

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

CHENNAI | WEDNESDAY | 8 MAY 2024

WEATHER



Max: 36°C
Min: 28°C
Rainfall: nil

ASTROGUIDE

Sobakrithu: Chithirai 25
Tithi: Amavasyai
Star: Bharani
Rahukalam:
12 noon to 1.30 pm
Yamagandam:
7.30 am to 9 am
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.00 am
Zuhar: 1.00 am
Asar: 4.00 pm
Maghrib: 6.31 pm
Isha: 8.00 pm



Actor Shekhar Suman and former Congress leader Radhika Khera after joining the BJP in New Delhi on Tuesday. — PTI

Take down BJP video on Muslim quota, EC tells X

New Delhi: The Election Commission on Tuesday directed social media platform 'X' to "immediately" take down an animated video shared by the Karnataka unit of the BJP related to the row over reservation for the Muslim community. In a letter to the nodal officer of 'X', the EC took exception to the non-compliance of the directive of the Karnataka Chief Electoral Officer to the social media platform for taking down the video.

Jharkhand min's secy, aide remanded

New Delhi/Ranchi: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Tuesday alleged that Jharkhand Cabinet minister Alamgir Alam's secretary Sanjeev Kumar Lal collected commission on tenders on behalf of "some influential people". Mr Lal — secretary of rural development minister and Congress leader Alamgir Alam — and the domestic help, Jahangir Alam, of the minister, were produced before the special court, which sent them to six days of ED custody. ■ P4

Mayawati removes her 'successor'

Lucknow: Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati on Tuesday night said she is divesting her nephew Akash Anand of his responsibilities as the party's national coordinator and her "successor". Announcing it on X, the former Uttar Pradesh chief minister said she has taken the decision in the interest of the party and the movement and till the time Anand gains "full maturity". She said her brother and Akash's father Anand Kumar will continue to fulfil his responsibilities as before.

COUNTER POINT



Not a pendrive... you need a 22 terabyte hard disk to store your criminal record!

SC stays HC order invalidating WB teacher appointments

RAKESH K. SINGH, RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, MAY 7

In a major relief to 25,753 teachers and non-teaching staff of West Bengal, the Supreme Court on Tuesday stayed the order of the Calcutta high court invalidating their appointment in state-run and state-aided

schools. The top court, however, permitted the CBI to continue with its investigation and said it may probe even the members of the state cabinet if needed. The ruling and the Opposition parties of West Bengal lauded the Supreme Court ruling.

Earlier in the day, the apex court termed the

► The top court permitted the CBI to continue with its investigation and said it may probe even the members of the state cabinet if needed.

alleged scam "systemic fraud" and said the state authorities were duty-bound to maintain digitised records pertaining to the appointment of teachers and non-teaching staff.

While granting relief on the pleas, including the one

filed by the state government, a bench comprising Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud and Justices J.B. Pardiwala and Manoj Misra asked the CBI not to take any precipitative action like arrest of suspects during its ongoing

investigation. The apex court, however, made it clear that the teachers and non-teaching staff of the state, whose appointments were cancelled by the high court, will have to refund the salaries and other emoluments if it

It's 'vote jihad' Vs Ram rajya: Modi

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC
BHOPAL, MAY 7

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday exhorted people to choose between "vote jihad", being "promoted by the Congress", and "Ram Rajya", being "established by the BJP", while exercising their franchise in the ongoing general election.

Addressing two poll rallies in Khargone and Dhar districts of Madhya Pradesh, Mr Modi said the country now stands at a "critical juncture of history" and the people have to decide whether they opt for the path of "vote jihad", a move to unite Muslims against the BJP, or to establish "Ram Rajya" (good governance).

"Terrorists in Pakistan are threatening jihad against India, while some

Modi aims only power, vote INDIA for equal future: Sonia

DC CORRESPONDENT WITH AGENCY INPUTS
NEW DELHI, MAY 7

Senior Congress leader Sonia Gandhi in a video message on Tuesday claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP were only aiming for power while rejecting inclusivity and dialogue.

Appealing to the people to vote for her party for a "brighter and more equal future" for all, Ms Gandhi

Congress leaders are calling for a "vote jihad" against him (Mr Modi), calling upon the people of a partic-

said, "Reject the proponents of lies and hatred and vote for the Congress for a brighter and more equal future for all. Press the 'hand' button and together let us build a stronger, more united India with peace and harmony for all."

Her appeal came on the day of the third phase of polling for the Lok Sabha polls.

She said the Congress and the INDIA bloc members were committed to

ular religion to unite and vote against Modi," the PM said. He said that the term "love jihad" was not acce-

defending the Constitution and democracy. She alleged that youth unemployment, crimes against women, and discrimination against Dalits, Adivasis, and minorities have reached unprecedented levels. These challenges, she claimed, stem from the niyat (intention) and niti (policy) of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP which aim for power, rejecting inclusivity and dialogue.

ptable in a democracy and added that the Indian Constitution also did not allow such kind of "jihad". ■ P4

EC ASKS TELANGANA TO DEFER FARMER RELIEF

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 7

The Election Commission on Tuesday directed the Telangana government to defer payments under the Rythu Bharosa scheme till the Lok Sabha elections are held in the state on May 13.

In a letter to the Telangana chief electoral officer, the EC said chief minister Revanth Reddy had violated the model code of conduct (MCC) by saying in his public speeches that the scheme's payouts would be given on

or before May 9. The EC had, on November 24, 2023, given no objection for disbursement of Rythu Bharosa scheme — earlier known as Rythu Bandhu — assistance in Telangana with conditions that the state government would follow instructions issued by it in October 2018, and no direct benefit transfer (DBT) assistance would be affected during the silence period and poll das in the state. This NoC was given by EC on the premise that this is an ongoing scheme. ■ P4

Israel takes control of Gaza's lifeline Rafah

Jerusalem/Cairo, May 7: The Israeli military said on Tuesday it had taken operational control of the Palestinian side of Gaza's southern Rafah Crossing, which borders Egypt and has been pivotal for the delivery of aid and exit of injured people in the Gaza war.

The Gaza Crossings Authority said in a statement that Israel's takeover

was a "death sentence" against Gazans, particularly the ill and injured.

Throughout the seven-month war, Rafah, the only crossing not run by Israel, has been the main lifeline to the outside world for Gaza's 2.3 million Palestinians, allowing humanitarian supplies in and transport of patients out during severe shortages. **Full report ■ P8**



Jayakumar death: Cong leader, MLA questioned by special police teams

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Lara says Surya has to play at No.3 for India

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They Came, They Saw, They Rocked



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Govt schemes helped change lives in 3 years, says CM Stalin

CM quotes beneficiaries in video message on 3rd anniversary

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR, D. SEKAR | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 7

Looking back at his three years of rule in the state, Chief Minister M K Stalin said that he had earned the respect and love of the people who had come to believe that 'Stalin means action' and were praising him from the depth of their hearts for all the good things that had happened to them.

Starting his fourth year in office on Tuesday by paying tributes at the decorated memorials of DMK founder C.N. Annadurai and former chief minister M. Karunanidhi, Mr Stalin released a video message in which he quoted beneficiaries of the various schemes launched by his government to drive home the point that his consistent action had brought happiness to people.

A woman called him her son as he had given her financial support through the scheme providing Rs 1000 as 'right assistance' to women, which stood them in goodstead whether they went to work or not and whether their children supported them or not, he said.



Chief Minister M.K. Stalin along with senior ministerial colleagues and party leaders visits Kalaingar Karunanidhi Samadhi at Marina beach on the occasion of the completion of three years of the DMK rule in Tamil Nadu on Tuesday.

He also mentioned schemes that helped transgenders and differently able people

Referring to the women self help group's progress, a member said that though their income otherwise hovered between ₹4,000 and ₹5,000 a month, each of them made an easy Rs 15,000, adding that their lives had progressed because of the SHG activities in the present regime.

The interest charged for the loans up to Rs 1 lakh was less than elsewhere and if the loans were cleared on time without any lapse, they were offered another loan and the money due to them was credited in the bank accounts without fail, the Chief Minister quoted the woman.

The Chief Minister also

Straight to women's hearts

THE CM LISTED schemes such as 'right assistance' to women, women self-help groups, breakfast scheme for school children, loan scheme for women, *Naan Mudhalvan*, Friends Hostel and *Pudhumai Penn* scheme which basically addressed the needs of women.

programme to provide welfare assistance had given her the dignity she strove for, the Chief Minister said. Speedy disbursement of government service has brought relief to a lot of people, he said.

A person with disability was thrilled over the construction of a wooden ramp on the Marina for people like them to reach the sea. It was a dream come true for them after they had longed to dip their legs in the sea while passing through the beach road for years, Mr Stalin recalled.

The testimonials went to prove that it was the people's government that was in power, Mr Stalin said.



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi being greeted by JMM leader Kalpana Soren during a public meeting at Chaibasa in West Singhbhum district of Jharkhand on Tuesday. — PTI

Haryana's BJP govt reduced to minority

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 7

In a major setback to the ruling BJP in Haryana, four Independent MLAs backing the government have withdrawn support. The MLAs — Sombir Sangwan, Randhir Gollen, Rakesh Daulatabad and Dharampal Gonder — also said that they have decided to extend support to the Congress during the election. The Congress has asked BJP chief minister Nayab Singh Saini to resign immediately. This development comes just days before the all-important Lok Sabha elections for 10 parliamentary constituencies in the state.

The MLAs made the announcement at a press

conference held in Rohtak in the presence of former Haryana chief minister Bhopinder Singh Hooda and state Congress chief Uday Bhan.

As of now, the state has 88 MLAs out of 90. The JJP has 10 MLAs, the BJP 40 MLAs and the Congress 30. The tally of the NDA is now 43, with two Independent MLAs and one MLA of Gopal Kanda's party. As of now, 45 MLAs constitute a majority. The Congress has claimed the Saini government is a minority government and should resign.

"We are withdrawing support to the government. We are extending our support to the Congress," Mr Gonder said.

No decision on Kejriwal bail; remand extended

RAKESH K SINGH, BHASKAR HARI SHARMA | DC
NEW DELHI, MAY 7

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal failed to get any relief from the Supreme Court on Tuesday, with a two-judge bench rising without pronouncing an order on his plea for interim bail in view of the Lok Sabha elections. In another setback for Mr Kejriwal in the day, a Rouse Avenue court extended his judicial custody

in a money-laundering case linked to the excise policy "scam" till May 20.

In the apex court, a bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta, which reserved its order on the grant of interim bail to Mr Kejriwal earlier in the day and said it will be pronounced at 2 pm, rose without delivering its verdict.

Before rising for the day, the bench indicated that on Wednesday the judges will be sitting in different combinations and if the

hearing on matters listed for Wednesday gets completed and the judges have time in hand, they will resume hearing Mr Kejriwal's plea against his arrest by the ED.

Without specifying any time frame for the pronouncement of the verdict on Mr Kejriwal's interim bail plea, Justice Khanna said, "If not tomorrow, then we may take up the matter on Thursday. If not on Thursday, then we will be taking up this matter next week."

reaches the conclusion that their recruitment was illegal. While the ruling Trinamul Congress hailed the top court for putting an interim stay on the Calcutta high court order terminating the 25,753 jobs over alleged corruption, the BJP praised the apex court for allowing the CBI to continue its probe into the scam. ■ P4

SHORT TAKES

17 tourists injured in mishap

Erode, May 7: As many as 17 persons were injured when a tourist bus capsized near Sathyamangalam on Tuesday, police said.

According to police, the mishap occurred when the driver of the tourist bus carrying 17 passengers was proceeding to Bengaluru from Udagamandalam hit a parked vehicle near Athiappa Gounden Padur in Sathyamangalam and capsized as a result.

All the 17 tourists were caught inside the bus.

On receiving information, the Sathyamangalam police rushed to the spot, safely evacuated all the 17 passengers and the driver by breaking the front glass of the vehicle.

All the passengers sustained minor injuries and were moved to the Government Hospital in Sathyamangalam. After receiving treatment, the 17 passengers were sent to Bengaluru by another bus.

Sathyamangalam police registered a case and are investigating. —PTI

Van with ₹666 cr worth gold jewels capsizes

Erode, May 7: A private container carrying Rs 666 crore worth 810 kg gold jewels capsized at Chitode near Erode late on Monday night. According to police, a container belonging to a private logistics firm loaded with the jewels proceeded from Coimbatore last night to Salem. When the vehicle came near Samathuvapuram near here, the driver Sasikumar lost control over the vehicle when he was negotiating a turning which led to it capsizing, police said.

In the incident, the driver Sasikumar and armed security Balraj fell down and sustained serious injuries. On getting information, the Chitode police rushed to the spot, removed the injured persons and admitted them to a hospital nearby.

The gold jewels kept inside the container were not affected, police said. The consignee and consignor learnt about the incident and sent a new truck and security guard to the spot. They removed the gold jewels from the capsized vehicle into the new one and left for Salem. Chitode police registered a case and are investigating it. —PTI

SRMU Tiruchy unit congratulates Kanniah

R. VALAYAPATHY | DC TIRUCHY, MAY 7

The Tiruchirapalli divisional unit of the Southern Railway Mazdoor Union (SRMU) congratulated Dr.N. Kanniah, general secretary of the SRMU, for being elected the president of the All India Railwaymen Federation (AIRF) for the 5th consecutive term, during the recent three-day centenary celebrations of AIRF at New Delhi. In a release here on Sunday, SRMU's Tiruchirapalli divisional secretary S. Veerasekaran said the committee formed by government is continuously fighting for the revival of the old pension scheme.

EPS TAKES UP CUDGELS ON BEHALF OF SAVUKKU

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, MAY 7

Leader of the opposition Edappadi K Palaniswami demanded an enquiry by a judge to ascertain if the charges that YouTuber and social media activist Savukku Sankar was beaten up in the Coimbatore jail as alleged by the lawyer.

In his post on X, Palaniswami said that while action can be taken against Sankar if he had violated the law, the police were not empowered to take the law into their hands.

Sankar was arrested at Theni on charges of defaming women police personnel in an interview given to a YouTube channel and taken to Coimbatore where the case was filed against him. He was sent to jail and it was where he is reported to have been assaulted by the jail staff.

Meanwhile, Chennai police reopened an old case against him on the basis of a complaint filed by a woman journalist years ago.

TN plans to deepen, inter-link major lakes to prevent floods

N. RAVIKUMAR | DC CHENNAI, MAY 7

The state government is planning to deepen major lakes in Chennai's neighbourhood to avoid flooding during the rainy season and to store water for summer needs. If the plans are executed, water will flow to the river Adyar only after the lakes get filled up, reducing or stopping floods in the city during the monsoon season.

The government is also discussing plans to publish the details of water stagnation during floods in each area with the survey numbers of the land. Those buying vacant plots and building houses can know about the water stagnation in the areas before buying the plots.

Besides, there are many requests from social activists not to allow construction of ground floor in flood-prone areas and to

permit only apartments with parking areas on the ground floor. If there are no ground floors in areas of flooding, people need not be evacuated during rains and loss of belongings can be avoided. The government can come out with guidelines on construction only when there is a proper record of water stagnation and flooding in each area.

The plans to mitigate floods in Chennai were discussed at a review meeting held by Chief Secretary Shiv Das Meena last month. Water resources department sources said the meeting was attended by officials from the department besides those belonging to the public works department, Chennai Metro politan Development Authority, revenue department, besides top officials from Chengalpet, Kanchipuram and Tiruvallur.

Chennai was affected by floods in 2015, 2021 and 2023, especially when the quantity of water flowing in the river Adyar increases beyond a certain level. The river receives water from the Chembarambakkam lake and the overflowing water from the canals besides the hundreds of big and small lakes in Kanchipuram and Chengalpet districts.

The rivers Kosasthalayar and Cooum get water from the overflowing water bodies and canals. Since flood water from the three surrounding districts of Chengalpet, Kanchipuram and Tiruvallur passes through Chennai, the city gets flooded during heavy rains.

One of the ways to reduce the floods is to reduce the water flow from the neighbouring districts by increasing the storage capacity of the

lakes in the three districts. Besides mitigating the flood situation, increasing the storage level of the water bodies will also help supply water for drinking and irrigation purposes during the summer season.

The officials discussed plans to deepen around 60 big lakes in Chennai's neighbourhood as they could not be widened as the residential areas nearby will be affected. The residents themselves have come out with requests to deepen the lakes and strengthen the bunds during floods. Besides deepening the lakes, inter-connecting them with canals will ensure that all lakes are filled before the water flows to the nearby river.

The government is in the process of strengthening the stormwater drains in Chennai and clearing encroachments near the Buckingham Canal which carries water to the sea.

SCORCHING SUMMER



Star tortoises are given fresh vegetables and juice fruits to beat the heat at Snake Park in Chennai. —E.K.Sanjay



Nurses checking the special ward set up for treating heat-related ailments, at the Government hospital in Chromepet. —DC

100 special buses in city and suburbs for summer vacation

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, MAY 7

The transport department will operate 100 additional buses every day to Marina, Besant Nagar, Kovalam and Mamallapuram beaches and the Arignar Anna Zoological park in Vandalur for the summer vacation. The summer vacation for all the school

students started on April 24 when the annual examinations for all classes ended. As the summer temperature this year peaked early, people are seeking refuge at the Marina, Besant Nagar, Kovalam and Mamallapuram beaches in the evening. Besides, they are going to the zoo at Vandalur to spend the day time with their families.

The buses in the morning and evening are crowded since more people are travelling. To meet their demands, the transport department will run 100 additional buses to Marina, Mamallapuram, Kovalam and Besant Nagar beaches and the Vandalur zoo every day. The buses will be operated till June first week.

Call for effective pet management policy

T. SUDHEESH | DC CHENNAI, MAY 7

The effective pet management policy which brings in accountability of pet owners has once again become a focus while Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) called for tightening rules for entry of pets following the recent attack on a 5-year-old girl by two Rottweiler dogs in a public park at Thousand Lights, here.

In India, people buy ferocious dogs from backyard breeders who have no expertise on their traits and character. Though the Central government has formulated a general law on the care and safety of pet animals, there is no specific policy in handling ferocious breeds like Rottweiler, Pitbull and American Bulldog.

On the basis of the recent attack of two Rottweiler dogs, animal rights activists pointed out that the absence of a strict pet policy had result-

ed in increasing ownership of aggressive breeds. The owners, without proper training, walk with ferocious dogs creating trouble for innocent people.

Dhanu Roy, founder, Right4Paws, a start-up offering the next generation of pets, pointed out that the Indian system had not mandatorily introduced a policy that could ensure the behavioural changes, socialisation manners and civil obedience test for ferocious pets.

In Europe, you will get a pet licence for 20 euros but if you fail to conduct the civil obedience test, the pet owner has to pay 1,000 euros. In India, we don't have such a system. If the government brings in such strict policies, it will help to improve employability as well as ownership responsibility in the sector. We need to train the pet owners on the physiological traits of breeds they own. Based on this, owners have to be

trained to handle pet dogs in public places, he said.

Manoj Poovanniyil, founder, Rottweiler Chennai, stressed that banning the selling and breeding of Rottweilers was not the solution for the problem which is created by owners. People buy ferocious breeds, including Rottweiler dogs, from breeders without knowing anything about their traits and character. I have been breeding and selling Rottweiler dogs for the last two decades in the city. I can confidently take you to dozens of Rottweiler dogs which will be so calm and polite to you. In the recent incident, the owners did not even tie a collar or belt on the dog. They were simply looking at the dog while they were mauling the little girl. Later, they get away from any kind of punishment. India's animal protection laws should be updated with strict pet policies that could hold the pet owners accountable if such an

incident happened, he said.

"Pet-loving countries like the US and UK have formulated pet policies with the intention of conflict-free pet management. Just like that, the local administration should properly implement a pet management system. If a pet dog attacks others, police should register a first information report (FIR). The authorities should collect the entire history of the dog and conduct a local survey. If the people complain that the particular dog was a threat to human beings, they should be taken away from the owner. Most pet owners don't sterilize their pets. So, these ferocious breeds, by nature, will not be cordial to human beings. They will always be aggressive," said Arun Prasanna, founder, People for Cattle in India (PFCI).

GCC, in the backdrop of the incident, wants revised rules to make it

mandatory for pets inside parks. They want to allow a pet owner to take only one pet to the park at a time.

