

India exit polls suggest ruling party gains in state elections

Elections in five states and territories have taken place in April

- All eyes will be on West Bengal
- Exit polls predict the BJP has a slight edge over TMC
- Polls say it would be a tightly contested race in Kerala

AFP | New Delhi, India

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling party appeared set for gains in crucial state elections in India, according to exit polls released yesterday ahead of final results due on May 4.

Exit polls have a patchy record in India, but they often show early markers of the final outcome.

Elections in five states and territories have taken place in April including in the major opposition-held states of West



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi (L) interacts with Uttar Pradesh's Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath during a public meeting for women in Varanasi

Bengal and Tamil Nadu.

Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the ruling party in the national parliament, is hoping to make inroads in the opposition strongholds.

Results in all the elections -- which were also held in Assam, the smaller coastal territory of Puducherry and the Communist-run Kerala -- will be re-

leased on Monday.

All eyes will be on West Bengal, where the BJP waged an aggressive bid to dislodge Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, the firebrand leader of the All India Trinamool Congress (TMC), in power in the state since 2011.

Exit polls predict the BJP has a slight edge over TMC, and a win this time would mean the BJP

gets to rule the state of over 100 million people for the first time. Banerjee's party won 213 of the 294 seats in the previous election held in 2021.

Past elections have resulted in violence in the state. The campaign this time was marked by protests over the removal of millions of names from voter rolls during a Special Intensive Revision -- meant to remove ineligible voters but which critics say is skewed against marginalised and minority communities.

Political activist Yogendra Yadav said there was "no way" the TMC would lose in a "fair election".

"The only way the BJP can win is by rigging, ie, electoral malpractice of one form or the other, from voter list manipulation to counting fraud," he said in a post on X on Wednesday.

Both in the northeastern state of Assam and southern Puducherry, the BJP-led alliance is widely expected to be re-elected.

In the southern state of Tamil

May 4

Final results of the state elections in India are due on May 4.

Nadu, a key industrial hub with more than 80 million people, exit polls predict the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) under Chief Minister MK Stalin will hold onto power.

But the polls also predict debutant actor-turned politician C. Joseph Vijay from the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam party to emerge as a strong opponent to the traditional parties in the state, including DMK.

And it would be a tightly contested race in Kerala, the only state in the country ruled by communists, with a Congress-led alliance expected to win this time.

287 nominations for Nobel Peace Prize: institute

AFP | Oslo, Norway

The Norwegian Nobel Institute on Thursday announced that 287 nominations had been submitted for this year's Nobel Peace Prize.

The list comprised 208 individuals and 79 organisations, it said, without identifying them.

While fewer than the record 376 registered in 2016, the institute said the number remained "consistently high".

"In an increasingly conflictual world, there is no lack of candidates whose principled commitment and innovative action points towards a brighter future," the institute said in a statement.

In line with Nobel statutes, the identity of the nominees is kept confidential for 50 years.

White House against Anthropic expanding Mythos model access

San Francisco, United States

The White House is opposing Anthropic's plans to expand access to its new artificial intelligence model Mythos to 120 companies, the Wall Street Journal reported Wednesday.

President Donald Trump's administration and Anthropic had only recently started to mend ties following a dispute over the AI firm's refusal to grant the military unconditional use of its software.

Anthropic has withheld the powerful Mythos model from public release citing potential cybersecurity risks and concerns it could be exploited by hackers.

Instead it shared a version with selected companies including Apple, Microsoft and Nvidia under a project called "Glasswing" to help improve their security infrastructure.

Kanpai! Space-brewed sake sells for \$700,000

- The drink was packaged in a 100-millilitre bottle and went to an anonymous buyer for 110 million yen (\$686,000).

AFP | Tokyo, Japan

A small bottle of Japanese sake, made from mash fermented in space, sold for almost \$700,000, its brewer said as the company explores ways to make the drink on the Moon.



