

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI SATURDAY 25 MAY 2024



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India would have progressed more faster if borders had been secure, defined: Doval



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Trump holds a rally in South Bronx as he tries to woo his hometown

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Are Hardik Pandya and Natasa Stankovic headed for divorce? Latter drops surname 'Pandya'



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WINDOWS



Bollywood actor Kriti Sanon poses for photos during Father's Day celebrations in Mumbai on Friday. — PTI

Kejriwal's close aide Bibhav sent to jail for 4 days

New Delhi: A Delhi court on Friday sent chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's close aide Bibhav Kumar to four-day judicial custody in connection with the alleged assault on AAP Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal. Mr. Kumar, the personal assistant to the CM, allegedly assaulted Ms Maliwal on May 13.

Metropolitan magistrate Gaurav Goyal allowed the prosecution's plea seeking Mr Kumar's judicial custody for four days. The Delhi police said electronic, scientific and medical evidence along with statements of witnesses have been collected during the investigation. Full report on Page 2

Butcher who chopped B'desh MP's body held

Kolkata: The West Bengal CID arrested one person for his alleged involvement in the "murder" of Bangladesh MP Anwarul Azim Anar. The arrested man, a Bangladeshi citizen and a butcher by profession, has admitted that he helped the other accused in chopping the victim's body. Full report on Page 4

Red alert in Bengal as severe cyclone looms

Kolkata: A depression in the Bay of Bengal is likely to concentrate into a severe cyclonic storm and make landfall between Sagar Island in West Bengal and Khepupara in Bangladesh around May 26 midnight. The Met issued a red alert for coastal districts. Full report on Page 4

COUNTERPOINT



My sixth sense says your party will win only 6 seats in the sixth phase of polling!

WEATHER

Max: 44°C
Min: 31°C
RH: 22%
Rain: 0%

Forecast: Sunny

ASTROGUIDE

Krodhi: Uttarayana
Tithi: Vaishakha Bahula Vidiya till 6.54 pm
Star: Jyeshtha till 10.33 am
Varjyam: Nil
Durmuhurtam: 5.45 am to 7.28 am
Rahukalam: 9 am to 10.30 am
SUNSET TODAY 7.11 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.25 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 10.13 PM
MOONSET TODAY 6.24 AM

State polls in Odisha too ■ Khattar, Maneka, Kanhaiya in fray Delhi, Haryana to go to polls today; 58 seats in 6th phase

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

Former Haryana chief minister Mahohar Lal Khattar, BJP veteran Maneka Gandhi, former JNU students union leader Kanhaiya Kumar, actor turned politician Raj Babbar and late BJP leader Sushma Swaraj's daughter Bansuri Swaraj are some of the prominent politicians whose fates will be sealed in ballot boxes on Saturday when voting for the sixth and penultimate phase of the ongoing Lok Sabha polls takes place.

In this phase, polling will be held for 58 parliamentary seats across eight states and Union territories. Haryana and Delhi will head to the polls, along with Bihar, Jharkhand, Jammu and Kashmir, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, which will continue with their polls in this phase.

Mamata says will move SC against HC's OBC verdict

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, MAY 24

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday said that her government would move the Supreme Court after the Election Commission (EC) to upload polling station-wise voter turnout data on its website within 48 hours of completion of each phase of polls during the ongoing Lok Sabha elections, saying a "hands-off attitude" needs to be adopted during the ongoing electoral exercise.

A vacation bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and Satish Chandra Sharma adjourned the hearing on the application filed by an NGO and said it will be heard with its writ petition filed in 2019 after the ongoing Lok Sabha elections are over. In its order, the top court said, "The arguments on the interim application were heard. Prima facie, we are not inclined to grant any relief on the interim application at this stage in view of the similarities between prayer 'A' of the interim application and prayer 'B' of the writ petition out of which the interim application arises. The grant of such interim relief will amount to granting the final relief in the writ petition."



Officials leave after receiving poll material at Gole Market in New Delhi on Friday, the eve of Phase 6 of the Lok Sabha elections. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

THE TAMLUK seat is witnessing a fierce battle between BJP's ex-HC judge Abhijit Gangopadhyay and the creator of the 'Khela Hobe' slogan Debangshu Bhattacharya

Polling for 42 Assembly constituencies for the Odisha state Legislative Assembly will also take

place simultaneously. In West Bengal, the Tamluk seat is witnessing a fierce battle between BJP candidate and former Calcutta high court judge Abhijit Gangopadhyay and the creator of the "Khela Hobe" slogan for Trinamul Congress' 28-year-old Debangshu Bhattacharya. Sayan Banerjee is the CPI(M) ■ Turn to Page 4

AAP-Cong, BJP in direct battle in 7 Delhi seats

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

The intense battle for the seven Lok Sabha seats in the national capital is all set for polling on Saturday, after a record 83 days of campaigning, with the BJP and the INDIA bloc partners pitted in a direct, one-on-one contest.

The polls will be a litmus test for the AAP and the Congress, which for the first time are contesting as alliance partners in the very same Delhi, where the AAP was formed following a massive agitation against the then ruling Congress. ■ More on Page 2

SC declines plea to direct EC to post booth-wise voter data

Says can't 'burden' EC now, will take it up after polls

RAKESH K. SINGH
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

The Supreme Court on Friday refused to entertain an NGO's plea to issue direction to the Election Commission (EC) to upload polling station-wise voter turnout data on its website within 48 hours of completion of each phase of polls during the ongoing Lok Sabha elections, saying a "hands-off attitude" needs to be adopted during the ongoing electoral exercise.

A vacation bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and Satish Chandra Sharma adjourned the

hearing on the application filed by an NGO, Association for Democratic Reforms, and said it will be heard with its writ petition filed in 2019 after the ongoing Lok Sabha elections are over. In its order, the top court said, "The arguments on the interim application were heard. Prima facie, we are not inclined to grant any relief on the interim application at this stage in view of the similarities between prayer 'A' of the interim application and prayer 'B' of the writ petition out of which the interim application arises. The grant of such interim relief will amount to granting the final relief in the writ petition."

Noting that the 2024 elections are spread over seven phases, out of which five are already over and the sixth is on May 25, the bench said, "This particular ■ Turn to Page 2

Fear grips Indians in Kyrgyz, govt vows to help

Students want to return after anti-foreigner riots in Bishkek; envoy visits varsities

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

In an indication of the fear that has gripped thousands of Indian students in the Central Asian nation of Kyrgyzstan after the recent anti-foreigner riots there, the Indian embassy in Kyrgyz capital Bishkek said on Friday that though the situation in Bishkek is calm, it is working with medical universities in the Central Asian nation at the request of Indian medical students "to arrange for their transport to the

nearest international airport to address their concerns". The statement indicates that many Indian students want to return home amid reports that they have virtually been confined to their rooms for the last several days by the authorities there to ensure their safety from local mobs on the streets. Commercial flights between Bishkek and Delhi are operational through other cities in third countries such as Almaty, Dubai, Istanbul, Sharjah and Tashkent. India had earlier this week said it was con-

cerned at the recent incidents of violence against foreign students in Bishkek but pointed out that "due to swift action by the Kyrgyz authorities, the situation in Bishkek has returned to normal"

cerned at the recent incidents of violence against foreign students in Bishkek but pointed out that "due to swift action by the Kyrgyz authorities, the situation in Bishkek has returned to normal". Pointing out that about

17,000 Indian students are in the Kyrgyz Republic, New Delhi urged the students and their families "not to pay attention to rumours being spread by some mischievous elements". It further said the Indian ambassador in Bishkek and other Indian diplomats posted in the Central Asian nation had visited various universities in the country over the past few days to interact with Indian students and address their concerns. India also said that the Kyrgyz authorities, the situation in Bishkek has returned to normal". Pointing out that about

pointed out that all Indian students must contact their universities about the formalities required for the completion of their exams.

It may be recalled that according to media reports, violence had broken out a few days ago between local Kyrgyz students and foreign students belonging to a North African country, following which riots erupted in the Central Asian nation where the locals targeted foreign students in the streets.

In a statement earlier ■ Turn to Page 4



A helicopter carrying 7 people, including pilgrims, makes an emergency landing after developing a technical snag, 100m away from Kedarnath's helipad in Uttarakhand's Rudrapur district on Friday. ■ Report on Page 4 — PTI

INDIA bloc balloon has burst, can't govern: PM

Targets Cong for 1984 riots ■ 'Kejriwal runs Punjab govt' ■ In Himachal, attacks Opp. over 'disrespect' for Kangana

SHASHI BHUSHAN
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI/SHIMLA/
CHANDIGARH, MAY 24

Continuing his tirade against the INDIA bloc, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said that the "balloon" of the Opposition alliance has burst and no one wants to vote for it in the ongoing Lok Sabha polls and hit out at the alliance constituents — the AAP and the Congress — for their poor shows in governance in Punjab and Himachal Pradesh, respectively.

Targeting the AAP government in Punjab for being piloted by Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, Mr Modi, who addressed election rallies in Punjab's Gurdaspur and Jalandhar, said that chief minister Bhagwant Mann cannot take any official decision regarding the state on his own and had to go to the Tihar Jail in Delhi to take orders from Mr Kejriwal, who was undergoing judicial custody before being released on May 10 on

■ Turn to Page 4



Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a rally for the Lok Sabha elections in Gurdaspur on Friday. — PTI

Shah: Lalu worked neither for backward classes nor Yadavs

AGE CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI/ARRAH (BIHAR),
MAY 24

Launching a blistering attack on RJD supremo Lalu Prasad Yadav, Union home minister Amit Shah on Friday alleged that he neither worked for the welfare of backward classes nor the people belonging to his caste "Yadav". Mr Shah also targeted the Congress and the

Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) at a Jharkhand rally, saying the two are "competing with each other on corruption".

Addressing an election rally in favour of Union minister R.K. Singh in Arrah, the home minister said if Mr Yadav, as part of the "arrogant" INDIA bloc, comes to power, "jungle raj, abduction and gangwar will return to Bihar". ■ More on Page 3

Top UN court orders ops in Rafah halted; Israel unlikely to comply

The Hague, May 24: The top United Nations court ordered Israel on Friday to immediately halt its military operations in the southern Gaza city of Rafah. While Israel is unlikely to comply with any such order, it will ratchet up the pressure on the increasingly isolated country.

Criticism of Israel's conduct in the war in Gaza has been growing — even from its closest ally, the United States, which warned against an invasion of Rafah, where hundreds of thousands of

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Palestinians have sought shelter from fighting elsewhere.

And this week alone, three European countries announced they would recognise a Palestinian state, and the chief prosecutor for another UN court requested arrest

warrants for Israeli leaders, along with Hamas officials.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is also under heavy pressure at home to end the war, which was triggered when Hamas-led militants stormed into Israel, killing 1,200 people, most civilians, and taking some 250 captive.

Thousands of Israelis have joined weekly demonstrations calling on the government to reach a deal to bring the hostages home, fearing that time is running out. — AP



Britain's Prime Minister and Conservative Party leader Rishi Sunak lays a brick during a bricklaying workshop at Cannock College in central England on Friday during a campaign event in the build-up to the UK general election on July 4. — AFP

Maoists offer to hold talks with govt on Bastar truce

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
RAIPUR, MAY 24

The 72-hour-long counterinsurgency operation launched by security forces in Abujhmad of Bastar in Chhattisgarh ended on Friday with the killing of the eighth Maoist and a "truce offer" from the outlawed CPI(M).

An ultra was gunned down in an encounter in the forest along the borders of Dantewada-Bijapur-Narayanpur districts, the Bastar police said.

On Thursday, seven Maoists were killed by security forces in the area. In another development, Maoists on Friday called upon the Chhattisgarh government to begin talks to "end bloodshed" in Bastar.

A Maoist leader who claimed to be a central committee member of the CPI(M) issued a press release offering to hold talks with the government. The offer comes amid the killing of 113 Naxals by security forces in Bastar in the last five months. ■ More on Page 4

IN BRIEF

2 nabbed for duping man of ₹23.30 lakhs

New Delhi: The Delhi police has arrested two men for allegedly duping a person of ₹23.30 lakh on the pretext of investment in share market and stocks, officials said on Friday. The accused have been identified as Jai Pal (26) and Bhupendra (24), officials said, adding both are residents of Rajasthan and government job aspirants. "We had received a complaint from Sumit Sharma that he had been duped of ₹23.30 lakh when he was searching for some trading work," deputy commissioner of police (north) Manoj Kumar Meena said. The officer further said that initially the man invested small amounts and started getting refund which built his trust and led him to invest a larger amount. "He got to know about the fraud when he asked the accused to withdraw his profit and they asked him to pay more ₹35.33 lakh as tax. An FIR was registered and an investigation was launched," Mr Meena said. The team checked details of the bank accounts and money trail, the police said. Later, the two accused — Jai Pal and Bhupendra were arrested from Jaipur. Accused Jai Pal and Bhupendra admitted their involvement in the scam, revealing that they worked with a larger network of fraudsters," the DCP said. "Teams have been formed to nab other accused. Two mobile phones and debit cards were recovered from the accused," he added.

Cops gets more time to probe Parl breach

New Delhi: A Delhi court on Friday granted more time to the Delhi police to complete its investigation into the Parliament security breach case. Additional sessions judge Hardeep Kaur granted 13 more days to the police on an application that certain reports were awaited and digital data was voluminous. The police had urged the judge to grant three more months to complete the probe. In a major security breach on the anniversary of the 2001 Parliament terror attack, two persons — Sagar Sharma and Manoranjan D. — jumped into the Lok Sabha chamber from the public gallery during the Zero Hour in 2023, released yellow gas from canisters before being overpowered by the MPs. Around the same time, two other accused — Amol Shinde and Azad — also sprayed coloured gas from canisters outside the Parliament premises.

Fire breaks out at Alipur banquet hall

New Delhi: A fire broke out at a banquet hall in outer Delhi's Alipur area and no one was injured, officials said on Friday. A call was received at 1.55 pm and 13 fire tenders were pressed into service, an official from the Delhi fire service (DFS) said. The fire tenders took two hours to douse the blaze, which gutted a portion of Carnival Resort located at Narela Road here, the official said. The police said prima facie it is suspected that a short circuit caused the incident.

2 DIE, 1 HURT AS TRACTOR FALLS IN GHAZIABAD DRAIN

Ghaziabad: Two farm labourers were killed and one was injured after their tractor trolley fell into a drain here, the police said on Friday. The victims were identified as Upendra (28), Vinay (22) and Chandra Bali (33), the police said. SHO of Bhojpur police station Sumit Sudhakar Ramteke said that the workers were working with a farmer, Vinod Kumar. They were transporting sugarcane seeds in the tractor trolley to another field on Thursday when Upendra, the driver, lost control of the vehicle and it fell into a drain. The locals rescued the victims and rushed them to a hospital where doctors declared Upendra and Vinay dead on arrival, the SHO said. While Bali is undergoing treatment and is said to be in a critical condition, he added. The tractor-trolley was taken out from drain with a crane, he said. The bodies were sent for post-mortem and further investigation is underway, Mr Ramteke said. — PTI

Body found dumped in drain, accused held Neighbour rapes, kills 3-year-old in S-W Delhi

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 24

A three-year-old girl was allegedly kidnapped, raped, and killed and later her body was found dumped in a drain by her neighbour in Southwest Delhi. The accused was later arrested after a brief exchange of fire.

