

IN BRIEF

2 teens stabbed to death in South Delhi

New Delhi: Two 17-year-old boys were stabbed to death and another was injured after they were allegedly attacked by a group of men in South Delhi, the police said on Friday. According to the police, the incident occurred on Wednesday in the Tigri area. The victims were identified as Firoz, Asif and Salman. Deputy commissioner of police (South) Ankit Chauhan said around seven men attacked the victims with knives and sticks when they were standing at the C-Block in the Sangam Vihar area. All three victims were rushed to the hospital where Firoz was declared dead on arrival. Asif succumbed to his injuries. Salman is undergoing treatment, the police said. During the investigation, the police found that Firoz had allegedly slapped one of the accused a few days ago and a minor scuffle broke out between the two groups. Seeking revenge, the accused attacked the victims, the DCP said. The police formed multiple teams, examined CCTV footage and identified the accused.

Man stabbed to death by 3 robbers

New Delhi: A man was stabbed to death by three youths in a robbery bid in Northeast Delhi's Harsh Vihar area, an official said, adding that they have arrested the accused trio, identified as Suraj (19), Rohit a.k.a Rayata (18), and Major (18). The officials said that they have also recovered the robbed mobile phone of the deceased identified as Jagatpal, a resident of Milan Garden and weapon of offence which is a button actuated knife from their possession. According to the police, in the intervening night of Tuesday and Wednesday, a police control room (PCR) call regarding stabbing, was received at the Harsh Vihar police station. Upon reaching the spot, it was revealed that Jagatpal was already taken to the GTB Hospital by his neighbour. "He has been stabbed on chest and left hand. Later, the victim succumbed to his injuries during treatment," said deputy commissioner of police Joy Tirkey.

75 AI FLIGHTS CANCELLED OVER CREW SHORTAGE

AGE CORRESPONDENT
with agencies input
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

The Air India Express (AIE) on Friday cancelled around 75 flights due to cabin crew shortage but operations are expected to normalise by Sunday. Sources said the airline's flight schedule is still not fully stabilised since the rostering was disturbed but it is getting back on track. On Saturday, the number of flight cancellations are expected to come down to 45-50. Meanwhile, following an agreement between the union and the management on Thursday at chief labour commissioner's office, the protesting cabin crew have started joining back and the airline is extending support to them for medical checkup and securing fitness certificate, which is required before they can resume duty. Sources said most international flights are in the evening time and the operations on that front are expected to be better from Friday.

■ Relief against dictatorial regime sign of change in winds: Uddhav ■ It will be very helpful in elections: Mamata

Victory of truth: INDIA hails bail to Kejriwal

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

As the news of interim bail to Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal came in, the Opposition INDIA bloc leaders welcomed the decision and congratulated the Delhi CM. West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee was among the first to react. She said, "I am very happy to see that Shri Arvind Kejriwal has got interim bail. It will be very helpful in the context of the current elections." Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena leader Aaditya Thackeray also took to X and said, "Arvind Kejriwalji getting justice and relief against the dictatorial regime in the

country is a huge sign of change in the winds. He has been speaking the truth and that is what the BJP dislikes. More power to him and the INDIA alliance for Bharat. We will protect our Constitution and democracy!" Samajwadi Party supreme Akhilesh Yadav said, "It's a victory for truth and justice. INDIA alliance is together and soon we will get rid of the government that troubles the common man."

"We welcome the intervention by the Supreme Court in granting bail to Arvind Kejriwal. We also hope that the Prime Minister gets enough time after June 4, when he becomes the former Prime



Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal addresses supporters in New Delhi on Friday.

Minister of India, to introspect while sitting in Sabarmati Ashram at the kind of politics he has indulged in. We hope the

former chief minister of Jharkhand, Hemant Soren, also gets due justice," Congress media department head Pawan

Khera said.

The Opposition had been arguing that Mr Kejriwal's arrest was an attempt to keep him out of the Lok Sabha campaign.

While Mr Kejriwal would campaign in Delhi for joint candidates of the Congress and AAP (the two parties are INDIA bloc allies) in Punjab, his party's candidates are pitted against those of the Congress, the BJP, and the Akali Dal.

There, it would be interesting to see who he targets, and whether he speaks against the Congress too.

Of the 13 seats, eight were won by the Congress in 2019.

NCP chief Sharad Pawar said, "India remains stead-

fast in the pursuit of democracy."

Arguing that bail to Mr Kejriwal was given "despite ED's vehement opposition to it,"

CPI general secretary D. Raja said, "Importantly, SC's observation that it took ED two years to initiate action against Arvind Kejriwal suggests that the timing of his arrest, right before elections, was not above suspicion and could be politically motivated."

The National Conference supreme Farooq Abdullah said that this is a big boost for AAP.

Taking a different route, Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva said that interim bail does not mean that he is innocent.

After bail, CM set to attend 1st roadshow in Delhi today

New Delhi, May 10: Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal Friday said he will participate in a roadshow in South Delhi on May 11 along with his Punjab counterpart Bhagwant Mann. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener was granted interim bail till June 1 by the Supreme Court earlier in the day in a money laundering case linked to the alleged Delhi excise policy scam.

This will be Mr Kejriwal's first roadshow after walking out of Tihar Jail on Friday. The chief minister reached his residence in the Civil Lines area at around 8.20 pm from the prison complex.

"There is a roadshow in South Delhi. I will participate in the roadshow with Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann," he told reporters while standing through the sunroof of his vehicle.

AAP has fielded Sahi Ram Pahalwan from the South Delhi parliamentary constituency.

Under a seat-sharing arrangement between the Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), the former has fielded candidates from three Lok Sabha seats in Delhi while the latter is contesting from the remaining four.

Meanwhile, Delhi Congress president Devender Yadav said his party will not only focus on the three Lok Sabha constituencies in Delhi where it has fielded candidates but will also campaign along with AAP for the four other seats as well. Congress and AAP candidates will conduct door-to-door campaigns, he said, adding that when the INDIA bloc comes to power at the Centre, the promises made to youth, women, farmers, the poor, the downtrodden, the marginalised and others will be fulfilled.

—PTI

A victory of democracy, says Sunita

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's wife Sunita Kejriwal on Friday hailed the Supreme Court's decision granting interim bail to her husband as a "victory of democracy" and said the relief is the result of prayers and blessings of millions of people. In a major relief to Mrs Kejriwal, the Supreme Court granted him bail till June 1 to campaign in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections.

"Hanuman ji ki jai. This is the victory of democracy. It is the result of the prayers and blessings of millions of people. Many thanks to everyone," Sunita said in a post on X in Hindi.

Elections in Delhi will be held in the sixth phase on May 25. The AAP is contesting in four of the seven seats as part of a seat-sharing arrangement with INDIA bloc partner Congress.

Mr Kejriwal will have to surrender and go back to jail on June 2. June 1 is the last day of the seven-phase elections.

CM out of jail, will boost campaign of AAP & Opp.

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

The much-awaited interim relief granted to Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal will be a boon for AAP as well as the INDIA bloc's campaign as the Lok Sabha polls enter the crucial phases in the coming weeks and elections are due in Delhi, Haryana, and Punjab where the AAP is contesting.

Senior AAP leader Saurabh Bharadwaj said Mr Kejriwal coming out of jail will be a "game changer" in favour of the INDIA bloc. Hinting at a rise in the stature of Mr Kejriwal as a top INDIA grouping leader, Mr Bharadwaj said he will go all over the country to campaign for the Lok Sabha polls.

AAP leaders said the party will decide on the campaign schedule of the Delhi chief minister keeping in mind the demands of INDIA bloc partners for his canvassing in other states.

The major chunk of 17 Lok Sabha constituencies in Punjab and Delhi, out of the total 22 seats contested by the AAP across the country, will go to polls on May 25 and June 1.



Arvind Kejriwal

Within hours of the interim bail granted to Mr Kejriwal by the apex court, the AAP was running the 'Jail Ka Jawab Vote Se' campaign, and its leaders started posting comments and videos on social media platforms using the hashtag #ModiCantStopKejriwal.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is independently fighting all 13 seats in Punjab and four out of seven in Delhi in a seat-sharing pact with its INDIA bloc partner Congress.

The elections are now at a stage where most of the political pundits do not know which way they are going, Mr Bharadwaj said.

"The BJP has lost its sheen and is changing its narrative every day. They are clueless. So, this is the time when somebody like

Mr Kejriwal was needed to change the narrative in the favour of the INDIA bloc," he said.

In the absence of Mr Kejriwal, who was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on March 21 and lodged in Tihar jail under judicial custody since April 1, his wife Sunita Kejriwal was campaigning for party candidates in Delhi and Gujarat.

She was also scheduled to campaign in Punjab and Haryana where the party is contesting the Kurukshetra seat.

"You will find him campaigning from tomorrow. His only goal is that the dictatorship in the country should end. His interim bail is perhaps a divine hint that the dictatorship in the country should go," senior AAP leader and Delhi minister Atishi told the media.

Mr Bharadwaj said the BJP understood the potential of Kejriwal so it deployed a "legal artillery" to oppose his bail.

He said Mr Kejriwal was an "exceptional communicator" having the power to connect with the masses in a simple language.

ED files fresh charges, names Kavitha, 4 more in liquor case

AGE CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

The Enforcement Directorate on Friday filed a fresh chargesheet in the Delhi excise policy-linked money laundering case naming BRS leader K. Kavitha and four others as accused.

About 200-page prosecution complaint (chargesheet) along with annexures was filed under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act at the Delhi's Rouse Avenue court.

Ms Kavitha, an MLC of the Bharat Rashtira Samithi party, three employees of a company that handled AAP's Goa campaign (Chariot Productions Media Pvt Ltd) - Damodar Sharma, Prince Kumar and Chanpreet Singh - besides a former employee of



K. Kavitha

India Ahead News Channel Arvind Singh have been named as accused in the latest chargesheet.

Special judge Kaveri Baweja is likely to take up the chargesheet for cognisance on May 13. A similar complaint against Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal is expected to be filed next week.

The probe agency had arrested Ms Kavitha (46), the daughter of former Telangana chief minister K. Chandrababhan Rao, from her Banjara hills res-

idence in Hyderabad on March 15.

Mr Chanpreet was arrested on April 15 and it was alleged by the agency that he "managed" cash funds for AAP's 2022 Goa Assembly campaign.

The three Chariot company employees too had alleged role in the movement and handling of "bribe" funds paid by the 'South Group' through 'Angadiyas' and hawala route for the party's Goa campaign.

Mr Singh, the commercial head and production controller of India Ahead News, was arrested by the CBI in this case in May last year for alleged transfer of these funds that have been called "kick-backs" of this "scam".

This is the seventh chargesheet filed by the ED in this case in which it has arrested 18 people so far including Mr Kejriwal.

8-year-old kidnapped, raped, 1 held

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

An eight-year-old girl who was allegedly kidnapped from South Delhi was also sexually assaulted, the police said on Friday.

The accused in the case, Mohammad Umar (28), a resident of Mehrauli was arrested on Tuesday.

After the girl was rescued and reunited with her family, she was sent for a medical examination where she told that Umar had sold her nose ring and bought her some clothes and some food items for himself, they said.

"The MLC confirmed sexual assault and slight abrasion on the upper body," the police added.

27 emails, 10 ac/s: Mystery of missing Taarak's star deepens

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

The mystery of missing actor Gurucharan Singh, who played Roshan Singh Sodhi's character in TV serial *Taarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashmah* has become deeper as the Delhi police has found that the actor was using 27 separate email accounts in the fear of being "surveilled" by someone.

According to a police officer, who is privy to the investigation, the actor was having a suspicion of being "surveilled" for which he would often change his email accounts.

The 51-year-old actor was supposed to board a flight from Delhi to Mumbai on April 22 evening but never reached his destination. His father, who lives in Palam, informed the local police



Gurucharan Singh

after his phone was found to be unreachable.

A police officer said a case under section 365 (kidnapping or abducting with intent to convey out of India or secretly confine person) of the IPC was registered at the Palam police station on April 26. A police team has been tasked to trace his location from the mobile phone which he was carrying, a police officer said.

The officer said Mr Singh's mobile phone is switched off since 9.22 pm

on April 22. On the basis of a CCTV footage, his last location was tracked to Dabri in Southwest Delhi where he reached in an e-rickshaw, hired from near IGI airport.

The actor used to carry two mobile phones. But he left one of them at his home in Delhi. He made the last call to his friend, who was supposed to pick him at the Mumbai airport, another officer said.

The police teams have scanned his financial transactions from his bank accounts and credit cards. They show that the last transaction was of ₹14,000, which he withdrew from one of his bank accounts on the day he went missing.

The police officer said Mr Singh's financial condition was not sound, as he had several loans and dues on him.

Modi invites Sharad Pawar to join NDA

■ Continued From Page 1
their respective parties, Uddhav Thackeray and Mr Pawar now head the Shiv Sena (UBT) and the NCP (SP), respectively. Commenting on Mr Modi's offer, Mr Pawar rejected the possibility of going with the BJP, saying that it was not in the interest of the country and he will never ditch the Nehru-Gandhi ideology. "We will not go anywhere and will not leave the Nehru-Gandhi ideology. Mr Modi has made some comments about the Muslim community in his speeches. We will never join hands with those who adopt such a stand. If we have to take this country forward, we will have to take communities together," Mr Pawar said in Pune.

Alleging that Mr Modi does not believe in democracy, Mr Pawar said, "Today,

our parliamentary and democratic system is in danger. The Prime Minister does not believe in our democratic system. Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren have been arrested and put in jail. The Centre is involved in this and therefore there is no question of going with them (the BJP)," he said.

Maharashtra CM Shinde, however, supported Mr Modi's statement, saying it was always better to follow (late Shiv Sena founder) Balasaheb Thackeray's ideology than to join the Congress.

"The talks of mergers begin when the party becomes weak. Both parties — the NCP (SP) and Shiv Sena (UBT) — have lost their strength and hence they have started talking about going with the

Congress. It means they have given up," he said.

Addressing a huge public meeting in Hyderabad's Lal Bahadur Stadium, Mr Modi said that he found an energetic and unmatched support for the BJP in Telangana, where people are saying, "Congress nakko, BRS nakko, MIM nakko, BJP jetao".

At the rally, Mr Modi highlighted the significance of Hyderabad amid cheering from a large number of BJP workers. Remembering the pivotal role the city played in bringing the BJP government at the Centre a decade ago, he said, "Hyderabad holds a special significance and the venue is much more special." Lashing out at the Congress, he said the venom of racism is filled in the veins of the party.

"The Congress maintains a soft stand towards racism and has always taken a stand against the rich cultural ethos and values of the country, including the worship of Lord Sri Ram." "The Congress is determined to make Hindus second-class citizens in their own motherland. Do these people want to establish Aurangzeb's rule in India? Is this the reason for them to talk about the vote jihad?" he asked.

Slamming the divisive mindset of the Congress party, Mr Modi said they have never looked at the country as a nation and asked people to be alert against the Congress and the INDIA bloc parties.

Stating that the Congress has always been an anti-middle-class party, Mr Modi said the Congress wants to take away their savings and income and distribute it to its votebanks.

—PTI

NORTHERN RAILWAY	
NOTICE FOR E-AUCTION	
Senior Divisional Commercial Manager/FS, Delhi Division, Northern Railway, in terms of Railway Board letter no. 2022/TC (FM)/10/04 dated 13.06.2022, invites bids through e-Auction (www.ireps.gov.in) for the contract of Management and Operation of Cloakroom (on ROMT basis) situated at PF-1 of Hazrat Nizamuddin (HNZM) Railway Station (Area 71.79 Sq Mtrs) for 5 (five) years as per detail and schedule given below:-	
S. No.	Date & time of e-Auction
1.	24.05.2024 at 11:00 am
Assets to be auctioned	
The contract of Management and Operation of Cloakroom (on ROMT basis) situated at PF-1 of Hazrat Nizamuddin (HNZM) Railway Station (Area 71.79 Sq Mtrs) for 5 (five) years.	
Important notes: 1. For more information, requirement and various aspects regarding these e-Auctions, interested bidders are advised to visit https://www.ireps.gov.in/html/helpdesk/learning_centre.html . (E-Auction learning section). 2. Earnest Money Deposit (EMD): 5% of the total contractual bid value to be deposited online during the auction. EMD of the successful bidder will be retained as Security Deposit. 3. Railway Administration reserves the full and absolute rights to short terminate these contracts at any point of time and/or for taking any decision regarding the discontinuation/continuation of these contracts with modified/additional terms and conditions depending upon the situation.	
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NORTHERN RAILWAY

INVITATION OF TENDERS THROUGH

E-PROCUREMENT SYSTEM

Azadi Ka
Amrit Mahotsav

Tender Notice No. 12/2024-2025

Date: 10.05.2024

Principal Chief Materials Manager, Northern Railway, New Delhi-110001, for and on behalf of the President of India, invites e-tenders through e-procurement system for supply of the following items:-

S. No.	Tender No.	Brief Description	Qty.	Closing Date
01	09243068	ANTI TRACKING FINISHING VARNISH	4811 KGS	31.05.24
02	07230459	SUPPORTING DEVICE COMPLETE FOR CBC OF LHB COACHES	292 NOS	03.06.24
03	19240810	SET OF LABYRINTH RING, BEARING CAP AND CLAMP PLATE	818 SET	04.06.24
04	19240706	BULL GEAR (72 TEETH) FOR WAP-7 LOCO	34 NOS	05.06.24
05	09243043	HIGH PERFORMANCE ANTI CORROSIVE EPOXY COATING	18692 KGS	07.06.24
06	12241701	ALUMINIUM CONDUCTOR WELDING CABLE	34749 MTR	10.06.24
07	09243010	ENAMEL SYNTHETIC, EXTERIOR, FINISHING OXFORD BLUE	25315 LTR	11.06.24
08	12240029	EARTHING CABLE COMPLETE 70 SQ MM	11006 NOS	11.06.24
09	19240563	OIL COOLING RADIATOR FOR CONVERTER/TRANSFORMER OF 3-PHASE LOCOMOTIVES	42 NOS	12.06.24
10	07240118	FOOT REST MULTISTAGE ARRANGEMENT FOR LHB TYPE AC CHAIR CAR	29267 NOS	28.06.24
11	07230086	TWO PIECE GLASS SHUTTER	4696 NOS	15.07.24
12	19243517	ROLLER BEARING RB5020	724 NOS	22.07.24
13	07240059	LADDER	8379 NOS	23.07.24
14	19242711	AXLE BOX COMPLETE ASSEMBLY FOR CENTRE AXLE	61 NOS	05.08.24

NOTE -1. Vendors may visit the IREPS website i.e. www.ireps.gov.in for details.