Sake brewer Dassai teamed up with aerospace and engineering firm Mitsubishi Heavy Industries to build specialised

brewing equipment and send it to the International Space Station (ISS) along with sake ingredients.

The alcoholic fermentation process was carried out in November inside facilities at the ISS that mimicked lunar gravity, the two firms said in a joint statement, dated Tuesday.

The mash was returned to Earth in February and was refined into 116 milliliters (four fluid ounces) of sake in March in Japan.

The drink was packaged in a 100-millilitre bottle and went to an anonymous buyer for 110 million yen (\$686,000).

The remaining 16 milliliters allowed for taste tests. "It offers a pronounced acid-

ity. It has a well-balanced and robust sake flavour," a Dassai spokeswoman told AFP.

Proceeds from the sale will be donated to support Japan's space development efforts, the two firms said.

"This result demonstrates experimentally that sake production is feasible even under lunar-gravity conditions using a process comparable to that on Earth," the firms said.

Dassai says it wants to build a sake brewery on the moon by 2050 to "improve quality of life for future lunar habitation".

Teen with 30 tortoises under clothes nabbed at Thai airport

AFP | Bangkok, Thailand

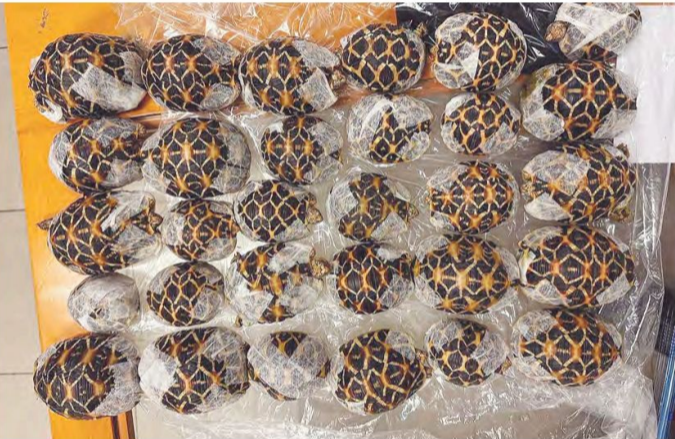
Thai authorities arrested a teenager at a Bangkok airport for allegedly smuggling 30 protected tortoises valued at about \$9,000 that were taped under her clothing, wildlife officials said Wednesday.

Thailand is a major transit hub for wildlife smugglers who often sell highly prized endangered animals on the lucrative black market in Asia.

Authorities became suspicious of the 19-year-old Taiwanese woman's unusual movements as she prepared to board a flight to Taipei early Tuesday, Thailand's wildlife conservation department said in a statement.

A search at Suvarnabhumi airport's departure terminal uncovered the Indian star tortoises -- 29 alive and one dead -- strapped to her body, the department said.

"The suspect had used adhesive tape to immobilise the



Indian star tortoises confiscated from a woman attempting to travel with them at Suvarnabhumi International Airport in Bangkok.

animals, packed them into cloth bags and attached them to her

body to evade detection," it added.

The Thai customs department said the tortoises -- protected

under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) -- commanded a high price on the black market, placing their total estimated value at around \$9,000.

The woman was charged with illegally transporting animals and evading customs controls.

The surviving tortoises were transferred to wildlife conservation officials for care and to serve as evidence.



Indian star tortoises are classified as a vulnerable species by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which says they have been targeted to meet international demand for use as "exotic pets".

Myanmar mass prison sentence cut trims Suu Kyi's sentence

Yangon, Myanmar

Myanmar's coup-chief-turned president cut all prisoners' sentences by one-sixth on Thursday, a blanket measure a source close to deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi said would further shorten her detention.

Suu Kyi has been sequestered since a 2021 military coup, but the senior member of her dissolved National League for Democracy (NLD) party said while her term had been reduced, her remaining sentence is still unclear.

"We also don't know exactly how many years she has left," the source told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity for security reasons.