

THE ASIAN AGE

LONDON THURSDAY 9 MAY 2024



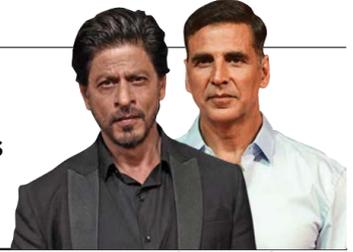
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Molestation case: Bengal gov to show CCTV footage to 100 people, except Mamata, police



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WINDOWS



Actress Sonali Kulkarni during an event in Mumbai on Wednesday. — PTI

AI Express cancels over 80 flights after its crew call in sick

New Delhi: Hundreds of passengers were stranded at several airports after more than 80 flights of Air India Express got cancelled Tuesday night after over 200 senior cabin crew reported sick to protest against alleged mismanagement at the Tata Group-owned airline. Apart from going on mass sick leave, the staff has also switched off their mobiles. This turbulence in the Tata group comes nearly a month after another carrier Vistara witnessed pilot woes, forcing it to cancel more than 100 flights. An Air India Express spokesperson said the airline is engaging with the cabin crew members to understand the reasons for reporting sick and apologised for the flight disruptions. Meanwhile, the civil aviation ministry has sought a report from Air India Express. The airline is to operate 360 daily flights during the summer schedule that started in the last week of March. Full report on Page 2

Maldives minister in India for talks

New Delhi: Amid a diplomatic standoff, Maldives foreign minister Moosa Zameer on Wednesday arrived in New Delhi on an official visit to India to discuss bilateral ties. This is Mr Zameer's first official visit to India since assuming office. — PTI Full report on Page 3

Sibal to contest polls for SCBA prez's post

New Delhi: Senior advocate Kapil Sibal has announced his candidature for the post of Supreme Court bar association president, elections to which are slated to be held on May 16. A Harvard Law School graduate, Mr Sibal was the additional solicitor-general of India during 1989-90. Full report on Page 2

COUNTERPOINT



I came to know that you are attending my rival party candidate's rallies!



'Has Cong got tempo loads of cash? Dal me kuch kala hai' Why has Rahul gone all quiet on Adani-Ambani issue?: PM

N. VAMSI SRINIVAS HYDERABAD, MAY 8

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday alleged that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi received "tempo loads" of ill-gotten money from the country's two top industrialists - Gautam Adani and Mukesh Ambani - after the 2024 Lok Sabha elections were announced, and, as a result, he has stopped criticising them.

Speaking at a public meeting in the temple town of Vemulawada in Telangana, the Prime Minister demanded that the Congress explain to the nation whether "Shehzada" (Mr Gandhi), who for the past five years chanted "Ambani-Adani", stuck a "sauda" (deal) with them and stopped abusing them. "Zaroor dal me kuch kala hai. Paanch saal tak Ambani, Adani ko gaali deei, aur raaton raat gaaliyaa band ho gayi. Matlab koi na koi chori kaa maal tempo bhar ke aap ne paaya hai (definitely, something amiss. For five years, you criticised Ambani and Adani, but overnight you stopped



Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a public meeting in Telangana's Karimnagar on Wednesday. — PTI

THE PM said Rahul Gandhi started chanting about five industrialists after his efforts to portray the Rafale deal in poor light fell flat. He then started talking about Ambani and Adani

abusing them. It means you have received some or the other ill-gotten money loaded in tempo," he said. It is for the first time that Mr Modi referred to the country's two most powerful industrialists in his election campaign and to everyone's shock, he

also talked about tempo loads of black money still being in circulation in the country post-demonetisation. "I am asking Shehzada from this soil of Telangana to explain how much money he took from Mr Adani and Mr Ambani? How much "kala dhan" (black money) did he loot? Whether the Congress received tempo loads of currency notes," he said. Mr Modi said Mr Gandhi started chanting about five industrialists after his efforts to portray the

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PM is attacking friends as chair shaking: Kharage

New Delhi, May 8: Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Wednesday claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's chair is "shaking" after three phases of the Lok Sabha polls as he has started attacking his own "friends" and this shows the "real trend" of the result. His remarks came after Mr Modi during a rally in Telangana, said the Congress should explain to people why it has stopped raising the "Ambani-Adani" issue as its "Shehzada" used to do for the past five years and asked if it has struck a "deal".

"The times are changing. Friends are no longer friends". After the completion of three phases of elections, today the Prime Minister has started attacking his own friends. It is becoming clear that Modiji's chair is shaking. This is the real trend of the results," Mr Kharge said. — PTI

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Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra during a roadshow in Rae Bareilly on Wednesday. — PTI

Pitroda quits post as row builds over 'Africans' jibe

PM, BJP seek Rahul's response on aide's racist remarks; Congress keeps distance

ASHHAR KHAN NEW DELHI, MAY 8

Amid the ongoing Lok Sabha elections, Congress leader Sam Pitroda sparked another controversy when he compared South Indians to Africans, embarrassing his party and handing over to the BJP another issue to attack the Opposition. Sure enough, Prime Minister Narendra Modi led the BJP's all-out attack on the Congress over Mr Pitroda's racial analogy, forcing the grand old party on the back foot and its overseas chief to resign on Wednesday.

Speaking to a news outlet, Mr Pitroda described India as a "... diverse country... where people in the east look like Chinese, people in the west look like Arabs, people in the north look like maybe whites, and people in the south look like Africans". Campaigning in Telangana, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was quick to pounce on Mr Pitroda's remark, claiming that the



Sam Pitroda

THE CONG LEADER described India as a "... diverse country... where people in the east look like Chinese, people in the north look like maybe whites, and people in the south look like Africans"

Congress sought to defeat President Droupadi Murmu in the presidential poll as her "skin colour is dark". Hitting out at the Congress, Mr Modi demanded a response from Rahul Gandhi, saying that the country "won't tolerate disrespect on the basis of the colour of skin". Repeating his "shehza-

da" (prince) barb for Mr Gandhi, Mr Modi said, "Shehzade, you will have to answer. The country will not tolerate the disrespect of our countrymen on the basis of their skin color. Modi will definitely not tolerate it."

Caught in a tricky situation, the Congress immediately "distanced" itself from the racist remarks. By Wednesday evening, Mr Pitroda had resigned from the post of chief of the India Overseas Congress.

Taking to X, Jairam Ramesh said, "Mr Pitroda has decided to step down as chairman of the Indian Overseas Congress of his own accord. The Congress president has accepted his decision." He added: "The analogies given by Mr Pitroda for India's diversity are extremely wrong and unacceptable. The Indian National Congress completely disassociates itself from these analogies."

However, the BJP was unrelenting in its attack on the Congress over

Shah warns against Opp's 'Babri lock'

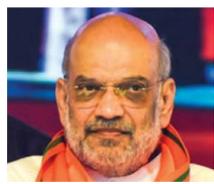
'Who will be INDIA PM?' Jabs Cong, SP on Muslim quota

AMRESH SRIVASTAVA with agency inputs NEW DELHI/LAKHIMPUR KHERI/HARDOI/KANNAUJ, MAY 8

Addressing back-to-back election rallies in Uttar Pradesh's Lakhimpur Kheri, HarDOI and Kannauj on Wednesday, Union home minister Amit Shah said that if the INDIA bloc parties come to power after the ongoing Lok Sabha polls, it will put a "Babri" lock at the Ram temple in Ayodhya. Mr Shah alleged that the leaders of the Opposition

coalition did not attend the consecration ceremony at the Ram temple in Ayodhya in their bid to appease their votebank. At the rallies, Mr Shah accused Congress leader Rahul Gandhi of pushing Pakistan's agenda. He said Mr Gandhi will be defeated in Rae Bareilly as well and that "he should settle down in Italy, the only place left for him".

At a rally in support of Union minister of state for home Ajay Mishra, the BJP candidate from Lakhimpur Kheri, Mr Shah accused the



Amit Shah

Congress, the SP and the BSP of defaming the saffron party and Narendra Modi by saying if the Prime Minister gets 400 seats in the ongoing election, reservations will be done away with.

Referring to SP leader Ram Gopal Yadav's statement in which he said the Ram temple issue is "bekar" (useless), Mr Shah said, "Ram Gopal ji says the temple is useless. Remember me, though it is not going to happen, if the Opposition parties come to power, they will put a Babri naam ka tala (Babri lock) at the Ram temple."

"All of you know who comprises their votebank. Uttar Pradesh will never support those who shy away from Lord Ram's

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JJP ready to back Cong to bring down Haryana govt

CM Saini denies BJP govt now in minority

Chandigarh, May 8: The BJP's former ally Jannayak Janata Party (JJP) on Wednesday said it is ready to help the Congress bring down the BJP government in Haryana, a day after three Independent MLAs withdrew support to it. However, chief minister Nayab Singh Saini asserted that his government is not in any trouble. Independent MLAs Sombir Sangwan (Dadri),

JJP LEADER Dushyant Chautala said if a no-confidence motion is brought against the Saini government, they will vote against them

Randhir Singh Gollen (Pundri) and Dharampal Gonder (Nilokheri) withdrew support to the ruling BJP in Haryana on Tuesday and announced that they would back the Congress, which claimed

that the Saini government is reduced to a minority and demanded the imposition of President's rule.

The fast-paced political developments in the state come at a time when the Lok Sabha polls are just a fortnight away and Assembly elections are scheduled to be held in October.

Speaking to reporters in Hisar, Jannayak Janata Party (JJP) leader

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India-Canada ties on boil again over Nijjar's death

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 8

Bilateral tensions between India and Canada show no signs of abating, as Canada once again accused India of involvement in the killing of pro-Khalistan extremist Hardeep Singh Nijjar on its soil in June last year. Ottawa's accusation comes just a day after New Delhi again condemned Canada for "providing criminal and secessionist elements with a safe haven and

political space". Speaking to the media in Ottawa on Wednesday (IST), Canada's minister of foreign affairs Melanie Joly said, "Our job is to protect Canadians and we stand by the allegations that a Canadian was killed on Canadian soil by Indian agents."

On the question of the relationship with India, Ms Joly said, "I think that it's always better when diplomacy remains private..."

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SC to deliver Kejriwal's interim bail order Friday

RAKESH K. SINGH NEW DELHI, MAY 8

The Supreme Court will deliver its order on granting interim bail to Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal in a money laundering case linked to the excise policy "scam" on Friday.

Justice Sanjiv Khanna, who headed the bench which heard Mr Kejriwal's petition against his arrest by the ED, said: "We will pronounce the order (on interim bail) on Friday. The main matter related to the challenge to arrest will also be taken on the same day."

Justice Khanna, who was sitting in a different combination with Justices M.M. Sundresh and Bela M. Trivedi, remarked on Wednesday after additional solicitor-general S.V. Raju, appearing for the Centre in a matter related to the Goods and Services Tax, sought a clarification on the listing of Mr Kejriwal's plea. On Tuesday, the Justice Khanna-led bench, also comprising Justice Dipankar Datta, had deferred its verdict on interim bail to Mr Kejriwal.

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Porn star Stormy Daniels testifies on sex with Trump in hotel suite

New York, May 8: Stormy Daniels, the porn star at the heart of Donald Trump's historic criminal trial, testified Tuesday in sometimes explicit detail - about an alleged 2006 sexual encounter with the former President in a hotel penthouse suite.

Mr Trump, 77, is accused of falsifying business records to reimburse his lawyer, Michael Cohen, for a \$130,000 hush money payment to Ms Daniels on the eve of his 2016 election against



Stormy Daniels

Hillary Clinton, when the lurid story of marital infidelity could have sunk his campaign.

"The people call Stormy Daniels," prosecutor Susan Hoffinger said as Mr Trump, who is seeking to recapture the White

House in November, sat at the defence table in the Manhattan courtroom flanked by his lawyers.

What followed was detailed testimony about the sexual encounter Ms Daniels said she had with Mr Trump while the former President stared on, stony faced.

Mr Trump has denied the affair, and his defence team tried - unsuccessfully - to have a mistrial declared, citing the "extremely prejudicial" nature of Ms Daniels' testimony. — AFP



Chinese President Xi Jinping and President of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic at the Palace of Serbia in Belgrade on Wednesday. Both countries signed an agreement to build a 'shared future', making the Balkan country the first in Europe to agree on such a document with Beijing. — AP

IN BRIEF

Sex racket busted in Gurgaon, 10 held

Gurgaon: A joint team of the CM flying squad and the local police last night busted a prostitution racket being run in a guesthouse here, said the police. The police arrested 10 accused allegedly involved in the prostitution, including two Uzbek women and two guesthouse operators named Dilbag and Sanjay, and registered an FIR in this regard. The arrested accused were produced in a city court on Wednesday and sent to the judicial custody, they added. According to the police, they had received a tip-off about an alleged sex racket being run at a guesthouse in the G Block of Sector 57. A special team was formed and a decoy customer was sent to the guesthouse, and he negotiated with the manager named Sanjeev, the police said. When the deal was finalised, the decoy customer entered the guesthouse and signalled the place, which raided the place. Six women were found on the spot, whose age is said to be between 24 and 34 years. Two women were from Uzbekistan, two from Bangladesh and one each from Assam and Kolkata. The women from Bangla-desh were allegedly found without visa, said the police. "We have registered an FIR under the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act and the Foreigners Act," the police said.

On Thalassemia Day, India Gate lit up in red

New Delhi: In an effort to raise awareness towards Thalassemia on the occasion of World Thalassemia Day, Sir Ganga Hospital illuminated the India Gate in red colour. Dr D.S. Rana, chairman, Sir Ganga trust society, said that it is important to prevent the disease by identifying the carriers with simple blood test. In the last 20 years, over 55,000 pregnancies have been screened in Sir Ganga Ram Hospital and not a single patient of thalassemia has been born. The hospital held event into two parts: a walkathon was held in the morning, and in the evening, Dr Rana was the chief guest at the historic event of illuminating the India Gate in red colour.

COP ARRESTED, 1 SUSPENDED OVER ₹4L EXTORTION

Gurgaon: The Gurgaon police has arrested a head constable and suspended a station house officer for allegedly extorting ₹4 lakh from a Delhi man who was arrested in a case of theft, an officer said on Wednesday. The two were deployed at the Civil Lines police station. According to the police, head constable Kulwinder was accused of extorting ₹4 lakh by a Delhi resident on May 3. In his complaint filed with DCP (West) Karan Goel, the victim, who deals in scrap, alleged that on April 24 HC Kulwinder had arrested him in a case of theft and subsequently produced him in a court. He alleged that after the appearance, Kulwinder demanded ₹4 lakh from him for not taking him on remand or framing him in another case. On April 26, his nephew gave ₹4 lakh to Kulwinder, said the police. Based on the complaint, an investigation was conducted by ACP city Mukesh Kumar, who found the allegations to be true. Kulwinder was booked under section 384 (extortion) of the IPC and Prevention of Corruption Act at Civil Line police station and arrested.

'It's great, green & trashy': Danish envoy flags bylane 'full of garbage'

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 8



Freddy Svane

In a major embarrassment for the national capital Delhi's civic agencies, Danish ambassador Freddy Svane set the cat among the pigeons on Wednesday afternoon by flagging a bylane full of trash adjoining his country's embassy in the posh Chanakyapuri area of the city. The Danish envoy posted a video of the trash and demanded an action by the civic agencies to clear it.

In the scathing video that he posted that reflected his

anguish and frustration at the surroundings, the Danish ambassador said, "Welcome to great, green and trashy New Delhi. Here we have the Danish Embassy and we have the Greek Embassy over there. This should be a service lane but here you see it's full of trash. People are just dumping whatever they like here. I hope somebody will listen to this and take action. No more nice words, my friends, just action. 'Dhanyavaad' (thanks)." Responding to the video the NDMC said, "NDMC welcomes feedback from any stakeholder for improving its services. In this regard, the social media message from H. E. Freddy Svane, Ambassador, Royal Danish Embassy was promptly acted upon, which was later acknowledged by the Ambassador himself to the media. Immediate steps have been taken on the plot of land (which is not a service lane) by lifting the dumped material."

