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Modi has given India's entire wealth to 4-5 rich people: Priyanka

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Thousands of civilians flee N-E Ukraine after Russia presses a border assault



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I am overwhelmed, enjoying it, as well as lying low: Aditi Rao Hydari on Heeramandi's success

Vol. 31 No. 87 | 16 PAGES | £1.50



Actress Jennifer Lawrence at an event in New York on Sunday.

— AP

China overtakes US to be top trade partner of India

New Delhi: China has emerged as the largest trading partner of India with \$118.4 billion two-way commerce in 2023-24, slightly edging past the United States, according to the data of economic think tank GTRI. The bilateral trade between India and the US stood at \$118.3 billion in 2023-24. Washington was the top trading partner of New Delhi during 2021-22 and 2022-23. The data showed that India's exports to China rose by 8.7 per cent to \$16.67 billion in the last fiscal. The main sectors which recorded healthy growth in exports to that country include iron ore, cotton yarn/fabrics/made-ups, handloom, spices, fruits and vegetables, plastic and linoleum. — PTI

Full report on Page 7

ED calls J'khand mantri over ₹35cr cash seizure

Ranchi: The ED has summoned Jharkhand minister Alam for questioning in a money laundering case on May 14. The agency had last week arrested Mr Alam's personal secretary Sanjeev Kumar Lal (52) and the latter's domestic help following the seizure of more than ₹32 crore cash. — PTI

Full report on Page 4

Cannes festival set to kick off tomorrow

Paris: The Cannes Film Festival starts Tuesday with script including the comeback of Hollywood icons, fears of a strike, a Donald Trump biopic and the shadow of MeToo accusations. A total of 22 films will be competing for the affections of a jury, which will announce its verdict on May 25. — AFP

Full report on Page 6

COUNTERPOINT



My wife wished to ride an elephant... our candidate sent her one immediately!



■ 'Scams full-time business of TMC' ■ Holds 4 poll rallies in WB

Modi pledges 5 guarantees to cement Bengal votebank

RAJIB CHOWDHURI KOLKATA, MAY 12

Sending a stern message to the INDIA bloc partners, including the Trinamul Congress and the Congress, a day before the fourth phase of voting in the Lok Sabha elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi promised five "guarantees" on caste, creed and religion to cement the BJP's vote-bank.

On Sunday, Mr Modi accused the TMC of "making scams a full-time business" and "running an open industry of scams" in West Bengal while addressing poll campaign rallies at four parliamentary constituencies, his highest so far in the state.

Mr Modi, who reached Kolkata on Saturday evening and spent the night at Raj Bhavan, which has become a centre of controversy over the allegations of molestation by a female contractual staff member of governor C.V. Ananda Bose, however, remained silent on the sensational issue.

Listing out the five guarantees, the Prime Minister said at Barrackpore in North 24 Parganas, "As long as Modi is there, no reservation on the basis of religion will be provided; no one can abolish SC, ST and OBC reservations; no one can stop you from worshipping Lord Ram and celebrating Ram Navami, no one can



Prime Minister Narendra Modi greets people during a public rally at Arambagh in Hooghly district of West Bengal on Sunday.

— PTI

▶ THE PM said corruption is a common characteristic of the Cong, the Left or any other INDIA bloc partners. Most of them engineer scams covertly. But the TMC runs an open industry of scams here.

change the Supreme Court's verdict on Ram Mandir and no one can repeal the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)." Launching a scathing attack on the TMC at his

last rally of the day in Howrah, Mr Modi alleged, "The TMC is the sum total of all the ills of the Congress and the Left. Farmers can't sell their produce at the markets because the TMC extortionists control them. Without paying commission to the TMC extortionists, purchase and sale can't happen here."

He claimed: "The TMC now runs two departments of loot. The TMC leaders' job is to trigger

■ Turn to Page 2

PM should've asked Bengal gov to resign, laments Didi

AGE CORRESPONDENT KOLKATA, MAY 12

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee came down heavily on Prime Minister Narendra Modi once again on Sunday for maintaining his silence on the molestation slur against governor CV Ananda Bose despite his second stay at Raj Bhavan after the allegation became public.

The TMC chief said she had expected the PM to ask Mr Bose to resign from his constitutional post, but he did not.

Taking a dig at Mr Modi, Ms Banerjee, addressing a rally in Barrackpore, North 24 Parganas, after the PM's rally, said, "You should be ashamed for playing with the dignity of women of Sandeshkhali by paying them to file fake rape complaints."

Immediately after her attack on the PM, Sandeshkhali witnessed fresh unrest as the villagers, mostly women allegedly backed by the BJP, heckled local TMC MLA Sukumar Mahato and thrashed two of his aides.

■ More on Page 3

■ Guarantees statehood for Delhi, jobs, MSP, end of Agniveer scheme
Kejriwal unveils AAP's 10 LS poll promises

AVINASH PRABHAKAR and SANJAY KAW NEW DELHI, MAY 12

Delhi chief minister and AAP convenor Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday unveiled "Kejriwal ki Guarantee," outlining 10 priority initiatives to be executed, including the attainment of statehood for the national capital, ensuring 24/7 power supply and implementing free education nationwide, if the INDIA bloc forms government at the Centre.

The guarantees include the promise to "free Indian land from Chinese occupation" and give two crore jobs to the youth of the country in one year. The AAP chief also promised to end the

Agniveer scheme and ensure that farmers get MSP for their crops as per the Swaminathan Commission's report.

The Delhi chief minister said people will have to choose between "Modi ki Guarantee" and "Kejriwal ki Guarantee".

"The latter is a brand... The AAP has fulfilled its 'guarantees' of free power, good schools and mohalla clinics in Delhi and Punjab... Mr Modi has not fulfilled his guarantees," he claimed.

Dubbing the BJP as the biggest reason behind "corruption" in the country, Mr Kejriwal said: "The system where honest people are being sent to jail and the corrupt are being protected will end..."



Delhi chief minister and AAP convenor Arvind Kejriwal with Punjab chief minister Bhagwant Mann during a press conference in New Delhi on Sunday.

— PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

Like we attacked corruption at the lower and higher levels in Delhi and Punjab, we will attack it across the country as well."

Mr Kejriwal then went on to issue an apology to the INDIA alliance partners for not discussing it with them before

announcing the promises. He said: "I apologise to all my INDIA bloc alliance partners for not discussing this with them before announcing the guarantees. I don't have time because the elections are half done. But I am sure they will not object to the opening of schools and hospitals. I will press upon my INDIA bloc partners to fulfill these guarantees."

The Opposition bloc, comprising parties such as the AAP, the Congress, the Trinamul Congress and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, among others, as its members, was formed to take on the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance in the Lok Sabha polls. A day

■ Turn to Page 4



BJP supporters at Union home minister Amit Shah's public meeting in Rae Bareilly on Sunday.

— PTI

Sonia spent 70% of MP funds on minorities: Shah

'Opposition afraid of its votebank'

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs NEW DELHI, RAEBARELI/ PRATAPGARH (UP), MAY 12

Taking on the Gandhis in their bastion Rae Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, senior BJP leader and Union home minister Amit Shah on Sunday accused the four-term MP and former Congress president Sonia Gandhi of "spending more than 70 per cent of her MP funds on minorities". At another rally in the day in UP's Pratapgarh, Mr Shah said, "Rahul Gandhi can be scared of an atom bomb, but the BJP is not."

Seeking votes for BJP candidate Dinesh Pratap Singh, who is pitted against Mr Gandhi in Rae Bareilly, Mr Shah accused Mrs Gandhi of not visiting her parliamentary constituency while she represented the seat in the Lok Sabha. Mrs Gandhi recently moved to the Rajya Sabha.

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, who was also campaigning in Rae Bareilly, vehemently rejected Mr Shah's charge. Addressing a poll rally in support of Mr Gandhi, Ms Vadra accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of never visiting any village in his Varanasi constituency.

At Rae Bareilly rally, Mr Shah said, "You gave the Gandhi family a chance for years, but no development work has been done... They (the Congress) do not believe in development. They do not even come to you in your happiness and sorrows."

Asking people to vote for the BJP candidate, the Union minister said, "We will connect Rae Bareilly with Modi Ji's development journey."

"The 'Shahzada' ■ Turn to Page 4



Amit Shah

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"The 'Shahzada' ■ Turn to Page 4

SHORT TAKES

Fire breaks out in Bawana, 3 critical

New Delhi: Nine people were rescued and rushed to a nearby hospital after a massive fire broke out at a factory on the outskirts of Delhi on Sunday, the police said, adding that six people sustained injuries and three are in critical condition. Delhi fire service (DFS) chief Atul Garg said that a call regarding a blaze at a factory in sector-1, Bawana Industrial area was received at 3:04 p.m. “Total nine people were rescued and rushed to Valmiki hospital and 20 fire tenders were used to douse the flames. Fire is under control and it is reported that 6 people got injured,” said Mr Garg. The fire department official said that three, who are in a serious condition have been identified as Kuldeep (18), Bablu (25) and Mastram (20) and all of them have been referred to Safdarjung for further treatment. “The reason behind the cause of fire is yet to be ascertained,” the official added.

Man beaten to death during cricket match

New Delhi: A 21-year-old man was allegedly beaten to death on Saturday after he tried to intervene in a fight between his brother and other players during a cricket match in Bharat Nagar area, the police said. Vishal Kumar succumbed to internal injuries, the police said, adding that a murder case has been lodged and teams have been formed to nab the accused. According to a police officer, Kumar is survived by his wife and a one-year-old son, who live in the Pratap Nagar area. His younger brother and sister are studying. The officer said Kumar used to work in a cosmetics factory in Sadar Bazar. His younger brother Kunal had gone to play cricket near their house, the police said, adding that subsequently, there was a scuffle between Kunal and others.

ILLEGAL PARKING PLAGUES DELHI, SAYS MAYOR

New Delhi: Delhi mayor Shelly Oberoi on Sunday wrote to the MCD commissioner highlighting the detrimental impacts of illegal parking on public convenience, traffic flow and financial stability and demanding strict action against illegal parking plaguing the city. Urging swift and resolute action, the mayor has asked the commissioner to direct the concerned officials to identify, document, and address illegal parking hotspots in the city with a strict deadline of five days to submit a comprehensive report to her. “It has come to my notice that so many illegal parkings are being run in various parts of Delhi. These illegal parkings are creating nuisance and inconvenience to the public due to traffic jams and also tarnishing the image of the corporation. Apart from this, it has also resulted in huge revenue loss to the corporation...,” the letter reads. It said further, “In view of the above, it is desired that necessary direction may be given to the concerned officer to identify various illegal parkings running in Delhi, to prepare a list of all the illegal parkings, to take stern action and submit the report to the office of undersigned (Mayor) wit-hin five days,” it added.

Modi pledges 5 guarantees

■ **Continued From Page 1** violence, while the TMC-backed goons’ task is to grab land. The TMC goons openly grab land here. This happens under the protection and blessing of the state government. The TMC has made scams its full-time business. Corruption is a common characteristic of the Congress, the Left or any other INDIA bloc partners. Most of them engineer scams covertly. But the TMC runs an open industry of scams here. The lottery scam is one of the examples.” Repeating his charges against the TMC government for opposing the CAA, Ram Mandir inauguration and Ram Navami celebration and patronising corruption through multiple scams in the state, Mr Modi tore into chief minister Mamata Banerjee’s party for still trying to protect Shahjahan Sheikh, the prime

NETA’S NATTER

ARE EGOS HURTING BJP’S POLL CHANCES IN DELHI?

While the Delhi unit of the BJP is eying a clean sweep of all seven Lok Sabha seats for the third consecutive time in the ongoing polls, the state leadership is struggling to resolve the trivial issues of local leaders, some of whom are disgruntled because their peers are either not sharing their social media posts or putting their small photos on the banners and backdrops. As a result, the party,

which boasts of its organisational structure, is struggling to keep it intact in several pockets of the national capital due to the lack of bonhomie among its local leaders.

A senior party leader said, “Almost on a daily basis, we are wasting almost two hours on resolving such petty issues and that too when elections are on our heads. If we want to avoid any future repercussions, we must learn to ignore trivial issues.”

