

SHORT TAKES

City court dismisses
Tahir Hussain's plea

New Delhi: A court here has dismissed former AAP councillor Tahir Hussain's plea for the production of certain documents in a case regarding a "larger conspiracy" behind the 2020 northeast Delhi riots. Hussain and several others have been charged in the case under the stringent provisions of the UAPA. Additional sessions judge Sameer Bajpai noted that Hussain's application had sought the production of the statements of a witness, Rahul Kasana, which were recorded in another rioting case and a money-laundering case lodged against the former AAP councillor. He also took note of Special Public Prosecutor Amit Prasad's reply, according to which the application was "an attempt to collect documents in the defence of the accused at the stage when even charges have not been framed".

'Resignation of Delhi
mantri sent to Prez'

New Delhi: Lieutenant-governor V.K. Saxena has forwarded the resignation of Delhi minister Raaj Kumar Anand to the President following the recommendation of chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, Raj Niwas officials said on Monday. In his only official communication during the period when he was out on interim bail in the Delhi excise policy case, Mr Kejriwal recommended the acceptance of Mr Anand's resignation, they said. "The L-G has forwarded the resignation to the President of India for consideration, as required by law," an official said. Mr Anand had resigned from the Cabinet and quit the ruling AAP on April 10, alleging diversion of funds for SC and ST for other purposes and schemes and that Dalits were not given adequate representation in the party. He joined the BSP on May 5 and contested the LS polls from the New Delhi constituency on a party ticket.

33 in Noida booked
under Gangsters Act

Noida: Noida police on Monday invoked the stringent Uttar Pradesh Gangsters and Anti-Social Activities (Prevention) Act against 33 accused in the multi-crore GST scam. So far, a total of 45 people have been arrested in connection with the case. Known as the GST scam, the case came to light in June 2023 and pertains to revenue loss to the exchequer through input tax credit being claimed by thousands of bogus companies floated using forged documents, officials said. "The Gangsters Act has been invoked in the GST fraud case, which is lodged at Sector 20 police station. Action is being taken against 33 charge sheeted accused. The charges have been invoked under provisions 2/3 of the Gangsters Act," DCP (crime) Shakti Mohan Avasthy said.

FOLLOW FIRE SOPs
IN HOSPS, HEALTH
SECY TELLS STATES

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 3

Union health secretary Apurva Chandra on Monday called for strict compliance with fire-safety protocols in a meeting with states and healthcare organisations, citing an increased possibility of fires in hospitals with high temperatures. With the entire northern region reeling under a prolonged heatwave, incidents of fire, including in forests, are increasingly being reported. Several of these fire incidents were reported to be caused by short circuits which happened due to sub-optimal electrical maintenance and/or overload of electricity lines with heavy use of air-conditioners and other equipment. "Given the potential risks associated with fire hazards in hospitals, it is imperative that strict protocols and measures be put in place to prevent, detect and respond to fires effectively. "Establishing a robust fire safety plan and conducting fire-evacuation and safety drills will not only ensure compliance with regulatory requirements but also safeguard lives and property," Mr Chandra said. The meeting was attended by 15 representatives from state health departments and around 390 healthcare organisations.

■ Court extends judicial custody of BRS leader Kavitha July 3

Over ₹1,100cr laundered
in Delhi excise scam: ED

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 3

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Monday alleged in its supplementary charge sheet filed against BRS leader K. Kavitha before a court here that more than ₹1,100 crore was laundered in the alleged Delhi excise scam and out of the said amount, she was involved in the proceeds of crime (PoC) worth ₹292.8 crore.

The allegations were made in a supplementary prosecution complaint (equivalent to a charge sheet) by the Central financial agency before special judge Kavari Beweja.

The judge extended her judicial custody till July 3 after Ms Kavitha was produced before the court in pursuance of its earlier order issuing a production warrant against her. The court had issued the warrants after taking cognisance of a charge sheet against the BRS leader in the case on May 29.

The court also granted bail to three co-accused persons—Prince, Damodar, and Arvind Singh. The three accused were charge-sheeted without being arrested during the investigation by the ED.

Mother Dairy
hikes milk
prices by ₹2
in Delhi-NCR

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 3

A day after Amul announced a price hike across all variants, Mother Dairy on Monday announced ₹2 per litre hike in milk prices in the Delhi-NCR market due to a rise in input cost over the last 15 months. The price-hike by these two leading milk suppliers come just after the completion of the voting process of the Lok Sabha elections. "The increase in prices of all variants of milk is effective from Monday (June 3) in Delhi-NCR as well as other markets where it has a presence. Mother Dairy, in a statement, said it is "increasing its liquid milk prices by ₹2 per litre across all operating markets from June 3 onwards."

The increase in consumer price is mainly to compensate the producers for increased production costs, which have been on the rise for over one year, it said.

In Delhi-NCR, Mother Dairy full cream milk will be available now at ₹68 per litre, while toned and double-toned milk at ₹56 and ₹50 per litre, respectively. Buffalo and cow milk prices have been increased to ₹72 and ₹58 per litre respectively.

Haryana to launch
₹10K-cr project to
fight air pollution

Chandigarh, June 3: Haryana chief secretary T.V.S.N. Prasad on Monday said the state will soon roll out a ₹10,000-crore project funded by the World Bank to address air pollution. The Haryana clean air project for sustainable development will be implemented in the state in a phased manner with the first phase being implemented in the districts falling in the NCR and replication in entire state later, Mr Prasad said.

The announcement was made in a meeting of the governing committee of Haryana clean air project for sustainable development held under the chairmanship of the chief secretary here on Monday, as per an official statement.

Mr Prasad said this 10-year comprehensive project

SC to hear Sisodia' bail pleas
in cases by ED and CBI today

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 3

AAP leader Manish Sisodia has moved the Supreme Court challenging the Delhi HC's verdict dismissing his bail pleas in cases lodged by the ED and CBI in connection with the alleged liquor policy scam.

As per the cause list uploaded on the apex court website, a vacation bench of Justices Aravind Kumar and Sandeep Mehta is scheduled to hear Mr Sisodia's pleas on Tuesday.

"As per the investigation so far, the total proceeds of crime identified is ₹1,100 crore, out of which PoC of ₹292.8 crore is being dealt with in this prosecution complaint. Through activities of accused persons K. Kavitha, Champreet Singh, Prince Kumar, Damodar Sharma, and Arvind Singh, huge proceeds of crime have been generated," the charge sheet alleged.

The charge sheet claimed that Ms Kavitha

was involved in PoC (money generated and laundered in crime) of ₹292.8 crore, out of which kickbacks of ₹100 crore was given to AAP leaders. She conspired with the members of the South Group and the AAP leaders through accused Vijay Nair (who was acting on behalf of the top leaders of the AAP) to pay kickbacks to the tune of ₹100 crore and receive undue benefits, the agency claimed in the charge

sheet. The Enforcement Directorate also claimed that Ms Kavitha, by way of conspiracy and formation of IndoSpirits—a company accused in the case—has participated in the generation, acquisition, and use of the PoC of ₹192.8 crore, which was derived as a result of the conspiracy of kickbacks and payment of kickbacks.

By showing IndoSpirits as a genuine business entity and acquiring the PoC of ₹192.8 crore, she is involved in projecting this PoC as genuine profit from a legitimate business, the ED alleged.

She also allegedly received the PoC of ₹5.5 crore from IndoSpirits in the name of her associate and co-accused in the case, Abhishek Boinpally, the agency said.

The report further accused her of destroying the digital evidence to conceal her role and involvement in the case.

It further alleged that Ms Kavitha was also involved in acts of influencing the witnesses.

The 46-year-old BRS leader is in judicial custody in the two cases lodged by the ED and the CBI in the alleged scam.

'Delhi CM weighed thrice in Tihar with
different machines, not provided cooler'

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, JUNE 3

A day after Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal surrendered at the Tihar Jail after completion of his interim bail in a money laundering case, the AAP leaders on Monday alleged that he was not provided a cooler in his cell in prison and his weight was measured thrice in a "conspiracy."

The Tihar authorities refuted the AAP leaders' claim, saying the CM's weight was taken with one machine only and added that he was not provided a cooler because this facility is provided after the court's order.



Arvind Kejriwal

"The weight of Kejriwal is 63.5 kg, which was measured only once when he surrendered on Sunday. There was no problem with the weighing machine. His other vitals, including blood pressure and sugar, are normal," a senior Tihar Jail officer said.

In a press conference, senior AAP leader and Delhi minister Atishi claimed that Mr Kejriwal's

weight was measured with three weighing machines during his medical examination in Tihar on Sunday. She also claimed that at a time when temperature in Delhi is ranging from 48° C to 50° C, Mr Kejriwal was kept in a cell where not even a cooler was provided.

"Coolers are provided to even notorious criminals lodged in Tihar. But popular chief minister

weight was measured with three weighing machines during his medical examination in Tihar on Sunday.

She also claimed that at a time when temperature in Delhi is ranging from 48° C to 50° C, Mr Kejriwal was kept in a cell where not even a cooler was provided.

"Coolers are provided to even notorious criminals lodged in Tihar. But popular chief minister

Fire breaks out in 3 coaches of Taj Exp, none hurt

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 3

Three coaches of the Taj Express train caught fire in Southeast Delhi's Sarita Vihar on Monday, officials said. No one was injured in the incident as passengers managed to get out of the affected coaches in time, they said.

The cause of the fire was not known immediately. "We received a call at 4.24 pm regarding the fire in three coaches of the Taj Express train. Eight fire tenders were pressed into service and the fire was put out by 5.43 pm," a

Delhi Fire Services (DFS) official said.

Earlier, DFS officials had said that four coaches of the train had caught fire.

The police said a PCR call regarding the fire was received around 4.40 pm.

"After receiving the call, police personnel rushed to the spot near Apollo Hospital. After reaching the spot, it was found that three coaches of the Taj Express train had caught fire. The train was stopped," a senior police officer said.

"Coaches D3 and D4 were gutted in the fire, while D2 was partially

damaged. No one was injured in the incident as the passengers quickly moved to other coaches and deboarded the train," he said.

The police said further action in the matter is being taken by the railways.

"The train was running about 10 hours late and had started from New Delhi Railway Station at 3 pm. The train runs from New Delhi Railway Station to Jhansi," a police officer said.

The officer said the train caught fire between Okhla and Tuglakabad railway station.

Delhi gears up for D-Day, over
89 lakh votes up for counting

3-tier security in place to guard counting centres

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 3

The arrangements for the D-day for the counting of over 89.21 lakh votes, which will begin at 8.00 am across the seven constituencies of Delhi, have been notched up with the authorities deploying a three-tier security arrangement at the counting centres.

The officials at the Delhi poll body said that a total of 7,000 personnel would be deployed at the seven counting centres.

"We have made all the necessary arrangements for the counting tomorrow which will start at 8.00 am sharp. The required security deployment has been made which includes a three-tier security arrangement at the counting centre. The manpower of counting staff is trained and ready," Delhi chief electoral officer P. Krishnamurthy said.

"There will be a total of 7,000 personnel and each segment will have about 1,000 personnel, which includes a lot of support staff who will assist in works such as carrying the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) from the strong room to counting halls and back," he added.

Digital monitors will be set up outside the counting centres to share the



A Congress worker carries a chair during preparations on the eve of the results of the Lok Sabha polls at the AICC headquarter in New Delhi on Monday.

— PTI

▶ **THE OFFICIALS** at the Delhi poll body said that a total of 7,000 personnel would be deployed at the seven counting centres

trends and the poll body personnel will also make mic announcements on the candidates leading in the initial trends.

Around 21 to 28 rounds of counting will take place to count a total of 89,21,495 votes that were cast by 58.69 per cent electorates, which includes 59.03 per cent men, 58.29 per cent women, and 28.01 third gender individuals.

Seven returning officers will head a team of dozens of assistant officers and observers, who will oversee the counting of votes

Sanjay Singh demands ban on
exit polls, calls them unreliable

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 3

Aam Aadmi Party leader and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh on Monday demanded a ban on exit polls in the country, claiming they have been proven wrong several times. Several exit polls on Saturday predicted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will retain power for a third straight term, with the BJP-led NDA expected to win a big majority in the Lok Sabha polls.

During a press conference, Mr Singh said, "Exit polls should be completely banned in the country since they have been proven wrong not once but many times. This is a



Sanjay Singh

wrong attempt to influence the people of the country, the administrative system, and the election commission before the poll counting."

He claimed that the INDIA bloc will get 295 seats after the June 4 counting.

Since the exit polls two days ago, the BJP has been in a celebratory mood ad distributing sweets.

Court rejects
bail of on-duty
doctor in Delhi
hosp fire case

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 3:

A Delhi court on Monday dismissed the bail plea of an on-duty doctor of a private hospital where a fire on May 25 killed seven newborns and injured five, saying no logical reason was given why despite being an ayurvedic doctor, the accused was working in the most critical ward of the facility.