2. No Manual offer will be entertained.

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SHORT TAKES

JJP MLA's convoy attacked; 6 injured

Chandigarh: The convoy of JJP's sitting MLA and the party's Hissar Lok Sabha candidate Naina Chautala was allegedly attacked by some people in Roj Khara village of Jind district, leaving six injured, the party leaders said. In a video message, Jannayak Janta Party leader Digvijay Chautala claimed that the hooligans had been identified as Congress workers. The convoy was headed to Uchana in Jind when the incident took place. While Ms Chautala did not get injured in the incident, six others were. The Congress leader B.B. Batra, who was speaking to reporters in Chandigarh on another issue, denied that the Congress workers were involved in the incident. While a police officer from Jind said the matter is under investigation, Mr Digvijay said, "I received news that convoy of my mother and JJP leader Naina Chautala was attacked, leaving our workers and some of her staff members injured." — *PTI*

Panda files papers from Kendrapara

Bhubaneswar: Accompanied by thousands of party workers, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) national vice-president Baijayant Panda on Friday filed his nomination papers from Kendrapara Lok Sabha seat. Mr Panda filed his nomination after conducting a mega roadshow in the city. Scores of people assembled on both sides of the road up to Kendrapara collector's office during the roadshow. Mr Panda greeted people during the roadshow and exuded confidence that the party would register a superb performance in the 2024 elections in Odisha and the country at large. His roadshow procession passed through several prominent locations in Kendrapara. He urged the people of Kendrapara to vote in large numbers on June 1.

Neta vows 'double wives, double aid'

Bhopal: Congress veteran and former Union minister Kantilal Bhuria has stirred a row by pledging to provide double aid to the person having two wives, after his party forms government at the Centre. The Congress in its manifesto has promised to provide a financial aid of ₹1 lakh per annum to a woman if the party is voted to power in the general election and those with two wives will get double the amount, he said. The 73-year-old leader made the remarks while addressing a rally at Sailana, under the Ratlam (ST) Lok Sabha constituency, in Madhya Pradesh late Thursday evening. His announcement left the gathering in splits. The Congress veteran and former chief minister Digvijay Singh and state party president Jitu Patwari were also present on the occasion.

I DOUBT IF MODI WILL DEBATE WITH ME: RAHUL

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

Senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday said he was ready to debate with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on public issues but expressed scepticism about the latter's willingness to participate in such a debate. Mr Gandhi was addressing an event titled "Rashtriya Samvidhan Sammelan" in Lucknow when he was asked about the letter from a senior journalist and two former judges urging the Congress leader and Prime Minister Narendra Modi to participate in a public debate on the ongoing Lok Sabha elections. He said, "I am 100% ready to debate with PM on public issues," Mr Gandhi asserted. "But I know him, he will 100% not debate with me." Veteran journalist N. Ram, former Supreme Court judge Madan Lokur and former Delhi high court chief justice A.P. Shah on Thursday asked the two leaders to participate in a public debate on a non-commercial and non-partisan platform, saying they have only heard allegations and challenges from either side but meaningful responses.

Important for India to have stable leadership, says EAM

'World will witness very stormy churn due to conflicts'

New Delhi, May 10: The world will witness a "very, very stormy" churn because of conflicts, power shifts and sharpening competition in this decade, which makes it all the more important for India to have a stable and mature leadership, external affairs minister S. Jaishankar said.

In an exclusive interview to PTI late Thursday, Mr Jaishankar painted a picture of the world radically different from the one we are living in now by the end of 2020s when asked to draw on his nearly 50 years of experience in diplomacy and politics to give an assessment of the global power balance.

"Multiple conflicts, tensions, divides! With all these variables that I am putting to you, I am painting to you, actually, a very, very stormy international scene for the balance of the decade," said Mr Jaishankar, a former ambassador to China and the United States, who was tapped for the political role by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2019.

Mr Jaishankar especially referred to the declining influence of the United States, the conflict in Ukraine, the fighting in Gaza, attacks in the Red Sea, tensions in the South China Sea, the challenge of terrorism in different geographies and advent of



External affairs minister S. Jaishankar during an interview in New Delhi on Thursday.

— *PTI*

new technologies as the drivers of the "churn".

"I think the combination of all of this today poses a kind of a picture of great churn, and on top of it the competition is sharpening," he said.

In this context, he added it is imperative that voters in the ongoing Lok Sabha polls choose wisely so India continues to have a stable and mature leadership.

"I think today, one of the biggest choices which the Indian voters have to make is in this situation — whom do you trust to lead the Indian government," he said, pitching for continuation of the National Democratic Alliance government.

In a veiled reference to Rahul Gandhi, Mr Jaishankar said Sam Pitroda's controversial comments were not a slip of tongue, it rather revealed the mindset of his Congress Party and that of the people he has mentored.

"I think what he was saying probably is what is the talk in the circles which he inhabits, possibly shared by people he has mentored, and I think there were two parts of it which were troubling for me," Mr Jaishankar added.

Mr Jaishankar, who has a massive fan base in the country for raising India's and the Modi government's profile internationally with his hard-nosed diplomacy, pointed out that the churn is already happening.

— *PTI*

■ 'Will make best efforts to strengthen India, China relations' New China envoy Xu arrives in Delhi

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

After a gap of one and a half years, China will have a new ambassador in New Delhi. The newly appointed Chinese ambassador Xu Feihong arrived in the national capital on Friday to take charge of his new assignment.

The new envoy is expected to present his credentials to President Droupadi Murmu in due course. He will be the 17th Chinese ambassador in India. The previous Chinese ambassador Sun Weidong had completed his term in October 2022, following which the Chinese embassy in the



Xu Feihong

capital was functioning under a Charge d' Affaires.

On Friday, the Chinese embassy stated, "On 10th. May 2024, H.E. Xu Feihong, the newly appointed Chinese ambassador to India, arrived in New Delhi to assume office. Ambassador Xu Feihong is the 17th Chinese ambassador to India."

The embassy said Mr Xu

and his wife Tan Yuxiu were greeted, at the airport upon their arrival, by diplomats from the Chinese embassy including minister Ma Jia (who had served as Cda during the past several months) apart from minister Wang Lei and minister counselor Chen Jianjun and also by officials from the protocol division of India's ministry of external

affairs as well as the dean of diplomatic corps and ambassador of Eritrea to India Alem Tsehaye Woldemariam.

MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal had stated, "We have our ambassador in China, and the new Chinese ambassador is coming here, it's a normal routine. Our ambassador is there, so their ambassador should also be here."

Speaking to the Chinese media, the new Chinese envoy said leaders of the two nations were of the view that both nations are cooperation partners and not competitors and added that he would do his best to strengthen ties between the two nations.



Commuters cover themselves for protection against the scorching Sun on a hot summer day in Beawar on Friday.

— *PTI*

Char Dham kicks off amid chanting of hymns, fanfare

PRITHVIRAJ SINGH
DEHRAUN, MAY 10

The portals of the renowned Hindu pilgrimage centre and 11th "jyotirlinga" Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamunotri shrines in the Garhwal Himalayas were opened amid traditional religious ceremonies on Friday, coinciding with "Akshay Tritiya".

Chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami, who attended the Kedarnath ceremony along with his wife Geeta, claimed that the Char Dham Yatra will set a new record of footfall this season.

"It is an auspicious day for which we wait throughout the year. I welcome you all on the occasion. May you all be showered with the blessings of Baba Kedar," Mr Dhami said addressing a gathering outside the temple after offering prayers.

The Kedarnath shrine portals were opened at 7

am amid chanting of hymns and rituals being performed by priests in the glory of Lord Shiv. The occasion was also marked by the customary devotional tunes played by the Army's Grenadier Regiment band in the presence of nearly 10,000 pilgrims. The temple was decorated with over 20 quintals of flowers were also showered on pilgrims by a helicopter.

The portals of Gangotri and Yamunotri were opened after the Kedarnath ceremony at 10.29 am and 12.25 pm respectively.

The portals of the Kedarnath shrine will be opened on Sunday.

"The yatra will create a new record in this pilgrimage season and the state government is committed to provide all facilities to the pilgrims coming to Gangotri, Yamunotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath. Adequate medical facilities and other services are also being put in place," Mr Dhami said. It's significant that more than 55 lakh pilgrims visited Uttarakhand during the 2023 season.

As per the traditional process of opening the Kedarnath portals, "panchmukhi" (penta-faceted) idol of Lord Kedarnath arrived in Kedarpur from its "panchkedar" on Thursday, passing through its main halting points Guptkashi, Fata and Gaurikund. The pilgrims had started arriving at the temple premises to participate in the portal opening ceremony as early as 4 am.

■ 'Cong, Mamata engineered ₹12L-cr scams, won't be spared' TMC stands for 'tushtikaran' mafia, corruption: Amit Shah

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, MAY 10

Union home minister Amit Shah on Friday asserted that the Trinamul Congress stood for "tushtikaran (appeasement) and mafia" and accused West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee of indulging in "endless corruption" in the state.

During his Lok Sabha election campaign in three parliamentary constituencies in the state, Mr Shah branded Ms Banerjee's government as "number one" in corruption in the country and also criticised her for "remaining silent" on the Sandeshkhali issue.

"Mamata Banerjee has orchestrated endless corruption here. ₹50 crores were recovered from her minister's house," he told a rally at Ranaghat in Nadia in support of local BJP MP and candidate Jagannath Sarkar.

"Has anyone here seen ₹50 crores ever? Who does it belong to, Mamata Didid? The money belongs to the poor youth of Ranaghat. The Congress and Mamata Banerjee engineered scams of ₹12 lakh crores. Whoever is involved in corruption, will not be spared," he said.

The BJP heavyweight



Union home minister Amit Shah waves to supporters during an election rally in West Bengal's Nadia district on Friday.

— *PTI*

added that all of the corrupt will be put behind bars. There is corruption in ration distribution, municipal recruitment, and teachers' recruitment. There are also cow and cattle smuggling scams. Mamata Banerjee, your government is number one in corruption in the entire country," the minister said.

Later speaking at another rally in Birbhum for BJP candidate Debanu Bhattacharya, Mr Shah also claimed that the BJP never sent the CBI and the ED to raid TMC leaders' houses.

"Mamata Banerjee complains of the CBI and the ED raids. But we didn't send CBI ED. The high court did," he pointed out.

Referring to arrested TMC strongman of Birbhum Anubrata Mondal, the Union home minister sarcastically remarked, "Do you know Anubrata Mondal? Don't feel scared, he is in jail! He ran all types of illegal activities here."

Mr Shah observed, "He is now breathing air in Tihar Jail in the cattle smuggling scam. Those who run syndicate, cut money nexus still have time for correction. All of them will be hung upside down after we come to power here." He further wondered though Ms Banerjee was born in the same district, why people have to go outside to earn a living or set up their businesses.

Cong 'apologist': BJP over Aiyar's Pak nuke bomb slur

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

Senior Congress leader Mani Shankar Aiyar has come under fire after an old interview of his went viral where he said that India should engage in dialogue with Pakistan or the country could end up paying a heavy price. Mr Aiyar said Pakistan has nuclear bombs that they could drop on India if our governments irked them.

His party was quick to dissociate itself from the comments while the BJP latched on to them, accusing the party of being an apologist for Pakistan and the terrorism emanating from its soil.

Mr Aiyar said the video was old and dredged up now as the BJP's election campaign is faltering.



Mani Shankar Aiyar

As the remarks triggered a row, the Congress said it totally disagrees with the remarks made by Mr Aiyar some months ago. Mr Aiyar does not speak for the party in any capacity whatsoever, Congress media department chairperson Pawan Khara said on X.

"Indian National Congress dissociates itself completely from and disagrees totally with some

remarks made by Mr Mani Shankar Aiyar few months back which have been revived today by the BJP in its attempt to deflect attention from Prime Minister Modi's daily goof ups. Mr Aiyar does not speak for the party in any capacity whatsoever," Mr Khara said.

Uploading a video of external affairs minister S. Jaishankar, Mr Khara said, "If old videos are to be used, here is a not so old video where the external affairs minister is publicly advising India to be afraid of China."

Seeking to corner the Opposition party in the middle of the high-stakes general election, BJP fielded Union minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar to attack the Congress.

Election brings cheer & hope in J&K's Shia town

YUSUF JAMEEL
BUDGAM, MAY 10

There is a wave of happiness among the voters in this predominantly Shia town, about 15 km west of Kashmir capital Srinagar, but more avid appears to be Tanvir Hussein, a senior citizen who lives in a tiny but nice house of exposed bricks and timber built on a sloped land here.

"I didn't vote in any of the elections in the past nearly three decades. But this time I'm going to vote with all pleasure and excitement," he told this newspaper. Mr Hussein is a sworn supporter of Jammu and Kashmir Anjuman-e-Sharie Shian, a religious-political organisation of Shia Muslims based here in Budgam.

As a constituent of the separatist amalgam Hurriyat Conference, the Anjuman endorsed its boycott call in every election that was held in the past be it for the Lok Sabha or the Assembly of the erstwhile state, leaving Mr Hussein with no choice but to follow the diktat.

Kashmiri watchers say that it was because of a combination of fear of and sympathy for the separatists that the post-1989 Kashmir Valley witnessed the least participative polls and the lowest voter turnouts in its history.

► **KASHMIRI WATCHERS** say it was because of a combination of fear of and sympathy for the separatists that the post-1989 Kashmir Valley witnessed the least participative polls

But this time there is no poll boycott call from any separatist political or militant group and the people here and elsewhere in the Valley are going to vote without facing any such dilemma.

However, Fatima bint Hassan, another resident, says she did not care about the separatists' boycott call even when defying their diktats was fraught with hazards. "Though the situation here in Budgam was different as compared to the rest of the Valley, the threat of being harassed was ever-present," she said.

In the 2002 Assembly elections, Ms Fatima chose to vote for Aga Syed Ruhullah Mehdi, a member of the Budgam's influential Aga family, considering him a "victim of terrorism". Mr Mehdi's father Aga Syed Mehdi was killed in an IED blast on November 3, 2000 at neighbouring Kanihama, the incident blamed on separatist militants by the police.

NINE PLUS INFRASTRUCTURE PRIVATE LIMITED
CIN: U45400HR2007PTC073696
Corporate Office: 524, 5th Floor, Galleria, DLF City Phase-IV, Gurgaon, Haryana-122009
Tel: 0124 - 4052649

Form INC-26 NOTICE

Before the Central Government
Regional Director (Northern Region)

B-2 Wing, 2nd Floor, Paryavaran Bhawan,
CGO Complex, New Delhi - 110003

In the matter of sub-section (4) of Section 13 of Companies Act, 2013 and clause (a) of sub-rule (5) of rule 30 of the Companies (Incorporation) Rules, 2014

AND
In the matter of M/s NINE PLUS INFRASTRUCTURE PRIVATE LIMITED having its registered Office at SHOP NO. MS0236 MEGA MALL GOLF COURSE ROAD DLF PHASE-1, Gurgaon, Haryana-122001

(Petitioner)

Notice is hereby given to the General Public that the company proposes to make application to the Central Government under section 13 of the Companies Act, 2013 seeking confirmation of alteration of the Memorandum of Association of the Company in terms of the special resolution passed at the Extra Ordinary General Meeting held on 30th November, 2023 to enable the company to change its Registered office from "State of Haryana" to "State of Gujarat."

Any person whose interest is likely to be affected by the proposed change of the registered office of the company may deliver either on the MCA-21 portal (www.mca.gov.in) by filing investor complaint form or cause to be delivered or send by registered post of his/her objections supported by an affidavit stating the nature of his/her interest and grounds of opposition to the Regional Director, Northern Region, B-2 Wing, 2nd Floor, Paryavaran Bhawan, CGO Complex, New Delhi - 110003, within fourteen days from the date of publication of this notice with a copy of the application company at its registered office at the address mentioned below.

ADDRESS OF REGISTERED OFFICE:
SHOP NO. MS0236 MEGA MALL GOLF COURSE ROAD DLF PHASE-1, Gurgaon, Haryana-122001 (Present Address) and CIN-U45400HR2007PTC073696

For and on behalf of
M/s NINE PLUS INFRASTRUCTURE PRIVATE LIMITED
Director
(Megha Anand)
DIN: 07958829
Tel. No.: 0124-4052649
Email ID: nineplusinfrastructure@gmail.com

SHORT TAKES

India, Moldova sign visa waiver pact

New Delhi: India and Moldova on Friday signed an agreement which after coming into force, will allow diplomatic and official passports holders of either country to travel to the other without a visa, the ministry of external affairs said. This agreement will add “further momentum” to the friendly and cordial relations between the two countries, it said. “Pavan Kapoor, secretary (West), MEA of the Republic of India and Ana Taban, ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary of the Republic of Moldova, on behalf of their respective governments, signed an agreement on visa waiver for diplomatic and official passports, today on 10 May,” the statement said. This pact, after coming into force “will allow holders of diplomatic and official passports of either country to travel to the other, without a visa”, it said. — *PTI*

MP: Adopted son kills mother for FD

Gwalior, MP: A 24-year-old man allegedly killed his mother and buried her in the bathroom of his house in Madhya Pradesh's Sheopur district to get his hands on ₹30 lakh she had in a fixed deposit, police said on Friday. The police on Thursday arrested the accused, Deepak Pachauri, for the murder of his mother, Usha (65), an official said. Deepak, the victim's adopted son, lodged a complaint with Kotwali police in Sheopur town earlier this week, claiming that his mother had gone missing from their home, Sheopur Superintendent of Police Abhishek Anand told PTI. During the probe, the police questioned Deepak, his relatives and neighbours, he said. The police got suspicious when he started making contradictory statements, and investigations revealed that he had lost ₹15 lakh in the share market and needed money desperately. The police team found that the accused had built a new section in the bathroom of the house, and on removing the plaster, they found woman's body, official said. — *PTI*

Brij Bhushan to be charged for sexual harassment: Court

■ **Continued from Page 1** with sexual harassment and stalking in a separate case lodged on the basis of a complaint by six women wrestlers. Police had recommended cancellation of the complaint involving the minor wrestler, saying "no corroborative evidence" was found. The POCOS Act provides for a minimum imprisonment of three years, depending on the Sections under which a crime has been registered. The closure report notwithstanding, the court has to take a call on whether to accept it or order further investigation.

