

India, France kick off drill in Meghalaya

New Delhi: India and France on Monday kicked off their joint 'Shakti' combat exercise at Umroi in Meghalaya, with French ambassador Thierry Mathou saying the aim of the expansive bilateral defence cooperation is to strengthen the sovereignty and strategic autonomy of the two nations, and together advance peace and security in the Indo-Pacific.

"The relations between France and India are at their brightest since they were officially established in 1947. Together, we have built a unique strategic partnership, based on a level of mutual trust that is rarely seen between nations," said Mathou, at the inauguration ceremony of the exercise. TNN

Monsoon set to arrive in Andamans May 19: IMD

Neha.Madaan
@timesgroup.com

Pune: The southwest monsoon is poised to enter the south Andaman Sea, certain areas of southeast Bay of Bengal and the Nicobar islands by May 19, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

IMD director-general Mrutyunjay Mohapatra told TOI, "This aligns with the near-normal onset date for the region, with Port Blair usually experiencing monsoon onset around May 20. Favourable conditions, including strengthening southwesterly winds and heightened rainfall activity, are expected to facilitate the monsoon's advance-

NORMAL DATE MAY 22

- **Conditions are favourable for monsoon advance over the south Andaman Sea, certain areas of the southeast Bay of Bengal and Nicobar islands around May 19**
- **Normal monsoon advance date is around May 22**
- **Slightly earlier onset over Andamans does not necessarily mean monsoon will arrive earlier than normal over Kerala, where normal onset date is June 1**

ment into the region by May 19." The normal advancement date is around May 22.

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Putin replaces Defence Minister Shoigu

MOSCOW, May 13 (AP)

RUSSIAN President Vladimir Putin on Sunday replaced Sergei Shoigu as Defence Minister in a Cabinet shakeup that comes as he begins his fifth term in office.

The entire Russian Cabinet resigned on Tuesday following Putin's glittering inauguration in the Kremlin, and most members have been widely expected to keep their jobs, while Shoigu's fate had appeared uncertain. Putin signed a decree on Sunday appointing Shoigu as secretary of Russia's Security Council, the Kremlin said. The appointment was announced shortly after Putin proposed Andrei Belousov to become the country's Defence

Minister in place of Shoigu.

The announcement of Shoigu's new role came as 13 people were reported dead and 20 more wounded in Russia's border city of Belgorod, where a 16-story apartment building partially collapsed after what Russian officials said was Ukrainian shelling. Ukraine hasn't commented on the incident. Belousov's candidacy will need to be approved by Russia's upper house in Parliament, the Federation Council. It reported on Sunday that Putin introduced proposals for other Cabinet positions as well but Shoigu is the only Minister on that list who is being replaced. Several other new candidates for federal Ministers were proposed on Saturday by Prime



Minister Mikhail Mishustin, reappointed by Putin on Friday.

Shoigu's Deputy, Timur Ivanov, was arrested last month on bribery charges and was ordered to remain in custody pending an official investigation. The arrest of Ivanov was widely interpreted as an attack on Shoigu and a possible precursor of his dismissal, despite his close personal ties with Putin.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that Putin had decided to give the Defence Minister role to a civilian because the Ministry should be "open to innovation and cutting-edge ideas." He also said the increasing defence budget "must fit into the country's wider economy."

India's goodwill gesture: Extend \$50 mn budgetary support to Maldives as

MALE, May 13 (PTI)

IN A goodwill gesture, India has decided to extend vital budgetary support to the Maldives with the rollover of a USD 50 million Treasury Bill for another year at the Maldivian Government's special request, it was announced on Monday.

The State Bank of India has subscribed for one more year to the USD 50 million Government Treasury Bill, issued by the Ministry of Finance of Maldives, upon maturity of the previous subscription, the High Commission of India said in a

brief statement on Monday.

The Indian Government took this decision despite the bilateral ties experiencing turbulence since Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu, a pro-China leader, assumed office six months back. These Government Treasury Bills are subscribed by SBI under Government-to-Government, a unique arrangement at zero cost to Maldives. The continuation of subscription has been made at the special request of the Government of Maldives to secure budgetary support from the Government of India, the statement said.

Ukrainian forces locked in fierce battle amid Russian assault

KYIV, May 13 (AP)

UKRAINIAN troops are locked in intense battles with the advancing Russian army in two border areas, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said, while the death toll from a Russian apartment building collapse blamed on Ukrainian shelling rose to 15.

Zelenskyy said "fierce battles" are taking place near the border in eastern and north-eastern Ukraine as outnumbered Ukrainian soldiers try to push back a significant Russian ground offensive.

"Defensive battles are ongoing, fierce battles, on a large part of our border area," Zelenskyy

"Occupier feeds on lies and fear..."

KYIV, May 13 (ANI)

AMID recent gains made by the Russian forces in the war, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy acknowledged that "fierce battles" are taking place and the situation is "extremely difficult" in some regions while affirming that the key thing is for the country to remain "resilient" and hold its ground.

Zelenskyy also warned against Russian PSYOPs saying that the "occupier feeds on lies and the fear that fol-

lows lies" and urging people not to chase the headline.

"Today, the key issue is, of course, the frontline and our counteraction to Russian operations. Throughout the day, there have been reports from the Commander-in-Chief, Intelligence, and Interior Minister," President Zelenskyy said.

He said that "special attention" is paid to the Kharkiv region, where he said Russia, which he referred to as "occupier," is trying to gain a foothold there.

said in his nightly video address. The Kremlin's forces are aiming to exploit Ukrainian weaknesses before a big batch of new military aid for Kyiv from the US and European partners arrives on the battlefield in the coming weeks and months, analysts say.