The notification from Chennai Corporation said a pet licence had been made mandatory. It may be noted that in March, the Central government asked states to ban the sale and breeding of 23 breeds of ferocious dogs, including Pitbull Terrier, American Bulldog, Rottweiler and Mastiffs. It also added that those who already have these breeds as pets must sterilise them at once.

GCC Commissioner J. Radhakrishnan said there was no individual policy for pet management in the country. Though there was a ban order on these breeds, the high court had put a stay on. We have intensified the monitoring of pet dogs and owners should mandatorily register details of their pets with the public health department of the Corporation, he said.

Jayakumar death: Cong leader, MLA questioned by special police teams

M. ARULOLI | DC TIRUNELVELI, MAY 7

Special police teams questioned former Tamil Nadu Congress Committee president, K.V. Thangkabalu, and Nanguneri Congress MLA Ruby Manoharan in connection with the suspicious death of Tirunelveli district Congress president, K.V.K. Jayakumar Dhanasingh, on Tuesday.

Having been mentioned in a letter, purportedly written by the deceased, Thangkabalu was summoned for inquiry by the special police team investigating the death of the Tirunelveli east district president.

Questioned by inspector Kannan, head of one of the seven special teams constituted to investigate the suspicious death of the Congress functionary, at a private hotel in Tirunelveli, Thangkabalu was reportedly asked about his financial dealings with Jayakumar. The same day that

M. ARULOLI | DC TIRUNELVELI, MAY 7

Former Tamil Nadu Congress Committee president K.V. Thangkabalu stoutly denied the allegation that he received ₹1.1 lakh from Jayakumar Dhanasingh.

Thangkabalu, who came to Tirunelveli on police summons for an inquiry into the suspicious death of Tirunelveli east

Thangkabalu was questioned in Tirunelveli, Ruby Manoharan, too, was probed by Panagudi police inspector of another special team probing Jayakumar's death. Ruby Manoharan was said to have received ₹78 lakh from the Congress functionary, and, hence, came into the picture.

district Congress president K.V.K. Jayakumar Dhanasingh, whose body was found charred a few metres from his residence a couple of days ago, spoke to mediapersons before attending the police inquiry at a private hotel. "I had never received any amount from any of the Congress functionaries," he asserted.

The questioning took place at a private marine college at Poochikadu, near Sathankulam, in Thoothukudi district. Having recorded the statements of the two Congress leaders, the police were said to have instructed them to appear for further investigation, if

He added that he was ready to face any litigation as Jayakumar, in his letter before his death to one of his relatives, Jeba, had stated that the money he gave to Thangkabalu and to Nanguneri MLA Ruby Manoharan be recovered through court.

Expressing faith in the police investigation in the case, Thangkabalu assured full cooperation to the police.

Several others, including the family members of Jayakumar, have been questioned, though a few of the persons whose names have been mentioned in the letter written by Jayakumar, could not be reached, according to police sources.

ANKYLOSING SPONDYLITIS DAY AT RGGGH



Ankylosing Spondylitis Day was observed at the Institute of Rheumatology, Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital (RGGGH), on Tuesday. RGGGH dean, Dr.E. Theranirajan, presided over the function. It was attended by around 50 patients with ankylosing spondylitis, doctors, physiotherapists and postgraduate students of various specialities. Dr. Arul Rajamurugan, head of the department of rheumatology, welcomed the gathering. Dr. Theranirajan said ankylosing spondylitis is a type of arthritis which affects the larger joints and the spine. It initially starts as low back pain and, if ignored at the early stage, will lead to stiffness of neck and spine. He said it commonly affects young men. He stressed the importance of early diagnosis and proper medical treatment along with physiotherapy. The dean informed that with the help of the government, all latest, expensive drugs were made available to needy patients. Physiotherapists spoke about benefits of doing daily exercise like improvement of joint pain, back pain and stiffness, improvement in joint swelling and mobility. Dr. Arul Rajamurugan spoke about the other benefits of exercise like prevention of diabetes, heart attack, improvement in cholesterol levels, muscle and bone strength and also weight reduction. He stressed the importance of taking a healthy diet. An awareness video on exercise therapy was screened. Patients also shared their experience and the benefits of therapy. —N.Sampath

Sewage continues to flow on Kanchi streets

N. RAVIKUMAR & P.A. JEBARAJ | DC CHENNAI, MAY 7

Overflowing sewage on streets even during the summer season has become a major problem for residents of Kanchipuram town. The problem was temporarily solved when the residents refused to vote in the Lok Sabha elections but sewage is flowing on the streets again.

Kanchipuram is one of the oldest towns in the state and the drainage system was built before it was turned into a Corporation three years ago. The Corporation has

51 wards but the civic problems have got compounded after the town became a Corporation.

The drainage system was built five decades ago and it is either broken or blocked at several places leading to leakages and overflow of sewage. Several silk textile shops, temples, houses, commercial organisations, schools and anganwadi centres function in the area which are covered with sewage on the streets.

People from several parts of the country visit the place to buy silk clothes and visit the temples. When the people threat-

ened to boycott the Lok Sabha elections if the sewage problem is not solved, the problem was temporarily tackled. After polling, the sewage started flowing again, angering the residents.

The residents said the drainage pipes were very old and broken since they were laid 50 years ago. The sewage flows on the streets. The people have lodged many complaints with the Corporation officials but a permanent solution has not been found.

The Corporation workers only find temporary solutions, the residents complain. The old pipes

should be removed and new ones laid, they demanded, and added that though taxes had been increased after Kanchipuram was upgraded into a Corporation, the amenities had become worse.

The Corporation officials said people throw plastic waste into the drains, resulting in blocks at several places. At some places, the pipes are broken and they could be replaced only after the model code of conduct is withdrawn. People should cooperate with the Corporation and not throw plastic waste into the canals and drainage, they said.

Engg applicants cross 30K on second day

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, MAY 7

More than 34,000 students have applied for the engineering courses in the State government, government-aided and self-financial colleges on Tuesday. Since the number of students choosing the arts and science degrees are surpassing those opting for engineering courses, the engineering colleges had introduced new courses with the hope of bringing them back.

Last year, more than 3 lakh students applied for the arts and science seats throughout the State. A total of 3,14,666 students applied for Arts and Science Colleges as against the availability of 1,07,395 seats and many of them were unable to obtain seats.

The students are not taking chances and applying for engineering courses

too since they are not sure of getting seats in arts and science degrees, especially in top colleges.

The students applying for engineering will be admitted to about 1.5 lakh vacancies through the single window system. The students started applying on Monday evening after the plus-2 results were declared. Till Monday, around 20,000 students applied for various engineering courses and the number went beyond 34,000 on Tuesday afternoon. The students can apply online till June 6 and the choices in engineering have increased after the introduction of new courses. The cut-off for engineering is expected to be lesser since the number of graduates in Physics and Chemistry has fallen. Besides, new engineering courses have been increased, increasing the number of seats by about 30,000.

SHORT TAKES

Electricity minister clarifies

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 7

State Electricity Minister Thangam Thennarasu said that the present government had spent Rs 743.38 crore in developing electricity infrastructure by revamping the old transformers that were not functioning properly all over the State and ensured that three phase power supply to agricultural connections was given for 12 to 16 hours every day.

In a statement here on Tuesday, the Minister said that in the previous regime three phase electricity was given to farmers in the delta region for 12 hours and in the other areas for nine hours. That was changed after the DMK government came to power.

After the power infrastructure was developed, 652 MVA additional power capability was added. Also the new government had already given 1,50,000 new agricultural power connections in the two years and more connections would be given in the coming months, he said. Since power fluctuations led to electrical equipment getting damaged, efforts were made to set them all right and regularize power supply, he said and gave details of the transformers that were changed and rectified.

4 young purohitis die as car crashes into stationary lorry

DC CORRESPONDENT
ARIYALUR, MAY 7

Four purohitis were killed on the spot when the car in which they were travelling rammed the rear of a stationary lorry near Elakurichi section road, near Ariyalur, on Tuesday.

Police said the deceased were identified as G. Eswaran (24), B. Bhuvanesh Krishnasamy (18), D. Selva (17) and V. Shanmugam (23), all hailing from Thanjavur. They were returning home after taking part in a temple function at Perambalur when the mishap took place. Thirumanur police removed the bodies and sent them to the government medical college hospital at Ariyalur for post-mortem.

Youth from Pamban drowns in sea

SP. LOGANATHAN | DC
RAMESWARAM, MAY 7

Seven youths from the Pamban area went to the Kudukul port area of Pamban to celebrate their holiday. They also bathed in the sea.

But one of them, J. Mohammad Mujahid (20) from Pamban Palliwasal Street, went deep into the sea and was unable to return. While the efforts of his friends to rescue him went in vain, the fishermen of the area went in boats to search for the young man who drowned.

Bloom of Delonix red canopy flowers allures Nilgiris tourists

B. RAVICHANDRAN | DC
OOTY, MAY 7

While the dried up hills and flora here began to see rejuvenation after the recent good showers, the bloom of elegant Delonix flowers in Mudumalai Tiger Reserve (MTR) jungles as well as in other forest fringes and on some roadsides in the Nilgiris began to bring the summer colours to the jungle cover.

The bloom of Delonix flowers would certainly make one feel as if the deep red-orange colour jewels are hanging atop the tree tops in clusters. The elegance of these jungle flower beauties certainly make one become awestruck.



The enchanting bloom of Delonix flowers that gives a red canopy look along the Moyar river bed in MTR.

The Delonix bloom along the MTR reception and nearby road along the Moyar river, are simply alluring and give one an opportunity to enjoy a stroll under the canopy of red-orange Delonix beauties as the bloom of this flower on both sides of the

road gives it a red canopy look which simply charm the tourists who flock there to click photos of their magnificence.

V. Sivadas, managing trustee of the Nilgiris Environment and Socio-Cultural Trust, said Delonix, also called May

Flower, which is an exotic species, is popularly known as umbrella tree for its flamboyant display of flowers and canopy during the bloom. "The flowers are orange-red when they begin to bloom and the mature flowers become brilliant red. The species found in the Nilgiris is Delonix regia which usually blooms between April and June. The spectacular arrangement of Delonix flowers in bunches with its broad shape and brilliance of colour make its bloom so special. Its bloom in early summer is ecologically significant as it provides the much-needed nectar for bees, and a few insect species and avians feed on it," he added.

Karnataka CM arrives in Ooty for summer break

B. RAVICHANDRAN | DC
OOTY, MAY 7

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah arrived here on Tuesday afternoon for a five-day summer break.

After a hectic and high-octane election campaign in Karnataka, the 76-year-old Karnataka Chief Minister

flew to the Theetukul helipad here on Tuesday afternoon by a chopper. He was received by the officials at the helipad. He drove to a private guesthouse on Havelock Road here.

Official sources said Siddaramaiah will stay in the hills here till May 11. Though it is said to be a private visit to the hills, wherein he will be joined by his family, sources said he might

visit tourist spots in the Nilgiris to enjoy his summer sojourn.

It is widely expected that he may visit the Karnataka Siri Botanical Garden at Fern Hill here, which is growing into a major tourist attraction. It came into being on land owned by the Karnataka horticulture department here during his tenure as Chief Minister of Karnataka in 2017.

Chola era Nandhi, Vishnu sculptures found in village near Thanjavur

G. SRINIVASAN | DC
THANJAVUR, MAY 7

Chola period Nandhi and Vishnu sculptures were found by a team of researchers, led by Dr. Mani Maran, Tamil Pandit of Saraswathi Mahal Library, at Chithirakudi village, 18 km from here, on the Thanjavur-Budalur Road.

According to Mani Maran, following information from Dr. S. Sandhya of Chithirakudi village that a Nandhi,

half of which was buried, was found in her field, Mani Maran, Thillai Govindarajan, headmaster, government primary school at Ponthiyakulam, G. Jayalakshmi, graduate teacher of government middle school, visited the place and studied the Nandhi.

Mani Maran said it belonged to the Chola period and the beads around its neck were beautifully made. It has been sculptured exactly like bulls in the area.

Chithirakud is flanked by the Vennar on the north and Grand Anicut canal on the south. About 100 mts from the Nandhi, on the left bank of the Ananda Cauvery river, which irrigates Chithirakudi, a Vishnu sculpture was found. That also belongs to the Chola period, Mani Maran said.

Besides these two, the researchers also found another Nandhi (Pallava period) in a temple nearby, which has a Pallava inscription beneath it.

Ease of darshan at Samayapuram for seniors, pregnant women, diff-abled

R. VALAYAPATHY | DC
TIRUCHY, MAY 7

Aged devotees, pregnant women, women carrying babies and the differently-abled coming to offer worship to Goddess Sri Mariamman, popularly known as Samayapurathaal, at the Samayapuram temple, near Tiruchy, are now a happy lot over the special arrangements made for them for comfortable and easy darshan.

They thanked the recently-appointed board of trustees team, led by chairman (CBT) V.S.P. Elangovan. Ramalingam (72) of Perambalur and Hemalatha (29) of Chennai told visit-

ing mediapersons that they used to visit Samayapuram at least once a year to offer worship. So far, the temple authorities made them join the regular queue. But, for the last two months, special arrangements have been made for them in which they were taken into the sanctum sanctorum directly through the north gate along with an attendant and had darshan within a few minutes.

Two battery cars are being operated from the bus terminus to the north gate of the temple free of cost for the benefit of senior citizens, pregnant women, women carrying ba-

bies and the differently-abled. Wheelchairs are also available in the temple.

The temple authorities were also giving preference to devotees with cloth bags instead of plastic carry bags.

Samayapuram temple is the second highest revenue-yielding temple of the HR&CE department and attracts thousands of devotees during ordinary days and lakhs of devotees on special days like festivals, monthly Amavasya and Full Moon Day.

Most devotees want more facilities for easy and early darshan of Goddess Sri Mariamman.



Children involved in playing palmyra fruit cart (Nungu vandi) during their summer holidays in Madurai. —K. Manikandan

Kovai farmers say their farmland of generations has been marked as elephant corridors

DC CORRESPONDENT
COIMBATORE, MAY 7

Farmers from the Thondamuthur region in Coimbatore protested against the Tamil Nadu forest department for recommending as elephant corridors lands they have been cultivating for generations.

Kumar, a farmer from Thondamuthur and chairman of the Velliangiri Uzhavan Producer Company Limited, located in Coimbatore, said, "A recent news article reported that the Tamil Nadu forest department has identified 42 new elephant corridors across Tamil Nadu. Subsequently, we reviewed the draft report published on the department's website, which mentions the identification of four new elephant corridors in Coimbatore alone. We were shocked to

find that the areas encompassing our agricultural members' farmlands, residences and temples were also listed as elephant corridors."

He charged that no farmer from the area was consulted, and no meeting was held with. In contrast, this draft report was formulated by individuals who possess limited understanding of the nuanced topography and ecological dynamics of our region, he said.

They have never witnessed or even heard of elephant migration in the area. If it were an area where elephants migrate frequently, sustaining farming activities here for many generations would have been impossible, he argued.

Kumar said they strongly oppose the proposal to acquire 450 acres to establish and expand the non-

existent elephant corridors, as outlined in the draft.

"Any attempt to displace us under the guise of protecting elephants is a clear violation of our human rights," he pointed out.

He objected to designating areas where Velliangiri Andavar Temple, Marudamalai Temple, Anuvavi Temple, Bannari Temple, and Ponnuthu Amman Temple are situated as elephant corridors, calling this an attempt to infringe upon their right to worship.

"We strongly urge the Tamil Nadu government to reconsider the designation of the Velliangiri Andavar Temple-Marudamalai as an elephant corridor, which lacks proper field study and consultation with local stakeholders, including farmers and local communities," said Kumar.

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Not-so-spicy returns from chilli cultivation in Ramanathapuram

District known for its organic gundu chillies affected by unseasonal rains

SP. LOGANATHAN | DC
RAMESWARAM, MAY 7

Ramanathapuram district is known as a drought-hit, dry district. Chilli farming is more common here than rice cultivation.

Ramanathapuram grows the special gundu chilli, which has drought tolerance. The uniqueness of this chilli is its spiciness.

The traditional Ramanathapuram gundu chilli is widely cultivated as it gives more yield than other champa varieties. As the amount of rainfall increases, chilli yield is severely affected. Cultivation is good only when rainfall is low.

Ramanathapuram gundu chillies give good income to farmers. The cost of chilli cultivation per acre is Rs. 10,000 and income per acre is Rs. 30,000. It can be sown in the Tamil months of Avani / Karthigai and harvested in Chithirai / Vaikasi. Cotton can be grown as an intercrop with chillies. Some farmers intercrop coriander with chillies.

An acre under chilli yields 1,000 kg chilli yield (50 bags: 1 bag = 20 kg).

In Ramanathapuram district, chilli is cultivated in the



villages of Theriruvelli, Mattiyarenthal, Thazhiyarental, Puseri, Kadampodai Karumal, Kulathur, Thiruvaramangam, Bosukkudi Thuvai Saveriarpattanam under Mudugulathur taluk.

Apart from this, Ithampadal, Sikal, Kavakkulam, Geechelvanur, Mechelvanur and other towns near Sayalkudi, and most villages of the district like Mangalam taluk, Thiruvadan taluk, Kamudi and Ramanathapuram taluk.

Annually 50,000 tonnes of chillies are cultivated on 19,000 acres in these areas. Gundu milakai of Ramanathapuram district has a special feature compared to chillies in other

districts. Farmers use only organic fertilisers.

So, the gundu chillies produced in Ramanathapuram district are more alkaline than chillies produced in other districts. That is why the gundu chilli produced here has also a geographical code.

Chilli cultivation was affected by unseasonal rains in January this year. As the quality of chillies decreased, the price also fell. As a result, chilli farmers in Ramanathapuram district have lost several lakhs of rupees.

Muniyaswamy, a chilli farmer from Mattiyarenthal, said: "We have been farming 4 acres of agricultural land for generations in Mattiyarenthal

village, in Mudugulathur taluk. At present, we have cultivated chillies on only one acre by spending ₹1 lakh. Unseasonal rains in January, during the chilli-growing season, waterlogged the fields and the plants rotted. This has affected chilli yield.

"Similarly, the wages of agricultural labourers have also shot up. There is a decrease in revenue and loss. However, we continue farming as we cannot give up agriculture as we do not know any other work. A 40 kg bag used to be bought for ₹2,600, but now it is bought for ₹1,500."

Muniyaswamy said they have lost what they spent on this quantity of yield.

Sri Kartik Swami Temple
Abode of Lord Murugan in the Uttarakhand Himalayas

Sri Kartik Swami temple at Kraunch Parvat, mentioned in Skanda Purana is believed to be the place where Lord Kartik meditated.

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SHORT TAKES

CBI files FIR in Jal Jeevan scam in Raj

New Delhi: The CBI has registered an FIR in the Centrally-funded Jal Jeevan Mission Scheme scam case in Rajasthan in which Jaipur-based contractors used fake completion certificates purportedly issued by Ircon to bag tenders from the public health engineering department of the state. The Central anti-graft agency has booked executive engineer of Rajasthan's public health engineering department Vishal Saxena and proprietors of Shree Shyam Tubewell and Shri Ganpati Tubewell, Padamchand Jain and Mahesh Mittal, respectively for alleged criminal conspiracy, forgery and cheating among others, the officials said. The CBI action came after the conclusion of an eight-month-long preliminary enquiry registered in August last year, they said.

SC: Conduct safety audit of Bombay HC

New Delhi: Noting concerns over the safety of the 150-year-old Bombay high court building and the need for additional space, the Supreme Court on Tuesday directed the Maharashtra government to "forthwith" conduct a safety audit of the heritage structure. A special bench of Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud and Justices B.R. Gavai and J.B. Pardiwala also asked the government to expedite drawings of the site earmarked for constructing a new high court building in Mumbai. The bench said, "In order to ensure the structural safety of the existing premises, the state PWD will forthwith conduct a safety audit and apprise it on the next hearing of the steps taken on that regard." Exercising its suo motu jurisdiction, the apex court took note of an April 29 letter petition of Bombay Bar Association president Nitin Thakker and other bar leaders.