The court also denounced as "highly insensitive" the statement of the doctor that the infants were not victims of the blaze as they died due to suffocation and not burns.

The court was hearing the bail plea of Dr Akash, who was on duty when the fire broke out at the hospital. He and the owner of the hospital, Dr Naveen Khichi, were sent to judicial custody for 14 days on May 30. Rejecting the argument that Dr Akash was working at the hospital as a trainee, the court said the investigation has revealed that he provided treatment and gave prescriptions to the infants.

"Despite knowing that he was entitled to practise only in Haryana as a Bachelor of Ayurvedic Medicine and Surgery doctor as per the certificate of the medical council of Haryana, accused Dr Akash willingly started working in the most-sensitive zone of the hospital, i.e. Neo-natal Intensive Care Unit," the court said.



Smoke and flame billows out after a fire broke out in the Taj Express train in Sarita Vihar on Monday.

— PTI

IMD predicts rain, dust storm
for today, issues orange alert

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 3

After a marginal dip in the maximum temperature, the mercury again started rising as the capital recorded a high of 44.7°C, five notches above normal, on Monday, according to the India Meteorological Department.

On Sunday, the city recorded a maximum temperature of 42.8°C and was on yellow alert, according to the India Meteorological Department bulletin.

In Delhi, the other weather stations recorded the following temperatures: Najafgarh 46.9°C, Narela 46.9°C, Aya Nagar 45.1°C, Ridge 44.9°C and Palam 44.8°C.

Relative humidity oscillated between 20 per cent and 39 per cent on Monday.

The maximum and minimum temperatures on Monday are likely to

Delhi announces closure of all
Anganwadi centres till June 30

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 3

In the wake of severe weather and ongoing heat in the national capital, the Delhi government has announced the closure of all Anganwadi centres till June 30. This measure aims to protect the health and safety of vulnerable children and mothers.

To offset the impact of the closure, the Kejriwal government will provide supplementary nutrition

food, delivering these essential supplies directly to the beneficiaries' doorsteps, including children aged three to six years who typically receive hot cooked meals at the centres, said an official statement.

Delhi women and child development minister Kailash Gahlot said, "Given the unprecedented weather and ongoing heatwave conditions, it is imperative that we take proactive measures to protect them."

nied by strong surface winds with speed of 25 to 35 kmph on Tuesday.

The capital will be on orange alert on Tuesday. The weather office has also predicted a gradual decrease in temperature in the coming days.



SHORT TAKES

INDIA bloc to get 25+ Bihar LS seats: RJD

Patna: The RJD on Monday claimed that the INDIA bloc, helmed by it in Bihar, would notch up a tally of "25-plus" in the state with 40 Lok Sabha seats, dubbing exit polls a "psychological trick". The RJD national spokesperson Manoj Kumar Jha made the statement at a press conference, flanked by alliance partners, less than 24 hours before the counting of votes was to commence. "The exit polls have played a psychological trick. Huge money is involved in the exercise. We are told that besides the stock markets, the Prime Minister's Office also has a stake," he claimed. Most exit polls have predicted that the NDA will retain the upper hand in the state, but fall short of the near clean sweep of 2019 when it wrested all but one seat. He said, "Agencies may have carried out exit polls their own. But we gained a first-hand sense of the popular sentiments." — PTI

Raut hits out at EC over Uddhav action

Mumbai: On the eve of announcement of the Lok Sabha election results, Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Monday said the PM candidate of the INDIA bloc will be announced within 24 hours of the poll outcome being declared. He also slammed the Election Commission's decision to initiate action against Uddhav Thackeray for calling the poll agency a "BJP branch". Counting of votes nationwide for the seven-phase Lok Sabha polls, which ended on June 1, will take place from 8 am on Tuesday. When asked about the PM candidate of the INDIA bloc, the Sena (UBT) said, "Narendra Modi will not become Prime Minister again. The BJP will not come back to power. Only the INDIA bloc will win."

JD-U neta murdered in Bihar's Nalanda

Nalanda: A JD(U) leader was allegedly murdered in Bihar's Nalanda district in the early hours of Monday, police said. The incident happened in Maua village in the Parwalpur police station area around 4.30 am when Anil Kumar (62) had gone out for morning walk, they said. He was a polling agent of the JD(U) when elections happened in the area on June 1, they added. Armed men, who are yet to be identified, first beat him up and then stabbed him, police said. "His family took him to the nearest hospital from where he was referred to the district government hospital. He died there while undergoing treatment," district magistrate Shashank Shubhankar said. "Police reached the spot and sent the body for the post-mortem examination. The exact cause of the incident is not known. A case has been registered," he said. — PTI

SC BARS MLA FROM ENTERING COUNTING STN

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 3

The Supreme Court on Monday barred the Yuvajana Samika Rychu Congress Party (YSRCP) MLA Pinnelli Ramakrishna Reddy, who allegedly smashed an electronic voting machine at a polling station, from entering the counting centre of Macherla Assembly constituency on June 4. A vacation bench of Justices Aravind Kumar and Sandeep Mehta saw the video of the May 13 incident and questioned the anticipatory bail granted to Mr Reddy, saying it a "sheer mockery of the justice system". "Once you see the video, you will find that it is a completely erroneous order. This is sheer mockery of the justice system," the bench told senior advocate Vikas Singh, appearing for Mr Reddy. Mr Singh said he is not contesting the occurrences but the presence of the MLA at the polling booth when these allegedly happened. He said it is only an interim order subject to certain conditions and the matter is listed for June 6 for final hearing. He urged the court not to stay the bail order, as votes will be counted on Tuesday.



P.R. Reddy

■ In view of top court order, EC issues SOP for EVM memory

Were never out, always here, says CEC on 'laapata' memes

AGE CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, JUNE 3

Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar on Monday referred to various memes doing rounds on social media, describing the Election Commission as "laapata gentlemen", asserting that he and fellow commissioners Gyanesh Kumar and Sukhbir Singh Sandhu were "never out" and were "always here".

Social media users had targeted the commission for allegedly being absent amid the model code violations by top leaders during the campaign for the Lok Sabha elections.

The memes were based on a recent Bollywood movie titled *Laapata Ladies*.

Addressing a press conference here on the eve of the counting of votes on Tuesday, Mr Kumar said in a lighter vein that now

Jairam claims on DMs: EC refuses extra time to neta

New Delhi, June 3: The Election Commission on Monday refused to grant additional time to Congress leader Jairam Ramesh to back his claims that attempts were made to influence 150 district magistrates and collectors ahead of the June 4 vote count for Lok Sabha elections.

Mr Ramesh was asked by the EC to submit factual details by Sunday evening of the allegations that he made in a social media post recently. He wrote to the EC on

Monday seeking a week more to submit his reply. In a letter to Mr Ramesh, the EC said, "The commission hereby outrightly rejects your request for time extension and directs you to file your response along with the factual basis of your allegation by 7 PM today — June 3, failing which it would be presumed you have nothing substantive to say in the matter and the commission would proceed ahead to take appropriate action." — PTI

people will see memes on the social media with a tagline that "laapata gentlemen" are back.

"We were never out. We were always here. We chose to interact with you

through our press notes. This was the first time we issued close to a 100 press notes and advisories all put together," he said. CEC Kumar said the poll authority has been inter-

acting from behind the scene and they decided to hold a press meet Monday.

He said that questions were raised on flaws in the electoral rolls, on the efficacy of the EVMs and the alleged fudging of voter turnout figures.

The CEC said while the one making allegations was present in the court (kachahari), there was no "gavah" or witness.

Meanwhile, in adherence to the SC's order, the EC has issued a standard operating procedure (SOP) to be followed for the checking and verification of EVM-VVPAT of the burnt memory or microcontroller post announcement of results.

As per the SOP, candidates finishing second or third can demand checking and verification of the EVMs — having control units, ballot units and VVPAT — burnt memory for any tampering or modifications in 5 per cent of the machines.

■ BJP veteran leader says new Opp. needed to strengthen democracy Uma predicts 450+ for NDA ahead of results

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPLA, JUNE 3

A day before the coming of the LS polls results, former Union minister Uma Bharti on Monday took everyone by surprise by predicting the BJP-led NDA to cross the 450 mark.

Ms Bharti, who has been on a spiritual tour of the Himalayas for the last two months, took to the social media site "X". "I will not be surprised if NDA gets more than 450 seats in the

Lok Sabha elections."

"The Opposition has collapsed. A new Opposition should emerge to strengthen the democracy in the country," she said.

Terming the pilgrims thronging to religious places of significance in the Himalayan region as "bellwether", she said her interactions with them during her stay in the area have convinced her that the NDA will win more than 450 seats in the polls.

"Pilgrims from across the country visit various



Uma Bharti

religious places in the Himalayan region of Uttarakhand. I was interacting with them during my stay in the region to

gauge their pulses. I am convinced after interactions with them that the NDA will get more than 450 seats," she said.

Interestingly, no exit poll aired on June 1 has predicted a victory of such scale for the NDA in the LS polls.

India Today-Axis My India has forecast the maximum 361-401 seats for NDA, while Today's Chanakya predicted 335 seats for the BJP and 400 for the BJP-led alliance.

The BJP had coined the

"400 paar" slogan for the NDA in the polls.

Former chief minister Bharti, who last contested the Lok Sabha polls from Jhansi in Uttar Pradesh in 2014 and subsequently became a member in the Narendra Modi Cabinet at the Centre, has attributed a possible landslide victory for the NDA in the polls to the miserable failure of the Opposition to emerge as an alternative force by putting forth their ideology effectively before the

EC gives SC tentative time for Assembly bypoll in WB

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 3

The Election Commission on Monday placed before the Supreme Court the tentative schedule for the byelection to the Maniktal Assembly constituency in West Bengal.

The senior Trinamul Congress leader Sadhan Pande had won the Maniktal seat, defeating the BJP pick Kalyan Chaubey, who challenged the poll result in the Calcutta high court, alleging violence by his rival.

Mr Pande died on February 20, 2022.

The EC had refused to hold a bypoll for the seat on the ground that Mr Chaubey's election petition remains pending before the high court.

On May 6, Mr Chaubey had informed the SC that he has moved an application before the HC seeking withdrawal of his petition challenging the 2021 election.

On May 13, the SC was informed the HC had dismissed the election petition as withdrawn.

Battle of nerves as HP govt gets lease of life

■ Speaker accepts resignation of 3 MLAs ■ Sukhu govt still holds majority with 34 seats

New Delhi, June 3: The battle of nerves between the ruling Congress and the BJP continues in Himachal Pradesh with the Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu government getting another lease of life after the acceptance of resignations of three Independent MLAs, who had cross-voted in the Rajya Sabha polls.

The decision of Speaker Kuldeep Singh Pathania of accepting the resignations of Independent MLAs K.L. Thakur (Nalagarh),

Hoshiyar Singh (Dehra) and Ashish Sharma (Hamirpur) comes a day ahead of results of the bypolls to six Assembly constituencies on June 4.

There has been a tussle for power in the hill state of Himachal Pradesh ever since the BJP won the Rajya Sabha polls after six Congress and three Independent MLAs switched sides and cross-voted in favour of BJP candidate Harsh Mahajan.

The Congress currently has 34 MLAs in its favour



Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu

and the BJP has 25 in the Himachal Assembly, whose strength has come down to 59 now. Six

Congress MLAs were disqualified earlier and the resignations of three independent MLAs were accepted on Monday creating three more vacancies in the 68-member House.

Once the results are out on Tuesday, the strength of the Himachal Assembly will rise to 65, but since its strength is 34 it will remain in majority irrespective of the outcome of the bypolls.

Two sitting MLAs Vikramaditya Singh and Vinod Sultanpuri are also

contesting the Lok Sabha elections from Mandi and Shimla constituencies and their victory may usher in fresh byelections in their constituencies of Shimla Rural and Kasauli.

"By accepting the resignations of three independent MLAs, chief minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu has ensured that his government will survive for another few months. The decision comes as a relieve for the Congress," a senior BJP leader said. — PTI

Patnaik 75 days shy of becoming the longest serving chief minister

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, JUNE 3

Odisha chief minister and Biju Janata Dal president Naveen Patnaik is just 75 days away from becoming the longest serving chief minister, surpassing the record of Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) chief Pawan Kumar Chamling of Sikkim.

Mr Patnaik has already served as the CM of Odisha for the fifth consecutive term, and is eyeing the sixth term this time. The Odisha Legislative Assembly polls results, to be announced on Tuesday, will decide if the 78-year-old veteran will be lucky enough to be sworn-in as



Naveen Patnaik

years, 90 days in the chief minister's office, Odisha.

Mr Chamling, who served as Sikkim CM from December 12, 1994 to May 26, 2019, was in the office for 24 years and 165 days.

The Odisha CM, who has been in power since 2000 by winning the past five elections very convincingly, found for himself a tough challenge this time - Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Though he had

announced a team of 40 star campaigners to match the PM's high profile entourage of campaigners and strategists, but he virtually had to rely on his own political astuteness and ability as well as the wisdom of his close aide V. Karthikeyan Pandian to defend his position. Both of them held massive rallies across the 147 Assembly seats and 21 parliamentary constituencies.