According to the police, the incident took place on Wednesday evening when the victim's family reported the kidnapping of their daughter from the Kapashera area.

"A police team was sent to the spot immediately. The victim's mother told the police that her daughter was playing outside their house at around 6.00 pm when her neighbour kidnapped her," said DCP Rohit Meena.

Based on the mother's complaint, an FIR was lodged and a massive search operation was launched to trace the girl and the accused.

The police examined the CCTV footage, he said.

"In one camera, at 7.05 pm, the accused was seen going towards a drain with the girl. In the same

▶ **THE ACCUSED** sensed an opportunity to escape. He grabbed the loaded service revolver of a police officer, tried to escape from custody, and fired at the police team. The police fired in self-defence and hit him.

camera, he was caught returning alone without the girl at around 7.25 pm," DCP Meena said.

The accused was traced and detained at about 11.55 pm, the same day, from a bus heading towards Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh, he said.

"He was interrogated and initially denied having played any role whatsoever in the kidnapping. But during sustained interrogation, he broke down and admitted to having killed and dumped the girl in a marshy drain located at the border of Gurgaon and Kapashera," the DCP said.

The police said that the accused then led the team to the drain, where it launched a search operation.

The crime and Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL)

teams were also called to the spot.

"After a long search operation lasting more than an hour in the dark, the girl's body was finally found dumped in the marshy drain," the DCP said.

"At that moment, the accused sensed an opportunity to escape. He grabbed the loaded service revolver of a police officer, tried to escape from custody, and fired at the team. The police fired in self-defence and hit him. He was immediately rushed to Indira Gandhi Hospital," the DCP added.

"The body was examined by the FSL and crime team. The accused was arrested and is now in judicial custody. The body was sent for post-mortem," he said.

"The autopsy report confirmed that the girl was raped. We are adding 376 (rape) of the Indian Penal Code and relevant sections of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POSCO) Act to the earlier Sections 363 (abduction) and 302 (murder) of the IPC," he added.

Bibhav is sent to 4-day custody, BJP targets AAP

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 24

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has accepted that the excise policy case is wrong, Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday claimed and said everyone arrested in the matter should be released.

Addressing a virtual press conference, Mr Kejriwal said the BJP has been screaming that there has been a scam.

"They are screaming for two years that there is a liquor scam claiming it was to the tune of ₹100 crore, but not even a penny has been recovered," said the chief minister, who is out on interim bail till June 1 in the case.

"Yesterday, the PM was asked in an interview that Kejriwal was saying that no evidence has been found in the case. The PM said no money was found because Kejriwal is an experienced thief. He accepted that no recovery was made," he added.

"To hide it, he said Kejriwal is an 'anubhavi chor'. This is just an excuse to prove the wrong arrests right. When you have accepted that the excise scam is wrong, please release those who have been arrested," said the AAP national convener.

"The Am Aadmi Party (AAP) will lose at the hustings as people are angry over the incident, the BJP claimed. A day before polling in Delhi, BJP national spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia alleged that the chief minister is trying his best to save Mr Kumar.

It was at Mr Kejriwal's behest that his aide assaulted Ms Maliwal, Mr Bhatia claimed.

"Ms Maliwal has said that Kumar and others slapped her seven to eight times in the presence of Arvind Kejriwal at his residence and they also

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 24

A Delhi court on Friday remanded chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's aide, Bibhav Kumar, to a four-day judicial custody in the assault case of AAP Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal.

The BJP, meanwhile, slammed Mr Kejriwal over the assault case and claimed that his AAP will suffer such a defeat in the Lok Sabha polls in Delhi that deposits of its candidates will be forfeited.

Metropolitan magistrate Gaurav Goyal allowed the prosecution's plea seeking Mr Kumar's judicial custody for four days.

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"Ms Maliwal has said that Kumar and others slapped her seven to eight times in the presence of Arvind Kejriwal at his residence and they also



Bibhav Kumar being taken to a hospital from Civil Lines police station in New Delhi on Friday. — PTI

used indecent language against her. It is bizarre that Mr Kejriwal has maintained silence over the incident. What a shameless and cheap person he is!" Mr Bhatia said.

The BJP spokesperson alleged that to hide the truth about Mr Kejriwal's involvement in the assault, footage from CCTV cameras at the CM's residence had been edited and Mr Kumar's mobile phone formatted.

"He (Kejriwal) should not underestimate the power of the people. There is anger among the people. When polling is held tomorrow, people will inflict such damage to his party's prospect with their votes that even its deposits will be forfeited," he said.

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Medha Patkar, president of the National Council of Civil Liberties, is seen in a photograph. The magistrate said Ms Patkar's statements calling Mr Saxena "a coward, not a patriot" and alleging his involvement in hawala transactions were not only defamatory per se but also crafted to incite negative perceptions.

"Also, the accusation that the complainant was mortgaging the people of Gujarat and their resources to foreign interests was a direct attack on his integrity and public service," the magistrate said.

The court said Mr Saxena's testimony, supported by two court witnesses, showed Ms Patkar falsely associated him with activities contrary to his public stance.

The court said it was clear that Ms Patkar's actions were "deliberate and malicious, aimed at tarnishing the complainant's good name, and indeed caused substantial harm to his standing and credit in the eyes of the public."

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Delhiites vote today: INDIA bloc, BJP in intense one-on-one battle

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA NEW DELHI, MAY 24

The intense battle for the seven Lok Sabha seats in the national capital is all set for polling on Saturday, after a record 83 days long campaigning, with the BJP and the INDIA bloc partners pitted in a direct, one-on-one contest. The polls will be a litmus test for the AAP and the Congress for the first time as they are contesting as alliance partners in the very same Delhi, where the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) was formed following a massive agitation against the then ruling Congress and sludged it from the power.

The INDIA bloc partners have reached a pre-poll understanding for the elections in Delhi. While the AAP is contesting on four seats, the Congress has fielded candidates on the remaining three seats. This is the first Lok Sabha election in which they both have fielded joint candidates against the BJP, posing a challenge to the party ruling the Centre.

Voting will start from 7 am with special arrangements at the polling booths to help the voters exercise their franchise amid scorching heat. The weather department has sounded a yellow alert on the polling day with maximum temperature expected around 44°C.

Over 2.52 lakh first-time voters will cast their maiden votes in the elections in the city.

The AAP faced a major jolt with its supreme and Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal being



Polling officials at a distribution centre in Gole Market in New Delhi on Friday. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

arrested by the ED, hardly a week after announcement of the polls, on March 21. However after 50 days, Mr Kejriwal was granted an interim bail by the Supreme Court to campaign and came out of Tihar on May 10 emerging his cadre and supporters with a whirlwind tour of the city in the road shows and public meetings in favour of not only the AAP candidates but also its ally, the Congress.

The BJP that won all the seven seats in Delhi in 2014 and 2019 with huge margins is gearing up for a clean sweep third time in a row.

Several dignitaries and eminent personalities including the President Droupadi Murmu, Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, Mr Kejriwal and Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri are also voters of the city. A massive secu-

rity apparatus has been put in place with 60,000 personnel on the ground to ensure peaceful, free and fair polls, the Delhi police officials said.

Delhi CEO P. Krishnamurthy has said based on the directives from the Election Commission and the IMD forecast of an intense heat wave, comprehensive measures have been implemented to address the expected high temperatures of 44 to 45°C.

"Our preparations are complete. Shaded areas will be established at all polling stations, with fully covered waiting zones equipped with coolers and fans to ensure voter comfort. We have ensured the availability of drinking water, toilets, ramps, and wheelchairs at every polling station under the Assured Minimum Facility Policy so that no voter faces any inconvenience," he said.

Commonwealth Village picked as strong room

New Delhi, May 24: The Delhi police has issued a traffic advisory for Friday for the area around the Commonwealth Games Village, which has been designated as a strong room-cum-counting centre for the Lok Sabha elections. In a post on X, the Delhi traffic police on Thursday said, "In view of the Lok Sabha elections, the Commonwealth Games Village is a strong room-cum-counting centre. On 24.05.24, from 9 am to 5 pm, movement of a large number of buses and other vehicles related to election duties are expected."

The police requested the commuters to avoid the roads and utilise public transport.

Break trend of urban apathy: EC appeals to Delhi-NCR

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 24

New Delhi, May 24: The Election Commission has urged the voters in the urban centres including Delhi, Gurgaon and Faridabad to break the trend of urban apathy by coming out in large numbers to vote in the sixth phase of Lok Sabha elections on Saturday. At the end of voting in the fifth phase of election on May 20, the poll panel had lamented that constituencies in various cities such as Mumbai, Thane, Nashik and Lucknow have continued the trend of "urban apathy" as noticed in the 2019 polls.

In a statement on Friday on the preparation for the sixth phase of elections, the poll authority said voters in urban centres such as Delhi, Gurgaon and Faridabad are specially reminded about their right and duty and "break the trend of urban apathy."

The court said Mr Saxena's testimony, supported by two court witnesses, showed Ms Patkar falsely associated him with activities contrary to his public stance.

The court said it was clear that Ms Patkar's actions were "deliberate and malicious, aimed at tarnishing the complainant's good name, and indeed caused substantial harm to his standing and credit in the eyes of the public."

On poll eve, candidates unwind after hectic campaigns in Delhi

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 24

A day before the Lok Sabha elections in Delhi, the candidates spent their time with their families, seeking blessings from God and planning booth management for D-Day.

The campaigning for the polls ended on Thursday evening.

The AAP candidate from the West Delhi parliamentary constituency, Mahabal Mishra, began his day by playing carrom with his grandchildren.

Similarly, the AAP candidate from South Delhi, Sahi Ram Pahalwan, said he spent one hour in the morning with his family and then left to meet the volunteers to discuss booth management.

"Even the volunteers are a part of our family and they have been working hard giving their blood and sweat for the campaigning," he added.

The AAP candidate from New Delhi, Somnath Bharti, unwound himself after a hectic campaign by playing tennis in the



BJP candidate Manoj Tiwari with the party's other candidates in New Delhi on Friday. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

morning, having tea with his family, and then paying obeisance at a gurdwara and Valmiki temple.

Kuldeep Kumar, who is in the fray from AAP from East Delhi, also met volunteers throughout the day regarding deployment for booths for May 25.

The Congress candidate from Chandni Chowk, J.P. Agarwal, said it was the "busiest" day for him as he covered special areas in his constituency ahead of the D-Day.

His opponent from BJP, Praveen Khandelwal, said

he started his day at 6.00 am, and since then he has been meeting people and visiting their homes.

"This is the final day of our 84-day campaign and I am connecting with the people on an individual level to make personal connections. I don't just want to be a candidate; I want to be a part of their families," he said.

The BJP candidate from Northwest Delhi, Yogendra Chandolia, said the last few days have been hectic with campaigning.

ED opposes Kavitha's bail plea, says release will affect inquiry

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 24

The ED on Friday opposed in the Delhi high court the bail plea of BRS leader K. Kavitha in a money laundering case linked to the alleged excise policy scam, saying her release would adversely affect further investigation to unearth the "deep-rooted, multi-layered conspiracy".

The ED, in its reply to Ms Kavitha's bail plea, contend-

ed that the she is a "highly influential" individual and stands accused of having committed a grave economic offence. She has the potential to tamper with evidence and influence witnesses, it said.

On Friday, Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma heard arguments advanced by Ms Kavitha's counsel and listed the matter for further proceedings on May 27.

Medha Patkar convicted in defamation case by L-G

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 24

More than 23 years after the complaint was registered, a Delhi court on Friday convicted Narmada Bachao Andolan leader and activist Medha Patkar in a defamation case lodged against her by V.K. Saxena, the incumbent lieutenant-governor, saying reputation is one of the "most valuable assets" and significantly impacts

one's standing in society. Holding Ms Patkar's statements as "defamatory per se" and "crafted to incite negative perceptions," metropolitan magistrate Raghav Sharma convicted the activist of the offence of criminal defamation under the IPC which entails a maximum punishment of simple imprisonment of up to two years or fine or both.

Mr Saxena had filed the case in November 2000 when he was the presi-



Medha Patkar, president of the National Council of Civil Liberties, is seen in a photograph. The magistrate said Ms Patkar's statements calling Mr Saxena "a coward, not a patriot" and alleging his involvement in hawala transactions were not only defamatory per se but also crafted to incite negative perceptions.

"Also, the accusation that the complainant was mortgaging the people of Gujarat and their resources to foreign interests was a direct attack on his integrity and public service," the magistrate said.

The court said Mr Saxena's testimony, supported by two court witnesses, showed Ms Patkar falsely associated him with activities contrary to his public stance. The court said it was clear that Ms Patkar's actions were "deliberate and malicious, aimed at tarnishing the complainant's good name, and indeed caused substantial harm to his standing and credit in the eyes of the public."

The court said Mr Saxena's testimony, supported by two court witnesses, showed Ms Patkar falsely associated him with activities contrary to his public stance. The court said it was clear that Ms Patkar's actions were "deliberate and malicious, aimed at tarnishing the complainant's good name, and indeed caused substantial harm to his standing and credit in the eyes of the public."

SC declines plea to direct EC to post booth-wise voter data

■ **Continued From Page 1** compliance that you (the NGO) are insisting upon would require not only manpower but also mandamus (a judicial writ). It is not possible during this period. We have to be conscious of the ground reality and cannot change the process midway."

The bench told NGO's counsel Dushyant Dave, "Let us tell you, we keep it pending and (will) hear along with Article 32 writ petition after elections are over. In between the elections, a hands-off attitude has to be there." Senior advocate

Maninder Singh, appearing for the Election Commission, questioned the maintainability of the interim application and claimed it has been filed on the basis of mere suspicion and apprehension coupled with false allegations.

The bench put several questions to Mr Dave about the maintainability of the plea and asked why the interim application filed by the NGO contained an identical prayer made in the writ petition of 2019.

Prayer 'B' in your writ petition. That's the final relief you have prayed for in the writ petition. Now, how can you claim it as interim relief?" the bench asked Mr Dave.

The prayer 'A' in the interim application says, "Direct the Election Commission to immediately upload on its website scanned legible copies of Form 17C Part-I (Account of votes recorded) of all polling stations after the close of polling of each phase in the on-going 2024 Lok Sabha elections."

Prayer 'B' in your writ petition. That's the final relief you have prayed for in the writ petition. Now, how can you claim it as interim relief?" the bench asked Mr Dave.

The top court said the NGO's interim applica-

tion is based on various press notes issued by the poll panel relating to the 2024 polls and asked, "Can a court, by an interim order, grant a relief that is in the nature of a final relief while keeping the writ petition pending?"