Mosquito-borne fever surge in Kerala dists

Thiruvananthapuram: The Kerala government on Tuesday said that West Nile fever cases have been reported from Thrissur, Malappuram and Kozhikode districts of the state. State health minister Veena George, in a statement, confirmed that cases of the viral infection have been reported in the state and that all the districts have been asked to be vigilant. As part of the vigil against the viral fever, spread by the "Culex" species of mosquitoes, the minister has ordered that steps be taken for mosquito control by destroying their breeding grounds, the statement said. The minister requested anyone showing signs of fever to seek treatment immediately. The main symptoms of "West Nile" infection are headache, fever, muscle aches, dizziness and loss of memory, etc. — PTI

China appoints ambassador after 18 months

Xi appoints Xu Feihong as new envoy to India

Beijing, May 7: Chinese President Xi Jinping has appointed senior diplomat Xu Feihong as the new ambassador to India, after an unusual long delay of 18 months, amid frozen relations between the two countries over the eastern Ladakh military standoff. While there is no official announcement yet, the Chinese foreign ministry has confirmed to PTI that Mr Xu, former ambassador to Afghanistan and Romania, has been appointed as China's new envoy in India.

Mr Xu, 60, is expected to travel to New Delhi soon to take over his new posting. He will succeed veteran Chinese diplomat Sun Weidong, who completed his tenure in India in October 2022.

Mr Sun, who was China's envoy to Pakistan before his India stint, is currently the vice-foreign minister overseeing China's South Asia policy. Mr Xu's appointment,



Xu Feihong

which coincides with the ongoing general election in India, comes amid protracted military and diplomatic negotiations between Beijing and New Delhi to resolve the prolonged military standoff. Relations between the two countries were frozen, except for trade, ever since the eastern Ladakh border standoff erupted on May 5, 2020, following a violent clash in the Pangong Tso (lake) area.

The eastern Ladakh standoff has resulted in a freeze of bilateral ties.

The two sides have so far held 21 rounds of corps

commanders-level talks to resolve the standoff.

According to the Chinese military, the two sides so far agreed to disengage from four points, namely the Galwan Valley, the Pangong Lake, Hot Springs and Jianan Daban (Gogra).

India is pressing the People's Liberation Army to disengage from the Depsang and Demchok areas, maintaining that there cannot be restoration of normalcy in its relations with China as long as the state of the borders remains abnormal. — PTI

Maldivian foreign minister to meet EAM tomorrow

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 7

Maldivian foreign minister Moosa Zameer will hold talks with his counterpart external affairs minister S. Jaishankar in New Delhi on Thursday, even as India is already replacing defence personnel with civilians to operate three aviation platforms for medical evacuation in the tiny archipelago nation.

The Maldivian President, Mohamed Muizzu, had vowed to evict a small contingent of Indian troops from his country that were manning medical evacuation and contingency operations.

INDIA HAD lambasted Prime Minister Trudeau for the political space to have been given in Canada to separatism, extremism and violence.

Display of posters of Indian diplomats have also been put out across Canada threatening violence against them. Celebration and glorification of violence should not be a part of any civilized society. Democratic countries which respect the rule of law should not allow intimidation by radical elements in the name of freedom of expression." New Delhi added, "We continue to remain concerned about the security of our diplomatic representatives in Canada and expect the government of Canada to ensure that they are able to carry out their responsibilities without fear. We again call upon the Government of Canada to stop providing criminal and secessionist elements a safe haven and political space in Canada."

India had lambasted Canadian PM Justin Trudeau for his recent controversial remarks that illustrate once again the political space to have been given in Canada to separatism, extremism, and violence.

Nirav's bail plea rejected by UK court for flight risk

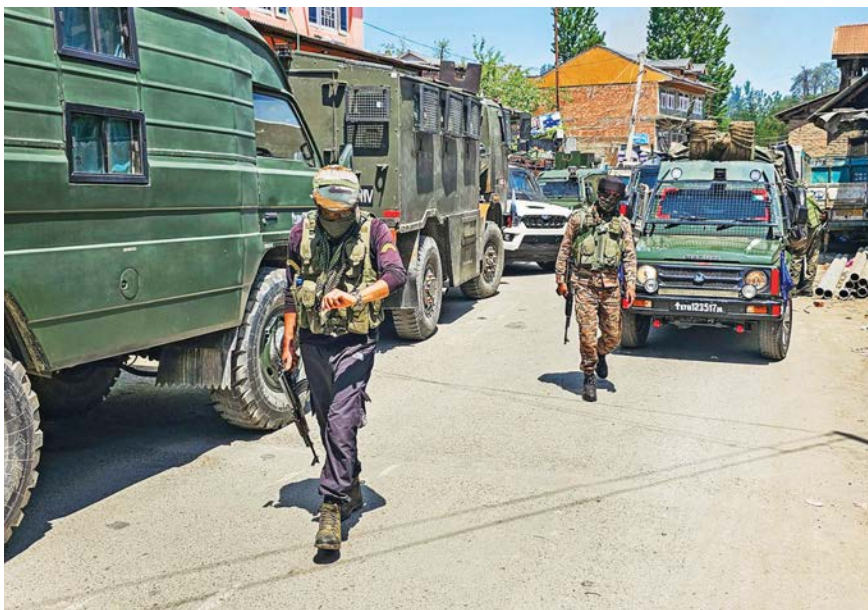
London, May 7: Fugitive businessman Nirav Modi, who has been in prison in London for over five years, on Tuesday made a new bail application that was rejected by a UK judge who ruled that he continued to pose a "substantial risk" of absconding justice.

The 52-year-old diamond merchant, who lost his extradition battle to face fraud and money laundering charges in India, did not appear for the bail hearing at Westminster Magistrates court in London but his son and two daughters were present in the gallery.

District judge John Zani accepted their submission that the long passage of time since the last bail plea three and a half years ago constituted a change in circumstances to allow the hearing to go ahead.

"However, I am satisfied that there remain substantial grounds against bail. There continues to be a real, substantial risk that the applicant [Nirav Modi] would fail to attend court or interfere with witnesses," concluded Mr Zani in his judgment after a short hearing. "This case involves, by any footing, a very substantial fraud allegation... Not one where bail can be granted and the application is refused," he said.

The court heard that there were "confidential" proceedings instigated by him. This would indicate an asylum application but the only indirect reference made to it in court was when the Crown Prosecution Service, appearing on behalf of the Indian authorities, dismissed the assertion that the UK home secretary may "never be able to order extradition" as incorrect. — PTI



Security forces personnel during an encounter with militants at Redwani Payeen area of J&K's Kulgam district on Tuesday. — PTI

ED arrests Jharkhand minister Alam's secy

Sanjeev Lal collected money for 'influential people': ED

AMRESH SRIVASTAVA
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI/RANCHI, MAY 7

The Enforcement Directorate on Tuesday alleged that Jharkhand Cabinet minister Alamgir Alam's secretary Sanjeev Kumar Lal collected commission on tenders on behalf of "some influential people", and told the local court in Ranchi that officials of his rural development department — from "top to bottom" — were involved in an alleged illegal cash payment nexus.

Mr Lal — secretary of rural development minister and Congress leader Alamgir Alam — and the domestic help, Jahangir Alam, of the minister, were produced before the Special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court of Prabhakar Kumar Sharma here. The court sent them to six days of ED custody.

The Central agency had arrested Mr Lal and domestic help Jahangir Alam on Monday, after a whole day of searches



Cash recovered during searches by the Enforcement Directorate at a flat linked to Jharkhand minister Alamgir Alam's personal secretary Sanjeev Lal and the latter's domestic help on Tuesday. — PTI

that led to the seizure of ₹32.20-crore cash from a flat in Ranchi, where the latter was residing.

The total seizure of cash by the ED in the case has been recorded at around ₹36.75 crores, as the agency seized about ₹3 crores from another location that included ₹10.05 lakhs from Mr Lal's place, ₹1.50 crores was also seized from a contractor's premises on Tuesday.

In its remand papers submitted in court to seek

the custody of Mr Lal and Mr Alam for interrogation today, the Central agency said, "It is ascertained that Sanjeev Lal takes care of the collection of commission on behalf of some influential persons and plays a pivotal role in managing the tenders and collection of commission from engineers, also the said percentage of commission is distributed in a mechanised manner to higher-ups of the government."

Slain terrorist was involved in 18 terror acts, had bounty of ₹10L on his head

'Most wanted' LeT commander killed in J&K

DC CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR, MAY 7

Basit Ahmed Dar, a top commander of the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba, on whose head the National Investigation Agency had put a bounty of ₹10 lakhs, was killed along with another militant in a gunfight with the security forces in Jammu and Kashmir's Kulgam district on Tuesday.

Inspector general of police (Kashmir range) V.K. Birdi said Dar, who went missing from his

home in Kulgam's Redwani in 2021 to join the militants' ranks, was involved in as many as 18 cases of terrorist violence.

"These included attacks on security forces and the members of minority communities in Srinagar and south Kashmir districts," he said.

The police said that Dar was currently active at the head of a group of militants associated with The Resistance Front, an offshoot of the LeT.

The fighting between the militants and the security

MEANWHILE, J&K police said the immovable properties of seven terror handlers, based in Pakistan, were attached by it in Baramulla district

forces broke out in Redwani Payeen village of Kulgam early Tuesday and continued till around 1 pm. The security forces had moved into the village after receiving information about the presence of militants. Soon, the two sides were engaged in a fierce gunfight, which cul-

minated with the killing of Dar and his accomplice, the police said.

"His killing is a big achievement for the security forces. He was also the mastermind behind a spat of civilian killings," the IGP said. The officer said that the J&K police and other uniformed forces are taking all necessary steps to ensure peace in all three Lok Saha constituencies in the Kashmir Valley, which will go to voting in the fourth, fifth and sixth phases of the elections.

"We won't allow anyone to disrupt elections or the peaceful atmosphere in Kashmir," he was quoted as saying by local news agency GNS. The officer added that the identity of the second militant killed in the gunfight is being ascertained.

Meanwhile, the J&K police in a statement said that the immovable properties of seven "terror handlers" based in Pakistan were attached by it in the Valley's north-western Baramulla district on Tuesday.

EC ASKS TELANGANA TO DEFER FARMER RELIEF

FROM PG 1

And Rabi installments were disbursed between October to January for the last five years. However, due to MCC violation during state Assembly elections last year by the then state finance minister T. Harish Rao, the EC had withdrawn the permission on November 27, 2023.

The EC said though "Rythu Bhandhu" is an ongoing scheme, and that the disbursement of money under it should have been completed by January 2024, the Telangana CM Revanth Reddy violated the MCC by speaking about payments under it on or before May 9.

"In the above premise and clear violation of Model Code of Conduct by Revanth Reddy, president of Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) and star campaigner and chief minister, the Commission has directed that disbursement of balance installment under the Rythu Bharosa Scheme for Rabi season of 2023 will be effected only after completion of polls in the state of Telangana on 13.05.2024," the EC said. Elections to all 17 Lok Sabha seats in Telangana will be held in the fourth phase on May 13.

The EC, in its previous directives while giving permission to release money under the scheme, had said that no new beneficiaries should be added under the scheme during election period, no publicity should be made in this regard, no public function should be held and no public functionary should be involved while disbursing money, and as far as possible money should be transferred directly in the account of people.

SC STAYS HC ORDER INVALIDATING WB TEACHER APPOINTMENTS

FROM PG 1

TMC supremo and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who earlier opposed the HC order and legally backed the job losers, posted on X-handle, "I am really very happy and mentally relaxed on receipt of justice at the highest court of the land. Congratulations to the entire teaching fraternity and my humble regards to the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India."

Her MP nephew Abhishek Banerjee, who is the TMC national general secretary, stated that the Supreme Court has "defused" the BJP's plan to malign Bengal's image and destabilise the state government. "Truth has triumphed! We will continue to defy all odds and stand shoulder to shoulder with the people until our last breath," he said.

Dubbing Mr Banerjee's statement "laughable", BJP Rajya Sabha MP Shameek Bhattacharya said, "The SC clearly termed the scam 'systematic fraud'. The TMC should be ashamed. It is true that an interim stay has been given, but that doesn't mean the CBI probe has been rejected in the scam. The CBI probe will continue. The state government tried to stop it legally but failed."

CPI(M) leader Sujan Chakraborty pointed out, "The SSC finally admitted at the SC that around 7,500 got jobs illegally. That means the rest are legal. However, the SC has not reached any conclusions on them. Our demand is to identify the illegal appointments and reinstate the legal ones."

In its order, the Supreme Court bench said: "We are of the view that an expeditious disposal of the matter will be in the interest of justice. We accordingly direct that the proceedings be listed for hearing and final disposal on July 16. In the meantime, we are inclined to continue the ad-interim protection granted by this court in the order dated November 9, 2023, subject to the express stipulation that any person found to have been appointed illegally and has continued as a consequence of the present order shall undertake to refund the entire amount of the salary which may be paid from the date of this order and the final judgement of this court."

The top court said the issue that merits a closer analysis is whether the appointments that suffer from taint can be segregated from the genuine ones. If such is possible, then it will be wrong to set aside the entirety of the process, the bench said.

The order said that the court should also be mindful that a large number of teachers for classes 9th and 10th will be affected. Assuming that such a segregation is possible, this court has to set out the modalities to determine the segregation.

Earlier in the day, the bench dubbed the alleged recruitment scam in West Bengal "systemic fraud" and said the state authorities were duty-bound to maintain the digitised records pertaining to the appointment of 25,753 teachers and non-teaching staff.

It's 'vote jihad' Vs Ram rajya: Modi

FROM PG 1

"Frustration and desperation have pushed the Congress to stoop to such a low. The intentions of the Congress are alarming and its conspiracies are very dangerous," he said. He was referring to an election speech by Maria Alam, a Samajwadi Party leader and niece of senior Congress leader and former external affairs minister Salman Khushid, in which she said: "Together do 'vote jihad' — with intelligence, without being sentimental and with silence. As we can only do 'vote jihad' to drive away this Sanghi government".

Both Mr Khushid and his niece have been booked by the Uttar Pradesh police for the remark.

Training his guns on the Congress, Mr Modi said that many senior Congress leaders having association with the party for over three-four decades are now resigning, saying "enough is enough".

One of the woman Congress leaders (Radhika Khara) who resigned from the party has narrated how she was subjected to mistreatment by the party for visiting the Ram temple. Another leader said that the Congress was now captured by the Muslim League and Maoists.

"Another Congress leader has exposed that the



Prime Minister Narendra Modi holds a child on his arrival to cast his vote for the third phase of Lok Sabha elections, in Ahmedabad, Tuesday.

Congress 'Shehzada' (referring to Rahul Gandhi) intends to overturn the Supreme Court's verdict on the Ram Mandir, similar to how his father, former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, had reversed the SC's decision in the Shaho Bano case," Mr Modi said.

He took a swipe at the Congress for its "love for Pakistan", saying that it was growing after every phase of polling.

He referred to the recent statement by Congress leader and former Punjab chief minister Charanjit Singh Channi that the terrorist attack on an IAF convoy in Poonch last week was a "pre-election stunt by the BJP" to justify his "love for Pakistan" jibe at the Congress.

Launching a tirade against the INDIA bloc, he said that there was competition among the leaders of the grouping to make "anti-

national" statements as no one there was "bothered about our faith or the national interest".

"A former chief minister (Mr Channi) said that our Army is behind the terrorist attack and Pakistan is innocent. Look at the shamelessness of another Congress leader (Vijay Wadettikar), who said that Pakistan had no hand in the Mumbai terror attack either. An alliance partner of Congress (Farooq Abdullah) threatens India, saying that Pakistan is not wearing bangles (to allow secession of PoK and its merger with India)", he said. "I want Shahzada to clarify the intentions of his colleagues who make such statements. Why so much love for Pakistan and so much hatred for our Army?" he said.

Mr Modi said he had dared the Congress a couple of weeks ago to provide written assurances to the people of

the country on three issues. "First, they (Congress) should commit in writing that they will not provide reservations based on religion. Second, they must assure that they will not remove reservations for SCs, STs and OBCs. Third, they must assure that their state governments will not reallocate the OBC quota overnight to give reservation to a specific community (Muslims).

"But the Congress has remained silent. The silence is concerning and dangerous", he said.

Mr Modi said the manifesto of the Congress aims at making religion-based participation in tenders and sports. "The Congress is so deep in the mire of appeasement that, if given the chance, they would claim that a particular community has the primary right to live in the country", Mr Modi said.

Mr Modi said: "As long as I am alive, I will not allow any attempt to erase India's identity under the guise of false secularism to succeed".

Seeking votes for the BJP, he said: "Modi needs 400 seats to counter every design by the Congress and the INDIA alliance and to ensure that the Congress does not restore Article 370 in Kashmir and that the Congress does not take the initiative of overturning the Ram Mandir verdict".

IN BRIEF

Woman's body found in varsity water tank

Noida: A 32-year-old woman's body was found in a water tank on the roof of her residence at a university in Greater Noida, with the police suspecting the role of her 33-year-old absconding husband, officials said on Tuesday. Kaushal's body was found on Monday in the cemented water tank on the roof of the servants' quarters at the Gautam Buddha University, where her husband Kapil works as a class-four employee, the police said. According to the police, who cited accounts by neighbours, the couple had a heated argument the night before her death. Kapil's mother also lived with them. The PRV control room was informed about the incident on Tuesday, a police spokesperson said. "Officials of the Ecotech-1 police station went to the spot for investigation and found the body of the woman, whose husband is a class-four employee," the spokesperson said. "According to the neighbours and people who live nearby, there was a fight between the husband and the wife over some issue till 3 am. They used to fight often," the official said. — PTI

Murderer on the run for 12 yrs arrested

New Delhi: A murder accused, who was evading law since 2012 after changing his identity, was arrested from Aligarh in Uttar Pradesh, officials said on Tuesday. "We got information that the accused Mukesh Kumar (37) was hiding in the Aligarh area. A team was formed and he was apprehended on Monday. He was working in a 'dhaba' using a different name," a senior police officer said. Kumar along with his associates - Vedprakash and a juvenile - had strangled a man, Netrapal, to death with a rope in the national capital's Timarpur area in January 2012, the officer said. Following the crime, the accused absconded but Vedprakash and the juvenile were later apprehended while efforts were on to locate Kumar, the police officer said.

COURT FINES MAN ₹1L FOR MAKING GOD CO-PARTY

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 7

Calling it a case of "rank collusion with an intent to grab" a private property, the Delhi high court has imposed a cost of ₹1 lakh on a 31-year-old man who made Lord Hanuman his co-litigant in a plea seeking public access to the deity's temple. A single judge bench of Justice C. Hari Shankar observed: "I never thought that God would, one day, be a litigant before me. This appears, however, thankfully, to be a case of Divinity By Proxy". The high court said there was nothing to indicate, even prima facie, that the temple was a public temple and therefore the appellant man's claim that he was entitled to defend Lord Hanuman as his next friend does not survive for consideration. Dismissing the appeal, the court directed the appellant to pay costs of ₹1 lakh to the other party. Justice Shankar, however said that "in order to avoid the Appellant No.1 now advancing the contention that the costs had to be shared by Lord Hanuman, it is clarified that the costs would be entirely payable by him - with a small 'h'."

At 42°C, Delhi sees season's highest temp

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 7

The capital recorded a temperature of 42°C on Tuesday, the highest maximum temperature so far this summer season, according to the India meteorological department (IMD). This was the highest maximum temperature recorded, three notches above the normal. The previous hottest day was May 6, with a maximum temperature of 41.1°C, according to the data from the IMD.

On the other hand the air quality in the city dipped alarmingly to the 'very poor' category on due to highly unfavourable meteorological conditions, according to the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM).



Mirage is seen on the Kartavya Path on a hot day in New Delhi on Tuesday. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

The 24-hour air quality index of the city soared to 302 by 4 pm, prompting the CAQM, a statutory body responsible for planning and implementing air pollution reduction strategies in the Delhi-NCR, to call an

emergency meeting. The particulate matter load over the region increased due to rapid changes in wind direction and speeds due to high convection rate and absolute dry conditions leading to

■ Co-accused Chanpreet Singh custody also extended till May 20

Kejriwal, Sisodia, Kavitha fail to secure bail in excise 'scam'

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA NEW DELHI, MAY 7

A Delhi court on Tuesday extended the judicial custody of chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, his party colleague Manish Sisodia, and BRS leader K. Kavitha in cases related to the alleged excise scam.