In 2019, the BJD had won 12 Lok Sabha and 113 Assembly seats. Subsequently, it won two more Assembly seats in Bijapur and Patkura Assembly by-polls, taking the total Assembly seats tally to 115.

Pawar warns Shinde govt on Maha drought situation

AGE CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, JUNE 3

Nationalist Congress Party (SP) chief Sharad Pawar on Monday warned the Maharashtra government that its failure to take steps for drought mitigation will lead to a clash between him and the government. In a letter written to chief minister Eknath Shinde, the NCP founder said that he cannot keep quiet when the people are suffering.

"I have always taken a cooperative stand with the state government when it comes to dealing with drought. However, it is becoming difficult for me to keep quiet looking at the plight of people in the current situation. I



Sharad Pawar

appeal to the state government to take firm steps for drought mitigation earliest. In case of failure to do so

on the government's part, I will be forced to take a combative stand," the veteran politician said.

Several parts of Maharashtra are facing severe water crisis and drought-like situation. According to a state government report, the average water stock in nearly 3,000 dams in Maharashtra is down to 21.40 per cent on Monday, which is more than eight per cent less than the water stock available on the same date last year.

'Anti-India sentiments deep-rooted in Kashmiris'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR, JUNE 3

Iltija Mufti, "media advisor" and daughter of former chief minister and People's Democratic Party (PDP) president Mehbooba Mufti, said "anti-India sentiment is still deeply rooted in Kashmir", and that it is not easy to entice its people particularly the youth into the mainstream politics.

"While campaigning for the PDP in the Lok Sabha elections, I received tremendous love and respect from the people especially womenfolk and the youngsters, not only in the Kashmir Valley, but also in the Pir Panjal region of Jammu. I felt that it is ample for the people who have lived in a constant state of fear, worry and uncertainty in the past five years even if you go to them just to ask about their welfare. It makes them feel relaxed," she told this correspondent in an interview.

Ms Iltija, by any yardstick, is making her mark. But will the political prowess, the 36-year-old Iltija may have inherited, help the PDP to reach out to the young Kashmiris, who have grown up under the shadow of guns, is still an open question.

SHORT TAKES

Rape accused dies in custody; SHO booked

Jaipur: Eight policemen, including an SHO, have been booked for allegedly beating a rape-accused to death in Jhunjhunu district, officials said on Monday. The incident took place on May 29 under the Mandela police station limits, following which the SHO has been suspended, they added. Gaurav Sharma, a resident of Kotputli, was arrested from Jaipur on May 24 in a rape case lodged at Mandela police station. The next day, the court handed over the accused to the police on remand, the officials said. On May 29, the accused, nearly 30, was taken to a hospital after his health deteriorated in police custody. He was declared brought dead by doctors, they added. Additional superintendent of police Pushpendra Singh Rathore on Monday said the deceased's family members had refused to take the body, demanding that a murder case be filed against the SHO and other cops involved. — PTI

Telugu actress held in rave party case

Bengaluru: The Central Crime Branch probing Bengaluru rave party case arrested Telugu film actress Hema following interrogation on Monday. The rave party was organised on May 19 at a farmhouse near Electronic City. The Central Crime Branch (CCB) had summoned Hema to its office on Monday. Sources said she deposed before her interrogators wearing a burqa to hide her identity. As her replies were not satisfactory, she was arrested. The rave party was organised on the pretext of a birthday party where most of the people had come from neighbouring Andhra and Telangana, as per CCB sources. There were a few people from Bengaluru as well, they added. Based on a tip-off, the CCB raided the location and collected the blood samples of those who attended party. — PTI

Ex-techie gets life for spying for Pak

Nagpur: The Nagpur district court on Monday handed life imprisonment to former BrahMos Aerospace Pvt Ltd engineer Nishant Agarwal under the Official Secrets Act for spying for Pakistan's intelligence agency ISI. Agarwal will also have to undergo rigorous imprisonment for 14 years and was also fined ₹3,000. Additional sessions court judge M.V. Deshpande stated in the order that Agarwal was convicted under section 235 of the Criminal Procedure Code for an offence punishable under section 66 (f) of the IT Act and various sections of the OSA. "The court sentenced him to life imprisonment for 14 years under the Official Secrets Act and fined him ₹3,000," said special public prosecutor Jyoti Vajani. Agarwal was arrested in a joint operation by the military intelligence and ATS of Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra in 2018. — PTI

SC calls Yamuna Board meet Jun 5

■ **Continued from Page 1** Himachal Pradesh have agreed that a meeting of the UYRB be held. The top court was hearing a plea filed by the Delhi government seeking a direction to Haryana to release the surplus water provided by Himachal Pradesh to the national capital to mitigate its water crisis. The bench said, "In the course of hearing, all the parties agreed that there should be a non-adversarial approach to the problem of scarcity of water faced by the citizens of Delhi." The top court said the lawyers have "agreed that there shall be an emergent meeting of the Upper Yamuna River Board on June 5 to address the issues agitated in this petition and all other connected issues in right earnest so that the problem of scarcity of water for the citizens of Delhi shall be properly addressed". Quoting the figures placed before the board, Mr Mehta said if 100 litres of water comes to Delhi, the residents get only 48.65 litres.

IAS couple's daughter falls to death from Maha building

Mumbai, June 3: A 27-year-old woman, daughter of an IAS couple, tragically ended her life by jumping off the 10th floor of a government residential building near the Mantralaya in south Mumbai early Monday morning, police said. Lipi Rastogi, a law student pursuing her LLB course in Sonapat, Haryana, took the drastic step at around 4 am when everyone else at the IAS officers' government accommodation near Mantralaya was asleep, they said. A guard posted at the building informed Lipi's family after she was found lying unconscious on a motorbike parked near the premises, following which she was rushed to GT Hospital, police said. Despite immediate medical attention at the hospital, she was pronounced dead upon arrival. A suicide note found in her room in which Lipi held no one responsible for her decision. Police have initiated an investigation, registering a case of unnatural death at the Cuffe Parade police station. Police said Lipi was under immense pressure regarding her academic performance, leading to her distress. — PTI

Several rivers across Assam flowing above danger level

New Delhi, June 3: Several rivers in Assam continue to flow above the danger level amid incessant rain, according to the Central Water Commission (CWC). The commission's latest bulletin highlights critical water levels at various monitoring sites, indicating severe and above-normal flood situations. Three sites in Assam have severe flood situation where the water level is touching or exceeding the danger level but below the highest flood mark, while three sites have above-normal flood situation, according to the bulletin. The CWC said more than 39,000 people displaced by flood are taking shelter in 193 relief camps in different districts. Another 82 relief distribution centres are also operational. Rescue and relief operations are being carried out by multiple agencies, including the NDRF, SDRF and local administration, while medical teams have also been deployed in the affected areas. — PTI

Experts divided on Delhi HC relief to Guptas

■ *'Judicial order always supersedes admin order'* ■ *Some in legal fraternity say relief to suspects 'mockery' of judiciary*

RAKESH K SINGH
NEW DELHI, JUNE 3

While the Delhi high court granting temporary relief to Gupta brothers of South Africa — Atul and Rajesh — facing Interpol red corner notice (RCN) to visit Kedarnath and Badrinath along with their Saharanpur-based 77-year-old mother has raised concerns over judicial overreach, legal experts held divided opinions. They said judicial order always supersedes administrative order and that the temporary relief can always be challenged in the appellate jurisdiction by the aggrieved parties, which in this case is the Interpol or the South African government where they are wanted. A section of the legal fraternity, however, said granting relief to suspects for spiritual tourism is a "mockery" of the judicial system. Through an order last

month, the Delhi HC allowed the Guptas to visit India despite the duo facing RCN of Interpol. The SC advocate Ashwani Dubey said, "The HC exercising its extraordinary jurisdiction to grant temporary relief to the Gupta brothers is well within the constitutional mandate. The Gupta brothers have not committed any offence within the Indian jurisdiction and they are wanted in South Africa for the alleged offences committed there." "They have been granted limited relief after which they will go back to Dubai where they are currently residing. They are not facing RCN for an offence committed in India and the HC order has allowed them to visit here. Unless the HC order is challenged by the aggrieved parties before the appellate jurisdiction, they will be at liberty to visit India. Judicial decisions always supersede administrative decisions," Mr Dubey added. The Delhi HC advocate Sanjeev Prakash Upadhyay said, "Granting interim relief for spiritual tourism is a mockery of the judicial system. RCN notified suspects should have been detained and handed over to the country where they are wanted in criminal cases. Exercise of constitutional jurisdiction to suspects for religious or spiritual tourism is judicial overreach." Another legal expert said, "A person certainly has a fundamental right to celebrate his/her religious rites and rituals, but in those circumstances, when any person having accusations for national or international crime/wrong, and for that a look out notice has already been served against him to arrest, cannot use religion as a weapon to enjoy freedom." The SC advocate Vineet Jindal said, "The high

■ **THE GUPTA** brothers are accused of exploiting their links with ex-SA Prez Jacob Zuma to expand their biz, causing huge losses to the state exchequer in the process

court of Delhi has ordered to allow the Gupta brothers to visit India and provided immunity from arrest against the red corner notice issued against Atul and Rajesh Gupta." Mr Jindal said, "The Delhi HC's order also refrained from the extradition petition filed by South African authorities before UAE courts, which had already been rejected on March 15, 2023. The Delhi HC passed this order on the basis of fundamental rights and humanitarian grounds, but it is limited to the red corner notice proceedings and does not extend to any other proceedings against them, such as the matter of abet-

ment to suicide registered in Dehradun, where one of their brothers was arrested."

The story of the Gupta Brothers — Atul, Ajay, and Rajesh — started in UP's Saharanpur and peaked in South Africa. The trio migrated to South Africa in 1993 to establish Sahara Computers. Atul Gupta first set up a shoe business and later started Sahara Computers. He then went on to expand into industries like mining, air travel, energy, and media. At one of their firm's functions, he met South African politician Jacob Zuma, who would go on to serve as the country's president from 2009 to 2018. In 2016, Atul Gupta was among the 10 richest South Africans with his wealth valued at \$700 million.

The Gupta brothers are accused of exploiting their connections with Mr Zuma to expand their businesses, causing huge losses to the

state exchequer in the process. The term "Zupta" refers to the close relationship between the Gupta family and Jacob Zuma, particularly used by detractors of both Mr Zuma and the family. The brothers left South Africa in 2018, amid damning reports about their businesses. In 2022, UAE authorities said they arrested Atul and Rajesh after receiving an Interpol "red notice". The brothers were provided "Z" category security by the Uttarakhand government in 2018, which was an upgrade from the "Y" category cover they had enjoyed till then.

On May 24, Dehradun-based builder Sandeep Singh Sahni reportedly died by suicide. The deceased named Ajay and Anil Gupta, in his suicide note before jumping off his multi-storey building. On Saturday last week, Ajay and his brother-in-law Anil Gupta were arrested.

Cops intensify effort to find missing doc in Maoist-hit dist

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO

BHUBANESWAR, JUNE 3

The Odisha police has intensified its effort to trace out a doctor who was on Saturday evening "abducted" by suspected Maoists from his official residence at Kalimela in Malkangiri district, nearly 650 km from Bhubaneswar. Alman Bhoi, who serves at the Kalimela Community Health Centre, was allegedly kidnapped from his official quarters. According to reports, some unidentified miscreants allegedly abducted Amlan soon after he reached his quarters after completing his duty on June 1.

Amlan hails from the Tikabali area in the Kandhamal district. On Monday, his family members met the Kandhamal collector and superintendent of police and urged them to conduct a detailed investigation into the matter and rescue him.

"We are yet to get any information. His mobile phone is also switched off. We have urged the authorities to take appropriate steps in the matter," Alman's father Abani Bhoi said on Monday.

"We have met senior administrative and police officials. They have assured to discuss the matter with Malkangiri officials in this regard," Amlan's uncle said.

25-yr-old arrested for assaulting cabin crew

Tried to open AI Express flight door

Mumbai, June 3: The Mumbai police has arrested a 25-year-old man for allegedly assaulting the cabin crew onboard an Air India Express flight from Kozhikode to Bahrain and trying to open the door of the aircraft, an official said on Monday.

The accused, Abdul Musavir Nadukandee, was arrested after the flight made an emergency landing at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (CSMIA) on Saturday, an official from the Sahar police said.

Mr Nadukandee, who hails from Kerala, woke up when the flight took off from Kozhikode and immediately went to the back of the aircraft, where he allegedly

assaulted the cabin crew and tried to open the door of the aircraft, he said.

When the crew members managed to bring the man back to his seat, he started verbally abusing and assaulting other passengers and threatened to open the emergency door, the official said.