2 get life term, 3 acquitted in Dabholkar murder case

PRASAD PATIL
MUMBAI, MAY 10

A Pune sessions court on Friday convicted two and acquitted three accused persons in the 11-year-old murder of rationalist Narendra Dabholkar. However, the rationalist's son Hamid said the fight is far from over as the prosecution has failed to find the mastermind behind the murder.

Special judge P.P. Jadhav held Sahin Andure and Sharad Kalaskar guilty of shooting Dabholkar to death.

The remaining three accused — Virendrasinh Tawade, Sanjeev Punalekar and his aide Vikram Bhawe — were acquitted for insufficient evidence against them.

Andure and Kalaskar were sentenced to life imprisonment along with a



Narendra Dabholkar

penalty of ₹5 lakhs.

Both of them are also accused in the Govind Pansare murder case, while Kalaskar is also an accused in the murder of Gauri Lankesh.

“I will challenge the acquittal of the three accused persons, who were the conduit between the mastermind and assailants,” Mr Hamid said. Dabholkar, the founder of the Maharashtra Andhashraaddha Nirmoolan Samiti (MANS), was shot dead by two assailants during a

■ **NARENDRA DABHOLKAR**, founder of the Maharashtra Andhashraaddha Nirmoolan Samiti, was shot dead during a morning walk in Pune in 2013.

morning walk in Pune in 2013. The murder had sparked a nationwide debate over the threat to freedom of speech. Subsequently, the country witnessed three similar murders — communist leader Govind Pansare in February 2015, Kannada scholar M.M. Kalburgi in August 2015 and Bengaluru journalist Gauri Lankesh in September 2017.

“We are satisfied that the two accused have been convicted. But three accused persons have been acquitted for lack of evidence and the investigators have not

been able to expose the masterminds behind the murder. Our fight will not be over till the arrest of the three acquitted accused and masterminds. Now it is clear that the murders of Narendra Dabholkar, Pansare, Lankesh and Kalburgi were part of a larger conspiracy. All murders have similar modus operandi and the masterminds are the same. We will challenge the acquittals in the Bombay high court,” Hamid said.

The investigation into the Dabholkar murder cases has seen several twists and turns in the last 11 years. Initially, the police had arrested alleged firearms peddler Manish Nagori and his aide Vilas Khandelwal. Both were arrested by the Thane police in an extortion case on the same day of Dabholkar's murder.

Centre notifies Act on theatre commands

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

The Centre on Friday notified the Inter-Services Organisations (Command, Control and Discipline) Act that will pave the way for the reorganisation of the Indian military into integrated theatre commands.

It will empower the commander of a tri-services command to take disciplinary action against any personnel under his command, irrespective of services they originally belongs to.

“The act has been notified through a gazette notification to be enforced with effect from May 10, 2024,” said the ministry on Friday.

Days after IAF convoy hit, forces locate perpetrators

AGE CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR, MAY 10

Almost a week after the security forces launched a massive operation against separatist militants involved in a sneak attack on an Indian Air Force (IAF) convoy in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district, “contact” has been established with the perpetrators, officials said on Friday.

They said an exchange of fire took place between the militants and the security forces in the Sinal Top area of Poonch. “The terrorists who have been encircled by the security forces are believed to be the same group that had targeted the IAF convoy last Saturday,” officials said.

12 Naxals killed, 2 jawans hurt in gunfight in C'garh's Bijapur

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
RAIPUR, MAY 10

Twelve Maoists were on Friday gunned down in an encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district on Friday. The encounter took place in the Pedia jungle under Gangaloor area in the district, the police said.

“An encounter took place in Gangaloor area. Twelve dead bodies of Naxals were recovered. I congratulate our jawans and senior officers for the successful counterinsurgency operation,” chief minister Vishnu Deo Sai said.

He said that since BJP came to power in Chhattisgarh, the fight against Naxals has intensified. Both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union home minister Amit Shah want the Left-wing extremism to end soon and ‘We are getting the benefit of the double engine sarkar’.

■ **WITH THIS**, number of Maoists killed in the last four months has reached 103. On April 29, 10 Maoists were killed in an encounter with security forces in Narayanpur district of Bastar

The police said that two jawans were injured in the incident.

Acting on special intelligence inputs on the gathering of at least a dozen senior Maoist leaders, including Naxal commanders Linga and Papa Rao along with a large number of armed Left-wing guerrillas in Pedia forest, a joint search operation involving security forces of the districts of Dantewada, Bijapur and Sukma was launched on Friday morning.

The joint team of 1,200 security personnel drawn from special task force (STF), District Reserve Guard (DRG) and Cobra

(Commando Battalion for Resolute Action) came under attack by Maoists in the Pedia forest leading to a fierce encounter between them.

Twelve bodies of Maoists, along with some weapons, were recovered, the police said. A DRG jawan and a STF jawan were injured in the incident. A senior police officer said that the West Bastar division of Maoists headed by Papa Rao attacked security forces in Pedia forest. The Maoist carried a bounty of ₹40 lakh on his head.

With this, the number of Maoists killed in the last four months has reached 103. On April 29, 10 Maoists were killed in an encounter with security forces in Narayanpur district of Bastar. Twenty nine Naxals were killed in an encounter with security forces in Maad area under Kanker district in Bastar on April 15 this year.

Top Saarc official on India visit from today

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

Even as the South Asian eight-nation grouping South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) has been virtually in deep freeze since 2016 due to India-Pakistan tensions, the secretary-general of Saarc and experienced Bangladeshi diplomat Golam Sarwar will visit New Delhi on a five-day visit starting Saturday during which he will deliver the third Shakti Sinha Memorial Lecture on “The Future of Saarc” next week on Monday in the Capital. The visit is being seen as a significant development although considerable hurdles still remain before any revival of the grouping.

Saarc has eight nations — India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Maldives — as its eight members. Apart from the Indo-Pak tensions, most nations in the world also do not recognise the Taliban regime ruling Afghanistan. While India does not recognise the Taliban regime in Kabul diplomatically, New Delhi's engagement with the (Afghan) Taliban has been stepped up in the past two years even as the Taliban's ties with its benefactor Pakistan has soured considerably in the past several months.

India to host Bharat Parv at Cannes

SHASHI BHUSHAN
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

India is set to host Bharat Parv at the 77th Cannes Film Festival for eminent dignitaries and delegates from around the world to showcase the myriad creative opportunities and a rich bank of creative talent in the country. The Union ministry of information and broadcasting on Friday said an Indian delegation, consisting of representatives from Central and state government and members of the industry, will showcase India's creative economy in the leading film market of the world, Marche du Films, through a series of initiatives.

“It is for the first time that the country will host a Bharat Parv at the 77th Cannes Film Festival, for eminent dignitaries and delegates from around the world participating in the festival will engage with film celebrities, filmmakers, directors, producers, buyers and sale agents from across the world and showcase the myriad creative opportunities and a rich bank of creative talent,” the ministry said. The official poster and trailer of the 55th India International Film Festival (iffi) to be held in Goa on November 20-28 this year will be unveiled at the Bharat Parv.

The Bharat Parv will also see the release of the ‘Save

the Date’ for the first World Audio-Visual& Entertainment Summit (Waves) to be hosted alongside the 55th IFFI.

The Cannes Pavilion at the Cannes at 108 village International Riviera, will be inaugurated on May 15 in the presence of eminent film personalities. The pavilion will be organised by the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) in collaboration with the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) as industry partner. A “Bharat Stall” will be put in the ‘Marche du Cannes’ through the Confe deration of Indian Industry (CII) for providing the industry to connect

and collaborate.

The Bharat Pavilion has been designed by the National Institute of Design (NID) Ahmedabad and is christened on “The Sutradhara” for depicting this year's theme of “Create in India”. Several Indian movies and productions will be showcased during the festival, Payal Kapadia's magnum opus All We Imagine As Light vie for the prestigious ‘Palme d'Or’. British-Indian filmmaker Sandhya Suri's poignant narrative in Santosh, in Un Certain Regard alongside Karan Kandhari's evocative Sister Midnight in Directors' Fortnight and Maisam Ali's compelling ‘In Retreat’ in L'Acid.

EC snubs Kharge's turnout claim

■ **Continued from Page 1** data. On Friday, the Congress, as part of a multiparty delegation, went to the EC with complaints over the Prime Minister's alleged “hate and divisive” speeches. Its complaint also mentioned issues pertaining to voter turnout data.

The EC rejected charges of mismanagement and delay in the release of turnout data and said Mr Kharge's allegations are unwarranted, without facts and “reflective of a biased and deliberate attempt to spread confusion”.

The poll body specially “condemned with contempt” Mr Kharge's statement, wherein he said, “Could this be an attempt to doctor the final results?”. The Congress president said it can create an anarchic situation, besides doubts and disharmony.

While criticising the EC over the delay in releasing the final poll percentage, Mr Kharge in a letter to the leaders of the INDIA bloc parties, wondered whether the delay is an attempt to doctor the final results. In his post on X, Mr Kharge had also talked about discrepancies in voting turnout data released by the EC and the non-publication of registered voters.

“The commission has not mentioned crucial yet related figures, such as the votes polled in each parliamentary constituency and in the respective Assembly constituencies. This raises additional issues — a) If the voter

turnout data was published within 24 hours of voting along with the crucial figures, then we would have known if the increase (of ~5 per cent) had been witnessed across constituencies? Or only in constituencies where the ruling regime did not perform well in the 2019 elections?”

(b) As per the Commission, the polling agents of the candidates have the exact voter turnout data for each polling station. It means that the Commission also has the requisite data on voter turnout for each polling station; now our question to them is, what exactly is precluding the Commission from publishing the same for the general public?” the Congress said in a complaint to EC on Friday.

The Congress further said that to alleviate these doubts raised in the public domain, the Commission should have not only released the data per parliamentary constituency but also the voter turnout data in each polling station.

In a strongly worded letter to Mr Kharge, the EC said such utterances from the president of a national political party attacking the credibility of the electoral steps and processes can have a negative impact on voter participation and can be seen as a means to deter an elector from exercising their franchise, apart from demoralising the election staff and machinery.

“While the Commission outright rejects the allegation of so-called ‘glaring mismanage-

ment’ yet, a pointwise response to your concerns on the subject is still provided,” the EC said in its letter.

The poll body further said that since Mr Kharge is a “senior parliamentarian, a very seasoned politician, with experience of 52 years in electoral politics and electoral processes, and as the head of a prominent national political party,” he must be aware that EC follows the most transparent process of preparation of electoral rolls and well designed and well-tested participation of the political parties and candidates at every stage of the process. All political parties know the number of electors at every stage of the election process,” it added.

The EC dubbed Mr Kharge's statements “aggression on the vitals of live election operations”, adding that the Commission is determined “to act against developments that have a direct impact on the delivery of its core mandate.”

Calling it an attempt to push a biased narrative, the poll body said none of the Congress field functionaries or candidates raised any concerns at the close of polls or during scrutiny and no repolls on these counts were sought or ordered.

The EC added that while it respects his entitlement to ask questions about all aspects of the conduct of the elections, it also takes in its stride all criticism that comes its way, many of which may be or have been without any basis.

■ **Continued from Page 1** day, Ms Kejriwal, who was filling in for her husband during his absence, said, “Hanuman ji ki jai. This is the victory of democracy. It is the result of the prayers and blessings of millions of people. Many thanks to everyone.”

As Mr Kejriwal was granted relief by the apex court, top AAP leaders held a press conference and hailed the verdict as a “victory for democracy”.

Party workers celebrated and raised victory slogans at the party headquarters in Delhi. Some jubilant workers were seen dancing and raising slogans such as “Jail ke taale toot gaye, Kejriwal ji chhoot gaye.”

Hinting at a rise in the stature of Mr Kejriwal as a top INDIA grouping leader, Mr Bharadwaj said he will go all over the country to campaign for the Lok Sabha polls. The AAP leaders said the party will decide on the campaign schedule of Mr Kejriwal, keeping in mind the demands of INDIA bloc partners for his canvassing in other states.

Mr Kejriwal's legal team had made a strong pitch for his release to allow him to campaign for the AAP in the days before the election for Delhi's seven Lok Sabha seats — all held by the BJP — on May 25.

The Delhi CM is also

going to campaign aggressively in Punjab, where the AAP is in power and has fielded its candidates in all 13 Lok Sabha seats. He will also be campaigning in Haryana, where the party has fielded its candidate from the Kurushetra constituency.

A wave of jubilation also swept across the INDIA bloc parties, with the Opposition leaders welcoming the court verdict and saying the “fight to save democracy” will now be more intense.

Congress leader Pawan Khara hoped former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren also got justice. “We welcome the intervention by the Supreme Court in granting bail to Mr Kejriwal... We also hope that the Prime Minister gets enough time after June 4, when he becomes the former Prime Minister, to introspect, sitting in the Sabarmati Ashram, on the kind of politics he has indulged in,” he said.

West Bengal chief minister and Trinamul Congress chief Mamata Banerjee said, “I am very happy to see that Mr Kejriwal has got interim bail.”

In the top court, as soon as the bench took up the matter, solicitor-general Tushar Mehta, appearing for the ED, said, “Now we have been approached by

Amritpal Singh. That's a concern.”

Mr Singh, chief of the Waris Punjab De outfit, is currently lodged at Dibrugarh jail in Assam under the National Security Act. Justice Khanna replied, “That's something entirely different. You can't compare.”

Mr Metha said he “could not find any precedent to assist your lordships either way, that a person is released for campaigning...” However, Justice Khanna said, “Let's not put into a simple straight-jacket like that.” He added that the case was registered in August 2022 and Mr Kejriwal was arrested in March 2024 after about one-and-a-half years. “Twenty one days...should not make any difference,” he said.

The bench rejected the vehement argument of the ED counsel that enlarging Mr Kejriwal on interim bail to campaign in the elections will be without precedent. The top court did not concur with the contention that interim bail to the AAP convener for campaigning will be like giving the “premium of placing the politicians in a benefic position compared to ordinary citizens of this country.”

“While examining the question of the grant of interim bail or release, the courts always take into

consideration the peculiarities associated with the person in question and the surrounding circumstances. In fact, to ignore the same will be iniquitous and wrong,” the bench said, adding that the parliamentary elections are the “most significant and an important event this year.”

The bench said, “No doubt, serious accusations have been made, but Mr Kejriwal has not been convicted yet, does not have any criminal antecedents and is “not a threat to the society.” It noted that, more importantly, the legality and validity of his arrest itself were under challenge before the top court, which has yet to pronounce its verdict on it.

The apex court said: “The factual situation cannot be compared with the harvesting of crops or the plea to look after business affairs. In this background, once the matter is subjudice and the questions relating to the legality of arrest are under consideration, a more holistic and libertarian view is justified, in the background that the 18th Lok Sabha general elections are being held.”

Ruling that Mr Kejriwal's case is “not an exception”, the bench said the power to grant interim bail is commonly exercised in a number of cases

and interim bail is granted keeping in mind the facts of each case.

The top court directed Mr Kejriwal not to make any comment with regard to his role in the case and to not interact with any of the witnesses or have access to any official files connected with the case.

The apex court said the ongoing Lok Sabha elections have prompted the consideration of interim bail for Mr Kejriwal, as at this stage, it is not possible for the court to either conclude the arguments or finally pronounce the verdict on his plea challenging his arrest.

The top court said: “As the appeal is pending before us, we do not think it will be proper for us to direct the appellant, Mr Kejriwal, to approach the trial court for interim bail or release. This may not be apt in view of the legal issues and contentions that are under examination and consideration before us.”

The bench noted the investigation in the case has remained pending since August 2022 and Mr Kejriwal was arrested on March 21 this year. It, however, said the grant of interim bail will not be treated as an expression of opinion on the merits of the case or the criminal appeal that is pending its consideration.



THE ASIAN AGE

11 MAY 2024

Ray of justice seen in ‘poll’ bail for Kejriwal

Arvind Kejriwal is a free man till the end of the Lok Sabha polls on June 1. In granting him interim bail for campaigning, the Supreme Court has upheld the right of the Delhi chief minister and head of the Aam Aadmi Party to take part in the election campaign and vote. Justice has been rendered to an extent, but it is not a blanket order since many others, including his former deputy CM Manish Sisodia, remain in jail in the same “liquor-gate” case.

The money laundering case linked to a scrapped Delhi liquor policy registered against him remains and he will return to Tihar Jail on June 2. The implications of the verdict, delivered by a bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta, are far-reaching. It could be argued that the release of a star campaigner could influence the polling.

The conditional bail order sets a sort of precedent in cases involving the PMLA Act which by its very nature of being draconian could be misused by those in authority to muzzle political opponents. Of course, the merits of the case are yet to be examined in detail before a verdict is pronounced on whether members of the Delhi Cabinet were conspirators in a liquor policy scam for the benefit of their political party.

The orders served in similar cases, some linked to the same Delhi liquor policy change and another significant one in the arrest of the former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren — who, incidentally, is still in jail with his right to campaign not having brought him equivalent relief — have been mixed, though one of the judges has been a constant in many of the benches that dealt with the cases against other politicians regarding the granting of regular bail.

Considering the current circumstances when the country is in the middle of parliamentary elections, the Kejriwal case assumes great significance. On the one hand is the charge that the ruling party has been prone to using Central investigative agencies to put many opponents in jail, especially by using the PMLA with its stringent conditions devolving upon the accused to prove their innocence.