2 docs, 7 staff held in RML bribery racket

AMRESH SRIVASTAVA NEW DELHI, MAY 8

The CBI on Wednesday unearthed a bribery racket at the top central government hospital in Delhi - Ram Manohar Lohia (RML) hospital and arrested two cardiologists on corruption charges.

Cardiology professor Ajay Raj and assistant professor Parvatagouda Channappagouda have been arrested for taking bribes from medical equipment suppliers to use their products and stents, the agency officials said.

The central anti-graft agency sleuths also nabbed medical equipment supplier Naresh Nagpal of Nagpal Technologies who paid ₹2.48 lakh to Parvatagouda for promoting the sale of medical equipment, Bharat Singh Dalal of Bharti Medical Technologies who bribed Raj using UPI twice, and Abrar Ahmed who paid bribes to the Cath Lab in charge in the hospital Rajnish Kumar, they said. Rajnish Kumar, clerks Bhuvral Jaiswal, Sanjay

Kumar, and Vikas Kumar have also been arrested.

All the arrested accused were produced before a special court here which sent them to the CBI custody till May 14.

The CBI alleged that Bhuvral Jaiswal took bribes for fixing appointments with doctors while Sanjay Kumar took bribes for fake medical certificates.

A probe revealed that the accused were collecting bribes from the patients and the medical equipment suppliers. "The agency arrested nine persons, including doctors, clerks of RML and middlemen and medical equipment suppliers after carrying out searches at around 15 locations, including the hospital on Wednesday," the agency officials said.

In its FIR the agency named a professor and an assistant professor of the cardiology department of RML, a senior technical in-charge, a nurse, two clerks, several private medical equipment supplier companies and unknown government servants.

24-yr-old man arrested for mowing down Cong leader

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 8

The Delhi police on Wednesday arrested a 24-year-old property dealer for allegedly mowing down a Congress leader with his mini SUV in Rohini's Prashant Vihar area, the police said. Harikishan Jindal, 62, a former district Congress committee president, died after being hit by a car while he was on a morning walk Tuesday near his house in Rohini's Prashant Vihar area.

According to deputy commissioner of police (Rohini) G.S. Sidhu, the car driver, Chirag Chaudhary, was arrested from his house in Sector 14, Rohini.

"On sustained questioning, Chaudhary revealed that he was going to drop some of his friends in Rohini, when he suddenly lost his control on a turn and hit Jindal," Mr Sidhu said. Chaudhary, who runs a property business, fled after the incident.

The officer said the vehicle, a white Grand Vitara, has also been seized.

Sibal to contest polls for SC Bar president

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 8

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal has announced his candidature for the post of president in the upcoming Supreme Court Bar association elections.

The veteran advocate has announced his candidacy after holding the post thrice between 1995 and 2002. Senior advocate Adish Aggarwala is currently the president of the SCBA.

A Harvard Law School graduate, Mr Sibal was designated as senior advocate in 1983. He had served as the additional solicitor-general of India

'Cong turncoats to help BJP secure votes in minority-dominated areas'

SHASHI BHUSHAN and BHASKAR HARI SHARMA NEW DELHI, MAY 8

After the induction of former Delhi Congress president Arvinder Singh Lovely and other local leaders Raj Kumar Chauhan, Neeraj Basoiya, Nasseeb Singh, and Amit Malik into the BJP, the saffron party is working on a strategy to make their best use in the Congress dominated pockets for the seven Lok Sabha seats in the national capital.

It is reliably learnt that the party may soon announce a fresh campaign plan to organise meetings of these leaders to woo Congress voters for the BJP candidates.

The BJP sources said, "Even though the Congress has been out of power in Delhi since 2013, there are still some pockets, particularly minority-dominated, in the city where they enjoy a strong presence and these former Congress leaders will help in transferring that vote to the BJP."

Mr Lovely, meanwhile, emphasised that his allegiance will now remain with the BJP.

"I will rather quit poli-

Over 90 AI Express flights cancelled after crews go on 'mass sick leave'

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agencies input NEW DELHI, MAY 8

Hundreds of passengers were stranded at several airports after more than 90 flights of Air India Express got cancelled on Tuesday night after over 200 senior cabin crew reported sick to protest against alleged mismanagement at the Tata group-owned airline.

Apart from going on mass sick leave, the staff has also switched off their mobiles.

This turbulence in the Tata group comes nearly a month after another carrier, Vistara, witnessed pilot woes, forcing it to cancel more than 100 flights.

Air India Express MD in a letter to the employees on Wednesday said the company leadership to ready to address the concerns of the employees. He added that the act of going

on mass leave is largely of L1 employees and is not representative of nearly 2000 employees of the AIE.

Earlier, an AIE spokesperson said that the airline is engaging with the cabin crew members to understand the reasons for reporting sick and apologised for the flight disruptions.

"A section of our cabin crew has reported sick at the last minute, starting last night, resulting in flight delays and cancellations. While we are engaging with the crew to understand the reasons behind these occurrences, our teams are actively addressing this issue to minimise any inconvenience caused to our guests as a result.

"We sincerely apologise to our guests for this unexpected disruption and emphasise that this situation does not reflect the standard of service we

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strive to provide. Guests impacted by cancellations will be offered a full refund or complimentary rescheduling to another date.

"Guests flying with us today are requested to check if their flight is affected, before heading to the airport," said the spokesperson of Air India Express.

The airline is to operate 360 daily flights during the summer schedule that started in the last week of

March. Hundreds of Air India Express passengers, mostly scheduled to travel to the Gulf nations, protested at airports in Kerala against last-minute flight cancellations. Some of them claimed that they were informed about the cancellations after the cancellation of security checks.

Flight disruptions are happening at various airports, including Kochi, Calicut, Delhi, and Bengaluru.

Discontent has been brewing among a section of the cabin crew at the low-cost carrier for some time now, especially after the start of the process to merge AIX Connect, formerly AirAsia India, with itself.

Aviation experts said the group is going through a merger which always leads to human resource issues. Late last month, a Union

representing a section of the Air India Express cabin crew alleged that the airline is being mismanaged and there is a lack of equality in the treatment of the staff.

Air India Express Employees Union (AIXEU) had also alleged that mismanagement of the affairs has affected the morale of the employees.

The Union has reportedly alleged that employees find themselves 'silenced' while attempting to address grievances, with management 'suppressing' dissenting voices on company platforms.

The employees have accused the management of posting discrimination.

The staff is also under tremendous pressure over feedback from passengers—three negative feedbacks may lead to sacking. Apart from this, some allowances also have been stopped.

SC to pass order on Kejriwal bail May 10

RAKESH K SINGH NEW DELHI, MAY 8

The Supreme Court will deliver its order on granting interim bail to Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal in a money laundering case linked to the excise policy "scam" on Friday.

Justice Sanjiv Khanna, who headed the bench that heard Mr Kejriwal's petition against his arrest in the case by the Enforcement Directorate, said, "We will pronounce the interim order (on interim bail) on Friday. The main matter related to the challenge to arrest will also be taken on the same day."

Justice Khanna, who was sitting in a different combination with Justices M.M. Sundresh and Bela M. Trivedi, remarked after additional solicitor general S.V. Raju, who was appearing for the Centre in a matter related to goods and services tax (GST), appeared for the Enforcement Directorate (ED).

Solicitor general Tushar Mehta, who also appeared for the ED, had opposed showing any leniency to Mr Kejriwal on account of the Lok Sabha polls and said granting interim bail to the AAP national convener would amount to creating a separate class for politi-



Arvind Kejriwal

cians. The top court has divided the hearing on Mr Kejriwal's petition against his arrest into two parts with the main petition challenging his arrest by the ED and seeking it to be declared illegal and the second issue relates to the grant of interim bail to enable him to campaign in the ongoing parliamentary polls.

The apex court reserved the order on Tuesday on the issue of grant of interim bail.

During the hearing on Tuesday, the top court said that if it grants interim bail to Mr Kejriwal, he cannot function as the chief minister as it will have a "cascading effect" on other issues.

"We are on the issue of propriety today, not on legality. We do not want anything to affect the functioning of the government," the bench had noted.

On Tuesday, the Rouse Avenue court had extended Mr Kejriwal's judicial custody till May 20.

AAP's 'Jail Ka Jawab Vote Se' again May 13

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 8



Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva and party leader Arvinder Singh Lovely during an interaction with the media in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PTI

tics instead of leaving the BJP," he said.

"Last time, I had taken the decision to quit Congress due to anger. This time, however, we have taken the decision with a cool head and much thought. Now, we will do politics here (in BJP) only or quit politics instead of leaving the party," Mr Lovely told this newspaper.

Mr Lovely is one of the 40 star campaigners of the BJP for the polls in Delhi.

He further hinted that many other leaders in the Delhi Congress will join the BJP in the coming days.

"Raj Kumar Chauhan

is a big leader in Northwest Delhi but his influence is not limited to that constituency only. Similarly, myself and Nasseeb Singh are based in the trans-Yamuna area where there are two seats. This is just the beginning; if the party allows, our other friends too will come," he said.

Mr Lovely thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP chief J.P. Nadda, Union minister Amit Shah, and the Delhi BJP for his entry into the saffron outfit, saying he had friendly relations with many leaders in the party earlier also.

HC junks PIL seeking system for CM to run govt from jail

SANJAY KAW NEW DELHI, MAY 8

The Delhi high court on Wednesday dismissed with ₹1 lakh cost a public interest litigation (PIL) seeking appropriate arrangements for chief minister Arvind Kejriwal to run the Delhi government from jail and directions to the media restraining them from running "misleading news" compelling him to resign.

The Supreme Court will also deliver its verdict on granting interim bail to Mr Kejriwal in connection with a money laundering case on Friday.

The high court said since Mr Kejriwal had already filed a petition before the apex court challenging his arrest by the ED and the top court is seized of the matter, "no orders for allowing the CM to interact with his ministers and MLAs via video conferencing is called for."

A high court division bench of acting chief justice Manmohan and justice Manmeet Pritam Singh Arora said it can "neither impose censorship by directing media channels not to air their views nor proclaim emergency or martial law by preventing the CM's political rivals from organising any rally/protests or taking any steps/making a statement calling for his resignation."

9 held in pan-India police crackdown on Lawrence Bishnoi-Goldy Brar gang

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 8

In a pan-India crackdown of the Delhi police's special cell against the criminal module of absconding alleged terrorist Satinderjeet Singh aka Goldy Brar and Lawrence Bisnoi, nine members were arrested while a juvenile was apprehended, the police said on Wednesday, adding that all arrestees were connected with each other through social media sites including Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and other encrypted chat platforms.

The official said that the operation spanned across seven Indian states—Delhi, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and with their arrest, contract killing /heinous crime in Delhi and other states have been averted.

The official said that some of the arrested persons are previously involved in criminal activities at the behest of Goldy Brar and Lawrence Bisnoi. Two have been arrested from Delhi, one from Rajasthan, one from Madhya Pradesh, two from UP, two from Punjab, one from Haryana and one from Bihar.

Sharing the details, the police said that reliable inputs were received that an interstate module operating at the behest of notorious gangsters Lawrence

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THE OFFICIAL said that the operation spanned across seven Indian states—Delhi, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and with their arrest, contract killing /heinous crime in Delhi and other states have been averted.

Bisnoi, lodged in jail and Goldy Brar, based abroad is very active in Delhi, NCR and adjoining states for committing offences of extortions, killings and other heinous crimes.

"While monitoring the activities of this syndicate some incriminatory conversation amongst the members of this syndicate

sitting in different states came to notice through technical surveillance wherein they were conspiring to carry out some killing/heinous crime which was further corroborated by source input," said deputy commissioner of police (special cell) Prateeksha Godara.

It was also learnt that these gangsters had also procured weapons. "To avert the nefarious designs of these members, a case was registered at Special Cell on April 24 under relevant provisions of IPC. Multiple teams were constituted and dispatched immediately at different locations in all the states where these members were located," said the DCP.

3 men get life imprisonment in 2011 murder-kidnapping case

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 8

A Delhi court has sentenced three men to life imprisonment in a kidnapping and murder case, saying though the offences were "heinous", capital punishment was not being awarded as there was a chance of the convicts being reformed.

The court also did not award the maximum punishment of death sentence, observing that the crime was not within the ambit of the 'rarest of the rare' doctrine. Additional sessions judge Virender Kumar Kharta was hearing the case

against the trio who were convicted under Indian Penal Code (IPC) sections 302 (murder) 120 B (criminal conspiracy) and 364 A (kidnapping for ransom etc.).

As per the facts of the case, the court noted that Anadil Hasan, Mehboob Alam and Raju Lal Jaat kidnapped Rohit Ahlawat (27) for ransom and later murdered him in the intervening night of November 20-21, 2011. In a judgment pronounced on Monday, the court said that the convicts were not involved in any crime earlier, nor did they commit any penal offence after being released on bail.

BSES discoms launch plan for replacement of old ACs

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 8

The BSES power discoms have launched a scheme for the consumers in the city to exchange their old air conditioners with energy-efficient ones with discounts of up to 63 per cent, according to a statement.

The summer season this year is anticipated to be intense with temperatures already reaching 40°C in Delhi and expected to rise even higher, it said.

The statement said cooling load can account for up to 50 per cent of a household's or a discom's

annual energy expenses. Switching to a 5-star energy-efficient air conditioner can significantly reduce this cost, it added.

The BSES Rajdhani Power Limited (BRPL) and the BSES Yamuna Power Limited (BYPL) have launched a limited-period 'AC replacement scheme' in partnership with leading air conditioner manufacturers.

This initiative will help domestic consumers of South, West, East, and Central Delhi to replace their old air conditioners with new and energy-efficient 5-star ACs.

SHORT TAKES

HC quashes Maha dists renaming plea

Mumbai: The Bombay high court on Wednesday dismissed petitions challenging notifications issued by the government officially renaming Aurangabad and Osmanabad cities as Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar and Dharashiv. The court held that notifications issued by the state government do not suffer from any illegality and petitions were dismissed as "bereft of merit". A division bench of chief justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya and Justice Arif Doctor said, "We have no hesitation to hold that the notification issued by the state government renaming Aurangabad and Osmanabad does not suffer from any illegality." While rejecting the plea, the bench quoted William Shakespeare's play "Romeo and Juliet" and said, "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet."

Covishield no longer to be used in India

London/New Delhi: United Kingdom-based pharmaceutical major AstraZeneca has started global withdrawal of its Covid-19 vaccine, which was provided in India as "Covishield" in partnership with Serum Institute of India, days after it admitted to rare side effects of blood clotting and low platelet counts. The withdrawal has been initiated due to a surplus of available updated vaccines since the pandemic, the company said in a statement. AstraZeneca had partnered with Oxford University to develop the Covid-19 vaccine, which was sold in India as Covishield and as Vaxzevria in Europe. The European medicines agency, the medicines regulator for the European Union (EU), issued a notice on Tuesday to confirm that Vaxzevria "known as Covishield in India" is no longer authorised for use in the 27-member economic bloc after AstraZeneca (AZ) voluntarily withdrew its authorisation in March. It said it will similarly work with regulatory authorities worldwide to initiate withdrawal of vaccine. —PTI

Phase 3 turnout climbs to 65.68%

New Delhi: The updated approximate voter turnout figures for polling in the third phase of the ongoing Lok Sabha elections stands at 65.68 per cent, the Election Commission said on Wednesday. The figures were retrieved at 10 pm on Wednesday, it said. The figures will continue to be updated by the field level officers, the poll panel said. Voting for the third phase was held on Tuesday in 93 constituencies spread over 11 states and Union Territories with stray incidents of violence.

INDIA REVIEWS HAJ READINESS IN SAUDI ARABIA

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 8

With over 1.75 lakhs Indian pilgrims scheduled to visit Saudi Arabia under the 2024 Haj quota this year, India conducted a review of preparations for Haj in Jeddah and Madinah during the visit of the MEA's secretary Muktesh K. Pardeshi to Saudi Arabia, New Delhi said on Wednesday, adding that the visit from May 4 to 7 was "aimed at strengthening the strategic partnership" between the two nations.