On Mr Dave's submission that it is not adversarial litigation and the NGO has approached the court for a genuine public cause as the Election Commission, after the first two phases of polling, came out with a voter turnout figure that was substantially higher than what it had initially

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SHORT TAKES

BJP is spreading hatred: Tejashwi

Deoghar: RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav on Friday alleged that the BJP wanted to snatch the rights of deprived communities by changing the Constitution, and asserted that the Opposition INDIA bloc would never let that happen. Addressing an election rally in Jharkhand's Deoghar for Congress' Godda candidate Pradeep Yadav, he accused the BJP of spreading "hatred" in the country. "The BJP wants to change the Constitution, which was written by Baba Saheb Ambedkar and snatch the rights of tribal, dalits and OBCs. They want to snatch your reservation. We want to tell the BJP that till INDIA bloc leaders are there, we will not allow anyone to change our Constitution," Mr Yadav said. "The BJP does politics of hatred. It cheated people in the name of Hindu-Muslim. I want to tell them that now hatred will not work but employment will," he said, urging the people to vote for the INDIA bloc candidates. — PTI

WB: Monks protest against Mamata jibe

Kolkata: A rally by monks was organized in Kolkata on Friday, condemning chief minister Mamata Banerjee's recent remarks against certain monks of Ramakrishna Mission and Bharat Sevashram Sangha. Christened, as "Sant Swabhimani Yatra", Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) along with members of the Bangiya Sanyasi Samaj — an apex body of saints in the state — held the rally from North Kolkata's Bagbazar to Shimla Street, the ancestral residence of Swami Vivekananda. "We condemn the remarks by the honourable CM against us. We are pained and feel insulted by the derogatory remarks. She is not following *raj dharma*," a protesting monk said. Senior VHP leader Sourish Mukherjee said, "Due to vote bank politics, the CM is making such remarks." — PTI

'Lalu worked neither for backward classes nor Yadavs' Shah: Cong & JMM competing with each other on corruption

AMRESH SRIVASTAVA with agency inputs
NEW DELHI/ARRAH (BIHAR)/JAMTARA/DEOGHAR (JHARKHAND), MAY 24

Launching a blistering attack on RJD supremo Lalu Prasad Yadav, Union home minister Amit Shah on Friday alleged that he neither worked for the welfare of backward classes nor the people belonging to his caste "Yadav". Mr Shah also targeted the Congress and the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) at a Jharkhand rally, saying the two are "competing with each other on corruption".

Addressing an election rally in favour of Union minister R.K. Singh in Arrah, the home minister said if Mr Yadav, as part of



Union home minister Amit Shah greets supporters during a rally at Arrah in Bhojpur, Bihar, on Friday. — PTI

the "arrogant" INDIA bloc, comes to power, "jungle raj, abduction and gangwar will return to Bihar". "People don't want the return of the

own caste 'Yadav'. They are under the wrong impression that Lalu works for them," he said.

"Laluji allowed his two sons to become ministers, sent one daughter to Rajya Sabha and another is contesting the Lok Sabha polls. He made his wife the chief minister of Bihar... He promotes only his sons and daughters. He can't think for the welfare of people belonging to his own caste," he added.

Mr Shah also accused the Congress and the RJD of "trying to rob reservation from the quotas of SC/STs and OBCs and give such benefits to Muslims".

"The NDA under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi will not allow this to happen," he asserted.

'Free Patnaik from clutches of his aide'

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, MAY 24

In a move that is seen as a political gimmick, the Odisha state unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party on Friday urged the state director general of police (DGP) to "free" chief minister Naveen Patnaik from the "clutches" of V.K. Pandian, a Tamil Nadu born bureaucrat-turned-politician who "wields high influence on the ruling Biju Janata Dal and the CM".

In a letter to the DGP Arun Sarangi, former BJP state president Samir Mohanty said the party believed that the CM has been held hostage by Mr Pandian and demanded that he (CM) be freed from the latter's clutches.

"You must be aware of a sensitive issue in Odisha. The chief minister of our state Naveen Patnaik has

been held hostage by his former personal secretary V.K. Pandian for some days. It is evident from many incidents. It is evident from the videos posted on various social media platforms of the CM's own party BJD that the CM of the state is being held hostage by Pandian and some other non-Odia officials. We doubt whether the chief secretary and you (DGP) are able to hold discussions with him as per the protocol," the letter read.

"All the people of Odisha have the right to know about the CM. Hence, the Odisha BJP is requesting that you in the presence of a justice and some other reputed personalities make the chief minister free from the clutches of Pandian and hold an interaction with the media in the state," it further said.

Pawar slams govt's casual approach over Maha drought

SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, MAY 24

NCP founder Sharad Pawar on Friday accused the Maharashtra government of showing lackadaisical approach in handling the drought in the state.

Taking a dig at Maharashtra agriculture minister Dhananjay Munde, Mr Pawar said the minister did not attend chief minister Eknath Shinde's review meeting in connection with drought at Marathwada, which shows the seriousness of the agriculture minister about the drought.

He said that despite having the highest numbers of dams in the country, 73 per cent of the state is staring at drought.

However, Maharashtra deputy chief minister Devendra Fadnis said the government has taken all steps required, and alleged that Mr Pawar is indulging in politics over the drought situation.

Mr Pawar — former Union agriculture minister — said that the government has not paid attention to the drought in the state.

"There will be no rainfall across the state till the end of June. This can lead to a serious situation in the state. Therefore, drought relief works and fodder camps should be begun immediately," he said.

Welcoming the state government's decision to seek relaxation of the model code of conduct for providing relief assistance in drought affected areas.

"The government has taken the right stand in writing to the Election Commission of India since the polls are over in Maharashtra," the NCP founder said.

Cong: INDIA bloc to name PM by June 7

Chandigarh, May 24: The Congress on Friday hit back at the BJP over its "five PMs in five years" remark against the INDIA bloc, saying the alliance which is set to get a "clear and decisive" mandate in the Lok Sabha polls will have one person as Prime Minister for five years. The name of the Prime Minister will be announced by the INDIA bloc within three days after the result of the elections is declared on June 4, the Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh told a press conference here ahead of the sixth round of polling on Saturday.

The elections are being held in seven phases and the last is on June 1. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has in his poll rallies repeatedly tar-



Jairam Ramesh

geted the bloc, claiming that it has plans to have five PMs in five years if voted to power.

The INDIA bloc is going to get a "clear and decisive mandate" on June 4 and, like in 2004, history will repeat itself after 20 years, Mr Ramesh said.

"Those who repeatedly raise the question who will be Prime Minister (if the INDIA bloc comes to power), I want to remind that in 2004, after the Congress and its allies got the mandate, within three days Dr. Manmohan Singh's name was announced for (the post of) PM," the Congress leader said. — PTI

INDIA bloc is against dalits, tribals: Nadda

Kushinagar/Ballia/Sonbhadra (UP), May 24 : Hitting out at the INDIA bloc, BJP president J.P. Nadda on Friday alleged that the "ghamandia" (arrogant) alliance is against the dalits, tribals and backwards because it wants to rob the reservation of these sections and appease Muslims.

The BJP chief also alleged that the "arrogant alliance" is "anti-Sanatan" and "anti-national".

Mr Nadda was addressing an election rally in Kushinagar in support of the local BJP candidate and sitting MP Vijay Dubey.

Mr Nadda claimed India will be third largest economy if Mr Modi becomes PM for third time. — PTI

Didi: Will approach SC against HC order on OBC certificates

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, MAY 24

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday said her government would move the top court after the summer vacation to challenge the Calcutta high court order that recently cancelled all OBC certificates issued in the state after 2010.

The Trinamul Congress supremo, who was addressing a poll rally at Sagar in South 24 Parganas, also asserted that the Other Backward Classes (OBC) reservation would, meanwhile, continue like other categories.

"There is no reason to feel scared. I won't allow the OBC quota to be cancelled. It will continue as it was. Tapashili, Adivasi and general people's categories will also go on. We

CALCUTTA HC on Wednesday ordered the cancellation of nearly five lakh OBC certificates issued by the TMC government, sparking a political debate amid LS polls

also have a scheme for the Economic Backward Classes, which shall continue too," she said.

"Now the summer vacation is underway. As soon as it ends, we will move to a higher court," the CM said, adding, "I respect courts but a few judges are only abiding by the diktat of the BJP and the CPI(M)."

The Calcutta HC on Wednesday ordered the cancellation of nearly five lakh OBC certificates issued by the TMC government, sparking a political debate in the middle

of the LS polls. Ms Banerjee further took potshots at Prime Minister Narendra Modi for calling himself the "son of God" during an interview to a national TV channel.

At another party rally in Mathurapur, Ms Banerjee said, "He is now calling himself the son of God. He claims that, unlike us, he doesn't have biological parents. He says he has been sent by God."

Ms Banerjee sarcastically added, "I ask, does God send someone to orchestrate riots or spread lies or jail people in the name of NRC exercise sponsor hoolliganism in the name of the CAA? Does God go back on his promise of depositing ₹15 lakhs in people's bank accounts? God can not do such things."

Appeal to Voters of Delhi

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- Always maintain peace in and around the polling station
- Show your photo ID card as prescribed by the Election Commission of India
- Follow instructions on "How To Vote"
- Show courtesy to the polling team which is facilitating your vote
- After casting your vote come out of the polling station quietly

DONTs

- Do not accept bribe in favour of your vote. Bribery is an offence.
- Do not impersonate for someone else. Impersonation is an offence.
- Do not cause any disturbance in the poll process. You may land up in prison.
- Do not cause damage/tamper with poll material including EVM/VVPAT. You may land up in prison.
- Do not obstruct the polling team in performing election duty. You may land up in prison.

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SHORT TAKES

Pune car crash: Father, 5 get JC

Pune: A court here on Friday remanded Vishal Agarwal, father of a 17-year-old involved in a car crash that killed two persons in the city, and five other accused in the case in judicial custody till June 7. The prosecution had demanded extension of their police custody for further probe. But the court remanded Agarwal and others including the owner and employees of two liquor-serving establishments — where the teenager had allegedly consumed alcohol before his Porsche car knocked down two software professionals on a motorbike — in judicial custody instead. Attempts were made to make it appear that the minor was not at the wheel and some adult person was driving the car at the time of the accident on May 19, Pune police commissioner Amitesh Kumar had said earlier in the day. — *PTI*

Thane factory blast toll increases to 13

Mumbai: The death toll in the chemical factory blast at Dombivli rose to 13 after the discovery of six more bodies from the factory site on Friday. The police has registered a culpable homicide case against the owners and senior employees of the factory. A boiler exploded at the factory of Amudan Chemicals, situated at the Maharashtra industrial development corporation area, Dombivli, on Thursday afternoon. There were 2-3 subsequent blasts due to chemicals stored in the factory. The impact of blasts was such that it shattered windows of nearby buildings and also damaged adjacent factories. A police official told that they have booked the owners of Amudan Chemicals — Malti Pradeep Mehta, Malay Pradeep Mehta and other senior officials of the company under the IPC Section 304 and Explosive Substance Act.

Raj sizzles at 49°C, 6 die of heatstroke

Jaipur: Six more deaths due to suspected heat stroke were reported in Rajasthan, where the mercury soared to 49° Celsius, officials said on Friday. There were reports of five deaths due to suspected heat stroke in the state on Thursday as well. Many parts of the state remained in the grip of severe heat conditions during the day. As per to Met Centre Jaipur, Phalodi was the hottest place in the state with 49° Celsius. The day temperature in Jaisalmer was 48.3° Celsius, in Barmer 48.2° Celsius, in Jodhpur 47.6° Celsius, in Kota 46.7 degrees Celsius, in Ganganagar 46.6° Celsius, in Bikaner 45.8° Celsius, in Churu 44.8° Celsius and in Jaipur 42.8° Celsius, it said. As per Rajasthan's disaster management and Relief department, three people died in Balotra, and one each in Bhilwara, Bikaner and Jodhpur. — *PTI*

CID takes his help to locate body parts, says he 'smothered, skinned' Anwarul Butcher held for Bangla MP's murder

RAJIB CHOWDHURI KOLKATA, MAY 24

In a major breakthrough in the murder of Bangladeshi MP Anwarul Azim Anar at a flat in Kolkata's New Town, the criminal investigation department (CID) of the West Bengal police arrested one person for his alleged involvement in the murder.

Jihad Hawladar (24), the accused who is a Bangladeshi and a butcher by profession, was caught by the CID on Thursday evening from Bongaon in North 24 Parganas. A native of Barakpur village in Bangladesh's Khulna district, he had entered India illegally and was

staying in Mumbai hiding his identity.

He worked as a butcher in Mumbai from where he was hired and brought to the city two months ago by the mastermind of the murder plot, Mohammad Akhtaruzzaman, a US citizen of Bangladeshi origin.

During the interrogation, Jihad confessed to have smothered the Awami League leader to death with the help of three other accused. He later skinned and chopped the body into multiple pieces, which were packed in polythene bags and put on trolleys for disposal.

After the arrest, the butcher was taken to Krishnamati at Bhangar in South 24 Parganas to



Anwarul Azim Anar

identify the area where the body parts were disposed of.

The CID has employed deepwater divers at the ponds in Bhangar also to find out the body parts of the Bangladeshi politi-

cian, the police said.

An initial probe revealed that the MP's close friend Akhtaruzzaman had paid around ₹5 crores to those involved in the crime, it added.

On Friday, the accused was produced at the Barasat court, which remanded him in CID custody for 12 days.

Meanwhile, a Dhaka court remanded the three other arrested accused to eight-day police remand.

The trio — Amanullah alias Shimul Bhuiyan, Celesty Rahman and Faisal Ali alias Saji — were produced before metropolitan magistrate Dilruba Afroz Tithi of the chief metropolitan magistrate's court during the

day.

The police had prayed for a 10-day remand for them.

Celesty, a woman, is one of the two accused who were caught the CCTV footage of Sanjiva Gardens in New Town while leaving the housing complex after the murder of the Jhenaidah-4 MP there. A CID team is also in Dhaka for the probe.

The search for the missing MP, who reportedly arrived in Kolkata on May 12 to undergo medical treatment, began after Gopal Biswas, a resident of Baranagar in north Kolkata and an acquaintance of the Bangladeshi politician, filed a complaint with the local police on May 18.

Cyclone to strike tomorrow night, red alert in WB

Kolkata, May 24: A depression in the Bay of Bengal is likely to concentrate into a severe cyclonic storm and make landfall between Sagar island in West Bengal and Kheppurara in Bangladesh around May 26 midnight, bringing heavy rain in the coastal districts of the state, the Met department said on Friday.

The Met issued a red alert for West Bengal's coastal districts of South and North 24 Parganas district, warning of 100 to 110 km per hour wind speed on May 26 and 90 to 100 kmph on May 27, accompanied by extremely heavy rainfall at one or two places on both days. An orange alert was issued for Kolkata, Howrah and Purba Medinipur districts by the Met, warning of 80 to 90 kmph wind speed on May 26 and 70 to 80 kmph wind speed on May 27, accompanied by heavy to very heavy rain at one or two places on the two days.

The depression, which lies over central Bay of Bengal, about 660 km south-southeast of Sagar island, is likely to concentrate into a cyclonic storm by May 25 morning, the Met said.