Special judge Kaveri Baweja extended Mr Kejriwal's custody till May 20 in the money laundering case linked to the alleged scam being probed by the ED, after he was produced before the court through a video conference on the expiry of his remand granted earlier.

The judge also extended the judicial custody of Mr Sisodia till May 15 in a related corruption case being probed by the CBI. The judge fixed May 15 for further arguments on



A BJP worker during the party's protest against jailed Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal in New Delhi on Tuesday. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

framing of charges in the corruption case against Mr Sisodia.

The court, meanwhile, extended till May 14 the judicial custody of Ms Kavitha in the money laundering case, while her judicial custody in the corruption case was extended

till May 20.

The judge extended the custody of the Telangana MLC after she was produced before the court on the expiry of her remand.

During the proceedings, the Enforcement Directorate told the court the investigation was at a cru-

cial stage and it is likely to file a charge sheet against Ms Kavitha within a week.

The judge also extended the judicial custody of co-accused Chanpreet Singh till May 20 in the money laundering case.

Mr Kejriwal was arrested on March 21 and is currently lodged in Tihar jail.

The court had on April 30 dismissed the bail pleas of Mr Sisodia in corruption and money laundering cases, lodged by the CBI and the ED.

It had on May 6 dismissed the bail applications filed by Ms Kavitha in corruption and money laundering cases.

The matter pertains to alleged corruption and money laundering in the formulation and execution of the Delhi government's now-scrapped excise policy for 2021-22.

Tiwari richest LS candidate in Delhi, Kanhaiya poorest

New Delhi, May 7: BJP's Manoj Tiwari (53) is the richest among the prominent Lok Sabha poll candidates in Delhi with assets worth ₹28.05 crore. Ramvir Singh Bidhuri (71), the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate from South Delhi, is on the second spot with assets worth ₹21.08 crore.

According to his income-tax returns for 2022-23, Mr Bidhuri has an annual income of ₹14.93 lakh. The third-richest among the poll contenders is Mahabab Mishra (69), the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) candidate from West Delhi. He has declared assets worth ₹19.93 crore. Mr Mishra's highest qualification is pre-university certificate from the LS College in Bihar's Muzaffarpur that he obtained in 1971.

Oxford University returned lawyer Bansuri Swaraj (40), daughter of former external affairs minister late Sushma Swaraj, with assets worth ₹19 crore, occupies the fourth spot, followed by former AAP leader Raaj Kumar Anand, who is now with the Bahujan Samaj



Manoj Tiwari

Party (BSP). Mr Anand owns assets worth ₹17.87 crore.

She possesses one-sixth of a joint property in Haryana's Palwal valued at ₹99.34 lakh and three flats in posh areas of Delhi - two at Jantar Mantar and one at Hailey Road.

Anand is the BSP candidate from the high-profile New Delhi seat. He has declared in his poll affidavit that he has vehicles worth ₹51 lakh, including that of his wife.

Congress's Kanhaiya Kumar from Northeast Delhi has assets worth ₹10.65 lakh. He holds a PhD that he completed in 2019 from the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU).

BJP's Kamaljeet Sehrawat from the West Delhi seat has declared



Kanhaiya Kumar

movable assets worth ₹1.3 crore and immovable assets worth ₹27.6 lakh. She holds a master's degree in commerce from the Himachal Pradesh University in Shimla.

Praveen Khandelwal (64), the BJP's Chandini Chowk candidate, has declared assets worth ₹6.62 crore. According to his income-tax returns for 2022-23, he had an income of ₹4.56 lakh. He completed his graduation from the Delhi University's (DU) Ramjas College.

Udit Raj (66), the Congress candidate from Northwest Delhi, has shown an income of about ₹1 crore in his 2022-23 income-tax returns. He has movable assets worth ₹5.54 crore.

— PTI

HC asks MCD, DDA to state timeline to complete survey of its Delhi land

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 7

The Delhi high court on Tuesday asked the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) and Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) to finalise the agency for conducting a survey of its land in the national capital and state a timeline for the completion of the exercise. The court's order came on a petition concerning unauthorised construction in Delhi, including in areas near centrally-protected monuments.

The counsel appearing for the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) informed that a meeting was held between the MCD commissioner and the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) vice-

chairman with respect to the issue and it was decided that the survey of their respective land in Delhi will be undertaken to ascertain their status and the same shall be revisited every six months to check for any changes.

"Both the MCD and DDA are directed to finalise the agency from whom the survey of Delhi is to be conducted and provide a timeline when it will be completed," said a bench of acting Chief Justice Manmohan and Justice Manmeet P.S. Arora.

The court, during the hearing, suggested that a survey of the entire city should be undertaken by the authorities, including the forest areas.

The MCD counsel

informed that every agency is responsible for its own land and the exercise can be replicated by other land owning agencies as well.

"We are going to map the entire area which falls under the purview of MCD, DDA. We will keep track of that and revisit it every six months so that there is any change in construc-

tion that will be acted against," the lawyer said.

He also said in the meeting, new technology like satellite imagery, digital maps and drone survey were taken note of and the survey of the MCD and DDA land was proposed to be done by Survey of India. The matter will be heard next on July 2.

NCRTC reaches milestone of 1m commuters on Namo Bharat trains

New Delhi, May 7: The National Capital Region Transport Corporation (NCRTC) on Tuesday said it has reached the milestone of serving one million commuters on Namo Bharat trains since it started operations around six months ago. Namo Bharat train started operations in October 2023. Passenger operations are running on the 34-kilometre extended section of the RRTS corridor from Sahibabad to Modinagar North.

Taking to the X, the NCRTC wrote, "We

are proud to share that we have reached the milestone of serving 1 million commuters on #NamoBharat trains! We remain dedicated to bringing People & Places closer through fast, safe & comfortable journeys. Thank you for choosing Namo Bharat as your transit partner!"

Currently, the service is available to passengers every 15 minutes. The target is to complete the entire 82-kilometre corridor from Delhi to Meerut by June 2025.

— PTI



Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a public meeting for Lok Sabha elections, in Ahmednagar, Tuesday.

Cong leader hit by vehicle during morning walk dies

New Delhi, May 7: A local Congress leader died after being hit by a car while he was on a morning walk near his house in Rohini's Prashant Vihar area, the police on Tuesday said. The incident took place a few meters away from Banda Bahadur Residential Society in Rohini Sector 14 where Harikishan Jindal (62) lived with his family, they said.

The owner of the car, which hit Jindal, has been identified, the police said.

A police officer said that the CCTV footage from the cameras installed in the area have been scanned and in one of the footages, a white colour car is spotted crossing the lane soon after the accident.

A senior police official said that on Tuesday at 6:36 a.m., a PCR received



Harikishan Jindal

a call regarding an accident by a car in Sector-14, Rohini at Prashant Vihar police station.

The police has registered a case under sections 279 (rash driving) and 304-A (causing death by negligence) at the Prashant Vihar police station and formed a team to nab the errant driver.

Jindal is survived by his wife and 28-year-old son. His daughter is married.

Jindal, a former district Congress committee president, contested the

Assembly elections from Wazirpur in 2020.

Jindal's relative said that he would always go for morning walk with his neighbours. "Today morning, he was accompanied by two to three persons, but he was alone during the accident," he said.

"He went to offer prayers at a Balaji temple near the park. And as soon he came out of the temple, a car hit him and sped away from the scene," he added.

Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee president Devender Yadav expressed deep shock at Jindal's sudden demise.

"Delhi Congress has lost a strong and dedicated leader in the demise of Hari Kishan Jindal. He had been associated with the Congress organisation for several decades, having worked for the party from the grass-root level," Mr Yadav said in a

HC: Minors must be taught virtual touch, its potential dangers

SANJAY KAW NEW DELHI, MAY 7

Apart from the concepts of "good touch" and "bad touch," minors must be educated on the emerging concept of "virtual touch" and its potential dangers, the Delhi high court has said.

This involves teaching them appropriate online behaviour, recognising warning signs of predatory behaviour, and understanding the importance of privacy settings and online boundaries.

"Minors must be equipped with the knowledge and tools to navigate online interactions safely and recognise potential risks lurking in cyberspace. Just as children are taught to exercise caution in the physical world, efforts must be made to teach them to develop critical thinking skills to assess the credibility of online contacts and safeguard their personal information," Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma said.

Justice Sharma stressed that the "need of the hour" is to send a message through the court's order to the concerned stakeholders—schools, colleges, Delhi State Legal Services Authority, and Delhi Judicial Academy—to hold programmes, workshops, and conferences focusing not only on the traditional concepts of good and 'bad touch' but also on the "emerging concept" of 'virtual touch' and its potential dangers.

"This court, therefore, emphasises that the concerned stakeholders should include in their curriculum, apart from the education about good

■ 'MINORS MUST BE equipped with the knowledge and tools to navigate online interactions safely and recognise potential risks lurking in cyberspace.'

touch and bad touch, the virtual touch and its repercussions and danger," the judge underscored.

The high court's observations came while dismissing a bail plea by a woman, Kamlesh Devi, accused of helping her son in sexually assaulting a minor girl after kidnapping her and forcing her into prostitution in 2021. The 16-year-old was allegedly befriended by Rajiv on social media, who later kidnapped her when she came to meet him. The girl was taken to Madhya Pradesh and confined there for several days. She was allegedly sexually assaulted by several persons.

CHITTARANJAN LOCOMOTIVE WORKS
OPEN GLOBAL E-TENDER NOTICE
No. COS/CRJ/PUB/e-Tender/19/0162 Date: 03/05/2024. The following e-Tenders can be accessed under the link www.ireps.gov.in. Offers for such e-Tender can be submitted only electronically by accessing the link www.ireps.gov.in → login → E-Tender Stores/Supply. Vendors may also contact the following officials to obtain clarification regarding particular tender or IREPS related information if any, Dy. CMM /HQ/CLW/Chittaranjan, 0341-2525594 or SMM/CON/HQ, 0341-2535631. Office Address: Office of the PCMM/CLW/Chittaranjan.SL.No.: [1]. Tender No.: 75241010. Brief Description of Item: Intermediate Gear Bearing and Pinion Bearing for Aluminium Gear Case of WAP-5 as per CLW's drawing No. 1210-01.411-022, 1210-01.411-023. (A) Pinion Bearing, 798 CONE-02 Nos. and 792 CUP-02 Nos. (B) Intermediate Gear Bearing M432148A CONE-02 Nos. and M432111 CUP-02 Nos. [Warranty Period: 30 Months after the date of delivery]. Quantity: 21.00 Set. Earnest Money Deposit (Rupees): ₹0.00. Tender Closing Date & Time (IST): 03/06/2024 at 11:00 AM.
PRS/405/ PCMM/CLW/Chittaranjan
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EAST CENTRAL RAILWAY E-TENDER NOTICE

E-Tender is invited on behalf of the President of India for the under mentioned work :-

E-Tender No. - ECR-CAO-C-S-EPC-06-23-24 Name of work :- Construction of double line track (3rd & 4th line) formation including earth work, blanketing, minor bridges, RUB, major bridges, important bridges, RFO works, Track works, Station building, electrification miscellaneous works (2x25 KV) and other works for 32.57 Indian Railway Standard Loading in Gaya detour section (in between DFCC CH:183.680 (IR CH:434.426) (Near Koderna Detour End) to DFCC CH:225.300 (Near New Kastha) in DHN and DDU Division of East Central Railway. Approx. cost of the work in (Rs.) : ₹101,75,69,248.62, Cost of tender form in (Rs.) : ₹0.00/-, Earnest Money (Rs.) : ₹2,00,00,000/- Period of work completion : 1278 (One Thousand Two Hundred and Seventy Eight) Days. Date and Time for Pre-Bid Conference : 10.05.2024 at 12.00 hrs. Date and time for closing of tender : 25.06.2024 at 12.00 hrs., Any e-tenders which is sent by Post/Courier/Fax or by hand will not be accepted. All such manual submission of tender even if it is on firm's letter pad or received in time will not be accepted. The above e-tender document alongwith full information is available on website <http://www.ireps.gov.in>. Note: In case of any discrepancies found in tender notice, English version will be final. Tenderers are requested to visit the website <http://www.ireps.gov.in> atleast 15 days before last date of closing, for latest corrigendum/corrections etc. in connection with this e-tender.

Any change/addendum/corrigendum will be published on IREPS website only.
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DECCAN Chronicle

8 MAY 2024

Action on Kejriwal during elections raises questions

The general election to the 18th Lok Sabha now underway could go down in the history as the worst, perhaps after the election to the sixth Lok Sabha held in 1977 where the government in power made every possible attempt to strangle the Opposition with the law while arrogating to itself the right to violate it at will.

The latest such abuse comes in the form of the recommendation of the Delhi lieutenant-governor V.K. Saxena to the Union home ministry to hold an investigation by the National Investigation Agency, the anti-terror agency of the Union government, into the allegations that Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) he heads have received political funding from the banned “Khalistani” outfit, Sikhs for Justice. The L-G’s recommendation is based on a complaint he received from the national general secretary of the World Hindu Federation. The outfit has alleged that AAP received \$16 million from it for facilitating the release of Devendra Pal Singh Bhullar, a convict in the 1993 Delhi bomb blast case.

The AAP, which trashed the charges, has pointed out that the Delhi high court had junked a similar plea, seeking an investigation into the charge, citing that the Union home ministry was seized of the matter. Reports suggest that the name of Prof. Bhullar, who has got his death sentence commuted to life by the Supreme Court due to his ill health and delays in the trial, was there on the list of nine Sikh convicts for whom the Union government had decided to grant remission on the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev as a special gesture. In fact, he has moved clemency petitions as many as eight times, and they have all been rejected by the Delhi government’s Sentence Review Board (SRB), even after the AAP government had come to power both in Delhi and in Punjab.

The question then arises now is what prompted the lieutenant governor to jump the queue and make a recommendation to the Union home ministry, even suggesting the name of the agency which should in his opinion investigate the allegations. The timing of the letter and its release to the public are also suspicious as it coincides with the Supreme Court taking up the interim bail petition of Mr Kejriwal.

The Union government must now assure the people of Delhi and the nation that to slap the Opposition leaders with charges one after the other to keep them behind bars and thereby hijack the entire democratic process is not its agenda.

However, it appears that the muscle flexing by the government has not yet appeared on the radar of the Election Commission of India. It may also be noticed that the Election Commission has not yet thought it fit to take cognisance of the speeches Prime Minister Narendra Modi delivers which many people have complained to it as being divisive and demeaning of one or the other community.

Free and fair elections are fundamental to a functioning democracy. The entire exercise would be reduced to a farce if the ruling party and the Opposition are subjected to different sets of rules. It is time the umpire woke up and made the necessary course correction.

Bibi keeps Israel on warpath

Stating that the terms of the ceasefire deal that Hamas was willing to accept were too far from its obligatory demands, Israel’s war cabinet voted to go ahead with the invasion of Rafah, thus dealing a death blow to extended peace negotiations.

Brushing aside US objections regarding the likelihood of civilian casualties in Rafah, where more than a million people from other parts of the Gaza Strip have taken refuge, an Israeli tank brigade took control of the Gazan side of the Rafah crossing thus further isolating the enclave and seriously jeopardising a key aid route by land from Egypt.

The hand of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his war cabinet is clearly seen in this as they have sworn to destroy the Hamas leadership rather than accept peace. It is no secret that Mr Netanyahu’s political future lies only in extending the war.

The implications of Israel’s latest offensive on the one city they had left nearly untouched in the seven-month war in retaliation for the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel are vast and may spill well beyond the conflicted West Asian region.

As one of his own backers in senior politician Bernie Sanders speculates, the Gaza war could well turn out to be US President Joe Biden’s ‘Vietnam’ moment in an election year. The unrest on US campuses, which has been spreading across continents to as far as Australia, could be crucial in rising support for the cause of the stricken Palestinians of Gaza even as a close-run poll with Donald Trump looms.

The fear is the limited operations to seize the Rafah crossing for which about one lakh people were asked to vacate may be a precursor to an all-out assault on the city that could raise the Gaza toll that is already near 35,000, mostly women and children.

In tatters lies the ceasefire proposal that could have led to a limited hostage release to begin with and partial Israeli troop pullbacks within Gaza. Of course, Israel is unlikely to agree to vacating Gaza until they believe their operations against Hamas are over.

Mr. Netanyahu, under pressure from the extreme wings of his extended coalition cabinet, may be betting on the US polls acting as a restraint on Mr Biden in terms of moral and material support to Israel and so is unlikely to accept ceasefire terms. It appears he will keep Israel on the warpath.

Subhani



Will climate change trigger social unrest, future wars?



Abhijit Bhattacharyya

Whether you call it a fad or a more serious change-maker, from the high table of diplomacy to the ordinary citizen’s dining table, “climate change” is today’s real buzzword. One doesn’t need to be a scientific or technological expert to understand the obvious: that climate change is an engulfing conflagration which must be controlled and tackled through a consensus and with collective wisdom. Across the world, severe “climate change” symptoms are creating scary scenarios.

Military Balance 2022 (International Institute for Strategic Studies, London) put across the issue crisply: “First-order physical effects of changing climate include storms, floods, heatwaves and droughts. Second-order effects include degradation of water supplies, reduced agriculture productivity and damage to infrastructure and disruption to energy generations, with all these having potential consequences for economics, employment”. All these, the receding glacier line, less ground water level, deforestation, rising sea levels, tsunamis, tornado, migration, flood and displacement are creating formidable challenges to governance, which will make mass social unrest inevitable.

No doubt the 194 members of the United Nations are relentlessly pursuing it in various international platforms as treaties are signed, promises made, lofty ideas floated to the delight and appreciation of politicians and diplomats, yet virtually nothing so far appears workable. On the contrary, regressive actions are ruthlessly revived by the human hunger for cash and commerce, culminating in multi-dimensional conflict and combat. To them, talking climate change is a good topic for optics at the UN, but not implementable in a materialistic world, which cannot distinguish between

the lure for dollars and the plebeian’s right to live.

Simple and basic questions, therefore, need to be addressed to get into “climate change” and chalk out an implementable action plan to ensure that things don’t go out of control to inflict wholesale disaster, which would threaten the survival of the human race.

What are the main reasons for this fiery situation? Who are the responsible, and what can be a way out? Is it impossible to ensure a stable climate, air purity, water and soil preservation, preventing degradation by mankind?

No doubt, the leaders of various nations do realise the threat as efforts are on for a consensus at the UN. While setting goals at the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change, it was gloomily estimated that “up to 14 per cent of land species face a very high risk of extinction”. The reasons for this grim realisation could be pointed to innumerable sources of origin, attributable to unbridled human greed to “control” the trajectory of science and tech advancement. From the North and South Poles to the Himalayas, the oceans to teeming megalopolises, the fertile arable land of various continents to the Amazon basin, and South Asia’s natural forestry inhabited by tigers, lions and rhinos, nothing has been spared under the guise of “development projects” of nation states by plundering monopolists or other merchants who can dictate terms to any small, medium or even large nation in need of state-of-the-art technology. They often offer astronomical financial benefits to the rich elites of various nations to sweeten the deal.

The most harmful of all actors responsible for killing the climate/atmosphere system today, however, are the profit-seeking mega arms corporations, which have little or no concern whatsoever even if the world gasps for fresh air, or

Why is the entire Christian West, the advanced Jewish state and the OIC not trying to stop the potential Armageddon for the sake of ‘climate change’, on which the leaders and diplomats of all countries talk long but act short?

the thirsty die without potable water or agricultural land for global food security is bombed out to permanent sterility. Along with arms merchants selling everything from machine-guns to warplanes, these shark-like predators whose commercial interests from environmentally harmful mining to manufacturing show little concern for resource-rich but poor Third World countries who often emerge as “basket cases”, depending on alms and loans which turn into non-returnable debt, leading to their loss of sovereignty. Their outlook of “only money matters” overrides the survival interests of ordinary people facing the adverse effects of climate change.

Slowly, however, some kind of realisation is beginning to dawn about the harmful effects caused. The armed forces of some advanced nations are thinking of how to reduce the carbon emissions from combat hardware to achieve sustainable and achievable goals. But for now, these still seem to be a mirage.