IT’S DIFFICULT TO KEEP TRACK OF WHO’S AN ALLY & WHO’S A FOE



Addressing a gathering at the AAP headquarters on Saturday after chief minister Arvind Kejriwal was released from jail on interim bail, Punjab chief minister Bhagwant Mann said, “*Lok Sabha chunav me BJP aur Congress ka supda saaf kar denge* (We will wipe out the BJP and the Congress in the Lok Sabha polls).” However, realising that the AAP is an alliance with the

IS ‘SAFE SEAT’ HAJIPUR NOT SAFE FOR NDA ANY MORE?

Many considered Hajipur seat a safe constituency for the late Ram Vilas Paswan’s son, Chirag Paswan, but he is facing a tough challenge from the INDIA bloc’s candidate Shiv Chandra Ram. Mr Ram is contesting the seat from the RJD’s quota and is getting all the support from both Lalu Prasad Yadav and his son Tejashwi Yadav.

Adding to Mr Paswan’s woes, supporters of the Pashupati Paras faction are secretly supporting the RJD candidate. Mr Paras is the sitting member of Parliament, he won this seat in 2019 and wanted to contest it



again, but the BJP denied this seat to him and gave it to his nephew, Mr Paswan. Though Mr Paras decided to remain in the NDA fold, his supporters are not ready to support Mr Paswan.

Congress in Delhi, Mr Mann made it clear within seconds that “*BJP aur Congress ka supda Punjab me saaf kar denge*”. Making amends, the Punjab CM said, “Here in Delhi, the AAP and the Congress are fighting together against the BJP. But in Punjab, we are fighting against both the Congress and the BJP.” But his statement left many wondering and some ‘red-faced.’

‘BJP had plans to topple AAP govts’

Kejriwal meets party MLAs, calls meeting with councilors today

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 12

AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday claimed that the BJP’s plan was to topple the AAP governments in Delhi and Punjab after his arrest, but this did not fructify. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) became more united “after my arrest”, the Delhi chief minister said, while addressing MLAs of his party after a meeting. Mr Kejriwal has called for another major meeting on Monday and will meet with councilors at the party office here.

Meanwhile, AAP national general secretary (Org.) and Rajya Sabha MP Sandeep Pathak said, the AAP supremo would also campaign across the country for the INDIA alliance. “Mr Kejriwal will take part in the election campaign for the INDIA alliance and will go across the country



Delhi chief minister and AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal with Punjab counterpart Bhagwant Mann during a roadshow at Moti Nagar in New Delhi on Sunday.

— PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

and seek votes. He will campaign for the Opposition bloc in Lucknow on May 15. Apart from this, he will take part in election campaigns in Jamshedpur, Jharkhand on May 16, and in Mumbai on May 17,” Mr Pathak said.

“The BJP people would

have said before my arrest that they would break the party and topple the governments in Delhi and Punjab.” Mr Kejriwal said, adding that the saffron party had a plan to arrest him, break the AAP, topple the AAP governments, first in Delhi and

then in Punjab respectively. “After my arrest, their plan failed, as you all did not break,” the Delhi CM said to party MLAs.

Hitting out at the BJP Mr Kejriwal said, “BJP people contacted many MLAs to break the AAP so that the government falls, but their plan failed,” adding that the people had tried all parties, and it’s AAP only that could give a bright future to the country.

Mr Kejriwal along with Punjab chief minister Bhagwant Mann also held two road-shows in support of party’s Lok Sabha candidate Somnath Bharti and Mahabul Mishra.

The Delhi CM said if people choose AAP on May 25, he won’t have to go back to jail. “I have to go back to jail after 20 days. If you choose jhadu (AAP’s symbol), I won’t have to go back to jail,” the chief minister said during the roadshow in Moti Nagar.

SC to hear CM petition against summons today

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 12

The Supreme Court is slated to hear on Monday a plea of Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal challenging a Delhi high court order upholding the summons issued to him in a criminal defamation case for retweeting an allegedly defamatory video circulated by YouTuber Dhruv Rathee in May 2018.

A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta is scheduled to hear the matter in which Mr Kejriwal has admitted that he “committed a mistake” by retweeting the alleged defamatory video.

On March 11, the apex court asked Mr Kejriwal whether he wanted to give an apology to the complainant in the matter.

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 12

The Delhi BJP on Sunday flagged off a bike rally where several youth from the Sikh community participated in support of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, an official statement said. The rally, with slogan #SikhWithModi, was started from the state BJP office and reached the national headquarters via Connaught Place.

Addressing the rally, Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva said the Prime Minister values every section of the society, but the way the Kartarpur Corridor was opened for the Sikh community, Bal Divas was announced on the name of Veer Shahbajade on December

26, taxes were removed from langar, and the 350th birth anniversary celebration of Guru Govind Singh was organised, all these historic works were done by the Modi government. Not only this, but PM Modi also “wiped the tears” of the victims of Sikh riots, he said, adding that if any government has empowered Sikh youth with opportunities, “it is only the Modi government”.

BJP leader Manjinder Singh Sirsa said, “With the hashtag #SikhWithModi, today, the Sikh community is moving forward on the streets with the message that we all stand with Modi. Our dream of a developed India will be fulfilled under the leadership of Modi.”

■ Police officials say nothing suspicious found

After schools, 8 hosps, IGI get bomb threats

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, MAY 12

In yet another incident of bomb scare, eight hospitals and the IGI Airport in Delhi received bomb threats through emails on Sunday, days after similar emails, sent to over 150 schools, had spread shock and fear in Delhi/NCR.

The police received information regarding the threat from Burari Hospital at 3 pm, after which complaints were flown in from several other hospitals across the city and the police teams were dispatched. “Nothing suspicious has been found yet,” officials said.

The bomb threats were reported from Indira Gandhi International Airport Terminal-3, Burari Hospital, Sanjay Gandhi Memorial Hospital, Guru Teg Bahadur Hospital, Bara Hindu Rao Hospital, Janakpuri Super Speciality Hospital, Deen Dayal Upadhyay, Dabri’s Dada Dev Hospital and Aruna Asaf Ali Government Hospital in Civil Lines, a senior Delhi fire services official said.

“I have placed explosive devices inside of your building. They will explode in the following hours. This isn’t a threat, you have a few hours to disarm the bomb or else the blood of innocent people inside the building will be on your hands,” read the email screenshot.

“The security operations control centre at IGI Airport has received a threat email concerning an explosive device within the premises. Enhanced security protocols are now in effect, and safety measures have been intensified. Legal action has been initiated. No suspicious item has been found as of now,” deputy commissioner of Police (IGI) Usha Rangnani said. The officer said the airport authorities received a threat email at 6 pm.

Security has been beefed up in all the hospitals in



Sanjay Gandhi hospital after it received bomb threat in New Delhi on Sunday.

— PTI

Pro-Khalistan graffiti found on Metro pillars

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 12

Pro-Khalistan graffiti with the slogans ‘*Desh banega Khalistan*’ and against India and Prime Minister Narendra Modi were found on the pillars under the Karol Bagh and Jhandewalan Metro stations on Sunday.

The officials said that they informed the concerned authorities to remove the graffiti and

the city, and additional police force deployment was made at the airport. However, nothing suspicious was so far recovered from any of the locations so far, they said.

After the threat call from Burari Hospital, local police, bomb squad and dog squad were rushed to the spot, DCP M.K. Meena said. “Teams are checking the hospital. Nothing suspicious has been found yet,” he added.

In a statement, an official at the Burari Hospital said, “At around 3 pm, we received an email regarding a bomb in the hospital. After this, all the safety measures had been thoroughly checked and everything was stable.”

Sanjay Gandhi Hospital also received a threat

slogans from the pillar and an FIR has been registered in this connection.

“We have formed teams to probe the matter. Police teams are scanning CCTV cameras in the area and on the Metro stations to identify the culprits and nab them. A case under relevant sections of the IPC has been registered and graffiti and slogans have been removed” said a senior police officer.

4 suspects caught on CCTV, doc tortured before murder: Cops

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 12

The Delhi police’s investigation into the murder of an elderly physician in Southeast Delhi’s Jangpura area has revealed that he was brutally tortured and hit on the head with a blunt object before being strangled with a leash, the officer said.

The accused had locked Paul’s two dogs in the bathroom. They then ransacked the house before fleeing. The police has registered a case of murder and robbery and are investigating it from various angles.

“We have not ruled out the possibility of some insider or someone known to Paul being involved,” the officer said.

Paul lived with his wife

Neena Paul, a doctor at a Delhi government hospital. She was at work when her husband was murdered.

One of their daughters lives in Canada while the other lives in Noida. Both are married.

Two men died while three others sustained injuries after the car they were travelling in lost control and turned turtle in Delhi’s Aman Vihar on Sunday, the police said.

The deceased were identified as Sanjay (23), and Ashutosh (22), both residents of Kishan Vihar.

According to the police, on Sunday at 12:30 p.m. a PCR call regarding overturning of an Ertega car in Sector 22, Rohini was received at the Aman Vihar police station.

Upon reaching the spot, the vehicle was found in an accidental condition by the police team and it was learnt that the five occupants who sustained injuries in the accident had been shifted to the hospital, where two of them were declared brought dead by doctors and three are under treatment.

2 die, 3 hurt as car turns turtle in Aman Vihar

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 12

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Rally organised for voter awareness

New Delhi: The New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) alongwith various stakeholders like New Delhi district election office, Khan Market traders association, volunteers and NDMC staff organised a bicycle rally as the voter awareness event at Khan market on Sunday.

As many as 500 participants including chairman - NDMC, Amit Yadav along with senior officers, staff of the engineering, horticulture and public health departments and traders participated in the bicycle rally with full enthusiasm in the morning.



Sikh community people take part in a bike rally in New Delhi on Sunday.

— PTI

SHORT TAKES

Modi plans more rallies in Odisha

Bhubaneswar: Prime Minister Narendra Modi seems to be fighting a decisive battle this time against Odisha chief minister president Naveen Patnaik. He has decided to take the battle right into the enemy camp by challenging the CM in his home turfs — Hinjili and Kantabanji — the two seats where the latter is fighting Assembly elections. Home minister Amit Shah will address a public meeting at Hinjili on May 15 and party’s president J.P. Nadda will hold a rally at Kantabanji on May 17. The PM, who has so far addressed five public rallies and held a roadshow in Bhubaneswar, is again coming to the state on May 20 to hold more public meetings and a roadshow at Puri where party’s national spokesperson Dr Sambit Patra is fighting Lok Sabha elections. The PM will hold the roadshow in Puri on May 20 morning and later address public meetings at Angul and Cuttack.

Daily wager throws his hat into poll ring

Bhubaneswar: The Aska assembly constituency in Odisha’s Ganjam district is back in the news after a 55-year-old daily wage-earner entered the electoral fray. Ramachandra Badatya, a mason hailing from Haradapadar village, has filed his nomination papers to contest the polls from Aska assembly polls. He goes out to work in the morning and undertakes his campaigns for two hours in the forenoon and again in the evening. Ramachandra strikes a balance between his work schedule and the campaigning hours. He is seen visiting houses seeking votes. Ramachandra is a member of the Red Stat Committee of CPI (ML). “My working hours are from 8 am to 11 am. During the three-hour break, I undertake campaigning activity for two hours.

Yogi: DNA of INDIA bloc similar to Pak

Sitapur/Varanasi: Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday said the DNA of Congress, Samajwadi Party, INDIA bloc are similar to Pakistan where people are starving and there is lack of development. “The poor used to die of hunger during the time of SP-Congress. And now people are starving to death in Pakistan, whereas 80 crore are getting free ration in India,” he said during a rally at Gandhi Degree College in Sidhauili in the Sitapur Lok Sabha constituency. Mr Adityanath said, “Congress had opportunity for 60-65 years to work for the development of India, but it did not. There was lack of medical facilities during the UPA government. They used to play with people’s faith, allowed the poor to die of hunger and drove farmers to suicide.” — *PTI*

THAROOR OFFERS RED CARPET TO PAWAR, OTHERS

AGE CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, MAY 12

Senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor on Sunday said that not just Sharad Pawar’s party, but all those who separated from Congress in the past, will be welcomed back (in his party) on a “red carpet.” Several parties formed across the country after splitting from the Congress should once again join hands under one roof, he said. “Let’s see what happens in the future. But, if the people who have left the Congress are returning, we will welcome them,” the Thiruvananthapuram MP said when asked about NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar’s recent statement about smaller parties merging with the grand old party. “There is not one party, there are many parties in the country which were (initially) in the Congress and (later) split due to some reasons. If they come back, we will welcome them with a red carpet. Because we think that if the ideology is the same, why should we be different?” Mr Tharoor said. He also added that though there are several parties in the INDIA bloc, they are united as an alliance.