Muktesh K. Pardeshi

"During his visit, the secretary met with vice-Haj minister Abdul Fattah Mashat and discussed logistical arrangements and infrastructure developments aimed at the welfare and comfort for pilgrims," the MEA said. In Riyadh, Mr Pardeshi held substantive discussions with Saud bin Mohammed Al Sati, deputy minister for political affairs at the Saudi ministry of foreign affairs, and reviewed the progress under the strategic partnership council along with several topics of bilateral interest, it said. "The secretary met with assistant minister of electricity affairs Nasser Al Qahtani and assistant minister for petroleum and gas Mohammed Albrahim to discuss deepening energy cooperation," it said.

Defeat a foregone conclusion, PM scared of own shadow: Cong 'Modi's chair shaking, he has started attacking his friends'

New Delhi, May 8: Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Wednesday claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's chair is "shaking" after three phases of the Lok Sabha polls, as he has started attacking his own "friends" and this shows the "real trend" of the result.

His remarks came after the Prime Minister, during a rally in Telangana, said the Congress should explain to people why it had stopped raising the "Ambani-Adani" issue what its "Shehzada" had been doing for the past five years and asked if it has struck a "deal".

"The times are changing. Friends are no longer friends! After the completion of three phases of elections, today the Prime Minister has started attacking his own friends.



Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury during an election rally in West Bengal's Murshidabad district on Wednesday. —PTI

It is becoming clear that Modi's chair is shaking. This is the real trend of the results," Mr Kharge said in a Hindi post on X. At a poll rally in Telangana's Vemulavada, Mr Modi said, "Ever since elections have been

announced, these people (Congress) have stopped abusing Ambani-Adani. I want to ask from Telangana soil, let the Shehzada announce, how much has been lifted from Ambani-Adani. Has tempo loads of notes (currency)

reached the Congress? What deal has been arrived at, that abusing Ambani-Adani has stopped overnight."

"Certainly something is fishy. For five years, (they) abused Adani-Ambani and it stopped overnight. It means you have received some tempo loads of 'chori ka maal' (loot). You have to answer the nation," the Prime Minister added.

After the PM's attack, the Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said the tide of this polls has turned so "violently" that the "pappa" of "hum do hamare do" is turning on his own children.

"Defeat is a foregone conclusion. The Prime Minister is now spooked even by his own shadow," he said in a post on X and shared a PM's photo along with his shadow. —PTI



Congress candidate from Amritsar Gurjeet Singh Aujla tries wrestling as he visits an "Akhara" during his election campaign in Amritsar on Wednesday. —PTI

Male aims to step up 'long-standing' India partnership

Male, May 8: Maldives foreign minister Moosa Zameer arrived in New Delhi Wednesday on his "very first bilateral official visit", the maiden high-level visit from Male since bilateral ties came under severe strain after President Mohamed Muizzu, a pro-China leader, assumed office six months ago.

During his visit from May 8 to 10, Mr Zameer will meet with minister of external affairs S. Jaishankar and hold discussions on deepening and expanding the long-standing partnership between the Maldives and India, the foreign ministry here said in a statement.

"This is foreign minister Zameer's first official visit to India since assuming office. "Departing to New Delhi on my very first bilateral official visit. Looking forward to meeting my counterpart Minister of External Affairs, Dr @DrSJaishankar, and discuss deepening and enhancing cooperation between #Maldives and #India for the mutual



Moosa Zameer

benefit of our peoples," Mr Zameer said in a post on X.

The bilateral ties came under severe strain after President Muizzu insisted on the withdrawal of nearly 90 Indian military personnel operating three aviation platforms in the island nation.

India has already withdrawn most of its military personnel. President Muizzu had set May 10 as the deadline for the exit of all Indian troops from his country.

On Monday, Mr Muizzu's spokesperson announced that 51 Indian military personnel have left the Maldives and confirmed that the rest would leave the island by May 10 as agreed by the two countries. —PTI

BJP paying money to buy votes, claims Didi

Kolkata, May 8: West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday alleged that the BJP is paying money to people to buy votes.

Speaking at an election rally at Arambagh in support of TMC candidate Mitali Bagh, Banerjee alleged that the saffron party is paying money to the extent of ₹5,000, ₹10,000 and ₹15,000 to people to purchase votes.

"The BJP leaders at present are former CPI(M) 'harmads' (anti-socials). If you don't want a reign of terror to usher in, then refrain from voting for the BJP", she said.

Ms Banerjee said this election is to change the power equation in Delhi. "This power equation in Delhi has to be altered and change has to be brought in", she added. "The BJP is in the habit of 'defaming' the people of Bengal. They have dishonoured the women of Sandeshkhali by paying money to make false rape allegations", she said. —PTI

BJP will change fate of Odisha: Rajnath

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO RAYAGADA/BHAWANI PATNA (ODISHA), MAY 8



Rajnath Singh

Defence minister Rajnath Singh on Wednesday launched a broadside on Odisha's ruling Biju Janata Dal (BJD) by calling them "bhrast" (corrupt), and urged people to give Bharatiya Janata Party a chance to change the fate of the state.

Addressing separate poll rallies at Bhawanipatna under Kalahandi parliamentary constituency and Rayagada under Koraput, Mr Singh said Odisha continued to suffer from backwardness due to the "misgovernment" of both the BJD and the Congress.

"A lot of development work has taken place in the country for 10 years under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership. Once the BJP government is formed in Odisha, rapid developments will take place

across the state with special focus on Kalahandi that is considered as one of the backward places in the country," said the defence minister.

"The Congress had been in power for a long here. Be it Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi or Manmohan Singh, all of them only claimed to eradicate poverty. Unfortunately, they could not live up to their words. However, after Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power, the Centre has been able to uplift over 25 crores people from poverty," Mr Singh added.

The BJP leader flagged that the BJD government has deprived the Odisha people of the benefits of the Centre's Ayushman Bharat scheme.

ED raids Jharkhand's rural development dept premises

Top bureaucrats, netas being probed, says ED

AMRESH SRIVASTAVA with agency inputs NEW DELHI/RANCHI, MAY 8

BJP releases 28-page 'Aarop Patra' against JMM-led govt

The Enforcement Directorate on Wednesday raided the premises of the Jharkhand government's rural development department in Ranchi, as part of the ongoing money laundering probe after the arrest and questioning of Jharkhand minister Alamgir Alam's personal secretary Sanjeev Lal and the minister's domestic help Jehangir Alam.

In a search operation conducted on Monday, the Central agency seized over ₹30 crores and arrested Mr Lal and the minister's domestic help Jehangir.

Mr Lal, 52, collected "commission" on behalf of some influential people, the ED had claimed before a court on Tuesday, adding that government officials from "top to bottom" of the rural development department are involved in the alleged

Ranchi, May 8: The Jharkhand unit of the BJP on Wednesday released a 28-page "Aarop Patra", highlighting alleged corruption, deteriorating law and order and crumbling infrastructure under the JMM-led regime in the state.

Releasing the "Aarop Patra" days ahead of Jharkhand's first phase of

illegal cash payments nexus. The ED said the names of "senior bureaucrats and politicians" have emerged in the case and are being investigated.

The money laundering case of September 2020 is based on a Jharkhand police anti-corruption branch (Jamshepur) case and a March 2023 FIR filed by the economic offences wing of the Delhi

voting on May 13. BJP state chief Babul Marandi alleged that corruption has reached its peak under the JMM-led alliance government in the state.

"Corruption is rampant under the protection of the government. Bundles of notes were recovered in raids by the ED," Mr Marandi alleged. —PTI

protection against former chief engineer of the state rural works department Veerendra Kumar Ram and some others.

The ED arrested Mr Ram last year. The former chief engineer was with the water resource department of the Jharkhand government and was sent on deputation to the rural development and works department (special division).

K'taka no to CBI probe over Revanna sexual abuse

Bengaluru, May 8: Karnataka home minister G. Parameashwara on Wednesday ruled out a CBI probe into the sexual abuse case against the JD(S) MP Prajwal Revanna, who is the NDA candidate from Hassan. This was after JD(S) second-in-command H.D. Kumaraswamy mounted an attack on the government expressing doubts over the manner the investigation was carried out.

Alliance partners JD(S) and the BJP demanded that the case, which is being investigated by the state government-constituted SIT, be handed over to the CBI.

Mr Kumaraswamy intensified his attack on the government even as his elder brother and Holenarasipura MLA H.D. Revanna, who is facing charges of kidnapping a woman, was remanded to judicial custody till May 14 by a magisterial court on Wednesday.

Mr Revanna, son of former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda, was produced before the court after the completion of four days' police custody.

Also, his bail petition before a sessions court has been posted for Thursday. Mr Revanna was arrested in the alleged case of kidnapping a woman, based on a complaint by her son, who alleged that the MLA's son and MP Prajwal Revanna had sexually assaulted her. The woman was subsequently rescued, according to the police.

The alleged sexual abuse of several women by Prajwal has raised a political storm with the ruling Congress and BJP-JD(S) engaged in a slugfest.

Alleged explicit videos involving Prajwal started making the rounds ahead of the first phase of the Lok Sabha elections in Karnataka on April 26.

Mr Prajwal reportedly left the country on April 27, a day after the polls. —PTI

Further strain in India-Canada ties

Ottawa again accuses Delhi of involvement in pro-Khalistan extremist killing

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 8

Bilateral tensions between India and Canada show no signs of abating, as Canada once again accused India of involvement in the killing of Canadian citizen and pro-Khalistan extremist Hardeep Singh Nijjar on its soil in June last year.

The accusation comes just a day after New Delhi again criticised Canada for "providing criminal and secessionist elements with a safe haven and political space".

"Our job is to protect Canadians and we stand by the allegations that a Canadian was killed on Canadian soil by Indian agents," Canada's minis-

ter of foreign affairs Melanie Joly said in Ottawa on Wednesday. Ms Joly added that a probe by the Canadian police was underway and neither she nor other officials from her government would further comment on the issue.

"What I am telling though on the question of relationship with India, I think it is always better when diplomacy remains private. The nation will continue to stand by protecting Canadians, making sure that we protect our sovereignty and in the end also protect our rule of law," the Canadian minister said.

After a pro-Khalistan rally on Sunday at Malton in Canada showed

directly condemned Canadian PM Justin Trudeau for his recent controversial remarks that it said "illustrate once again the political space that has been given in Canada to separatism, extremism, and violence".

New Delhi also said, "This not only impacts India-Canada relations but also encourages a climate of violence and criminality in Canada to the detriment of its own citizens."

It may be recalled that Mr Trudeau had in Canadian Parliament last year accused India of involvement in the killing of Nijjar following which bilateral ties that were already under strain had sharply nosedived.

India had last week

Sule: Baramati lost image for recent slugfest

AGE CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI, MAY 8

A day after the polling in the much-hyped Baramati Lok Sabha constituency, which was marred by several allegations of malpractices, NCP-SP candidate Supriya Sule on Wednesday said the image of Baramati has been tarnished by the events that took place during the voting.

She said the voting percentage also dropped as the people have lost hope due to the current political situation.

The contest in Baramati LS seat has caught the eyes of the entire country, where Supriya Sule and Ajit Pawar-led NCP's Sunetra Pawar are locked in a fierce battle.

K'taka cops summon Nadda and Malviya over online post

Bengaluru, May 8: The Bengaluru police has summoned Bharatiya Janata Party president J.P. Nadda and the party's IT cell head Amit Malviya in connection with a social media post allegedly intimidating members of SC and ST community not to vote for a particular candidate, officials said on Wednesday.

They have been asked to join the probe at the High Grounds police station. "For the purpose of investigation of the said case, you are hereby directed to appear before the undersigned investigation officer at 11 am at High Grounds police station within seven days of receipt of this notice," the summons read.

The move comes after an FIR was registered against Mr Nadda, Mr

VIDEO posted on social media allegedly featured animated characters of Rahul Gandhi and chief minister Siddaramaiah. In the clip, SC, ST and OBC community are portrayed as "eggs".

Malviya and BJP's Karnataka unit chief B.Y. Vijayendra in connection with a social media following a complaint filed by the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) with the Election Commission and the police on May 5, alleging violation of the model code of conduct.

They were booked under sections of Representation of People Act and Section 505 (2) (statements creating or promoting enmity, hatred or ill-will between classes)

of the Indian Penal Code, a senior police officer said.

In the complaint, the KPCC cited the video uploaded on social media platform "X" by the official account of Karnataka state BJP which, it alleged, is operated by Mr Malviya, on instructions of Mr Nadda and Mr Vijayendra, BJP state president and social media incharge, Karnataka BJP, on May 4. "The said video posted on social media featured animated characters of (Congress leader) Rahul Gandhi and (chief minister) Siddaramaiah. In the clip, SC, ST and OBC community are portrayed as 'eggs' in a nest and it also suggested Rahul planting a big egg labelled as Muslim community," it alleged. —PTI

MP: Bus with EVMs, officials catches fire

AGE CORRESPONDENT BHOPAL, MAY 8

A bus carrying polling staff and electronic voting machines (EVMs) late Tuesday night caught fire near Sonora Gaula village in Madhya Pradesh's Betul district. One polling officer was injured, while four EVMs were damaged in the incident, Betul district collector Narendra Suryavamsi said.

The incident took place at around 11 pm when the bus, carrying election officials of six polling booths, six EVMs and other poll materials, was returning from Saikheda to Betul, a senior district officer said. "While four EVMs were damaged, two others were safe," the DC said.

CBI takes over INLD leader murder probe

Ex-BJP MLA among 7 named in case

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 8

The Central Bureau of Investigation has taken over the probe into the killings of Indian National Lok Dal's Haryana unit president Nafe Singh Rathee and a party worker by unidentified gunmen in February in Bahadurgarh near Delhi.

The Central probe agency has re-registered the case on the recommendation of the Haryana government, the officials said on Wednesday, adding it was routed to the agency by the Centre through a notification on April 26.

The CBI has named seven accused, including former BJP MLA Naresh Kaushik, in its case, the

officials said. The other six accused are Karambir Rathee, Ramesh Rathee, Satish Rathee, Gaurav Rathee, Rahul and Kamal, they said.

They added that an FIR filed under IPC sections of criminal conspiracy, murder, among others, has been filed against the accused in the case.

The 67-year-old MLA from Bahadurgarh and INLD worker Jaikishan were killed when unidentified assailants opened fire on Rathee's SUV on February 25. Rathee was elected from Bahadurgarh twice in 1996 and 2005.

During the attack, three private gunmen hired by Rathee for security had also sustained injuries.