On the other hand, Mr Kejriwal had not set a very good example in ducking multiple summonses from Central agencies over nine months that his ultimate arrest came much closer to the polls and thus brought this angle of it infringing the democratic right of an individual. No court is likely to be as sympathetic if a common man was to ignore summons in this manner.

The ED delaying Mr Kejriwal’s arrest after registering an ECIR in August 2022, as pointed out by the court, the ED refusing to accept lawyers’ offer to present all documents called for and Mr Kejriwal ducking summons on the grounds that the charges were politically motivated, had led to an impasse until his arrest on March 21. What the bail order has done is to level the electoral playing field that had been skewed by arrests and the tendency of the investigating agencies to make the process itself the punishment more than bringing graft cases registered against prominent politicians to a conclusion.

Whatever be the denouement, it is now established that political priorities have a way of trumping everything else in India, even if the court insists that this interim bail will not set a precedent. And yet there is a ray of justice to be seen in Mr Kejriwal being given time off to seek votes for his party and the national alliance it has joined.

Some good tips on Indians’ diet

For some time now most people, empowered by bits and pieces of knowledge gleaned thanks to the Internet revolution, have known what a healthy diet is and that Indians in general have hardly made moves to get closer to that ideal.

The medical council and the national nutrition institute, in their latest guidelines based on research also on the latest dietary trends in India, have simply reiterated the importance of a healthy diet.

It is up to people to heed the advice after studying the details of the recommendations, take measures to cut sugar intake and oils and eat fat only in moderation and avoid ultra-processed foods that contain a huge amount of chemicals and preservatives. All that must be done while undertaking proper physical exercise in combination with a more active lifestyle to avoid the non-communicable diseases that burden more than half the 1.4 crore Indians because of their unhealthy diet patterns.

There is a huge amount of good advice among the 17 dietary recommendations, many of which we may have all known already but still struggled to adapt and follow from sheer force of habit or due to economic circumstances or existing medical conditions. It is never too late to switch to a healthier diet pattern that may help fend or stave off altogether lifestyle diseases like hypertension, obesity and diabetes that haunt Indians to such levels as to label the country the world’s diabetes capital, etc.

The battle against malnutrition may have been won to a certain extent but under-nutrition is prevalent in Indians and only a change in diet patterns paying greater attention to nutrient intake might help retrieve the situation.

The advice against taking protein supplements because of their content beyond healthy proteins might sound jarring to younger generations, many of whom are inveterate gymnasium enthusiasts. Maybe, greater attention to the information on labels would help them find the right source of proteins.

The very thought that a significant proportion of premature deaths can be averted by following a healthy lifestyle should wake the general population to something that is being said for the good health of the nation.

In the end, you are what you eat, and the old maxim should suffice as a reminder that there is a better way to eat so that we may live better. More fruits and nuts, more nutritious combos, less sugar, less carbs and less red meat is the way to go and to stick to this is a challenge people must accept if they wish to live longer and, more importantly, healthier.

KAUSHIK MITTER

Editor

K. SUBHAAR

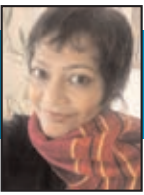
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Subhani



Vaccines and trust: Need for nuanced conversation



Patralekha Chatterjee

Dev 360

In a polarised and election-mode India, spreading paranoia over rare side effects of the AstraZeneca/Covishield vaccine, willingly or unwittingly, can lead to a permanent tear in public trust in vaccines.

Soon after Anglo-Swedish drugmaker AstraZeneca acknowledged in a British court that its Covid-19 vaccine can, “in very rare cases, cause TTS”, there has been utter panic among sections of the Indian public. TTS, or Thrombosis with Thrombocytopenia Syndrome, causes people to have blood clots and a low blood platelet count.

Back in April 2021, a statement by the World Health Organisation had noted: “Based on latest available data, the risk of TTS with Vaxzevria and Covishield vaccines appears to be very low. Data from the UK suggest the risk is approximately four cases per million adults (1 case per 250,000) who receive the vaccine, while the rate is estimated to be approximately one per 100,000 in the European Union. Countries assessing the risk of TTS following the Covid-19 vaccination should perform a benefit-risk analysis that considers local epidemiology (including incidence and mortality from Covid-19 disease), age groups targeted for vaccination and the availability of alternative vaccines.”

The statement, following a review by WHO’s Global Advisory Committee on Vaccine Safety, flagged the possibility of “a geographic variation in the risk of these rare adverse events” and urged evaluation of potential cases of TTS in all countries.

At the time of writing, AstraZeneca has begun worldwide withdrawal of its Covid-19 vaccine. The pharma major says the vaccine was being removed from markets for commercial reasons; it was no longer being manufactured or supplied,

having been superseded by updated vaccines that tackle new variants.

In India, it is election time and the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, manufactured and marketed by the Pune-based Serum Institute of India (SII), is troublingly at the centre of a fierce political row between the ruling Bharatiya Janata party and the Opposition.

Scientists must investigate the side effects of all vaccines, rare or not. Questions must be asked about Covishield or any other vaccine or drug in public interest. But how it is done, and by whom is critical. Sweeping generalisations can do immense damage. In India, nearly one out of every four children still miss out on essential vaccines.

Fear of vaccines is the last thing that one wants. How did we get to this messy state?

India’s effort to vaccinate its vast population against Covid-19 was widely lauded, critiques about overall management of the pandemic notwithstanding. But the vaccination campaign, like so many other campaigns in recent years, pivoted around Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Until recently, Covid-19 vaccination certificates had the Prime Minister’s photo. Mr Modi’s photo was removed from CoWIN certificates after an Election Commission directive. “Vote for Modi as he got us Covid-19 vaccines”, said a BJP leader last month.

Now, several politicians opposed to Mr Modi have latched on to AstraZeneca’s statement about rare side effects in a British court: all too predictably, BJP sympathisers see a grand conspiracy about AstraZeneca admitting to side effects in its Covishield vaccine during the ongoing election season.

What is being muted in all the noisy paranoia about blood clots and heart attacks in relation to Covishield are three key words — a “rare

Trust remains vital in the age of polycrisis, uncertainty and shifting truths. There is a real need for nuance, openness and transparency in the vaccine conversation.

side effect”. They may happen within a few days or a few weeks of taking the vaccine, but not several years after the vaccination.

What has contributed to the mess is the insufficient emphasis on possible rare adverse effects during earlier awareness campaigns when the priority was to get every eligible person vaccinated.

As Dr Anant Bhan, a researcher on global health and bioethics, puts it: “Every vaccine, including the long established and used oral polio vaccine, has some risk. But serious adverse effects are rare and the benefits of vaccines, whether old or new ones, far outweigh the risks. The hysteria in the social media over the recent disclosure by AstraZeneca (about rare adverse effects of their Covid vaccine, used as Covishield in India) is unfortunate”.

Dr Bhan points out there was always a large active online community of “anti-vaxxers” globally. Now there is a risk of the recent developments feeding local discourses over vaccines negatively. “Disclosure about risks of clotting (TTS) are not new findings. These were not hidden. They have been known and written about in medical journals since 2021. The problem is that in an election season, the whole issue about known adverse effects as discussed in the context of a UK court case has got politicised. And there is a danger of sections of the public thinking that vaccines mean risk. This is dangerous,” says Dr Bhan.

Health advocates are stressing that it is crucial to remember that the benefits of vaccination far outweigh the risks. “To put it into perspective, let us consider cancer treatment. Some cancer drugs can have serious side

effects, like lowering blood counts or harming the heart, liver, and kidneys, or even increasing the risk of severe infections. Despite these risks, we still use chemotherapy because the benefits are clear. Similarly, in treatment for heart attacks, thrombolytic drugs can be life-saving, but they also carry the risk of causing bleeding in the brain, which can be fatal. Yet, we still administer them because the benefits outweigh the risks. So, it is not fair to blame the vaccine for these adverse events and blow them out of proportion. Yes, there have been cases of myocarditis, especially in younger people, but at the time, we did not fully understand the extent of the risk. However, it is worth noting that the anti-vaccine movement might do more harm than good by spreading fear and panic. If people become too scared to get vaccinated, it could have serious consequences for public health,” says Dr S.P. Kalantari, professor of medicine, Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences, Sevagram, Maharashtra.

Which brings me to trust: the bedrock of immunisation programmes.

Trust remains vital in the age of polycrisis, uncertainty and shifting truths. How one communicates messages about vaccines is the key to building trust. There is a real need for a nuanced conversation, openness, and transparency in the vaccine conversation.

“Health policy messaging must convey that vaccines have significant benefits and acknowledge the rare risks. This calls for responsible behaviour on the part of everyone and there is an urgent need to build trust in the system. A person being vaccinated must believe that the health system will come to her/his aid if anything were to go wrong, even if that probability is rare. We cannot whitewash concern whenever and wherever it arises,” says Dr Bhan.

The system cannot be opaque.

The writer focuses on development issues in India and emerging economies. She can be reached at patralekha.chatterjee@gmail.com.

LETTERS

DRAGON IN EUROPE

Chinese President Xi Jinping’s recent tour of Europe, spanning six days and including stops in Hungary and Serbia, sought to bolster China’s strategic interests in Eastern Europe, particularly evident through initiatives like the Belt and Road. The tour underscored China’s ambitions to expand its influence, potentially reshaping traditional alliances and testing EU cohesion. However, enduring tensions in China-EU relations, exacerbated by disputes over trade practices and China’s support for Russia in the Ukraine conflict, highlight the complexities of navigating this relationship. European countries are reassessing their ties with China, recognising both opportunities and challenges.

Amarjeet Kumar Hazaribagh

CALL FLOOR TEST

HARYANA is in political turmoil after three independent MLAs withdrew their support to the ruling BJP and, and its former coalition partner, the JJP, offered support to the Congress to form an alternative government. The BJP government led by Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini appears to be in a minority with 43 MLAs by its side — it needs 45 for a majority. The Haryana governor must ask the government to prove its majority. What is he waiting for?

Sankar Paul Chakdaha, West Bengal

PM’S SELF-GOAL?

IT HAS COME as a complete surprise that the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, has alleged that the Congress has received bribes for Adani in order not to speak against him. Fact checking has showed that Rahul Gandhi has not stopped making allegations against Adani. By bringing this up, the PM has given an effective handle to the Opposition parties to attack him. Even the BJP supporters and leaders must be surprised by this outburst of the PM. It would be interesting to know how Adani and Ambani have reacted to this statement. Many of the media houses are owned by them, and one wonders what the TV channels will make of it.

Anthony Henriques Mumbai

Farrukh Dhondy Cabbages & Kings



“O come with old Bachchoo and leave the rest Though Khayyam and Rumi are still the best He who tries and tries they say never dies — So Bachchoo attempts poetic conquest...”

— From Aesop’s Goal, by Bachchoo

There is no escaping the fact: I am part of what some characterise as the “Indian diaspora”. I haven’t decided whether being a member of it is a historical triumph or something to be ashamed of. I suppose, to settle my trembling heart on the question, I should examine the evidence for one or the other — for being proud or ashamed of being a “diasporic” individual. The question doesn’t keep me awake all night, but some events, recent encounters, media shows and even a recent academically researched book, bring me to wonder.

It’s Edward T.G. Anderson’s Hindu Nationalism in the Indian Diaspora. He begins the book with a history of the formation of what can be loosely labelled the Indian “diaspora”. This is not the belated account of people like the Pakistani workers in the mills of Yorkshire and Lancashire who migrated in the 1950s and 1960s; or myself, who came as a student to Britain in the mid-1960s and for various reasons remained (do read my autobiography Fragments Against My Ruin, which says why I stayed. Stop advertising your rubbish — Ed).

Anderson’s account takes into consideration the movements of labour under the British Raj — the indentures to the Caribbean islands in the nine-

teenth century, the migration of Indians to South Africa, etc. The diaspora is not just recent history, though Anderson’s account concerns itself in great detail with the genesis of the Hindu and Hindutva ideology and organisations which arose through the inspiration of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and organisations such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP).

Anderson’s detailed and profound analysis is subtitled “Transactional Politics and British Multi-culturalism”. Undoubtedly, the Hindutva ideology as perpetrated by the RSS and VHP have some impact on the worship and beliefs of the Hindu communities in the UK. The public impact of these is nothing more than the presence of predominantly Gujarati hordes at London’s Wembley Stadium when Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited and presided there.

The only “political” impact that this particular tenet of philosophy had was perhaps a riot of Hindu-Muslim dissent which lasted a few days in Leicester with agitators from each community invading the residential districts of the other and shouting slogans. Big deal?

The “diasporic” record, in recent times, is so much more interesting. Let’s count the “diaspora” as people from the subcontinent. Muslims welcome in the term.

These have made their mark in the culture, commerce and politics of the UK to which I’m concentrating my contentions — not that I can’t see that Leo Varadkar in Ireland and Kamala Harris in the

United States have made their mark.

The world knows that Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi, among others, have had a profound impact on world literature — not to mention the diasporic master of international insight, the Nobel laureate Vidya Naipaul.

Vidia seems to have an ambivalent position as one of us — as an Indian diasporic. He was a Trinidadian by origin, a descendant of Indian indentured labour and, in Anderson’s definition, a distinct diasporic. He wrote an early book of discovery through an exploration of India called An Area of Darkness, which was denounced, almost universally, by Indian critics.

But then, when in his next book and in several historically truthful works he wrote about the cruelty of the Muslim regimes of India against the Hindu population, he was adopted by the Hindutva brigade as one of their spokespersons.

He was actually, trust me, who knew him intimately and personally, no such thing.

And so, gentle reader, apart from these triumphs of diasporic achievement, I have, after reading Edward’s meticulously examined book, contemplated sadly, disappointedly, writing something about the truly negative contribution of us diasporic members to countries, to culture, to history and even to truth.

I mean targeting very prominent people like Hedgie Soongone (yes, my name for Rishi Sunak), the unelected by people or party, “Prime Minister of the

UK”; Cruella Cowardperson (satirical name for Suella Fernandes Braverman) and Ugly “Priti” Patel... and yes, some others.

These — the named three — are the diasporic Indian children of immigrants who fled Africa and were given shelter in the UK and British citizenship. What have all three dedicatedly done to further their Conservative political careers?

Gentle reader, “Priti”, promoted to the rank of home secretary, formulated a policy to send people fleeing from prejudice, oppression and even genocide and seeking asylum in Britain, to Rwanda — a country now designated as a great, safe place after its genocidal history between the Tutsi and Hutu tribes.

Ugly’s family had fled Africa — Idi Amin, racial discrimination... geddit? So did the families of Cruella and Hedgie, both of whom have, in political office as successive home secretaries of the UK and as PM, sucked up to the same policy. Yes, very many of this trio’s Tory colleagues think their policy is a disaster. It is.

My humble diasporic opinion — or question — is why do the descendants of families who fled Africa want to exile desperate refugees to be forcibly sent there?

Thirty pieces of silver?

Nah!

Pandering to supposed crowd prejudice? Most likely. But that’s not decidedly, uniformly, ambivalent Britain. Watch this space!



SHORT TAKES

CHAD JUNTA
CHIEF DEBY WINS
PRESIDENTIAL VOTE

N'Djamena, May 10: Chad's junta chief Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno won this week's presidential election in the first round, according to provisional official results released Thursday, extending his family's decades-long grip on power.

Monday's vote aimed to end three years of military rule in a country crucial to the fight against jihadism across Africa's Sahel desert region.

"I am now the elected president of all Chadians," Deby said in a brief televised address, promising to make good on his "commitments".

TAIWAN AIR FORCE
HOLDS LIVE-FIRE
EXERCISE

Taipei, May 10: Taiwan's air force conducted live-fire training exercises deploying fighter jets, missiles and laser-guided bombs, the island's military news agency said Friday, releasing footage of the drills 10 days before the inauguration of a new president China calls a "dangerous separatist".

The May 20 inauguration of incoming president Lai Ching-te will be closely watched globally, as Beijing said prior to the January vote that Lai's election would bring "war and decline" to Taiwan.

WARNED U.S. SHIP
IN S. CHINA SEA,
SAYS CHINA

Beijing, May 10: Beijing's military on Friday said it had tailed and issued a warning to a US Navy ship in the disputed South China Sea, just days after the same vessel sparked China's ire by sailing through the Taiwan Strait.

Beijing claims almost the entire South China Sea despite an international ruling that its assertion has no legal basis. And on Friday, military spokesman Tian Junli said China had "organised naval and air forces to tail and monitor" the American guided-missile destroyer USS Halsey.

ITALIANS URGED
TO HAVE BABIES
AS FUTURE HOPE

Rome, May 10: Pope Francis pressed his campaign on Friday to urge Italians to have children, calling for long-term policies to help families and warning that the country's demographic crisis was threatening the future.

The number of births is the first indicator of the hope of a people, Francis told an annual gathering of pro-family groups. Without children and young people, a country loses its desire for the future. It was Francis latest appeal for Italy and beyond that Europe to invert what he has called the demographic winter facing many industrialised countries.

SEOUL TURNS TO
FOREIGN DOCTORS
AS STRIKE DRAGS

Seoul, May 10: South Korea will allow foreign doctors to work in its hospitals after a rigorous vetting process, the Prime Minister said Friday, as a months-long strike by junior medics shows no sign of resolution. Thousands stopped working on February 20 to protest government plans to train more doctors, causing chaos in hospitals.

The government, which has already offered some concessions in a bid to end the stand-off, said this week that doctors with foreign medical licenses would be allowed to practice in the country.

SA'S TOP COURT
HEARS CRITICAL
ZUMA POLL CASE

Johannesburg, May 10: South Africa's top court was hearing an appeal on Friday to have former president Jacob Zuma declared ineligible to stand for office in a politically charged legal showdown set to raise tensions before the tightest election in decades. Zuma, 82, is fronting uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK), a new opposition party that has become a potential disrupter in the May 29 general ballot. But poll authorities have argued the graft-tainted politician should be barred from the race because of a 2021 contempt of court conviction.