■ Didi: Why is PM not seeking Bengal gov’s resignation despite allegations of molestation?

PM still lying about Sandeshkhali: WB CM

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, MAY 12

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee came down heavily on Prime Minister Narendra Modi once again on Sunday for maintaining his silence on the molestation slur against governor C.V. Ananda Bose despite his stay at Raj Bhavan for the Lok Sabha election campaign within a span of 10 days.

According to the Trinamul Congress supremo, she had expected the PM to ask Mr Bose to resign from his constitutional post but he did not. Taking a dig at the PM, Ms Banerjee, who addressed a poll rally at Barrackpore in North 24 Parganas, said, “You should be ashamed for playing with the dignity of women in Sandeshkhali by paying them to file fake rape complaints. I will not listen to any lectures from such people who don’t respect women.”



West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee during a rally at Uluberia in Howrah district on Sunday. — *PTI*

She claimed, “The Prime Minister comes to Bengal and stays in Raj Bhavan while no woman is willing to visit Raj Bhavan after shameful deeds of the his representative, *laaf saheb* (A Bengali dialect to identify the British officers as bigshots), came to light. Women are scared of visiting Raj Bhavan. This has landed me in trouble because I can’t talk to him also in person.”

The chief minister

added, “If needed, I will then have to speak to him (the governor) on the road. You should have asked him to resign from his post but you didn’t utter a single word and much to my surprise you are still peddling fake statements on Sandeshkhali. A *sandesh* (news) is waiting for you. It is about the country which is saying Modi is losing and is about bidding adieu.”

Immediately after her

attack on the PM, Sandeshkhali witnessed fresh unrest as the villagers, mostly women allegedly backed by the BJP, heckled local TMC MLA Sukumar Mahato and thrashed two of his aides Dilip Mullick and Tatan Gayen. The incident took place near the Sandeshkhali police station.

Mr Mahato, Dilip and Tatan were talking among themselves at a house. Suddenly a group of women, armed with sticks and rods, stormed the house and dragged them out. They alleged that Dilip and Tatan were circulating fake videos from their cell phones to defame them at the behest of the TMC MLA.

The furious mob then snatched the cell phones of Dilip and Tatan and beat them black and blue on the road. They also shoved Mr Mahato who appeared to be helpless in face of the sudden outburst.

Over 70 women got money for Sandeshkhali stir: Video

Kolkata, May 12: In a purported video that surfaced from Sandeshkhali, a local BJP leader was heard saying that over 70 women had received ₹2,000 each for taking part in protests against local TMC satrap Shahjahan Sheikh and his aides who were accused of sexual assault and land grab.

In the video, lasting over 45 minutes, a man resembling Sandeshkhali mandal president Gangadhar Kayal told this to the questioner. It was Mr Kayal who had earlier said in another purported clip, the first in a series in the past week, that the rape allegations were “staged”.

In the latest tape that surfaced on Saturday night, Mr Kayal was heard saying that 70 women got ₹2,000 each for taking part in protests against Sheikh

who was arrested and later suspended by the police.

“We will need ₹2.5 lakhs in cash for 50 booths where 30 per cent of protesters would be women. We have to keep the SC, ST and OBC people here in good humour by paying them satisfactorily. In any situation, women will form the front row confronting the police,” he said in the video.

Mr Kayal could not be contacted, but the BJP has dubbed the videos as fake.

TMC spokesperson Riju Dutta said, “The truth of the BJP’s fake narrative on Sandeshkhali is tumbling out of the closet.”

Multiple purported videos of Sandeshkhali women have surfaced and shared by the TMC in the past few days. — *PTI*

All arrangements in place for Phase 4 of LS poll: EC

28 Odisha seats, Andhra set to go for Assembly polls

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 12

With the stage set for the fourth phase of polling of Lok Sabha elections, the Election Commission of India (EC) on Sunday said all arrangements are in place. Spread across 10 states and Union territories, voting on Monday will take place for 96 Lok Sabha seats. Besides, 175 Legislative Assembly seats of Andhra Pradesh and 28 Legislative Assembly seats of Odisha are also going to polls in this phase.

The polling on Monday will see participation of 17.7 crore electors at 1.92 lakh polling stations. Though there is no forecast for the heat wave on poll day in major parts of the areas, arrangements have been made at all polling stations including facilities like water, shamiyana and fans.

Due to heat conditions in Telangana, polling time in certain Assembly segments of 17 parliamentary constituencies has been increased from 7 am till 6 pm to increase voters’ participation.



Vehicles on election duty parked at the Birsa College Stadium (converted into a distribution centre) on the eve of the fourth phase of Lok Sabha elections in Jharkhand’s Khunti district on Sunday. — *PTI*

So far, till phase 3 of the general election, polling has concluded smoothly and peacefully in 283 parliamentary constituencies and 20 states/UTs.

1,717 candidates are in fray in the fourth phase and the average number of contesting candidates in a parliamentary constituency is 18. According to EC, 122 air sorties have been done in the fourth phase in three states — Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand and Odisha — to ferry polling and security officials.

Besides, 364 Observers have already reached

their constituencies. A total of 4,661 flying squads, 4,438 static surveillance teams, 1,710 video surveillance teams and 934 video viewing teams are keeping surveillance round the clock to deal with any form of inducement of voters strictly and swiftly.

The poll panel said 1,016 inter-state and 121 international border check posts are keeping strict vigil on any illicit flow of liquor, drugs, cash and freebies. Strict surveillance has been kept at sea and air routes.

■ Booth-level panels, panna pramukhs active on ground in MP

BJP pull out all stops for high turnout

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, MAY 12

Boosted by an improvement in voting in the third phase of Lok Sabha polls, the BJP has launched a special drive to push the polling in the fourth and final phase of LS elections in Madhya Pradesh. The party has mobilised its booth-level committees, block in-charges of the party and BJP MLAs to spread out in their respective areas of influence to draw voters out of their homes and bring them to the polling booth to vote, a senior BJP functionary told this newspaper on Sunday.

Eight LS constituencies falling under Malwa-Niwar region of Madhya

Pradesh are going to polls in the fourth and final phase polling in the state on Monday. “The booth-level committees, ‘*panna pramukhs*’ and the elected representatives of the party have been activated on the ground to ensure record polling in the fourth and final phase of LS elections in Madhya Pradesh”, state BJP secretary Rajneesh Agrawal said.

The voter turnout in the third phase polling witnessed a sharp rise, as compared to the second phase polling, after the party launched a special drive to improve voting, he said.

The second phase polling had recorded a voting percentage of 58.59 per cent that increased sharply by 7.91 per cent to 66.50 per cent in the third phase of elections.

The improvement in voting in the third phase polling came, following a missive to the effect by Union home minister Amit Shah.

The first three phases of LS elections in Madhya Pradesh saw polling in six, seven and nine seats respectively. However, the polling percentage in the seats held in the first, second and third phases was less than 7.32 per cent, 9.05 per cent and 3.66 per cent

▶ **THE STATE BJP leadership has, however, found it a challenging task to increase voting in the final phase polling, considering the low key campaigning in the phase**

cent in the third phase of elections. The improvement in voting in the third phase polling came, following a missive to the effect by Union home minister Amit Shah.

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SC to hear Soren’s plea against his arrest today

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 12

The Supreme Court is slated to hear on Monday a plea of former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren, challenging his arrest by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in a money laundering case linked to a “land scam”.

A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta will hear Mr Soren’s plea in which he has challenged the May 3 order of the Jharkhand high court dismissing his petition against the arrest.

The JMM leader had also sought an interim bail for campaigning in the Lok Sabha elections till the court delivers its verdict on his plea against the arrest.

On May 10, the SC had disposed of Mr Soren’s plea seeking a direction to the HC to deliver its verdict on his petition challenging his arrest by the ED in a money laundering case.

The bench had observed that Mr Soren’s petition has become infructuous, as the HC has delivered its judgment on May 3 and the JMM leader has already challenged the same in the SC.

“This has become infructuous,” the bench had told senior advocates Kapil Sibal and Arunabh Chowdhury, who were representing Mr Soren. In his appeal, Mr Soren contended that the HC had erred in dismissing his plea against the arrest.

Actor Allu Arjun booked for poll code violation

Nandyala (Andhra Pradesh), May 12: The Andhra Pradesh police booked a case against popular Telugu actor Allu Arjun here for allegedly violating the model code of conduct during the silent period in the run-up to polls.

Nandyala district superintendent of police K. Raghuveera Reddy said Arjun allegedly came in a rally to Nandyala YSRCP Assembly constituency candidate S. Ravi Chandra Kishore Reddy’s home on Saturday. — *PTI*

Modi gave ‘entire wealth’ to 4-5 rich people: Priyanka

‘PM waived loans of big industrialists’

AGE CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI/RAE BARELI, MAY 12

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Sunday attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi, accusing him of giving the country’s “entire wealth” to “four or five rich people”.

Addressing a rally in support of her brother and Congress’ Rae Bareli Lok Sabha seat candidate Rahul Gandhi, she said, “Narendra Modi has been the MP from Varanasi for the last 10 years, but he has not visited any village there or asked a farmer how he is living.”

Noting that the privatisation is not bad in itself, Ms Vadra further said, “But if the prime minister gives the entire wealth of the nation to four or five rich people, then that is not right. Today, coal, electricity, ports and airports of the country are all with the friends of the Prime Minister.”

Mentioning former Prime Ministers and Congress leaders Rajiv Gandhi and Indira Gandhi, she said they visited villages and asked people about their issues.

“Our Prime Minister organises big events where you will see many big capitalists but not

▶ **THE CONGRESS leader said if the Congress comes to power after the Lok Sabha polls, it will provide a legal guarantee for MSP and remove GST from farm products to increase farmers’ earnings**

find a single poor person,” Ms Vadra said.

“Modi says that if Congress comes to power they will steal your mangalsutra, will take away your buffalo. The public is laughing over this. The PM is saying this because he has not done any work,” she said. Ms Vadra alleged that Modi waived loans of big industrialists and not of the farmers.

The Congress leader said if the Congress comes to power after the Lok Sabha polls, it will provide a legal guarantee for MSP and remove GST from farm products to increase farmers’ earnings.

“The BJP has stopped all avenues of employment generation,” she said. Targeting the BJP over the electoral bonds issue, Ms Vadra said, “They call us corrupt. But the Congress party could not become a rich party in 55 years, but the BJP has become the richest party in the world within 10 years.”

Will do ‘X-ray’ of country through caste census: Rahul

AGE CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, MAY 12

Keeping up the attack on the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday targeted the PM saying while the BJP has been “counting the notes” it got from “*tempo wale* billionaires”, his party will conduct a caste census to ensure equality.

Mr Gandhi was reacting to Mr Modi’s remarks on the Congress receiving “cash loaded in tempos from Adani and Ambani.”

In a post on X, Mr Gandhi said, “They have been ‘counting notes’ they got from ‘*tempo wale* billionaires’ for the last 10 years. We will X-ray the country through ‘caste census’ and ensure equitable share for every section”.

Meanwhile, Congress leader Jaiiram Ramesh said Prime Minister Narendra Modi is yet to muster courage to accept an invitation for debate.

Justice (Retd) Madan B. Lokur, Justice (Retd) Ajit P. Shah and journalist N. Ram had written to former Congress chief Gandhi and the PM last week inviting them to a platform for a debate on the key election issues.

Srinagar to vote today; NC, PDP say workers arrested

YUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, MAY 12

Security arrangements have been beefed up in Srinagar constituency that is all set to go for voting on Monday in the fourth phase of Lok Sabha elections.

The police officials said strategic deployment has been done particularly at and around 2,135 polling stations in 1,323 locations across 19 Assembly segments spread over five districts — Srinagar, Ganderbal, Budgam, Pulwama and Shopian.

As, for the first time in over three long decades, no separatist political or militant organization has

given an election-boycott call, the authorities anticipate far higher turnout than recorded in previous elections.

Srinagar has 17,47,810 voters. Though there are as many as two dozen candidates — mostly independents — in fray, Srinagar is virtually witnessing a triangular contest between former minister and National Conference (NC) nominee Aga Syed Ruhullah Mehdi, People’s Democratic Party (PDP)’s key face Waheed-ur-Rehman Para and J&K Apni Party’s Mohammad Ashraf Mir.