In today’s world, there are two broad ways to multilateral diplomacy — first, through 46 “arms control and disarmament agreements”, and second, through 74 “international security co-operation bodies”, which include the UN, Nato, the European Union and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

All these have effectively entangled the entire world. But one can also understand how varied and bizarre these binding systems can be from the bewildering variety of titles given to them, creating the impression of a global exercise in futility, making every diplomatic act appear artificial. All these agreements and alliances end up looking useless as they cannot con-

tain or control the bilateral or multilateral arms trade between nation states, some of which are making astronomical profits by killing thousands and destroying environment forever.

Just consider two major conflicts of our times. First, the ongoing intra-Slav Russia-Ukraine race war, over two years old, in which more than 50 nations have now got entangled, killing the environment, contaminating water, destroying fertile land, murdering humans and injecting poison in air. What is the future of Europe, the cradle of recurring, prolonged mayhem since the days of the Roman Empire?

Second, the Levant’s religious war of hatred between Muslims and Jews also spells disaster for both climate and human race. Starvation, famine, poisonous air, water and soil degradation will surely inflict generational damage to future children of congenital mental disability and incurable physical deformity.

Who should then bell the cat of catastrophe? Why is the entire Christian West, the advanced Jewish state and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation not trying to stop the potential Armageddon for the sake of “climate change”, on which the politicians and diplomats of all countries talk long but act short? No wonder the types and numbers of bilateral, trilateral and multilateral “agreements” between nations have names which would be a true reflection of the indifference to, and collective failure of, the League of Nations between the two world wars and now the lame duck United Nations.

Frankly speaking, “climate change” will continue to degrade human life and help depraved political leaders, diplomats and others to lead us to inevitable doom. Most ambitious plans about tackling the warming planet are a joke: all talk and no action. The world’s arms bazaar rules the roost and overrides all other factors. The West’s “military industrial complex” is on the march, and any reversing of climate change is its first casualty.

The writer is an alumnus of the National Defence College, New Delhi. Views expressed are personal.

LETTERS

RAISING A STINK

Reports have it that Tamil actor Dhanush spent more than ten hours close to a garbage dump yard in Mumbai in connection with a film shoot for his upcoming movie Kubera. It is claimed that the actor went through the entire shooting without a grimace despite not wearing a mask. What’s the big deal? In Chennai, hundreds of thousands of people live in the vicinity of the Cooum River and Buckingham Canal 24x7 without a whimper. In fact, as compared to the conditions there, the Mumbai dump yard stink pales into insignificance.

P.G. Menon
Chennai

JOBS & PROMISES

Former Executive Director at IMF, Mr. Surjit Bhalla said India provided 1 crore jobs in 7-8 years on an average under the present government, which is fine. On the eve of the 2014 elections, Modi promised that 2 crore new jobs would be created every year. On that basis, 20 crore new jobs should have been created so far during his decade-long tenure. The above figure of 1 crore works out to only 5% of his promised quantum of job creation.

M. Govindaraj
Gudiyatham

REIN IN RAGGING

Increasing instances of ragging in higher educational institutions where students are being bullied, assaulted, and sometimes driven to suicide are a matter of grave concern. While SC recommended an anti-ragging committee and an anti-ragging squad on educational campuses in 2009 to give students a sense of security, the reality is college authorities always attempt to downplay ragging cases and muffle student voices to protect the institution’s reputation. UGC has drawn up several commendable initiatives, which include a round-the-clock toll-free helpline and a dedicated email ID for students to complain, as well as the setting up of district-level committees comprising district magistrates, university heads, superintendents of police, local media, and student organisations to monitor institutions on the ground.

M. Jeyaram
Sholavandan

Mail your letters to chennaiadesk@deccanmail.com

Maleeha Lodhi



China-US rivalry hots up but both careful to avoid collision course

Increased diplomatic engagement between the US and China has helped to bring down the temperature in their fraught relationship. But it has not yielded any agreement on key issues — Taiwan, war in Ukraine, trade, tech curbs and military postures, especially in South China Sea.

The visit of the US secretary of state to Beijing in late April was part of the effort to improve communication and contain tensions. Antony Blinken’s trip took place against a mixed background of escalating tensions but also modest advances in cooperation and communication in certain areas.

This resulted from the meeting last November between Presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in San Francisco. Their first face-to-face meeting in over a year produced a tentative thaw in frosty ties. It led to restoration of high-level military-to-military contacts, suspended by Beijing in 2020, and agreement on counter-narcotics cooperation. Last month, the two leaders also spoke on the phone. Increased dialogue was reflected in the conversation between the defence ministers and US Treasury secretary Janet Yellen’s visit to China last month. The first talks on artificial intelligence between the two countries are due to take place in coming weeks.

But just hours before Mr Blinken’s arrival in Beijing, the US Congress approved billions of dol-

lars of assistance for Taiwan and to counter China in the so-called Indo-Pacific region. This was part of a \$61bn aid package that included Ukraine and Israel. It also involved the requirement for TikTok’s Chinese parent company to sell its stake in the social media platform or face a ban in America. In election year, US officials have threatened higher tariffs on Chinese imports, with Mr Biden calling for tripling tariffs on Chinese steel and aluminium — clearly as part of his re-election campaign.

Not surprisingly, Mr Blinken was told at the outset of his trip that the US had to choose between cooperation and confrontation. China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi said during the talks that while dialogue and cooperation had increased in “various fields”, “negative factors” in the relationship are “still rising and accumulating”. He warned against any transgression of China’s red lines. A Chinese foreign ministry statement said Mr Wang also criticised Washington for taking “an endless stream of measures to suppress China’s economy, trade, science and technology”. But he acknowledged “the China-US relationship is beginning to stabilise” and called for progress in areas where the two countries agreed. This was echoed by Mr Blinken, who said the US “seeks to deepen cooperation where our interests align”.

The high point of Mr Blinken’s visit was of course the meeting with President Xi. That the Chinese

President received him indicated Beijing’s desire to calm tensions with Washington. Warning against “vicious competition”, President Xi told Blinken that the US and China should be partners and not rivals — who “help each other succeed and not harm each other”. China, he said, wants to see a “confident, open and prosperous United States” but expected the US to see China’s development in a positive light. According to a statement issued by the Chinese foreign ministry, Mr Xi also told Mr Blinken that both sides “should honour words with actions rather than say one thing and do another”.

The readout from the American side was that Mr Blinken conveyed US concerns on China’s military assistance to Russia in the Ukraine war. Speaking to the media before the meeting, he said Russia “would struggle to sustain its assault on Ukraine without China’s support”, pointing out that Beijing supplied machine tools and several dual-use items critical for Russia’s defence industry. This posed a threat not just to Ukraine but also to Europe and was a red line for Washington. He said after the meeting the US will wait to see how China addresses this concern, warning that sanctions could be imposed. This injected a jarring note into the otherwise positive atmospherics of Mr Blinken’s trip. The Chinese reaction was predictably sharp. A foreign ministry spokesman rejected “groundless” US accusations as an effort to shift blame, while Mr

Wang made it clear that “China is neither the creator of the Ukraine crisis nor a party to it”. But days later, Washington went ahead and sanctioned several Chinese companies for supplying Russia with components for military use.

Nevertheless, Mr Blinken’s visit reflected an effort by both sides to stabilise the relationship and limit the turbulence and volatility that have come to characterise Sino-US ties. But beyond this effort to ease tensions, which is important, there was no evidence of any narrowing of differences on core issues. Moreover, the run-up to the US presidential election in November is likely to see a significant amount of China-bashing, given the political consensus and popular sentiment in America that advocates a tougher posture towards Beijing.

Taiwan will continue to be a dangerous flashpoint in the US-China confrontation. The military build-up and a series of recent incidents in the South China Sea also present obvious risks. The resumption of high-level military contacts between China and the US will be important to enable the two countries to reduce the risk of any inadvertent or accidental conflict. Neither side wants unmanaged tensions to push the two countries onto a collision course, which would have unpredictable consequences for them as well as the rest of the world.

— By arrangement with Dawn

SHORT TAKES

Fadnavis: Uddhav wanted me in jail

Mumbai: Maharashtra deputy chief minister Devendra Fadnavis on Tuesday alleged that former Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray wanted to put him in jail by hook or crook. The BJP leader claimed that now-retired IPS officer Sanjay Pandey was appointed as Mumbai commissioner on the condition that the officer will ensure his arrest. But despite numerous enquiries, they found nothing incriminating against me, he said. Speaking at an event, the senior BJP leader said, "It is true that the MVA was desperate to arrest me. They investigated everything about me and tried to find something, but they failed. In fact, a Mumbai commissioner was appointed only on the condition that he will make sure that I will be arrested. We all know what happened to that commissioner later. But despite all their efforts, they could not find a single incriminating thing against me."

Man stabbed to death outside polling booth

Mumbai: A 27-year-old man was killed and his friend injured in a knife attack outside a polling booth in Maharashtra's Dharashiv district, where polling is underway in the third phase of the general election on Tuesday, police said. The attack was due to personal enmity and had nothing to do with the elections, an official said. The incident occurred outside the polling booth in Patsangvi village of Bhoom tehsil around 11.30 am, he said. The victim, Samadhan Nanasaheb Pawar, and his friend were standing outside the polling booth when they were attacked by the accused, Gaurav alias Lalya Naiknavare, he said. The duo sustained serious injuries in the attack, he said. Pawar was rushed to a private hospital in Barshi, where he succumbed to injuries. — PTI

Foreign secy Kwatra to visit B'desh today

New Delhi: Foreign secretary Vinay Kwatra is set to travel to Bangladesh on Wednesday to review ties between the two countries and prepare the grounds for a likely visit to India by Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, people familiar with the matter said. In Dhaka, Mr Kwatra will hold wide-ranging talks with his Bangladeshi counterpart Masud Bin Momen on the entire gamut of bilateral relations and ways to further expand the ties, they said. The foreign secretary is also likely to call on foreign minister Hasan Mahmud. Mr Kwatra's visit is also aimed at preparing grounds for PM Hasina's planned trip to India in June, the people cited above said. Mr Mahmud visited India in February. It was in his first bilateral foreign trip after Ms Hasina came to power after a landslide victory in the poll in January. — PTI

'WHEN I WAS CM, MUFTI OPPOSED AFSPA REMOVAL'

Srinagar: National Conference leader Omar Abdullah on Tuesday accused PDP president Mehbooba Mufti of opposing the withdrawal of the controversial AFSPA from Jammu and Kashmir when he was the chief minister. "I have not forgotten this thing. When I was talking about the removal of AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers Act) from here (in 2012-13), Mehbooba Mufti, who is PDP president, said Omar Abdullah is disrespecting the Army. "She said the talk about the revocation of AFSPA is belittling the Army. That is where the opposition to revocation of AFSPA came from," Mr Abdullah told reporters in north Kashmir Kupwara district after an election meeting. He was reacting to a statement of Apni Party leader Altaf Bukhari that time had come for the armed forces in Jammu and Kashmir to go back to the barracks. "I had tried to send them back to the barracks in 2012 and 2013. That time the conspiracy was hatched by the party with which Mr Bukhari was affiliated at that time. Today, they are talking about sending the Army back to barracks. It is good. Better late than never," he said. — PTI



Omar Abdullah

Sporadic incidents of violence mar WB Ph-3

Bengal sees 73.93% turnout in 4 Lok Sabha seats

RAJIB CHOWDHURI and PRANMOY BRAH-MACHARI
KOLKATA/BERHAMPORE, MAY 7

The third phase of Lok Sabha election, covering four parliamentary constituencies - two each in Malda and Murshidabad districts - in West Bengal, recorded a 73.93% voter turnout amid some stray incidents of tussle among Trinamul Congress, BJP, and CPI(M) on Tuesday.

In Malda, Malda Uttar and Malda Dakshin seats saw 73.30% and 73.68% polling respectively. In Murshidabad, Jangipur and Murshidabad seats witnessed 72.13% and 76.49% polling.

The day also witnessed the Assembly bypoll at Bagwangola in Murshidabad where the voter turnout clocked 73.68%, dropping from the 85.63% registered in the Assembly election in 2021.

According to the chief electoral officer, West Bengal, a total of 433 complaints were received from various political parties during the polling at the four parliamentary constituencies. CPI(M) secretary

2 C'garh voters die in separate incidents

Raipur, May 7: An old man and a young woman on Tuesday died in two separate poll-related incidents in Chhattisgarh.

While the old man died while standing in a queue in a polling booth under Raigarh Lok Sabha constituency, the woman died after being struck by lightning while returning home along with her mother and brother after casting a vote in a polling booth under Surguja Lok Sabha seat.

Mohammad Salim, who contested in Murshidabad this time, was seen going after fake polling agents at many booths.

However, he was gheraoed by TMC workers in protest of his act, leading to a tussle. Meanwhile, bombs were hurled at Hariharpara and Domkal on Monday night to terrorize the voters. TMC-backed miscreants threatened the CPI(M) workers not to vote.

Two CPI(M) polling agents were assaulted,

and their motorbikes were damaged. At Jangipur, Bharatiya Janata Party candidate Dhananjay Ghosh and TMC leader Goutam Ghosh got engaged in a scuffle in front of the Ajagarpara polling station. The central paramilitary forces separated them.

At Shamsherganj, which is under the Malda Dakshin seat, two Congress polling agents and workers were admitted to the hospital with injuries after they were severely beaten up. At Mirzapur, two groups of TMC workers clashed over supporting the ISF candidate. Police dispersed them by lathi-charge.

On the third phase of Lok Sabha polls, Trinamul supremo and chief minister Mamata Banerjee claimed at party rallies in Bankura and Purulia, "Modi Magic is over...I have never seen such a lying Prime Minister ever. When children lie, they are disciplined by their mothers. But when a PM lies, people should ensure justice by voting him out and ensuring that he never assumes power again."



1. A mother (clockwise from left) with her divyang daughter after casting votes in Hathras on Tuesday.
2. People from Basdatta village, Hathras, boycott the polls after their polling station was shifted 3 km away from the village.
3, 4, 5. Voters wait in queues in Guwahati, a man shows his ink-marked finger in Bareilly and a voter at a polling station in Sambhal.
6. Adani Group chairman Gautam Adani and his wife Priti in Ahmedabad. — PTI

**Condemns Cong over 'dangerous agenda' on quota, terrorism**

INDIA bloc will expire June 4: Modi

PRASAD PATIL
MUMBAI, MAY 7

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday slammed the Congress and the INDIA bloc for their "dangerous" agenda of appeasement politics. He addressed election rallies in Ahmednagar and Beed for the BJP and the Shiv Sena candidates. Claiming that no trick of the INDIA bloc is working in front of the people, he said now their "B team from across the border has become active" to boost the morale of the Congress. He also said that June 4 is the "expiry date" of the INDIA bloc.

Addressing a rally for BJP's Sujay Vikhe-Patil and Shiv Sena's Sadashiv



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Maharashtra deputy chief minister Devendra Fadnavis during a public meeting in Ahmednagar on Tuesday. — PTI

Lokhande in Ahmednagar, Mr Modi said, "The expiry date of the INDIA bloc is June 4 (when the results of the Lok Sabha elections will be declared). After that day, there will be no one to

raise the flag of the INDIA bloc. This election is being held to choose between those who fulfil people's desires and those who indulge in appeasement. The BJP and the NDA want to satisfy all people with their hard work, while the Opposition is engaged in appeasement of their votebank. The Congress' entire manifesto bears the imprint of Muslim League."

The PM also condemned the Congress for carrying out a dangerous agenda regarding reservation and terrorism. He alleged that the Congress wants to give reservation to Muslims based on their religion from the quota reserved for ST/SCs and OBCs.

Assam sees 77.06% polling in Phase-3 amid bad weather

DC CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI, MAY 7

The final phase of the Lok Sabha elections in Assam on Tuesday recorded 77.06 per cent polling for the remaining four out of 14 Lok Sabha seats in the state. Voting was peaceful in the four Lok Sabha seats — Guwahati, Barpeta, Dhubri and Kokrajhar. The fate of 47 candidates who are in the fray for the four Lok Sabha seats was sealed in the electronic voting machines (EVMs).

Despite inclement weather conditions since morning, long queues were witnessed in most of the polling stations in Western Assam districts where polling was held.

Even as polling started at 7 am, in districts like Goalpara, voters started arriving at the polling stations from 5 am.

The IMD had issued a 'yellow warning' for Assam. Heavy rains lashed many parts of these districts in the last two days.

Fight within Opp. for Muslim votes: BJP on Lalu comment

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 7

Labelling Opposition camp members Samajwadi Party and Congress as "fundamentally anti-Hindu and anti-Ram", the BJP on Tuesday claimed that there is a fight within the INDIA bloc for Muslim votes and it has become a "fashion to abuse the Santana culture of India" for appeasement politics.

After RJD chief Lalu Prasad Yadav's remarks on extending reservation to Muslims and SP leader Ramgopal Yadav's "useless" remarks against the Ram Mandir, the ruling party claimed that the suspicion being raised by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP about the INDIA bloc's plan to change the Constitution to give reservation to Muslims from the share of SC/STs and OBCs is turning out to be true.

CHARGING THE INDIA bloc of being 'fundamentally anti-Hindu and anti-Ram', Yogi Adityanath said that the SP oppose Ram, shoot at Ram bhakts, support terrorists, celebrate the death of Ram bhakts and shed tears when mafias die

Mr Modi also addressed the RJD supremo's remarks during an election rally in Madhya Pradesh, saying the INDIA bloc's "conspiracy" is deeper and it wants all reservation of SC/STs and OBCs for its vote-bank.

Charging the INDIA bloc members of being "fundamentally anti-Hindu and anti-Ram", Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath, while addressing a rally in Sitapur, said, "SP people oppose Ram, shoot at Ram bhakts, support terrorists, celebrate the death of

Ram bhakts and shed tears when mafias die."

Training guns at the SP and other Opposition camp's members, the UP CM said, "It has become a fashion to abuse the Santana culture of India, to challenge the existence of Lord Ram and Lord Krishna. And about this, I will only say 'vinash kale viprit buddhi'."

Addressing the media at the BJP headquarters in New Delhi, BJP spokesperson and Rajya Sabha member Sudhanshu Trivedi, while reacting to the RJD supremo's Muslim reservation remarks, said, "The genie of Muslim reservation has come out of the lamp of the INDIA bloc. This word, 'pura ka pura' (full), used by him (Lalu) in his statement, is very serious. This makes it clear that they (INDIA bloc) want to provide reservation to Muslims from the share of SC/STs and OBCs."

Cong's Radhika Khera & Shekhar Suman join BJP

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 7

Former Congress leader Radhika Khera and actor Shekhar Suman joined the BJP on Tuesday amid the ongoing Lok Sabha elections.

Ms Khera, the former national coordinator of the Congress' media department, resigned from the party's primary membership on Sunday, days after her altercation with another leader at the party's Chhattisgarh office.

In her resignation letter to Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge, Ms Khera also said she was facing opposition in the party for her visit to the Ram temple in Ayodhya.

Both Ms Khera and Suman joined the saffron at its headquarters in the



Radhika Khera



Shekhar Suman

presence of senior leaders, including BJP general secretary Vinod Tawde and media department in-charge Anil Baluni.

After joining the BJP, Ms Khera slammed the Congress for being "anti-Ram and anti-Hindu".

"I also heard that the Congress is anti-Ram. But I am a living victim of this. The way I was treated when I went to the Mandir to offer prayers and later. It will become a matter of concern if such a party comes to power," Ms Khera said.

NCP-SP alleges bogus voting ■ Allegations show they have accepted defeat: Ajit

High-stakes Baramati keeps political pot boiling

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, MAY 7

The voting for the high-profile battle of the Baramati seat in Maharashtra was marred by allegations of coercion and voter intimidation, distribution of money, booth capturing and physical altercations on Tuesday.

The contest in the Baramati Lok Sabha constituency has caught the eyes of the entire country due to the battle in the famed Pawar family. NCP (SP) candidate Supriya Sule and Ajit Pawar-led

NCP's Sunetra Pawar are locked in a fierce battle in Baramati. Ms Sule is the daughter of NCP founder Sharad Pawar, whereas Ajit Pawar is his cousin.