SHORT TAKES

Tusker kills Kerala photo journalist

Palakkad, Kerala: In a shocking incident, a cameraman of a leading Malayalam news channel was killed in a wild elephant attack while reporting in this north Kerala district on Wednesday. A.V. Mukesh (34), working with Mathrubhumi News, was seriously injured in the elephant attack when he and the reporter were capturing visuals of the movement of the strayed elephant herd, channel sources said. The tragedy struck the hapless cameraman when he was shooting the visuals of jumbos crossing a river in a place located between Malambuzha and Kanjikode. It is an area that witnesses frequent straying of wild elephants, locals said. Though the reporter and the driver of vehicle could manage to run away to safety, Mukesh was attacked and seriously injured by a jumbo. He was rushed to a nearby hospital but he could not be saved, they said. — PTI

Man loses ₹1.88cr in WhatsApp scam

Thane: A 48-year-old coaching class owner in Thane district was duped of more than ₹1.88 crore in a share trading scam that started with the membership of a WhatsApp group, police said on Wednesday. As per the complainant, an unidentified person added him to the WhatsApp group "STOCK Vanguard (F)" in March, said an official. The group had 170 members and advice about share trading used to be posted there, he said. He found them trustworthy and invested as recommended, and later he was added to another group, "STOCK-Vanguard-VIP". Three, identified as Isha, Divya, and Raj Rupani showed him some kind of "SEBI certificate" to gain his trust, and told him that he could make huge profits by investing through an app called CIN-VEN/IC SERVICES, complainant said. — PTI

Militant shot dead in J&K encounter

Srinagar: A terrorist was killed in a fresh gunfight with security forces on Wednesday near the site of an encounter in Jammu and Kashmir's Kulgam district where two ultras were killed a day earlier. During search of houses near encounter site in the Redwani area of the district, the fresh exchange of fire took place with a terrorist hiding there, officials said. One terrorist was killed today, the officials said and added that the identity of the deceased was being ascertained. They said firing was going on till last reports came in. Two ultras, including wanted terrorist of Lashkar-e-Tayyaba Basit Dar, were killed in the encounter with security forces on Tuesday. — PTI

Why has Rahul gone all quiet on Adani-Ambani issue?: PM

■ **Continued from Page 1** Rafale deal in poor light fell flat. He then started talking about Mr Ambani and Mr Adani. Acknowledging a huge crowd at the meeting, Mr Modi said he was happy to see a bigger crowd than in his home state of Gujarat. He exuded confidence that the BJP-led NDA will register a thumping victory, adding that even surveys conducted after the third phase of polls predicted it. Mr Modi is the first Prime Minister to visit the famous Sri Raja Rajeshwara Swamy temple, which is located about 150 km away from Hyderabad. He offered Kode Moku and special prayers to the presiding deities. Former state BJP president and sitting MP Bandi Sanjay Kumar is seeking re-election from the Karimnagar Lok Sabha constituency. Mocking the Congress, which he claimed struggled till the eleventh hour to find a candidate to field in the constituency, the Prime Minister said that the large turnout of people from Karimnagar shows that Mr Kumar's win in the Lok Sabha seat appears certain. "While the BJP always believes in the policy of 'nation first', both the Congress and the BRS

believe in the policy of 'family first'. They are running the political parties for the family, of the family and by the family. They are two sides of a coin," Mr Modi added. He said the Congress, which works in the best interest and benefits of one family, neglected P.V. Narasimha Rao and also insulted him after his death by not conducting his final rites officially. But the BJP has honoured the late Prime Minister with Bharat Ratna. "I felt happy to meet three generations of Narasimha Rao's family, who are highly educated, at my office in Delhi," he pointed out. Mr Modi also questioned the Congress' silence on the Kaleshwaram fiasco even after forming the government six months ago and accused the party of indulging in large-scale corruption and protecting the culprits. "They joined hands together to indulge in corruption and are also trying to support the AIMIM because the BJP has become a threat to all three parties," he alleged. He reiterated his charge that the Congress had been levying "RR tax" (Rahul, Revanth tax) and alleged that the RR tax collection is multiple times more than the collection movie RRR.

■ Court pitches for preventive steps to tackle problem Cloud seeding no solution to U'khand forest fires: SC

New Delhi, May 8: The Supreme Court on Wednesday said cloud seeding or "depending on rain god" is not the answer to the raging forest fires in Uttarakhand and that authorities will have to take preventive measures to tackle the problem. The Uttarakhand government apprised the apex court about the steps taken to control the forest fires and said 0.1 per cent of the wildlife cover in the state was on fire due to such incidents. The state government told a bench of Justices B.R. Gavai and Sandeep Mehta that since November last year, there were 398 forest fires in Uttarakhand and five people were killed in such incidents. Deputy advocate-general of Uttarakhand Jatinder Kumar Sethi told the court that all the fires were man-made. A total of 350 criminal cases have been lodged in connection with the forest fires, he said, adding that 62 people have been named in those. "People say that 40 per cent of Uttarakhand is on fire, whereas 0.1 per cent of the wildlife cover was on fire. And all this was man-made. From November till today, we have 398 fires, all man-made," the counsel said. The court was hearing an application that has raised the issue of raging forest fires in Uttarakhand.



An Indian Air Force helicopter conducts a "Bambi Bucket" operation to control the forest fire in Pauri Garhwal district on Wednesday. — PTI

During the hearing, the bench told the state's counsel, "Cloud seeding or depending on the rain god is not the answer. He (applicant) is right in saying that you have to take preventive measures." The state government placed before the bench an interim status report containing details of the various steps taken by authorities to deal with forest

fires. Mr Sethi said helicopters of the Indian Air Force were also pressed into service to extinguish the fires. "What is the number of human lives lost?" the bench asked. The counsel said five people were killed due to the forest fires. The bench sought to know how many animals were killed in such incidents. — PTI

CM shunts 10 officials, hikes pine needles' price to ₹50/kg

PRITHVIRAJ SINGH DEHRADUN, MAY 8

Uttarakhand government on Wednesday suspended 10 frontline forest department personnel for the raging wildfire that has spread over nearly 1,350 hectares of Himalayan hills in the past one month. No official has been held responsible so far. Decision to suspend 10 forest guards and foresters was taken following an emergency meeting of the senior government officials with the Chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhama. Mr Dhama on Wednesday suspended all his engagements to chair meeting with the forest department officials. Meanwhile, the state returned to his predecessor Trivendra Singh Rawat regime's plan of dry pine needle, known as pirul, collection to prevent forest fires raising its price sharply from ₹3 to ₹50 per kilogram. Mr Dhama said it's aimed at preventing forest fires as pine needle is highly inflammable material and major cause of forest fires in high hills.

Bose to show CCTV to 100 people in molestation case

'Won't show video to politician Mamata, her police'

Kolkata, May 8: In the backdrop of a woman employee levelling molestation charge against West Bengal governor C.V. Ananda Bose, Raj Bhavan on Wednesday said it would show the related CCTV footage to 100 people, except "politician" Mamata Banerjee and "her police". Following the allegation, the police had requested Raj Bhavan to share the CCTV footage concerned. The governor, however, directed his staff not to cooperate with the police in this regard. "Governor Bose has launched a programme 'Sach Ke Saamne' in the background of the mischievous and fabricated allegations by the police that Raj Bhavan is not sparing the CCTV footage of an incident which is under the illegal and unconstitutional investigation of the police," Raj Bhavan said in a post on X. It asked the people to send requests over email or phone to attend the pro-



C.V. Ananda Bose

gramme at Raj Bhavan and the first 100 people would be allowed to see the footage inside the governor's house on Thursday morning. "The governor has decided that the CCTV footage can be seen by any citizen of West Bengal, except politician Mamata Banerjee and her police for the stand they had taken, which is in public domain," the post read. A contractual woman employee of Raj Bhavan on Friday lodged a written complaint with the Kolkata police alleging molestation by the governor.

■ **FOLLOWING THE** allegation, the police had requested Raj Bhavan to share the CCTV footage concerned. The governor, however, directed his staff not to cooperate with the police in this regard

Mr Bose had described the allegation as "absurd drama" and labelled chief minister Mamata Banerjee's politics as "dirty". The Kolkata police has constituted an inquiry team to probe the woman employee's allegation of molestation by Mr Bose. The police has summoned a few of Raj Bhavan officials and policemen posted there in connection with their investigation of the allegation. However, under Article 361 of the Constitution, no criminal proceedings can be instituted against a governor during his term in office.

Contracts must not be cancelled without assigning reasons: SC

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 8

The Supreme Court on Wednesday said contracts awarding work to private parties should not be cancelled without assigning reasons and reserved its judgment on an appeal against a Calcutta high court order. A bench comprising Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud and Justices J.B. Pardiwala and Manoj Misra said private parties, making investments after bagging a contract, have reasonable expectation of getting a return. Justice Chandrachud said, "How can a contract be terminated without assigning any reason? A private person invests in pursuance of award of contract." Referring to the facts of the appeal matter, the CJI said no reason was given for cancellation of the contract. On May 25, 2023, a division bench of the Calcutta high court had upheld the verdict of a single judge bench, which had approved the cancellation of the contract awarded to a firm headed by Subodh Kumar Singh Rathour. Mr Rathour has challenged the high court

order. Mr Rathour's firm had secured a contract for maintaining two underpasses on the Eastern Metropolitan Bypass in Kolkata for 10 years. As part of the contract, the firm was allowed to place advertisements both inside and above the underpasses for which he was required to undertake some construction work. On February 7 last year, the Kolkata metropolitan development authority (KMDA) terminated the contract. The KMDA has agreed to refund the licence fee deposited by Mr Rathour and the cost incurred by him on construction activity and maintenance. Senior advocate Rakesh Dwivedi, appearing for the KMDA, told the apex court that a fresh contract has now been awarded to another party and Mr Rathour can be compensated. Senior advocate Shyam Divan, representing Mr Rathour, said though he did not want disruption of maintenance activities at the underpasses, the impugned communication by which the contract was cancelled, has to be set aside.

India & EU hold talks on Ukraine war, Indo-Pacific

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 8

The European Union on Wednesday said that developments in Europe, including Ukraine, as well as South Asia and the Indo-Pacific figured in security and defence talks between India and the EU that were held earlier this week. "On May 6, the European Union and India held their second consultations on security and defence in New Delhi." "They exchanged views and respective assessments on international and regional issues in Europe, including Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, as well as developments in South Asia and in West Asia," it said in a statement. Furthermore, they discussed security and defence policy developments, it added. The EU also informed on the implementation of the EU's strategic compass and the Indo-Pacific strategy, including the European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS), as well as new European Union operations, such as the EUNAVFOR Aspidos.

Live-in relationship 'stigma' in Indian culture: C'garh HC

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY RAIPUR, MAY 8

The Chhattisgarh high court has held that a live-in relationship is an "imported" philosophy and considered a "stigma" in Indian culture. While dismissing a petition seeking custody of a child born from a live-in relationship, a division bench of the high court, comprising Justices Gautam Bhaduri and Sanjay S. Agrawal, observed that the concept of live-in relationship is an "imported philosophy contrary to the general expectations of Indian tenets and still considered a stigma in Indian culture." The court has held that such a relationship is preferred over marriage because it gives a "convenient escape when things

fail to work between partners". "The security, social acceptance, progress, and stability which the institution of marriage provides to a person is never provided by live-in relationship," the division bench observed. In its verdict in the case delivered recently, the high court observed, "The close inspection of society shows that the institution of marriage no longer controls the people as it did in the past due to the cultural influence of the western countries and this significant shift and apathy towards matrimonial duties has probably given rise to the concept of live-in relationship." One Abdul Hameed Siddique of Dantewada in Chhattisgarh had filed a petition in the high court seeking custody of the child born from a live-in relationship with Kavita Gupta. The Dantewada family court had earlier rejected such a petition by him, leading the petitioner to move the high court. While seeking custody of the child, the petitioner argued that the two had married under the Special Marriage Act, 1954, as it was an interfaith union. Under the Mahomedan law, the counsel claimed, Mr Siddique was allowed to perform a second marriage. He contended that he is entitled to the custody of the child. Ms Gupta's counsel held that the petitioner is not entitled to a second marriage since his first wife was alive and that he cannot claim custody of the child born from a live-in relationship. Her counsel argued that the petitioner lacks evidence to provide validity of the marriage.

Shah warns against 'Babri lock'

■ **Continued from Page 1** work," the Union minister noted, claiming that if the Opposition wins the Lok Sabha elections, crackers will be burst in Pakistan. Accusing the SP of being a dynastic party, the senior BJP leader said the Opposition party's chief Akhilesh Yadav is contesting from Kannauj, his wife Dimple Yadav from Manipuri, Aditya Yadav from Budaun, Akshay Yadav from Firozabad and Dharmendra Yadav from Azamgarh. "Once their children become mature, they will contest from all 80 seats. They are not well-wishers of the Yadav community as well," he claimed. Holding the Congress responsible for stalling the Ram temple construction for 70 years, the Union home minister said, "When you made Mr Modi the PM for the second time, he not only won the legal dispute involving the Ram Janmabhoomi but also performed the bhoomi puja (groundbreaking ceremony) of the Ram temple and its pran pratishtha (consecration) ceremony in January." Slamming the INDIA bloc, Mr Saha said, "If the alliance gets the majority, who will be its Prime Minister? Will Sharad Pawar, Mamata (Banerjee) Didi, (M.K.) Stalin, Mr Yadav or Mr Gandhi become the Prime Minister? It does not even have a prime ministerial

candidate. It neither has a leader nor a policy nor determination." "After the first three phases of the Lok Sabha polls, Modi Ji has crossed 190 seats... In the fourth phase, under Mr Modi's leadership, we are strongly heading towards 400 seats, while the SP, BSP and Congress have been wiped out," Mr Shah said. The senior BJP leader alleged, "The Congress, SP and BSP are defaming the BJP and Modi Ji by spreading falsehood. They are saying that if Modi Ji gets 400 seats, then reservations will end." "When the Congress got a majority in Karnataka, a five per cent reservation was given to Muslims. The reservations for Muslims came from the OBC quota. In Andhra Pradesh, the reservation was given to Muslims. There, too, reservations for backward classes were cut. If the BJP gets a majority, then we will end the anti-constitutional Muslim reservation and give it to the backward classes." Attacking Mr Gandhi, Mr Shah said, "He talks of eradicating poverty in one stroke... Your grandmother (former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi) imposed Emergency, your father (former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi) re-implemented triple talaq and your party has snatched away the reservation of backward communities." "The Congress party and

its cronies — the SP in Uttar Pradesh — are anti-backward people. All backward class people should understand this," he said. In Haridoi, Mr Shah continued his attack on the Congress and Mr Gandhi and said, "Mr Gandhi took out the Bharat Jodo Yatra. After elections, he will have to take out the Congress dhoondo yatra (find Congress march)," he said, accusing the INDIA bloc parties of being involved in scams worth ₹12-lakh crores. On the opposition's attack on the alleged misuse of ED and CBI, Mr Shah said, "I want to tell Mr Gandhi and Mr Yadav, if you do corruption, you will be caught and no one can stop this." In Kannauj, where Mr Yadav is contesting against the BJP's Subrat Pathak, Mr Shah said that for years, members of Mulayam Singh Yadav's family were elected by the people, but they did not return to the area after winning or losing. Mr Shah also alleged that during the riots in western Uttar Pradesh, the SP leaders were watching dance performances in Saifai, the native place of the Yadav family. He asked the audience whether they will vote for those who run "family ke dukan" (family shop) or those who hear "Janta ke awaz" (voices of the public) from this seat.

Pitroda quits post as controversy builds over 'Africans' jibe

■ **Continued from Page 1** Mr Pitroda's statement

The party's Tamil Nadu unit chief K. Annamalai said the Congress mindset and thinking believe that India is a land of invaders and we are descendants of invaders and only the Congress, which has its masters outside the country, can go to the extent where it can call Indians descendants of invaders. Condemning Mr Pitroda's remarks, Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said, "After I heard Mr Pitroda's statement, I looked at myself in the mirror and I appear as a proud Assamese and Indian, not as a Chinese... This is a racist comment." Mr Sarma also attacked Mr Gandhi for not "disowning" Mr Pitroda yet. "Those who are near Mr Gandhi always insult the Northeast. The people of the Northeast are proud Indians. You should never challenge our nationalism... Mr Pitroda and Mr Gandhi are not two separate people. Mr Pitroda is Mr Gandhi's friend, philosopher and guide. Why are you (the Congress) not disowning him (Mr Pitroda)?... How

is this a useless issue? This issue is connected to our sentiments. You are completely advocating racism," Mr Sarma said. BJP national secretary Anil K. Antony said Mr Pitroda's statement is 'definitely disappointing,' "it is with clear racial overtones and in poor taste." "But we shouldn't forget that he is the core advisor of Mr Gandhi. These kinds of statements from the high-positioned leaders in the Congress party once again make it clear to the people of India that in this election they should choose the BJP-led NDA under the leadership of Mr Modi." Distancing itself from Mr Pitroda's remark, AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh said none of the members of the INDIA bloc support the Congress leader's alleged racist remarks and accused the BJP of "hating" the dalits. A few weeks back, Mr Pitroda had got the Congress into another embarrassing situation when he talked about inheritance tax. The Congress had to distance itself from Mr Pitroda's statement at that time too.