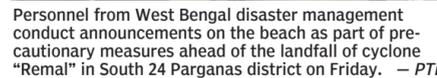
The weather office forecast heavy rain in Purba Medinipur on May 25, on which date elections are scheduled to be held in Tamluk and Kanti Lok Sabha constituencies located within the coastal district. Moving in a northward direction, the system will further concentrate into a severe cyclonic storm by May 25 evening, the weather office said.

The severe cyclonic storm is very likely to cross West Bengal and Bangladesh coasts between Sagar island and Kheppurara around midnight of May 26, it said.

The weather system will bring heavy to very heavy rain in South and North 24 Parganas, Purba Medinipur, Kolkata, Howrah and Hooghly districts of West Bengal on May 26 and May 27, the Met said.

Heavy rain is likely in the districts of Paschim Medinipur, Purba Bardhaman and Nadia on May 26 and 27, it said.

The weather office warned fishermen not to venture into the sea in north Bay of Bengal till May 27 morning. — *PTI*



Personnel from West Bengal disaster management conduct announcements on the beach as part of precautionary measures ahead of the landfall of cyclone "Remal" in South 24 Parganas district on Friday. — *PTI*

Maoists offer to hold talks to end bloodshed in Bastar

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY RAIPUR, MAY 24

The 72-hour-long counterinsurgency operation launched by security forces in Abujhmad of Bastar in Chhattisgarh ended on Friday with the killing of the eighth Maoist.

An ultra was on Friday gunned down in an encounter with security forces in a forest along the borders of Dantewada-Bijapur-Narayanpur districts, the Bastar police said.

On Thursday, seven Maoists were killed by security forces in the area. "The 72-hour-long counterinsurgency operation launched in Handawada-Rekabaya area falling under Abujhmad ended on Friday. A Maoist was gunned down in the area in the morning. With this, the number of Maoists slain in the operation has

gone up to eight", a senior police officer of Narayanpur district said. Huge cache of arms and ammunition and explosives were also recovered. The security forces also destroyed a training camp established by Maoists deep inside the Abujhmad forest and recovered a Maoist dump comprising 400 pairs of footwear, explosives and helmets.

Abujhmad, a 4,000 sq km area extending from Bastar in Chhattisgarh to Gadchiroli in Maharashtra, is said to be used by senior Maoist

leaders as their safe haven.

In another development, Maoists on Friday called upon the Chhattisgarh government to begin talks to "end bloodsheds" in Bastar.

A Maoist leader who claimed him as a Central Committee member of the outlawed CPI (Maoist) on Friday issued a press release offering to hold talks with the government to end "bloodsheds" in Bastar.

He however put a rider that the talks should be held in a "populated area". The Maoists' offer for talks comes amid the killing of 113 Naxals by security forces in Bastar in the last five months.

Chief minister Vishnu Deo Sai has earlier asked the Maoists to choose between two options left before them now, either surrender or get killed.

Living on Narmada water for over 3 yrs, says saint; MP govt to verify

AGE CORRESPONDENT BHOPAL, MAY 24

A study sponsored by the Madhya Pradesh government is being conducted on a Jabalpur-based seer to explain scientifically the "miracle" of his "living only on Narmada water since October 19, 2020".

Seer Samarth Sadguru Dada Guruji, who entered the Golden Book of World Records in 2023 for observing "fast for 1,000 days incessantly for the cause of the Narmada river conser-

vation and environment protection", has claimed to have been leading a normal life by drinking only Narmada water since October 19, 2020, drawing the attention of the state government.

The Narmada Mission, an NGO founded by the seer, has recently proposed the state government conduct a scientific study on his body for sustaining without food and only on Narmada water for the last three years and seven months, official sources said.

Over 50 Char Dham pilgrims dead in nearly a fortnight Narrow escape for 6 Kedarnath yatris

PRITHVIRAJ SINGH DEHRADUN, MAY 24

Six devotees flying to Kedarnath had a close shave on Friday morning as the helicopter they were on board developed serious technical snag and had to make emergency landing on hill top ahead of Kedarnath helipad.

Devotees on board helicopter were rescued and latter taken to the Kedarnath temple safely as the death toll of the chardham pilgrimage 2024 devotees reached 52 in nearly a fortnight. Rudraprayag district

administration officials informed that ill fated heli belonging to Crystal Aviation Company took off from Shersi helipad, nearly 25 kilometres from Kedarpuri, carrying six devotees but it started juddering midway leading to the machine's whirling movements in the air. This forced pilot to make emergency landing ahead of Kedarnath helipad.

District Magistrate Rudraprayag Saurav Gaharwar confirmed the incident and said all six devotees on board were safe. Saurav Gaharwar said "We were informed by

DEVOTEES ON board helicopter were rescued and latter taken to the Kedarnath temple safely as the death toll of the chardham pilgrimage 2024 devotees reached 52 in nearly a fortnight

the Disirict Disaster Management Officer in the morning that the helicopter of Crystal Aviation carrying pilgrims which flew from Shersi helipad for Kedarnath had to make emergency landing ahead of Kedarnath due to some technical fault in the machine. "Priliminary

probe indicates snag in rear rotor of the helicopter while further investigation is going on." Pilot's deftness and wisdom resulted into safe emergency landing and a major accident was averted" said Gaharwar.

"The helicopter carried six devotees from TN. All were safe and later were flown to the Kedarnath shrine for Darshan" state Garhwal Commissioner and secretary to chief minister Vinay Shankar Pandey as he shared that chardham bound pilgrims' death figure has reached 52 on Friday, 14th day of the pilgrimage 2024.

'INDIA bloc balloon has burst, can't govern'

Continued From Page 1

interim bail by the Supreme Court for campaigning in the general election. Mr Kejriwal is embroiled in the Delhi excise policy "scam" and he will have to surrender on June 2 before the jail authorities in the national capital on the expiry of his interim bail.

In Gurdaspur, Mr Modi said, "Delhi ke darbari" are running Punjab. The Punjab CM cannot take any decision on his own. His 'maalik' went to jail and the Punjab government started shutting down. To take new orders and run the government, the chief minister (Mr Mann) had to go to Tihar Jail and he had to present his report card to him (Mr Kejriwal)."

Attacking the Congress for the anti-Sikh riots, Mr Modi alleged that when the Congress was in power, it saved the rioters. "It was Modi who got files of the anti-Sikh riots opened. It was Modi who ensured punishment for the guilty," he said.

Addressing the second public meeting in Punjab's Jalandhar, Mr Modi said that their balloon has burst and no one wants to give their vote to the Congress and the INDIA bloc.

"If you stand on a chowk in Jalandhar and ask 100 people whose government is going to be formed, 90 will say Modi's government will return. When people have made up their minds to form the Modi government again, then who will commit the mistake of voting for someone else?" he said.

The country has seen a new period in the last 10 years, the Prime Minister said, adding that during the Congress rule, people were plagued by prob-

lems that were resolved by him. While there was a time when the danger of terrorism was increasing in the country, his government has broken its back, Mr Modi said.

"The country understands that where there is a Congress government, problems will remain. Where there is the BJP, there are solutions. That is why the entire country is saying in one voice -- on June 4?" he asked and the gathering replied, saying "400 paar" (more than 400 seats for the ruling BJP in the ongoing polls).

In his address, the Prime Minister said that Punjab is the land of gurus, but the Congress never treated it as more than a piece of land. He accused the grand old party of dividing the state in 1947 to give power to one family.

"Kartapur Sahib is close to our border, but the Congress handed it to Pakistan," he said, referring to the country's partition.

Earlier, in the same vein, Mr Modi hit out at the Congress for shutting down government recruitment machinery in Himachal Pradesh.

In his back-to-back public meetings in support of party candidates Suresh Kashyap and Kangana Ranaut, who are contesting from Shimla and Mandi constituencies, respectively, Mr Modi hit out at the Congress over the dissolution of the Himachal Pradesh Staff Selection Commission in Shimla in stark contrast to its promised 1 lakh jobs for the youth.

Mr Modi dubbed the Congress government in Himachal Pradesh a "talabaaz sarkar" for

"putting a lock on the recruitment commission".

In February last year, the chief minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu-led Congress government disbanded the HPSSC after a paper leak was reported in December 2022.

The Prime Minister said that on one hand, there is Modi's guarantee and on the other hand, there is the Congress' model of destruction. "The Congress deceived the people of Himachal Pradesh with plenty of lies and false promises just to gain power. They had pledged to create 1 lakh jobs in their first Cabinet meeting, but they failed to do so. This is taalebaaz Congress, which has even locked down the commission that conducts job exams," Mr Modi said.

At the rally, the Prime Minister mentioned that Palampur, located nearby, was the venue for the BJP's working committee meeting, where they committed to constructing a "Bhavya Ram Mandir" in Ayodhya during a convention. "Himachal Pradesh is the 'sankalp bhoomi' for the construction of the Ram Mandir. The historic pledge taken in Himachal Pradesh has now been fulfilled. The people waited for this moment and many sacrificed their lives. It's not Modi who ended this wait, but the strength of the votes of the people. Indeed, the power of one vote revoked Article 370 from Jammu and Kashmir," he said.

The Prime Minister stated that he has pledged for a Uniform Civil Code, advocating for equal rights under the law for all citizens, regardless of

their religion.

"The Congress, on the other hand, opposes the Uniform Civil Code and supports Sharia law under the guise of protecting Muslim personal law. The country and Himachal Pradesh do not accept such a Congress," he said.

The Prime Minister also said that communalism, casteism and dynastic politics are common in the Congress and the entire INDIA bloc.

Pointing to the recent Calcutta high court's decision to abolish the reservation for 77 Muslim communities in Bengal, Mr Modi said, "Now the leaders of the INDIA bloc, including (West Bengal CM) Mamata Banerjee, are in a state of panic. Ms Banerjee has even refused to comply directly with the court's orders. For them, the Constitution and the courts hold no significance; their sole concern is their votebank."

Speaking about the party candidate and actress Ms Ranaut, the Prime Minister said, "Mandi candidate Sushri Kangana Ranaut is not just a candidate but a representative of the aspirations of daughters. Ms Ranaut has proven that daughters too can succeed in new fields with the power of their beliefs."

"However, the Congress makes derogatory comments about Ms Ranaut. These comments are disrespectful to Mandi, Chhoti Kashi, Himachal Pradesh and every woman in Himachal. The entire Congress is anti-women. But it is Modi who guarantees a safe environment and new heights for our country's women," he said.

Fear grips Indians in Kyrgyz capital

Continued From Page 1

This week, the Indian embassy in Bishkek had said: "The embassy has been concerned at the recent incidents of violence against foreign students in Bishkek. However, due to swift action by the Kyrgyz authorities, the situation in Bishkek has returned to normal. No untoward incident has been reported in Bishkek during the past few days. There are no restrictions on the movement of transport or people. However, as a measure of precaution, the classes are being conducted in an online mode."

It added: "Every year, a large number of Indian students join medical and other universities in the Kyrgyz Republic for further studies. At the moment, about 17,000 Indian students are in the Kyrgyz Republic and spread across many cities, but most of them are in Bishkek... The embassy has been working actively with the universities and senior government functionaries to address the concerns of the Indian students. Two helplines... have been functional... where students can continue to reach out to the embassy for all kinds of assistance. Students and their families are urged not to pay attention to rumours being spread by some mischievous elements."

The Indian embassy added: "The ambassador visited the Jalal-Abad State University on May 18 and the International Higher School of Medicine in Bishkek today and interacted with the Indian students there. Embassy officials visited the International Medical University and the Eurasian Medical University on May 21 and the Royal Metropolitan University and the Avicenna University today to continue this interaction with the students and address their concerns. Air connectivity between Bishkek and Delhi remains operational and flights to India can also be availed via Almaty, Dubai, Istanbul, Sharjah and Tashkent. The local transport to Manas International airport in Bishkek remains accessible to Indian students."

It also pointed out: "As the academic year is coming to a close, prior to travelling back to India including for summer vacations, all Indian students must contact their respective universities about the formalities required for the completion of their exams. In case any assistance is needed, the students are requested to contact the embassy of India in Bishkek. The embassy remains committed to ensuring the well-being of the Indian student community."

Delhi, Haryana to go to polls today

Continued From Page 1

The Election Commission has directed concerned chief electoral officers and state machinery to take adequate measures against intense heatwaves or rainfall wherever predicted. The poll body has urged voters to end "urban apathy" and come out to vote.

"The Commission has called upon voters to turn out in greater numbers at polling stations and vote with responsibility and pride. Voters of parliamentary constituencies in urban centres like Delhi, Gurgaon and Faridabad are specially reminded about their right and duty to vote and break the trend of urban apathy," the EC spokesperson said.

At the end of voting in the fifth phase of the Lok Sabha elections on May 20, the poll panel had lamented that constituencies in various cities such as Mumbai, Thane, Nashik and Lucknow have continued the trend of urban apathy as noticed in the 2019 polls.

Around 11.4-lakh polling officials have been deployed to handle about 11.13-crore voters across 1.14-lakh polling stations. Veteran leaders like former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, BJP's L.K. Advani had all voted in advance using a home voting facility last week ahead of polling in Delhi.

The EC said 20 special trains were deployed to ferry security personnel. In this phase, 184 observers have already reached their constituencies days before the polls. Additionally, special observers have been deployed in certain states.

A total of 2,222 flying squads, 2,295 static surveillance teams, 819 video surveillance teams and 569 video viewing teams are keeping surveillance round the clock to deal with any form of inducement of voters strictly and swiftly.

THE ASIAN AGE

25 MAY 2024

Self-ruled Palestine can bring peace to Mideast

On the roadmap to peace in a region marked by decades of conflicts is a full-fledged state of Palestine encompassing at least the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as part of a "two-state solution". That most of the world agrees on this being the best way forward is further emphasised in the three European nations — Ireland, Norway and Spain — becoming all set to recognise a Palestine state.

As many as 80 countries, including India, have had Palestinian embassies coexisting with those of Israel for some years now. It reflects how Israel is losing international support for its counter-strike against Hamas and the way in which it has conducted the Gaza war. European nations, too, are now moving on, convinced that the only way to achieve peace is a state of Palestine with the principle of self-rule to be established.

The "two-state solution" is not a novel proposal as it has been in the air since the early 1990s when it was the bedrock of the US-backed peace efforts under the 1993 Oslo Accords, signed by Palestine Liberation Organisation and Israel. Why the idea is finding renewed acceptance internationally is because it appears to be the only way to draw the lines afresh once the Gaza war comes to an end.

Israel, now busily engaged in scaling up military operations by the day in Rafah with the one tactical change of trying to inflict lesser civilian fatalities, remains the principal roadblock. Beyond the war, Israel has little idea of how Gaza is to be handled except that it will not give up its security role there easily now that it is an occupier once again after having left the Gaza Strip in 2005.

After waging war for seven months and scoring a few victories over Hamas but nowhere near wiping out the militant wing of the group, Israel sees only hard options now on top of its disproportionate response in reducing most of Gaza to rubble and putting millions of its people on the brink of starvation.

Not deterred, Hamas has regrouped in certain areas and is till attacking Israeli settlements. The idea of Israel maintaining security control while delegating civil administration to local Palestinians who are not affiliated with Hamas or the Palestinian Authority is not suited to convincing the world that the "two-state" principle can be addressed.

