

# EVERY DROP COUNTS

## India's reservoirs storage level DROPS↓ to **24%**: Official data



Residents collect drinking water from a 'Nagar Nigam' tanker due to the ongoing water crisis amid extreme heat, at Jhalana Doongri in Jaipur on Friday. (PTI)

NEW DELHI, May 24 (PTI)

**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 on 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 meters (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 ten-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).

# Taiwan tracks Chinese warplanes, navy vessels off its coast

TAIPEI (Taiwan), May 24 (AP)

TAIWAN tracked dozens of Chinese warplanes and navy vessels off its coast on 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 on Friday showed animated Chinese forces approaching from all



Chinese vessel is seen near Taiwan on Thursday. (AP/PTI)

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

lived under threat of Chinese invasion since the sides divided during a bitter and bloody civil war in 1949.

Taiwan's Parliament was mired in a dispute between its political parties over procedural measures on Friday and business continued as usual in the bustling capital of Taipei.

The Defence 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.

# ICJ orders Israel to halt military operation in Rafah

## Israel is unlikely to comply

THE HAGUE, May 24 (AP)

THE top United Nations court ordered Israel on Friday to immediately halt its military operations in the southern Gaza city of Rafah. While Israel is unlikely to comply with any such order, it will ratchet up the pressure on the increasingly isolated country.

Criticism of Israel's conduct in the war in Gaza has been growing — even from its closest ally, the United States, which warned against an invasion of Rafah, where hundreds of thou-

sands of Palestinians have sought shelter from fighting elsewhere. And this week alone, three European countries announced they would recognise a Palestinian state, and the chief prosecutor for another UN court requested arrest warrants for Israeli leaders, along with Hamas officials.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is also under heavy pressure at home to end the war, which was triggered when Hamas-led militants stormed into Israel, killing 1,200 people, most civilians, and taking some 250 captive. Thousands of Israelis have joined weekly demonstrations

calling on the government to reach a deal to bring the hostages home, fearing that time is running out.

While the ruling by the ICJ is a blow to Israel's international standing, the court does not have a police force to enforce its orders. In another case on its docket, Russia has so far ignored a 2022 order by the court to halt its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Israel signalled it, too, would brush off an ICJ order. "No power on earth will stop Israel from protecting its citizens and going after Hamas in Gaza," Avi Hyman, the government spokesperson, said.

# SC refuses to direct EC to upload voter turnout data

NEW DELHI, May 24 (PTI)

**THE** Supreme Court on 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.

"This (IA) has to be taken with the pending writ petition because in between the elections, a hands-off approach has to be adopted," it said and pointed out that it would be difficult for the EC to mobilise manpower for uploading the voter turnout data on its website.



"Granting any relief in IA will amount to granting relief in the main petition which is pending," the bench said.

It said it needs to understand the ground reality and not overburden the poll panel by changing the process midway. On May 17, the top court had sought within a week EC's response on the

*(Contd on page 5)*

# 11cr voters 58 constituencies

## Phase 6 Voting today



A worker decorates a polling booth on the eve of the sixth phase of Lok Sabha elections in New Delhi on Friday. (PTI)

NEW DELHI, May 24 (PTI)

**VOTING** for the sixth and penultimate phase of Lok Sabha polls will be held on 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 EC has deployed around 11.4 lakh polling officials at 1.14 lakh polling stations.

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# MANIPUR VIOLENCE

## Cannot go by sentiments:



NEW DELHI, May 24 (PTI)

THE Supreme Court said on Friday it cannot go by sentiments and has to act in accordance with law, as it refused to entertain a petition seeking contempt action for alleged non-compliance with the apex court's order on protection of properties of people displaced during the Manipur violence.

A vacation bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Pankaj Mithal said it was not satisfied with the contention that a case of contempt was made out against the respondents, including the Chief Secretary of Manipur, and the petitioners can take recourse to remedy which may be available under the law.

Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati, appearing for Manipur, told the bench that no case of contempt was made out, and the State Government and the Centre were on the ground doing everything they can to assuage public concerns.

"The effort is to keep the pot boiling which is very unfortunate," Bhati said, adding that the State was duty bound to protect all and can file an updat-

ed status report on the issue.