Meanwhile, all the three parties have accused police and other law



Polling officials carrying EVMs ahead of the fourth phase of Lok Sabha election in Srinagar on Sunday. — *H.U. NAQASH*

enforcing agencies of harassing and even detaining their workers and intimidating their supporters to keep them away from the ballot.

Mr Mehdi said at a hurriedly called press conference here, “Our workers are being picked up by police since yesterday (Saturday). Many were

called to the police stations where they have been detained without signing any reason. We have sent their names to the poll panel.”

Meanwhile, Jammu and Kashmir police has denied the allegation that it is harassing the workers of certain political parties and intimidating their supporters ahead of the polling in the Srinagar Lok Sabha constituency.

“Statements and speculations of political parties suggesting that police has been harassing their party workers in different ways at the behest of the other is without basis,” it said in a post on microblogging site ‘X’.

Black days ahead if BJP returns to power: Uddhav

AGE CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, MAY 12

Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray has slammed the BJP saying the saffron party’s “*acche din*” promises never turned true (during its regime). Instead black days are ahead if the BJP is not defeated in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections, he said.

The former chief minister also made a scathing attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi calling him “a liar.” “Modi had promised about corruption-free India. But now protection



of the corrupt has become the ‘Modi guarantee’. The BJP has assured protection to corrupt people by inducting them into its fold,” he added.

Mr Thackeray’s criticism of the BJP and Modi came in an interview to his party mouthpiece “*Saamana*” while speaking about the polls. The ongoing political *Mahabharata* is all about saving democracy, he said.

SHORT TAKES

Mumbai ex-cop gets bail in '06 encounter

New Delhi: The Supreme Court has granted bail to former Mumbai police officer Pradeep Sharma, who was awarded life sentence in a 2006 fake encounter killing case. Sharma, was convicted in the 2006 fake encounter killing case of gangster Ramnarayan Gupta alias Lakkhan Bhaiya — an alleged close aide of gangster Chhota Rajan. A bench of Justices Hrishikesh Roy and Prashant Kumar Mishra noted the submission of the lawyer for the Maharashtra government that the state had no objection to the court granting bail to Sharma. Senior advocates Mukul Rohatgi and Sidharth Luthra appeared for Sharma, while senior advocate R. Basant represented the complainant and opposed the former officer's bail plea. On April 8, the SC said Sharma needs not to surrender till further orders to undergo the life sentence awarded to him in the case.

Two held for leaking clips in Prajwal case

Bengaluru: The Special Investigation Team (SIT) sleuths probing sexual abuse charges against Prajwal Revanna on Sunday arrested two persons in connection with the leak and circulation of explicit videos involving the Hassan MP, official sources said. Two persons — Chetan and Likith Gowda — were arrested in Hassan, and they are reportedly associated with the BJP in the district, they said. Officials recorded their statements and the spot “mahazar” was done at their residences in Yelagunda and Shravanab-elaogla respectively. Pen-drives containing the alleged explicit videos involving Prajwal Revanna, who was also BJP-JD(S) joint candidate from Hassan, were circulated in the district, a few days ahead of the first phase of Lok Sabha polls in the state on April 26. — PTI

Postpone Yamunotri Yatra for a day: Cops

Dehradun: After the huge traffic jam on the way to Yamunotri Dham, the police here asked the devotees to postpone their plan to visit the temple for Sunday.The journey to Yamunotri Dham situated at a height of 10,804 feet in Uttarkashi district started on Friday on Akshaya Tritiya as devotees are making a beeline to all the Dhams, including Yamunotri, to have to pay their obedience. The doors of the Badrinath temple in the Garhwal Himalayas in Uttarakhand opened for devotees on Sunday. With this, the Char Dham Yatra to Badrinath, Kedarnath, Yamunotri and Gangotri has started. Uttarakhand Police, in a post on X, said, “Today, as per the capacity, enough devotees have reached Yamunotri Dham for the yatra. It is risky to send more devotees now. — PTI

Kejriwal unveils AAP’s 10 promises

■ **Continued From Page 1** after his release from jail on interim bail, Mr Kejriwal said on Saturday that the INDIA bloc will form the next government and AAP will be part of it. On being asked about his comments on Prime Minister Narendra Modi retiring at the age of 75, Mr Kejriwal said: “I said that he made this rule himself in 2014 that after the age of 75, no one will get any responsibilities... I said he will also retire in 2025 as per this rule... Many BJP leaders said that that rule does not apply to Modi Ji... I’m sure the PM will not stop it from being implemented in his case as well... Let the PM say that this rule does not apply to me, that it was made for Advani ji. I don’t think the PM will say this.” Elaborating on the “Kejriwal ki Guarantee”, the AAP supremo promised to provide full statehood to Delhi. “The BJP inducts all corrupt people into their party. The BJP’s washing machine will be dismantled publicly. We will come up with a system for hassle-free trade and business in the country,” he said. Mr Kejriwal claimed that his third guarantee is to improve the country’s health sector. He declared that mohalla clinics will be started in every corner of the country. He said: “If the people of my country are healthy, it will take the country forward... Mohalla clinics will be started in villages and every corner of the country. The district hospitals will be turned into multi-speciality hospitals, as good as private hospitals. The treatment in these hos-

EC searches Kharge’s copter, Opp. cries foul

Were similar checks held on leaders of NDA? Cong

New Delhi, May 12: Opposition leaders are being targeted by poll officials, the Congress alleged on Sunday, claiming that while its chief Mallikarjun Kharge’s helicopter was checked in Bihar’s Samastipur, leaders of the BJP-led NDA were being allowed to move “freely”. Mr Kharge on Saturday addressed back-to-back Lok Sabha election rallies in Samastipur and Muzaffarpur in the state. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi’s helicopter was checked in Kerala and, now, party president Mr Kharge’s has been checked in Bihar’s Samastipur. Congress leader Rajesh Rathore claimed in a video message on X. Mr Rathore, who is the chief spokesperson of the Congress’ Bihar unit, also shared a video to claim that the chief electoral officer of Bihar is herself monitoring the checking of Mr Kharge’s helicopter in Samastipur. The video showed a helicopter with officials,

Dalits, tribals to be slaves again if Modi, Shah get 3rd term: Cong

Dhule (Maharashtra), May 12: Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Sunday asked people to vote for his party, claiming that a third term for Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah would mean that the poor, Dalits and tribals would be “treated like slaves”. Addressing a rally in Maharashtra’s Dhule constituency, where the Congress has fielded former MLA Shobha Bachhav, Mr Kharge appealed to voters to choose his party to save democracy and the Constitution.

including from police, around it. “The Election Commission (EC) should clarify whether such checking of choppers of Congress leaders is routine and whether similar checks were also conducted on top leaders of the



Mallikarjun Kharge

“Before Independence, the poor, Dalits and tribals were treated like slaves. If you give the third term to Mr Modi and Mr Shah, the same situation will repeat. We will become slaves again,” he said. Dhule in north Maharashtra will go to polls in the fifth phase of the general elections on May 20. Here, the BJP has nominated former Union minister Subhash Bhamre. — PTI

NDA,” Mr Rathore said in his video message. “The EC should make all such records public, otherwise it will be construed that it is only targeting opposition leaders to stop them, and is letting NDA leaders go freely,” he said. — PTI

Next round of India-Asean trade pact talks in July

New Delhi, May 12: Senior officials of India and the 10-nation bloc of Southeast Asian nations — ASEAN — will hold the next round of talks in July to review the existing free trade agreement in Jakarta, Indonesia, an official statement said on Sunday.The last round of the three-day negotiations concluded on May 9 in Putrajaya, Malaysia. The discussions for review of AITIGA (Asean-India Trade in Goods Agreement) started in May 2023 to make it more trade-facilitative and beneficial for businesses across the region, the commerce ministry said. A joint committee, which is undertaking the review work, has so far met four times. It has finalised its terms of reference and the negotiating structure for the review in its first two meetings and initiated talks for the review from its third meeting, which was held on February 18-19 here. The committee was co-chaired by Rajesh Agrawal, additional secretary in the department of commerce, and Mastura Ahmad Mustafa, deputy secretary general (trade), ministry of investment, trade and industry, Malaysia. — PTI



Telangana chief minister A. Revanth Reddy plays football with students of University of Hyderabad on Sunday. — PTI

ED calls J’khand minister over ₹35cr cash recovery

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs NEW DELHI/RANCHI, MAY 12

The Enforcement Directorate has summoned Jharkhand rural development minister and Congress leader Alamgir Alam for questioning in a money laundering case on May 14.

The money laundering investigation pertains to alleged irregularities and payment of “bribes” in the state rural development department. The agency had last week arrested the minister’s personal secretary and state administrative service officer Sanjeev



Alamgir Alam

Kumar Lal and the latter’s domestic help Jahangir Alam, following the seizure of more than ₹32 crore cash from a flat linked to them. The ED had informed a special PMLA court here, while seeking the remand of the two arrested persons, that Mr Lal collected “commission” on behalf of some influential people, and that the government officials from “top to bottom” in the rural department are involved in the alleged illegal cash payments nexus.

The total seizure of cash by the ED in this case has been recorded at around ₹36.75 crores, as the agency seized about ₹3 crore from other locations including ₹10.05 lakh from Mr Lal’s place apart from ₹1.5 crore cash from a contractor’s place last Tuesday. However, Mr Alam had distanced himself from the activities of Mr Lal, while speaking to reporters after the ED raids, pointing out that he had earlier served with other ministers of the state government also. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during his election campaign speeches in Odisha and Andhra Pradesh last week, had mentioned the seizure of “mounds of cash”. The Opposition parties had claimed the ED action was part of the campaign by the Centre to target their leaders.

■ Beehives installed on India-Bangla border to curb crimes Adopt BSF’s ‘beehives fence’ model across country, MHA directs CAPFs

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 12

The Union home ministry has directed all Central paramilitary and allied forces to replicate “beehives on border fence”, a beekeeping model initiated by a Border Security Forces (BSF) unit in West Bengal to boost employment opportunities for the locals and create goodwill with them for strengthening security. The sources said the decision was made during a meeting on “scientific beekeeping and honey mission” that was chaired by the Union secretary at his office in April. The model, devised and implemented by the 32nd battalion of the



Beehives installed at the fence along the India-Bangladesh border under ‘beehives on border fence’ beekeeping model initiated by a BSF unit in Bengal on Sunday. — PTI

BSF deployed to guard the India-Bangladesh international border in West Bengal’s Nadia district, was “lauded” during the meeting and a direction was issued to all the Central Armed Police Forces to adopt it in their respective areas of responsibility, a senior CAPFs officer said.

The aim of replicating the West Bengal BSF’s beekeeping model is to generate employment in remote locations, making friends and earning goodwill of the locals, who act as the “eyes and ears” in these areas from the security point of view, a senior BSF officer said. Launched in November

Leopard cat sighted in Pench for 1st time

Nagpur, May 12: A leopard cat has been spotted in Maharashtra’s Pench Tiger Reserve for the first time, a senior forest official said on Sunday. Leopard cat, with the scientific name Prionailurus bengalensis, belongs to the family Felidae, and is noted for its leopard-like colouring. The presence of the species at the reserve was found through camera trapping, a release by deputy director Prabhu Nath Shukla said, also claiming that this is the first such sighting in central India. Mr Shukla said a camera captured the grid-bearing cat near Narahar village in Pench in Nagpur district. “The site of image capture was inside a seasonal stream. This is the first record of the leopard cat from central India,” release said. Mr Shukla said 15 species of felids, or wild cats, are found in India, constituting over 40 per cent of global felid diversity. Leopard cat is the most widespread species after the jungle cat in India due to its “adaptive flexibility”, and is restricted to N-E India, northern Himalayan states, West Bengal, Odisha, and pockets of Western Ghats. It was believed to be absent in central India, he said. “The current finding will pave the way for more works in the distribution of the hitherto relatively under-studied felid... Studying the distribution of any animal is very vital to make any conservation efforts holistic,” — PTI

Have to learn to compete from China: Jaishankar

■ **Continued From Page 1** peace and tranquility in the border, how can you have a normal relationship,” Mr Jaishankar said. “After all if somebody is at your front door in an unfriendly manner, you are not going to go out there and act as though everything is normal. That to me is a straightforward proposition,” he said. India has been consistently maintaining that peace and tranquillity along the LAC were key for normalisation of overall ties. However, trade between the two countries is steadily expanding, especially with rising imports from China. Since the beginning of the last decade, bilateral trade between India and China recorded significant growth. From 2015 to 2022, India-China bilateral trade grew by 90.14 per cent, an average yearly growth of 12.87 per cent. In 2022, the overall trade with China increased by 8.47 per cent year on year to reach \$136.26 billion, crossing the \$100 billion mark for the second time in a row, according to official data. However, the trade deficit came to \$101.28 billion as India’s imports from China witnessed a major increase. In the last few years, the government has been making efforts to expand manufacturing in a number of critical areas as part of an aim to de-risking from China. There has also been a greater focus on India acquiring critical technologies to minimise import dependency. — PTI



The Asian Age

13 MAY 2024

Kejriwal on warpath, gives Opp boost, BJP gets a jolt

The unexpected return of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convenor and Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal to the public sphere and his first speech loaded with speculation of early retirement of Mr Narendra Modi should he return as PM has given the ongoing Lok Sabha election its first major plot twist, though the jury is out as to what would be its outcome.