Fearing a security threat, the pilot made an emergency landing at CSMIA and alerted the security officials, he said. A case has been registered against the accused under Sections 336 (act endangering life), 504 (provocation to breach of the peace), 506 (criminal intimidation) and 323 (voluntarily causing hurt) of the Indian Penal Code and relevant provisions of the Aircraft Act, the official said. — PTI

17 ISIS agents charged for radicalisation, making IEDs

AMRESH SRIVASTAVA
NEW DELHI, JUNE 3

The NIA on Monday chargesheeted 17 hardcore agents of the proscribed global terrorist network in a conspiracy involving recruitment and radicalisation of youth and fabrication of improvised explosive devices in the Delhi-Padgha ISIS terror module case.

With these 17, the total number of accused in the case, which had exposed global linkages with foreign handlers, has risen to 20, the agency said.

The Central agency had originally charged 3 in

March 2023 and out of the 17 accused, 15 are from Maharashtra and one each from Uttarakhand and Haryana.

The accused, chargesheeted under various sections of the IPC, Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, Arms Act and Explosive Substances Act, "were found to have been engaged in ISIS row involving recruitment, training and propagation of the ISIS ideology, along with fabrication of explosives and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and fund-raising for banned outfit", it said. — PTI



Children try to play cricket during a dust storm in Patna on Monday.

— PTI

LeT commander among 2 terrorists killed in fire

Srinagar, June 3: In a major breakthrough, two terrorists of banned Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT), including a self-styled "commander" who had been operating for the longest period, were killed in an encounter with the security forces in Pulwama district of Jammu and Kashmir, officials said.

The anti-terror operation started at 11.45 pm on Sunday when the Jammu and Kashmir police along with the army and paramilitary forces laid a cordon around a house in the Nihama area of Pulwama district following intelligence input about the presence of terrorists, they said.

The encounter with the two holed-up terrorists started at 7 am on Monday after the duo identified as

Riyaz Dar alias "Sathar" and Rayees Dar refused to surrender, they said.

During the operation, which was overseen by deputy inspector general of police (South Kashmir) Altaf Khan, precaution was adopted to ensure that there was no collateral damage or any harm to any civilian life, they said. The firing intensified Monday afternoon following which the house in which the two terrorists were holed up caught fire.

The operation was called off at 4 pm after the recovery of the bodies of two terrorists.

Riyaz Dar had joined the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba in 2014 and had closely worked with slain Pakistani terrorists Abu Dujana and Abu Ismail. He had participated in many terror-related activities.

While Riyaz, designated as an A++ terrorist, carried a cash reward of above ₹10 lakhs, Rayees Dar was categorised as "A" carrying a cash reward of ₹5 lakhs.

This is the second anti-terror operation in South Kashmir in less than four weeks.

On May 7, the police achieved a major success after they gunned down Basit Dar, self-styled commander of the banned The Resistance Front (TRF) terror group, a shadow group of Lashkar-e-Tayyaba.

He and another terrorist, Momeen, were killed in an encounter in Kulgam's Redwani village. Both were involved in 18 terror-related cases, which included targeting of minorities and police personnel. — PTI

Rajiv Kumar slams 'fake narratives'

■ **Continued from Page 1** ballot counting has to be completed before the start of the penultimate round of EVM counting.

The CEC said that earlier the number of postal ballots was less, but this time several senior citizens, people with disabilities, and those involved in essential services, including journalists, have been given the benefit of postal ballots.

With the EC facing criticism for holding elections in peak summer, the CEC said one of three big learnings from the polls was that this process should have been completed a month earlier.

"They shouldn't have been held in such hot weather. It is a big election that involves a lot of forces. There is a lot of movement. We cannot reduce the time taken for the process but it could have been done earlier instead of in such heat," Mr Kumar said.

Taking exception to allegations that district magistrates were being influenced, Mr Kumar said "fake" and "mischievous" narratives were spread to sway the general elections and sought proof from the Opposition to back its claim. "You cannot spread a rumour and bring everyone under a cloud of suspicion," Mr Kumar said, citing Opposition claims on faulty electoral rolls, the efficacy of EVMs, voter turnout and the counting process.

"There is a pattern, there is a design, I'm not saying it's a toolkit. But there is a design," the CEC said, adding that cases pending for years were raked up just four days before the first phase of polling.

The CEC said the Opposition

should also tell the poll authority about those trying to influence the poll process before the counting of votes begins.

"The EC is a constitutional body, it needs to be neutral. People are watching not only the parties and candidates but also the poll panel. But the way the EC has functioned till now, we can't trust it. Since it's a constitutional body, we respect it as it has dignity," he added.

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh had claimed that home minister Amit Shah had been calling district magistrates and collectors and indulging in "blatant and brazen" intimidation.

"The outgoing Union home minister Amit Shah has been calling up district magistrates and collectors. So far, he has spoken to 150 of them. This is blatant and brazen intimidation, showing how desperate the BJP is. Officers should not get under any pressure and must uphold the Constitution. They are under watch," Mr Ramesh had said. The EC has sent a notice to Mr Ramesh asking him to give proof of his allegation until Monday evening and refused to give him extra time to file a reply.

The poll panel said that until the model code of conduct is in place, all officers are under the deemed deputation of the EC and report directly to it for directions. The CEC further said that no district magistrate has so far reported any influence, as claimed. The model code of conduct will be lifted once the polling process ends on June 6.

Talking about the elections, Mr Kumar said India created a world record with 64.2 crore people vot-

ing in these polls, including 31.2 crore women. The CEC said over 68,000 monitoring teams and 1.5 crore polling and security personnel were involved in the world's largest electoral exercise. He said that nearly four lakh vehicles, 135 special trains, and 1,692 air sorties were used for conducting the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. "Only 39 repolls took place in the 2024 general elections, as against 540 repolls in 2019," the CEC said.

Mr Kumar said the commission is very enthused by the voter turnout in Jammu and Kashmir, and soon the Assembly election process in the Union territory will start. He added that Jammu and Kashmir recorded its highest turnout in four decades at 58.58 per cent overall and 51.05 per cent in the Valley.

There were seizures of ₹10,000 crores involving cash, freebies, drugs and liquor made during the 2024 polls, compared to ₹3,500 crores in 2019. "We have by and large controlled the menace of deep fakes and artificial intelligence (AI)-generated synthetic content in the 2024 general elections. All development work used to stop during the model code of conduct, and the poll panel gave permission within 48 hours of applications for 95-98 per of projects," the CEC added. Mr Kumar referred to various memes doing the rounds on social media, describing the election commissioners as "laapata gentlemen," asserting that he and fellow commissioners Gyanesh Kumar and Sukhbir Singh Sandhu were "never out" and were "always here."

Israel asks citizens to visit A&N, Goa & Lakshadweep

■ **Continued from Page 1** entering his beautiful and tiny archipelago nation after a recommendation from the Cabinet.

"The Cabinet decision includes amending necessary laws to prevent Israeli passport holders from entering the Maldives and establishing a Cabinet subcommittee to oversee these efforts," a statement from the Maldivian Presidential office was quoted as saying.

According to media reports, a total of 528 Israeli nationals visited the Maldives in the first four months of this year, dropping from 4,644 during the same period in 2023, according to Maldives government data.

It may be noted that, as per reports, there has been a sharp drop in the number of Indian tourists visiting the tiny archipelago nation that has some globally-renowned pristine and exotic beach destinations.

This happened after deterioration in ties between India and its south-western maritime neighbour due to the pronounced anti-India and pro-China stand taken by the Maldivian President who swept to power last year in the Presidential polls there. His political party also recently swept the parliamentary polls.

THE ASIAN AGE

4 JUNE 2024

EC's final task is to ensure fairness of vote counting

The great Indian general elections ended on June 1 after 64.2 crore people out of an eligible 97 crore cast their votes. Among them there were 31.2 crore women, making them the biggest ever number of voters since female suffrage was introduced in 1892 in New Zealand.

The biggest credit goes to the little over 64 crore people who braved the elements to exercise their franchise, a majority of whom having voted in the sweltering heat of a particularly severe Indian summer.

Minor glitches like EVM malfunction, power failure and sporadic incidence of violence were overcome. Whatever be the hitches, there was no reason to doubt the Indian polls are the freest elections in the world with not one eligible voter whose name is on the rolls pressured not to vote.

It is moot whether the polls were the fairest because the losers habitually cast aspersions on the Indian voting system despite its robust methodology and its strong voting and counting process governed by the stand-alone EVMs that are thought to be beyond manipulation.

Given the kind of charges that the combined opposition came up with, including a conspiracy theory surrounding the home minister calling up

There were questions raised about the difference between the real time voter turnout data and the final figures released by ECI which may not have been answered satisfactorily.

District magistrates and Collectors to pressure them, the EC held an unprecedented media conference to explain the election process and the challenges posed as well as to answer criticism.

The EC did well to explicitly state that the postal ballots will be counted first and the EVM votes 30 minutes later. But then the system has always followed that pattern, did so in 2019 and 2021 and in the counting of the Assembly poll votes of Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim and why the opposition was apprehensive about this has not been explained.

The Indian voting system has come far since the days of booth capturing, rigging and violence aimed at stopping voters from exercising their franchise. The EVMs, now backed by VVPATs and partial matching of its count with those of the EVMs, have proved reliable workhorses of the Indian voting system.

It is up to some parties to explain why they say the system is perfect when they win and why it is abominably prejudiced when they lose. And to think that the most flagrant violation of the poll process came when a candidate who was leading asked for a recount and managed to lose the seat to a very prominent opposition leader.

Where the EC may not have lived up to its reputation was in the exercise of its powers to pull up a candidate, including the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and other party bigwigs who either breached the norms in using religion as a talking point thus bringing in social divisiveness as the Prime Minister did or went overboard in castigating the PM with vituperative invective, including one legislator who did so in unacceptable Tamil slang.

There were questions raised about the difference between the real time voter turnout data and the final figures released by ECI which may not have been answered satisfactorily in the assertion that everything was fine. Now that the longest and biggest ever poll has come to an end, the focus shifts to the counting process that must be fair to satisfy the most basic premise of a democracy.

Telangana marches triumphantly

India's newest state Telangana has celebrated the 10th anniversary of its formation. It was the only state which had a history of decades long agitation as there were proponents for Telangana even before Andhra Pradesh was created in 1956.

Perhaps, no state was created amid so much inter-regional tussle and parliamentary drama as it was. Just like how eminent British politicians like Winston Churchill cast doubts on the viability of India at the time of its independence, Telangana too had many sceptics in his share. Nevertheless, Telangana proved naysayers wrong and flourished in the last 10 years.

One of the major issues that people feared about was the treatment of people from coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema who settled in Hyderabad after the formation of Telangana state.

In the last 10 years, however, there was absolutely no vindictiveness against any section of people living in Hyderabad or any part of Telangana. In the run-up to the formation of Telangana state, it was feared that many businesses in Hyderabad — established mostly by entrepreneurs from coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema — would move their operations from Telangana to Andhra Pradesh.

However, nothing of that sort happened. All kinds of businesses stayed on in Hyderabad and flourished. Telugu speaking people — whether their roots are from Telangana or Andhra Pradesh — displayed unparalleled sagacity and maturity on these two respects.

Even though Andhra Pradesh could not make a decision on the new state capital, Hyderabad grew manifold in terms of physical and economic size. Industry grew as more investments flowed in from everywhere. More jobs were created in the private sector.

Agriculture reaped benefits of mega projects like irrigation projects. Electricity consumption increased which reflects a better standard of living. State's tax revenue size increased, and its per capita income swelled.

Overall, the last 10 years has been the work in progress for Telangana. There is still a long way for the state to go to achieve the goals that set off the spark for the Telangana statehood movement.

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Subhani



A bizarre controversy on the exit poll predictions



Sunil Gatade

On Tuesday, June 4, the nation will learn who will come to power after the 2024 Lok Sabha elections with the announcement of the much-awaited results that will decide the fate of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his BJP, the world's largest party, as well as of the Opposition parties.

But before the actual counting, much drama and dispute has been seen over the exit poll predictions that have spoken of a landslide for the BJP under Mr Modi.

It has curiously run into a controversy with the Opposition seeking to dismiss the findings and insisting it was very much in the race to come to power. Such a counter-offensive by the opposition is an unprecedented move, turning the whole situation a little bizarre.

Shiv Sena's Sanjay Raut, himself a journalist, claimed the Opposition INDIA grouping is thick in the game and could win 295 of the total 543 seats, which has added much curiosity as to what is in store. His claim came a day after the meeting of INDIA leaders.

Never in the past has any Opposition questioned the outcome of the exit polls in such a forceful manner, questioning the very intent of the polling companies and suggesting that there is more to it than meets the eye.

The nation had seen such a landslide in 1971 and 1984 in the wake of the Bangladesh war and the assassination of Indira Gandhi. In contrast, the 2024 election is a "normal" one.

The exit poll predictions show unequivocally that the BJP under Mr Modi is way ahead in the Lok Sabha race against the INDIA grouping, one

of whose main constituents is the Congress.