The United States, Israel's most powerful and staunchest ally, would have to take the lead in promoting the idea of a Palestine state, but while conferring Palestinian self-determination it should not pose an existential threat to Israel. The starting point for all negotiations can only be the end of the war, which is entirely in the hands of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his war cabinet.

There are myriad issues of highly contentious nature — boundaries that have shifted substantially since the Green Line of 1949, East Jerusalem, Golan Heights, Hamas-Palestinian Authority differences — that must be tackled in pursuit of an idealistic "two-state" principle. The war must stop first before any peace plan can become a new reference point for negotiations on a Palestine state without a role for the likes of Hamas in it.

RBI's booster shot to economy

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) transferred a whopping amount of ₹2.1 lakh crores to the Central government as a dividend payout, giving a booster shot to volatile stock markets. The current payout is 141 per cent higher than the ₹87,416 crores that the RBI had given the Central government last year and is ₹1.1 lakh crores more than the amount the Central government expected to receive from the RBI this year.

The RBI earns money from its operations in financial markets, when it intervenes to buy or sell foreign exchange. It also earns income from government securities it holds and as returns from its foreign currency assets, commission from state and Central governments for handling their borrowings, among other avenues. After providing for its statutory reserves and other contingencies, RBI transfers surplus money every year to the government in the form of dividend.

The current year's higher dividend is expected to allow the Central government to meet its fiscal deficit target of 5.1 per cent that was envisaged in the interim budget of 2024. It will also give an elbow room to the next finance minister when he or she presents the full-fledged budget in July. The higher dividend from the RBI will offset any dip in the government's expected revenue from disinvestment.

The news of the RBI bonanza set off celebrations on Dalal Street, boosting the Sensex and the Nifty to all-time highs. A lower fiscal deficit means lower government borrowing, which makes bank credit available for the corporate world and the general public. This translates into greater consumption levels, setting off a virtuous cycle in the economy.

As the higher payout was made after increasing its contingency risk buffer by 50 basis points (more than ₹30,000 crores) from six per cent to 6.5 per cent of its balance-sheet, it remains to be seen how the RBI's surplus income has gone up so much and if a dividend of this magnitude is a one-off or can be seen as a regular annual contribution.

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Subhani



Hype and reality in India: Let's focus on the present



Patralekha Chatterjee
Dev 360

Narendra Modi's India may have done away with Five-Year Plans. But a 1,000-year vision is a recurring theme. Last year, on Independence Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said: "We will take decisions one after the other, and the golden history of the country for the next 1,000 years is going to emerge from it. The events taking place in this period are going to impact the next 1,000 years... We are at the milestone between 1,000 years of slavery and 1,000 years of a grand future that is about to come. We are at this crossroads and hence we cannot stop, nor shall we live in a dilemma anymore."

Earlier in the speech, Mr Modi had talked about "a thousand years of subjugation" and India being "ensnared in slavery". As India's long drawn-out general election reaches the final stretch, talk of the 1,000-year plan has surfaced again. "What's happening now will take India towards a brighter future for the coming 1,000 years. In my mind, this is our time. This is Bharat's time, and we must not lose the opportunity," Mr Modi recently told a TV channel.

How does one interpret a 1,000-year blueprint for a country in these hugely unpredictable times when climate change, artificial intelligence, economic distress, simultaneous wars, uncertainties and interlocking catastrophic events are turning the best-laid plans upside down? Does one smile?

Or does one see it as part of a package — the persistent refrain about 1,000 years of foreign rule, interpreted by many political commentators as conscious referencing of India's history when it was under Muslim rule and framing it as invasion, subjugation, and slavery, juxtaposed with Modi's India, the start of "Amrit Kaal" and

Hindutva, with Mr Modi as its principal narrator. In hyper-polarised India, how you react to the idea of a 1,000-year framework — whether in the context of the past or the future — depends on your political orientation. But one thing is clear — constant talk about centuries gone by, and centuries ahead hugely distracts from what we need to be doing to cope with the extremely challenging present and the near-future.

Arguably, politicians routinely tap into a nation's desire to be great and powerful. In 2016, Donald Trump sledgehammered MAGA (Make America Great Again). Chinese President Xi Jinping envisions China to be a modernised, innovation-driven country by 2035 and a modern "strong power" by 2050. In the age of strongman politics, catchphrases pivoting around national pride and national rejuvenation are common.

No Indian has any quarrel with acknowledging progress or the desire for a bright future for India or with the idea of seizing opportunities that come our way. But ordinary Indians can't escape the pressing problems of today, and they have to prepare for tomorrow. They deserve a grounded assessment of their country and specifics of plans to improve their everyday lives in the days ahead.

In a country with a dominantly young population, the present tense must be the priority — education, skills, jobs, health, social cohesion, the environment. But in the phantasmagorical packaging of India, many critical gaps related to these critical issues get glossed over. Countries where ordinary people have a high quality of life have invested not only in physical infrastructure — ports, airports, bridges, etc., — but also human capital. Many parts of India still trail woefully when it comes to the latter.

Millions of young Indians entering the labour market every year continue to be underemployed or engaged in low-paid, precarious work. India remains a grossly unequal country.

India's economy is growing but millions of young Indians entering the labour market every year continue to be underemployed or engaged in low-paid, precarious work. Economists have drawn attention to the persistence of unemployment even among college graduates. India remains a grossly unequal country and the staggering inequality is a roadblock to the country realising its full potential.

Rich or relatively affluent Indians can access excellent education and healthcare. That is not the case for those without money. India's female voters are often referenced through the prism of welfare schemes, but what about jobs? Female work participation rate in India continues to be extremely low.

"Building a new Singapore is achievable if we apply ourselves," Mr Modi said recently. India has around 1,300 islands, including many uninhabited ones. Some are nearly the size of Singapore. But building an economic success story like Singapore is not merely a construction project. The multi-racial, multi-religious city-state, which has one of the most diverse populations in Asia, has assiduously worked at social cohesion, social trust. None of this happened purely by accident. As Keshia Naurana Badalge, a writer from Singapore, pointed out in an essay: "It is, in part, the product of a strong central government that dictates certain aspects of everyday life — and sees racial harmony between its people as too important to be left to chance." A unique feature of Singaporean housing, she points out, is its remarkable racial diversity, and that is due to government intervention and as part of Singapore's Ethnic Integration Policy

and apologised, the Labour Party said it was deeply offensive and withdrew the whip. She hasn't, having devoted her entire adult life to the party, been, to date, reinstated. (As far as I know the Redheads Against Nasty Descriptivity (RANDY) haven't complained about Diane's anti-hairshade-ism).

Both Diane in her letter and the Labour Party in its response seem to subscribe to a preoccupation of our times: an assessment of degrees of victimisation. To my mind, it's a futile preoccupation. Yes, one recognises the fact that the Jews were enslaved by Babylon until they were freed by the Persian-Zoroastrian Emperor Cyrus and that Moses led them out of slavery in Egypt; that Africans were enslaved in the Atlantic trade in the "New World" is one of the tragic foundations of the modern world; that colonialism treated people badly; that discrimination against "untouchable" castes was imposed on Hindu populations for thousands of years; that homophobia is still rife in under-civilised human states and minds; that Travellers are characterised in negative ways; that certain nationalities or religions are the constant butt of jokes; that everywhere there is prevalent sexism, sizeism, ageism, class — snobbery... (We're cutting it here. — Ed. Too much other examples, yaar... — fd.)

But is there any measure, any scale, of historical prejudice, ill-treatment, racism etc?

Diane is obviously right when she says that being mocked for having Donald Trump hair is not as hurtful as being chained to a slave ship, whipped and starved. I could add that the "insult, injury and unsafe feeling" caused by delicate sensibilities on a campus through some faculty inviting a lecturer who doesn't believe that transwomen are really women, are in any sense comparable to that lecturer losing her job as a consequence?

The latest case of comparative suffering through prejudice is that of "asexual people". They call themselves "Aces" and in America, and now in the UK, organised groups of people who, for one reason or another, don't practise sex, and want to be included in the LGBTQ+ categories. Some activists already in these initialised groups vehemently deny the Aces a space in this categorisation. They don't want the collective expanded into LGBTQ+A! They don't believe that the "Aces" face the same degree of prejudice as Ls or Gs or indeed Bs Ts Qs or +s.

Are they right in denying the "Aces" membership? Is there really some measure of degrees of prejudice, discrimination or hurt that has determined this exclusion?

I don't think there can be. And yet, and yet, I can see that this preoccupation in our times of measuring and exposing "isms" is a healthy civilisational phenomenon, even though ranking prejudices is rank stupidity.

Reinstate Diane Now!

(EIP) introduced to counter the emergence of ethnic enclaves.

In his recent TV interview, Mr Modi also talked about global standards. Every Cabinet note related to a bill now comes with a global standards report so that the legislation can be aligned to the best practices worldwide, he said.

That is good news. But ordinary Indians must know how a law is aligned to global best practices as well as how it is implemented on the ground. Is India following global standards in every sphere? What about recent reports about Indian food products failing basic safety standards? If India's food regulator was doing its job meticulously, would two popular Indian spice brands be flagged as unsafe in Hong Kong and Singapore? The European Union has also raised concerns about contamination in Indian chili peppers.

In addition to everything else, there is climate change. Climate change is no longer future shock. It is happening now.

As I write, many parts of India are facing excruciating heat stress. "Some countries, like India, have comprehensive heat action plans in place. Yet, to protect some of the most vulnerable people, these must be expanded with mandatory regulations. Workplace interventions for all workers to address heat stress, such as scheduled rest breaks, fixed work hours, and rest-shade-rehydrator programmes (RSH), are necessary but have yet to become part of worker protection guidelines in the affected regions," says a recent study by the World Weather Attribution, an international group of scientists that studies the effects of climate change on extreme weather events.

These are just a few issues where ordinary Indians deserve an honest response and a grounded conversation which differentiates between hyperbole and genuine seeds of hope, between reality and reality.

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

LETTERS
FULL DISCLOSURE

Justice Chittaranjan Das, the Calcutta high court's third seniormost judge, has declared his association with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in his farewell speech on the last day of his tenure. This has both surprised and disappointed the legal fraternity. In his speech, Justice Das said that, having previously been an active member of this group, he will gladly accept any suitable duties assigned to him post retirement. Now, granted that the RSS is not a banned organisation and every citizen has the right to subscribe to an ideology, what was the need for making this statement in front of the complete bench of the high court, rather than at a private function before friends and family?

Abhijit Roy
Jamshedpur

NEED TAX RELIEF

THE SALARIED middle class is often left holding the wrong end of the stick when it comes governments doing something for them. The RBI dividend of ₹2.1 lakh crores to the government can be used to reduce income tax for this year. An exemption limit of ₹10 lakhs would put some money in the hands of the middle class and boost consumption. All this infrastructure spending is alright, but if people do not have money to pay for using them, they will serve no purpose. All other groups have lobbies except the salaried employees.

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai

TECH TO SAVE REEFS

FLOATING solar-powered artificial islands could help reduce mass bleaching of coral reefs while also creating new colonies. The biorock technique has successfully restored hundreds of coral reefs around the world. But it is difficult to run electricity lines out into the deeper sea. Now, researchers have created a system of three interconnected floating islands, each with a specific duty. One island would have a solar array to power coral restoration, the second will serve as a research station for teams monitoring the reef, and the third will be a botanical garden with a roof to collect rainwater. Costing \$2 million, they will have a lifespan of 50-100 years.

Arka Goswami
Asansol, West Bengal

Farrukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



"The sea's dark green yet its foam is white! Such are the tricks of refracted light" A dead fish on the sand — the gulls take it apart. Nailed to a cross in a gallery — people think it's art. The worst Narcissistic conceit of humankind? That God has an inventive, creative mind!"

— From Who Was Allowed In? by Bachchoo

The general election in Britain has been called for July 4 by Prime Minister Hedgie Soongone. He probably made the announcement with fingers crossed and puja lamps lit after inflation in the UK fell to 2.5 per cent, calculating that this may turn back the tide of unpopularity sweeping his government.

It won't. The Labour Party is still 20 per cent ahead in the opinion polls, though the media are looking for ways in which it could lose support. One of these is the fact that very many of Labour's potential supporters are not just disappointed but outraged at the Labour Party leadership's pro-Israeli stance and deliberate fence-sitting on calling for a ceasefire and an end to the genocide in Gaza. Several Muslim Labour councillors have quit the party and have even stood against the party in the local elections and won.

On the same issue, friends of mine have said they won't vote for Labour.

Will I? However critical I am of Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer and his shadow cabinet's stances, I can see no feasible alternative to rid this country of the likes of Hedgie, Cruella Braverman, Priti Patel and all the rest. It's even possible that Labour in power will be pressured by its own membership to go further than calling, as it has now been pushed to do, for an immediate ceasefire and humanitarian relief in Gaza. Of course, with their pro-capital stance, they won't cut arms sales to Israel.

One issue that rankles with me and made me think of joining the abstainers is the continued suspension from the party of MP Diane Abbot. Who is she? The first black woman MP to enter Parliament. She represents Hackney, a London constituency. In April she wrote a letter to The Observer in response to a debate in the papers about racism.

Her letter said: "It is true that many types of white people with points of difference, such as redheads, can experience this prejudice. But they are not all their lives subject to racism. In pre-civil rights America, Irish people, Jewish people and Travellers were not required to sit at the back of the bus. In apartheid South Africa, these groups were allowed to vote. And at the height of slavery, there were no white-seeming people manacled on the slave ships."

The Jewish Board of Deputies labelled the letter anti-Semitic and even though Diane protested that it wasn't the draft that she intended to have printed

and apologised, the Labour Party said it was deeply offensive and withdrew the whip.

She hasn't, having devoted her entire adult life to the party, been, to date, reinstated. (As far as I know the Redheads Against Nasty Descriptivity (RANDY) haven't complained about Diane's anti-hairshade-ism).

Both Diane in her letter and the Labour Party in its response seem to subscribe to a preoccupation of our times: an assessment of degrees of victimisation.

To my mind, it's a futile preoccupation. Yes, one recognises the fact that the Jews were enslaved by Babylon until they were freed by the Persian-Zoroastrian Emperor Cyrus and that Moses led them out of slavery in Egypt; that Africans were enslaved in the Atlantic trade in the "New World" is one of the tragic foundations of the modern world; that colonialism treated people badly; that discrimination against "untouchable" castes was imposed on Hindu populations for thousands of years; that homophobia is still rife in under-civilised human states and minds; that Travellers are characterised in negative ways; that certain nationalities or religions are the constant butt of jokes; that everywhere there is prevalent sexism, sizeism, ageism, class — snobbery... (We're cutting it here. — Ed. Too much other examples, yaar... — fd.)

But is there any measure, any scale, of historical prejudice, ill-treatment, racism etc?

Will Labour dump Sunak on July 4? Ranking 'degrees' of prejudice futile



SHORT TAKES

JAPANESE DOG OF 'DOGE' MEME FAME DIES: OWNER

Tokyo, May 24: The Japanese shiba inu dog whose photo inspired a generation of odd-ball online jokes and the \$23-billion Dogecoin cryptocurrency beloved by Elon Musk died on Friday, her owner said. "She quietly passed away as if asleep while I caressed her," Atsuko Sato wrote on her blog, thanking the fans of her dog called Kabosu — the face of the "Doge" meme.