Starting its campaign with the slogans of “400 plus this time” and “Modi’s guarantees”, the BJP has been presumably disappointed by the declining voter turnout in the first two phases of the polls.

Prime Minister Modi, followed by other leaders including BJP president J.P. Nadda, meanwhile, lost no time in getting on the communal bandwagon after purportedly discovering hints of wealth redistribution in the Congress manifesto. That the document has no such actual promise did not deter the saffron party’s leadership from scaring the people with the threat of an Opposition snatching the assets of the majority community, including women’s mangalsutras, if it were to be voted to power. Every day saw the level of political discourse sinking to lower and more nonsensical levels, yet the Congress and its INDIA alliance partners found it hard to defend their positions.

If Mr Kejriwal’s very release from jail albeit thanks to the verdict of the Supreme Court has further unsettled the ruling party, his first public speech that mentions Mr Modi turning 75 in September next year must have set the cat among pigeons.

The BJP leaders who would, in the normal course, have imperiously ignored Opposition jibes, were sent scrambling for an answer. Union home minister Amit Shah went out of his way to personally deny any talk of his chances of replacing Mr Modi. There is nothing in the party’s constitution which barred people above the age of 75 years from holding an office, he declared. The BJP president concurred with his statement.

It is a fact that the BJP constitution has no age bar on people holding post after 75 but the retirement of stalwarts L.K Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi and Yashwant Sinha and their transfer into a Margadarshak Mandal, or seniors’ circle, is rumoured to be the result of a decision by the leadership to limit positions of power to the relatively young. Mr Shah’s reported statement during the 2019 election campaign that the party had not given tickets to anyone above 75 only adds grist to the speculation. However, as the Indian Constitution has prescribed only a lower age limit for candidates contesting for legislative bodies, it stops no one, including Mr Modi, from holding office even after the age of 75.

Mr Kejriwal throwing a stone to the otherwise calm waters of BJP politics is a welcome diversion. It gives the Opposition alliance another chance to regroup and adds some fun to electioneering. Perhaps the next phases will see a higher voter turnout.

Probe Brij Bhushan case swiftly

Strange are the ways of men when it comes to handling charges of sexual harassment against one of their own. While denial is the first reaction, it can also lead to victim shaming and various other tactics to deflect the issue.

That it is never too late to nail a sexual offender is a truism best served in the case of Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, six-time BJP MP and for long president of the wrestling federation against whom a string of allegations came up, leading to dramatic demonstrations led by women wrestlers.

Only this month did a Delhi court order the framing of charges against the former wrestling federation chief saying that there is sufficient evidence on record to frame charges, thus paving the way for commencing the trial against him.

Thirty Indian wrestlers, among them many who had won medals in international competition, had staged a sit-in as long ago as January 2023, protesting against Brij Bhushan and other coaches for repeatedly harassing female players for years.

Given the importance of the principal accused in the election scheme of things as he wielded considerable political clout in his UP base, the government and the ruling party ignored the protests, even working to choke them. This was a classic example of the establishment standing behind an influential person regardless of the seriousness of the charges made against him.

Things seemed to change only after the BJP decided not to field Brij Bhushan again and opted for his son as candidate in the same Kaiserganj seat. This came long after a proxy of the MP was elected as chief of the federation whose inner workings had caused such a storm.

While the Delhi police had filed a chargesheet under sections dealing with sexual harassment, criminal intimidation and stalking involving five female wrestlers as long ago as June 2023, only nearly a year later has judicial action on criminal grounds begun.

The least people can expect is that such charges of sexual harassment of any person, male or female, be taken seriously and an investigation ordered quickly, with guilt or innocence established soon rather than the issue stretched out over years. This is seen in too many cases, including the sensational one of the father-son Revanna duo in Karnataka.

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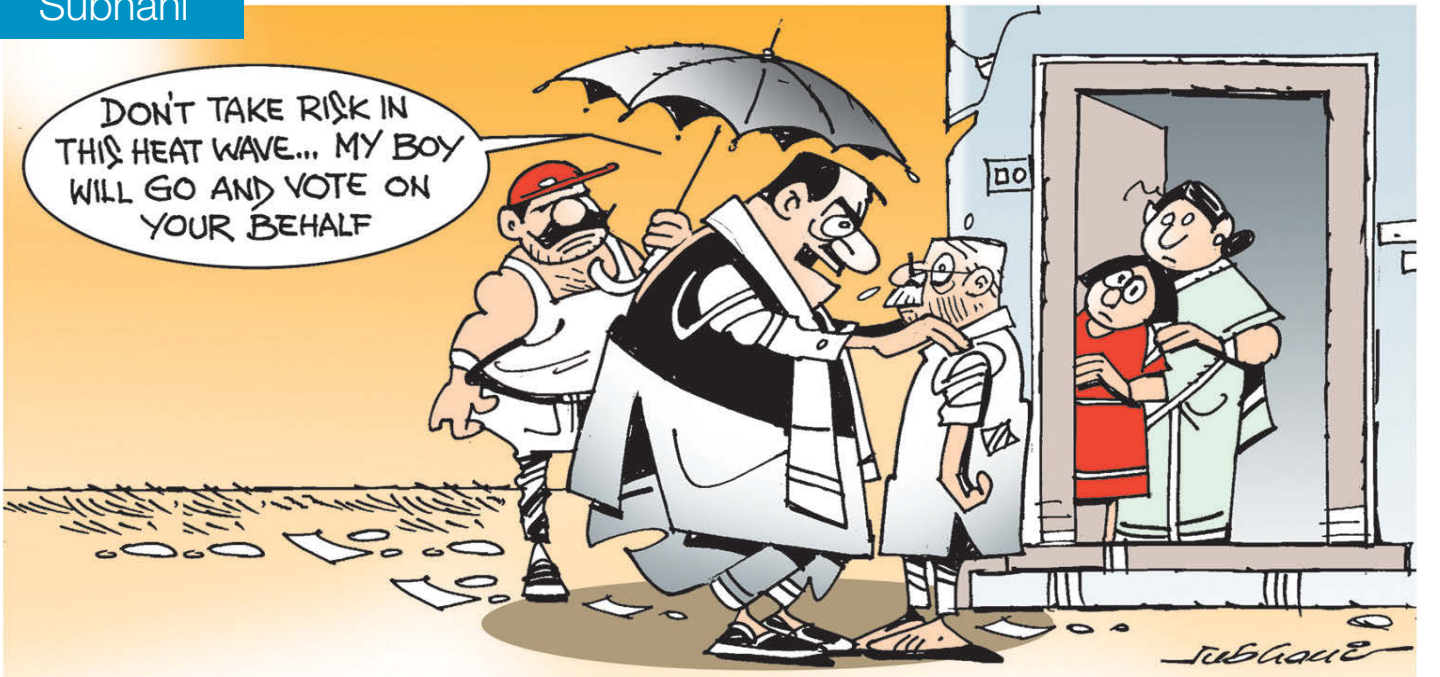
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Subhani



Of caste, class and a ‘Suit Boot ki Sarkar’



Sanjaya Baru

Sanjayovacha

It was Rahul Gandhi’s cleverest political jibe against Narendra Modi. Taunting a Prime Minister who sported a pin-striped suit which had his name stitched in gold thread, Rahul dubbed the Modi government a “suit boot ki sarkar”. Arvind Kejriwal made the best use of that moniker in that year’s Delhi state Assembly elections, when the national capital’s working class overwhelmingly voted for his Aam Aadmi Party. In the Narendra Modi vs Arvind Kejriwal campaign of 2015, the determining factor was class.

Delhi’s working class abandoned both the Congress and the Communists and made Arvind Kejriwal their hero. It would appear that Mr Modi has not forgotten that defeat. His continued campaign against the AAP and Mr Kejriwal smacks of a personal vendetta.

In securing interim bail and entering the election campaign, Mr Kejriwal has now joined hands with the Congress Party, that has fielded the fiery former student leader Kanhaiya Kumar in Delhi. While caste factors remain the focus of the media’s electoral analysis, in the nation’s capital class has emerged as a major mobilising factor. The wealthy and the upper middle class still favour the Bharatiya Janata Party, but the working class and the lower middle class remain loyal to Mr Kejriwal and his Aam Aadmi Party.

The economist turned psephologist Surjit Bhalla, who has been in the business of statistically analysing voting behaviour since the 1980s, has long held that economic interests and concerns matter for more than caste loyalties in Indian elections. Bhalla repeats this argument, mobilising data, in his recently published book *How We Vote: Factors*

That Influence Voters (2024). His argument, as a Modi supporter, is that economic factors in fact favour the BJP in the ongoing elections.

Most critics of Prime Minister Modi do not agree. They believe that unemployment, the middle class distress and rising inequality have made Mr Modi less popular.

It remains to be seen if caste factors, especially the support of backward classes and Scheduled Castes, play a larger role this time round or class factors, like livelihood concerns, dominate. The Congress Party entered these elections keeping its campaign focused on both caste and class issues, not worrying too much about upper caste and upper class support. One must view the recent political kerfuffle over Narendra Modi’s remarks on big business leaders Gautam Adani and Mukesh Ambani within this perspective.

Mr Modi may have suddenly discovered that while he continues to mobilise Hindu votes deploying anti-Muslim sentiment, Rahul Gandhi has deployed a two-pronged attack using both caste and class. This may well have revived the discomforting memory of Rahul’s “suit boot ki sarkar” jibe. Could this have prompted Mr Modi to try and distance himself from big business?

There are two other hypotheses that could explain Mr Modi’s decision to charge Mr Adani and Mr Ambani with amassing illegal wealth, “black money” in common parlance, and making some of it available to the Congress Party. First, that the electoral bonds scam has hurt the Bharatiya Janata Party politically, even if the funds have helped it financially. Mr Modi needs to make the point that other parties have also secured funding from business per-

While the Congress Party has clarified that its manifesto makes no mention of an inheritance tax, and that it was Rajiv Gandhi who abolished wealth tax, the fact is that it does not concern the vast majority

sons. Second, that business persons in the medium, small and micro enterprises (MSME) sector may have become less loyal in their support to the BJP, viewing the Narendra Modi government as one that protects the interests of big business but not those of the MSME sector.

Both are credible explanations. The importance of the second is often not appreciated by many political analysts. Consider the fact that the intimate relationship between Mr Modi and Mr Adani is not only well understood by ordinary folk but is resented by other big business as well as business persons in the MSME sector.

Demonetisation, the introduction of a Goods and Services Tax and persistent stagnation in private corporate investment have hurt the MSME sector. On the other hand, big corporates and listed firms continue to be cash rich and are doing well. There is an internal divide within the business class.

It has been a recurrent experience for me in the past year that any conversation on politics with a group of business persons always begins with pro forma statements about how business likes Mr Modi and ends with individuals listing out a series of complaints about the government in general and Mr Modi and his ministers in particular. Among their many complaints, a recurrent theme is the favouritism shown to Mr Adani. Many in Hyderabad are aware of how Mr Adani used his clout in New Delhi to edge out the GVK group from the Mumbai airport.

The charge of a “suit boot ki sarkar” has come to stick. The slogan of “Adani Ambani ki Sarkar” mimics

a Communist slogan of the Nehru-Indira years when their governments were dubbed by the Communists as the “Tata-Birla ki Sarkar”. Indira Gandhi ended that with her turn to the political Left in the late 1960s and the wave of nationalisations that she authorised. Narendra Modi will find it difficult to make such a turn to the Left given the class and caste basis of his support.