The actual numbers will put a stamp of approval/disapproval on the business of exit polls, pre-poll surveys and such exercises in the world's largest democracy. The outcome is expected to reveal what has weighed on the minds of voters, what has gone wrong for the rival sides and what has helped them. It must be conceded that the just-concluded campaign was the toughest one for Prime Minister Modi, who has been on a winning spree since Gujarat days in 2002.

This election will go down in history as the most puzzling for Mr Modi, as the hero of many an electoral battle who was fighting in the dark this time. Many commentators had claimed that Mr Modi may have missed the bus this time as he had delayed the announcement of the polls, which according to them should have happened in January after the Ram Mandir's inauguration in Ayodhya.

The two-month-long election schedule too looked a bit troublesome with the BJP, which was intended for Mr Modi to have much time for campaigning but appeared too tiring for him for want of a narrative.

If the exit poll predictions prove true, the lesson for the Opposition is that they could be a fighting force in states where they have worked hard and joined hands in fierce combat, and that the same must be replicated at the national level.

The exit polls show that the Opposition is doing much better in states like Maharashtra and Bihar because there they not only worked hard but unitedly too.

The moral of the story

Never in the past has any Opposition questioned the outcome of the exit polls in such a forceful manner, questioning the very intent of the polling companies and suggesting that there is more to it than meets the eye.

is that Mr Modi is not invincible and could be contained or defeated if the Opposition works purposefully with a plan of action and has boots on the ground.

The Opposition leaders, such as Uddhav Thackeray, Sharad Pawar or Tejashwi Yadav, could make a mark due to their connection with the grassroots, running an effective campaign and playing the victim card aggressively in the face of the BJP juggernaut.

There have been pluses for the BJP side too. The TINA (There Is No Alternative) factor has been working in favour of Mr Modi. Besides, both Mr Modi and Amit Shah are known to be hard taskmasters when it comes to fighting the polls.

A section in the BJP, however, insists Mr Modi is the past master in the polarisation game. His Hindu-Muslim rhetoric has silently mobilised the majority and the Hindutva card will be seen in action. It feels a sizeable section of Hindus don't buy the caste census logic, which it feels is past its expiry date.

The reporters of a news website not known to be Modi admirers insisted that what they saw during the campaign was that the BJP was very much on the ground and fighting hard.

But the experience was also that in states like Uttar Pradesh, the BJP was suffering some losses due to its failure to change candidates. For the Opposition, the lesson of the 2024 election season is that you cannot win a poll if you start preparing at the last

moment and fail to project a united face.

In West Bengal, where chief minister Mamata Banerjee appears under intense pressure, the Trinamul boss broke ranks with her INDIA allies to ensure that only the TMC gets the maximum number of seats.

There have been minuses too for the BJP. Despite being hailed as "Sher" by his supporters, Mr Modi was at a loss to clinch an issue that would drive a big wedge in the rival camp and take the poll battle into their territory.

Issues like price rise, unemployment and growing inequality raised by the Opposition did have resonance in the polls.

On the face of it, it did not appear that Hindutva has raised much crescendo in the minds of the majority community.

The Prime Minister's failure to correctly gauge the mood of the people by harping on the right issues and raising the pitch speaks poorly of the mighty election machinery of the world's largest party. How can they go so wrong?

Mr Modi has been good at sensing the mood of the people and this was seen in 2014 and 2019.

This time, he was like a character in the story in which some blind men were asked to specify their impression about the elephant. So, shooting in the dark, Mr Modi used all cards: Ram Mandir, Pakistan, dynasty, appeasement politics. The name of the game was polarisation.

Two decades back, Subhash Ghai had come out with a film *Yaadein*, which was sold out at exorbitant rates in all regions and the music rights too fetched much moolah. But the film flopped at the box office, leaving just *Yaadein*.

One thing did happen after *Yaadein*. Ghai was no longer the magic man of Bollywood. Tuesday will reveal the fate of Mr Modi, but one thing is clear — this was not his best election.

The writer is a journalist based in New Delhi

LETTERS

GVA STILL LAGGING

India's GDP growth for the January-March quarter and the entire 2023-24 fiscal year surpassed forecasts, expanding by 8.2 per cent to ₹173.8 lakh crores, with 7.8 per cent growth in Q4, largely due to a low deflator of 1.4 per cent that boosted manufacturing. Public investment drove fixed investment up by nine per cent to ₹58.3 lakh crores, and manufacturing grew 9.9 per cent to ₹27.5 lakh crore. However, the RBI and Centre's policy decisions remain complex due to gross value added (GVA) growth lagging behind GDP. The most troubling aspect is weak private consumption growth, which at four per cent, is less than half the GDP growth rate.

Amarjeet Kumar Hazaribagh

SOUTH AFRICAN MESS

SOUTH AFRICAN President Cyril Ramaphosa will face the ANC's Integrity Commission to respond to allegations that he stole millions of dollars. The latest corruption scandal involving Mr Ramaphosa started last week, when a former intelligence director opened a complaint against the President alleging that on February 9, 2020, robbers targeted Mr Ramaphosa's game farm in the northern Limpopo province, where they found \$4 million in foreign currency hidden inside furniture. However, the ANC appears to back him, saying he will continue.

Sankar Paul Chakdaha, West Bengal

LONG WAIT IS OVER

THE ICC T20 World Cup starting in the US is a cause for big celebration for cricket fans across America and Canada. American cricket lovers who are fond of baseball and basketball will be able to watch and experience the thrill of T20 cricket. India is a potential winning team. Afghanistan and Australia will face a tough challenge. Since becoming the 2013 ICC World Cup Champions, the Indian team has not won a final, ending runners-up in the 2023 ODI WC. But it may defeat traditional rivals Pakistan and hopes to end its wait for victory since 2013 this time.

Dattaprasad Shirodkar Mumbai

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Aakar Patel



After the verdict: Just more of the same, or will things change?

A painfully long general election in our hottest summer has finally ended. The tea leaves will be read in the exit polls that were released on Saturday evening, but one must keep in mind their imperfect record. Even for a single state, West Bengal, which held Assembly elections in the summer of 2021, one out of four got the result wrong. Opinion polls, conducted before this longest cycle of elections was announced, were unanimous that the BJP would get a majority.

Today, some are not sure this will be the case, but we shall see. Without knowing the results, however, what can be said about the election that is still important? Let us work our way through the possibilities.

The first is that no matter who wins, this was not a free or fair election. Two chief ministers were jailed before the campaigning began. Jailed not because they were convicted but because the BJP wanted them jailed. One of them was released for a few days of campaigning, but will have to return to jail now.

The access to bank accounts of the Opposition was restricted, through attacks made by the Central investigative agencies controlled by the BJP. The Election Commission compromised itself, sadly, and allowed the BJP to control both the planning of the phases and their execution. The com-

mission's insolent replies to the Opposition, its refusal to act on the Prime Minister's hate speeches against Muslims and its refusal to release the poll data on time has harmed our democracy. The electoral bonds scheme was determined to be unconstitutional, but thousands of crores raised under it were used in this election, and this has tainted it, quite irredeemably in my opinion.

Next, let's look at what the possibilities are. Since the opinion polls were unanimous, the most likely one may seem to be that Narendra Modi returns to office with a similarly large majority. What should one expect in that case? More of the same, of course. He has run the nation as one would a monarchy and his ministers are courtiers (see their social media accounts bleating his glories). The Opposition parties will continue to be attacked through the misuse of official agencies, civil society will be force-marched towards extinction and India's plummeting on the global indices will continue. The minorities, and especially Muslims, will continue to have open season declared on them. The institutions will continue on their path of decline. The consolidation of what a former chief economic adviser has referred to as "the two As" will continue, meaning a corporate capture of the economy. In short, what we see around us today will remain as it is.

It is unhealthy to have a single-party state,

as has happened in Gujarat. The Opposition exists, but only on sufferance. What happened to opponents and prospective candidates in Surat and in Varanasi will repeat in more places.

It should be conceded that if he wins again, Narendra Modi will be the most successful leader we have seen in our history, and delivering three consecutive Lok Sabha wins after three Assembly wins all with absolute majorities will be a singular achievement.

The second possibility is that the BJP gets a plurality of seats but not an absolute majority. Say, they get 250 seats and form the government. In this case, the situation changes in several ways. First, the allies will begin to assert themselves and it will no longer be possible for the king to ignore the courtiers. Does Mr Modi have it in him to function in a more democratic manner? No. This will make such a government a whole lot more volatile.

Within the party, there will be people wanting to assert themselves. The old men in Nagpur, always playing the long game, will raise their heads and become more visible.

Some of the things will shift, though the attack on minorities is likely to continue, because that happens at the level of the states, where in several places the BJP enjoys a certain popularity because of its bigotry. The attack on federalism will recede. Today,

India is federal only in name. The states have no power to tax after GST and the unhappiness of many has broken out into the open. Law and order continues to be a state subject, but from Delhi to Jharkhand to Karnataka to Bengal, the Union government has sent out its agencies to undermine state governments and chief ministers. With the Union government as strong and unwilling to change as it has been, there has been no attempt at redressal. An alliance government will likely alter that and this will be good for our country.

The last possibility is, of course, that the BJP loses. On the evidence of the opinion polls, this is the least likely possibility but one that we have to consider. To my mind, this will be a good outcome and not because of personal preferences entirely. Democracy renews and refreshes itself with changes in government. One man presiding for decades - take Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping and Kim Jong Un - rarely produces anything positive. Some of the things, many of them in fact, that we have taken on since 2014 need to be got rid of. It is true that our democracy gives us the option of countering them in other ways, for instance through the courts or through protests. But elections are the only way in which changes take place structurally.

The writer is the chair of Amnesty International India. Twitter: @aakar_patel

SHORT TAKES

GEORGIA 'FOREIGN INFLUENCE' BILL SIGNED INTO LAW

Tbilisi, June 3: The Speaker of Georgia's Parliament said on Monday he signed into law a controversial "foreign influence" bill adopted despite mass protests, Western condemnation and a presidential veto.

Georgia's Parliament adopted the divisive law last week, overriding a presidential veto on the measure, which critics say is anti-democratic and mirrors Russian legislation used to silence dissent.

Brussels has warned the move will derail the Black Sea nation from its path to European Union membership.

2 NYC OFFICERS, GUNMAN SHOT AND WOUNDED

New York, June 3: Two New York City police officers and a 19-year-old man were shot and wounded early on Monday during a confrontation and were hospitalised, officials said.

Mayor Eric Adams said one of the officers was saved by his bullet-resistant vest. The officers pursued the man while he was driving a motorised scooter the wrong way. The officers tried to pull him over, but he got off the scooter and ran away. The officers chased him on foot for several blocks. He fired multiple rounds at officers, who returned fire.

PARL SPEAKER QALIBAF ENTERS IRAN PREZ RACE

Dubai, June 3: Iran's parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, a former Revolutionary Guards commander, on Monday announced he would run for president to succeed Ebrahim Raisi who died along with seven others last month in a helicopter crash, state media reported.

Qalibaf, who has unsuccessfully contested two presidential races and dropped out of a third to avoid splitting the hardline vote, signed up to run in the June 28 election despite being re-elected as Parliament Speaker last week.

LANKA CLOSES SCHOOLS AS 10 DIE IN FLOODS

Colombo, June 3: Sri Lanka closed schools on Monday as heavy rain triggered floods and mudslides in many parts of the island nation, leaving at least 10 people dead and six others missing, officials said.

The education ministry announced that the reopening of schools would depend on how the weather develops. Heavy downpours have wreaked havoc in many parts of the country since Sunday, flooding homes, fields and roads, and forcing officials to cut electricity as a precaution. By Monday, over 5,000 people had been moved to evacuation centres.

CENSURE IRAN AT UN NUKE MEET: EUROPE POWERS

Vienna, June 3: Britain, France and Germany will seek to censure Iran over its lack of co-operation with the UN nuclear watchdog at its board meeting from Monday despite US opposition, diplomats told AFP.

According to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Tehran is the only non-nuclear weapon state to enrich uranium to 60 per cent, while it keeps accumulating large uranium stockpiles.

That is approaching the enrichment levels of 90 per cent needed for atomic weapons. It is also well above the authorised 3.67 per cent.

NIGERIAN UNIONS SHUT POWER GRID, DISRUPT AIRLINES

Lagos, Abuja, June 3: Nigeria's main labour unions on Monday shut down the national grid and disrupted airline operations across the country as they began an indefinite strike over the government's failure to agree a new minimum wage. This strike is the fourth embarked upon by the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC), two of the country's biggest unions, since President Bola Tinubu took office last year.

The Transmission Company of Nigeria said union members drove away operators at the power control rooms and shut down six substations.

Gaza truce plan doubtful as Israel-Hamas battle rages on

Hezbollah launches squadron of drones towards Israeli military targets

Rafah, Beirut, June 3: Doubts were growing on Monday about a plan for a Gaza ceasefire and hostage release deal outlined by US President Joe Biden as heavy fighting raged for a third day since his White House address.