JJP ready to back Congress

■ **Continued from Page 1** Dushyant Chautala said if a no-confidence motion is brought against the Saini government, they will vote against the government.

"I want to tell Leader of Opposition Bhupinder Singh Hooda that going by the present numbers in the Assembly, when this government is in a minority, if a step is taken that this government is brought down during (Lok Sabha) elections, then we will fully consider to support them in this from outside." "Now, Congress has to think whether they will take a step to bring down the BJP government," Mr Chautala said. He also ruled out reviving his party's alliance with the BJP. The two parties had snapped ties in March. "I have made it quite clear that the JJP will not go with the BJP now," Chautala said and demanded that Mr Saini should either prove majority or submit his resignation. The 90-member Haryana Assembly at present has an effective strength of 88 with Karnal and Rania Assembly seats being vacant. The BJP has 40 MLAs, the Congress 30 and the JJP 10 in the House. The INLD and the Haryana Lokhit Party has one member. Independents are six. The government has the support of two of the Independent legislators. "The government is not in any trouble, it is working strongly," chief minister Saini told reporters at Sirsa while replying to queries on the withdrawal of support. The chief minister was in Sirsa to campaign for BJP candidate Ashok Tanwar. — PTI

THE ASIAN AGE

9 MAY 2024

BJP must face Haryana vote: A taste of its own medicine?

With three MLAs belonging to the Haryana Legislative Assembly defecting to the Congress camp, the state government led by BJP's Nayab Singh Saini finds itself reduced to a minority. It now has 43 MLAs in an 88-seat House and is two short of an absolute majority.

It is only proper, therefore, that it takes early steps to prove its majority on the floor of the House and assert its legitimacy before proceeding with matters of governance in the state.

Ironically, there won't be many who will beat their chests at the fact that the party that has been conducting Operation Lotus to topple elected governments in state after state is now getting a taste of its own medicine. Although it is perhaps several years since a BJP government is threatened by defections, it cannot afford to ignore the crisis altogether either, especially since its former ally, the Jannayak Janta Party with 10 MLAs, has declared that it will vote against the government in the Assembly.

Haryana is due to have an Assembly election later this year. The BJP came to power for the first time in the state in 2014, winning 47 seats in a 90-member Assembly. Until then the political stage here had been shared by the Congress and various offshoots of the party once headed by Choudhary Devi Lal.

Does this gesture by the Independents have more to it than meets the eye? It is a question that the BJP must seriously ask itself. Lofty talk during campaign is not unusual but it must keep its ear to the ground.

The BJP could not muster the numbers in the elections in 2019 but managed to hold on to power with the support of the JJP, led by Dushyant Chautala, the great-grandson of Devi Lal.

Recently, the party effected a leadership change in the state. It replaced Manohar Lal Khattar who was its face since 2014 with Mr Saini.

It was part of the election management strategy of the BJP which calculated that the anti-incumbency feelings against the Khattar leadership could be neutralised by a largely

unknown new face. Such a strategy has been seen to work in several other states.

It is not yet clear if the Saini government will sail through a confidence vote in the Assembly but the fact remains that the three Independents have chosen to break free from NDA. Which is headed by BJP that claims it will return to power in the Centre winning more than 400 of the Lok Sabha's 543 seats.

Does this gesture by the Independents have more to it than meets the eye? It is a question that the BJP must ask itself seriously.

Grandstanding during election campaigns is not unusual but the Haryana development must cause the party to keep its ear to the ground. For, realpolitik can take you only so far; it's the will of the people that actually does the job.

Pitroda lands Cong in soup

Poll time is the open season when motormouths rattle off speeches the moment a microphone is sighted. Sam Pitroda, Overseas Congress chairman who is often described as a Congress leader's mentor, is a specimen case who finds a lot to comment on and it is up to the audience to decide whether to laugh or cry at his verbal outpourings.

Even a standup comedian, bereft of ideas on how to invoke laughter, may have hesitated to use the lines that Mr Pitroda did to classify Indians with a distinctly racial overtone — "Where people in the East look like Chinese, people in the West look like Arabs, people in the North look like, maybe White, and people in South look like Africans."

The pity is, such excesses of a loose tongue by a person in politics and public life only invites pointed criticism from political rivals while injecting greater divisiveness into an already vitiated poll atmosphere

Mr Pitroda's description of India's diversity is without foundation. Indians are rather proud of their Indianness, regardless of what the colour of their skin is, and even a school student would know pigmentation is genetically typed by what climatic conditions their ancestors may have lived in and mingled with upon migrating.

The beauty of the rainbow lies in its multiple hues. The unity and diversity of the modern world is reflected in its multiculturalism, and India, with its spatial spread and multiple ethnicities has been as good an example of it as any. To reduce such a cultural melting pot of a nation to racist definitions as Mr Pitroda did should, therefore, invite scorn and ridicule.

It is not known how Mr Pitroda would define himself after a look in the mirror. But his maverick views belittling the 1984 anti-Sikh riots and his borrowed idea on inheritance tax had landed him in controversies earlier.

The pity is, such excesses of a loose tongue by a person in politics and, by extension, in public life only invites pointed criticism from political rivals while injecting greater divisiveness into an already vitiated poll atmosphere that fully reflects the polarised times we live in when partisan politics is breeding all kinds of negative thinking.

THE ASIAN AGE

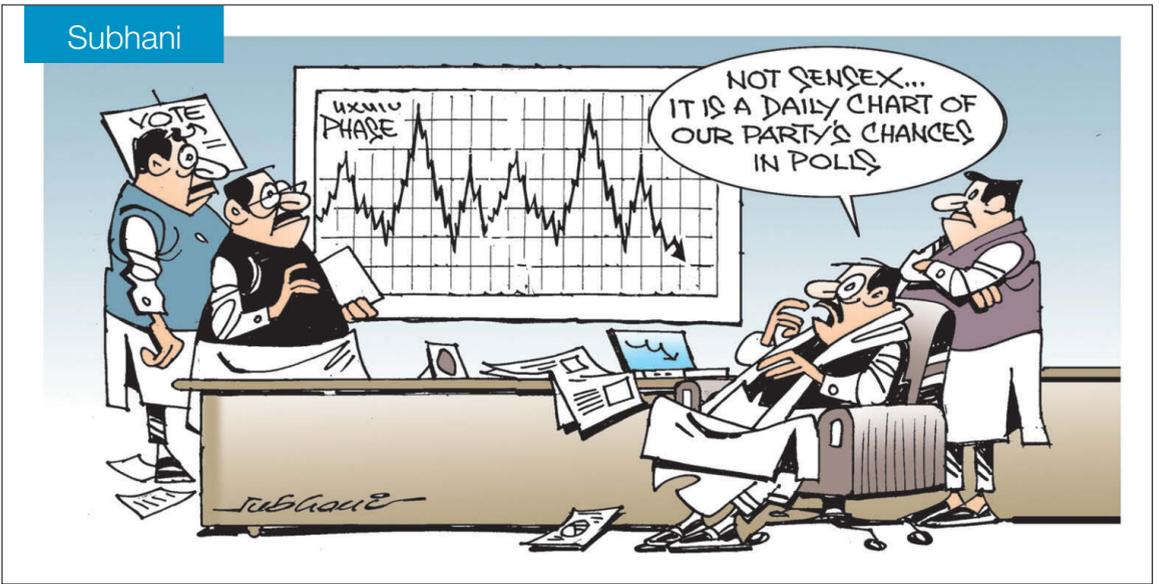
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THE ASIAN AGE office is located at:
New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Phone: (011) 23211124.

Published and Printed on behalf of and for:
Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited, Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002 at BFL Infotech Ltd., C-9, Sector-III, Noida -201301.
London: Quickmarsh Ltd, 8th Floor, Block 2, Elizabeth House, 39 York Road, London, SE1 7NQ.
RNI Registration number: 57290/94

Subhani



Amid global stir, why are Indians so quiet on Gaza?



Sunanda K. Datta-Ray

Reflections

When the Young Men of British Literature — John Braine, John Wain, Alan Sillitoe, Kingsley Amis and others — were rampaging in the 1950s and 1960s, the highly successful W. Somerset Maugham remarked cynically that an additional thousand pounds a year would dissolve their anger. Actually, it wasn't money alone that defused their protest but the opportunities created by the social revolution of the welfare state.

One looks in vain for a similar transformation in India. Young India doesn't have the money which is mainly in the hands of billionaires who fund political parties through anonymous electoral bonds and snap up major airports. At the same time, the obsession with caste suggests that a social revolution is almost as remote today as it was when temple entry agitated South Indian reformers. That leaves civil society at the mercy of India's one great certitude — an unchanging religious hierarchy that draws millions of voters. Additionally, the Hindutva project, its instrument for long-term social and political control, is useful in marginalising unwanted minorities.

Other concerns have been swept under the carpet. The upsurge sweeping through American university campuses where thousands of pro-Palestine protesters were arrested is a harsh reminder of the sudden silence of the torchbearers of India's revolution to usher in a brave new world. That's why it seemed like a flicker of future hope when students of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, once notorious as the "red fort", forced the authorities to cancel an invitation to Eric Garcetti, the American ambassador to India, to talk about US-

India ties. "We are protesting against the US support for the genocide in Gaza committed by Israel", explained the JNU students' union president, Dhananjay.

It was a pity to miss out on Washington's exposition of an important relationship, but the US ambassador's presence would have been another propaganda event in an India that recently added insult to injury by abstaining when the United Nations Human Rights Council urged countries to "cease the sale, transfer and diversion of arms, munitions and other military equipment to Israel."

Time was when young urban middle class India was in the forefront of every protest movement against injustice. The "city of processions" — Jawaharlal Nehru's nickname for Kolkata — lived up to its reputation with massive rallies chanting "Amar naam, tomar naam, Vietnam, Vietnam" (My name, your name, Vietnam is everyone's name), as evocative a slogan as John F. Kennedy's "Ich bin ein Berliner!"

Now, it's not Kolkata alone but India as a whole that seems to have abandoned idealism for avarice. A profusion of start-ups and dot-com millionaires herald the revival of the grab-as-grab-can 19th century free market under the label of "neo-liberalism". Elderly British friends, veterans of the old Labour movement, ask me in wonder whatever happened to the liberal socialism they associated with Jawaharlal Nehru, Jayaprakash Narayan and V.K. Krishna Menon. They find the NDA's market economics as un-Indian as "Howdy! Modi!" Showmanship isn't Indian. Neither is the pretence that "Vande Bharat" is more than just a marketing gimmick to repack old merchandise. "There aren't any good,

Why has Ukraine not touched Indian hearts? For one, even those who surreptitiously yearn for an American 'green card' dare not publicly champion the US military-industrial machine. Also, race and colour are the ultimate realities...

brave causes left". Jimmy, the embittered anti-hero of Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, lamented. Russia's ravaging of Ukraine has not touched Indian hearts and souls like the Vietnam war did. One reason could be that even those who surreptitiously yearn for an American "green card" dare not publicly champion the US military-industrial machine. Another is that race and colour being the ultimate realities, Indians object more strongly to Europeans brutalising an Asian nation and killing 882,000 Vietnamese. Russians and Ukrainians are indistinguishable from each other to most Indians.

Indian men are not afraid to die so that wives and children at home can survive. More than 147,000 of the casualties in the two world wars (excluding the three million killed in the 1943 Bengal Famine) were Indian. Now, the NDA government is pushing jobless young Indians into the trenches of West Asia through a pact with Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu.

Of course they are not forced to go. But 1.3 crore Indians would not have migrated if home had not been so bleak. About a lakh give up their Indian citizenship every year because of inadequate employment opportunities in India.

A few might aspire to be Rishi Sunak or Sundar Pichai. Most sell their assets and raise funds to join the deadly queues trying to smuggle into the United States or drown in the Mediterranean seeking a foothold in Europe. Those who can do neither must shut their eyes to the surrounding misery, stuff their ears to cries for food, and block their consciences to appeals for

help. Pressures will intensify with America's economic slowdown, China's reduced consumption and the construction crisis in Canada.

Meanwhile, Israel has virtually obliterated the Gaza Strip and continues to massively destroy life, property and the supporting economy. Not content with the havoc already wrought, Mr Netanyahu vows to invade Rafah to massacre more Palestinian men, women and children and further devastate the civic infrastructure even if Hamas sues for peace. The stark truth is that the Cairo and Qatari middlemen who are trying to bring about a ceasefire need not bother. Needing a ceaseless war against the Palestinians for his own political survival, Mr Netanyahu will not desist. President Joe Biden has again promised that the US will support him all the way.

It's shaming that while London, Berlin and Paris seethed with anger, Delhi and Kolkata remained placid. Of course, it can be argued that India's necessary relationship with the US should not be sacrificed at the altar of West Asian wars. Israel's side of the quarrel also deserves a hearing, especially after Hamas's abominable conduct on October 7. The world's most populous country, which never tires of repeating that it will soon boast the world's third largest economy, may be said to have a certain responsibility to exercise such weight as it has for the benefit of the global community. But New Delhi's ambition seems to be prestige more than action — joining the high table of the United Nations rather than exercising its influence to benefit mankind.

That is power politics, the game for which the land of the Buddha and the Mahatma supposedly had no appetite. Perhaps Maugham was right after all, not just about literature's Angry Young Men but Angry Old Nations as well. The JNU's is the small voice of morality amidst so many serving their own ends.

The writer is a senior journalist, columnist and author

LETTERS
DRUGS PRICE SURGE

If you compare the prices of medicines you bought eight months ago with their current prices, you will be shocked to find that the prices of medicines have gone up to 100 per cent. Why did these pharmaceutical companies suddenly raise the price of medicines so much? The answer is electoral bonds. Several pharma companies had to pay crores of rupees to the BJP government as extortion money through electoral bonds. In order to recover this money, the companies had no alternative but to increase the price of medicines without any control. The government allowed these companies to increase the prices of even essential medicines. If this is not corruption, then what is?

Jubel D'Cruz
Mumbai

GOLD RUSH IN CHINA

THERE IS SOMETHING afoot in China as it is buying gold in huge quantities. Suspicious that China was responsible for the Covid crisis yet persist. Whether we like it or not China is a much bigger player in the geopolitics of the world. Chinese influence on our neighbours is a cause for worry. The government has reiterated that China has not intruded on our territory, but ground reports suggest otherwise. The possibility that China could make a move against India cannot be discounted. China is hoping to become the top dog of the next President, there is going to be a renewed tug-of-war between the two.

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai

QUIET ADVANCES

TATA ELECTRONICS' initiation of semiconductor chip exports from its Bengaluru R&D centre signals a momentous stride forward for India's semiconductor sector. These chips, prepared at a Bengaluru-based pilot production line, are now being dispatched to partners across Japan, the US and Europe, paving the way for Tatas' forthcoming chip packaging facility in Assam and a massive \$10 billion chip foundry in Gujarat. Simultaneously, the company approaches the final phases of tape-out for chips across various nanometer nodes, a critical precursor to full-scale manufacturing.

Amarjeet Kumar
Hazariabagh

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



As secys retire, some stop-gap solutions amid talent shortage

In the wake of S.K.G. Rahate's retirement, the temporary assignment of senior AGMUT cadre IAS officer Raj Kumar Goyal as secretary, justice, underscores the Modi Sarkar's struggle to maintain a robust talent pool. Of course, this could be due to the government's preoccupation with the Lok Sabha elections currently underway, but it highlights the challenges faced in finding suitable successors for key positions.

While Mr Goyal's appointment may be a stopgap solution, it also raises questions about the long-term sustainability of such arrangements. The reason, many observers have pointed out, is talent deficit. Major reforms such as lateral entry and 360-degree appraisals have been introduced, and now the Prime Minister is giving a fresh push to lateral entry, with a focus on filling top government positions by selecting subject matter specialists and posting them in departments for which they are best suited. It is essential to address the systemic factors contributing to talent shortage in the bureaucracy.