Consider the manner in which the artificial controversy over an inheritance tax has panned out. Mr Modi tried to put Rahul Gandhi on the defensive alleging that the Congress Party would introduce an inheritance tax. BJP supporters enthusiastically campaigned against this claiming that it would hurt the interests of the “rising, aspirational middle class”. Rahul is so antediluvian, alleged an assortment of the so-called “influencers”. Then came the over-enthusiastic vice-chancellor of Galgotias University, who ordered students to march on the streets of New Delhi denouncing the inheritance tax idea.

That march fizzled out not just because of the dumb replies of the students interviewed on television, which then went viral on the social media, but because many knew that these were kids from well-off families. In a country where 10 per cent of the population, covering most of the upper caste, upper class families, accounts for 60 per cent of the national income, students at private educational institutions are unlikely to stir the emotions of the other 90 per cent. While the Congress Party has clarified that its manifesto makes no mention of an inheritance tax, and that it was Rajiv Gandhi who abolished wealth tax, the fact is that the issue does not concern a vast majority of the electorate. It matters only for the BJP’s upper caste, upper class support base.

The writer is an author, a former newspaper editor and adviser to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. He has recently edited The Importance of Shinzo Abe: India, Japan and the Indo-Pacific.

LETTERS

BYE BYE, MODI?

With each passing day, Narendra Modi’s speeches are becoming more and more banal. The release of Arvind Kejriwal has added zing to the ongoing elections. First is his presentiment that Mr Modi shall be superannuating in 2025 and second, Yogi Adityanath shall be given marching orders post-election. Expectedly, Amit Shah rubbished this and thundered that Mr Modi is indispensable but maintained a studied silence on the Yogi. But all said and done, the theory of diminishing returns suggests that his utility is already on the decline.

Deepak Singhal
Noida, UP

DIAMONDS IN ROUGH

SANJAY LEEA Bhansali’s *Heera-mandi*, released on Netflix on May 1, has become the most watched series globally in a week’s time. Bhansali, known for a lavish set and costumes, has once again delivered a hit. Set in 1920-1942, the story revolves around Lahore where Heera Mandi (Diamond Bazar) is located which is a hub of tawaifs or nautch girls. These women also participated in India’s freedom movement. Another feature of the series is that it is dominated by female characters. Manisha Koirala and Sonakshi Sinha have acted well. The dialogue in the series is crisp and reminds one of *Mughal-e-Azam*.

D.B. Madan
New Delhi

YOUR VOTE COUNTS

PEOPLE often choose not to vote because they feel their vote does not count. But one vote does count and in many ways. Your choice to vote or not will have far-reaching consequences on people all over the world, many of whom do not have the right to vote themselves. In local and national elections, lawmakers are elected who make laws, policies, and appointments that will have effects for years to come. The most common reason people say they do not vote is: One vote does not count. If everyone uses an excuse and does not vote, then what kind of government would we have? As citizens of the country, it is our duty to vote. Think twice, because every vote counts.

Jubel D’Cruz
Mumbai

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to Jubel DCruz (April 9). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Rafia Zakaria



Public opinion has changed in US; Israel most hated country

Whatever the Americans may have said on record, the past few weeks of the war in Gaza have proved to be quite trying for them. Central among their concerns is the hit that President Joe Biden’s re-election chances have taken as the war drags on.

In the opinion polls, American voters do not actually list the war in Gaza as one of their central concerns, with the economy and abortion taking the lead. However, those that tend to complain about the economy in the US feel that the seemingly endless amount of aid flowing to Israel and Ukraine is money that should have been spent on improving their own situation at home. Even though the US economy is currently in the lead globally, rents and food prices at home continue to be high, causing many Americans to criticise the Biden administration’s policies.

As many know, the campus protests and the fact that scores of graduation ceremonies in the US have been cancelled because protesters have vowed to disrupt them have added to the pressure, which the Biden administration has been feeling, to bring the war to an end. Even though the Democrats have stuck to their usual line of promising unconditional support to Israel and even joined the Republican-controlled House in approving \$26 billion in military assistance to

Israel, there has been discomfort within.

Most of this comes from the internal polling done by the Biden campaign, which reveals a generational shift in the US on the issue of Israel. Unlike the Republicans, the Democrats need young voters to turn out in huge numbers if they are to win like they did in 2020. In states like Pennsylvania—a battleground state—it is precisely this group of voters that took Joe Biden to victory last time. Many of these voters were from cities like Philadelphia, which is home to many universities, and where there is an increasing feeling of reluctance to vote for Mr Biden again, given his position on the war in Gaza. While these young people would not be lost to Donald Trump, most would likely just stay home; and if they do, then it would be the end of Mr Biden’s possibilities in Pennsylvania.

Not too far away from Pennsylvania is Michigan, another battleground state where the Democratic Party needs large numbers of urban voters in places like Dearborn. The large Arab-Muslim population in the state is unlikely to show up for Mr Biden if the war continues to drag on into November, and the number of Palestinian casualties continues to mount. Attempts by the Democratic Party to engage this population have not produced many positive results.

At the commencement ceremony for the University of Michigan, held last weekend, a

huge student walkout, complete with Palestinian flags and keffiyehs, disrupted the proceedings and provided a clear statement of the shape of things to come if matters did not change soon. On one political talk show, Queen Rania of Jordan pointed out that the world simply does not understand how the US can say Israel should not bomb civilians but then continue to provide it with weapons to bomb civilians, or complain about the lack of humanitarian aid and build a pier to provide it but vote down ceasefire resolutions at the UN.

None of this promises a good or durable deal. The Israelis have been coddled by access to seemingly bottomless American coffers, and to an obstinate moral immunity for a terribly long time. Listening to the Zionist perspective often reveals their inability to understand how suddenly and decisively American public opinion has changed.

Many continue to draw parallels with how Jewish students on various American campuses may ‘feel’, as well as the Holocaust. They are simply not able to see how utterly delusional their perspectives sound when considered against the more than 34,000 dead Palestinians and the horribly suffering and maimed women and children that Americans have been watching for over six months. Jewish intellectuals like the author Marsha Gessen, who compared Gaza to the ghet-

toes in Poland during the Holocaust, have faced derision from Zionists, but their silencing has been viewed with alarm by everyone else.

Israel is America’s spoilt child. It is used to throwing a tantrum on the floor of the toy store if it does not get whatever impractical plaything or ridiculous demand it makes. It is likely to continue with its behaviour beyond an invasion of Rafah just to have the last word and pretend at some imaginary ‘victory’. There are plenty of hardliners in Israel who even imagine themselves and their country as being able to conduct wars without the assistance of the US.

It is just one of the many delusions that have led Israel to where it has ended up after inflicting six months of merciless death and destruction on Palestinian civilians. Its international reputation is in the gutter, people all around the world are up in arms at its genocidal bloodlust, and now even the Americans seem uninterested in standing by their rabid child as it continues to demand a perpetual supply of Palestinian blood to satisfy its desires. Israel may be able to stall a ceasefire, and try to take the joy of peace away by insistently inflicting pain on what is left of the Gazans in Rafah. But in its pursuit of this, it will achieve nothing other than becoming the most hated country in the world.

—By arrangement with Dawn

SHORT TAKES

FIRE DESTROYS A SHOPPING CENTRE IN WARSAW

Warsaw, May 12: A massive fire that broke out on Saturday night in a shopping centre in Warsaw almost completely destroyed the place, authorities said. Nobody was hurt.

The Marywilka 44 with almost 1,400 commercial units was among the biggest shopping centres in Warsaw. It was owned and managed by Mirbud.

"Almost 100% of it was burned. The fire is being extinguished and this will take many hours, perhaps several hours," Mariusz Feltynowski, commander-in-chief of the State Fire Service said.

SPAIN SOCIALISTS EYE POWER GRAB IN CATALAN VOTE

Barcelona, May 12: Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's Socialists are hoping to show Catalonia has turned away from its independence fixation by winning Sunday's regional vote and defeating separatist leader Carles Puigdemont. When the polls open at 9:00 am (0700 GMT), the wealthy northeastern region of some eight million people will vote for 135 deputies to the Catalan parliament.

Polls suggest Socialists are ahead of Puigdemont's hard-line separatist JxCat and its rival ERC.

TUNISIA NABS 3 COMMENTATORS OVER COMMENTS

Tunis, May 12: Tunisian authorities on Sunday ordered the arrest of two journalists over critical comments, a lawyer told *AFP*, a day after security forces stormed the bar association and took political commentator Sonia Dahmani into custody.

Dahmani, also a lawyer, was arrested late on Saturday after criticising the state of Tunisia on television, her attorney Dalila Msaddek said in a post on Facebook.

Msaddek said there was a "police attack against the bar association headquarters".

7 SECURITY MEN KILLED IN TWO ATTACKS IN PAK

Peshawar, May 12: At least seven security personnel have been killed and two injured in two separate militant attacks on security forces in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, authorities said on Sunday.

Local officials said five security personnel were killed and two injured during the first attack that took place in the Hassan Khel area of North Waziristan district, bordering Afghanistan, in when an improvised explosive device went off targeting a bomb disposal unit on Saturday.

Militants opened fire on the forces soon after the blast.

CREWS PREPARE TO RAZE BRIDGE IN BALTIMORE

Baltimore, May 12: After weeks of preparation, crews are scheduled to conduct a controlled demolition to break down the largest remaining span of the collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge in Maryland, which came crashing down under the impact of a massive container ship on March 26. Of the crew members, 20 are from India and one is Sri Lankan.

The steel span landed on the ship's bow after the *Dali* lost power and crashed into one of the bridge's support columns. Since then, the ship is stuck among the wreckage and Baltimore's busy port has been closed to most maritime traffic.

34 KILLED IN INDONESIA RAIN, COLD LAVA FLOW

Tanah Datar, May 12: At least 34 people have died and 16 more were missing after flash floods and cold lava flow from a volcano hit western Indonesia, a local disaster official said.

The disaster hit two districts in West Sumatra province on Saturday evening after hours of heavy rain caused flooding and sent sweeping ash and large rocks down Mount Marapi, the most active volcano on the archipelago's Sumatra island.

"Until now our data shows that 34 people died: 16 in Agam and 18 in Tanah Datar. At least 18 others are injured. We are still searching for 16 others."



Graduate students walk out of commencement in protest against the war in Gaza at the DKR-Texas Memorial Stadium in Austin, Texas. — AFP

Rafah squeeze tightens, Israel pushes into Gaza

Biden: Truce possible 'tomorrow' if Hamas frees hostages

STUDENTS WALK OUT AT COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY

SMALL PRO-PALESTINIAN PROTESTS AS COLLEGE COMMENCEMENTS HELD

Small pro-Palestinian protests against the Gaza war popped up sporadically Saturday at colleges and universities from North Carolina to California in the United States conducted commencement ceremonies, including dozens of graduating students at Virginia Commonwealth University who walked out on an address by Governor Glenn Youngkin.



UN CHIEF CALLS FOR 'IMMEDIATE' GAZA CEASEFIRE, HOSTAGE RELEASE

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Sunday urged an immediate halt to the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza, the return of hostages and a "surge" in humanitarian aid to the besieged Palestinian territory.

SWITZERLAND'S NEMO WINS EUROVISION SONG CONTEST THAT WAS ROCKED BY CONTROVERSY

Switzerland's Nemo won the Eurovision Song Contest on Saturday, becoming the first artist identifying as non-binary to claim victory, in a competition marked by controversy over Israel's participation during the war in Gaza.

operating in Jabalia are preventing Hamas, which controls Gaza, from re-establishing its military capabilities there.

"We identified in the past weeks attempts by Hamas to rehabilitate its military capabilities in Jabalia."

— Agencies

British climber, Nepali guide break Everest climb records

Kathmandu, May 12: A British climber and a Nepali guide have broken their own records for most climbs of Mount Everest, the world's highest mountain, hiking officials said on Sunday.

Rakesh Gurung, director of Nepal's department of tourism, said Britain's Kenton Cool, 50, and Nepali guide Kami Rita Sherpa, 54, climbed the 8,849-metre (29,032 foot) peak for the 18th and 29th time, respectively. They were on separate expeditions guiding their clients.

"He just keeps going and going... amazing guy!" Garrett Madison of the



Kenton Cool



Kami Rita Sherpa

US-based expedition organising company Madison Mountaineering said of the Nepali climber: Madison had teamed up with Kami Rita to climb the summits of Everest, Lhotse, and K2 in 2014.

K2, located in Pakistan, is the world's second-high-

est mountain and Lhotse in Nepal is the fourth-tallest. Lukas Furtenbach of the Austrian expedition operator Furtenbach Adventures called Cool's feat remarkable.