Lebanon's Hezbollah said on Monday it had launched a squadron of drones towards the headquarters of the Israeli military's Galilee formation in an intensification of cross-border violence between the two adversaries.

While Hezbollah has previously launched drones at Israel during hostilities that began in October, it marked the first time the Iran-backed group had announced firing a squadron of them.

Biden on Friday presented what he labelled an Israeli three-phase plan that would end the bloody conflict, free all hostages and lead to the reconstruction of the devastated Palestinian territory without Hamas in power.

However, Netanyahu's office stressed on Saturday that Israel would push on with the war sparked by the October 7 attack by Palestinian militants on southern Israel until all of its "goals are achieved",

ISRAEL WILL BE DESTROYED: KHAMENEI

● Some 55 per cent of all structures in the Gaza Strip have been destroyed, damaged or possibly destroyed since war erupted in the Palestinian



territory eight months ago, according to preliminary satellite analysis by the UN.

● Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Monday praised Hamas's unprecedented October 7 attack against Israel that "was a decisive blow to the Zionist regime" and predicted the "destruction" of their common enemy.

● A war monitor said 16 members of pro-Iran groups were killed in an Israeli strike near northern Syria's Aleppo early on Monday, with state media also reporting a deadly Israeli attack.



Displaced Palestinians gather outside their tents in Deir al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip, on Monday. — AFP



● David Levy, an Israeli politician born in Morocco who fought tirelessly against deep-seated racism against Jews from North Africa and went on to serve as foreign minister and hold other senior governmental posts, has died. He was 86.

including the destruction of Hamas's military and governing capabilities.

Israel's media have questioned to what extent Biden's speech and some crucial details were coordinated with Netanyahu's

team, including how long any truce would hold and how many captives would be freed when.

Mediators US, Qatar and Egypt said they called "on both Hamas and Israel to finalise the deal embody-

ing the principles outlined by President Joe Biden".

White House national security council spokesman John Kirby said that "we have every expectation that if Hamas agrees to the proposal... that

PETROL BOMB THROWN OUTSIDE ISRAELI EMBASSY

Jerusalem, Bucharest, June 3: A foreign citizen was detained in Romania's capital Bucharest on Monday after throwing a Molotov cocktail outside the Israeli embassy, causing no damage or casualties, police said.

The Romanian Intelligence Service said its anti-terrorism officers caught the 34-year-old suspect, who allegedly also threatened he will set himself on fire, and handed him over to police.

Israel's foreign ministry confirmed the arrest of the suspect "apparently of Syrian origin".

He had pulled out, lit and thrown the petrol bomb while undergoing a security inspection, the ministry added. — Reuters

Israel would say yes". US secretary of state Antony Blinken "commended" Israel on the plan in a phone call with war Cabinet member Benny Gantz and defence minister Yoav Gallant. — Agencies

UK: July 23 Rwanda deportation takes off

London, June 3: The British government says it intends to begin deporting asylum seekers on July 23, court documents showed on Monday, although the controversial scheme is dependent on Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's Conservative parties winning the upcoming election.

The policy of sending asylum seekers who arrived in Britain to the East African nation is one of Sunak's flagship policies but legal and parliamentary obstacles have meant it has never got off the ground.

Sunak recently said the deportation flights would not leave before an election on July 4.

However, the Prime Minister has promised if he wins they would begin soon after, although he is trailing the opposition Labour Party by about 20 points in opinion polls and it has promised to scrap the plan. In documents submitted to the London High Court as part of a charity's challenged to the policy, government lawyers said the intention

LABOUR SEEKS TO BUOY VOTERS ON N-ARSENAL

London, June 3: Britain's Labour opposition party committed Monday to ensuring the UK's nuclear arsenal, pitching itself as strong on defence for July's election in contrast to the last vote, when it lost heavily.

Leader Keir Starmer said Labour was "the party of national security" as he tried to reassure voters that the centre-left grouping has changed since he succeeded socialist Jeremy Corbyn four years ago. Corbyn, who led Labour to a landslide defeat to the Conservatives at the 2019 election, was seen as weak on defence because of his support for nuclear disarmament and ambivalence towards Nato. — AFP

was "to effect removals with a flight to Rwanda on 23 July 2024 (and not before)." — Reuters

In Manila, Zelenskyy promotes peace meet

Manila, Beijing, June 3: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy met with the Philippine president on Monday in a rare Asian trip to urge regional leaders to attend a Swiss-organised global peace summit on the war in Ukraine that he accuses Russia, with China's help, of trying to undermine.

China on Monday denied accusations by Zelenskyy that it was trying to prevent other countries from attending the meet.

Zelenskyy arrived unannounced and under heavy

security in Manila on Sunday after speaking over the weekend at the Shangri-La defence forum in Singapore. He was given a red-carpet welcome with military honours before meeting with President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

Marcos pledged that his country would take part in the summit, Philippine communications secretary Cheloy Garafil said. "I'm happy to hear today from you that you'll participate in our peace steps," Zelenskyy told Marcos. — Agencies

Water world



The historic part of Heidelberg is flooded during high water of the Neckar river in southwestern Germany, on Monday. — AFP

Nitisha Kandula, Indian student, missing in US

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs

HYDERABAD, JUNE 3

Nitheesha Kandula, a 23-year-old student from Telangana's Bodhan, has been reported missing in the United States for four days. Kandula, who is pursuing higher education at California State University San Bernardino (CSUSB), was last seen on May 28. The missing report was filed on May 30. CS-USB chief of police John Guttierrez posted a missing person report on X.

■MissingPersonAlert: California State University San Bernardino Police along with our partners in #LAPD, is asking anyone with information on the whereabouts of @CSUSB-Nitheeas Kandula, to contact us at: (909) 537-5165," the police said.

Kandula was described as 5 feet 6 inches tall, and around 160 pounds (72.5 kgs) in weight.

PAST CASES

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF INDIAN STUDENTS IN THE US HAS BEEN CAUSING CONCERN AMONG THE COMMUNITY.

● Last month, 26-year-old Rupesh Chandra Chintakindi went missing in Chicago.

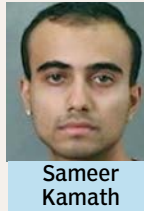
● In April, 25-year-old Indian student Mohammad Abdul Arfath from Hyderabad's Nacharam, who had been missing since March, was found dead in Cleveland. He was pursuing a Masters in IT from Cleveland University.

● In March, a 34-year-old trained classical dancer from India, Amarnath Ghosh, was shot dead in St Louis, Missouri.

● Sameer Kamath, a 23-year-old Indian-American student at Purdue University, was found dead in a nature preserve in Indiana on February 5.

● On February 2, Vivek Taneja, a 41-year-old Indian-origin IT executive, suffered life-threatening injuries during an assault outside a restaurant in Washington.

● In January, 18-year-old Akul Dhawan, a University of Illinois student was found unresponsive outside a campus building.



Sameer Kamath



Mohammad Abdul Arfath

LATEST | UPDATE

Climate change will increase temperatures in the long term, warns WMO

La Nina can help lower mercury this year: UN

Geneva, June 3: The return of the cooling La Nina weather phenomenon on this year should help lower temperatures somewhat after months of global heat records, the United Nations' weather agency said on Monday.

The impact is likely to be felt in the next few months because the warming El Nino weather pattern — which has helped fuel a spike in global temperatures and extreme weather around the world since mid-2023 — "is showing signs of ending", the UN's

World Meteorological Organisation said in its latest update. The WMO warned, however, that global temperatures would continue to rise in the long term due to human-induced climate change, which continues to make extreme weather worse and upend seasonal rainfall and temperature patterns.

La Nina refers to the cooling of the ocean surface temperatures in large swathes of the tropical Pacific Ocean, coupled with winds, rains and changes in atmospheric pressure.



File picture of motorists passing through the inundated area in Cilincing, North Jakarta, on Jan. 31, 2024. — AFP

In many locations, especially in the tropics, La Nina produces the opposite climate impacts to El

Nino, which heats up the surface of the oceans, leading to drought in some parts of the world and trig-

gering heavy downpours elsewhere. The WMO said there was a "60 per cent" chance of La Nina conditions in the period from July to September and a "70 per cent" likelihood during August-November.

The chances of El Nino redeveloping are negligible, it added. Every month since June 2023, when El Nino returned, has set a new high temperature record, and 2023 was by far the warmest year on record globally.

The WMO said the planet would continue to heat up

Eighth arrest for Tiananmen post in Hong Kong

Hong Kong, June 3: Hong Kong police arrested an eighth person over social media posts about commemorating Beijing's 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown on Monday, the eve of the bloody incident's 35th anniversary.

The arrest was the latest in a series of law enforcement actions taken since last Tuesday against a group that was accused of publishing "seditious" online posts to "take advantage of an upcoming sensitive day".

The group was the first nabbed under Hong Kong's "Safeguarding National Security Ordinance", the city's second national security law, enacted in March following another security law imposed by Beijing in 2020.

The police said on Monday the eighth person arrested was a 62-year-old man, who was suspected of committing an "offence in connection with seditious intention" — the same offence the first seven were arrested under last week.

It carries a penalty of up to seven years in jail under the new security law. Among those arrested last week was Chow Hang-tung, a prominent activist who led the now-disbanded Hong Kong Alliance that once organised annual vigils to mark the Tiananmen Square crackdown.

Jailed since 2021, Chow is already serving a more than 30-month jail sentence over other charges, including "unauthorised

● THE THREE-DECADE tradition has been banned since 2020, when Beijing imposed the first national security law on the financial hub to quell dissent following huge, and sometimes violent pro-democracy protests the year before.

assembly" for her attempt to publicly commemorate the June 4 anniversary.

Hong Kong's security chief said last week the group made online posts that "were trying to incite disaffection and distrust — and even hatred — against the central government, the Hong Kong government and the judiciary". Six of them have been released on bail and subject to a "movement restriction order", according to the police.

Hong Kong used to be the only place under China's rule where public commemoration of Beijing's deadly clampdown on pro-democracy demonstrators in Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989, was allowed.

The three-decade tradition has been banned since 2020, when Beijing imposed the first national security law on the financial hub to quell dissent following huge, and sometimes violent pro-democracy protests the year before.

On Monday evening, dozens of police were seen patrolling Hong Kong's shopping district of Causeway Bay. — AFP

Courts acquit Imran in 3 cases, including cipher

Islamabad, June 3: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party founder Imran Khan was on Monday acquitted in three high-profile cases, including the cipher case, in a major relief to the beleaguered ex-PM who was sentenced to 10 years in jail for making public a secret diplomatic communication.

The 71-year-old former cricketer-turned-politician has been in jail since August last year after being convicted in some of the nearly 200 cases slapped on him since his ouster in April 2022.

On Monday, a two-member bench of the Islamabad High Court (IHC) comprising Chief Justice Aamer Farooq and Justice Miangul Hassan Aungzeb acquitted Khan and former foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi in the cipher case.

However, the duo are not expected to be released from prison due to Khan's sentence in the Iddat case (illegal marriage) while Qureshi was arrested in a case linked to the May 9 violence. He is on physical remand till June 5.

Khan and Qureshi were sentenced to 10 years' jail in the cipher case in Jan. by a special court, established under the Official Secrets Act. Both Khan and Qureshi had challenged the verdict in the Islamabad High Court.

The case pertains to the incident in which Khan showed a piece of paper

QUETTA: METHANE GAS SUFFOCATES 11 COALMINERS

Quetta, June 3: At least 11 coalminers suffocated to death in a build-up of methane gas in a mine outside the southwestern Pakistani city of Quetta on Monday, a government official said.

The miners died in the Sanjdi coalfield, about 60 km (40 miles) from Quetta, according to Abdul Ghani Kakar, the chief inspector of mines for the provincial Balochistan government. "Methane gas accumulated which caused the deaths," he said. — Reuters

— allegedly a copy of a diplomatic communication — at a public rally in Islamabad, claiming it as proof of a conspiracy against his government by a foreign power, referring to US diplomat Donald Lu, who has been at the centre of the cipher controversy.

Khan had brandished the cipher paper just two weeks before the ouster of the PTI government in April 2022 through a vote of no-confidence in Parliament. Leader of the Opposition Omar Ayub hailed the verdict and called for the immediate release of the duo. — PTI

MI6 RECRUITED STATE WORKERS TO SPY: BEIJING

Taipei, June 3: Beijing has accused two Chinese citizens of spying for UK, in the latest test of a relationship growing increasingly fraught.

China and the UK have clashed over Beijing's clampdown on free speech and open poll in Hong Kong. In a social media message on Monday, the ministry of state security said it uncovered an espionage case involving a couple identified by their surnames, Wang and Zhou, allegedly recruited by UK's intelligence agency, MI6. — AP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	76,468.78	3.39
Nifty 50	23,263.90	3.25
S&P 500*	5,292.37	0.28
Dollar (₹)	83.14	0.39
Pound Sterling (₹)	105.63	0.53
Euro (₹)	90.09	0.48
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	71,550*336	0.47
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	79.20	-2.35
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.945	-0.041
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.465	-0.047

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Sebi launches new mobile app Saathi 2.0

Capital markets regulator Sebi on Monday launched mobile app 'Saa'zhi 2.0' on personal finance for investors with comprehensive tools aimed at simplifying complex financial concepts. The app includes financial calculators and explain KYC procedures, mutual funds, ETFs, buying and selling shares on stock exchanges, investor grievances redressal mechanism, and online dispute resolution platform.