Interestingly, there are hints that the government is keen to change crucial aspects of judicial management after the elections

when it forms the next government. While little has been revealed or said, quietly and definitively, Mr Narendra Modi hopes to continue to change the rules of babudom.

IPS OFFICER VINDICATED AGAINST BOGUS FIRS

Justice is finally knocking on the door for Chhattisgarh IPS officer Gurjinder Pal Singh. After getting slapped with three FIRs in 2021 because he didn't play ball with the big shots in the state government, Mr Singh is now getting the green light to hop back into action. The Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) has just ordered his reinstatement within four weeks.

Back in 2021, Mr Singh found himself in hot water, suspended from duty, starting at three FIRs — one for corruption, one for sedition and one for extortion! But here's the kicker: Mr Singh was doing his job, leading the charge on an SIT to sniff out allegations against former Chhattisgarh chief minister Raman Singh in a multi-crore public distribution system (PDS) scam. When he couldn't find the "smoking gun", the state government fired back vindictively with bogus

FIRs. It turns out that the case against Mr Singh, including serious charges like sedition and extortion, was orchestrated by the state Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB).

The CAT order stated that there was substance in Mr Singh's plea that two kilograms of gold and seditious material had been planted by the investigating officer illegally to frame Mr Singh in a criminal case. Hopefully, Mr Singh can now put his nightmarish experience behind him and get the justice he deserves. And all this for daring to ruffle some feathers.

A CLASH OF TITANS

In the latest twist of the drama surrounding the Vadra-DLF land deal in Haryana, senior IAS officer Sanjeev Verma has escalated tensions by writing to state chief secretary T.V.S.N. Prasad, calling for disciplinary and criminal action against noted whistleblower and colleague Ashok Khemka. Known for his fearless stance against corruption, Mr Khemka had recently questioned the sluggish pace of the investigation into the controversial land deal.

At the heart of the matter is Mr Khemka's

unwavering commitment to transparency and justice in his handling of the Vadra-DLF land deal back in 2012. His decision to cancel the mutation of a high-profile land transaction set off a chain of events that continue to reverberate within the state's political and babu circles. Several setbacks in his quest have only strengthened his determination to see the matter through to the end.

Interestingly, both Mr Verma and Mr Khemka, have their own history of conflict, notably over alleged irregularities in recruitment at the state Warehouse Corporation. Their ongoing feud underscores the entrenched power struggles in Haryana's babudom and mirrors the political rivalries playing out in the state. Interestingly, Mr Khemka is one of few IAS officers who has managed to rub all political dispensations the wrong way, with his adherence to transparency and accountability. If he has so many foes, surely, he must be doing something right!

Love them, hate them ignore them at national peril, is the babu guarantee and Dilip's belief. Share significant babu escapades dilipcherian@hotmail.com.

SHORT TAKES

AFGHAN BLAST KILLS 3 TALIBAN SECURITY MEN

Kabul, May 8: Three Taliban security personnel were killed when a motorcycle carrying an explosive device blew up near a military vehicle in northern Afghanistan being used in opium poppy eradication operations, an interior ministry spokesman said on Wednesday.

Protests have roiled several districts in the northern province of Badakhshan where farmers object to Taliban security forces' attempts to wipe out opium cultivation — the backbone of many household incomes in impoverished Afghanistan.

ANOTHER TORIES LAWMAKER DEFECTS TO OPPN

London, May 8: A lawmaker in Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's Conservative Party defected to the opposition Labour Party on Wednesday, the second to do so in less than two weeks.

Sunak's Conservatives are trailing Labour by about 20 points in opinion polls ahead of a national election expected this year, and the party suffered heavy losses in local elections last week.

"Under Rishi Sunak, the Conservatives have become a byword for incompetence and division," defecting lawmaker Natalie Elphicke said.

JSP-N CHIEF: NO AFFECT OF SPLIT ON NEPAL GOVT

Kathmandu, May 8: Deputy Prime Minister and chairperson of the Janata Samajbadi Party-Nepal (JSP-N) Upendra Yadav on Wednesday said that he will approach the court against the "unconstitutional move" to divide his party when he was abroad as he insisted that the split won't affect the stability of the coalition government. The JSP-N, one of the coalition partners in Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda-led government, suffered a division early this week when Yadav was in the US to attend an event.

RESTRUCTURING: SL EYES \$17 BN DEBT SLASH

Colombo, May 8: Sri Lanka is looking at a reduction of approximately \$17 billion from its overall debt burden in the ongoing debt restructuring process, foreign minister Ali Sabry said on Wednesday and highlighted his government's efforts to foster strong ties with major partners and creditors, including China and India, for further negotiations with the IMF. It comes after the visiting Japanese foreign minister Yoko Kamikawa said Tokyo expected cash-strapped Sri Lanka to sign MoUs for a transparent and comparable debt restructuring deal with all the creditors.

DEFAMATION OF ROYALS: THAI LEADER JAILED

Bangkok, May 8: A court in Thailand on Wednesday sentenced a prominent pro-democracy activist to three years in jail for royal defamation.

Critics say the government has used the strict lese-majeste laws to silence dissent, prosecuting scores under the tough legislation that protects King Maha Vajiralongkorn and his family. Panupong Jadnok, 27, was among the leaders of 2020's youth-led demonstrations, which saw thousands take to the streets to make unprecedented calls to reform the monarchy.

He was convicted for social media posts related to the king in 2020.

DISPLACED IN MYANMAR NOW AT 3MN, SAYS UN

Yangon, May 8: The number of displaced people in Myanmar has reached three million, the United Nations said, with the vast majority forced to flee their homes by conflict unleashed by the military's 2021 coup.

Around 2.7 million have fled since the putsch that toppled Aung San Suu Kyi's government after a short-lived experiment with democracy.

The coup sparked renewed clashes with established ethnic armed groups and birthed dozens of new "People's Defence Forces" that the military has failed to crush.

Israel bombards Gaza city as Cairo ceasefire talks resume

Israel reopens a key Gaza crossing but the UN says no aid has entered

Rafah, Jerusalem, Cairo, Washington, May 8: Israel bombarded the overcrowded Gaza city of Rafah, where it has launched a ground incursion, as talks resumed on Wednesday in Cairo aimed at agreeing the terms of a truce in the seven-month war.

The Israeli military said on Wednesday that it has reopened the Kerem Shalom crossing into Gaza, a key terminal for the entry of humanitarian aid that was closed over the weekend after a Hamas rocket attack killed four Israeli soldiers nearby.

Despite international objections, Israel sent tanks into Rafah on Tuesday and seized the nearby crossing into Egypt that is the main conduit for aid into the besieged territory.

The White House condemned the interruption to humanitarian deliveries, with a senior US official later revealing Washington had paused a shipment of bombs last week after Israel failed to address concerns of the US over its Rafah plans.

The Israeli military said hours later it was reopening another major aid crossing into Gaza, Kerem Shalom, as well as the Erez crossing. But the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, said the Kerem Shalom crossing — which Israel shut after a rocket attack killed four soldiers on Sunday — remained closed.

It came after a night of



A Palestinian descends on a rope across the concrete wall of Israel's controversial separation barrier into the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Beit Hanina after having climbed and crossed over from occupied West Bank's al-Ram, on Wednesday. — AFP

heavy Israeli strikes and shelling across Gaza. AFP-TV footage showed Palestinians scrambling in the dark to pull survivors, bloodied and caked in dust, out from under the rubble of a Rafah building.

"We are living in Rafah in extreme fear and endless anxiety as the occupation army keeps firing artillery shells indiscriminately," said Muhanad Ahmad Qishta, 29.

"Rafah is a witnessing a very large displacement, as places the Israeli army claims to be safe are also being bombed," he said.

Al-Ahli hospital said a strike on an apartment in

devastated Gaza City killed seven members of the same family and wounded several other people.

An emergency doctor working in Rafah and neighbouring Khan Yunis said that with humanitarian access compromised, the health situation was "catastrophic".

"The smell of sewage is rife everywhere," said doctor James Smith. "It's been getting worse over the course of the last couple of days." The war was sparked by Hamas's unprecedented October 7 attack on Israel, which resulted in the deaths of more than 1,170 people, mostly civil-

ians, according to Israeli official figures.

Israel in response vowed to crush Hamas and launched a military offensive that has killed at least 34,844 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the Hamas-run territory's health ministry.

Militants also took about 250 hostages, of whom Israel estimates 128 remain in Gaza, among them 36 the military says are dead.

Talks aimed at agreeing a ceasefire resumed in Cairo on Wednesday "in the presence of all parties", Egyptian media reported. — Agencies

AT AL-SHIFA HOSPITAL, 49 BODIES FOUND

Gaza Strip, May 8: Gaza health workers uncovered on Wednesday at least 49 bodies at Al-Shifa hospital, a medical official and Hamas authorities said, the latest such discovery at the facility previously raided by Israeli forces.

The Israeli military has repeatedly targeted Al-Shifa, the Palestinian territory's largest hospital, and other medical facilities in its war against Hamas, triggered by the Palestinian group's unprecedented October 7 attack.

Israel accuses Palestinian militants of using hospitals as command centres and to hold hostages abducted on October 7. Hamas denies the accusation.

Motassem Salah, head of the emergency department at Al-Shifa, told journalists that "a third mass grave was found inside this hospital." The statement accused Israel of "killings... inside and outside hospitals", without offering further information concerning the bodies found on Wednesday.

The Israeli military did not immediately comment.

AFP footage from Al-Shifa hospital showed at least a dozen bodies wrapped in black plastic body bags. — AFP

BRITAIN WILL EXPEL RUSSIAN DEF. ATTACHE

London, May 8: Britain will expel Russia's defence attaché, remove diplomatic status from some properties and limit the length of Russian diplomatic visas in response to what interior minister James Cleverly called Moscow's "malign activity".

Britain's action was among several taken across Europe on Wednesday. Estonia summoned the head of the Russian embassy to protest the jamming of GPS signals and Poland said it had been targeted by a hacking attack from a Russia-linked group.

Last week, Nato members said they were "deeply concerned" about recent attacks they attributed to Russia that affected the Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Britain.

Addressing Parliament on Wednesday, Cleverly said Britain was already "an extremely challenging operating environment for Russian intelligence services." — Reuters

Trump classified docu case judge cancels May trial date

Washington, May 8: The federal judge in Florida presiding over the classified documents prosecution of former President Donald Trump has canceled the May 20 trial date, postponing it indefinitely.

The order from US District Judge Aileen Cannon had been expected in light of still-unresolved issues in the case and because Trump is currently on trial in a separate case in Manhattan charging him in connection with hush money payments during the 2016 presidential election.

The New York case involves several of the same lawyers representing him in the federal case in Florida. Cannon said in a five-page order Tuesday that it would be "imprudent" to finalise a new trial date now, casting further doubt on federal prosecutors' ability to bring Trump to trial before the Nov. presidential election.

Trump faces dozens of felony counts accusing him of illegally hoarding at his Mar-a-Lago estate in

Biden, Trump win Indiana primaries

Washington, May 8: President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump have won the Indiana Democratic and Republican primaries ahead of the US presidential election in November.

Tuesday's win gives Trump, already the presumptive Republican nominee, another 58 delegates, said US media reports. Trump, 77, was the only active candidate on Indiana's Republican ballot.

President Biden, also the presumptive Democratic Party candidate, won all 79 delegates in Indiana's Democratic primary.

In Indiana, 81-year-old Biden's name was the only one that appeared on the ballot.

The race between Biden and Trump will mark the first time since 1912 that a former president and a sitting president will do battle in the November 5 election. — PTI

Palm Beach, Florida classified documents that he took with him after he left the White House in 2021, and then obstructing the FBI's efforts to get them back. He has pleaded not guilty and denied wrongdoing. Trump faces four criminal cases as he seeks to reclaim the White House, but outside of the

New York prosecution, it's not clear that any of the other three will reach trial before the election.

The SC is weighing Trump's arguments that he is immune from federal prosecution in a separate case from special counsel Jack Smith charging him with plotting to overturn the 2020 prez poll. — AP

German state min. hit on head

Berlin, May 8: A senior figure in Chancellor Olaf Scholz's party became the latest target in a string of attacks on German politicians when a man struck her from behind with a bag containing a hard object in a Berlin library, officials said on Wednesday.

Berlin senator and former city mayor Franziska Giffey was slightly injured

and taken to hospital for a short time to treat the pain. A 74-year-old suspect, who was previously known to police for hate crime and unspecified incidents against state security, has been detained, police said, adding the suspect was also believed to have mental health issues.

The attack on Tuesday coincided with an emergency meeting of state ministers calling for greater police protection of politicians after a rising number of verbal and physical assaults ahead of European and local elections this year.

"We must protect all those who stand up for our democratic society and our country from attacks - no matter what party they belong to," she said. "If these people are no longer safe, then our democracy is no longer safe either."

Meanwhile, two people were arrested in Dresden after a member of the Greens party was shoved and spat at. — Reuters

HIGHEST RECIPIENT Migrant workers face financial debt, xenophobia and workplace abuse

In '22, India received \$111 bn remittances

United Nations, May 8: India received over \$111 billion in remittances in 2022, the largest in the world, becoming the first country to reach and even surpass the \$100 billion mark, the United Nations migration agency has said.

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM), in its World Migration Report 2024 launched on Tuesday, said that in 2022, India, Mexico, China, the Philippines and France were the top five remittance recipient countries.

"India was well above the rest, receiving more than \$111 billion, the first country to reach and even surpass the \$100 billion mark. Mexico was the second-largest remittance recipient in 2022, a position it also held in 2021 after overtaking China, which historically had been the second-biggest recipient after India, it said.

According to the report's data, India was the top country receiving remittances in 2010 (\$53.48 billion), 2015 (\$68.91 billion), and 2020 (\$83.15 billion), with



Three countries in Southern Asia — India, Pakistan and Bangladesh underscoring the significance of labour migration from the subregion. — Agencies

the remittances crossing the \$100 billion mark to reach \$111.22 billion in 2022. It noted that with a very

large number of migrant workers from the subregion, Southern Asia receives some of the largest inflows

Blackouts after Moscow strikes Kyiv power grid

Kyiv, Moscow, May 8: Russian missiles and drones struck nearly a dozen Ukrainian energy infrastructure facilities on Wednesday, causing serious damage at three Soviet-era thermal power plants and blackouts in multiple regions, officials said.

Russia said on Wednesday it had captured two more frontline villages in Ukraine, including in the north-east Kharkiv region where its troops had been pushed back two years ago.

Moscow has made a string of gains on the front in recent months, pressing its manpower and weapons advantage on the battlefield as Kyiv waits for critical supplies of Western aid.

The Russian defence ministry said its Army units had "liberated the village of Kyslivka in the Kharkiv region" and "Novokalyovne in the Donetsk People's Republic."

Ukraine's air force said it shot down 39 of 55 missiles and 20 of 21 attack drones used for the attack, which piles more pressure on the energy system more than two years since Russia launched its full-scale invasion.

"Another massive attack on our energy industry!" Energy Minister German Galushchenko wrote on the Telegram app.

Two people were injured in the Kyiv region and one was hurt in the Kirovohrad region, interior minister Ihor Klymenko said.

Galushchenko said power generation and transmission facilities in the Poltava, Kirovohrad, Zaporizhzhia, Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk and Vinnytsia regions were targeted.

Some 350 rescuers were racing to minimise the damage to energy facilities, 30 homes, public transport vehicles, cars, and a fire station, the interior ministry said.

National power grid operator Ukrenergo said



Volodymyr Zelenskyy

4 ARRESTED FOR DUPING INDIANS TO FIGHT FOR MOSCOW

New Delhi, May 8: Indian police said four people linked to a network of human traffickers have been arrested on suspicion of luring young men to Russia with the promise of lucrative jobs or university places only to force them to fight the war.