Over 1 lakh flee Rafah
as Israel begins attack

Heavy fighting keeps crucial aid crossings inaccessible

Rafah (Gaza Strip), May 10: Heavy fighting between Israeli troops and Palestinian militants on the outskirts of the southern Gaza city of Rafah has left crucial nearby aid crossings inaccessible and driven more than 1,10,000 people to flee north, UN officials said Friday.

With nothing entering through the crossings, food and other supplies were running critically low, aid agencies said.

The World Food Program will run out of food for distribution in southern Gaza by Saturday, said Georgios Petropoulos, an official with the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Rafah. Aid groups have said fuel will also be depleted soon, forcing hospitals to shut down critical operations and bringing to a halt trucks delivering aid across south and central Gaza.

The UN and other agencies have warned for weeks that an Israel assault on Rafah, on the border with Egypt near the main aid entry points, would cripple humanitarian operations and cause a disastrous surge in civilian casualties. More than 1.4 million Palestinians half of Gaza's population have been sheltering in Rafah, most after fleeing Israel's offensives elsewhere.

Heavy fighting was also underway in northern Gaza, where Hamas appeared to have once again regrouped in an area where Israel has already launched punishing assaults.

Israel's move into Rafah has been short of the full-scale invasion that it has planned. The United States is deeply opposed to a major offensive and stepping up pressure by threatening to withhold arms. But the heavy fighting has shook the city and spread fear that a bigger assault was coming.

PANDEMIC PACT
TALKS NEAR
END WITH DEAL
STILL ELUSIVE

Geneva, May 10: Hectic last-ditch talks aimed at striking a landmark global agreement on handling future pandemics rolled into the final day on Friday with a deal still up in the air.

Two years of work on drafting an international accord on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response are coming to the crunch, with just hours left to find a consensus.

In December 2021, the raw pain of Covid-19 — which killed millions, shredded economies and crippled health systems — motivated countries to seek a binding framework of commitments aimed at preventing another such disaster.

However, big differences quickly emerged on how to go about it — fractures which still had not been healed going into Friday.

World Health Organisation (WHO) chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus voiced optimism that the talks would prove successful and conclude an agreement ready to be formally adopted at the annual gathering of WHO member countries, which runs from May 27 to June 1.

"I am encouraged that all 194 member states are strongly committed to finalising the agreement in time for the World Health Assembly," he said on Wednesday. "They are working long hours to find common ground, in good faith, for the people of the world," he added. — AFP



A file photo of a man reacting as a nasal swab is collected for a Covid test in Bangkok. — AP



Palestinians pile their belongings on a vehicle as it drives to safer areas in Rafah, on Friday. — AFP

Artillery shelling and gunfire rattled throughout the night into Friday, an Associated Press reporter in the city said.

The UN agency for Palestinian refugees, known as UNRWA, said more than 1,10,000 people have fled Rafah. Families who have already moved multiple times during the war packed up to go again. One woman held a cat in her arms as she sat in the back of a truck piled with her family's belongings about to head out.

The full invasion hasn't started and things have already gotten below zero, said Raed al-Payomi, a displaced person in Rafah. "There's no food or water. Those fleeing erected new tents camps in the city of Khan Younis which was half destroyed in an earlier Israeli offensive and the town of Deir al-Balah, straining infrastructure."

The international charity Project Hope said its medical clinic in Deir al-Balah had seen a surge in people from Rafah seeking care for blast injuries, infections and pregnancies. People are evacuating to nothing. There are no homes or proper shelters for people to go to, said the group's Gaza team leader based in Rafah, Moses Kondowe.

Petropoulos said humanitarian workers had no supplies to help them set up in new locations. We simply have no tents, we have no blankets, no bedding, none of the items that you would expect a population on the move to be able to get from the humanitarian system, he said.

Israeli troops captured the Gaza side of the Rafah crossing with Egypt on Tuesday, forcing it to shut down. Rafah was the main point of entry for fuel.

Israel says the nearby Kerem Shalom crossing Gaza's main cargo terminal is open on its side, and that aid convoys have been entering. It said trucks carrying 2,00,000 liters of fuel were allowed to enter the crossing Friday.

But the UN said it is too dangerous for workers to reach the crossing on the Gaza side to retrieve the aid because of Israel's incursion and the ensuing fighting with Hamas.

Israeli troops are battling Palestinian militants in eastern Rafah, not far from the crossings. — PTI

SOLAR STORM SCARE

A SEVERE SOLAR STORM THIS WEEKEND THREATENS TO TRIGGER BLACKOUTS, DISRUPT NAVIGATION SYSTEMS AND KNOCK OUT HIGH-FREQUENCY RADIOS AROUND THE WORLD.

STORM POWER

TRUE POWER will be known about 60 to 90 minutes before it hits Earth as satellites measure inbound bursts of energy.

NORTHERN LIGHTS

The Northern Lights are seen overnight where skies are dark and clear enough.

FLIGHTS AFFECTED

LARGE PARTS of Asia, Europe and North America may be able to see an aurora

IT IS LIKELY the aurora will be visible across the entire UK.

TRANS-POLAR FLIGHTS BETWEEN Europe, Asia and North America will likely be rerouted to avoid increased radiation exposure for passengers and crews.

DISRUPTIONS

- **PEOPLE WILL BE PROTECTED** by Earth's magnetic field
- **UNPREPARED ELECTRIC** grids can be disrupted
- **PIPELINES CAN BE CHARGED** with current and spacecraft can be knocked off course.

CULPRIT

THE SUN, WHICH ROLLS THROUGH an 11-year cycle in which the number of spots waxes and wanes, is approaching the peak of the current one that began in December 2019.

THIS IS THE FIRST TIME since January 2005 the US Space Weather Prediction Centre has issued a G4 geomagnetic storm watch — the second-highest on a five-step scale — as multiple waves of solar energy bear down on the planet.

THE LAST TIME EARTH was hit by a G5 storm — the worst on the scale — was October 2003, causing power outages in Sweden and damaged transformers in South Africa.

LEARNING | CURVE

Professors believe it can ease global shortage of teachers

Hong Kong varsity tests AI professors

Hong Kong, May 10: Using virtual reality headsets, students at a Hong Kong university travel to a pavilion above the clouds to watch an AI-generated Albert Einstein explain game theory.

The students are part of a course at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) that is testing the use of "AI lecturers" as the artificial intelligence revolution hits campuses around the world.

The mass availability of tools such as ChatGPT has sparked optimism about new leaps in productivity and teaching, but also



Students using virtual reality headsets in a class at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology in Hong Kong. — AFP

fears over cheating, plagiarism and the replacement of human instructors.

Professor Pan Hui, the project lead for HKUST's AI project, is not worried about being replaced by

Daniels denies extortion
claims by Trump's lawyer

New York, May 10: Stormy Daniels finished her marathon testimony at Donald Trump's hush money trial on Thursday with attorneys for the former president seeking to paint her as a greedy liar who profited from her allegations.

The X-rated film actress, who claims to have had sex with the married Trump in 2006, denied that she threatened the tycoon if he did not buy her silence. "I wanted the truth to come out... to get my story protected with a paper trail so that my family didn't get hurt," the 45-year-old Daniels said during aggressive cross-examination by Trump's attorney Susan Necheles.

Trump, 77, is accused of falsifying business records to reimburse his lawyer, Michael Cohen, for a \$130,000 payment to Daniels on the eve of the 2016 presidential election, when the story could have proved politically fatal.

The face-off between Daniels and Team Trump took place six months before the November election, when the Republican hopeful will try to defeat Democratic President Joe Biden. During nearly eight hours of testimony over two days, Daniels walked the New York jury through the one-night stand she said she had with Trump at a celebrity golf tournament, and then the financial settlement she says ensued. On



Former US president Donald Trump, with his lawyer Todd Blanche, talks to the press, at Manhattan Criminal Court in New York City. — AFP

Thursday, Trump's lawyers suggested Daniels was out for the money.

They accused her of appearing at strip club events promoted with a picture of Trump and the tagline "Making America Horny Again." "I never used that tagline — I hated it," said Daniels who wore a green dress and a long, hooded black cardigan, her hair loose and her cadence confident.

In her testimony Tuesday, she described Trump's pajamas, his boxer shorts, the sexual position and that he did not wear a condom. Trump has denied having sex with Daniels and his lawyers on Tuesday asked the judge for a mistrial on the grounds her testimony was "extremely prejudicial" in what is essentially a financial records and election-related case.

Judge Juan Merchan denied the mistrial request, and a second one lodged on Thursday. — AFP



Employees of the state emergency service extinguishing fires of private houses destroyed by a shelling in Kharkiv, eastern Ukraine. — AFP

Russia opens new
front in Kharkiv

Kyiv, May 10: Russian forces launched an armoured ground attack on Friday near Ukraine's second city of Kharkiv in the northeast of the country and made small inroads, opening a new front in a war that has long been waged in the east and south.

Ukraine sent reinforcements as fighting raged in the border areas of the region, the defence ministry said, adding that Russia had pounded the frontier town of Vovchansk with guided aerial bombs and artillery.

"Russia has begun a new wave of counteroffensive actions in this direction," President Volodymyr Zelenskyy told a news conference in Kyiv. "Now there is a fierce battle in this direction."

Ukraine had warned of a Russian buildup in the area, potentially signalling preparations for an offensive or an effort to divert and pin down Ukraine's overstretched and outnumbered defenders. It was unclear if Moscow would develop the attack.

Zelenskyy has said Russia could be preparing a big offensive push this spring or summer. Kyiv's

PUTIN APPOINTS
MISHUSTIN AS
PRIME MINISTER

Moscow, May 10: Russian President Vladimir Putin appointed Mikhail Mishustin as Prime Minister on Friday, the government said, following the approval of his nomination by the lower house of parliament. — Reuters

forces were prepared to meet Friday's assault, but Moscow could send more troops to the area, he told reporters.

"At approximately 5 a.m., there was an attempt by the enemy to break through our defensive line under the cover of armoured vehicles," the defence ministry said. "As of now, these attacks have been repulsed; battles of varying intensity continue." Kharkiv region's governor said the length of the border and the settlements in it were a "grey zone" and confirmed active fighting taking place. — Reuters

FBI WARNS USE
OF AI TO SPREAD
MISINFORMATION

Washington, May 10: The FBI is concerned that foreign adversaries could deploy artificial intelligence as a means to interfere in American elections and spread disinformation, a senior official said Thursday, describing the technology as an area that's probably going to see growth over the coming years.

The threat is more than theoretical given the prevalence of AI deepfakes and robocalls and the way such technology has already surfaced in politics. An incident in the U.S. involved robocalls impersonating President Joe Biden urging voters in New Hampshire to abstain from voting in January's primary election. — AP

BUSHRA BIBI'S
RIGHTS VIOLATED
IN JAIL: PAK HC

Islamabad, May 10: A Pakistani High Court has concluded that the state transgressed the right to life of former premier Imran Khan's wife Bushra Bibi by confining her at her private residence designated as a sub-jail and depriving her of interaction with other prisoners, a media report said on Friday.

On Wednesday, the Islamabad High Court (IHC) ordered the former first lady's transfer to the high-security Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi, where her 71-year-old husband Khan has been jailed.

Bushra Bibi, 49, had been incarcerated at Bani Gala, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party founder's mansion in the suburbs of Islamabad, after conviction in two cases, while Khan was kept at the Adiala Jail.

On Thursday, the HC issued a 15-page written order in which it said that the state has not just made the sentence of simple imprisonment harsher and heavier but has also violated Bushra Bibi's right to life guaranteed under Article 9 of the Constitution. — PTI

IMF'S SUPPORT
TEAM IN PAK, TO
REVIEW REQUEST

Islamabad, May 10: Ahead of the IMF mission's visit to Pakistan, an advance team of the global lender has reached the cash-strapped country to hold talks regarding their request for a longer and larger bailout package, according to a media report on Friday.

Geo News, quoting sources, said a support team of the International Monetary Fund will discuss the first phase of the next long-term loan under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) with the country's financial team.

The IMF review mission is scheduled to arrive in Islamabad on May 16, the report said.

The IMF team will receive data from different departments and will also discuss the upcoming budget 2025 with the finance ministry officials, Geo News reported. The team will reportedly stay in Pakistan for more than 10 days.

Pakistan is seeking a new bailout package in the range of \$6 to \$8 billion for three years under the EFF. — PTI

quick
BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	72,664.47	0.36
Nifty 50	22,055.20	0.44
S&P 500*	5,230.27	0.31
Dollar (₹)	83.49	0.03
Pound Sterling (₹)	104.62	0.33
Euro (₹)	90.02	0.45
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	72,427₹788	1.10
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	84.02	0.17
IN 10-Yr bond yield	7.127	-0.009
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.465	0.016

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Wipro Hydraulics
to acquire assets
of Mailhot Ind.

Homegrown Wipro Hydraulics has signed an agreement to acquire the assets of Canada-based Mailhot Industries. Wipro Hydraulics is the hydraulics business of Wipro Infrastructure Engineering (WIN). “This acquisition marks a pivotal moment for us, further bolstering our market position by integrating new technologies and expanding our global footprint,” said Pratik Kumar, chief executive officer, WIN.

Forex reserves
rise to touch
\$641.5 billion



After three consecutive weeks of drop, India's forex reserves increased by \$3.6 billion to \$641.59 billion for the week ended May 3, the RBI said on Friday. The overall kitty dropped \$2.4 billion to \$637.9 billion for the previous week ended April 26. For the week ended May 3, the foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, increased by \$4.4 billion to \$564.1 billion, the data showed.

Grew Energy to
set up module
unit in J&K

Grew Energy announced plans to set up a 3.2 GW module manufacturing facility at Kathua in Jammu and Kashmir at an investment of ₹4,500 crore. “With establishment of Kathua facility and our existing 2.8 GW module manufacturing facility in Jaipur, Grew will achieve a total of 6 GW manufacturing capacity for modules and 2.8 GW for solar components by FY25,” Grew Energy CEO Vinay Thadani said.

Go Digit General
IPO price band
fixed at ₹258-272

Go Digit General Insurance announced ₹2,614 crore initial public offering opening on Wednesday, May 15, 2024. The company has set a price band at ₹258 to ₹272 per equity share of ₹10 face value. The IPO closes on May 17. The public issue comprises a fresh issue of ₹1,125 crore and an offer for sale of over 5.47 crore equity shares by the promoter selling shareholder Go Digit Infoworks Services.

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Basic metals, pharma, transport equipment top contributors

Factory output in March
grows at 4.9%: NSO data

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

India's industrial output slowed marginally to 4.9 per cent in March this year, said data from National Statistical Office (NSO).

The factory output, measured in terms of the index of industrial production (IIP), was 5.6 per cent in February this year while it saw a growth of 1.9 per cent in March 2023.

The IIP grew 5.8 per cent during fiscal year 2023-24, compared to a 5.2 per cent expansion in the preceding fiscal.

The previous high of IIP was recorded at 11.9 per cent in October last year. It slowed to 2.5 per cent in November, 4.2 per cent in December, and 4.1 per cent in January this year, the



● THE IIP growth was led by a robust expansion in electricity, with demand boosted by rising temperatures, and dampened by a feeble rise in mining output.

data showed on Friday.

As per the NSO data, the growth rates of the three sectors - mining, manufacturing and electricity for March 2024 are 1.2 per cent, 5.2 per cent and 8.6 per cent respectively.

Mining output growth decelerated to 1.2 per cent in March against a 6.8 per cent expansion in February.

“The manufacturing sector's growth accelerated to 5.2 per cent in March com-

pared to 1.5 per cent a year ago. The power generation increased by 8.6 per cent in March against a contraction of 1.6 per cent last year,” it showed.

“Within the manufacturing sector, the growth rate of the top three positive contributors to the growth of IIP for March 2024 are - basic metals (7.7 per cent), pharmaceuticals, medicinal chemical and botanical products (16.7 per cent), and other transport

equipment (25.4 per cent),” the data showed.

Primary goods output rose 2.5 per cent, while capital goods output increased 6.1 per cent. Intermediate goods output rose 5.1 per cent and infra and construction goods output gained 6.9 per cent. Consumer durables output rose 9.5 per cent and consumer non-durable output fell 4.9 per cent, the data showed.

“The IIP growth was led by a robust expansion in electricity, with demand boosted by rising temperatures, and dampened by a feeble rise in mining output. Encouragingly, manufacturing growth rose to a five-month high, albeit on a very low base,” said Aditi Nayar, chief economist, head research and outreach, ICRA Ltd.

Citigroup pegs India GDP
growth at 6.8% in FY2025

Bengaluru, May 10: Citigroup analysts upgraded India to “overweight” from “neutral” in their emerging markets allocation on Friday, citing strong earnings and economic growth momentum.

The brokerage expects India's blue-chip NSE Nifty 50 index to rise 7 per cent between now and the end of the current financial year ending March 2025, setting a target of 23,900.

The Nifty 50 closed at 22,055.20 on Friday. The benchmark has underperformed the MSCI emerging market Index in 2024 so far.

Citi's view is underpinned by the expectation that India's economy - the fastest growing among major peers - will remain strong, growing at 6.8 per cent in the current fiscal.

The brokerage's estimates imply an earnings CAGR of 13 per cent for FY24-FY26, with the trajectory broadly stable,



Surendra Goyal, managing director and head of Indian research at Citigroup, said in a note on Friday, while also attributing the India upgrade to sustained economic growth.

It also attributed India's one-year forward price-to-earnings (P/E) of 20x, which is slightly higher than the long-term averages, to a stable earnings trajectory.

The brokerage remains “overweight” on India's banks, insurers, public sector enterprises, autos and capital goods companies among others. It recommends “underweight” on information technolo-

gy firms, metals, consumer durables and discretionary as well as paint companies.

JPMorgan Chase & Co. is on track to include India in its emerging market debt index from June with most of its clients ready to trade despite some “teething issues,” according to the firm's global head of index research.

“Based on the annual index governance consultation process, market feedback so far has been largely positive, with the majority of our index clients already set up to trade in the IGB market,” managing director Gloria Kim said.