RBI says 97.8% of ₹2,000 notes returned to banks

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Monday said 97.82 per cent of the ₹2,000 denomination banknotes have returned to the banking system, and only ₹7,755 crore worth of the withdrawn notes are still with the public. The total value of ₹2000 banknotes in circulation, which was ₹3.56 lakh crore at the close of business on May 19, 2023, has declined to ₹7,755 crore at the close of business on May 31, 2024.

Bajaj Auto sells 3.5L automobile units in May

Bajaj Auto said its total sales remained flat at 3,55,323 units in May. The automaker sold 3,55,148 vehicles in May 2023, the company said in a regulatory filing. Total domestic sales declined 1 per cent to 2,25,087 units last month compared to 2,28,401 units sold in May 2023. Total exports during May rose 3 per cent at 1,30,236 units in May from 1,26,747 vehicles shipped out to overseas markets in the year-ago period.



Paras Buildtech to invest ₹500 cr in Gurugram

Realty firm Paras Buildtech will invest around ₹500 crore to develop a luxury housing project in Gurugram as part of its expansion plan amid strong demand. The company said it has launched a super-luxury project, "The Manor," in Gurugram. The company will develop 120 apartments in this 4.26 acre project. "The price of each apartment will be around ₹9 crore," Kunal Rishi, COO of Paras Buildtech, said.

Exit polls indicated political stability, policy continuity

Stock markets see big rally on poll predictions

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, JUNE 3

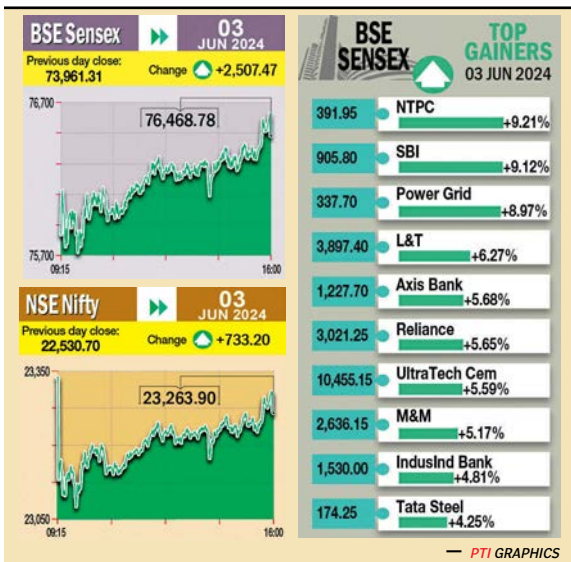
Exit poll euphoria led to a mammoth rally in the market with over 3.25 per cent gain for Sensex and Nifty-50 index surpassing earlier highs and over ₹13.81 lakh crore total notional gain for investors. BSE's market capitalisation rose to over ₹425.91 lakh crore or \$5.13 trillion, a record high.

However, analysts warned of market volatility on June 4 when election votes will be counted.

The Sensex gained 2,507.47 points or 3.39 per cent closing at a new high of 76,468.78 while Nifty-50 gained 733.20 point or 3.25 per cent at a new all time high of 23,263.90.

As expected market saw record high opening, riding the exit poll numbers for NDA and hopeful of political stability and economic policy continuity.

"Nifty logged its best session in over three years, as investors cheered exit



polls, along with better-than-expected India Q4 GDP data, positive global cues," said analysts.

"Exit poll has activated the optimism of a win for the ongoing government. PSUs had a humongous rally, in anticipation of continuation of the

reform gains, triggering further re-rating. The sustenance of broad rally is anticipated to continue on the inflows," said Vinod Nair, head- Research, Geojit Financial Services.

The exit poll numbers attracted foreign investors who went on a buying

spree with ₹6,850.76 crore net buying along with domestic institutional investors net buying of ₹1,913.98 crore.

In May, foreign investors were net sellers by ₹25,586.33 crore. India's 10 year government bond yield dropped to 6.945 per cent, which led to hefty gains in PSU bank stocks.

The market saw broad-based buying. All sectoral indices closed in green, with capital goods, PSU banks, oil and gas, power, and real estate up 5-7 per cent, only IT and healthcare underperformed, said analysts.

The BSE mid-cap index gained 3.54 per cent while BSE small-cap index up 2.05 per cent. "The Nifty-50 index has crossed the barrier of previous high of 23,110 and has managed to stay above it, indicating strength; however the outcome of the general election, may cause market volatility," said Neeraj Sharma, analyst, Asit C. Mehta Investment.

Strong growth to upgrade ratings, says Deutsche

Mumbai, June 3: Strong growth and a narrower fiscal deficit can lead to a sovereign rating upgrade for India, a German brokerage said on Monday.

The government's commitments on fiscal deficit to 5.1 per cent in FY25 and further down to 4.5 per cent in FY26 "look more credible now", analysts at Deutsche Bank said,

pointing out that the number came in at 5.6 per cent in FY24 as against the budgeted 5.8 per cent.

Courtesy the higher than expected dividend announcement by the Reserve Bank of India at ₹2.1 lakh crore, the fiscal deficit for FY25 can come down to 5 per cent as against budgeted 5.1 per cent. On growth, the note said

it expects real GDP expansion to come at 6.9 per cent in FY25 and go down further to 6.5 per cent in FY26. "Strong growth, lower fiscal deficit opens up room for ratings upgrade," the note said.

"A faster-than-anticipated pace of fiscal consolidation could pave the way for a sooner-rather-than-later sovereign rating

upgrade for India," the analysts said.

The note said the Indian economy has exhibited resilience despite higher rates for longer, the Russia-Ukraine war and Covid prior to that, though a strong pickup in real GDP growth during FY24 can be also attributed materially to a very low GDP deflator. — PTI



MERCEDES-BENZ PRICES C300 AMG AT ₹60 LAKH

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, JUNE 3

Mercedes-Benz, the German luxury car maker, on Monday introduced the new C 300 AMG Line priced at ₹69 lakh at pan India showroom.

The automaker has also introduced new features across the C-Class range and the GLC SUV. The new C 300 AMG Line replaces the C 300d AMG Line in the C-Class lineup. It undercuts the BMW M340i by about ₹4 lakh.

The C 300 AMG Line is powered by a 2.0-litre 4-cylinder turbo-petrol engine paired with a mild-hybrid system and a 9-speed automatic gearbox.

"The top-end C 300 AMG Line offers the right combination of peak performance and luxury features, and its introduction indicates a market shift towards higher-spec petrol powertrain. The multiple enhancements in comfort, technology and safety will enhance the appeal of the C-Class and GLC," said Santosh Iyer, MD and chief executive officer at Mercedes-Benz India.

540 products get BIS quality orders

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JUNE 3

Since introduction of the BIS Act in 2017, over 140 quality control orders (QCOs) have been issued for more than 550 products. Quality control has supported better growth in the respective sectors, finds GTRI.

The BIS Act simplified the process of notifying products, systems, and services that must meet specific standards. Some of the sectors where the QCOs were issued include toys, footwear made from leather, pneumatic tyres and tubes for automobiles, steel and steel products and electronic and information technology products, including mobiles, mobile batteries and laptops.

The enforcement of QCOs and higher import duties has significantly reduced the import of substandard toys, with India's toy imports dropping from US\$ 304.1 million in FY 2019 to US\$ 64.9 million in FY 2024 and imports from China decreasing from US\$ 264.6 million to US\$ 41.5 million in the same period.

It saw a 15 per cent increase in domestic electronics production and 20 per cent increase in R&D spending by companies.

The recall rate for electrical appliances reduced by 25 per cent.

Industries such as electronics, textiles, and toys, have experienced growth rates of 8-10 per cent post-implementation, compared to 4-5 per cent growth before.

Rising air traffic to up revenues

Dubai, June 3: Global airlines on Monday raised their profit forecast for 2024 and projected industry-wide revenues just shy of \$1 trillion as a record number of travellers board flights.

The international air transport association (IATA) said it expected the worldwide industry to generate \$30.5 billion of profit this year, higher than an upwardly revised \$27.4 billion in 2023 as carriers keep a lid on underlying labour costs despite recent strikes.

"That comes just four years after the industry collapsed to a \$140 billion loss in 2020 as a result of the pandemic.

"The environment is better than we had expected, particularly in Asia," director general Willie Walsh said on the sidelines of an annual meeting of IATA's more than 300 members, which acco-



START-UPS RAISE \$1.3 BILLION IN MAY, HIGHEST SO FAR THIS YEAR

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JUNE 3

Start-ups raised this calendar year's highest investment of \$1.3 billion across 128 deals in May.

The surge in funding in May can be attributed to Google-Flipkart's \$350 million deal and several growth stage investments, finds TheKredible. The funding in May saw a nearly 29 per cent sequential jump over \$1 billion (bn) in April. On a year-on-year basis, May 2024 also saw a 32 per cent rise in investments against \$1.01 bn in May 2023.

Since January, home-grown start-ups have raised over \$5.1 billion which is likely to reach \$12 billion by the year end. In 2023, the total funding in start-ups stood at \$11.3 bn.

Bengaluru-based start-ups remained on the top with 52 deals, contributing around 60 per cent of the overall funding in May. Delhi-NCR and Mumbai followed with 33 and 14 deals, respectively.

E-commerce start-ups led the show with 25 deals followed by fintech with 20 deals. "The strong revival in May might be attributed to a few large deals, but even these no doubt signal confidence in the market for other investors," said TheKredible.



unt for more than 80 per cent of global air traffic.

However, the airline industry warned its ability to serve a strong rebound in travel demand is being hampered by disruption to global supply chains, including deliveries of its own fleets.

Passenger yields - or the average amount paid by a passenger to fly one mile - are expected to strengthen by 3.2 per cent compared with 2023, IATA said in a twice-yearly economic outlook. In part, that is because capacity growth

Manufacturing continues to expand: Survey

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, JUNE 3

India's manufacturing growth remained in expansionary territory in May. However, it was bit low due to intensive heat wave and rising production costs that hampered the volumes, a private survey showed on Monday.

As per the survey conducted by seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), the index fell from 57.5 in May from 58.8 in April, signalling a slower but substantial improvement in the health of the sector. In the PMI parlance, a print above 50 means expansion while a score below 50 denotes contraction.

Indian manufacturers expressed the highest level of positive sentiment towards growth prospects, fuelled by advertising and innovation, alongside expectations that economic and demand conditions will remain favourable.

As per the survey, the slowdown was attributed to reduced working hours amid intensive heatwave and rising production costs.

"Panelists cited heat waves as a reason for lower work hours in May, which may have affected production volumes. In contrast, new export orders rose at the fastest pace in over 13 years, with a broad-based demand across geography," said Maitreyi Das, global economist at HSBC.

"The manufacturing sector remained in expansionary territory in May, albeit the pace of expansion slowed, led by a softer rise in new orders and output. On the price front, higher raw material and freight costs led to a rise in input prices. Manufacturers were only able to pass on a part of this increase to consumers, resulting in a squeeze in manufacturing margins," said Das.



INDIAN MANUFACTURERS expressed the highest level of positive sentiment towards growth prospects, fuelled by advertising and innovation, alongside expectations that economic and demand conditions will remain favourable.

Manufacturers were only able to pass on a part of this increase to consumers, resulting in a squeeze in manufacturing margins," said Das. The survey also noted that new orders rose at a substantial pace. "The rise was associated with marketing efforts, demand strength and favourable economic conditions. The growth was reportedly stymied by competitions and election-related disruptions," the survey said, adding that in contrast to the trend for total sales, new export orders rose at a faster pace in May.

JAPAN AIRLINES IN CODESHARING DEAL WITH INDIGO

Mumbai, June 3: Japan Airlines on Monday said it has entered into a code-share arrangement with IndiGo, which would help the Japanese carrier expand services to 14 destinations of the domestic carrier's network.

At present, Japan Airlines operates its services to Delhi and Bengaluru from Tokyo. It offers daily flight services to the national capital from Haneda Airport.

"The partnership expands the choices available to Japan Airlines customers for journeys to/from Japan, using IndiGo's extensive network in India," said Abhijit DasGupta, senior vice president for network planning and revenue management at IndiGo.

— PTI

AMD plans to add more AI-based chips in 2 yrs

Taipei, June 3: Advanced Micro Devices (AMD) unveiled its latest artificial intelligence (AI) processors on Monday and detailed its plan to develop AI chips over the next two years in a bid to challenge industry leader Nvidia.

At the Computex technology trade show in Taipei, AMD chief executive officer Lisa Su introduced the accelerator, which is set to be made available in the fourth quarter of 2024.