"He is a fundamental part of the Everest guiding industry."

— Reuters

NEPALESE COURT ORDERS LIMIT ON EVEREST PERMITS

Kathmandu, May 12: Nepal's Supreme Court has ordered the government to limit the number of mountaineering permits issued for Everest and other peaks.

The Himalayan republic is home to eight of the world's 10 highest peaks and welcomes hundreds of adventurers each spring, when temperatures are warm and winds are typically calm.

When dialysis complications arose requiring frequent procedures, his

Thousands evacuated as Russia hits Ukrainian city

Kyiv, May 12: Thousands of people been evacuated from border areas in Ukraine's Kharkiv region, as Russia kept up constant strikes on a key town as part of a cross-border offensive, officials said.

The surprise Russian attack across Ukraine's northeastern border began on Friday, with Moscow's troops making small advances in an area from where they had been pushed back two years ago.

A Ukrainian strike on the Russian border city of Belgorod caused the partial collapse of a building that injured at least 20 people, Russian emergency services said as a Ukrainian drone attack hit a refinery in Russia's Volgograd region causing a fire at the complex, the regional governor said. Russia's defence ministry said eight overnight drone attacks were intercepted.

"In total, 4,073 people have been evacuated," Kharkiv regional governor Oleg Syneubov wrote on social media, a day after Russian forces claimed the capture of five villages in the region.

Syneubov said a 63-year-old man was killed by artillery fire in the village of Glyboke, and a 38-year-old man was wounded in Vovchansk, a border town which had some 3,000 residents before the current offensive.

"The city is constantly under fire," said Oleksiy Kharkivsky, a senior police officer from Vovchansk helping to coordinate the evacuations. "Everything in the city is being destroyed... You hear constant explosions, artillery, mortars. The enemy is hitting

Concern about Russia dominates as Lithuanians vote

Vilnius, May 12: Lithuania voted on Sunday in a presidential election dominated by security concerns with the main candidates all agreed the Nato and EU member should boost defence spending to counter the perceived threat from neighbouring Russia.

The Baltic state of 2.8 million people fears it could be next in Russia's crosshairs if Moscow wins its war against Ukraine.

While the top three contenders agree on defence, they have diverging views on social issues and on Lithuania's relations with China, which have been strained for years over Taiwan. "Lithuania's understanding of the Russian threat is unanimous and

unquestionable, so the main candidates are following suit," Eastern Europe Studies Centre director Linas Kojala told *AFP*.

Polls close at 1700 GMT and the result is expected later on Sunday — but a run-off on May 26 will probably be needed with no candidate expected to win an overall majority.

Opinion polls give the incumbent, 59-year-old former banker Gitanas Nausėda, a comfortable lead over the other seven candidates, who include Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte and prominent lawyer Ignas Vegele.

Pensioner Aldona Majauskiene, 82, told *AFP* she had voted for Nausėda because "he is the best in every category". — *AFP*

the city with everything they have," he said, speaking at an evacuation point near Vovchansk.

Kharkivsky said one person who was trapped under rubble had died overnight and "several people were killed by shelling" on Saturday.

He estimated that around 1,500 people had been evacuated or fled Vovchansk since Friday and said there had been 32 drone strikes on the town over the past 24 hours.

He said evacuation teams had come under fire

First recipient of pig kidney dies

Boston, May 12: The first recipient of a genetically modified pig kidney transplant has died nearly two months after he underwent the procedure, his family and the hospital that performed the surgery said on Saturday.

Richard "Rick" Slayman had the transplant at Massachusetts General Hospital in March at the age of 62. Surgeons said they believed the pig kidney would last for at least two years.

The transplant team at Massachusetts General Hospital said in a statement it was deeply saddened by Slayman's passing and offered condolences to his family. They said they didn't have any indication that he died as a result of the transplant.

The Weymouth, Massachusetts, man was the first living person to have the procedure. Previously, pig kidneys had been temporarily transplanted into brain-dead donors. Two men received heart transplants from pigs, although both died within months. Slayman had a kidney transplant at the hospital in 2018, but he had to go back on dialysis last year when it showed signs of failure.

When dialysis complications arose requiring frequent procedures, his



Richard Slayman

doctors suggested a pig kidney transplant. In a statement, Slayman's family thanked his doctors.

"Their enormous efforts leading the xenotransplant gave our family seven more weeks with Rick, and our memories made during that time will remain in our minds and hearts," the statement said.

They said Slayman underwent the surgery in part to provide hope for the thousands of people who need a transplant to survive. "Rick accomplished that goal and his hope and optimism will endure forever," it said.

Xenotransplantation refers to healing human patients with cells, tissues or organs from animals. Such efforts long failed because the human immune system immediately destroyed foreign animal tissue. Recent attempts have involved pigs that have been modified so their organs are more humanlike.

FOURTH INDIAN ARRESTED OVER NIJJAR KILLING

Washington, May 12: The Canadian authorities on Saturday arrested a fourth Indian national for his role in the killing of separatist Khalistan Hardeep Singh Nijjar, according to an official release.

Twenty-two-year-old Amardeep Singh, a resident of Brampton, Surrey, and Abbotsford areas of Canada, has been charged with first degree murder and conspiracy to commit murder. The Integrated Homicide Investigation Team (IHIT) said that Singh was arrested on May 11 for his role in the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar.

He was already in the custody of the Peel Regional Police for unrelated firearms charges out, the official release said. "This arrest shows the nature of our ongoing investigation to hold responsible those that played a role in the homicide of Hardeep Singh Nijjar," said superintendent Mandeep Mooker, the Officer in Charge of IHIT.

Nijjar, 45, was killed outside Guru Nanak Sikh Gurdwara in Surrey, on June 18, 2023. IHIT investigators on May 3 nabbed three Indian nationals — Karan Brar (22), Kamalpreet Singh (22) and 28-year-old Karanpreet Singh. — *PTI*

SILVER | SCREEN

MeToo hits France's film industry with accusations against biggest star Gerard Depardieu

Comebacks, strikes as Cannes film fest starts tomorrow

Paris, May 12: The Cannes Film Festival starts Tuesday with an action-packed script, including the comeback of Hollywood icons, fears of a strike, a Donald Trump biopic and the shadow of MeToo accusations.

The return of "The Godfather" director Francis Ford Coppola with his decades-in-the-making epic "Megalopolis" is the most anticipated of this year's entries for the top prize Palme d'Or.

It is one of 22 films competing for the affections of a jury led by "Barbie" director Greta Gerwig, which will announce its verdict on May 25.

Those walking the red carpet include actors Richard Gere, Demi Moore and Kevin Costner, all present in new films. Three-time Oscar-winner Meryl Streep and "Star Wars" creator

CANNES FILM FEST



George Lucas will also receive honorary awards.

And the latest from George Miller's "Mad Max" universe, "Furiosa", starring

ring Anya Taylor-Joy, will also get its world premiere on Wednesday.

But there are darker plotlines at the 77th edition of

the festival.

France's film industry is in the midst of a belated MeToo reckoning, with a string of accusations against

its biggest star, Gerard Depardieu, and rumours in the run-up to Cannes of more accusations to come against high-profile figures.

22 FILMS are competing for the affections of a jury led by "Barbie" director Greta Gerwig, which will announce its verdict on May 25.

A GROUP OF FESTIVAL EMPLOYEES have called for a strike over pay and conditions that could cause disruption at the event.

ELSEWHERE, EMMA STONE reunites with director Yorgos Lanthimos, fresh from their Oscar triumph with "Poor Things", for "Kinds of Kindness".

B-movie producer Roger Corman dies

Washington, May 12: American B-movie director and producer Roger Corman, best known for churning out hundreds of low-budget films and giving some of Hollywood's biggest stars their early breaks, has died at the age of 98.

Corman earned a reputation for cultivating Tinseltown's young talent, helping jumpstart the careers of Martin Scorsese, Robert De Niro and Francis Ford

Coppola, as well as casting Jack Nicholson in his debut role. Corman died at his home in San Antonio, California, on Thursday, his family told industry publication *Variety*.



Roger Corman

ures. Actor Judith Godreche, who has accused two directors of assaulting her when she was a teenager,

is presenting a short film, "Moi Aussi" (Me Too) aimed at encouraging more women to come forward. — *AFP*

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	72,664.47	0.36
Nifty 50	22,055.20	0.44
S&P 500*	5,222.68	0.16
Dollar (₹)	83.55	0.03
Pound Sterling (₹)	104.62	0.33
Euro (₹)	90.02	0.45
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	72,722*5	0.01
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

Anarock sees 36% rise in revenue to ₹566 cr in FY24

Real estate consultant Anarock Group has posted a 36 per cent increase in its revenue to ₹566 crore in the last fiscal, helped by better earnings from housing brokerage and other services. During 2022-23, the company posted a revenue of ₹416 crore. Anarock Chairman Puri said, "Real estate markets, particularly residential, across cities, are doing well with sales and launches at a 15-year high."



Coal imports rise 7.7% to 268 MT on higher demand

India's coal import rose by 7.7 per cent to 268.2 million tonne (MT) in FY24 driven by softness in seaborne prices and likelihood of increase in power demand during summer. The country's coal import was 249.06 MT in FY23, according to data compiled by B2B e-commerce company mjunction services. Coal import in March FY24 also rose to 23.96 MT, over 21.12 MT in the same month of the previous fiscal.

Suryadev Alloys brings new range of TMT bars

Integrated steel and power company Suryadev Alloys and Power has rolled out a new range of TMT bars for the construction sector equipped with anti-corrosion properties, the company said. The Suryadev Fe550D CRS TMT Bars with a blend of copper, chromium, and nickel have been unveiled in the backdrop of diverse climates posing a formidable challenge to the country, the company said.



FPIs withdraw ₹17,000 crore so far this month

Foreign investors pulled out a massive ₹17,000 crore from Indian equities in the first 10 days of the month owing to the general election and the uncertainty surrounding its outcome coupled with expensive valuations and profit booking. This was way higher than a net withdrawal of ₹8,700 crore in the entire April on concerns over a tweak in India's tax treaty with Mauritius and a sustained rise in US bond yields.

China, USA emerge lead trade partners of India

Bilateral trade with India stands at \$118 bn for these nations

New Delhi, May 12: China has emerged as the largest trading partner of India with \$118.4 billion two-way commerce in 2023-24, slightly edging past the US, according to the data of economic think tank GTRI.

The bilateral trade between India and the US stood at \$118.3 billion in 2023-24. Washington was the top trading partner of New Delhi during 2021-22 and 2022-23.

The data showed that India's exports to China rose by 8.7 per cent to \$16.67 billion (bn) in the last fiscal. The main sectors which recorded growth in exports to that country include iron ore, cotton yarn, fabrics or made ups, handloom, spices, fruits and vegetables, plastic and linoleum. Imports from the neighbouring country



● **TRADE WITH the US** showed growth, with exports increasing significantly by 47.9% from \$52.41 billion to \$77.52 billion. Imports from the US also grew by 14.7%, from \$35.55 billion to \$40.78 billion.

increased by 3.24 per cent to \$101.7 billion.

On the other hand, exports to the US dipped by 1.32 per cent to \$77.5 billion in 2023-24 as against \$78.54 billion in 2022-23, while imports dipped by about 20 per cent to \$40.8 billion, the data showed.

The global trade research initiative (GTRI) said that from fiscal year 2019 to FY24, India's trade dynamics with its top 15 trading partners underwent significant transformations, impacting both

exports and imports along with the status of trade surplus or deficit across various sectors.

It added that China witnessed a marginal decline in exports by 0.6 per cent, from \$16.75 bn to \$16.66 bn, while imports from China surged by 44.7 per cent, from \$70.32 bn to \$101.75 bn.

"This growth in imports led to an expanding trade deficit, rising from \$53.57 billion in FY2019 to \$85.09 billion in FY2024, highlighting concerns over stagnant exports amidst

rising imports," GTRI founder Ajay Srivastava said.

Conversely, it said, trade with the US showed growth, with exports increasing significantly by 47.9 per cent from \$52.41 billion to \$77.52 billion. Imports from the US also grew by 14.7 per cent, from \$35.55 bn to \$40.78 bn.

This resulted in an expanded trade surplus for India, which grew from \$16.86 billion to \$36.74 billion.

According to the commerce ministry data, China was India's top trading partner from 2013-14 till 2017-18 and also in 2020-21.