EIGHT KILLED IN CENTRAL CHINA STABBING

Beijing, May 24: A man killed eight people and wounded one more with a knife in central China, state media reported Friday, citing local authorities. The stabbing took place on Thursday morning in the city of Xiaogan in Hubei province, state broadcaster said. The 53-year-old attacker surnamed Lu had previously been treated for mental illness, it added. He is being held by police, who are investigating the attack. Mass violent crime is relatively rare in China, which strictly prohibits citizens from owning firearms, but there has been a spate of stabbings in recent years.

ARMENIA RETURNS 4 BORDER VILLAGES TO AZERBAIJAN

Yerevan, May 24: Armenia has returned to Azerbaijan four border villages it seized decades ago, the countries confirmed on Friday — a key step towards normalising ties between the historic rivals. The move, which has sparked protracted protests in Armenia, represents an important move towards reaching a comprehensive peace agreement after years of fruitless talks mediated by Russia and Western countries. The Caucasus countries, both former Soviet republics, fought two wars in the 1990s and in 2020 for control of the breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh.

IRAN DENIES FOUL PLAY IN RAISI COPTER CRASH

Tehran, May 24: Iran's army had so far found no evidence of criminal activity in a helicopter crash that killed the country's president Ebrahim Raisi and seven others, state media reported. The 63-year-old died on Sunday after his helicopter went down in the country's mountainous northwest. "No bullet holes or similar impacts were observed on the helicopter wreckage," said a preliminary report by the general staff of the armed forces published by the official IRNA news agency late Thursday. "The helicopter caught fire after hitting an elevated area," it said, adding that "no suspicious content was observed."

N. KOREA MAY BE READY FOR SPY SATELLITE LAUNCH

Seoul, May 24: South Korea's military said Friday it had detected signs that North Korea was preparing to launch another military spy satellite, just days before Seoul, Beijing and Tokyo's top leaders are due to meet for their first summit in nearly five years. Nuclear-armed North Korea is barred by multiple UN resolutions from tests using ballistic technology, and analysts say there is significant technological overlap between space launch capabilities and the development of ballistic missiles.

'CYBERAPOSTLE' TEEN TO BE FIRST MILLENNIAL SAINT

Vatican, May 24: A London-born Italian teenager who spent his short life spreading the faith online will become the Catholic Church's first millennial saint, after the Vatican attributed to him a second miracle. Carlo Acutis, who died of leukaemia in 2006 aged 15, was beatified four years ago after the Vatican ruled he had miraculously saved another boy's life. He will now become a saint after Pope Francis on Thursday approved another miraculous act, an intercession on behalf of a young woman in Florence who suffered severe head trauma in July 2022.

Heavy fighting in Gaza, Israeli tanks advance

Medics suspect 5 dead, many feared trapped under rubble

Cairo, May 24: Israeli forces stepped up military strikes on Gaza on Friday, residents and medics said, with heavy fighting reported in Jabalia in the north and tanks pushing further into Rafah in the south.

Medics said at least five Palestinians were killed when houses were hit in Jabalia and more were believed to be trapped under rubble, but that the area could not be reached due to the intensity of the bombardment.

In the southern city of Rafah bordering Egypt, where an escalating Israeli assault has sent hundreds of thousands of people fleeing from what was one of the few remaining places of refuge, residents reported explosions and smoke rising in the distance as tanks advanced further into the eastern district of Jneina.

Israel launched its assault on Gaza following a Hamas-led attack on southern Israeli communities on October 7 that killed 1,200 people and saw more than 250 hostages seized, according to Israeli tallies. Since then, Israel's incursion has killed more than 35,000 people, according to Gaza health authorities.

Simultaneous Israeli assaults on the northern and southern edges of Gaza this month have caused a new exodus of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fleeing their homes, and have cut off the main access routes for aid, raising the risk of famine.

Israel had said its forces cleared Jabalia, the largest of Gaza's eight historic refugee camps, months earlier in the war. But it returned there this month saying it needed to prevent Islamist militants regrouping, and the area has seen intense fighting in recent weeks. — Reuters



Displaced Palestinians fetch water in a devastated neighbourhood in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on Friday, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas. — AFP

<p>CIA CHIEF BURNS TO VISIT PARIS US intelligence chief Bill Burns is expected to hold talks in Paris with representatives of Israel in a bid to re-launch talks aimed at finding a truce in Gaza, a Western source close to the issue said Friday.</p>	<p>PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY AT RISK OF FISCAL COLLAPSE The Palestinian Authority is facing the possibility of financial collapse, the World Bank said in a report, as revenue streams run dry and economic activity drops precipitously against the backdrop of the Gaza war.</p>	<p>ISRAEL RECOVERS 3 BODIES OF HOSTAGES Israeli military said it had retrieved the bodies of three hostages in an overnight operation in the northern Gaza Strip's Jabalia. Based on verified intelligence, the hostages were murdered during the Oct. 7 massacre, it said.</p>
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EU discusses possible role in monitoring Gaza border

Brussels, Belgium, May 24: The European Union is studying whether it could play a role monitoring the Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt after Israel's war with Hamas ends, officials said Friday.

The 27-nation bloc set up a mission in 2005 to help monitor the crossing but that was suspended two years later after militant Islamists Hamas took control of Gaza. "We received demarches from different parties including Israel whether we could study the possibility to reopen it (the EU mission)," a high-ranking EU official said.

The official said EU foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell would likely get a green light from European ministers meeting in Brussels on Monday to draw up options for a potential redeployment of an EU mission.

"Obviously this would not be in the current circumstances, not in war circumstances. We are talking about the future," the official said. A European diplomat cautioned that the EU —

which has struggled to come to a unified position on the Gaza war — was still at the "very beginning of the possible process" towards launching the mission.

The Rafah border crossing is currently closed by Israel as it carries out an assault on the Gaza city. Israel in early May launched an assault on Rafah, the last Gaza city to be entered by its ground troops, defying global opposition and sending more than 800,000 people fleeing, according to UN figures. — AFP

Chinese military exercises practise Taiwan's 'capture'

Beijing, May 24: China warned on Friday of war over Taiwan and said it would ramp up countermeasures until "complete reunification" was achieved, as Chinese forces conducted military drills around the self-ruled island.

Warships and fighter jets encircled Taiwan on the second day of exercises that Beijing said were a test of its ability to seize the island, days after its new president was sworn in.

China's military kicked off the two-day war games on Thursday morning, surrounding democratic Taiwan with naval vessels and military aircraft as it vowed the blood of "independence forces" on the island would flow. The exercises were launched three days after Lai Ching-te took office and made an inauguration speech that China denounced as a "confession of independence". The drills are part of an escalating campaign of intimidation by China. — AFP



Taiwanese armoured vehicle rolls down a street in Kinmen on Friday. — AFP

TAIWAN TRACKS CHINESE WARPLANES, NAVY VESSELS ON DAY 2 CHINA DRILLS

Taipei, May 24: Taiwan tracked dozens of Chinese warplanes and navy vessels off its coast Friday on the second day of a large exercise China's Peoples Liberation Army held in response to the inauguration of the islands new leadership.

A new video on Friday showed animated Chinese forces approaching from all sides and Taiwan being enclosed within a circular target area. Despite that, there was little sign

of concern among Taiwan's 23 million people, who have under threat of Chinese invasion since the sides divided during a bitter and bloody civil war in 1949.

The defense ministry said it tracked 49 warplanes and 19 navy vessels, as well as Chinese coast guard vessels, and that 35 of the planes flew across the median of the Taiwan Strait, the de facto boundary between the sides. — AP

Moscow tried to link Ukraine, West for attack Russia finds I.S. hand in concert hall attack

Moscow, May 24: Russia on Friday for the first time said that the Islamic State group coordinated the March concert hall assault in Moscow, the country's deadliest terror attack in two decades.

IS had claimed responsibility on multiple occasions for the March 22 attack which killed over 140 people, but Moscow had repeatedly tried to link Ukraine and the West to the attack.

FSB chief Alexander Bortnikov was quoted as saying by the RIA Novosti news agency that "preparations, the financing, the attack and the retreat of the terrorists were coordinated via the internet by members of Khorasan Province (IS-K)," an IS branch active in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Bortnikov did not discard the Ukrainian angle in his statements on Friday, saying that "upon completing the attack, the terrorists received clear instructions to move toward the Ukrainian border, where from the other side a 'window' had been prepared for them."

"The investigation continues, but it can already be said with certainty that Ukrainian military intelligence is directly implicated in the attack", he said. Ukraine had repeatedly denied involvement.

Gunmen in camouflage stormed the Crocus City Hall venue on the outskirts of Moscow before setting the building on fire. More than a dozen suspects have been arrested.



Destroyed resort compound is seen from above after a Russian rocket attack near Kharkiv in Ukraine. — AP

RUSSIA 'BOGGED DOWN' IN BID FOR BORDER: UKRAINE

Kyiv, May 24: Russian forces have become "bogged down" trying to capture the Ukrainian border town of Vovchansk but have intensified their offensive elsewhere on the eastern front, Ukraine's top general said on Friday. Kyiv has been battling a fresh Russian land assault on its northeastern Kharkiv region since May 10, when thousands of Moscow's troops stormed the border, making their biggest territorial advances in 18 months. — AFP

EU SLAMS RUSSIA OVER BUOYS ON ESTONIA BORDER

Brussels, May 24: The European Union on Friday denounced Russia's removal of buoys marking the border with Estonia on the Narva River.

"This border incident is part of a broader pattern of provocative behaviour and hybrid actions by Russia, including on its maritime and land borders in the Baltic Sea region. Such actions are unacceptable," European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said in a statement. — AFP

The United States has said it had publicly and privately warned Russia in early March that extremists were planning an attack on a concert hall in Moscow. — AFP

TRUMP COURTS BIDEN'S BLACK, HISPANIC TIES

New York, May 24: Donald Trump rolled the dice on a campaign stop in deepest Democratic New York on Thursday seeking to woo Black and Latino voters whose support for Joe Biden has shown signs of faltering.

The event, in the Bronx where the Republican was trounced in 2020, follows a trend of Trump sorties into traditionally liberal states, most recently in New Jersey and Minnesota.

But his speech in the South Bronx was more about signaling that he can draw large crowds among the Hispanic and African-American coalition seen as crucial to Biden's hopes of retaining the White House.

Though the crowd was predominantly white, it was markedly more diverse than at the recent event in New Jersey.

"You look at these people... they are physically fit, they're 19 to 25, almost everyone is a male, and they look like fighting age — I think they're building an army," he said. — AFP



Donald Trump

HURRICANE SEASON

THE WORLD METEOROLOGICAL ORGANISATION (WMO) said it expected a highly active hurricane season and stressed that early warnings were needed to save lives.

FORECAST BY NOAA*

- A RANGE OF 17 TO 25 named storms.
- AVERAGE 14: 8-13 to become hurricanes.
- *U.S. National Oceanic and Atmosphere Administration.

WMO ANTICIPATES...

- HIGH OCEAN heat content and the anticipated development of La Nina event are expected to fuel a very, very, very active hurricane season this year.
- IT ONLY TAKES one landfalling hurricane to set back years and years of socio-economic development.

EARLY WARNINGS

- REALLY CUT the death toll dramatically.
- BETWEEN 1970 and 2021, tropical cyclones — which include hurricanes — were the leading cause of reported human and economic losses worldwide.



Landslide hits PNG, over 100 feared dead

Port Moresby, May 24: A massive landslide struck remote villages in Papua New Guinea's highlands Friday, with many homes buried and scores of residents feared dead.

The disaster hit an isolated part of Enga province at around 3:00 am local time, according to government officials, when many villagers were at home asleep.

Provincial Governor Peter Ipatas said that "there has been a big landslide causing loss of life and property".

He later said "six villages" had been affected and described it as an "unprecedented natural disaster".

Three bodies have so far been recovered, but there are fears that hundreds more may be entombed. The true toll may take days or weeks to become clear.

Steven Kandai, a community leader at the scene, told AFP that many residents had no time to flee. "All of a sudden there was a big landslide. The mountain just collapsed all of a sudden while people were still sleeping," he said, adding their homes were "completely buried".

6 KILLED AS HEAVY RAINS BATTER LANKA

Colombo, May 24: Six people were killed in rain-related incidents in Sri Lanka as heavy monsoon showers battered the island nation on Friday.

The torrential rains also damaged some 1,346 homes and hampered train services in the country, officials said.

Six people died in four districts after trees fell on them due to high wind and heavy showers, while over 34,000 people were marooned, the Disaster Management Centre (DMC) said.

Eighteen of the 25 administrative districts have been affected by bad weather with heavy rains and gusty winds, it said. — PTI

Others "heard a huge sound from rocks falling down and then escaped. But some went to escape, on their way they were killed by falling trees, rolling rocks", he said. — AFP

HEALING | TREATY Patent applicants must disclose origin of genetic resources

UN deal on origin of traditional pills

Geneva, May 24: U.N. member countries on Friday concluded a new treaty to ensure that genetic resources used in inventions, like new medicines derived from exotic plants in the Andes mountains, are properly traced.

It marks the first time that 193 member states of the UN's World Intellectual Property Organisation have agreed that patent applicants must disclose the origin of genetic resources used and traditional knowledge linked to them often from indigenous cultures that have long been exploited by colonists, traders and others.

The treaty will, for example, require companies in industries like fashion,



WIPO director general Daren Tang (R) speaks with a delegate prior to the final day of a "Diplomatic Conference on Genetic Resources and Associated Traditional Knowledge" in Geneva. — AFP

luxury goods and pharmaceuticals to specify the origin of the plant-based chemicals in medicines or skin creams that they use for their innovative products. About 30 countries already have similar rules on their national books. The treaty does not

address the thornier issue of compensation to Indigenous communities for their historic expertise about things like tropical plants.

But the accord is seen as an important first international step. — AP

Pandemic deal talks come to the crunch

Geneva, May 24: Countries trying to thrash out a global agreement on handling future pandemics are hoping to seal the deal Friday after weeks of creeping progress in exhausting talks.

Having ploughed past several previous deadlines, the hard stop of next week's annual gathering of the World Health Organisation's 194 member states is now in clear sight.

Scarred by the devastation caused by Covid-19 — which killed millions, shredded economies and crippled health systems — WHO member countries have spent two years trying to hammer out binding commitments on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response.

"Discussions are ongoing," WHO spokesman Christian Lindmeier told a media briefing on Friday. — AFP

quick BITES

INDICATORS	%
Sensex	75,410.39 -0.01
Nifty 50	22,957.10 -0.05
S&P 500*	5,292.88 0.46
Dollar (₹)	83.09 0.24
Pound Sterling (₹)	105.61 0.33
Euro (₹)	89.98 0.36
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	71,554.23 0.03
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	81.83 81.83
IN 10-Yr bond yield	7.000 0.004
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.479 4.479

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Govt procures 264 LMT wheat in current season

The government on Friday has revealed that wheat procurement for the 2024-25 marketing year is in full swing and it has crossed last year's total procurement figure. The states that have contributed the highest wheat procurement are Punjab, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. "A total of 262.48 lakh metric tonnes (LMT) wheat was procured in central pool," the government said.