“As always, there are still teething issues when entering a new market, however we have found these to be related mostly to the operational readiness and flexibility of counterparties and custodians rather than barriers to entry,” she said.

— Reuters/Bloomberg

BPCL to spend
₹1.7 lakh crore
in 5 yrs under
‘Project Aspire’

New Delhi, May 10: Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) plans to invest ₹1.7 lakh crore (cr) over the next five years in its core oil refining, fuel marketing and petrochemical business as well as in clean energy such as hydrogen, its chairman G Krishnakumar said.

As part of ‘Project Aspire’, a five-year strategic framework, BPCL plans to raise its oil refining capacity, augment petrochemical business and expansion in cleaner fuel space with an eye on energy transition and meeting country's fuel demand, he said.

“We remain committed to our core businesses, which include refining, marketing of petroleum products and upstream. In addition, we are focusing on petrochemicals, gas, green energy, non-fuel retail, and digital,” Krishnakumar said.

“Of total investment, ₹75,000 cr is earmarked for refineries and petrochemicals. We plan to undertake pipeline projects with an investment of ₹8,000 cr, of which projects worth ₹5,000 cr have identified. “We will invest more than ₹20,000 cr in our marketing businesses and also earmarked investments of ₹32,000 cr in upstream production. We will invest ₹25,000 cr on gas business, and ₹10,000 cr on green energy business,” he said. — PTI

Yellow metal
gives 20.5%
returns in 1-yr

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MAY 10

Gold has provided returns of 20.5 per cent for a person who had invested in the metal on Akshaya Tritiya last year. Meanwhile, gold sales on the same auspicious day this year were dampened by price rise and election-related curbs.

Due to the weakness of the US dollar and the gold price rise in the international market on Thursday, domestic prices of the yellow metal surged on Friday. Gold future contract on the multi-commodity exchange (MCX) for June expiry opened higher at ₹71,730 per 10 gm and touched an intraday high of ₹72,888 per 10 gm, logging an intraday rise of around ₹1,200 per 10 gm.

This made buyers restrain their sales to token purchases. “Further, the checks by government authorities on account of elections in different states have affected the movement of the metal. Third-party logistics providers have been facing problems and this has made jewellers go slow with marketing this time,” said Tom Jose, chief financial officer of Joyalukkas.

According to him, sales in volume terms would have been slightly lesser than last year.

However, Saurabh Gadgil of the Indian bullion and jewellers association found that footfalls were high in the morning, though they slowed down in afternoon. “Pre-book-



● GOLD FUTURE contract on MCX for June expiry opened higher at ₹71,730 per 10 gm and touched an intraday high of ₹72,888 per 10 gm, logging an intraday rise of around ₹1,200 per 10 gm.

ing accounted for almost 40 per cent of the sales this year,” Gadgil said.

Gold prices have appreciated 20.5 per cent from ₹59,845 per 10 gm on the last Akshaya Tritiya, prices have gained around ₹13,000 to touch the intraday high of ₹72,888 per 10 gm on Friday.

Further, the yellow metal has surged from ₹31,729 per 10 gm in 2019, increasing by nearly ₹41,000 per 10 gm rise during the five years.

Ajay Kedia, managing director, Kedia Commodities, said that there could be corrections owing to profit-booking at higher levels. “The interest rate cut by the US Federal Reserve is likely to provide further support to gold. The geopolitical tensions also improve gold's prospects as a safe haven asset,” he said.

Rising net usage
to aid data centres

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MAY 10

Rapid expansion of internet usage will lead to increasing data centre capacity to 2000 MW and this requires an investment of ₹50,000 crore in the next three years.

While India generates about 20 per cent of the global data, its share in data centre capacity is just 3 per cent, implying significant under-penetration of data centre capacity and this is leading the way for large capacity addition plans.

The internet user penetration in India is the lowest whereas mobile data consumption is highest compared to China, the USA and the European Union. The data centre capacity per million internet users in India stood at just 1 MW as against 4 MW per million users in China, 51 MW per million users in the USA and 12 MW per million users in the European Union, as per CareEdge data.

Expansion of e-commerce, fintech platforms, online streaming, and gaming services and adoption of technologies such as 5G, IoT and AI are also expected to significantly augment demand for data and in turn data centres.

● EXPANSION OF e-commerce, fintech platforms, online streaming, and gaming services and adoption of technologies such as 5G, IoT and AI are also expected to significantly augment demand for data and in turn data centres.

These demand factors are projected to triple data consumption in India.

The industry witnessed a yearly addition of 100 to 150 MW during the three years from 2020 to 2023 and the capacity reached close to 900 MW. The increased capacity was well complemented by the capacity absorption with the utilisation increasing from 82 per cent in 2019 to 93 per cent in 2023.

The industry has entered a growth phase and CareEdge Ratings estimates that capacity is expected to double to around 2000 MW by 2026. The growth plans have also created substantial investment prospects and a capex of ₹50,000 crore is expected in this space over the next three years.

Almost 70 per cent of the capex plans are debt-funded and for large-sized investments, debt requirement has higher demand.



CYBER CRIME: 20L
MOBILE NUMBERS
UNDER GOVT RADAR

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

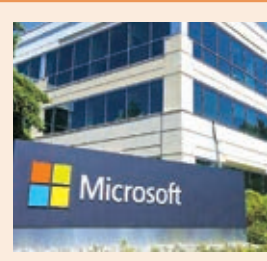
Acting tough on cyber frauds across the country, the government on Friday directed telecom operators to block 28,200 mobile handsets used in carrying cyber crimes, while 20 lakh mobile numbers associated with these handsets have to be re-verified. In case, the re-verification of the numbers fails, the same would be disconnected.

Besides, the department of telecommunications (DoT), ministry of home affairs (MHA) and state police have joined hands to curb the misuse of telecom resources in cyber-crime and financial frauds. “The unified approach demonstrates a shared commitment towards public safety and to safeguard the integrity of telecommunications infrastructure and ensure a secure digital environment,” the ministry said.

WEB | STORE

Will facilitate gaming across devices, says Xbox president

Microsoft plans game consumables store



● THE COMPANY saw an opportunity to create a store that “goes truly across devices - where you are, your library, your identity, your rewards travel with you versus being locked to a single ecosystem.”

Redmond, May 10: Microsoft Corp. will launch its own online store for mobile-game consumables in July, creating an alternative to Apple Inc. and Google's app stores and their fees.

The browser-based store will debut with Microsoft's own games, offering discounts on in-game items associated with titles like Candy Crush Saga.

Xbox president Sarah Bond announced the move at the Bloomberg Technology Summit. Later, Microsoft will open the

store to other publishers. Bond says the store is launching on web and app, so it's “accessible across all devices, all countries, no matter what, independent of the policies of closed ecosystem stores.”

The company saw an opportunity to create a store that “goes truly across devices - where you are, your library, your identity, your rewards travel with you versus being locked to a single ecosystem,” Bond said. The company's intention is to facilitate gaming across consoles, comput-

ers and mobile devices. Microsoft's blockbuster cross-platform game Minecraft may be an early addition to the web store, Bond said. “This web-based store is

the first step in our journey to building a trusted app store with its roots in gaming,” an Xbox spokesperson said.

Apple and Google dominate the app stores where

game developers release titles, charging an approximate 30 per cent fee on sales. In late 2023, Microsoft gaming head Phil Spencer shared that the company is in talks with partners to launch its own Xbox app store.

Microsoft lagged behind game industry competitors in entering the \$90 billion mobile gaming market. Now, it's Xbox unit is poised to make a big splash after its \$69 billion takeover of Activision Blizzard, owner of the Candy Crush and Call of Duty. — Bloomberg



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

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Short takes

Impact Player rule is set to be reviewed

BCCI Secretary Jay Shah says the 'Impact Player' rule, which has divided opinions in the ongoing IPL, can be revisited if that's what the stakeholders want given that it was introduced as a "test case".

"Impact player rule was brought in as a test case. On the bright side, it is providing additional playing opportunities to two Indian players. Isn't it important that two Indian players are getting a chance? The game is also becoming more competitive," he said.

"But still, if the players feel that this is not alright we will speak on it. However, no one has said anything about it yet. After the IPL and the World Cup, we will have a meeting and decide," he added.

Kohli ok with taking risks while batting

Amid the chatter around his strike rate, Virat Kohli on Thursday said "I know I need to take risks" and bringing out the slog sweep against Punjab Kings spinners helped him score at a better clip.

Kohli was adjudged the Player of the Match after he set up RCB's 60-run win over Punjab Kings with a 47-ball 92. This IPL season, he has amassed 634 runs at a strike rate of 153.5 and an average of 70.44. "For me it's still quality over quantity. For me it works really well. Also the understanding of the game allows you to practice less, just try to replicate what I have done in the past. Still aiming to improve aspects of the game that you want to get better at. It's an evolving process," Kohli said after the match.

TITANIC WIN

Tons by Gujarat openers Gill and Sai sink CSK

Ahmedabad, May 10: Skipper Shubman Gill and B. Sai Sudharsan smashed brilliant hundreds in a record-equalling double hundred plus opening stand to power Gujarat Titans to a comfortable 35-run win over Chennai Super Kings in an IPL match here on Friday.

With this win, Gujarat stay alive in theory for a place in play-offs.

Sudharsan struck 103 off 51 balls with five fours and seven sixes while Gill scored season's first ton — a sublime 104 off 55 balls with half a dozen sixes to help GT post a daunting 231 for 3 after being sent into bat.

The two batters put on 210 runs for the first wicket and equalled the record set by Quinton de Kock and K. L. Rahul in 2022.

Chasing the stiff target, CSK witnessed a torrid start before Daryl Mitchell (63 off 34) and Moeen Ali (56 off 36) shared 109 runs for the fourth wicket to keep their team in the hunt.

But the target was too stiff as CSK were eventually restricted to 196 for 8 in 20 overs.

Towards the end, Mahendra Singh Dhoni played a 11-ball 26-run cameo but in vain.

For GT, Mohit Sharma (3/31) was the pick of the bowlers, while Rashid Khan (2/38) picked two wickets.

Earlier, Sudharsan matched his skipper Shubman stroke for stroke as the two openers notched destructive centuries. Invited to bat, Gill timed to perfection an over pitched Mitchell Santner delivery for GT's first boundary of the innings. He then lofted the ball over mid on for a maximum, setting the tone of the game.

At the other end, after a relatively slow start, Sudarshan, who was elevated to the role of an opener, too accelerated. He went down on his knees to hit a slog sweep off star spinner Ravindra Jadeja to get his fifty in 32-balls.

— PTI



Gujarat Titans centurions Sai Sudharsan (left) and Shubman Gill celebrate during their 210-run partnership for the opening wicket in the match against Chennai Super Kings at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad on Friday.

— PTI

SCOREBOARD

Gujarat Titans: B. Sai Sudharsan c Dube b Deshpande 103, Shubman Gill c Jadeja b Deshpande 104, David Miller not out 16, Shahrulkh Khan run out 2, Extras (w-5, lb-1) 6. **Total (for 3 wickets in 20 overs) 231.**
Fall of wickets: 1-210, 2-213, 3-231.
Bowling: Mitchell Santner 2-0-31-0, Tushar Deshpande 4-0-33-2, Shardul Thakur 4-0-25-0, Simarjeet Singh 4-0-60-0, Ravindra Jadeja 2-0-29-0, Daryl Mitchell 4-0-52-0.
Chennai Super Kings: Ajinkya Rahane c Tewatia b Sandeep Warrier 1, Rachin Ravindra run out (Miller) 1, Ruturaj Gaikwad c Rashid Khan b Yadav 0, Daryl Mitchell c Shahrulkh Khan b Sharma 63, Moeen Ali c Noor Ahmad b Sharma 56, Shivam Dube c Noor Ahmad b Sharma 21, Ravindra Jadeja c Miller b Rashid Khan 18, M. S. Dhoni not out 26, Mitchell Santner b Rashid Khan 0, Shardul Thakur not out 3. Extras (lb-3, w-4) 7. **Total (for 8 wickets in 20 overs) 196.**
Fall of wickets: 1-2, 2-2, 3-10, 4-119, 5-135, 6-165, 7-169, 8-169.
Bowling: Umesh Yadav 3-0-20-1, Sandeep Warrier 3-0-28-1, Kartik Tyagi 4-0-51-0, Noor Ahmad 2-0-25-0, Rashid Khan 4-0-38-2, Mohit Sharma 4-0-31-3.

Knights set sights on play-off berth

Kolkata, May 10: In red-hot form, two-time former champions Kolkata Knight Riders will look to seal an IPL playoff berth for the first time in three years when they take on the struggling Mumbai Indians in their final home match of the season, here on Saturday.

The return of their two-time title-winning skipper Gautam Gambhir as team mentor has done wonders for the side which has found ways to win games from difficult situations this season.

Sitting at the top of the 10-team standings with eight wins from 11 matches, another win will guarantee them the playoff berth as the Shah Rukh Khan-owned franchise will look to end on a high, its campaign at the home venue of Eden Gardens.

Gambhir's ploy to back Sunil Narine as an opener along with World No.2 T20I batter Phil Salt has been a masterstroke.

The duo have scored bulk of the team's runs, giving it the perfect platform in power-plays to post six 200-plus totals

ACTION TODAY

FROM 7.30 PM, LIVE ON STAR SPORTS

from eight matches battling first.

With 32 sixes to his name, Narine is also the second in the list behind Abhishek Sharma (35).

The consistency with which Narine keeps churning out high scores match after match has been phenomenal.

With one century and three fifties, the Trinidadian has also been their leading run-getter, amassing 461 runs at a strike-rate of 183.66. Salt has scored 429 runs at a strike-rate of 183.33. The duo's explosive form has also meant that the likes of Andre Russell and Rinku Singh, who have been their designated finishers, have not got enough opportunities.

— PTI

Shami terms Sanjiv scolding skipper shameful

New Delhi, May 10: Star pacer Mohammed Shami has termed Sanjiv Goenka's "public reprimand" of his India teammate K. L. Rahul as "shameful" and said the Lucknow Super Giants team owner's reaction to a loss in front of TV cameras "does not have any place in sports".

Goenka's animated chat purportedly reprimanding Rahul after Lucknow Super Giants' record demolition at the hands of Sunrisers Hyderabad in Hyderabad has gone viral

on social media and Shami was the first Indian cricketer to criticise the act.

"Crores of people are watching you and learning from you. If these things happen in front of cameras, and you see such reactions on screen, it's shameful," a blunt Shami said on 'Cricbuzz Live'.

"Aapka ek dayra hona chahiye baat karne ka, yeh message bahut galat jaata hai. (You should have boundaries, there's a way to talk. This sends a very wrong message)," he added.

SRH openers Travis Head and Abhishek Sharma smashed fiery fifties as the home side chased down the target of 166 in just 9.4 overs.

But what followed after the result has become a big talking point. The video of a furious RPSG Group chairman and Kolkata-based billionaire, Goenka apparently losing his cool on Rahul, has gone viral on social media.

TV commentators Graeme Smith and Scott Styris remarked that such discussions should occur

privately, not in front of cameras. "It's very important to note that players have respect, and you are a respectful person too, as an owner. It's not that you're talking suddenly," Shami said.

"If you have to do that, there are many different ways. You could've done the same thing in the dressing room or the hotel. It wasn't necessary to do it on the field. Aisle reaction de ke koi lad quile pe jhand toh gaad nahi diya aapne (you didn't hoist a flag on Red Fort by doing

what you did)," Shami said.

Shami, who is currently recovering from an injury and is not taking part in the IPL, said such actions send a wrong message to the public. "He's the captain, not a normal player. It's a team game; it isn't a big thing if the plan isn't successful. Anything is possible in the game. I understand there can be good or bad days, but every player has respect, and there's a way to talk," he said.

"There are a lot of

moments in the game when tempers flare up, and players quarrel with each other. It should not happen in cricket or any sport, but it does happen. A player talking to another player is different, but someone from the outside discussing something with the player is different. We are only speculating from what we are seeing, and only K. L. Rahul can tell what the conversation was about, but these kinds of reactions do not have any place in sports," Shami said.

— PTI

WRESTLER | ON MAT

BAJRANG BLAMES OFFICIALS FOR NO TO DOPE SAMPLE

New Delhi, May 10: Olympic medalist wrestler Bajrang Punia has claimed that he refused to provide urine samples during the selection trials in Sonapat in March because the dope control officials failed to furnish adequate proof that they were carrying proper equipment to conduct the tests.

Bajrang, one of the country's most successful wrestlers, was suspended by National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) on April 23 after being served a whereabouts failure notice on April 18.

On Thursday, wrestling's world governing body UWW also suspended him till the end of this year following NADA's decision to hand him a provisional suspension for refusing to undergo a dope test on March 10 in Sonapat.

"This is to clarify that, I have at no stage refused to give my sample for doping control. On 10 March 2024, when I was approached by alleged doping control officials, I merely reminded them that the last two times they came to collect my sample, they had gotten expired kits once," wrote Bajrang on 'X' on Friday.

"...and on the other instance, they had approached me with a single testing kit as opposed to the three testing kits," added Bajrang, who competes in the 65 kg category and one who has been at the forefront of a protracted agitation against former Wrestling Federation of India chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh.

— PTI

Games torch lights up France

Marseille (France), May 10: The Olympic torch relay completed its first day on French soil in Marseille on Thursday with the port city's football legend Basile Boli taking the flame in front of the iconic basilica of Notre-Dame de la Garde before passing it on to a number of other celebrity sports stars on its way to Marseille's iconic Stade Velodrome.

France's former NBA great Tony Parker was also among the 200 people who will carry the torch in Marseille along with skier Cyprien Sarrazin who collected the flame from Ukrainian gymnast Mariia Vysochanska.

The 21-year-old from Lviv, whose father is fighting at the front against the Russian invasion, was 'captain' for the day of a collective relay of 28 athletes, with one representative from each of the 27 countries of the European Union including Poland's three-time reigning Olympic hammer champion Anita Wlodarczyk.

The relay "is a way of emphasising our solidarity with Ukraine," said French sports minister Amelie Oudea-Castera.