As soon as the voting began, the Sharad Pawar-led group levelled severe allegations related to the use of money and muscle power, including police security, to influence voters. NCP (SP) leader Rohit Pawar alleged that cash was being distributed in Bhor by the ruling Ajit Pawar-led NCP and alleged that a cooperative bank in Bhor was kept open till late Monday



NCP(SP) supremo Sharad Pawar at a polling booth in Baramati on Tuesday. — PTI

night. Rohit Pawar took to "X" and alleged that the Ajit

Pawar-led party was distributing money for votes in the Baramati Lok Sabha seat.

Refuting Rohit Pawar's charge of money distribution, Ajit Pawar said it is the Election Commission's job to look into such things. "Only those making allegations know such things. They see their defeat. I have personally contested elections seven times and never indulged in such practices. Right from the beginning of the campaign, some sections of the Opposition have been making such allegations against me but I

don't pay any heed to them," he said.

The NCP (SP) also filed a complaint with the Election Commission alleging the use of pass-books from Pune District Co-operative Bank and Baramati Co-operative Bank as identification for 'bogus voting' in the Baramati constituency.

"In an unprecedented manner making a mockery of elections and the rules, such corrupt, criminal and illegal practices are being blatantly conducted by the candidate of Ajit Pawar-led NCP," the complaint said. — PTI

Under BJP rule, MCC means 'Modi code of conduct': Didi

Purulia (WB), May 7: West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday alleged that the Election Commission has turned a blind eye to the allegations against BJP leaders that they indulge in hate speeches during campaigns, converting the model code of conduct to "Modi code of conduct".

Addressing an election rally at Purulia, the TMC supremo also claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other top BJP leaders consider only themselves as Hindus, and they do

not think about other communities.

Mr Modi and other BJP leaders by their "hate-filled speeches" are intimidating lower caste Hindus, minorities and other marginalised sections, but the Election Commission is silent, she alleged.

"The EC's model code of conduct has turned out to be a mockery and should be rechristened as Mr Modi code of conduct. But we will continue to flag every incident of violation of rights of citizens of this country," Ms Banerjee said. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

PAK: ATTACK ON CHINESE PLANNED IN AFGHANISTAN

Islamabad, May 7: Pakistan's military said on Tuesday that a suicide bomb attack that killed five Chinese engineers was planned in Afghanistan.

The suicide bomber rammed a vehicle into a convoy of Chinese engineers working on a dam project in northwest Pakistan in March, killing six people. "The entire attack was planned in Afghanistan, the car used in it was also prepared in Afghanistan, and the suicide bomber was also an Afghan national," Pakistan military spokesman Major-General Ahmed Sharif said.

LANKA CONTINUES FREE TOURIST VISAS FOR INDIA

Colombo, May 7: Visitors from India, China, Russia, Japan, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia will continue to receive tourist visas free of charge, the Sri Lankan government has said. It comes amidst a row surrounding increased fees for on-arrival visas, being handled by a foreign company.

"It was decided today to maintain the existing \$50 fee for a 30-day visa for foreigners visiting the country and the free visa service currently offered to citizens of seven nations — India, China, Russia, Japan, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia.

COURT REJECTS NIRAV MODI'S FRESH BAIL PLEA

London, May 7: Fugitive businessman Nirav Modi, who has been in prison in London for over five years, on Tuesday made a new bail application which was rejected by a UK judge who ruled that he continued to pose "a substantial risk" of absconding justice.

The 52-year-old diamond merchant, who lost his extradition battle to face fraud and money laundering charges in India, did not appear for the bail hearing at Westminster Magistrates Court in London but his son and two daughters were present in the gallery.

NEPAL'S RULING COALITION PARTY FALLS APART

Kathmandu, May 7: The Janata Samajbadi Party-Nepal (JSP-N), one of the coalition partners in Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda-led government, has split after a majority of its lawmakers and over two dozen central committee members applied for a new party at the Election Commission.

A faction of the JSP-N led by the party's federal council chair Ashok Rai registered the application for a new party while the party's chair deputy PM Upendra Yadav, who is also minister for health and population, is on a trip abroad.

THAILAND NABS U.S. MAN FLEEING 25-YR JAIL TERM

Bangkok, May 7: Thai police have arrested an American who fled a 25-year jail sentence in the United States for kidnapping, sex trafficking and other crimes, officers said.

Selva Delano Mudaliar was sentenced to at least 25 years by a court in the US state of Oregon in March this year, according to a Thai police statement, on 11 counts that also included strangulation and coercion.

The 37-year-old fled to Thailand while on parole and lived in the kingdom for more than three months, "frequently changing hotels and apartments", said police.

ROCKET VALVE ISSUE: BOEING CANCELS LAUNCH

Cape Canaveral, May 7: Boeing called off its first astronaut launch because of a valve problem on the rocket.

The two Nasa test pilots had just strapped into Boeing's Starliner capsule for a flight to the International Space Station when the countdown was halted, just two hours before the planned liftoff. United Launch Alliance CEO Tory Bruno said an oxygen pressure-relief valve on the upper stage of the company's Atlas rocket started fluttering open and close, creating a loud buzz. The valve may have exceeded its 2,00,000 life-time cycles, Bruno said.

Israeli tanks in Rafah, border crossing seized

UN says operation denies access to humanitarian passage

Rafah, May 7: Israel sent tanks into Rafah in southern Gaza, seizing control of the border crossing with Egypt Tuesday, an operation the UN said denied it access to the key humanitarian passage.

It shut down a vital aid route into the Palestinian enclave that is already on the brink of famine.

The military's thrust into the eastern sector of the city packed with displaced civilians came with negotiators and mediators due in Cairo in the latest effort towards a hostage release and ceasefire in the seven-month-old war.

A senior Hamas official, requesting anonymity to discuss the negotiations, warned that it would be Israel's "last chance" to free the estimated 128 captives still held in the Palestinian territory, including 35 the military says are dead.

A Hamas delegation was headed "shortly" to Cairo, the official said. Israel has said it would also send negotiators, and mediator Qatar announced it was dispatching a team too.

The long-threatened Rafah operation began hours after Hamas announced late on Monday it had accepted a truce proposal, prompting cheering crowds to take to the streets despite Israel saying it was "far" from plans it had previously agreed to. Rafah resident Abu Aoun al-Najjar said the "indescribable joy" following the Hamas statement and hopes for an end to the war were short-lived.

"It turned out to be a bloody night," he told *AFP*, as more Israeli strikes and bombardment "stole our joy". Army footage showed tanks flying the Israeli flag taking "operational control" of the Palestinian side of the Rafah crossing, the military said, in a deployment that had a "very limited scope against very specific targets". — *AFP*

CHINA HOSPITAL KNIFE ATTACK KILLS 2, HURTS 21

Beijing, Kunming, May 7: At least two people were killed and 21 others injured in a knife attack at a hospital on Tuesday in China's Yunnan province, local authorities said, in the latest incident of mass stabbing in the country.

The attack took place at around 11:30 am when a man assaulted people with a knife at a local hospital in Zhenxiang County, the county's public security bureau said.

The injured are being treated in the hospital, and the case is under investigation, the state-run *Xinhua* news agency reported. The suspect, identified as a male local villager, was captured in the afternoon, *Xinhua* reported.

No motive has been given for the attack.

Local media reports said the detained man was carrying a bottle of water and some bread when he was wrestled to the ground by the officers. So far, little is known about the victims, but police said they are being treated in hospital, the Hong Kong-based *South China Post* reported.

China, where private gun ownership is illegal for most civilians, has faced a spate of mass knife attacks in public places in recent years.

In August last year, two people were killed and seven others injured after a man with a history of mental illness attacked people with a knife in a residential district in also Yunnan.

In July of that year, six people were killed in a stabbing at a kindergarten in the south-eastern province of Guangdong. Zhenxiang County in Yunnan's northeast, borders Guizhou and Sichuan provinces and, until 2020, was classified as poverty-stricken. — *PTI*

● **THE SUSPECT**, identified as a male local villager, was captured in the afternoon



Men inspect rubble outside a destroyed house in the Tulkarem camp for Palestinian refugees, after an Israeli military raid there, in West Bank, on Tuesday. — *AFP*

Clashes, arrests as Europe stir spreads

Amsterdam, May 7: Student protests to demand that universities break ties with Israel over the Gaza war spread across Europe on Tuesday, with police breaking up demonstrations in the Netherlands, Germany, and France.

Students at some elite European universities, inspired by ongoing demonstrations at US campuses, have been occupying university halls and facilities, demanding an end to partnerships with Israeli institutions because of Israel's punishing assault on Gaza.

At the University of Amsterdam, images on public broadcaster NOS showed police baton-charging protesters and smashing up tents at around 4:00 am (0200 GMT), after they refused to leave the campus. "The demonstration took on a violent nature because later in the

evening massive stones were removed from the ground," police said in a statement.

At Berlin's Free University, police also cleared a demonstration after up to 80 people set up a protest camp in a courtyard of the campus early on Tuesday.

The protesters, some of whom wore the keffiyeh scarf that has long been a symbol of the Palestinian cause, sat in front of tents and waved banners.

They later tried to enter rooms and lecture halls and occupy them, according to the university, which said it then called in the police to clear the protest.

Videos on social media showed officers carrying away some protesters. The university said property was damaged while classes in some buildings were suspended for the day. — *AFP*

India pulls most troops from Male

Male, May 7: The Maldives has said India withdrew more than half of its troops deployed in its territory ahead of a Friday deadline, as the strategically located archipelago strengthens ties with China.

The Maldives, known as a luxury tourist destination with its white sand beaches, also straddles key east-west international shipping routes.

Pro-China President Mohamed Muizzu's election win last year hinged in large part on a pledge to reduce India's political clout in the atoll nation.

After coming to office he vowed to disband a garrison of 89 Indian soldiers deployed to patrol the maritime boundary of the nation, made up of 1,192 tiny coral islands scattered around 800 kilometres (500 miles) across the equator.

A spokeswoman for Muizzu told reporters in the capital Male that 51 Indian military personnel had left by Monday.

"As of now, 51 soldiers stationed at two platforms have been repatriated," Heena Waleed said

As of now, 51 Indian soldiers stationed at two platforms have been repatriated."

— HEENA WALEED
Spokeswoman for Maldives President

on Monday night.

"All Indian military personnel in the country will be withdrawn from the Maldives by May 10," Muizzu's first state visit as president was to China, breaking a tradition of India being the first overseas stop for new Maldivian leaders.

He has entered into a raft of agreements with Beijing to boost bilateral relations and economic ties, sidelining India, which considers the tiny nation to be within its sphere of influence.

In March, the Maldives signed a "military assistance" deal with China as the Indian garrison began leaving.

The Maldivian defence ministry said the deal was to foster "stronger bilateral ties" and that China would train its staff under the pact. — *AFP*

MERCURY | RISES

Asia warming faster than global average: UN organisation

S. Korea's hottest April in 50 years

Seoul, May 7: South Korea experienced its hottest April since comprehensive records began in 1973, the state weather agency said on Tuesday, with average daily temperatures more than 2.5 degrees higher than in previous years.

"The highest average national temperature for April (is) 14.9 degrees Celsius (58.8 degrees Fahrenheit) in 2024", the Korea Meteorological Administration said, adding it was the highest recorded in April since the

national weather observation network was established in 1973.

The previous record was 14.7 degrees Celsius, set in April 1998, KMA said. Average nationwide temperatures in April surpassed the 1991-2020 April average of 12.1 degrees Celsius, it added.

The average daily high also reached a record-breaking 21.1 degrees — which is an increase of 2.5 degrees from the average from 1991 to 2020.

April 14 saw especially high temperatures, as the



Xu Feihong

XU FEIHONG NAMED NEW ENVOY TO INDIA

Beijing, May 7: Chinese President Xi Jinping has appointed senior diplomat Xu Feihong as the new Ambassador to India after an unusually long delay of 18 months amid frozen relations between the two countries over the eastern Ladakh military standoff.

While there is no official announcement here yet, the Chinese Foreign Ministry has confirmed to PTI that Xu, former Ambassador to Afghanistan and Romania, has been appointed as China's new envoy in India. Xu, 60, is expected to travel to New Delhi soon to take over his new posting.

He will succeed veteran Chinese diplomat Sun Weidong who completed his tenure in India in October 2022. — *PTI*

Navalnaya calls Putin 'murdererous tyrant'

Putin starts new term as US boycotts event

Moscow, May 7: Russian President Vladimir Putin said it was up the West to choose between confrontation and cooperation as he was sworn in for a new six-year term on Tuesday at a Kremlin ceremony that was boycotted by the United States and many of its allies.

More than two years into the war in Ukraine, Putin said he wanted to "bow" before Russia's soldiers there and declared in his inauguration speech that his landslide re-election in March was proof the country was united and on the right track.

"You, citizens of Russia, have confirmed the correctness of the country's course. This is of great importance right now, when we are faced with serious challenges," he told dignitaries in a gilded Kremlin hall where a trumpet fanfare sounded to greet his arrival. "I see in this a deep understanding of our common historical goals, a determination to adamantly defend our choice, our values, freedom and the national interests of Russia."

At 71, Putin dominates the domestic political landscape. Leading opposition figures are in prison or exile, and his best known critic, Alexei Navalny, died suddenly in an Arctic penal colony in February.

His widow and exiled Russian opposition leader Yulia Navalnaya urged supporters on Tuesday to keep up the fight against President Vladimir Putin, describing him on the day of his re-inauguration as a murderous tyrant.

"Our country is currently being led by a liar, a thief and a murderer, but this will definitely come to an end," she said.

On the international stage, Putin is locked in a confrontation with Western countries he accuses of using Ukraine as a vehicle to try to defeat and dismember Russia.

Putin told Russia's political elite after being sworn in that he was not rejecting dialogue with the West, including on nuclear weapons. "The choice is theirs: Do they intend to continue trying to restrain the development of Russia, continue the policy of aggression, incessant pressure on our country for years." — *Reuters*

Curbs hit Russian cybercrime leader

London, May 7: Britain, the US and Australia have sanctioned and unmasked a senior Russian leader of the notorious cybercrime gang LockBit, the British government said on Tuesday.

Dmitry Khoroshev will face asset freezes and travel bans after being identified as one of the leaders of LockBit, the ransomware group which has digitally extorted over \$1 billion from victims worldwide, it said.

Meanwhile, UK PM Rishi Sunak said on Tuesday that a "malign actor" has probably compromised the payments system used by the British military after reports that China had hacked into a database holding personal information of the armed forces.

Investigators searched

KEY EVENTS OF PUTIN'S 24 YEARS IN POWER

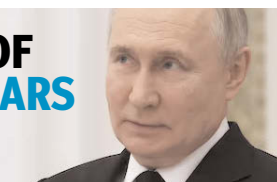
DEC. 31, 1999: Russian President Boris Yeltsin announces his resignation and makes Putin, the prime minister, the acting president.

MAY 7, 2000: After winning election with about 53% of the vote, Putin is inaugurated for his first four-year term.

MAY 11, 2000: Tax police raid the offices of NTV, a popular independent broadcaster noted for critical coverage of the Kremlin.

OCT. 25, 2003: Oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky, a potential challenger to Putin, is arrested and later sentenced to 10 years in prison for tax evasion and fraud.

AUG. 8-12, 2008: Russia fights a short war with Georgia, gaining full control of the separatist Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions.



MARCH 18, 2014: Moscow annexes Crimea after the Kremlin sends in troops wearing uniforms without insignia.

JULY 1, 2020: A referendum approves constitutional changes proposed by Putin, allowing him to run for two more terms starting in 2024.

FEB. 24, 2022: The invasion of Ukraine begins.

SEPT. 30, 2023: The International Criminal Court issues a war-crimes indictment for Putin.

FEB. 16, 2024: Opposition leader Alexei Navalny dies at an Arctic prison colony of unspecified causes.



KYIV THWARTS RUSSIA PLOT TO KILL ZELENSKYY

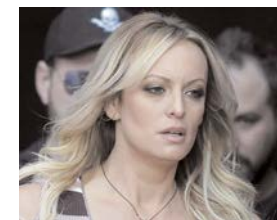
Kyiv, May 7: Ukraine said on Tuesday it had unravelled a Russian plot to assassinate senior Ukrainian political and military figures, including President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Two Ukrainian security officials were arrested for their links to the group, which had aimed to carry out high-profile killings ahead of Russian President Vladimir Putin's inauguration.

"The terrorist attack, which was supposed to be a gift to Putin for his inauguration, was in fact a failure of the Russian secret service," Vasyl Maliuk, head of the Security Service of Ukraine, said in a statement. — *AFP*

RUSSIA, UKRAINE TRADE CHEMICAL WEAPONS CHARGE

Amsterdam, May 7: Russia and Ukraine have accused each other at the global chemical weapons watchdog in The Hague of using banned toxins on the battlefield, the organisation said on Tuesday.

The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) said that the accusations were "insufficiently substantiated" but added: "The situation remains volatile and extremely concerning regarding the possible re-emergence of use of toxic chemicals as weapons." Neither Russia nor Ukraine has formally asked the OPCW to investigate the alleged use of chemical weapons. — *Reuters*



Stormy Daniels

BLACKED OUT BEFORE SEX WITH TRUMP: DANIELS

New York, May 7: Adult film star Stormy Daniels testified at Donald Trump's criminal trial on Tuesday that he told her "this is the only way you're getting out of the trailer park" prior to having sex with her in his hotel suite in 2006.

Daniels told a New York jury she grew up as the daughter of a low-income single mother who was gone for days at a time and began working in strip clubs and in pornography before she met Trump at a Lake Tahoe golf tournament.

A New York real-estate mogul at the time, Trump was the celebrity host of a popular reality TV show known as "The Apprentice."

Daniels testified on Tuesday that she "blacked out" after Trump prevented her from leaving the room, though she consumed no drugs or alcohol. She said she woke up on the bed with her clothes off. "I was staring at the ceiling and didn't know how I got there, I was trying to think about anything other than what was happening there," Daniels testified as she described having sex with Trump. Daniels, whose real name is Stephanie Clifford, said she did not tell Trump to stop. — *Reuters*

TORNADOES HIT OKLAHOMA, HAIL PELTS KANSAS

Oklahoma City, May 7: Powerful storms have erupted in the central United States, bringing tornadoes to rural Oklahoma and large hail in parts of Kansas, with forecasters warning that the dangerous weather could stretch into the early hours of Tuesday amid a rare high-risk weather warning. — *AP*



A woman walks past air-conditioning units in Seoul. Average daily temperatures in April was 2.5 degrees higher than in previous years. — *AFP*

OTHER STORIES

Taj Coromandel celebrates 50 years

Chennai: Taj Coromandel, an iconic landmark in the heart of Chennai, celebrates 5 decades of hospitality and sophistication. Set up in 1974, Taj Coromandel Chennai has been a symbol of fine living and warm hospitality, enchanting guests from around the globe with its rich heritage and service. The hotel commemorates this significant milestone with thoughtfully curated experiences for its guests from May 1 to Aug 3.

As part of the 50th anniversary celebrations, guests who choose to stay with Taj Coromandel Chennai between May 17 and May 31 can enjoy a 50% discount on best available rates for room stay and a further 50% discount on Sunday brunches. Guests can also enjoy turn-down chocolates featuring the iconic 50 years logo.

Timeless Cuisine: To commemorate its golden jubilee, the hotel is presenting a culinary journey revisiting its legendary restaurants and iconic menus that have defined the dining experience in Chennai. From the traditional Mysore and the charming Pavilion to the Golden Dragon and Fort S. George, the celebration of timeless cuisine has been put together by executive chef Sujan Mukherjee and his team of master chefs. Guests can dine at Southern Spice, Anise, Golden Dragon, La Patisserie or Chipstead, on a 50% discount.

At Golden Dragon, one of the first restaurants to introduce fine Sichuan cuisine to Chennai, guests can enjoy the whiff of nostalgia laced with an array of flavours and tastes from May 1-15. From May 17 – 31, Anise, erstwhile Pavilion, presents signature dishes reminiscent of Pavilion's legacy.

Guests are invited to take a walk back in time and savour some authentic South Indian recipes at the award-winning Southern Spice, erstwhile Mysore, from June 1 – 16.