Hindalco Q4 net rises 31.6% to ₹3,174 crore

Aditya Birla Group's metal flagship Hindalco Industries on Friday reported a 31.6 per cent rise in consolidated net profit at ₹3,174 crore for the quarter ended March 31, 2024, on the back of stronger margins and volumes across aluminium and copper business segments. The company had posted a net profit of ₹2,411 crore in the January-March period of FY23, Hindalco Industries said in a filing to BSE.

Eco Hotels plans new property in Rajasthan

Eco Hotels and Resorts on Friday said it has signed a deal to open a 63-key mid-segment hotel under The Eco Satva brand in Kota, Rajasthan, which it claims is a net carbon-zero hotel. The hospitality company is in advanced discussions to sign another 250 rooms by the end of this month, with plans to reach over 500 rooms by the end of June 2024, Eco Hotels and Resorts said in a statement.

Computacenter opens new office in Bengaluru

British IT company Computacenter on Friday opened its India headquarters and service centre in Bengaluru. "India is a strategic location for us, helping us to deliver great services to our customers across the world. We will continue to expand our presence here over the coming years - leveraging India's diverse and skilled talent pool to drive innovation," chief executive officer Mike Norris said.

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Made in India Range Rovers to cost 22% less

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, MAY 24

In a significant development, India becomes the first country outside of the UK to locally manufacture Jaguar Land Rover's flagship Range Rover and Range Rover Sport SUVs at its factory in Pune, thereby bringing down their prices significantly.

Till now, the iconic Range Rover models were only being manufactured in Tata Motors-owned JLR's UK plant and then exported world over.

On Friday the British luxury car maker priced the Range Rover 3.0-litre diesel HSE LWB at ₹2.36 crore (down by ₹44 lakh) while the Range Rover Sport 3.0-litre diesel Dynamic SE at ₹1.40 crore (down by ₹29 lakh) at pan India showroom.

Tata Group chairman N Chandrababu Naidu said the manufacturing of Range Rover in India underlines the confidence JLR has in India. "The Range Rover will be manufactured right here in India is just a super feeling... it's a very special moment," he told reporters.

Rajan Amba, managing director at JLR India, said it was a big step to making Range Rover and Range Rover Sports cars accessible to a wider set of buyers across India.

According to experts, JLR's move is indicative of the kind of market India is shaping into when it comes to premium offerings.

Amba said the local assembling will allow the company to take the ben-



● WITH THE addition of the two Range Rover models, Jaguar Land Rover India will now be rolling out six models from the Pune factory that it shares with Tata Motors.

efit of the duty structure and to bring the price down of the two models by about 18 to 22 per cent.

On expansion plans, Amba said the company aimed for doubling its business over the next three years. "We will bring the latest innovative products in the luxury market, and leverage the Tata Group ecosystem," he said.

"The products remain very premium but more in a price range where we can capture that aspiration and desire to be affiliated to the brand," Amba pointed out.

With the addition of the two Range Rover models, JLR India will now be rolling out six models from the Pune factory that it shares with Tata Motors.

Range Rover MD Geraldine Ingham said retail sales in India have surged and the local manufacturing will address this growing demand.

iQOO AIMS HIGH GROWTH IN TS, AP WITH NEW MODEL Z9X

FC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 24

With an aim to solidify its growth in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh states, smartphone brand iQOO launched iQOO Z9x in Hyderabad on Thursday.

Hyderabad is the number one city in India for iQOO sales, seeing a 28 per cent YoY growth. Additionally, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have seen the highest growth of about 35 per cent, said Nipun Marya, chief executive officer of iQOO.

"Now, if you compare this to the industry growth of nearly 5 per cent you can see that in Hyderabad we have grown at six times the speed and in AP and TS at nearly seven times," he said.

"We are seeing growth from Guntur, Rajahmundry, Vijayawada and other cities," he said.

iQOO Z9x will be available in 4GB, 6GB, 8GB variants priced from ₹12,999 to ₹15,999 based on the storage capacity. It comes in two colours with a 6000mAh battery.

The new phone will be manufactured at vivo's Greater Noida facility. Customers can visit any of the 670+ company-owned service centres out of which 18 service centers are in Andhra Pradesh and 28 are in Telangana, he said.



RBI dividend positive for India's fiscal metrics

Its use could signal the new government's priorities

New Delhi, May 24: Global rating agencies on Friday said windfall of ₹2.1 lakh crore dividend from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is positive for the country's fiscal metrics and its usage will provide a signal around the new government's fiscal priorities.

The board of India's central bank earlier this week decided to pay ₹2.1 lakh crore dividend to the government from the profits earned in 2023-24. This is more than double of ₹1.02 lakh crore that was budgeted by the government.

Fitch Ratings Asia-Pacific Sovereigns director Jeremy Zook said sustained deficit reduction, particularly if underpinned by durable revenue-raising reforms, would be positive for India's rating fundamentals over the medium-term.

"The use of the dividend, whether it is saved



● THE IMPACT of much higher-than-expected transfers from the RBI will ultimately be determined by what the incoming government decides to do with these additional resources.

or used for additional spending, could provide a signal around the government's fiscal priorities," Zook said.

Another rating agency Moody's Ratings said the fiscal impact of much higher-than-expected dividend transfer by the RBI will be determined by new government decides to do with these additional resources.

Moody's Ratings senior vice president Christian de Guzman said on one hand, the government could observe expenditure restraint and facilitate

further progress towards meeting its deficit target. This would lower the borrowing requirements that could in turn free up liquidity in the market for other purposes.

He said the government could also deploy these extra funds towards new policies and initiatives.

"The impact of much higher-than-expected transfers from the RBI will ultimately be determined by what the incoming government decides to do with these additional resources," Guzman said.

The general elections

are currently underway and a new government would be formed sometime next month. A full budget for 2024-25 fiscal would be tabled in July.

The larger-than-expected RBI dividend to the government is likely positive for fiscal metrics, helping to ensure that the fiscal deficit target of 5.1 per cent of GDP will be met and could be utilised to lower the deficit beyond current target, Zook said.

Another global rating agency S&P Global Ratings on Thursday said the additional dividends from the RBI are around 0.35 per cent of GDP and India can get a 'rating support' over time, if it utilises the windfall dividend to reduce fiscal deficit.

All three global rating agencies - Fitch, S&P and Moody's - have the lowest investment grade rating on India with a stable outlook. — PTI

IT job offers rise in Hyd, B'luru

Mumbai, May 24: Job postings in the IT sector have increased by 41.5 per cent in Hyderabad and 24 per cent in Bengaluru, highlighting the growing prominence of these cities as top destinations for IT professionals, a report said on Friday.

Overall job opportunities in the IT sector declined by 3.6 per cent nationwide, according to data from Indeed.

There has also been a significant growth in job clicks, with a 161 per cent rise in job seeker interest in Hyderabad and an 80 per cent increase in Bengaluru, the report added.

The decrease in IT job opportunities nationally indicating that tech companies are being cautious in hiring due to the uncertain global economic climate, said the report.

The report is based on data related to job postings and job clicks on

● SOFTWARE AND IT positions seem to be highly sought after, not just by those currently working in the field but also by individuals looking for new career opportunities.

Indeed's platform in April compared to that of the same month in 2023.

There is rise in five job postings are for skills in analysis, agile, APIs, jav-

ascript and SQL, it said.

"Software and IT positions seem to be highly sought after, not just by those currently working in the field but also by individuals looking for new career opportunities. Despite the layoffs, the appeal of IT jobs has risen. This strong interest in IT could also be due to the extensive skill specialisation, training," Indeed India Head of Sales Sashi Kumar added. — PTI

Adani back at pre-Hindenburg level

New Delhi, May 24: Shares of Adani Enterprises have bounced back to pre-Hindenburg Research report levels and have hit a one-year peak in intraday trade on Friday.

Hindenburg Research in a damning Jan. 24, 2023 report accused the Adani Group of "brazen stock manipulation" and accounting fraud, which led to a stock market rout that erased about \$150 billion in the group firms' market

value at their lowest point. It vehemently denied all allegations.

Shares of Adani Enterprises climbed 1.91 per cent to hit the 52-week high of ₹3,456.25 at the BSE on Friday. It, however, ended flat at ₹3,384.65.

Shares of Adani Enterprises rallied for the fifth day in a row till Thursday, rising 11.51 per cent.

Adani Enterprises stock price was ₹3,434.50 on Jan. 23, 2023, a day before the

● SHARES OF Adani Enterprises climbed 1.91 per cent to hit the 52-week high of ₹3,456.25 at the BSE on Friday. It, however, ended flat at ₹3,384.65.

report. From that level, the stock price went southward and fell to ₹1,194.2 on Feb. 27, 2023.

The company's stock price has now zoomed over 189 per cent from last

year's February 27 level.

The combined market valuation of all the 10 listed group firms stood at ₹17.23 lakh crore on Thursday. The company's stock price has now zoomed over 189 per cent from last year's February 27 level.

Adani Group's market capitalisation on Wednesday regained \$200 billion (₹16.9 lakh crore) after its listed firms gained ₹11,300 crore. — PTI

Doordarshan gets two AI anchors for Kisan

New Delhi, May 24: Indian government channel, Doordarshan is all set to unveil two artificial intelligence (AI) news anchors for its farmer-focused channel DD Kisan on May 26.

Named AI Krish and AI Bhoomi, the virtual anchors will front a relaunch of the channel after nine years on air, showcasing a new look and updated content aimed at the country's agricultural community, according to the agriculture ministry.

The AI anchors, capable of reading news 24x7 without breaks, will provide real-time updates on

agricultural research, mandi prices, weather alerts and government schemes to the farming community across the country.

A key highlight is their ability to communicate the content in 50 different Indian and foreign languages. "From Kashmir to Kanyakumari, and Gujarat to Arunachal, these AI anchors will disseminate vital agriculture-related information in regional languages," the ministry statement said.

The use of AI presenters is an innovative move for a government broadcast network. — PTI

Flipkart in Google's cart for small stake

New Delhi, May 24: Google has proposed an investment in e-commerce major Flipkart to buy a minority stake during the company's fresh funding round, the Walmart group firm said on Friday.

"As part of the latest funding round led by Walmart, Flipkart today announced that it will be adding Google as a minor-

ity investor, subject to receipt of regulatory and other customary approvals by both parties," Flipkart said in a statement.

"Google's proposed investment and its cloud collaboration will help Flipkart expand its business and advance the modernization of its digital infrastructure to serve customers," it said. — PTI

Markets retreat after new peaks

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, MAY 24

Riding the previous sessions bullish momentum NSE's benchmark index Nifty-50 crossed 23,000 mark in the early morning trade and later made a new all time high of 23,026.40 intra-day and finally closed flat at 22,957.10 down by 10.55 points or 0.05 per cent.

Negative global cues weighed on domestic market sentiments with overnight US market closing in red on fresh US job data and hawkish US Fed minutes souring early rate cut hopes for the time being.

The 50 stock Nifty index took over four months to travel the last 1,000 points from the 22,000 mark it hit for the first time on Jan.



15, 2024 to 23,000 milestone for the first time.

"Nifty remained sideways during the day after crossing 23,000. Sentiment might remain subdued in next few days, with the index ranging between 22,950 and 23,050," said Rupak De, technical analyst, LKP Securities.

The Sensex also made a new high of 75,636 intraday. However, both the benchmark indices closed in the red on profit taking

as the Sensex closed at 75,410.39 down by 7.65 points or 0.01 per cent.

"The indexes closed near flat after a week of volatile trading, trading cautiously ahead of the last leg of the federal elections and the results thereafter," said Joseph Thomas, head-Research, Emkay Wealth Management.

The domestic institutions were net buyers of equities worth ₹2320.32 cr while foreign portfolio investors booked profit worth ₹944.83 cr net selling.

"The domestic market is reaching new highs, with large caps playing second fiddle to the broader market rally, indicating sustained momentum in the short term," said Vinod Nair, head-Research, Geojit Financial Services.

FUTURE FILMS | Alphabet, Meta developing tech to create realistic scenes from text prompts

Tech giants offer AI video to Hollywood

California, May 24: Alphabet and Meta Platforms have held discussions with major Hollywood studios about licensing content for use in the tech giants' artificial intelligence (AI) video generation software, according to people familiar with the matter.

Both companies are developing technology that can create realistic scenes from a text prompt, and have offered tens of millions of dollars to partner with studios in some capacity. Rival OpenAI, backed by Microsoft, is having similar conversa-

tions. Hollywood studios are keen to discuss ways to use AI to reduce costs while also protecting themselves from having their work stolen. They are wary of giving films and TV shows to tech companies without control over how that content is used. Just this week, the actress Scarlett Johansson demanded OpenAI stop using a voice that sounded like her to power its chatbot after she refused to work with the company.

Warner Bros. Discovery Inc. has expressed a willingness to licence some of



● A NEW crop of tools, including OpenAI's Sora and Alphabet's Veo, go a step further by promising to help filmmakers quickly create vivid, hyper-realistic clips based on just a few words of description.

its programs to train the models, but only for specific divisions - not its entire library. Walt Disney Co. and Netflix Inc. aren't willing to licence their content to these companies, but have expressed an interest in other types of collaborations.

Hollywood studios are already using AI in production, as are many filmmakers. Tyler Perry has used the technology to recreate the makeup he wears for his Madea character in movies.

But a new crop of tools, including OpenAI's Sora

and Alphabet's Veo, go a step further by promising to help filmmakers quickly create vivid, hyper-realistic clips based on just a few words of description. Director Robert Zemeckis has deployed AI to de-age Tom Hanks in new film.

Studios would like to find a way to make AI work for them rather than fight a new technology that could help significantly reshape the industry. But studios have yet to agree to major commercial relationships around the use of AI with the largest technology companies. — Bloomberg



BUFFERS INDIA HAS CAN HELP NAVIGATE TENSIONS: FINIMN

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

Finance ministry on Friday said that strong macroeconomic buffers of India should help the real sectors of economy navigate challenges posed by geopolitical tensions and growth momentum during the current fiscal.

"Formal jobs are rising, as indicated by the growing net payroll additions under employees' provident fund organisation," the finance ministry said.

In its monthly report on economic review for the month of April, the finance ministry also elaborated about the Met's monsoon prediction, inflation, debt sustainability, and geopolitical tensions among other issues as well.

"Along with growth and employment, the other macroeconomic indicators are also improving," said the April edition in its review by the department of economic affairs.

"Retail inflation clocked 4.83 per cent in April 2024, the lowest in the past 11 months. On the external front, despite global challenges, India's foreign exchange reserves are comfortable, and the Indian rupee has been one of the most resilient vis-à-vis the US dollar in recent months," the report said.

The report further said that robust trends in the capital spending of the government during April-Feb. of FY24, combined with the fiscal consolidation plans reflected in the FY 25 Budget, have laid to rest concerns about debt sustainability.