About 35 Indian men were duped in this manner, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) said. The four Indian nationals arrested were a translator, a person facilitating visa processing and the booking of airline tickets as well as two "main recruiters" for the southern states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, the CBI said.

The investigation "is continuing against other accused persons who are part of this international network of human traffickers," the CBI said.

The families of two Indian men killed in the war have told Reuters they had gone to Russia expecting to work as "helpers" in the Army. — Reuters

it was forced to introduce electricity cut-offs in nine regions for consumers and that it would expand them nationwide for businesses during peak evening hours until 23:00 (20:00 GMT).

Officials urged Ukrainians to limit power consumption. — Agencies

Boeing cargo plane lands without front wheels in Istanbul

Istanbul, May 8: A FedEx Airlines Boeing 767 plane landed at Istanbul Airport on Wednesday without its front landing gear, a Turkish transport ministry official said, adding there were no casualties and authorities had launched an investigation.

The aircraft, flying from Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport, informed the control tower in Istanbul that its landing gear had failed to open and touched down with guidance from the tower, managing to remain on the runway, a ministry statement said. Airport rescue and fire fighting teams were scrambled before landing, but no one was injured. The ministry gave no reason for the failure.

The aircraft involved is a nearly 10-year-old Boeing 767 freighter, one of the most common cargo planes and based on the 767 passenger model dating back to the 1980s.

An official from Turkey's transport ministry said its teams were conducting examinations at

the scene as part of the ongoing investigation, but did not provide further details.

Boeing referred queries to FedEx, which said in a statement it was coordinating with investigation authorities and would "provide additional information as it is available".

Video footage obtained by Reuters showed sparks flying and some smoke as the front of the plane scraped along the runway before coming to a halt and being doused with firefighting foam. No fire appeared to have broken out. The video showed the pilots holding the plane's nose above the runway for several seconds after the main wheels had touched the ground, apparently executing the emergency drill for landing with a retracted nose gear that pilots train for, according to the SKYbrary aviation database.

In June last year, a small 22-year-old Boeing 717 flown by Delta Airlines made a similar smooth landing without a nose gear in Charlotte. — Reuters

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	73466.39	-0.06
Nifty 50	22302.50	0.00
S&P 500*	5,190.73	0.06
Dollar (₹)	83.51	0.011
Pound Sterling (₹)	104.33	0.35
Euro (₹)	89.79	0.06
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	71,214.66	0.09
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	83.38	0.26
IN 10-Yr bond yield	7.138	0.009
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.49	0.029

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Lam Research to expand supply chain to India

Lam Research Corporation announced its plans to expand its global semiconductor fabrication equipment supply chain to include India. The company said it is assessing capabilities across various supply chain segments and is exploring India-based suppliers who can collaborate to fulfil the need for precision components, custom parts, and other assemblies that go into semiconductor wafer fabrication equipment.



DG Innovate forms JV with EVage Motors

UK-based advanced R&D firm DG Innovate announced its entry into the domestic electric vehicle space through a joint venture with electric commercial vehicle start-up EVage Motors to manufacture its Pareta electric drive system in Punjab. The JV will be 60 per cent owned by DG Innovate and 40 per cent by Indian partner, will produce electric motors for domestic and overseas markets, EVage said.

RBI lifts ban on Bank of Baroda mobile app

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Wednesday lifted the ban imposed on Bank of Baroda's 'bob World' mobile application, which barred it from onboarding new customers. In October 2023, the regulator had asked Bank of Baroda, India's second largest state-owned lender, to suspend any further onboarding of its customers onto the 'bob World' mobile application with immediate effect.



India INX helping gold importers to take hedge

BSE's arm India International Exchange (India INX) on Wednesday said India's leading gold refiner, which brings in up to 20 per cent of the country's gold, has started trading gold futures on its platform. This suggests that India INX, set up at Gujarat international finance tec-city (GIFF City), is becoming the main place for Indian jewellers and gold importers to hedge against the risk in gold prices.

CEA: India's FY24 GDP growth may touch 8%

Higher than RBI's estimate of 7.5% growth for economy

New Delhi, May 8: Chief economic adviser V Anantha Nageswaran on Wednesday said there was a high possibility of GDP growth touching 8 per cent in FY24 on the back of robust growth registered during the three quarters of the financial year ended March 2024.

India's gross domestic product (GDP) grew 8.4 per cent in the third quarter ended December 2023. In the second quarter, the GDP growth was 7.6 per cent while 7.8 per cent in the first quarter.

"The IMF has projected a growth rate of 7.8 per cent for FY24. But if you look at the trajectory of growth in the first three quarters the possibility that the growth rate touches 8 per cent is quite high," he said at an event organised by Ncaer here.

This is higher than RBI's estimate of 7.5 per cent



● **THE IMF** has projected a growth rate of 7.8 per cent for FY24. But if you look at the trajectory of growth in the first three quarters the possibility that the growth rate touches 8 per cent is quite high.

growth for the Indian economy in 2023-24.

For the ongoing financial year, he said, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has an estimate of 6.8 per cent but the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) expects a 7 per cent GDP growth for FY25.

"If that materialises, of course, it will be the fourth consecutive year after Covid starting from FY22 that the economy will have grown at 7 per cent or more. The RBI forecasts of 7 per cent for

FY25 turns out to be either correct or even underestimated, then it would be the fourth consecutive year of 7 or higher growth rate," he said.

However, he said, a lot would depend on how the monsoon shapes up. Although the expectations are that there will be an above-normal monsoon, spatial and temporal distribution will matter.

On the growth beyond FY25, Nageswaran said, there is a possibility of India growing between

6.5-7 per cent because the key difference this decade compared to the last is the one of balance sheet strength in the financial sector and the non-financial sector in the corporate sector as well.

The investment made in supply-side augmentation of both physical and digital infrastructure has placed the economy to pursue non-inflationary growth, he said, adding that this also helps absorb the challenge of overheating.

He also said that the household sector's net financial savings flows were lower in 2022-23 at 5.1 per cent due to the bulk of savings shifting to real sectors.

Asked about the RBI's recent circular on under-construction infra project financing, chief economic adviser said, this is draft guidelines and would not like to comment. — PTT

Public sector units not in disarray: Sitharaman

FC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 8

Defending the performance of public sector undertakings (PSUs) in the country, union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Wednesday said that PSUs are not in disarray, but thriving under the current government.

The finance minister in a social media post on X (formerly Twitter) said that under the Modi-gov-



ernment, public sector undertakings (PSUs) are thriving, benefiting significantly from the culture of professionalism infused

in them along with increased operational freedom.

The finance minister also said that the government's focus on capital expenditure has led to substantial growth in the stock performance of PSUs, as the net worth of all central public sector enterprises (CPSEs) increased 82 per cent from ₹9.5 lakh crore as of March 2014, to ₹17.33 lakh crore as of 2022-23 fiscal. "The greater alignment

of management incentives (through the sharpening of performance-linked incentives), capital management guidelines on dividends, buybacks, etc. And the calibration of the disinvestment strategy have helped improve the performance of the CPSEs and reposed investor confidence," she said.

"Due to better management of PSUs, their share prices have tremendously increased in the last three years," she added.

Central banks up gold purchases

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MAY 8

Several Central banks have been increasing gold holdings in their forex reserves. Gita Gopinath of International Monetary Fund finds that this is meant to hedge against economic uncertainty and sanctions risk.

"Looking at global FX reserves, the most notable development during 2022-23 has been an increase of gold purchases by central banks," First deputy man-

aging director of IMF Gita Gopinath said in a speech. India is one among the countries which have been increasing gold assets in its forex reserves. It had added 19 tonne to its forex reserves in the March quarter, which has a total of 822 tonnes.

Gold is generally viewed as a politically neutral safe asset, which can be stored at home and be insulated from sanctions or seizure. It can also be an inflation hedge but cannot be easily used in trans-

actions, Gopinath said. The share of gold in the FX reserves of the China bloc has been rising since 2015, a trend not exclusively driven by China and

Russia. Importantly, during same period, the share of gold in FX reserves of countries in the US bloc has been broadly stable.

This suggests that gold purchases by some central banks may have been driven by concerns about sanctions risk. This is consistent with a recent IMF study confirming that FX reserve managers tend to increase gold holdings to hedge against economic uncertainty and geopolitical issues, including sanctions risk.



APPLE UNVEILS IPAD PRO WITH NEW CHIP FOR AI

San Francisco, May 8: Apple unveiled its latest iPad Pro with a new chip for artificial intelligence (AI) computing as it rushes to catch up with its big tech rivals in a race to dominate the emerging technology.

Debuting its latest chip in a tablet rather than its Mac laptops is unusual for Apple, and suggests it is eager to give app makers a head start creating AI-related software ahead of its annual software developer conference next month, analysts said.

Apple said the iPad Pro's highest-priced model will have upgraded displays and start at \$1,000 for an 11-inch (27.9-cm) model and \$1,300 for a 13-inch (33-cm) model.

"With this level of performance, the neural engine and M4 chip is more powerful than any neural processing unit in any AI PC today," Tim Millet, VP of platform architecture at Apple, said.

Apple also introduced new models of its mid-priced iPad Air, which will now come in a larger 13-inch screen size at \$800, as well as the 11-inch size it previously came in for \$600. — Reuters

Pixel comes with new updated screen at \$499

California, May 8: Alphabet Inc.'s Google rolled out a new version of its \$499 lower-end Pixel smartphone, aiming to entice budget-minded shoppers with an updated screen and artificial intelligence (AI) features.

The Pixel 8a device, which comes a year after the 7a model, adds a faster processor, brighter screen, an option for double the storage and new AI features, the company said.

Google is also cutting the price of its Pixel Tablet by offering a new \$399 version. The updated

Pixel phone looks slightly different than the 7a, with more rounded edges. And it comes in four new colours. The \$499 model continues to include 128 gigabytes of storage, but a pricier 256-gigabyte version also is available for the first time. The new screen is 40 per cent brighter and includes a faster, 120-hertz refresh rate, matching screens on many higher-end devices.

The announcements come a week ahead of Google's I/O event, where it will roll out new AI and Android software features. — Bloomberg

GOOGLE BRINGS DIGITAL WALLET APP TO INDIA

FC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 8

Google launched the Google Wallet app for Android users in India to securely store essentials like boarding passes, loyalty cards, event tickets, and public transport passes. It comes as a complementary service to Google Pay app.

"Google Pay is not going anywhere, it will remain our primary payment app, Google Wallet is specifically tailored for non-payment use cases," said Ram Papatla, GM and India Engineering Lead, Android at Google.



INDIA SEES NEW INVESTMENTS OF ₹11.5 LAKH CRORE IN MARCH QUARTER

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MAY 8

State-level investor meets helped India witness its second-best quarterly new investment announcements worth ₹11.5 lakh crore in the March quarter of FY24.

The new investment announcements of ₹11.5 lakh crore in Q4 was much higher than ₹5.2 lakh crore in Q3 FY2024.

This was mainly supported by a few state investor meets held in Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Goa, and Gujarat in Jan. 2024, which together saw investment proposals amounting to ₹9.5 lakh crore.

However, the aggregate new proposals during Feb.-Mar 2024 slowed to ₹2 lakh crore, suggesting some transient caution amid the onset of the Model Code. The momentum is likely to remain subdued in the Election quarter of Q1 FY25, based on the historical trends.

After peaking at ₹39.1 lakh crore in FY2023, the value of new investment projects declined sharply to ₹27.4 lakh crore in FY2024, while exceeding the average annual cost of ₹19.5 lakh crore, that was seen during FY 2015-2022.

The number of newly announced projects dipped to an 18-year low 3,183 in FY24 against 5,897 in FY23.

Vehicle sales rise 27% in April to 22 L units: FADA

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, MAY 8

The automobile retail sales surged 27 per cent in April, the first month of this fiscal, to over 22 lakh units compared to the year before, the federation of automobile dealers associations (FADA) said on Wednesday. As many as 17.4 lakh units were sold in April 2023.

Positive market sentiments, bolstered by stable fuel prices, a favourable monsoon outlook, festive demand and the marriage season, contributed to this sales rise, FADA said.

New model launches also helped drive growth, despite some delays in supply, it noted.

Sales of two-wheeler, three-wheeler, passenger vehicle, tractor and commercial vehicle grew by 33 per cent, 9 per cent, 16 per cent, 1 per cent, and 2 per cent respectively.

Auto dealers sold 3.35 lakh passenger vehicles in April to mark a record as against 2.89 lakh units sold last year.

As many as 90,707 commercial vehicles were sold in April compared to 88,663 units the same time last year. The segment grew 2 per cent Y-o-Y growth and decline 0.6 per cent month-on-month.

Three-wheeler sales touched 80,105 units, compared to 73,310 in April 2023. As many as 56,625 tractors were sold, compared to 55,857 units in April 2023.

"The passenger vehicle category experienced double-digit year-on-year



● **THE PASSENGER** vehicle category experienced double-digit year-on-year growth, supported by enhanced model availability and favourable market sentiments, particularly around festive events.

growth, supported by enhanced model availability and favourable market sentiments, particularly around festive events like navratri and gudi padwa, said FADA president Manish Raj Singhania.

He said despite strong bookings and customer flow, high competition, excess supply and discounting presented challenges for sustained growth. The lack of new models in some portfolios also impacted market traction, Singhania noted.

The two-wheeler segment grew due to improved supply and demand for 125cc models. As many as 16.4 lakh two-wheelers were sold in April compared to 12.3 lakh units in the same month last year.

Improved supply and planning in 2W segment have improved customer bookings and market sentiment, driven by positive crop yields, said FADA about its May outlook.

TOP GEAR

TVS MOTOR NET UP 15% TO ₹387 CR

TVS Motor Company on Wednesday said its consolidated net profit increased 15 per cent to ₹387 crore for the fourth quarter ended March 2024, riding on robust sales. The company had reported a net profit of ₹336 crore in the January-March period of the previous fiscal. Revenue from operations rose to ₹10,042 crore in the period under review compared with ₹8,031 crore in the fourth quarter of FY23.

HERO

HERO MOTOCORP NET RISES 16.3%

Hero MotoCorp on Wednesday reported a 16.3 per cent rise in consolidated profit after tax to ₹943.46 crore in the fourth quarter ended on March 31, riding on higher sales. The company had posted a consolidated profit after tax of ₹810.8 crore in same period a year ago, it said.

AUTO PARTS

BHARAT FORGE Q4 PROFIT AT ₹227 CR

Auto components major Bharat Forge on Wednesday reported a 77.8 per cent rise in consolidated net profit at ₹227.12 crore (cr) in the fourth quarter ended March 31. The company had posted a consolidated net profit of ₹127.7 cr in same period of the last fiscal, Bharat Forge said. Consolidated revenue during the quarter under review stood at ₹4,164.21 cr as against ₹3,629.05 cr in the year-ago period, it added.

Bank stock prices skid on RBI's new draft project finance norms

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, MAY 8

Bank stocks have seen selling pressure after RBI prescribed 5 per cent provisioning of standard assets in its draft project finance norm on May 3.

HDFC Bank, SBI, ICICI Bank, PNB were major losers in the last three sessions losing up to nine per cent since RBI released the draft guidelines seeking banks comments by June 15.

On Wednesday however,



there was a reversal of trend among the PSU banks which gained as reports said public lenders may oppose RBI's proposed norms on infra project financing.

NSE's Nifty Bank index fell intraday 0.89 per cent

to 4,851.15 but later recovered on a rally in PSU bank to close down by 0.55 per cent at 48,021.10.

The fall in heavyweight private bank stocks also pulled the market lower to a flat close for Nifty-50 as it remained unchanged from previous day close at 22,302.50 while the Sensex fell 45.46 points or 0.06 per cent to 73,466.39.

The broader market gained as the BSE mid-cap index was up 0.78 per cent while BSE small-cap index rose 0.50 per cent.