At La Patisserie, guests can access crafted sweet masterpieces by Pastry Chef Ravi Varma, from July 1 – August 3, 2024. Signature cocktails inspired by the old classics from Fort S. George, will be available at Chipstead, erstwhile Fort. S. George, from July 14 – August 3.



Saveetha holds research summit

Chennai: Saveetha Institute of Medical and Technical Sciences is holding its annual research summit at which founder & Chancellor of SIMATS, Dr. N.M. Veeraiyan, delivered the Presidential address.

He said that Saveetha medical College, in the top 3 ranked medical institutions of Tamil Nadu as per NIRF ranking of NIRF, is passing a significant milestone. "We are to engage in discussions, share insights, and forge collaborations that will shape the future of medical research."

Guests of honour at the opening were Ms. Lalatina Accouche, High Com-missioner of Seychelles, Dr. Lixing Lao President, Virginia University of Integrated Medicine and Prof. Mor Peleg-of the University of Haifa.

MoU's were signed and exchanged with Virginia University of Integrative Medicine, USA and University of Haifa, Israel for research collaborations and student exchange programs. The week-long summit will host and display 4,170 posters of 1,000 undergrad and 390 PG medical students of SIMATS.

Dr. Deepak Nallaswamy, Pro-Chancellor of SIMATS, pointed out that the three domains of a medical college academics, clinical services and research, which are of equal significance and efforts were being taken to achieve excellence in all three. He said the insights gained from the 'Medstar summit' have the potential to transcend borders and benefit healthcare systems worldwide. Traditional medicinal knowledge from India has already garnered interest from researchers and practitioners globally. By translating this knowledge into protocols, it can contribute to global health and pave the way for more holistic approaches to healthcare.

GAZA MAY BE JOE BIDEN'S VIETNAM: SANDERS

Washington: In April, Bernie Sanders repeatedly stood shoulder to shoulder with President Joe Biden, promoting their joint accomplishments on health care and climate at formal White House events while eviscerating Donald Trump in a widely viewed campaign TikTok video.

Then just last week, Sanders was bluntly warning that the crisis in Gaza could be Biden's "Vietnam" and invoking President Lyndon B. Johnson's decision not to run for reelection as the nation was in an uproar over his support of that war.

Such is the political dichotomy of Bernie Sanders when it comes to Joe Biden. They are two octogenarians who share a bond that was forged through a hard-fought primary in 2020 and fortified through policy achievements over the last three years.

Now, in this election year, Sanders will be Biden's most powerful emissary to progressives and younger voters — a task that will test the senator's pull with the sectors of the Democratic Party most disillusioned with the president and his policies, especially on Gaza.

Privately, Sanders has felt less enthusiastic in recent days about making the political case on Biden's behalf as the Gaza crisis worsened, according to a person familiar with Sanders' sentiments. Still, Sanders remains adamant



US President Joe Biden and Senator Bernie Sanders seen together at the Eisenhower Executive Office Building on the White House complex in Washington, in April. — AP

that the spectre of Trump's return to the Oval Office is too grave a threat and stresses that "this election is not between Joe Biden and God. It is between Joe Biden and Donald Trump."

"I understand that a lot of people in this country are less than enthusiastic about Biden for a number of reasons and I get that. And I strongly disagree with him, especially on what's going on in Gaza," Sanders said in a recent interview.

But Sanders continued: "You have to have a certain maturity when you

deal with politics and that is yes, you can disagree with somebody. That doesn't mean you can vote for somebody else who could be the most dangerous person in American history, or not vote and allow that other guy to win."

That will be the thrust of the message that Sanders will carry through Nov., even as progressive furor over Biden's handling of the war in Gaza continues to escalate, protests continue to fester and Sanders' own critiques of the administration's policy become more pointed.

A WH-Senate partner-

ship: Few can doubt Sanders' influence throughout the Biden presidency. Once rivals for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2020, the two men later joined forces to assemble half a dozen policy task forces that underpinned the party's policy platform later that year — an unusual endeavor that helped bring the Democratic socialist's supporters into Biden's fold.

That laid the groundwork for a burst of ambitious policymaking in the first two years of the Biden administration, from a sweeping \$1.9 tril-

lion pandemic relief package in early 2021 to legislation in the summer of 2022 that was a mishmash of longstanding Democratic priorities, including cheaper prescription drugs for Medicare beneficiaries. Sanders, who helped craft those blueprints as head of the Senate Budget Committee, had been directly encouraged by Biden to go big in those proposals, with the assurance that the president had his back.

"You and I have been fighting this for 25 years," Biden told Sanders admiringly at their joint health care event in April. "Finally, finally we beat Big Pharma. Finally."

Sanders, like many others who back Biden's domestic achievements, believes the public is still too unaware of them. He was the one who approached White House officials about doing an event specifically to spotlight a drop in the cost of inhalers.

More than three years into Biden's term, Sanders' connections throughout the West Wing are deep. He chats regularly not only with the president, but his top aides, including White House chief of staff Jeff Zients, senior adviser Anita Dunn and national security adviser Jake Sullivan.

"He doesn't mince words," Dunn said. "He's very direct with us, pretty blunt, and that's a good thing."

— AP



The real Katy Perry at a concert.

Katy Perry fools internet with fake AI photos of Met Gala

Paris: US singer Katy Perry said even her own mother was fooled by AI-generated fake images she posted Tuesday of herself pretending to attend the Met Gala in New York.

"Couldn't make it to the MET, I had to work," the "Firework" singer wrote to her 207 million followers on Instagram. But two photos with it appear to show Perry on the famous steps of the Metropolitan Museum, which hosted the glitziest fashion night of the year on Monday.

One had her wearing a huge floral dress, while a second had her in a warrior-style bronze bustier and grass petticoat. She put her location as "Metaverse", but many online fans failed to pick up on the fact that Perry was not actually present.

The image even fooled Perry's mother. The singer shared an exchange in which her mum wrote: "Didn't know you went to the Met."

Perry responded: "lol mom the AI got you too, BEWARE!"

Other fakes also emerged of the evening, including images of

singer Rihanna and actor Selena Gomez. Although AI has often been used to create harmful and sexualised images of celebrities, some are now embracing the technology themselves.

Earlier this year, British singer-songwriter FKA Tiger revealed she had built a deepfake version of herself. It "is not only trained in my personality, but also can use my exact tone of voice to speak many languages," she said in a statement.

"I will be engaging my 'AI twigs' later this year to extend my reach and handle my online social media interactions, whilst I continue to focus on my art from the comfort and solace of my studio," she added.

In Jan., a fake pornographic image of superstar Taylor Swift was viewed 47 million times on X in half a day before being removed by the platform.

The following month, 20 internet giants including Meta (Instagram, Facebook) and X committed to deploying technologies to more effectively identify and report content generated by AI. — AP

APOLLO DIALYSIS HAS NEW CENTRE IN THARAMANI

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI:

Apollo Dialysis Pvt Ltd a subsidiary of Apollo Health & Lifestyle Limited, a pioneer in Dialysis service provider launched a new Dialysis clinic at Apollo Proton Cancer Centre, Tharamani.

Inaugurating the centre, Dr. Venkatesh Raj Kumar

MD, DM Senior Nephrologist said, "Timely intervention can prevent further deterioration of kidney function, while a well-equipped dialysis unit plays a crucial role in providing life-sustaining treatments like haemodialysis or peritoneal dialysis. By prioritising promptness and comprehensiveness in care delivery, we can

improve the quality of life and outcomes for individuals living with end-stage renal disease."

M. Sudhakara Rao, COO, Apollo Dialysis added, "State-of-the-art dialysis clinic provides world class dialysis facilities with an impeccable track record, supported by world class infrastructure, dedicated and experienced nephrolo-

gists, and well trained, expert technicians".

Since its inception in 2010, Apollo Dialysis Clinics has been committed to revolutionising the dialysis industry in India. Offering a comprehensive range of healthcare services tailored to the needs of kidney failure patients, the company has established over 130 clinics nationwide.

Novel 'Night Watch' among Pulitzer winners this year

New York: Stories of race, slavery and the Civil War; real and invented, were winners this year for the Pulitzer Prizes.

Jayne Anne Phillips' "Night Watch," a mother-daughter saga set in a West Virginia asylum right after the war, was cited for fiction. Jacqueline Jones received the history prize for "No Right to an Honest Living: The Struggles of Boston's Black Workers in the Civil War Era" and Ilyon Woo's "Master Slave Husband Wife: An Epic Journey from Slavery to Freedom" won in biography.

Phillips, a West Virginia native who often sets her books in her home state, sees

"Night Watch" as the third of a trilogy of novels about war, following the Vietnam-era narrative "Machine Dreams" and the Korean War story "Lark & Termite," which draws in part on a Pulitzer Prize-winning Associated Press investigation into the No Gun Ri massacre.

She began "Night Watch" eight years ago, and found the Civil War era increasingly, and uncomfortably timely.

"The Civil War still has such an enormous hold on this country," she said. "I hope people can pick up a piece of fiction and put their politics aside and enter into feeling what it was like for people at that time."

Jones, a longtime faculty member of the University of Texas at Austin who has been a Pulitzer finalist twice before, noted that so much remains to be written about the Civil War because until recently narratives focused on the battlefield. She began working on "No Right to an Honest Living" because she wondered how Black people were treated in Boston at a time when the city was a center of anti-slavery activism.

"It turns out, the radical abolitionists represented a very small minority in Boston and that the social division of labor was really discriminatory," she said.



Migrants planning to start walking from Colombia to Panama and hoping to cross to the USA. This picture was one of the series of AP pictures that won the Pulitzer Prize for portraying the painful and often fatal human migration movement. — AP

Olympic flame to arrive in France ahead of Paris Olympics

Paris: The Olympic flame is set to arrive in the French port of Marseille on Wednesday in front of a crowd of up to 1,50,000 people in a first major test of the hugely ambitious plans for the Paris Games. The transfer of the flame onshore from a 19th-century tall ship will mark the start of a 12,000-km torch relay across mainland France and the country's far-flung overseas territories.

Organisers are hoping the first public spectacle of their much-hyped "iconic" Olympics - just 79 days away - will help build excitement after a damaging row about ticket prices and ongoing concerns about security.

"It's something we've been waiting for a very long time," chief organiser Tony Estanguet told reporters on Monday. "It's here. One hundred years after the last Games, the Games are coming home."

When the Paris opening ceremony begins on July 26, it will be the first time the city has played host for a century after previous editions in 1924 and 1900. France sees itself at the



The Olympic Flame, which began its journey from Athens, the city of the first modern Games, will be reaching Marseilles by ship Wednesday.

heart of the modern Olympic movement after a French aristocrat, Pierre de Coubertin, revived the idea of the Games as prac-

tised by the Greeks until the 4th century BC.

After the Covid-hit edition in Tokyo in 2021 and the corruption-tainted Rio

de Janeiro version in 2016, the Paris Olympics are seen as an important moment for the sporting extravaganza as a whole.

A measure of public excitement will come when the flame is handed over on Wednesday evening from the Belem, a French trade vessel that has made a 12-day trip from Greece.

"We are going to do beautiful, grandiose, sober and accessible at the same time," Marseille mayor Benoit Payan promised to AFP ahead of the flame arriving, while recalling how his gritty port city was founded by Greek traders in 600 BC.

'Beautiful, grandiose': Over 1,000 other boats will accompany its approach to the harbour and organisers expect around 1,50,000 people to witness the transfer in the revamped marina of Marseille, which will host the sailing events during the Olympics.

Fireworks and a free concert are set to complete the show which will be broadcast live on French TV.

In the background, around 6,000 members of the security forces are expected to be on duty in a major test of the vast security plans put in place at a time when the country is

on its highest terror alert.

"It's completely unprecedented for the national police to mobilise so many people on the same day at the same place," regional police coordinator Cedric Esson told reporters on Monday.

The honour of being the first torch bearer will fall to four-time Olympic medal-winning swimmer Florent Manaudou. Other stars scheduled to take part in the parade, which continues on Thursday, include NBA-winning basketball player Tony Parker and footballer Didier Drogba, as well as charity and entertainment figures.

Opening ceremony: Extremely tight security will be a constant feature as the torch travels through more than 450 French towns and cities, and passes by dozens of tourist attractions including the Mont Saint Michel.

Around 200 security forces are set to be positioned permanently around it, including an anti-terror SWAT team and anti-drone operatives.

Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin has referred to

the risk of protests, including from far-left groups or environmental activists such as Extinction Rebellion.

Organisers have promised a "spectacular" and "iconic" Olympics, with much of the sport set to take place in temporary venues around the City of Light including at the Eiffel Tower and the Invalides.

In the absence of a much-feared security scare, the opening ceremony will take place in boats on the river Seine in a radical departure from past Games which have opened in the main stadium.

All of the major infrastructure has been completed with only two new permanent sporting venues built in a bid to reduce the financial cost and carbon emissions of the global extravaganza.

The idea of the torch rally harks back to the ancient Olympics when a sacred flame burned throughout the Games. The Paris Olympics will run from July 26-Aug.11, followed by the Paralympics from Aug. 28-Sept. 8. — AFP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	73511.85	-0.52
Nifty 50	22302.50	-0.62
S&P 500*	5,191.80	0.21
Dollar (₹)	83.51	-0.01
Pound Sterling (₹)	104.70	0.30
Euro (₹)	89.85	0.08
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	71,255▼114	0.16
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	82.80	-0.64
IN 10-Yr bond yield	7.129	0.021
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.461	-0.028

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Client Associates raises ₹300 cr for start-ups fund

Wealth management company Client Associates on Tuesday said it raised ₹300 crore for its maiden alternate fund CAAF, meant for investment in start-ups, and is looking to add another ₹200 crore in this fiscal. The first round of funding saw participation from domestic family offices and ultra high net-worth individuals. "Client Associates is now targeting to achieve up to around ₹500 cr," the company said.



Juniper inks pact with SJVN to supply 320 MW

Juniper Green Energy on Tuesday said it has inked a power purchase agreement (PPA) with state-owned SJVN to supply 320 MW renewable energy. To cater to this, the company will be developing 1GW of capacity across Gujarat and Rajasthan, a statement said. The 25-year PPA, secured at a tariff of ₹4.38 per unit, propels Juniper's operational and under construction capacity to about 2.5 GW.

Japan's SMFG invests ₹1,300 cr for expansion

Japan's Sumitomo Mitsui Financial Group (SMFG) on Tuesday announced a ₹1,300 crore investment in domestic non-bank lender SMFG India Credit Co (SMICC) through a rights issue. Pankaj Malik, chief financial officer of SMICC, said the ₹1,300 crore underscores its commitment to expand. SMICC has invested ₹150 crore in its wholly-owned subsidiary SMFG Grishashakti, according to a statement.

Premier Roadlines sets price band at ₹63-67 per share

Logistics solutions provider Premier Roadlines on Tuesday said it has fixed the price band at ₹63 to ₹67 per equity share for its initial public offer which will hit the capital market on Friday to mop up a little over ₹40 cr. The company's shares will open for public subscription on May 10 and end on May 14. Shares of the company will be listed on the NSE's SME platform Emerge, it said.

Food and non-food segments contributed to growth in consumption FMCG grows on rural demand

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 7

Rural demand for packaged consumer goods outpaced urban markets for the first time in five quarters, while the FMCG industry witnessed 6.5 per cent growth in sales volume in the March quarter, according to NielsenIQ. Rural markets, which have remained a significant concern for India's fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) companies for longer than a year, outpaced the urban market after 15 months. Rural demand was up by 7.6 per cent in the March quarter.

On the other hand, urban markets reported a 5.7 per cent year-on-year rise in demand and the growth was slower than the December quarter's 6.9 per cent increase. According to NielsenIQ, there was a "gradual uptick" in rural consumption that surpassed urban consumption in the March quarter. In the March quarter, the FMCG industry reported a 6.6 per cent growth in value terms, driven by a 6.5 per cent increase in volumes. The volume growth for this quarter was higher than Q1 2023, which stood at 3.1 per



● **WITHIN RETAIL** sector, modern trade continues to exhibit strong double-digit volume growth at 14.7 per cent. Traditional trade saw stable growth, with volumes up 5.6%.

cent. Both food and non-food sectors contributed to the growth in consumption in the first quarter of 2024, but non-food saw almost double the growth as compared to food. Home and personal care (HPC) categories have outperformed food categories.

While food categories witness higher unit purchases, the growth in HPC is largely driven by the popularity of larger pack sizes, NIQ head of customer success India, Roosevelt Dsouza said. Within the retail sector, modern trade continues to

exhibit strong double-digit volume growth at 14.7 per cent. Traditional trade experienced stable growth, with volumes registering 5.6 per cent growth in Q1 2024, compared to 5.3 per cent in the previous quarter. While Godrej Consumer Products found that urban and rural markets grew at "similar levels" in the March quarter, Dabur saw its rural demand outpacing urban demand as it expanded its footprint. Hindustan Unilever is optimistic about rural consumption as it projects high single-digit growth in volumes.

High streets offer yields higher than shopping centres

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 7

Despite limited retail space availability, the potential yield per sq metre of high streets is 238 per cent higher than shopping centres, finds a report. The potential revenue yield of high streets in FY24-25 is estimated to be \$3,981 sq m per annum whereas the yield of shopping centres is projected to be \$1177 per sq m per annum. This is mainly due to higher retail densities across some categories that fare well only on high streets, finds Knight Frank India.



● **CONSUMPTION IN** high streets is expected to be \$3 bn for FY25 against \$14 bn in operational shopping centre stock. Indian high streets occupy 7% of the total gross leasable area compared to the shopping centre stock.

However, the total consumption in high streets is expected to be nearly \$3 billion for FY 2024-25 against \$14 billion in operational shopping centre stock. This is due to lower stock availability. Indian high streets occupy nearly 7 per cent of the total gross leasable area as compared to the shopping centre stock across all cities. The number of stores in 340 shopping centres is 16,815 while that in 58 high streets is 7,246. "High streets constitute a vital aspect of urban life, often preferred by traditional shoppers. Despite grappling with inadequate infrastructure, many retail high street locales are now witnessing concerted endeavours towards urban renewal particularly in tier 1 cities," said Shishir Bajjal, Managing Director, Knight Frank India. Meanwhile, around 13.3 million square feet of retail shopping centre

space in top cities has been categorised as 'Ghost Shopping Centre'. The gross leasable area of Ghost Shopping Centres is up 59 per cent since 2022 from 57 to 64 by the end of 2023. Knight Frank India estimates that this has resulted in a loss of Rs 67 billion or \$798 million in 2023. National Capital Region (NCR) accounted for the highest Ghost Shopping Centre at 5.3 mn sq ft with a rise of 58 per cent, followed by Mumbai with 2.1 mn sq ft with a growth of 86 per cent and Bengaluru with 2 million sq ft with a rise of 46 per cent. Hyderabad is the only city to record a decline in the Ghost Shopping Centre stock by 19 per cent to 0.9 mn sq ft in 2023. Despite the addition of 8 new retail centres, the total number of shopping centres reduced to 263 in 2023 as 16 shopping centres were shut down over the last year.

UPI transactions in April cross 13.3 billion

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, MAY 7

Digital payments platform PhonePe has continued to be the market leader in the unified payments interface (UPI) ecosystem processing nearly half of the total transactions in April 2024. According to National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) data, PhonePe clocked 6.5 bn transactions across person-to-merchant (P2M) and person-to-person (P2P) transactions via UPI out of the total transactions of 13.3 billion in April, implying a market share of 49 per cent. On the other hand, Google Pay did five billion transactions translating to a market share of 37.5

per cent. However, another significant player Paytm, continued to lose market share. Paytm's number of transactions declined to 1.11 billion (8.3 per cent market share) from 1.21 billion in the previous two months. PhonePe has maintained the leadership position in the overall unified payments interface transactions for more than 40 months since November 2020. UPI transactions declined in volume in April by one per cent to 13.3 billion from 13.44 billion in March. On the same lines, the total transaction value in the same period fell 0.7 per cent to ₹19.64 lakh crore from ₹19.78 lakh crore in March.