Former French international Boli, who scored the only goal in Marseille's victory over AC Milan in the 1993 European Champion Clubs' Cup final, set off at 8.20 am just beneath the famous gold-



Ukrainian gymnast Mariya Vysochanska holds the Olympic Torch Relays in front of the Mucem Museum in Marseille, southeastern France, on Thursday.

— AFP

en statue of the "Good Mother", which watches over France's second-largest city.

"It makes the heart beat and it's fantastic. It's the Olympic flame, it's the symbol of sport, of living together, of everything we can hope for in the world," said Boli.

There was a strong football element to the first of 78 days of the torch relay with 1991 Ballon d'Or winner Jean-Pierre Papin and Ivory Coast great Didier Drogba also among the torch bearers.

The torch ended its first full day in France in Marseille's Stade Velodrome, home of Olympique Marseille, which will host 10 matches during the men's and women's Olympic football competitions.

Drogba, a Marseille legend, carried the torch and lit the Games' second cauldron, which is situated on the square outside the Velodrome.

"The start is important in sport. We got off to a good start... now it's on," said chief organiser Tony

Estanguet after the beginning of the relay.

These are only the first steps on 12,000-kilometre (7,500-mile) relay across France and its far-flung overseas territories before the opening ceremony in Paris on July 26.

The flame arrived on French soil at Marseille on Wednesday on board the 19th-century sailing ship Belem in front of 150,000 spectators for a ceremony that posed a first major security test for organisers of the 2024 Paris Games.

— AFP

COACH | POTATO

Dravid will have to reapply if he wants to continue: Shah

Mumbai, May 10: India head coach Rahul Dravid will have to reapply if he wishes to continue in the job after his tenure ends with next month's T20 World Cup, BCCI Secretary Jay Shah has said while making it clear that the new appointment will be for a three-year term.

Dravid, who had a two-year contract originally, was given an extension along with his support staff after the conclusion of the 50-overs World Cup in November last year.

"We will call for applications in the next few days. Rahul Dravid's tenure is coming to an end. He has to reapply if he has to continue. We are looking for a long-term coach, for three years," Shah told media during an interaction at the BCCI office.

The BCCI secretary said there has been no precedent of having different coaches for different formats but ultimately the decision rests with the Cricket Advisory Committee. The CAC comprises Jatin Paranjape, Ashok Malhotra and Sulakshana Naik.

"There is no precedent of different coaches for different format in Indian cricket. Besides, we have a number of players who are all-format players. There are many common players across formats such as Rishabh Pant, Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma," he said.

"Ultimately, this is the Cricket Advisory Committee's call. I have to implement what they decide," he added.

Shah said even a foreign coach can be considered depending on the CAC's recommendations. "If the CAC selects a foreign coach, I can't interfere," he added.

The BCCI secretary informed that the vacant post of one national selector is expected to be filled up soon. "A few interviews for the selector's post have already happened. We will announce it soon," he said.

Greg Barclay's role as the chairman of the International Cricket Council ends later this year but Shah remained non-committal on running for the position.

— PTI

PRAGG THIRD AS WEI WINS RAPID CHESS

Warsaw (Poland), May 10: Grandmaster R. Praggnanandhaa, emerging Indian yet again in the faster version of the game as he finished sole third in the rapid section of the Superbet Rapid and blitz chess tournament, a part of the Grand Chess tour.

Wei Yi of China continued with his brilliant form and won the rapid section scoring over world championship challenger D. Gukesh in the seventh round and Nodirbek Abdusattorov in the eighth before settling for a draw against Praggnanandhaa in the final. World number one Magnus Carlsen had to be content with the second place following a sole victory against Vincent Keymer of Germany besides two draws on the final day of rapid.

— PTI

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matinee

Ranveer says wedding ring is very dear to him

16 >>



delhi THE AGE

SATURDAY | 11 MAY 2024

VIKRAM SHARMA

According to a new study published in the journal *Environmental Science and Technology*, flame retardants known or suspected of causing cancer may be in the air inside our car. The study published in *Environmental Science & Technology* reveals concerning findings regarding the air quality inside cars, with drivers and passengers potentially exposed to cancer-causing chemicals.

Conducted across 30 states in the US, the study conducted by researchers from Duke University examined cabin air from 101 electric, gas, and hybrid vehicles spanning model years 2015 to 2022. Alarming, 99% of the cars tested positive for TCIPP, a flame retardant currently under investigation by the U.S. National Toxicology Programme for its potential carcinogenic properties.

IT'S TOXIC

"The air inside our cars is toxic because toxic materials are used in everything, from paints to plastics, seat foam, fabrics, etc. There are innumerable carcinogenic emissions from all of this," says Sandeep Anirudhan, Convenor, Aikyam Community for Sustainable Living. The danger increases manifold as the car emits much more toxic chemicals when it is parked under the sun and it heats up, especially during summers, which India is presently reeling under.

"For safety, people should open the windows the moment they get into the car and allow the air accumulated inside to be replaced by fresh air before occupying the car," advises Sandeep.

Also, instead of using the air conditioner, it's better to keep the windows open for fresh air. These are the only ways of reducing the risks," adds Sandeep.

FLAME RETARDANTS

Flame retardants are added to various materials inside the car to ensure flames do not erupt, or if they do, the chemicals in the retardants slow their spread. All car manufacturers have been using flame retardants since the 1970s. It's added to a variety of consumer goods, including furniture, electronics, building and construction materials, and car interiors.

For those who do long commutes in the comfort of their four-wheelers, the risk is even greater. The study also found that, because heat causes chemicals from automobile materials to leak more rapidly, it is the summer time that leads to the highest concentrations of harmful flame retardants.

TURN TO PAGE 13

Car-cinogenic!

Car travel has never been this dangerous. No, it's not about the accidents; it's about the air circulating inside the vehicle, which could give you cancer, more so in the summer months!



99% percent of cars contain potentially harmful flame retardants in the seat foam and other interior surfaces.

- People who spend a lot of time in their cars, like commuters or those who drive for work, could be at higher risk of exposure to these chemicals.
- Reducing the amount of flame retardant used in vehicle interiors may help reduce exposure levels.

CANCER CASES ARE ONLY RISING IN INDIA

2020 13.9 lakh

THE NUMBER IS SET TO RISE TO

2025 15.7 lakh

WHICH IS A STRAIGHT

13%

increase in a span of five years



THE CHEMICALS IN FLAME RETARDANTS HAVE BEEN SHOWN TO CAUSE CERTAIN CANCERS LIKE THYROID, PROSTATE, BREAST, AND URINARY BLADDER CANCERS, ALTHOUGH THE EVIDENCE IS NOT AS CONCLUSIVE BUT HAS SHOWN A POSSIBLE ASSOCIATION."

— Dr NAGENDRA PARVATANENI, Senior Consultant and Head of the Department of Surgical Oncology at KIMS Hospitals.



“THE AIR INSIDE OUR CARS IS TOXIC BECAUSE TOXIC MATERIALS ARE USED IN EVERYTHING, FROM PAINTS TO PLASTICS, SEAT FOAM, FABRICS, ETC. THERE ARE INNUMERABLE CARCINOGENIC EMISSIONS FROM ALL OF THIS.”

— SANDEEP ANIRUDHAN, Convenor, Aikyam Community for Sustainable Living.



Did Alia pay a Gala price?

While the actress did India proud at the prestigious event, celebrity watchers are wondering what kind of money was involved in the whole exercise

Alia Bhatt made a stunning entry at the recent MET Gala in a Sabyasachi Mukherjee hand-embroidered saree. But while her beauty made heads turn, speculation about the attendant price tag is making heads whirl.

The rumour is that Alia's appearance at the red carpet cost ₹67 lakhs at the ultra-luxe event, also attended by Isha Ambani, socialite Natasha Poonawala, and philanthropist and businesswoman Sudha Reddy.

It is well known that there are hidden expenses associated with a MET Gala appearance. Sudha Reddy has joined hands with the Metropolitan Museum of Art's mission to support art. Isha Ambani has the backing of her mother, Nita Ambani, who made generous gifts to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2017 to celebrate Indian art and artists.

Sabyasachi Mukherjee made his debut at the Gala this year. In 2021, the designer entered into a strategic partnership with the Aditya Birla Group, which acquired a 51 percent stake in his brand. "The MET is the perfect platform to showcase homegrown designers. This is the perfect opportunity to present yourself and your brand. It's highly possible it was strategized by the Aditya Birla Group to push Sabyasachi," says a brand strategist.

One ticket for the Met Gala cost around \$75,000 (₹67 lakh) while entire tables started at \$350,000 (nearly ₹3 crore).

Rumour has it that fashion houses also purchase tables and extend invitations to celebrities to walk the red carpet wearing their designs.

Vogue editor-in-chief Anna Wintour is the one who oversees the list of invitees, and decides the hosts for the event.

THE GALA IS VERY STRINGENT ON WHO TO INVITE, AND WHO CAN INVITE THEMSELVES. PRIYANKA CHOPRA IS PERHAPS INDIA'S FAMOUS EXPORT, BUT ALIA IS THE YOUNG FACE OF INDIA ON THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE," SAYS AN INSIDER.

OFFICES ARE PEACOCKING

Many offices are transforming typical corporate cubicles into posh and peppy lounge-style settings to entice employees back to the office

ESHA LOHIA

Imagine if your office had a relaxing sofa, gaming section, central circulation space with overlapping functions for meetings, office phone booths, and a quick nap room! Well, offices are making your wishes come true. The work-from-home revolution brought on by the pandemic has left several companies scrambling to entice employees back to the office. 'Office peacocking', a flamboyant approach to workplace design, and facilities aimed at creating a comfortable in-person work experience for office hours.

Dr Samir Kumar Praharaj, head of Psychiatry department, Kasturba Medical College and Hospitals, Manipal, says, "Peacocking in the workplace is acceptable from both angles. From an employee's point of view, it can establish oneself as a successful, capable, or important member of the company, which could result in recognition or career promotion. From an organisational standpoint, it can foster a culture of aspiration and achievement, elevating spirits and drawing in customers or investors who are impressed by the business's apparent standing." However, the 2024 trend lies in the spectrum of companies making an effort to lure their employees for home-like office working experience. While the practice has been around for a while, it's on the rise again in 2024.

THE PEACOCKING CULTURE

When the future of work is likely to be a hybrid model, companies are trying to create an office environment that complements, rather than competes with, remote work. Just as a peacock uses its brightly coloured feathers to attract mates, companies are outfitting their offices with stylish furniture, high-end amenities, and trendy decor to make themselves more appealing to a workforce accustomed to the comforts of home. Companies like Amazon in Hyderabad, Razorpay in Bangalore, Adobe in Noida, Google in Hyderabad, Leo Burnett in Mumbai, etc have not just aesthetically pleasing offices but also, provide valuable



A comforting sofa for socialising and working



Isolated and personal space for work

PEACOCKING AROUND

- Companies like Amazon in Hyderabad, Razorpay in Bangalore, Adobe in Noida, Google in Hyderabad, Leo Burnett in Mumbai, etc have aesthetically pleasing offices loaded with comforting amenities for its employees.

- Plush sofas instead of cubicles, gourmet coffee stations, sleek video game consoles alongside meeting rooms, noise cancelling booths, green spaces with indoor plants, nap rooms, well-stocked pantries, relaxed dress codes, and pet-friendly working spaces are some of the office peacocking trends.

amenities for a relaxing and comfortable space to work at. Chetna Israni, Co-founder of Morning Star Brandcom says, "The office is designed as an open space that fosters camaraderie and collaboration, enabling open communication among employees. The open-plan workspaces, comfortable seating areas, and vibrant decor create an inspiring and welcoming environment for employees. We offer piped music, allowing employees to choose their playlist and create the ambiance they prefer. Additionally, we have a collection of books available for when the team wants to take a break and enjoy reading diverse content away from their screens." The company even stocks the pantry with preferred teas, coffees, and snacks, providing employees with healthy food and beverage options throughout the day. "Every Friday, as the week wraps up, the company hosts an informal winding down with coffee and snack sessions for casual conversations, ensuring a positive end to the week," she says.



Razorpay's Bangalore office has a playing room

A close-knit room for quick and small meetings

RESIMERCIAL WORKSPACES

The concept of office peacocking builds on the existing trend of 'resimercial' design that blends residential and commercial aesthetics. Think plush sofas instead of cubicles, gourmet coffee stations replacing vending machines, sleek video game consoles alongside meeting rooms, green spaces with indoor plants, nap rooms, well-stocked pantries, relaxed dress code, or pet-friendly working space. Aravind G (34), a Chennai-based HR professional says that each of their office meeting rooms is themed to reflect the company's culture and core values. Inspiring quotes are adorning their office walls.

The office is equipped with comfortable seating options, including fancy chairs, bean bags, and sofas. "New joining employees are required to attend book reading sessions, where they engage with insightful literature. Weekly sessions are held every Friday from 5pm to 6pm where employees come together to share their learnings and insights," Aravind says. Traditional office setups may seem outdated, particularly when aiming to attract millennials and Gen-Z. Think warm lighting, comfortable seating, noise-cancelling booths and an overall atmosphere designed to foster creativity, collaboration and a stress-free working zone. Aravind believes, "Workplace quality significantly influences productivity and outcomes and we are witnessing positive results. When I'm surrounded by aesthetically pleasing elements and comfortable amenities, it positively impacts my mood and helps me feel at ease, ultimately enhancing my overall comfort level in the office."

MOTIVATIONAL TREND

With many employees now enjoying the flexibility of remote work post-pandemic, companies are upgrading, hoping that a swanky, well-equipped office will provide a social, productive, and collaborative environment that can't be replicated at home. A thoughtfully designed office contributes to a more positive work experience, appealing to the younger generation



REGARDLESS OF THE SIZE OF THE EXPENDITURE, THE RETURN ON INVESTMENT IS EVIDENT IN EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION, INCREASED PRODUCTIVITY, AND TALENT RETENTION."

— CHETNA ISRANI, Co-founder, Morning Star Brandcom



THE OFFICE IS EQUIPPED WITH COMFORTABLE SEATING OPTIONS, INCLUDING FANCY CHAIRS, BEAN BAGS, AND SOFAS."

— ARAVIND G, HR professional, Chennai

who value face-to-face interaction with community building.

Undoubtedly, employees who feel valued in their workspace are likely to be more productive and engaged. Not only this, it can also be a factor in retaining employees for a longer period. While office peacocking has the potential to revitalise workspaces and boost employee morale, it's not without its drawbacks. Well, money can't buy you happiness but it can surely buy facilities and services to provide you with a happier and more satisfactory environment. Creating a luxurious office space can be expensive. Chetna says, "Creating an open, comfortable, and welcoming space for employees doesn't necessarily require high-end interior design. Regardless of the size of the expenditure, the return on investment is evident in employee satisfaction, increased productivity, and talent retention. The key is to create a happy space — productivity will naturally follow."

Focusing solely on aesthetics can backfire if the underlying company culture and work environment are not addressed. When too many aesthetics and comfort come handy, chances are that one might easily get distracted. But as 2024 is the year of exploration and experimentation, office peacocking is likely to continue evolving as companies experiment with different ways to create attractive workspaces. The key will be to strike a balance between style and substance.

'SRIDEVI KAPOOR CHOWK'

BMC pays tribute to the late veteran actress Sridevi; names a junction after her



 Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation have named the junction in the Lokhandwala Complex 'Sridevi Kapoor Chowk.'

The late actress was familiar with this location because she resided near the Green Acres tower. Furthermore, her burial procession proceeded through this road. The decision to name the crossroads after her stemmed from pleas from local residents and the municipality, demonstrating the community's profound esteem and affection for her.

Previously, there had been talk of making a biopic about the late actor's life. However, her husband, Boney Kapoor, had reservations about the idea, claiming that Sridevi was a private person whose life should be kept private.

SHE USED TO LIVE ON THE SAME ROAD AT THE GREEN ACRES TOWER, AND HER FUNERAL PROCESSION BEGAN ON THE SAME PURSHOTAM TANDON ROAD. AS A RESULT, BOTH LOCALS AND THE MUNICIPALITY REQUESTED THAT THE PARTICULAR STREET BE NAMED SRIDEVI CHOWK.



HAILEY AND JUSTIN EXPECTING A BABY

The model is just over six months pregnant

Kim Kardashian and model Gigi Hadid posted their congratulations under the announcement on Instagram.



On Thursday, Hailey took to Instagram to share a montage of her husband, Justin, snapping shots of her cradling her baby bump. The Rhode founder wore a white, lace dress as Justin wore a black baseball cap backwards and a black jacket.

This will be the couple's first child. Justin and Hailey tied the knot in 2018.

According to reports, Hailey is just over six months pregnant.

The happy announcement comes after the pop sensation published photos of himself crying online, causing concern among his followers. On April 27, Justin posted a carousel of photographs on Instagram, including two selfies of him crying. "A pretty crier," Hailey wrote on his post.

BOTH JUSTIN, 30, AND HAILEY BIEBER, 27, SHARED A VIDEO AND SERIES OF PHOTOS IN WHICH THE MODEL IS SEEN SHOWING OFF A BABY BUMP IN A WHITE GOWN WHILE THE COUPLE STANDS OUTSIDE IN A CEREMONY.



'IT WAS HARD TO WATCH'

DAVID BECKHAM TEXTED TOM BRADY AFTER BRUTAL NETFLIX ROAST

 Though it's been days since Tom Brady was brutally picked on during Netflix's *GROAT The Greatest Roast Of All Time: Tom Brady*, close friends are still checking in on him, including David Beckham.

During an appearance on Wednesday's episode of *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*, Beckham revealed he reached out to the former NFL star to "check if he was OK."

"The whole concept is quite funny. It was very funny. But I know Tom well, and I must admit, I did fire him a message just to check if he was OK," Beckham said.

"Is he OK?" Kimmel asked.

"He's more than OK, but, yeah, it was hard to watch,"

Beckham said.

When Kimmel quickly followed with an inquiry of whether we'd see Beckham as the honoree of a roast anytime soon, the retired soccer player said, "No, definitely not."