That makes this period a window of opportunity for Moscow and one of the most dangerous for Kyiv in the two-year war, they say.

The new Russian push in the north-eastern Kharkiv region, along with the ongoing drive into the eastern Donetsk region, come after months when the about 1,000-kilometre (620-mile) front line barely budged. In the meantime,

both sides have used long-range strikes in what largely became a war of attrition.

The Kharkiv incursion may be an attempt to create a "buffer zone" to protect Belgorod, an adjacent Russian border region battered by Ukrainian attacks.

Russian emergency services on Monday finished clearing the rubble in the region's capital city of Belgorod, where a section of a residential building collapsed following what authorities said was Ukrainian shelling.

Fifteen bodies were pulled from the rubble, Belgorod regional Gov Vyacheslav Gladkov said, and 27 other people were wounded.

Another three people in the

city of Belgorod were killed by shelling late on Sunday, he said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Sunday replaced Sergei Shoigu as Defence Minister in a Cabinet shakeup. Shoigu was widely seen as a key figure in Putin's decision to send Russian troops into Ukraine in February 2022. Russia had expected the operation to quickly overwhelm Ukraine's army and for Ukrainians to broadly welcome Russian troops.

Zelenskyy said fighting in the Donetsk area is "no less intense" than in Kharkiv. He said the Kremlin aimed to "spread our forces thin" by opening a second active front in Kharkiv.

SITUATION TENSE IN PoK

Strike enters 4th day



ISLAMABAD, May 13 (PTI)

THE situation remained tense in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir as the total strike against high prices of wheat flour and inflated electricity bills and taxes entered its fourth day on Monday, forcing the Pakistan government to allocate Rs 23

billion for immediate release to the region to quell a simmering unrest.

The disputed region witnessed clashes on Saturday between the police and activists of a rights movement, leaving at least one police officer dead and injuring over 100 people,

(Contd on page 5)

India, Iran sign 10-yr contract on Chabahar Port ops

NEW DELHI/TEHRAN, May 13 (PTI)

INDIA on Monday signed a 10-year contract to operate the strategic Iranian port of Chabahar that will help it expand trade with Central Asia.

The Chabahar port on the Gulf of Oman - which New Delhi had proposed to develop way back in 2003 - will provide Indian goods a gateway to reach landlocked Afghanistan and Central



Asia using a road and rail project called International North-South Transport Corridor, bypassing Pakistan.

US sanctions on Iran over its suspected nuclear programme had slowed the development of the port.

The long-term agreement was signed by Indian Ports Global Limited (IPGL) and the Port & Maritime Organisation of Iran, an official statement said.

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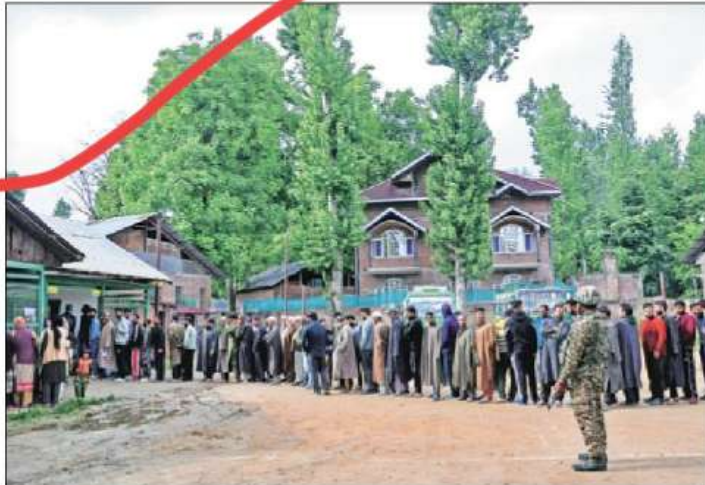
Over 67% turnout in 4th phase

NEW DELHI, May 13 (PTI)

A VOTER turnout of over 67 per cent was recorded on Monday in the fourth phase of the Lok Sabha elections covering 96 constituencies spread over 10 States and Union Territories, with scattered incidents of violence reported in West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh.

West Bengal, where polling was held in eight constituencies, again recorded an impressive turnout at 78.44 per cent, the highest among States/UTs in this phase, closely followed by Andhra Pradesh (25 seats) at 78.25 per cent and Odisha (four seats) at 73.97 per cent.

Srinagar constituency in



Security personnel stand guard as people wait in a queue to cast their votes at a polling booth during the fourth phase of General Elections-2024 in Srinagar, J&K on Monday. (PTI)



(Top) A family shows their inked-finger in Dewas, MP. (Above) People wait in queues to cast their votes in Khunti, Jharkhand. (PTI)

Srinagar constituency witnessed 37.98% voting, with EC stating that it was the "highest turnout in decades"

Jammu and Kashmir witnessed 37.98 per cent voting in the first Lok Sabha election in the Valley since the scrapping of Article 370, with the Election Commission stating that it was the "highest turnout

in decades".

According to the EC's voter turnout app at midnight, the overall voting in this phase was 67.70 per cent.

However, it said that this was an "approximate" trend

as data from polling stations was still being collated.

Among other States, Bihar (five seats) recorded 57.06 per cent polling, Jharkhand (four seats) 65.31 per cent, Maharashtra (11 seats) 59.84

per cent, Telangana (17 seats) 64.87 per cent and Uttar Pradesh (13) 58.05 per cent.

A provisional voter turnout of 71.72 per cent was recorded in Madhya Pradesh (eight seats), according to election

officials in Bhopal.

The overall voter turnout in the first three phases of the Lok Sabha elections was 66.14 per cent, 66.71 per cent and 65.68 per cent, respectively.

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