Health insurance sector sees premium hit ₹1 lakh cr in FY24

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI MAY 7

The health insurance sector recorded a premium of close to ₹one lakh crore in FY2024, reflecting a robust compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 20 per cent. More than 50 crore citizens are now covered under health insurance, according to data from industry body General Insurance Council (GICL). The industry has settled more than 2.5 crore claims worth ₹75,000 crore in 2022-23. This is expected to rise significantly for FY 24 as efforts to streamline processes continue by the non-life insurers. Currently, more than 60 per cent of claims are settled on a cashless basis, with this only expected to



go up over time, with the industry initiative called 'Cashless Everywhere'. GICL said. The initiative allows policyholders to avail cashless treatment at over 40,000 hospitals across insurance networks. GICL is part of initiatives to make health insurance more accessible with customised products for senior citizens, simplification of policy wordings, expansion of cashless access, collaboration with hospitals and other stakeholders, partnership with

the National Health Authority to develop a digital healthcare ecosystem, including the National Health Claims Exchange (NHCE) to standardise data and ease information exchange. The effort is to get all the ecosystem players on one platform to ensure customer claims are handled at a fast pace, with a high level of transparency, it said. Efforts are also underway to increase market penetration in underserved regions, with a focus on reducing the protection gap and enhancing insurance access through rural and social targets to insurers. The industry is also focused on identifying and removing roadblocks to ensure speedy claim settlements, it said.



GOVT PREPARING STANDARDS FOR MEDICAL DEVICES

New Delhi, May 7: Government and industry should work to bring down import dependence in the medical device segment to below 50 per cent over five years, department of pharmaceuticals secretary Arunish Chawla said on Tuesday. Highlighting the need to focus on quality, he noted that the government is in the process of formulating standards for over 2,000 medical devices being produced in the country to make them globally competitive. "Right now our medical sector is 75-80 per cent import dependent. In the next five years, we want to bring down this import dependence to less than 50 per cent," Chawla said at an industry event to formulate better policies for the sector. The PLI scheme for medical devices has played a stellar role in the growth of the segment. "Around 150 medical devices, which used to be imported earlier, are now being produced in India," Chawla said. — PTI

INOX Air plans to set up hydrogen unit

New Delhi, May 7: INOX Air Products on Tuesday said it will set up its first green hydrogen project with an annual capacity of 190 tonnes at Chittorgarh in Rajasthan. The clean energy will be supplied to Asahi India Glass Limited (AIS) under a 20-year offtake agreement, the company said in a statement. "This will be India's first-ever green hydrogen plant for the float glass industry. The plant will have a capacity to generate up to 190 tonne green hydrogen per annum through the electrolysis process," it said. The project will be powered by solar energy. INOX aims to commission the project by July 2024. The project is expected

to reduce carbon emissions by around 1,250 metric tonnes (MT) annually and 25,000 MT over the 20-year period. Siddharth Jain, Managing Director of INOX Air Products, stated, "We are proud to begin our green hydrogen journey as we partner AIS for their Chittorgarh facility, and giving shape to our first green hydrogen plant. Under the leadership of PM Modi, our country has laid tremendous focus on green economy, supported by a comprehensive National Green Hydrogen Mission, and an ambition to make India net-zero by 2070." The company did not disclose any financial details related to the project. — PTI

DRL SEES Q4 NET INCREASE 36% TO ₹1,307 CRORE

New Delhi, May 7: Dr Reddy's Laboratories on Tuesday reported a 36 per cent increase in its consolidated profit after tax at ₹1,307 crore for the quarter ended March 2024, aided by robust sales in the US market. The Hyderabad-based drug major had reported a profit after tax of ₹959 crore in the corresponding period of the previous fiscal. Revenue increased to ₹7,083 crore from ₹6,297 cr in the fourth quarter of FY23. For the full year ended on March 31, the drug major said its PAT rose to ₹5,568 crore as compared with ₹4,507 crore in 2022-23 financial year. Revenue was ₹27,916 cr for FY24 as against ₹24,588 cr in FY23. — PTI

Profit booking by FPIs trigger selling in market

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, MAY 7

Heavy profit booking by the foreign portfolio investors led to sharp fall in mid and small-cap stocks along with select heavy weights for the third consecutive session. The Sensex closed 383.69 points lower at 73,511 while Nifty-50 closed at 22,302.5, down 140.2 points. The foreign portfolio investors were net sellers of equities worth about ₹3,668.8 cr while domestic institutions were net buyers by ₹2,304.5 crore. The broader indices fall was bigger as BSE Midcap index fell 1.9 per cent and BSE Small-cap index fell 1.65 per cent. PSU stocks also saw continued profit taking as BSE PSU index fell 2.37



per cent. The volatility index, NSE's India VIX hit a 52 week high of 17.56 intraday as it was up 5.78 per cent causing more caution among investors. Among sectoral indices BSE IT (0.55 per cent) and FMCG (1.80 per cent) closed higher while realty, metals, power and oil and gas were down by more than two per cent each. "Despite positive global cues, the domestic market continued to consolidate and is witnessing profit booking due to various

factors, including a low turnout in the ongoing election and premium valuations. However, fast-moving consumer goods remained the biggest sectoral gainer, driven by improving volume growth from rural areas on favourable monsoon expectations," said Vinod Nair, head-research, Geojit Financial Services. "This rise in volatility index aligns with historical trends, as the VIX typically climbs before major events like general elections. In 2019, it saw a 150 per cent jump (from 12 to 30), and in 2014, it spiked 212 per cent (from 12.5 to 39). Based on this historical context, a further increase in the VIX is likely," said Santosh Meena, head-research, Swastika Investmart.

Jaiprakash Associates defaults on ₹4,616 cr loans

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, MAY 7

Jaiprakash Associates Ltd (JAL) on Monday said that it has defaulted on loans worth ₹4,616 crore, including principal of ₹1,751 crore and interest payments of ₹2,865 crore. "Total borrowing (including interest) of the

company is ₹29,805 crore, repayable by 2037, against which only ₹4,616 crore is overdue as on April 30, 2024," JAL informed the exchanges. The loans pertained to various banks, and the nature of the obligation is fund-based working capital, non-fund-based working capital, term loans

and FCCBs (foreign currency convertible bonds). Out of its debt of ₹29,805 crore, JAL plans to transfer ₹18,955 crore to a special purpose vehicle (SPV). This transfer, which is part of a Scheme of Arrangement, awaits approval from the National Company Law

Tribunal (NCLT) and has already been endorsed by all relevant stakeholders. "The company has been taking steps to reduce the borrowings. After the proposed divestment of the cement business and the restructuring are taken into consideration, the borrowing will get almost to nil," JAL said.

BIG | GADGET

Tablets could get an upgrade with a new processor optimised for AI work

Apple likely to showcase new iPads

Cupertino, May 7: Apple plans to hold a virtual event where it is expected to show new iPad models, some of which could come with a new chip aimed at speeding up artificial intelligence tasks carried out on the devices. Its latest product launch event comes as the Silicon Valley heavyweight trails Big Tech rivals as they race to build AI into its products across their businesses and dominate the emerging technology. The tech giant often introduces new iPads in May, a time when education customers are mak-

ing purchasing decisions for the next academic year. But in recent years, Apple has started to transform its pricey models into devices for creative and business professionals with its iPad Pro models. It is these tablets, which currently come with Apple-designed chips that earlier appeared in the company's MacBook laptops, that could get an upgrade with a new processor optimised for AI work. But precisely what AI features the new chips could power might not become fully clear until

● **THE TECH GIANT** often introduces new iPads in May, when education customers are making purchasing decisions for next academic year. In recent years, Apple made its pricey models into devices for creatives. Apple holds its annual software developer conference next month. For now, many AI features - such as helping zoom in on a user during a video call and slightly altering the look of their eyes to make it look as

though they are looking directly into the camera - are not likely to inspire a wave of upgrades, according to some analysts. "Is it really enough for people to look into it and buy them? Probably not," said Mikako Kitagawa, an analyst at Gartner. "It has to be some kind of remarkable experience." Apple rivals Microsoft and Alphabet's Google have dived headlong into AI, bringing chatbots to act as virtual assistants. While those companies' stocks have surged to record highs, Apple's share have fallen 6% year

to date as it struggles with weak iPhone demand and tough competition in China, and as investors wait for it to show how it will leverage AI tech. Apple Chief Executive Tim Cook said last week the company is "very bullish about our opportunity in generative AI" and plans to make more announcements later. Carolina Milanesi, an analyst with Creative Strategies, said upgraded iPads could be a way for Apple to get new chips onto the market ahead of its developer conference next month. — Reuters

Investments in mutual funds grow three-fold

New Delhi, May 7: Investment in mutual funds almost trebled to ₹1.79 lakh crore in 2022-23 in three years from ₹64,084 crore in 2020-21. It was ₹1.6 lakh crore in 2021-22.



The household investment in shares and debentures almost doubled to ₹2.06 lakh crore in 2022-23 from ₹1.07 lakh crore in three years from 2020-21. It was ₹2.14 lakh crore in 2021-22, according to National Account Statistics 2024 of the ministry of statistics and programme implementation. Bank advances (loans) to households have also doubled in three years to ₹11.88 lakh crore in 2022-23 from ₹6.05 lakh crore in 2020-21. It was ₹7.69 lakh crore in 2021-22. Loans to households by financial corporations and non-banking financial corporations increased also four-fold to ₹3.33 lakh crore in 2022-23 from ₹93,723 crore in 2020-21. They were ₹1.92 lakh crore in 2021-22. Net household savings declined sharply by about ₹9 lakh crore to ₹14.16

lakh crore in three years to 2022-23. The net household savings peaked at ₹23.29 lakh crore in 2020-21. These have been on the decline since then, the ministry of statistics and programme implementation data showed. The net household savings declined to ₹17.12 lakh crore in 2021-22 and dipped further to a five-year low of ₹14.16 lakh crore in 2022-23. The previous low of net household savings was ₹13.05 lakh crore in 2017-18 which increased to ₹14.92 lakh crore in 2018-19 and ₹15.49 lakh crore in 2019-20, the report further showed. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Wembanyama named NBA Rookie of the Year

New York: San Antonio Spurs star Victor Wembanyama won the 2024 NBA Rookie of the Year award, the league announced on Monday, marking the first time a Frenchman has captured the honor. The 20-year-old center, a 7-foot-4 (2.24m) prodigy who was the top pick in last year's NBA Draft, averaged 21.4 points, 10.6 rebounds, 3.9 assists, a league-high 3.6 blocked shots and 1.2 steals a game in his impressive debut campaign. Wembanyama was a unanimous selection, taking all 99 first-place votes, the first unanimous top rookie pick since Karl-Anthony Towns in 2016. "My goals were always to have my team as best as I could and to get better as the year went on," Wembanyama told US NBA telecaster TNT. "I knew that in order to do this I had to be individually good on the court and dominant so it was a huge thing for me, a big thing to get. "It has always been really important and I'm glad it's finally official." Chet Holmgren, a center for Western Conference champion Oklahoma City, was second and Charlotte's Brandon Miller third in the voting. Under the guidance of Spurs coach Gregg Popovich, Wembanyama became the third San Antonio player to win the award after fellow big men David Robinson in 1990 and Tim Duncan in 1998.

Bangladesh seal T20 series with nine-run victory

Chittagong: Bangladesh survived a late onslaught from Faraz Akram to beat Zimbabwe by nine runs in the third Twenty20 international and seal the five-match series 3-0 in Chittagong on Tuesday. Playing his first match in the series, Faraz hit an unbeaten 34 off 19 balls, a record for any Zimbabwean batting at number 10, but the visitors still finished short at 156-9. Faraz and Wellington Masakadza put on 54 for the ninth wicket to lift the side from 91-8. The visitors needed 21 runs from the final over but Mohammad Saifuddin bowled Masakadza in the first ball to put Bangladesh back on top. Saifuddin, who made 3-42, held his nerve to concede only three runs from the last three balls. Towhid Hridoy earlier scored his maiden Twenty20 international with 57 off 38 balls, helping the hosts recover from a sluggish start after they were put in to bat first. Jaker Ali provided Towhid ample support with 44 off 34 balls as the pair shared 87 for the fourth the wicket.

Swiatek feeling the squeeze from crowded Masters

Rome: After winning a gruelling final in Madrid three days ago world number one Iga Swiatek now has to quickly readjust to the clay in Rome for the Italian Open which began on Tuesday. Swiatek said she had spent the first two days in Rome "eating" after coming through "the most intense and crazy final" to avenge her loss to Aryna Sabalenka in last year's Madrid final with a three-hour 11-minute victory in the Spanish capital. The three-time French Open champion said that players were feeling rushed by the expanded format of Masters events which have ballooned to nearly two weeks long and which leave little or no time for physical and mental recovery. "Overall, the Tour is getting more and more demanding because of the length of the tournaments and all these mandatory rules, both on ATP and WTA," Swiatek said. "Scheduling-wise, the planning is going to be more important, sometimes even (missing) some tournaments that are important."

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TOP-ORDER TIP

Suryakumar has to bat at No. 3 in T20 World Cup, says Lara rooting for Team India

Dravid should have plans for superstars: Lara

New Delhi, May 7: India head coach Rahul Dravid will need a specific plan to get the best out of superstars Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma in the T20 World Cup in the Americas next month, the great Brian Lara said on Tuesday. As many as eight players from the 2022 edition of the ICC event find a place in the squad with the team continuing to back the unmatched experience of Kohli and Rohit.

"Sometimes when you have a team with a lot of superstars, you forget the plan and you believe that the superstars can do it. They just have to turn up. Sometimes you may feel, as a coach, intimidated, telling Sir Vivian Richards or Virat Kohli, you know exactly what you expect of them," Lara said.

Asked about the composition of the India squad, Lara gave the example of the highly experienced West Indies squad for the ODI World Cup in 1987 when Sir Vivian Richards-led side could not reach the semifinals.

"First of all, in terms of the players that were selected in the squad, let me start by saying that that's a dilemma that a lot of countries have faced in the past. The West Indies in 1988 (1987 actually) is one example," he said.

"Obviously when you have such great players,

Lara said given the big names that make the Indian squad, Dravid will have his hands full on the planning front.

"You've got a lot of exciting young players coming out and you also have that sort of conundrum. India have gone with a team that has experience. My advice, and it's not my criticism, it's my advice, to Rahul Dravid is to make sure and have a plan," Lara stated.

While he also agreed that Rinku Singh's omission was pure hard luck, Lara firmly believed that the team under Rohit Sharma could go the distance in this edition.

"The team is capable of winning the World Cup. Yes, it's a team that have maybe a couple of youngsters missing because of the situation. But I still believe that if they plan properly, India could win the World Cup," Lara said.

—PTI



Suryakumar Yadav during a training session.

including Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Axar Patel and Ravindra Jadeja, the last two being all-rounders. Lara sees only a couple of them playing in the eleven.

"In terms of spinners, I don't want to dig too deep into having four spinners because I don't think you're going to play four spinners. But I like the fact that Chahal is there. He is not just an IPL star. You look at him, oh, you look at the brains that he put behind the ball, the deliveries, he's out-thinking the batter."

"And also, Kuldeep. So, I see those guys are guys who are going to get wickets for you, not just look to restrain the battle or scared to bowl an attacking delivery."

Asked about the two finalists of the World Cup, Lara picked India and West Indies.

The talk around Kohli's strike rate has been incessant but Lara reckons players like him are needed in the playing eleven.

"You have to have a player like Virat in the playing eleven," Lara added.

—PTI

Rohit's presence will be key: Yuvi

New Delhi, May 7: Rohit Sharma is a sensible captain who takes good decisions under pressure and his presence will be crucial for India, feels former all-rounder Yuvraj Singh who wishes to see his "close friend" win the elusive T20 World Cup next month.

Besides reaching the final of the 50-over World Cup and the WTC Final last year, India made the semifinals of the 2022 T20 World Cup under Rohit's captaincy.

The opener is set to lead the 'Men in Blue' once again at the T20 World Cup in the Caribbean and USA, starting on June 2.

"(Rohit's presence is going to be) very crucial. I think we need a really good captain, a sensible captain who takes decisions well under pressure. And he's the one to take them," Yuvraj, who is the T20 World Cup 2024 ambassador, told ICC.



Sanju Samson with Rohit Sharma.

The World Cup 2023 final loss to Australia saw India's quest for an ICC title stretch to 10 years with their last victory dating back to the Champions Trophy in 2013 under the leadership of Mahendra Singh Dhoni.

Yuvraj feels India needs

someone with Rohit's expertise to lead the Indian team at the marquee event.

"He was the captain when we lost in the (Cricket World Cup) 50-over final (in 2023). He has won five IPL trophies as a captain. I think we need

somebody like him to captain India."

Yuvraj has witnessed Rohit's journey since the 37-year-old made his debut for the Indian team as a teenager way back in 2007.

Recalling his first impressive of the flamboyant opener, Yuvraj

Yuvraj Singh wishes to see his "close friend" Rohit Sharma win the elusive T20 World Cup.

joked "Very poor English."

"Very funny guy. From the streets of Borivali (in Mumbai), we always tease him. But a great guy at heart."

Yuvraj's final season as an active cricketer came under Rohit's captaincy at MI.

"The more success he's had, he has never changed as a person. That's the beauty of Rohit Sharma. Fun-loving, always having fun with the guys, A great leader on the park and one of my closest friends from cricket."

"I really want to see Rohit Sharma with a World Cup trophy and a World Cup medal. He really deserves it."

—PTI

Rejuvenated Amir back for 'unfinished work'

Karachi, May 7: Rejuvenated fast bowler Mohammad Amir said he has "unfinished work" at next month's T20 World Cup, 15 years after dazzling as a teenager when Pakistan last lifted the trophy. The 32-year-old, who was jailed for spot-fixing in 2011, came out of retirement last month and is grateful to have another crack at the World Cup.

"It's a great feeling to be playing for Pakistan again," Amir told AFP by phone from Lahore this week ahead of the tournament in the United States and the West Indies beginning on June 2.

"I want to complete the unfinished work and, for me, the short-term goal is to win the World Cup."

The young Amir impressed in all formats after breaking into the Pakistan side in 2009 and playing at the T20 World Cup.



Mohammad Amir

Within a year he was one of the hottest young talents in cricket, but his precocious career then crashed to an infamous halt in 2010.

Amir was one of three Pakistan players banned from cricket for five years

for spot-fixing during a Test match in England after being caught in a newspaper sting. He was later jailed in the UK for six months.

Pakistan captain Salman Butt, who was deemed the ringleader, and fellow

quick bowler Mohammad Asif were also banned and the pair were jailed for 30 and 12 months respectively.

Amir returned after his ban to play for Pakistan in 2016 but announced a shock retirement in

December 2020 after poor form kept him from being selected.

He will form a potent pace bowling attack with spearhead Shaheen Shah Afridi, Naseem Shah and Haris Rauf that sees Pakistan ranked among the World Cup favourites.

"The Pakistan Cricket Board and the team management have shown trust in me so I have to fulfil that trust," said Amir.

"I have come back after four years and when you play for your country the feeling cannot be described."

Amir played three of the four T20 home matches against New Zealand last month, taking three wickets in a 2-2 drawn series, and said he felt part of the attack again.

"To be honest I felt fitter than in 2019 and until you are fit you cannot express yourself, so I am ready to do better and better," said

Amir.

He will be in action when Pakistan travel to Ireland for three T20s in Dublin on May 10, 12 and 14.

Pakistan then move to England to play the defending T20 world champions in Leeds (May 22), Birmingham (May 25), Cardiff (May 28) and London (May 30).

Village boy to hero

Brought up in Changa Bangial village in Punjab province, some 60 kilometres from the capital Islamabad, Amir was determined to make his name in cricket after his five older brothers introduced him to playing.

He was picked out at the age of 15 by none other than great left-armers Wasim Akram at a fast bowling camp and within two years grew in height and overcame a stress fracture of the back.

Amir said now he only wanted to remember the

good events in his career.

"The 2009 Twenty20 World Cup winning memories are special and excite me to this day," said Amir, who took six wickets in seven matches in the tournament.

They included the prize dismissal of Sri Lanka opener Tillakaratne Dilshan -- the player of the tournament -- in Pakistan's eight-wicket final victory.

"I was selected for the first time and then became part of a champion team."

"When I landed (back) at Rawalpindi airport to go to my village there were so many cars and they were showering flowers on me," he recalled.

"I am lucky that I am still playing. When I came, I was the youngest in the team, so here I am having another chance to win the World Cup and that is the target for me and my team."

—AFP