed by Bangaon, also in West Bengal, at 80%. Urban apathy pulled down turnouts in Maharashtra, with Mumbai South and Kalyan witnessing the lowest turnouts of around 50% and 50.1% respectively. Kaushambi and Lucknow in UP reflected the trend with 52.8% and 52.3% polling respectively.

The final voting figures for Phase 5 released by EC are based on ballots cast on EVMs and do not include data from postal ballots. "Final turnout will be available post-counting with counting of postal ballots and its addition to total vote count," said an EC spokesperson.

While 58 parliamentary constituencies (PCs) across eight states/UT will witness polling in Phase 6 on Saturday, the seventh and final phase will see 57 PCs going to polls on June 1.



# Large number of Chinese known to work in cybercrime hubs: I4C chief

## Debit-Freeze On 3.2L Mule A/Cs In Last 4 Mths, 5.3L SIM Cards Suspended

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Not ruling out China's involvement in these scams, the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) chief said that a large number of Chinese people were known to work in these scam hubs and many of the suspected apps used for to defraud people are in Chinese language.

Amid an overall increase in big ticket frauds reported in 2024, with over six lakh complaints involving a total amount of Rs 7,061 crore received on the national cybercrime reporting portal, I4C has intervened to save Rs 812.7 crore from being defrauded.

Collaboration between I4C and law enforcement agencies has helped debit-freeze 3.2 lakh mule accounts in last four months, get more than 3,000

**TIMES VIEW:** Cybercriminals are innovative. They regularly come up with new methods to dupe the susceptible. The sharp rise in such foreign-based operations is further cause for concern. Cybercops must raise their game to catch such offenders. This is also a note of caution for all. A few basic rules of online behaviour must be followed. Be fully aware and awake when dealing with money on the phone and online. Think carefully before making payment decisions online. Avoid clicking on fishy links. Eschew easy passwords. Don't share an OTP number with someone you barely know. Staying vigilant is the only way to stay safe.

URLs and 595 apps blocked under Information Technology Act, 5.3 lakh SIM cards and over 80,000 IMEI numbers suspended since July 2023. Also, there have been 3,401 cases of unlawful content being taken down from social media, websites and WhatsApp in last two months.

Indians who are lured to southeast Asia's organised cybercrime factories with fake jobs advertised by illegal recruiters — detected in states like Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Odisha and Delhi — are pushed

into defrauding unsuspecting victims in India through social media advertisements and messaging promising quick financial gains on their investments or through gaming, digital arrests where the cyber offenders pose as a law enforcement personnel; or romance, dating scams. "These gangs work in an organised manner, from scam compounds... many of them were linked to casinos earlier," said Kumar.

The illicit gains from these cybercrime activities originat-

ing in southeast Asia are laundered through sophisticated financial channels including Indian bank accounts, cryptocurrency transactions, cash withdrawals, etc, he added.

In May this year, Visakhapatnam cybercrime police had arrested three illegal recruitment agents who were sending gullible youth to Cambodia.

Similar arrests were carried out in Odisha. Ministry of external affairs has been working with Phnom Penh to rescue the Indians trapped in these compounds and get them home.

Govt had earlier this month set up an inter-ministerial committee comprising various law enforcement and intelligence agencies to tackle the "spurt" in transnational organised cyber crimes being launched against Indians from southeast Asian countries.

# Cyclone Remal to reach W Bengal, Dsh coasts by Sunday evening, says IMD

NEW DELHI, May 23 (PTI)

A LOW-PRESSURE system over the Bay of Bengal will intensify and reach Bangladesh and adjoining West Bengal coasts as a severe cyclonic storm by Sunday evening, the IMD said on Thursday.

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

"The system will concentrate into a depression over central Bay of Bengal by Friday morning. It will further intensify into



a cyclonic storm on Saturday morning and reach Bangladesh and the adjoining West Bengal coast as a severe cyclonic storm by Sunday evening," said India Meteorological Department

(IMD) scientist Monica Sharma.

According to the IMD, the cyclone could reach a wind speed of 102 kilometres per hour on Sunday.

The Met office has warned of very heavy rainfall in the coastal districts of West Bengal, north Odisha, Mizoram, Tripura and south Manipur on May 26-27.

Fisherfolk out at sea have been advised to return to the coast and not venture into the Bay of Bengal until May 27.

Scientists say cyclonic storms are intensifying rapidly and retaining their potency for longer periods due to warmer sea surface temperatures, a result of oceans absorbing most of the excess heat from greenhouse gas emissions.