The top court was hearing a petition claiming the respondents had committed contempt of its September 25 last year order on protecting the properties of those displaced during the ethnic conflict.

"Who according to you are in contempt?" the bench asked the petitioner's counsel who said the Chief Secretary and others are.

"They are not the encroachers," the bench shot back.

When the advocate said the petitioners are living outside Manipur and are not in a position to go anywhere near Imphal, the bench said, "That does not mean that notice be issued against Chief Secretary".

Bhati referred to the September 25 last year order which said the State of Manipur and the Centre are given one week to respond to the directions, including on ensuring protection of properties of displaced persons and preventing their encroachment.

"We had filed a status report. We can file an updated status report," she said, adding the state was duty bound to protect its citizens and their properties.

# Top court of UN orders Israel to end Rafah op immediately

## Israel: Will Go On Fighting For Ourselves

The United Nations' top court ordered Israel to immediately halt its military operations in the Rafah region of the Gaza Strip, partially granting a request by South Africa in a case over genocide allegations.

Israel must open the Rafah border crossing for humanitarian assistance and submit a report on the measures it is taking to do that within one month, the International Court of Justice ruled by a vote of 13-2 on Friday. The ICJ's judgments are binding, with no right of appeal, but it has no mechanism to enforce any order. South Africa had asked the court to deliver an urgent order to protect Palestinians in Gaza from "irreparable violations" of their rights in hearings last week. Israel denied in those hearings that it is committing genocide in Gaza and said South Africa's request had "blatant distortions."

"Those who demand that Israel stop the war, demand that Israel decrees itself to cease from existence. We will not agree to that," Israel's finance minister Bezalel Smotrich in a post on X, reacting to



Heavy machinery is being used to dispose of rotten eggs, part of aid packages for Gaza stuck on the Egypt side of the border with Rafah on Friday. Egypt and the US agreed to temporarily send humanitarian aid to the UN in Gaza via Israel's Kerem Shalom crossing until legal mechanisms are established to reopen the Rafah border

## Labour politician wants to recognise Palestine

**London:** UK opposition leader Keir Starmer said on Friday he wanted to recognise a Palestinian state if he won power in the July 4 election, but said that such a move would need to come at the right time in a peace process. The Labour Party has been engulfed by an internal battle over its policy to the war in Gaza since the Oct 7 attack by Hamas that led to Israel's invasion. Starmer has faced criticism for some traditional Labour voters for only gradually shifting the party's position towards supporting a ceasefire in Gaza. REUTERS

Friday's verdict. "We continue to fight for ourselves and for the entire free world."

"This order is groundbreaking as it is the first time that explicit mention is made for Israel to halt its military action in any area of Gaza, this time specifically in Rafah," South African department of international relations & cooperation Zane Dangor said in a statement. "This is de facto calling for a ceasefire."

The Palestinian militant group Hamas hailed the UN court's ruling but criticised its decision to exclude the rest of war-torn Gaza from the order.

A senior EU official said Friday that talks on deploying a European Union mission at the Rafah border crossing in Gaza are at a preliminary stage and the deployment will not happen without an end to the war between Israel and Hamas. BLOOMBERG, AFP

## Army recovers remains of 3 Gaza hostages

The Israeli military said Friday its forces had retrieved the bodies of three hostages in an overnight operation in the northern Gaza Strip's Jabalia.

The remains of Israeli hostage Chanan Yablonka, Brazilian-Israeli Michel Nisenbaum and French-Mexican Orion Hernandez Radoux "were rescued" and their families had been notified after forensic identification, the military said in a statement. "Based on verified intelligence in our possession, the hostages were murdered during the October 7 massacre", it said.

Yablonka, 42, and Hernandez Radoux, 32, were abducted from a music festival when Palestinian militants stormed southern Israel from Gaza on Oct 7, triggering the ongoing Israel-Hamas war.

Nisenbaum, a 59-year-old from the Israeli city of Sderot near Gaza, was last contacted on his way to an army base on the border to pick up his granddaughter on the day of the attack. He had been on the phone with family members when the line was cut. A person speaking Arabic then answered a call from one of his daughters. AFP