In 2023-24, the UAE with \$83.6 billion, was the third largest trading partner of India. It was followed by Russia (\$65.7 bn), Saudi Arabia (\$43.4 bn), and Singapore (\$35.6 bn). —PTI

INDIA IS FASTEST GROWING NATION IN ASIA, SAYS ADB CHIEF ECONOMIST

New Delhi, May 12: India needs to focus on factor market reforms like land and labour to propel India's growth to a double-digit trajectory, ADB chief economist Albert Park has said on Sunday.

"There are still concerns that the basic factor markets like land and labour in the formal sector of unemployment in India are still small. So, you really want to formalise those," he said.

The factor market reforms include land, labour, energy, and access to credit, among others, which are critical factors for production.

Talking about other reforms, Park said further regulatory ease and ease of doing business and deregulation of tariffs by simplifying and reducing them will help increase India's share in the global value chain.

"India needs to improve exports in the manufacturing sectors like electronics, textiles etc are still much more limited and not growing as fast as other more dynamic parts of Asia," he added.

To achieve double-digit growth, Park said, India is doing well on various parameters, and it is the fastest growing economy in Asia, but achieving over 10 per cent growth would require huge investment in the infrastructure sector and global frontier technologies to improve efficiency and productivity. —PTI

Govt to focus on infra, logistics to increase exports

New Delhi, May 12: A study to assess required infrastructure and identify main industry clusters for achieving the \$1 trillion merchandise exports target by 2030 may be submitted by August-Sept. to the commerce ministry, an official said.

The official said that the Asian Development Bank (ADB) is doing that study for the ministry.

In 2023-24, India's merchandise exports dipped by over 3 per cent to \$437 billion. Imports during the last fiscal dipped by 5.7 per cent to \$675.4 billion.

By 2030, the ministry is aiming to more than double the country's outbound shipments of goods.

Explaining the rationale behind the exercise, the official said that to take the exports to \$1 trillion, there will be an import of about \$1.5 trillion, so to handle \$2.5 trillion worth of trade we need additional infrastructure and logistics capacity at roads, ports, airports and railways.

The ministries would see if they need investments for additional capacity development and where all that investment will go. As per rough calculations and estimates, another official said that India may need to create an infrastructure which will support an additional 2,000 MT of goods movement in the ports.

Similarly in the railways, there could be a need to create an infrastructure which will allow railways to carry on an additional 338 MT of goods by 2030. Airports also need to create an additional 5 MT of facilities for movement of goods. —PTI



● **TO TAKE** the exports to \$1 trillion, there will be an import of about \$1.5 trillion, so to handle \$2.5 trillion worth of trade we need additional infrastructure and logistics capacity at roads, ports, airports and railways.

September".

After that, the commerce ministry will share the details with ministries concerned, including shipping, aviation, roads and national highways, and railways.

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Govt measures lead to lower toy imports

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 12

The government measures to curb the inflow of substandard products have successfully reduced toy imports. However, they have not positively impacted toy exports.

India dramatically raised import duties on toys in February 2020. The basic customs duty was increased from 20 per cent to 60 per cent and then to 70 per cent in July 2021. Quality control order



(QCO) implemented in January 2021 mandates toys sold in India, whether domestically produced or imported, must comply with specific Indian Standards for safety.

Toys must also carry the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) certification mark.

India's toy imports decreased drastically from \$304.1 million in FY2019 to \$64.9 million in FY2024. The steepest decline occurred between FY2020 and FY2022 as imports fell from \$279.3 million in FY2020 to and \$35.9 million in FY2022.

Further, the share of imports from China dropped from 87 per cent of India's total toy

imports in FY2019 to 64 per cent in FY2024.

While the curbs were aimed at boosting local industry and ensuring safety, they did not significantly enhance India's toy exports, finds GTRI.

From FY2020-22, exports increased modestly from \$129.6 million to \$177 million. However, by FY2024, exports had decreased to \$152.3 million.

Indias share in the global toy export market is 0.3 per cent, totaling \$167 million.

Earnings, global trends to drive stock markets

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, MAY 12

Market is likely to see some consolidation after last two week's selling as Nifty-50 corrected more than 600 points to 22,055.20 and the Sensex by more than 2,000 points to 72,664.47.

However, volatility is likely to continue as uncertainty on the political front will weigh on market participants.

As the general election is progressing the market will be analysing the voting patterns and polling data more than economic data for knowing market direction.

After last week's selling several sectors including banks, metals look ready for a reversal of trend, analysts remain bullish on auto sector while consolidation in the FMCG sector is likely to end on better prospects on above normal monsoon forecast.

"Bank Nifty has virtually completed its corrective move and is set to reverse from the lower end. During the week, the metal sector has also felt the heat of the selling but consider-



ing an overall uptrend, the ongoing correction will be assumed as a strong buying opportunity," said Aditya Gaggar, director-Progressive Shares.

"In the data-heck week ahead, investor attention will be focused on the release of India and US consumer price index data, Europe and Japan's GDP releases, and the Fed chair speech. Furthermore, the next set of Q4 results will also attract market sentiment," said Vinod Nair, head-Research, Geojit Financial Services.

FPIs have net sold equities worth ₹17,082.71 crore in May month so far.

"This selling pressure overshadowed strong performance in global markets, keeping domestic indices under pressure throughout the week," Santosh Meena, head- Research, Swastika Investmart said.

GOLD ETFS DO WELL, ASSETS IN APRIL HIT ₹32,789 CRORE

New Delhi, May 12: Gold, with its performance over the last few years, has garnered substantial investor interest and the consistent increase in folio numbers serves as a testament to its attractiveness.

"In INR terms, gold has done fairly well over the last year but dwarfs in comparison to how equities have fared. Given this backdrop, flows in the Gold ETF category have been somewhat patchy relative to the equity asset class. That said, investors could have opted to book some profits in this segment which has resulted in asset class witnessing net outflows," Melvyn Santarita, analyst, Morningstar Investment Research India, said.

Gold Exchange Traded Fund (ETF) witnessed a net outflow of ₹396 crore April, making it first withdrawal of ₹266 crore after March 2023, owing to profit booking. Despite the decline, the asset under management of gold funds rose 5 per cent to ₹32,789 cr at April-end from ₹31,224 cr in the preceding month. —PTI

PSUs spent ₹50,200-cr capex in April

New Delhi, May 12: Large public sector companies have spent a little over ₹50,200 crore towards capital expenditure in April FY25 alone, which is 6.46 per cent of their full fiscal target of ₹7.77 lakh crore, an official said.

The pace albeit is slower than ₹54,177 crore capex spent in April FY24, about 7.3 per cent of the full year budget target of ₹7.42 lakh crore.

● **INTERIM BUDGET** for 2024-25 set a cumulative capital expenditure target of ₹9.01 lakh crore for all PSUs. Of this, ₹7.77 lakh crore worth capex is to be spent by PSUs.

"The capex spending will pick up going forward. Also, the numbers for April are still provisional and will go up in the revised final num-

bers," the official said.

The capital expenditure during the first month of 2024-25 fiscal was driven by railways, road, and oil and gas sectors.

The Indian railways and sector PSUs spent ₹26,641 crore in April, followed by national highways authority of India at ₹6,645 crore.

Among oil and gas sector PSUs, ONGC incurred capex of ₹2,318 crore, Indian Oil Corporation

₹2,423 crore in first month of current financial year.

HPCL and BPCL spent ₹1,155 crore and ₹417 crore, respectively in April. Power sector PSU NTPC spent ₹2,083 crore.

The Interim Budget for 2024-25 set a cumulative capital expenditure target of ₹9.01 lakh crore for all public sector undertakings. Of this, ₹7.77 lakh crore worth capex is to be spent by PSUs. —PTI

Maruti sees CNG car sales rising

New Delhi, May 12: Maruti Suzuki India expects its CNG car sales to rise over 30 per cent to around six lakh units this fiscal, according to a senior company official.

The country's largest carmaker also aims to export around three lakh units in the ongoing financial year.

"So CNG, this year, we did about 4,50,000 (units) in passenger vehicles. We are hoping to do something like 6,00,000 vehicles in FY24-25," Maruti Suzuki India executive director, Corporate Affairs, Rahul Bharti said



in an analyst call.

The company sells CNG trims across various models like WagonR, Brezza, Dzire, and Ertiga, among others in the domestic market.

Bharti said the company's capacity expansion by around one lakh units per annum at its Manesar

plant, in Haryana largely addresses the Ertiga supply issues.

On overseas shipments, Bharti said the company aims to export about three lakh units.

"We did about 2,83,000 units in FY24. Despite the fact that we've increased substantially over the usual 1,00,000 units per year that we used to do just about four years ago. We wish to take it further in the future years.

"And this year, we should be doing about 3,00,000 units fairly diversified across markets, across products," he said. —PTI



ESCORTS KUBOTA TO INVEST ₹4,500 CR IN MANUFACTURING

New Delhi, May 12: Farm and construction equipment manufacturer Escorts Kubota plans to invest up to ₹4,500 crore over the next three to four years to set up a new manufacturing plant, according to its whole-time director and chief financial officer Bharat Madan.

The company is currently in talks with the Rajasthan government for a site at Ghiloth, where it intends to set up the greenfield plant to double its domestic tractor production capacity to 3.4 lakh units annually.

"The greenfield plant will involve doubling tractor production capacity, setting up a new engine line and a construction equipment line in phases. Overall, the greenfield project may cost ₹4,000 cr to ₹4,500 crore over next three-four years," he said.

He further said, "This year we expect to procure land which may cost ₹400 crore to ₹450 crore and then start construction by the end of this fiscal. On the tractor sales outlook for FY25, he said the industry is expecting "a mid-single digit growth" with demand picking likely to gain momentum only in the second half of the fiscal.

—PTI

SMART | DEVICES iPhone maker to announce AI plans at Developers Conf.

Apple's iOS 18 may get ChatGPT

San Francisco, May 12: Apple has closed in on an agreement with OpenAI to use the startup's technology on the iPhone, part of a broader push to bring artificial intelligence features to its devices, according to people familiar with the matter.

The two sides have been finalising terms for a pact to use ChatGPT features in Apple's iOS 18, the next iPhone operating system, said the people, who asked not to be identified because the situation is private.

Cupertino-based company also has held talks with Alphabet's Go-gle about licensing that company's Gemini chatbot. Those discussions haven't led to an agreement, but are ongoing.



● **CUPERTINO-BASED** company also has held talks with Alphabet's Go-gle about licensing that company's Gemini chatbot. Those discussions haven't led to an agreement, but are ongoing.

An OpenAI accord would let Apple offer a popular chatbot as part of a flurry of new AI features that it's planning to announce next month.

It was reported in April that the discussions with OpenAI had intensified. Still, there's no guarantee that an agreement will be announced imminently.

Representatives for Apple, OpenAI and Google declined to comment.

Apple plans to make a splash in the artificial intelligence world in June, when it holds its annual Worldwide Developers Conference.

As part of the push, the company will run some of its upcoming artificial intelligence features via data centers equipped with its own in-house processors, Bloomberg has reported.

Last year, Apple chief

executive officer Tim Cook said he personally uses OpenAI's ChatGPT but added that there were "a number of issues that need to be sorted."

He promised that new AI features would come to Apple's products on a "very thoughtful basis."

On Apple's earnings conference call last week, he argued that Apple would have an edge in AI.

"We believe in the transformative power and promise of AI, and we believe we have advantages that will differentiate us in this new era, including Apple's unique combination of seamless hardware, software and services integration," Apple chief executive officer said during the earnings call. —Bloomberg

OpenAI to announce updates via livestream

San Francisco, May 12: Artificial intelligence (AI) company OpenAI will announce product updates via livestream on Monday, the company said in a post, stoking speculation about the AI giant's next major release.

OpenAI said that it will not be launching a search product at the event. The start-up has been working on a feature to rival Alphabet's Google and AI search startup Perplexity.

Alphabet's stock pared earlier losses on the news that OpenAI's search announcement wasn't imminent, reaching a session high. Instead, the OpenAI announcement will centre around an update to its popular chatbot, ChatGPT, and its



GPT-4 AI model.

It's been over a year since the company released GPT-4, its last flagship model, and a new version has been widely anticipated in the tech world.

In a post on X, chief executive officer Sam Altman said: "not gpt-5, not a search engine, but we've been hard at work on some new stuff we think people will love! feels like magic to me."

—Bloomberg