# CJI meets chief justice of Uzbekistan SC in Tashkent

NEW DELHI, May 23 (PTI)

CHIEF Justice of India D Y Chandrachud on Thursday had a bilateral meeting with the Chief Justice of Uzbekistan, Bakhtiyar Islamov, in Tashkent.

He discussed the possibility of bilateral cooperation between the top courts of both the countries, a communication said.

Chief Justice of India Chandrachud is in Tashkent for a meeting of the Chief Justices of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) member countries.

SCO is an intergovernmental organisation founded in



Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud during a bilateral meeting with Chief Justice of Uzbekistan Bakhtiyar Islamov in Tashkent on Thursday. (PTI)

Shanghai in June 2001.

Since its inception, the SCO has mainly focused on regional security issues and its fight against regional terrorism, ethnic separatism and religious extremism. To date, the SCO's priorities also include regional development.

Earlier, on May 22 the CJI had paid flower tributes to former Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri at Shastri bust in Tashkent. Shastri had died of a heart attack in Tashkent, Uzbekistan (then in the Soviet Union) on 11 January 1966, one day after signing a peace treaty to end the 1965 Indo-Pakistan War.



# BUFFER STOCK

## Govt plans radiation processing of onions to prevent shortages

NEW DELHI, May 23 (PTI)

THE Government is planning to significantly ramp up the radiation processing of onions to create a buffer stock of 1,00,000 tonnes this year, as it aims to prevent shortages and price rises of the politically sensitive bulb, according to a top government official.

The world's biggest exporter of onions is expected to see output fall by 16 per cent to 25.47 million tonnes in 2023-24 amid lower yields in key growing states of Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, according to government estimates. To discourage hoarding and curb price volatility often sparked by supply disruptions, the Government



plans to use radiation technology on a large scale to increase onions' shelf life, said Nidhi Khare, Secretary at the

Consumer Affairs Ministry.

"We are identifying 50 irradiation centres around the consuming areas. If we are suc-

cessful, we will be able to store up to 1 lakh tonnes of radiation-processed onions this year," Khare told PTI.

The ministry has asked the state agencies NAFED and NCCE, who are procuring 500,000 tonnes of onions to create a buffer stock this year, to explore irradiation facilities around key consumption centres such as Sonepat, Thane, Nasik and Mumbai.

Radiation processing was tried on a small scale of 1,200 tonnes near the growing region of Maharashtra last year.

To facilitate quicker transportation of the buffer stock, the ministry is also considering setting up controlled atmosphere storage facilities at major railway hubs, Khare added. In the past, the Government has banned onion exports and stockpiled a substantial share of the crop.



## 6th phase

# Campaigning ends at 58 seats

NEW DELHI, May 23 (PTI)

**CAMPAIGNING** ended on Thursday for the penultimate phase of Lok Sabha elections in 58 constituencies across six states and two Union Territories, including all the seven seats in Delhi.

Besides the national capital, polling for the sixth round of the marathon seven-phase elections will be held on 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 J&K.

Till now, voting has been completed in 25 States and Union Territories and 428 constituencies out of 543. The last phase of polling is scheduled on June 1 and counting of votes will be taken up on June 4.

Among the key contestants are Dharmendra Pradhan (BJP) from Sambalpur (Odisha), Manoj Tiwari (BJP) and Kanhaiya Kumar (Congress) from North East Delhi, Maneka Gandhi (BJP) from Sultanpur (Uttar Pradesh), Mehbooba Mufti (PDP) from Anantnag-Rajouri (Jammu & Kashmir), Abhijit Gangopadhyay (BJP) from Tamuk (West Bengal), and BJP's Manohar Lal Khattar (Karnal, Haryana), Naveen Jindal (Kurukshetra) and Rao Inderjit Singh (Gurgaon).

With campaigning reaching fever pitch, the Election commission took exception to utterances of star campaigners and on Wednesday directed the leaders of the ruling BJP to refrain from making speeches on religious and communal lines, and Opposition Congress from potentially divisive statements on the socioeconomic composition of the Armed Forces. On the last day of campaigning, Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a rally each in Punjab and Haryana.

He took a dig at the I.N.D.I.A bloc, saying the 'cow hasn't given milk but the fight over ghee has started' as the alliance is 'talking about having five PMs in five years'. Modi also asserted that till he is alive, no one can snatch the reservation for Dalits and tribals.

The day before, he referred to the Calcutta High Court's decision to strike down the OBC status granted to '77 classes' in West Bengal since 2010 to hit out at the I.N.D.I.A. bloc, saying its 'obsession with appeasement' has crossed every limit.

The Congress's poll campaign was led by its chief Mallikarjun Kharge, senior leader Rahul Gandhi and Sachin Pilot among others.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal held roadshows in support of Congress' candidates in Delhi.