COMPUTE | BIG Searching to be key area of interest for AI industry

OpenAI feature to cite sources

San Francisco, May 8:

OpenAI is developing a feature for ChatGPT that can search the web and cite sources in its results, according to a person familiar with the matter, potentially competing head on with Alphabet Inc.'s Google and AI search startup Perplexity.

The feature would allow users to ask ChatGPT a question and receive answers that use details from the web with citations to sources such as Wikipedia entries and blog posts, according to the person. One version of the prod-



● **THE FEATURE** would allow users to ask ChatGPT a question and receive answers that use details from the web with citations to sources such as Wikipedia entries.

uct also uses images alongside written responses to questions, when they're relevant. If a user asked ChatGPT how to change a doorknob, for instance, the results might include a diagram to illustrate the task, the person said.

OpenAI is under immense pressure to expand the capabilities of its most well-known product as a growing list of rivals are pushing out chatbots - and search has proven to be a key area of interest for the AI industry.

Perplexity has gained popularity, and a \$1 billion valuation, by offering an AI-powered search engine that emphasises accuracy and citations.

Some users on X, recently pointed to the existence of the web page search.chatgpt.com as an indicator that a search feature could be coming from OpenAI. Visitors to that URL will see a "not found" message in small type on the page, but over the weekend it briefly re-routed to chatgpt.com, the official website where users can interact with the chatbot. — Bloomberg

Meta testing AI tool to make marketing content

California, May 8:

Facebook and Instagram parent company Meta Platforms is testing new tools that will let advertisers create marketing material, including images and messaging, using generative AI prompts.

If an advertiser uploads a photo of their product, Meta's artificial intelligence (AI) tools can now generate new, different images of that product for marketing purposes. In the coming months, marketers will also be able to use text prompts to create different versions of the

original image, the company said.

Meta's AI tools can also generate text for advertisements, including headlines and primary ad copy. "We are currently testing the ability for the generated text to reflect your brand's voice and tone, by highlighting key selling points based on your previous campaigns and text input," Meta wrote in a blog post.

The companies can use Meta's generative AI tools to create promotional texts and images for free, it said. — Bloomberg

BLITZCRICK



- Chennai Super Kings
- Delhi Capitals
- Gujarat Titans
- Kolkata Knight Riders
- Lucknow Super Giants
- Mumbai Indians
- Punjab Kings
- Rajasthan Royals
- Royal Challengers Bengaluru
- Sunrisers Hyderabad

ORANGE	
Virat Kohli, RCB	542
Ruturaj Gaikwad, CSK	541
Travis Head, SRH	533

PURPLE	
Jaspit Bumrah, MI	18
Harshal Patel, PBKS	17
Varun Chakravarthy, KKR	16

SUN SCORCHES

Piping hot Hyderabad cook Lucknow in biryani contest

MOSES KONDETY
HYDERABAD, MAY 8

Who's got the best biryani, Hyderabad or Lucknow? Sunrisers settled that debate on Wednesday night by serving it piping hot to the visitors as they had them for dinner at the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium.

They made a mockery of LSG's modest total of 165 by smashing it down inside 10 overs with all 10 wickets in hand. Opener Abhishek Sharma bludgeoned 75 in 28 balls, eight of which crashed against the boundary and six soared over it. His partner Travis Head bulldozed his way to an energetic 89 in 30 balls with eight fours and an equal number of sixes.

When Sun came out to bat, it rained boundaries, from the blazing blades of Abhishek and Head, who are the flavour of the season. K. Gowtham, Yash Thakur and Ravi Bishnoi bore the brunt as the hosts brought up the team 50 in the fourth over and then wrapped up the match much before the half-way stage.

It was the biggest win for the Sunrisers in terms of the total chased down with all wickets intact. The victory also took them to third on the points table and also boosted the net run-rate.

Earlier, a fighting near-century stand for the unbroken fifth wicket between Nicholas Pooran and Ayush Badoni lifted LSG from a shaky 66 for 4 to a decent 165. Both put their heads down and got into damage control. Pooran packed in six boundaries and a six in his 26-ball 48 while Badoni batted diligently to make 55 in 30 balls.

The visitors were slow off the blocks. As Sun skipper Pat Cummins came in to bowl the second over, the screen at the stadium flashed "Happy Birthday Captain Cummins."

His opposite number Rahul played two dot balls and smashed the third into the stands.

Two brilliant catches, by Nitish Reddy on the boundary and Sanvir Singh on the edge of the



Bhuvneshwar Kumar of Sunrisers Hyderabad celebrates the wicket of Lucknow Super Giants batter Quinton de Kock in Hyderabad on Wednesday. — DEEPAK DESHPANDE

● Sunrisers Hyderabad opener Abhishek Sharma bludgeoned 75 in 28 balls, eight of which crashed against the boundary and six soared over it. His partner Travis Head bulldozed his way to an energetic 89 in 30 balls with eight fours and an equal number of sixes.

inner circle, saw LSG lose big guns Quinton de Kock and Marcus Stoinis inside the Powerplay period, at the end of which the score read a terrible 27 for 2.

Cummins finally got his man, courtesy a fine catch on the fine leg fence by T. Natarajan that ended

Rahul's 33-ball 29 right at half-way stage.

Lucknow 57 for 3 after 10 overs, during which the ball had crossed the boundary just four times. Sun sent it 30 times (16 fours and 14 sixes) in the same period to make it a no-contest.

YASHASVI CAN BREAK MY TEST RECORD: LARA

New Delhi, May 8: Yashasvi Jaiswal's Test career is just nine games old but the great Brian Lara feels if there is anyone who can get close to his lofty feats, including the record 400 not out, it is the 22-year-old southpaw from India.

Lara's high praise for Jaiswal doesn't come out of the blue. The left two-handers share a special bond, having spent a lot of time over the past year following their "4 am conversation" during the IPL when the West Indian was coaching SRH and the young opener was in the Rajasthan Royals' camp.

A lot has changed since IPL 2023 with Jaiswal now becoming an integral part of India's Test and T20 team. His exploits in the longest format stand out as he averages close to 70 with three hundreds in the recent home series against England. What has impressed Lara is Jaiswal's ability to change gears as per the situation of the game.

— PTI

SCOREBOARD

Lucknow Super Giants: KL Rahul (c) c Natarajan b Cummins 29, Quinton de Kock c Reddy b Bhuvneshwar 2, Marcus Stoinis c Sanvir b Bhuvneshwar 3, Krunal Pandya run out 24, Nicholas Pooran not out 48, Ayush Badoni not out 55. Extras (lb-1, w-3) 4. **Total (For 4 wickets in 20 overs) 165.**
Fall of wickets: 1-13, 2-21, 3-57, 4-66.
Bowling: Bhuvneshwar Kumar 4-0-12-2, Pat Cummins 4-0-47-1, Shahbaz Ahmed 2-0-9-0, Vijaykanth Vijaykanth 4-0-27-0, Jaydev Unadkat 2-0-19-0, T Natarajan 4-0-50-0.
Sunrisers Hyderabad: Abhishek Sharma not out 75, Travis Head not out 89. Extras (lb-1, w-2) 3. **Total (for no loss in 9.4 overs) 167.**
Bowling: Krishnappa Gowtham 2-0-29-0, Yash Thakur 2-4-0-47-0, Ravi Bishnoi 2-0-34-0, Naveen-ul-Haq 2-0-37-0, Ayush Badoni 1-0-19-0.

POINTS TABLE						
Teams	P	W	L	N/R	Points	Net RR
KKR	11	8	3	0	16	+1.453
RR	11	8	3	0	16	+0.476
SRH	12	7	5	0	14	+0.406
CSK	11	6	5	0	12	+0.700
DC	12	6	6	0	12	-0.316
LSG	12	6	6	0	12	-0.769
RCB	11	4	7	0	8	-0.049
PBKS	11	4	7	0	8	-0.187
MI	12	4	8	0	8	-0.212
GT	11	4	7	0	8	-1.320

Royals face Punjab in battle of survival

Dharamsala, May 8: A resurgent Royal Challengers Bengaluru will look for their fourth consecutive victory when they face an unpredictable Punjab Kings as the two sides fight for survival in the Indian Premier League, here on Thursday. After a horrendous start to the season, RCB have managed to claw their way back into the tournament. They have the winning momentum on their side, having won their last three games comprehensively.

The wins have not only boosted their sagging morale but also taken them to the seventh spot in the points table.

With eight points from 11 games, RCB can still make the playoffs if they win all their remaining three fixtures although the chances are slim.

Punjab Kings too stare at a similar situation. They occupy the eighth spot, having collected eight points from 11 games.

However, between the

ACTION TODAY

PBKS VS RCB

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two — only one team can reach the all-important 14 points mark.

Having beaten PBKS earlier in the season and heading to this clash with three wins on the trot, RCB will feel more confident than the hosts.

Virat Kohli remains consistent at the top, while skipper Faf du Plessis broke his string of poor scores with a beligerent knock in the last game.

PBKS, on the other hand, will be low on confidence having suffered an inexplicable batting collapse against Chennai Super Kings.

The Kings showcased their very best and worst against CSK. — PTI



Punjab Kings players during a training session in Dharamsala on Wednesday.

Short takes

Hayden happy with Samson's IPL show

Former Australian opener Mathew Hayden is mighty impressed with the IPL performance of Sanju Samson and has lauded the T20 World Cup-bound power-hitter for "handling both spin and pace with finesse". "Sanju Samson was batting like a dream, scoring 86 off 46 balls. He's proven his worth time and again... Throughout the tournament, he's been a master blaster, handling both spin and pace with finesse," Hayden said.

"He times his innings well. He's got the power. And the power is a big thing in T20 cricket. Yet, what stands out is his commitment to his team. He just needed a bit of luck, especially towards the end of the match," he added.

Sanju fined 30 per cent match fees

Rajasthan Royals captain Sanju Samson has been fined 30 per cent of his match fees for breaching the IPL Code of Conduct during his side's 20-run loss to Delhi Capitals at the Arun Jaitley Stadium.

The offence committed by Samson, who made 86, was not specified but it could be for arguing with the umpires when he was given out after Shai Hope took a catch just near the boundary ropes in the 16th over.

The question was whether Hope's feet touched the boundary ropes while taking the catch. The third umpire ruled Samson out but the RR skipper was not happy. He initially started walking towards the pavilion, only to return to the middle and have some words with the on-field umpires.

QUICK BYTES

OLYMPIC FLAME ARRIVES IN FRANCE AMID FANFARE

Marseille (France), May 8: The Olympic flame arrives in France on Wednesday where a highly choreographed ceremony and a crowd of 150,000 people will be a first major test for organisers and security forces ahead of the 2024 Paris Games.

The transfer of the flame onshore in the southern port of Marseille will mark the start of a 12,000-kilometre (7,500-mile) torch relay across France and its far-flung overseas territories.

Under bright skies and calm seas the Belem, the ship carrying the torch, was sighted off the coast of Marseille early on Wednesday. — AFP

STIRLING NAMED IRISH CAPTAIN AT T20 CUP

Dublin, May 8: Veteran opening batter Paul Stirling was on Wednesday named Ireland skipper in their 15-member squad for the upcoming T20 World Cup in West Indies and USA.

Besides Stirling, the experienced faces in their squad are Andrew Balbirnie and George Dockrell as Ireland begin their campaign against India in their Group A fixture in New York on June 5.

They had qualified for the Super 8 stage in their debut in 2009. — PTI
Ireland squad: Paul Stirling (captain), Mark Adair, Ross Adair, Andrew Balbirnie, Curtis Campher, Gareth Delany, George Dockrell, Graham Hume, Josh Little, Barry McCarthy, Neil Rock (wk), Harry Tector, Lorcan Tucker (wk), Ben White and Craig Young.



Mats Hummels (right) of Borussia Dortmund scores against Paris Saint-Germain during their Champions League semifinal second leg match at the Parc des Princes Stadium in Paris on Tuesday. Dortmund won 1-0. — AP

Hummels stuns Mbappe & PSG

Paris, May 8: Mats Hummels headed in the only goal as Borussia Dortmund stunned Kylian Mbappe and Paris Saint-Germain in their Champions League semifinal second leg on Tuesday, winning 1-0 on the night and advancing 2-0 on aggregate to next month's final at Wembley.

Hummels struck five minutes into the second half at the Parc des Princes and PSG were unable to muster a response, the home side all out of luck as they hit the woodwork four times in total.

Dortmund, who sit fifth in the German Bundesliga, were never expected to go so far and will be underdogs in the June 10 showdown regardless of whether they face their old rivals Bayern Munich or Real Madrid,

who meet on Wednesday. It will be their first final since 2013 when, remarkably, the match was also played at Wembley and Jurgen Klopp's Dortmund lost to Bayern.

Hummels played in that final and here, 11 years later, he was the hero as Dortmund built on the advantage given to them by Niclas Fullkrug's goal in the first leg. "It'll take us a bit of time

to realise that, but we're looking forward to it extremely," Dortmund coach Edin Terzic told broadcaster Amazon Prime of getting to the final.

"We did it somehow, making it to London." The story of this semifinal, however, is as much about PSG's failure in another crunch knockout tie in the competition. — AFP

JAPAN BOWL OUT MONGOLIA FOR 12, 2ND LOWEST TOTAL IN T20s

Sano (Japan), May 8: Seven months after they made their international debut at the Asian Games, Mongolia capped an ignominious milestone when they were bowled out for 12, the second lowest score in T20I history in a match against hosts Japan here on Wednesday.

In response to Japan's imposing 217 for 7 after the hosts elected to bat, Mongolia were folded in 8.2 overs, etching their name in the annals of infamy with the second lowest score in T20I history after Isle of Man's 10 all out against Spain in on February 26, 2023.

For Japan, 17-year-old Kazuma Kato-Stafford returned with 5 for 7 from his 3.2 overs, while Abdul Samad (2/4) and Makoto Taniyama (2/0) bagged two each in the match. Tur Sumaya (4 off 11) was the top-scorer for Mongolia, while opener Namsrai Batyalat faced a maximum 12 deliveries. — PTI
Brief scores: Japan 217/7 in 20 overs (Sabaorish Ravichandran 69; Zoljavkhan Shurentsetseg 3/32, Luvsanzundui Erdenebulgan 2/6) beat Mongolia 12 in 8.2 overs (Kazuma Kato-Stafford 5/7, Abdul Samad 2/4, Makoto Taniyama 2/0).

Neeraj to compete in India after 3 yrs

New Delhi, May 8: Olympic javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra will compete at home for the first time in three years after confirming participation in the National Federation Cup to be held in Bhubaneswar from May 12 to 15.

The 26-year-old superstar is expected to travel to India from Doha after opening his season in the first leg of the prestigious Diamond League series on May 10.

"As per entries @Neeraj_chopra1 and Kishore Kumar Jena will compete in domestic com-

petition starting May 12 in Bhubaneswar," the Athletics Federation of India tweeted.

Chopra's coach Klaus Bartonietz also confirmed that his ward is taking part in the Bhubaneswar event.

The 28-year-old Kishore Jena, who won a silver in the Hangzhou Asian Games where Chopra won gold, will also be competing in the Doha Diamond League on May 10. Chopra last took part in a domestic competition at the same event on March 17, 2021, when he won a gold with a throw of 87.80m. — PTI

MARADONA GOLDEN BALL HAD MYSTERIOUSLY DISAPPEARED

Paris, May 8: Diego Maradona's Golden Ball trophy from the 1986 World Cup has resurfaced. The award, which had been missing for decades, will be auctioned in Paris next month, the Aguttes house said Tuesday. Maradona, who died in 2020 at age 60, was awarded the trophy for his scintillating play at the tournament, where he captained Argentina in its 3-2 win over West Germany in the final in Mexico City. Before that, he scored the controversial "Hand of God" goal and the "Goal of the Century" in a 2-1 win over England in the quarterfinals.

The auction house said it expects the trophy "to fetch millions due to its uniqueness." Maradona received the award — given to the tournament's best player — at a ceremony at the Lido cabaret on the Champs-Elysees in 1986. — AP