"Thus, the major pillars of India's macroeconomic strength, including growth, price stability and fiscal management, are directionally positive and mutually reinforcing," it said.

BLITZCRICK



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

ORANGE SQUASH

Sunrisers stop Rajasthan's run, slide into final

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR
CHENNAI, MAY 24

A tricky two-paced surface, used for the first time this season at the M. A. Chidambaram Stadium, coupled with a short boundary on one side posed a significant challenge for the teams and it was Sunrisers Hyderabad who mastered the dynamic conditions to book their spot in the IPL final.

With a 36-run win over Rajasthan Royals in Qualifier 2, Sunrisers have set-up a title showdown with Kolkata Knight Riders on Sunday.

When the ball was not turning much in the first innings, Rajasthan Royals banked on their pacers Trent Boult, Sandeep Sharma and Avesh Khan who expertly utilised slower deliveries to restrict Sunrisers to 175 for 9. The Royals pace trio shared eight wickets among them.

What was initially considered an under-par total, soon proved too good. To their credit, Sunrisers used their spinners to telling effect. As the wicket started gripping and turning, Sunrisers spin duo of Shahbaz Ahmed (3/23) and Abhishek Sharma (2/24) ran through Royals line-up for an emphatic win.

Rajasthan were 51 for 1 in Powerplay, but once opener Yashasvi Jaiswal departed for a 21-ball 42, they fell from 65 for 1 to 79 for 5.

Dhruv Jurel waged a lone battle by scoring an unbeaten 56 off 35 balls.

Earlier, Heinrich Klaasen's 34-ball 50 was the saving grace for Sunrisers as their middle-order suffered a dramatic collapse.

Sunrisers opener Abhishek Sharma began with a bang, hitting a six over deep midwicket, but he fell in the last ball of the first over attempting to pull Boult again. Rahul Tripathi walked in with intent, targeting boundaries behind the square to maintain a high scoring rate, while Travis Head played a quieter role at the other end.

Boult, in his third over, delivered a double blow by dismissing Tripathi with a slower ball and Aiden



Abhishek Sharma (right) of Sunrisers Hyderabad celebrates with captain Pat Cummins after taking the wicket of Rajasthan Royals captain Sanju Samson at M. A. Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai on Friday. — SANJAY KISHORE

SCOREBOARD

Sunrisers Hyderabad: Travis Head c Ashwin b Sandeep Sharma 34, Abhishek Sharma c Kohler-Cadmire b Boult 12, Rahul Tripathi c Chahal b Boult 37, Aiden Markram c Chahal b Boult 1, Heinrich Klaasen b Sandeep Sharma 50, Nitish Reddy c Chahal b Avesh Khan 5, Abdul Samad b Avesh Khan 0, Shahbaz Ahmed c Dhruv Jurel b Avesh Khan 18, Pat Cummins not out 5, Jaydev Unadkat run out (Avesh Khan) 5. Extras (lb-1, w-7) 8. **Total (for 9 wickets in 20 overs) 175.** **Fall of wickets:** 13-1, 55-2, 57-3, 99-4, 120-5, 120-6, 163-7, 170-8, 175-9.

Bowling: Trent Boult 4-0-45-3, Ravichandran Ashwin 4-0-43-0, Sandeep Sharma 4-0-25-2, Avesh Khan 4-0-27-3, Yuzvendra Chahal 4-0-34-0.

Rajasthan Royals: Yashasvi Jaiswal c Abdul Samad b Shahbaz Ahmed 42, Tom Kohler-Cadmire c Tripathi b Cummins 10, Sanju Samson c Aiden Markram b Abhishek Sharma 10, Riyan Parag c Abhishek Sharma b Shahbaz Ahmed 6, Dhruv Jurel not out 56, Ravichandran Ashwin c Klaasen b Shahbaz Ahmed 0, Shimron Hetmeyer b Abhishek Sharma 4, Rovman Powell c Abhishek Sharma b Natarajan 6, Trent Boult not out 0. Extras (lb-1, nb-1, w-3) 5. **Total (for 7 wickets in 20 overs) 139.** **Fall of wickets:** 1-24, 2-65, 3-67, 4-79, 5-79, 6-92, 7-124.

Bowling: Bhuvneshwar Kumar 3-0-33-0, Pat Cummins 4-0-30-1, T. Natarajan 3-0-13-1, Jaydev Unadkat 1-0-5-0, Shahbaz Ahmed 4-0-23-3, Abhishek Sharma 4-0-24-2, Aiden Markram 1-0-10-0.

Markram with a length ball. Both catches were expertly taken by Yuzvendra Chahal at short third, reducing Sunrisers to 57 for 3.

After scoring 68 runs in the Powerplay, Sunrisers struggled to accelerate as Royals bowlers R. Ashwin,

Chahal, and Sandeep kept the batters on a short leash. For the record, Sandeep bowled 18 slower deliveries in his four-over spell.

A superb lofted six over extra couple by Klaasen broke a 26-delivery boundary drought.

Midway through the innings, Sandeep outfoxed Head with another slower delivery, which the Australian guided straight to Ashwin at short third man. In the 14th over, Avesh struck twice, dismissing Nitish Reddy and Abdul Samad in consecu-

tive deliveries, plunging Sunrisers into deep trouble at 120 for 6.

For the second game in a row, Hyderabad had to deploy their impact player Shahbaz in the first innings itself to bolster their struggling batting line-up.

HUNT FOR INDIA COACH

BCCI secy snubs Ponting, denies Aussie approach

Mumbai, May 24: BCCI secretary Jay Shah on Friday rejected claims that the Board has approached any former Australian cricketer to be India's next head coach and hinted that Rahul Dravid's successor could be an Indian by saying that he should have a "deep understanding" of the game's structure in the country.

While Dravid has reportedly told the Board that he is not interested in a third stint, former Australian players like Ricky Ponting and Justin Langer have claimed that they have turned down approaches for the high-profile position.

"Neither I nor the BCCI have approached any former Australian cricketer with a coaching offer. The reports circulating in certain media sections are completely incorrect," Shah said in a statement.

Both Ponting and Langer are involved in the Indian Premier League as the head coaches of Delhi Capitals and Lucknow Super Giants respectively. World Cup-winning former batting star Gautam Gambhir, who is currently mentoring Kolkata Knight Riders, is speculated to be among the top contenders for the post right now.

"Finding the right coach for our national team is a meticulous and thorough process. We are focused on identifying individuals who possess a deep understanding of the Indian cricket structure and have risen through the ranks," Shah said.

The BCCI secretary also said that having in-depth knowledge of Indian domestic cricket will be one of the important criteria for appointing the next coach. He said the understanding would be crucial to "truly elevate Team India to the next level."

The BCCI has set May 27 as the last date for filing applications for the job.

Ponting had claimed on Thursday that he was approached to take over the role but said that he declined as it did not fit with his "lifestyle" right now.

Ponting told ICC review, "I've seen a lot of reports about it. Normally these things pop up on social media before you even know about them, but there were a few little one-on-one conversations during the IPL, just to get a level of interest from me as to whether I would do it."

— PTI

LANGER QUILTS AFTER KL PRESSURE, POLITICS TIP

New Delhi, May 24: Former Australian cricketer Justin Langer was enticed by the prospect of becoming India's head coach but K. L. Rahul's word of caution regarding the "pressure and politics" that came with the job dissuaded him from pursuing the "amazing" opportunity.

Langer, who served as Lucknow Super Giants' head coach this IPL season, recalled a chat with franchise skipper and a senior member of the Indian team Rahul. "You never say never. And the pressure of doing it in India... I was talking to KL Rahul and he said, 'You know, if you think there's pressure and politics in an IPL team, multiply that by a thousand, (that's) coaching India,'" Langer told the 'BBC Stumped' podcast.

"That was a good bit of advice, I guess. It would be an amazing job, (but) I have (put myself out of contention)," he added.

The BCCI has invited fresh applications for the head coach position, with a deadline set for May 27 as Rahul Dravid is set to exit after the T20 World Cup.

— PTI

ORANGE



Virat Kohli, RCB 741

Ruturaj Gaikwad, CSK 583

Riyan Parag, RR 573

PURPLE



Harshal Patel, PBKS 24

Jaspit Bumrah, MI 20

Varun Chakravarthy, KKR 20

Short takes

Kohli talks of special bond with Karthik

Premier India batter Virat Kohli has paid tribute to Dinesh Karthik after his retirement at the end of RCB's IPL campaign. "Off the field, I have had some really nice and interesting conversations with him. He is a wise man, and has great knowledge about a lot of things, not just cricket," Kohli said in a special tribute video posted by RCB.

Kohli recalled the 2022 season when he averaged just 22.73 scoring 341 runs from 16 matches as they missed the final bus losing to Rajasthan Royals in the second qualifier.

"I have thoroughly enjoyed my conversations with him. Even in that phase in 2022 when I did not have a great IPL season, I was really struggling for confidence," he recalled.

Kaif says Dhoni could continue playing on

Former India batter Mohammad Kaif feels there is no reason why Mahendra Singh Dhoni should not play the next season of the IPL, given his form, fitness and ability to play big shots with ease. Speculation has been rife that Dhoni could have played his last IPL season. The former CSK skipper, who had undergone surgery to treat a knee injury issue last year, scored 161 runs in 73 balls at a strike rate of 220.55 this season. He was also good behind the stumps.

"Why he should not come back? He is fit, he is scoring runs and hitting sixes, and there's no reason to stop playing... it's up to him, we can't say with Dhoni what his plan is," said Kaif.

QUICK BYTES

FA CUP FINAL TODAY IS A MANCHESTER DERBY

London, May 24: Manchester United manager Erik ten Hag hopes to bolster his chances of avoiding the sack by ruining Manchester City's history bid in the FA Cup final on Saturday.

For the second successive season, Wembley will stage a Manchester derby in the showpiece fixture.

Last year, City beat United 2-1 in the final on route to an incredible treble-winning campaign that included Premier League and Champions League glory.

City remain England's pre-eminent force, as they showed by clinching an unprecedented fourth successive Premier League title last weekend. — AFP

MUMBAI SET FOR NIGHT RACING AFTER 20 YEARS

Mumbai, May 24: Over 60 Super Cars and 25 Super Bikes will roar to life on Saturday evening as night racing returns to Mumbai after nearly two decades.

The competitions will take place at the restricted Juhu Airport, once a haven for racing and off-roading among the elite. In keeping with the times, the night offers the modern avatar of racing — Drag Racing. The JK Tyre-backed Drag Star Night Race promises non-stop thrills as cars and bikes race in pairs along a 400-metre strip. "This is a high-end racing event. Spectators will witness some of the fanciest and fastest cars go against each other," Sanjay Sharma, Head-Corporate communication & Motorsport, JK Tyre, said.



USA players celebrate the dismissal of a Bangladesh batsman during the third T20 match in Houston. On the left is captain and wicketkeeper Monank Patel.

USA stun Bangladesh in T20 series at home

Miami, May 24: The United States defeated Bangladesh by six runs on Thursday to win the second Twenty20 international and claim a shock victory in the three-match series at Houston.

Chasing a modest 145 to win, Bangladesh were well-placed at 78 for 2 before losing their last eight wickets for 60 runs to crash to defeat two days after losing the opening match by five wickets.

Fast bowler Ali Khan claimed 3 for 25 for the home side while Bangladesh skipper

Najmul Hossain Shanto (36) and former captain Shakib Al Hasan (30) were their team's main run-makers in a total of 138.

The series is being played as part of the build-up to the Twenty20 World Cup in the United States and Caribbean which starts on June 1.

The final game also takes place in Houston on Saturday. After limiting the USA to 144 for 6 in 20 overs, Bangladesh were rocked after just four balls when opener Soumya Sarkar was caught and bowled by

Saurabh Netravalkar without scoring. At 78 for 2, Bangladesh appeared in control but lost skipper Shanto, run out an embarrassing mix-up with Towhid Hridoy.

His exit sparked a rapid slide by the Asian side who are ranked at nine in the world compared to the Americans at 19. — AFP

BRIEF SCORES

USA 144 for 6 in 20 overs (Monank Patel 42, Aaron Jones 35, Rishad Hossain 2/21) bt Bangladesh 138 in 19.3 overs (Najmul Shanto 36, Ali Khan 3/25).

KING SHINES AS WINDIES BEAT SOUTH AFRICA

Kingston (Jamaica), May 24: Stand-in captain Brandon King made 79 as West Indies defeated South Africa by 28 runs in the first Twenty 20 international of a three-game series in Kingston on Thursday.

Opener King, deputising for skipper Rovman Powell who has been away on IPL duty, racked up his runs off 45 balls with six sixes and six boundaries as West Indies made 175 for 8.

In reply, South Africa laboured to 147 all out. They never recovered from losing star opener Quinton de Kock for just four in the first over. Fellow opener Reeza Hendricks was ninth man out with just two balls left of the innings, making a career-best 87 off 51 balls with six sixes and six fours.

The Proteas struggled to gain momentum as wickets fell at regular intervals. — AFP

BRIEF SCORES

West Indies 175 for 8 in 20 overs (Brandon King 79, Kyle Mayers 34, Roston Chase 32 n.o., Ottneil Baartman 3/26, Andile Phehlukwayo 3/28) bt South Africa 147 in 19.5 overs (Reeza Hendricks 87, Matthew Forde 3/27, Gudakesh Motie 2/25, Obed McCoy 2/15).

MALAYSIA | MASTERS

Sindhu in semis with fine victory

Kuala Lumpur, May 24: Double Olympic medallist P. V. Sindhu took a giant stride towards securing a title at the Malaysia Masters after progressing to the semifinals with a hard-fought win over top seed Han Yue of China here on Friday.

World No. 15 Sindhu recovered from a mid-game slump to outwit Han, ranked sixth, 21-13, 14-21, 21-12 in a 55-minute quarterfinal battle to avenge her loss to the Chinese in their last meeting at the Asia badminton Championships in Ningbo last month.

Sindhu, a former world champion, will now square off against either Indonesia's Putri Kusuma Wardani or Thailand's Busanan Ongbamrungphan in the last four stage.

In other results, Ashmita Chaliha's fine run ended in the quarterfinals with a 10-21, 15-21 loss to sixth seed Zhang Yi Man of China. Sindhu, who last won the Singapore Open in 2022, gave a good account of herself during the 55-minute match as she broke off from 3-3 in the opening game to take a 11-5 cushion at the break. — PTI

MIXED TEAM ARCHERS ENTER TITLE ROUND

Yecheon (South Korea), May 24: Jyothi Surekha Vennam and Priyanshu advanced to the compound mixed team final, confirming India's second medal, while Deepika Kumari brightened the country's gloomy recurve campaign, reaching her second successive Archery World Cup semifinals after her comeback in the Stage 2 of the event, here on Friday.

The compound women's team of Jyothi, Parneet Kaur and Aditi Swami had assured India's first medal by making the final on Wednesday.

Young compound archer Prathamesh Fuge is also eyeing a medal as he advanced to the semifinal in the individual category.

The Indian compound mixed team, No. 2 in world rankings, dropped just two points from 16 arrows to eliminate the host country's duo of Han Seungyeon and Yang Jaewon 158-157 in a tight semi-final. — PTI

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