The roast took aim at multiple facets of Tom Brady's life, including his divorce from Gisele Bündchen.

WHILE THE FORMER SOCCER PLAYER ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE NETFLIX EVENT WAS "QUITE FUNNY," HE CLAIMED THAT HE WOULD "DEFINITELY NOT" WANT TO EXPOSE HIMSELF TO A ROAST.



Tom Brady



ARIES | MARCH 21 TO APRIL 20

Dear Aries, This week, your social life is scintillating. The cards indicate happy times in the company of friends and loved ones. A wedding or birth of a child is also indicated. This week is highlighted by love. Those who are single might find love unexpectedly, perhaps at a social gathering or a party. Alternatively, it might be possible that your true love has been right next to you all this while, but you haven't been able to recognise him or her. So, my dear Aries turn around and open your eyes to love.

LUCKY NUMBER: 3 | LUCKY COLOR: ROSE PINK
AFFIRMATION FROM LIGHT SEERS TAROT: I CONNECT IN THIS SACRED SIBLING HOOD AND INTO THIS EX-PANSIVE EXPERIENCE OF WITNESSING THROUGH TIME



TAURUS | APRIL 21 TO MAY 21

Dear Taurus, This week, you need to stand tall and embrace your inner warrior! You'll face challenges, but fear not; you've got the strength and resilience to overcome them. The Lady of Tarot encourages you to assert yourself and confidently defend your ground. Approach situations with courage, knowing that you possess the skills to rise above any obstacles. Remember, you're not alone in this battle; your unique perspective and determination will help you triumph. Stay true to your convictions, you'll find yourself on top. Embrace the journey, and let your inner light shine bright!

LUCKY NUMBER: 7 | LUCKY COLOR: BLOOD RED
AFFIRMATION FROM LIGHT SEERS TAROT: I SHOW UP BRAVELY AND I STAND MY GROUND



GEMINI | MAY 22 TO JUNE 21

Dear Gemini, This week, you really need to take good care of your health, physically, mentally, and emotionally. For physical health, eat a balanced diet, take rest, and exercise. For mental health, stop overthinking and overanalyzing every aspect of your life. For emotional health, try to stay happy. Spend some time pursuing a hobby. In case you feel unwell, please seek the advice of the advice of a doctor or medical practitioner. It would be best to take a break from your routine and spend some time on a spiritual retreat.

LUCKY NUMBER: 4 | LUCKY COLOR: BRIGHT PINK
AFFIRMATION FROM LIGHT SEERS TAROT: I GIVE MYSELF PERMISSION TO SLOWDOWN AND TO HEAL



CANCER | JUNE 22 TO JULY 23

Dear Cancer, This week, you seem to be exhausted and overstressed. This is not a time to push yourself beyond your limits; to do so now is to risk all that you have worked so hard for: your health, your work, and your relationships. It is time to take a break. Those who are in a relationship might feel that the stress and anxiety you and your partner are experiencing have spiralled and are pushing your relationship to a breaking point. So take heed now. A good approach would be to take a vacation with your beloved. A place close to water will help reignite the passion.

LUCKY NUMBER: 4 | LUCKY COLOR: BRIGHT YELLOW
AFFIRMATION FROM LIGHT SEERS TAROT: I GIVE MYSELF PERMISSION TO SLOWDOWN AND TO HEAL



LEO | JULY 24 TO AUGUST 23

My Dear Leo, This week brings happiness, success, and fame, but at the same time, you will have to make efforts to achieve them. If you are looking for a job, it is just around the corner. Just pursue the opportunity. Those in love might be taking their relationship for granted. It is important that you make your beloved feel special. Plan a surprise this weekend. A trip is also on the cards for some. Children bring happiness. For couples who are planning a child, it is an auspicious time. Lions, your mantra this week should be to stay happy and express gratitude for everything that you have in life.

LUCKY NUMBER: 19 | LUCKY COLOR: YELLOW
AFFIRMATION FROM LIGHT SEERS TAROT: IN WHOLENESS SHINE LIKE THE SUN AND I AM HAPPY

"TO LOVE ONESELF IS THE BEGINNING OF A LIFELONG ROMANCE."
— OSCAR WILDE

YOU ASK WE ANSWER

Answers to unsolved questions of life



By MAANYA KOHLI

MAANYA, A RENOWNED TAROT CARD READER, BELIEVES THAT TAROT IS A TOOL FOR DIVINITY AND THE CARDS CAN BE A SPIRITUAL GUIDE IN VARIOUS LIFE SITUATIONS

Q How will my court case go?

— Anonymous

Dear Anonymous, Based on the Tarot cards, it is highly probable that your court case will be handled by an intelligent woman. The judgement in this case will bring a sudden jolt into your life that will seem difficult but will be beneficial in the long run. You need to be careful, as you cannot trust people around you. Just trust your intuition and don't make decisions for now. God Bless!

Q My in-laws are attempting to relocate closer to our home, and they are highly intrusive and controlling. If that happens, how do you think things will go for me at home?

Mandy

Dear Mandy, According to the cards, it looks like your in-laws will not move closer to your residence immediately. But I do see obstacles and delays in their moving closer to you. The process may take up to one year. However, the move will prove beneficial for you. Your relationship with them and your husband will improve. Also, it will be advantageous to you financially, as they might level you a sizeable portion of the inheritance. God Bless!

Q I am looking into work-from-home and hybrid work options. I am also open to taking on multiple assignments. Do you think being on a single retainer is a better option for me, or would you recommend freelancing for numerous companies? I genuinely

miss it, but my fear is that if I go for full-time job, my mother-in-law will come closer and dominate my daughter in the path they want her to go.

Anisha Dutt

Dear Anisha, Based on the reading of the tarot cards, it appears that you are confused by the multiple options in front of you. Moving forward with your professional life will be good, no matter what path you take. You are an intelligent and rational woman, and you will do well if you go for either a full-time job or work for one retainer. However, your best option will be freelancing for several companies. It will bring a lot of prosperity and abundance, and it will help you bond beautifully with your daughter. Life is ready to uplift you to a higher frequency. God Bless.

VIRGO | AUGUST 24 TO SEP 23



Dear Virgo, This week, you have inner strength, personal power, strong will, and determination. It is time to face your fears head-on, understand all the joys and pains in the world that

make you who you are, and transform these into something useful, something that can benefit you. You don't want to make that call to the debt collection agency? Do it. You can't face that awful boss at work? Face him/her. You can do everything, and you can do it elegantly like a lion.

LUCKY NUMBER: 8
LUCKY COLOR: SUNSHINE YELLOW
AFFIRMATION FROM LIGHT SEERS TAROT: I DELIBERATELY SHINE MY COMPASSION AND STRENGTH

LIBRA | SEP 24 TO OCT 23



Dear Libra, Similar to last week, this week the watchword for you is 'Vigilance.' It is time to be prepared; look up, look ahead, and see what's coming. Reserve your power and

strength. The universe is putting your fortitude to the test. No matter how worn out you are, resist the urge to give up. Even though it's difficult, there is no use in turning away because you are almost there. Face your fear, your foe, and your circumstance; prepare for it and meet it head-on. By anticipating it, you have given yourself a head start in your battle against whatever or whoever comes your way.

LUCKY NUMBER: 9
LUCKY COLOR: BRIGHT RED
AFFIRMATION FROM LIGHT SEERS TAROT: I PUSH BEYOND MY OWN PERCEIVED LIMITATIONS

SCORPIO | OCT. 24 TO NOV. 22



Dear Scorpio, This week signifies a period of transformation. Something that was once a part of your life is now coming to an end, and this could be sorrowful. It's natural to feel sad when things are over.

However, change is an inevitable part of life, and it is important to learn to let go. This can be difficult, but it is necessary for growth. If you are experiencing relationship problems, it may be a sign that it is time to let go. Despite the pain that comes with it, you will look back at this moment and realise that it was the turning point. Whether you are ready to let go of what is lost or embrace what is to come.

LUCKY NUMBER: 13
LUCKY COLOR: SAPPHIRE BLUE
AFFIRMATION FROM LIGHT SEERS TAROT: I LET GO OF THE PAST AND ADD ENERGY TO NEW BEGINNINGS

SAGITTARIUS | NOV. 23 TO DEC. 21



Dear Sagittarius, It is time to be prepared; it is time to be on your toes this week. It is time to reserve your power and strength. You should be ready to face any eventuality. Identify

your own power and be ready to use it in your defense. The cards indicate a difficult situation, but they also indicate that you will find a way to overcome it. Remember that you have what it takes to be a winner inside you; you just need to bring that side out and shine.

LUCKY NUMBER: 9
LUCKY COLOR: DEEP RED
AFFIRMATION FROM LIGHT SEERS TAROT: I PUSH BEYOND MY OWN PERCEIVED LIMITATIONS

CAPRICORN | DEC. 22 TO JAN. 20



Dear Capricorn, This week, your environment seems to be working against you. There is no order; everyone is operating against one another. You're going to need extra patience.

Rest assured, there are no major blockages. Professionally, your productivity has decreased due to conflict brought on by a mismatch in personality and work style. Avoid getting too caught up in the drama; instead, concentrate on your responsibilities, and you will eventually triumph.

LUCKY NUMBER: 5
LUCKY COLOR: LIGHT GREY
AFFIRMATION FROM LIGHT SEERS TAROT: WE RISE TOGETHER IN ACCELERATED HARMONY

AQUARIUS | JAN 21 TO FEB 19



Dear Aquarius, This week, the cards indicate opportunities to expand your horizons through study, travel, business enterprise, and learning. You need to become more aware of

the opportunities that exist for you right now. The cards also advise you to embrace change. For some of you, travel is on the cards! You might visit a faraway land, where you will then have the opportunity to fully develop yourself and learn many new things!

LUCKY NUMBER: 3
LUCKY COLOR: VOILET
AFFIRMATION FROM LIGHT SEERS TAROT: I KNOW MY DREAM IS ON THE WAY

PISCES | FEB 20 TO MARCH 20



Dear Pisces, This week, the cards indicate the coming together of two diverse forces; they could even refer to the coming together of relationships, friendships, partnerships, and all

kinds of compromises and commitments. Be moderate and try to achieve balance in situations. Start fixing things before they get too far out of balance. Health will be good. This is the best time to kick out old habits. Your inner power is ready to heal you and make you stronger.

LUCKY NUMBER: 14
LUCKY COLOR: CRYSTAL WHITE
AFFIRMATION FROM LIGHT SEERS TAROT: I WALK THE MIDDLE PATH AND NOURISH WHOLENESS

IN THE NEWS

You'll always have my support, Allu Arjun tells Pawan Kalyan

FAMILY RALLIES AROUND JANA SENA LEADER AHEAD OF POLLS

Allu Arjun has publicly expressed support for his uncle, fellow actor and Jana Sena party leader Pawan Kalyan, ahead of the Andhra Pradesh Assembly elections on May 13th, to be held simultaneously with the third phase of the general elections.

"My heartfelt wishes to @PawanKalyan garu on your election journey. I have always been immensely proud of the path you've chosen, dedicating your life to service. As a family member, my love and support will always be with you. My best wishes for achieving all that you aspire for," Allu Arjun posted on X.

It may be recalled that in the 2019 elections, the actor had actively campaigned for his uncle. This year, it was another family member, Varun Tej's turn to do so. Some other members of the film fraternity have also expressed their support for Pawan Kalyan. Megastar Chiranjeevi released a video stressing that politics was Pawan's personal focus and interest.



Car-cinogenic!

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

DISORDERS

Dr Nagendra Parvataneni, Senior Consultant and Head of the Department of Surgical Oncology at KIMS Hospitals, says the chemicals in flame retardants have been shown to cause certain cancers like thyroid, prostate, breast, and urinary bladder cancers, although the evidence is not as conclusive but has shown a possible association.

"A few environmental perspective studies done in 2017-18 on the health effects of brominated flame retardants on children and prenatal women highlighted the potential health effects it can cause in the neurodevelopment and behavioural patterns of children. The chemicals have also been shown to impact reproductive health," he says.

Incidentally, he says, the studies also found there is an increased risk of cancer, particularly thyroid cancer. "The fire retardants comprise brominated and phosphorus-based

chemicals," he says.

Dr Nagendra says the exact mechanism is not fully understood and is thought to disrupt the endocrine system in the body, which in turn leads to potential changes in cell growth and differentiation due to its genotoxicity effects, which may lead to cancer development.

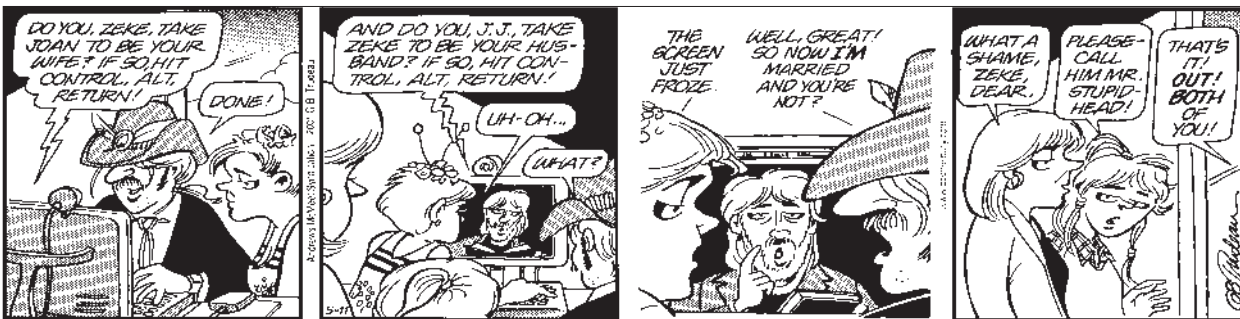
"In simpler terms, prolonged exposure to these retardants may cause a hormone mixup, DNA damage, oxidative stress, and, over time, a mess with the immune system, resulting in cancer. There is no direct evidence to show this, and there is only a possible association," he says.

A FLAME RETARDANT IS A CHEMICAL THAT IS ADDED TO MATERIALS TO MAKE THEM LESS FLAMMABLE AND PREVENT FIRES FROM SPREADING. FLAME RETARDANTS ARE OFTEN USED IN AUTOMOTIVE COMPONENTS SUCH AS UPHOLSTERY, CARPETS, INSULATION, AND ELECTRONICS TO IMPROVE FIRE SAFETY.

CALVIN AND HOBBS | Bill Watterson



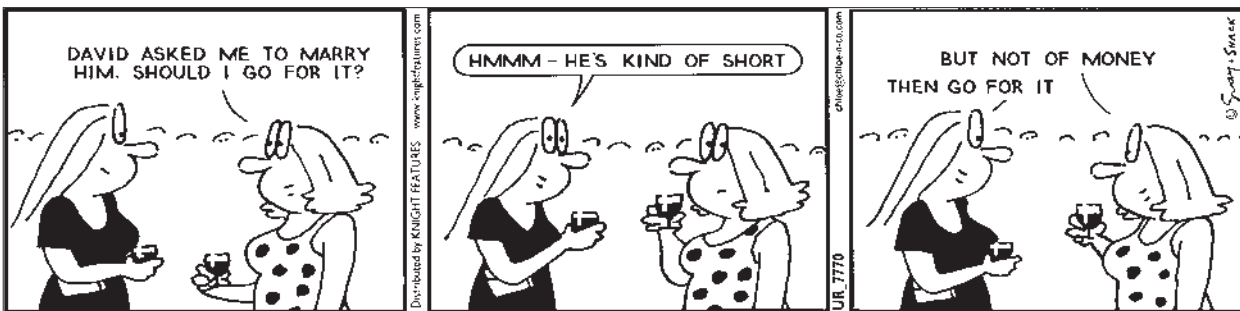
DOONESBURY | Garry Trudeau



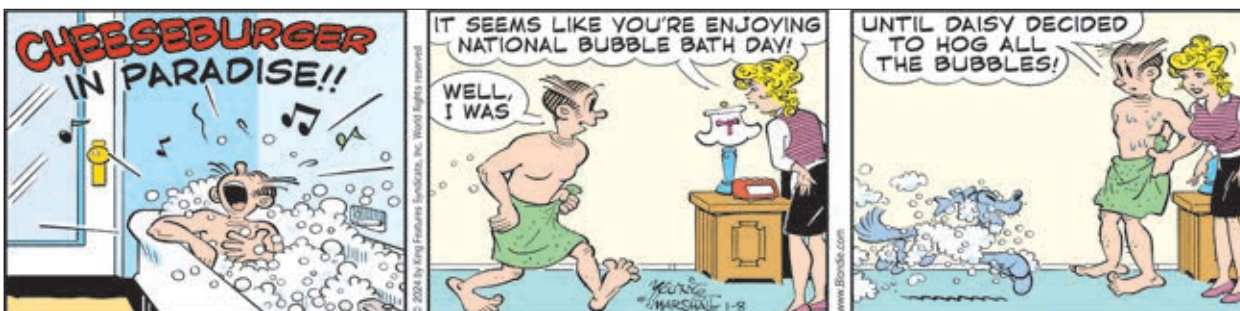
B.C. | Johnny Hart



UP AND RUNNING | Gray and Shack



BLONDIE | Dean Young and John Marshall



ANDY CAPP | Reg Smythe



Dennis the Menace



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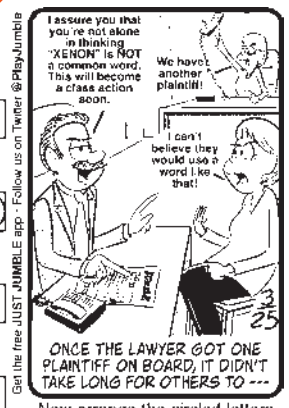
Find at least six differences in details between panels.



Differences: 1. Hair is different. 2. Sleeve is longer. 3. Hill is added. 4. Rail in fence is moved. 5. Boy's head is tilted forward. 6. Bracket is added.

jumble

CNEUL
WPTES
FILDED
LOEDDO



Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Answer here:

(Answers Monday)
Yesterday's Jumbles: RUGBY SWORN SICKLE MASCOT
Answer: The young lion was learning to sound like an adult, and it was a — ROARING SUCCESS