The race to develop generative AI programs has led to towering demand for the advanced chips used in AI data centers able to support these complex applications.

"AI is clearly our number one priority as a company and we have really harnessed all of the development capability within the company to do that," Su told reporters.

"This annual cadence is something that is there because the market requires newer products and newer capabilities. Every year we have the next big thing such that



we always have the most competitive portfolio."

AMD also introduced an upcoming series of chips titled MI350, which is expected to be available in 2025 and will be based on new chip architecture.

Compared to the currently available MI300 series of AI chips, AMD said it expects the MI350 to perform 35 times better in inference - the process of computing generative AI responses.

Additionally, AMD revealed the MI400 series, which will arrive in 2026 and will be based on an architecture called "Next".

At the Computex event, AMD said its latest generation of central processor units will likely be available in the second half of 2024. — Reuters

INCOME | STREAM

CEO bullish new devices will diversify sources of revenue for firm

Laptops on new chips last longer: Qualcomm

Taipei, June 3: Qualcomm Inc. said owners of laptops built on its new chips will be able to use the computers as much as they want without having to worry about the battery dying.

San Diego-based Qualcomm is providing the semiconductor underpinning Microsoft Corp.'s new breed of Copilot+ PCs that feature the software maker's latest and best artificial intelligence (AI) enhancements. Both Microsoft and Qualcomm have said the chipmaker's hardware is essential for



WINDOWS LAPTOPS based on Qualcomm's Snapdragon X Elite systems will have as much as twice the battery life of traditional counterparts.

making those AI additions possible - and to process them efficiently enough to keep a device running for a long time without a recharge. "We're really making

history together and the industry is starting to take notice," chief executive officer Cristiano Amon said in Qualcomm's keynote address at Computex trade show Monday.

"I believe it's as significant as Windows 95."

Qualcomm and some of its peers have spent more than a decade trying to loosen the dependency of the PC industry on Intel and provide a fresh set of key components using the Arm Holdings technology that's dominant in the smartphone industry.

Windows laptops based on Qualcomm's Snapdragon X Elite systems will have as much as twice the battery life of traditional counterparts, Amon said. And when it comes to running some AI

features, the power efficiency will be more than 100 times greater, he said.

The CEO's bullishness about the new devices is part of his attempt to diversify Qualcomm's sources of revenue - the company's mobile chips are ubiquitous across the smartphone industry, but it trails rivals in other segments. The greater efficiency and connectivity offered by Qualcomm's products will help it win share in a number of new markets, including automotive and computing, he has said. — Bloomberg

CRICKET

ICC MEN'S
T20 WORLD CUPPAGE
8

SHORT SINGLES

Delayed flight, lost luggage greets Oz

Lost luggage, flight delays and gusty winds on landing here summed up the Australian cricket team's rather tumultuous arrival at Bridgetown, Barbados, for the T20 World Cup but all-rounder Ashton Agar said a cruise along the city's stunning coastline was all it needed to calm the players. Australia will open their campaign against Oman on June 5.

Pace spearhead Pat Cummins and fellow fast bowler Mitchell Starc had come back to Australia after the IPL for a short break and while heading to the West Indies, the former lost his luggage which eventually did reach him, according to a report in 'cricket.com.au'.

"Flight delays also affected Starc and Maxwell, as the pair had to spend a night in Los Angeles and then another night in Miami en route to Barbados after their own brief trips back to Australia following the IPL," the website reported. Marcus Stonis also had to miss a practice match after his kit was delivered late to him.

However, Agar said a cruise on Saturday has managed to bring in a sense of calm for the side, which had to put support staff on ground during its practice games due to lack of first-choice players at that time.

Record prize purse for T20 World Cup

The International Cricket Council on Monday announced a record prize purse of \$11.25 million for the 2024 T20 World Cup with the winners pocketing at least \$2.45 million.

The runners-up will receive at least \$1.28 million, while the losing semi-finalists walk away with \$787,500 each.

The previous edition in 2022 had a total prize pool of \$5.6 million with winners England receiving \$1.6 million.

"The ninth edition of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup will see the winners of the 20-team tournament earn at least \$2.45 million, the highest prize money in the history of the tournament, along with the trophy that they will lift at Kensington Oval in Barbados on 29 June," said the ICC in a statement.

The four teams that fail to make it out of the Super 8s will earn \$382,500 each, while the teams placed ninth, 10th, 11th and 12th receive \$247,500 each. Participants who finish 13th to 20th place will return \$225,000 each. "And every team receives an additional \$31,154 for each match they win barring the semifinals and final," the sport's governing body added.

'Af confident of chasing big totals'

Afghanistan batters have developed skills and confidence of chasing down big totals and the team has ceased to rely on their bowlers for pulling off favourable results, captain Rashid Khan expressed on Monday.

Afghanistan, who have relied on their world-class spinners more often than not, have been bolstered with the rise of the explosive Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Ibrahim Zadran and Azmatullah Omarzai.

"That is something in the past. We were struggling a little bit in the batting area. Earlier, the bowlers would do a lot more and help us win the games," Rashid said.

"Later on, we got those youngsters — especially from Under-19 — the way they have worked hard and got the opportunity to play for Afghanistan at a very young age, and then start exploring all around the world (while) playing the leagues, where they got better and better," he added.

TOP NORTJE!

Anrich runs through Lanka line-up, SA begin with win

MOSES KONDETY
NEW YORK, JUNE 3

It's wasn't a knockout and South Africa had it easy. They rode on Anrich Nortje's four-wicket burst to open their campaign in the T20 World Cup with a convincing six-wicket win over sorry Sri Lanka at the Nassau County International Cricket Stadium here on Monday.

The Group 'D' opener was a slow dance as the South Africa sauntered past Lanka's substandard 77 with 3.4 overs to spare. IPL stars Quinton de Kock (20) and Heinrich Klaasen (19 not out) led the chase for the winners.

Earlier, Lanka struggled on a seaming wicket to sink to their lowest total in T20s. South African quicks ran through the rival batting line-up to return with brilliant figures. Leading the pack was Nortje with 4 for 7, followed by Kagiso Rabada (2/21), Keshav Maharaj (2/22) and Ottneil Baartman, who knocked down the first wicket, with 1/9.

Introduced in the fourth over, Baartman made an impressive start, conceding just one leg bye and extracting considerable bounce off the wicket that got him the wicket of Pathum Nissanka caught in the deep by Klaasen after making just 3 while consuming 8 deliveries. The South African gave away just two more runs in his next over as Sri Lanka crawled to 24 for 1 at the end of Powerplay.

Nortje struck in the eighth over; his first, to send back Kamindu Mendis who tried to force the pace and holed out to Reeza Hendricks as Lanka slipped to 31 for 2. It soon became 32 for 4 as captain Wanindu Hasaranga and Sadeera Samarawickrama fell to successive balls from left-arm spinner Maharaj.

At halfway stage, Lanka were tottering at 40 with half the side back in the hut, much to the disappointment of their supporters who had clearly outnumbered South African fans in the stands.

A little later, Charith Asalanka hit Nortje straight to Hendricks in the deep after making a 9-ball 6 that signalled Lanka's sixth wicket and doom.

Angelo Matthews hit the penultimate ball of Maharaj's fourth over for a six, first of the innings, to bring up Sri Lanka's 50 in the 13th over.

He hit another maximum but that was very much it as his side could not even last their full quota of overs with just three batters getting into double digits.



Anrich Nortje (left) of South Africa celebrates with a teammate after the dismissal of Sri Lanka batter Kusal Mendis during their T20 World Cup match at the Nassau County International Cricket Stadium in Westbury, New York, on Monday.

— AP

SCOREBOARD

Sri Lanka: Pathum Nissanka c Klaasen b Baartman 3, Kusal Mendis c Stubbs b Nortje 19, Kamindu Mendis c Hendricks b Nortje 11, Wanindu Hasaranga st de Kock b Maharaj 0, Sadeera Samarawickrama b Maharaj 0, Charith Asalanka c Hendricks b Nortje 6, Angelo Mathews c Baartman b Nortje 16, Dasun Shanaka b Rabada 9, Maheesh Theekshana not out 7, Matheesha Pathirana c Markram b Rabada 0, Nuwan Thushara run out 0. Extras (lb-3, w-3) 6. **Total (all out in 19.1 overs) 77.**

Fall of wickets: 1-13, 2-31, 3-32, 4-32, 5-40, 6-45, 7-68, 8-70, 9-71.

Bowling: Marco Jansen 3.1-0-15-0, Kagiso Rabada 4.1-21-2, Ottneil Baartman 4.1-9-1, Keshav Maharaj 4.0-22-2, Anrich Nortje 4.0-7-4.

South Africa: Quinton de Kock c & b Hasaranga 20, Reeza Hendricks c PHKD Mendis b Thushara 4, Aiden Markram c PHKD Mendis b Shanaka 12, Tristan Stubbs c Asalanka b Hasaranga 13, Heinrich Klaasen not out 19, David Miller not out 6.

Extras (lb-3, nb-1, w-2) 6. **Total (For 4 wickets in 16.2 overs) 80.**

Fall of wickets: 1-10, 2-23, 3-51, 4-58.

Bowling: Angelo Mathews 3.0-16-0, Nuwan Thushara 3.0-18-1, Dasun Shanaka 3.1-6-1, Matheesha Pathirana 3.0-12-0, Wanindu Hasaranga 3.2-0-22-2, Maheesh Theekshana 1.0-3-0.

England look to topple Scots

Bridgetown (Barbados), June 3: Deprived of ideal preparation by rain, defending champions England will hope to get their act right straightaway when they face Scotland in their T20 World Cup opener here on Tuesday.

Phil Salt will look to continue his red-hot form of the Indian Premier League in the T20 showpiece, even as pacer Jofra Archer's return adds firepower to the English bowling attack.

Rain played spoilsport in the preceding four-match T20I series at home against Pakistan, but England will still enter the tournament as one of the strong contenders to lift the title for an unprecedented third time.

In what will be their first ever meeting against the Scots in the shortest format, the Jos Buttler-led England will be the overwhelming favourites to emerge winners at the Kensington Oval, which offered a two-paced wicket for the game between Namibia and Oman on Sunday evening.

Placed in Group B, England have traditional rivals Australia, Namibia and Oman for company besides Scotland.

To reach the Super Eight stage, teams will have to finish in the top two of a group.

In white-ball cricket, it hasn't been smooth sailing for England since their five-wicket-victory over Pakistan in the final of the last T20 World Cup in Melbourne in 2022.

A year after their success in Australia, Buttler's men endured a



Pacer Jofra Archer's return adds firepower to the English bowling attack against Ireland.

disastrous campaign at the ODI World Cup in India, finishing seventh after winning three and losing six of their nine matches including a painful defeat to Afghanistan.

AFGHANISTAN EYE WINNING START

In the day's other match, Afghanistan will be the overwhelming favourites against Uganda at the Providence in Guyana. The Africans are making their maiden appearance in the tournament.

Afghanistan did extremely well in the last ICC tournament, beating the likes of England, South Africa and Pakistan in the ODI World Cup in India last year, and they will certainly take heart from that showing in this tournament. — PTI

SAMSON COUNTING ON HIS EXPERIENCE AT WC

New York, June 3: Despite being focused on leading his team in the IPL, the thought of the impending World Cup selections was at the back of his mind and he has come "most prepared", said Indian wicketkeeper-batter Sanju Samson.

The Rajasthan Royals skipper had another successful IPL season where he scored 531 runs including five half-centuries and he finally got his due when he was selected in the 15-member India squad for the T20 World Cup in the US and West Indies.

"This is the most prepared or experienced Sanju Samson has come into this World Cup, actually," said Samson in video posted by the BCCI on Monday.

"Ten years of lots and lots of failures, few successes here and there. Life in cricket has taught me everything I needed to know before we come to this crucial tournament."

A highly underrated wicketkeeper-batter, Samson despite his pro-



lific run with the bat in the IPL, has played just 16 ODIs and 25 T20Is.

"The IPL covered all my mind space, I think. There was a lot to do, there was a lot to think being the captain of the side. I think my mind was always occupied, but somewhere at the back of the mind it was there, the World Cup selections are also around."

The 29-year-old added that getting the call-up to represent the country in the World Cup was like a dream come true.

"It was a huge thing, actually. It was like one of the best things which could have happened to my career and those thoughts keep on playing." — PTI

PRAGG LOSES TO ALIREZA, CARLSEN JUMPS TO LEAD

Stavanger (Norway), June 3: The brother-sister Indian duo of R. Praggnanandhaa and R. Vaishali suffered defeats in their respective section while Magnus Carlsen justified his top billing with a win over an off-colour Ding Liren to surge to sole lead on 12 points in the Norway Chess tournament here. Fabiano Caruana also scored over compatriot Hikaru Nakamura to help Carlsen emerge as the front runner for the crown in the six-player double round-robin contest. Praggnanandhaa lost to Firouzja Alireza of France in the Armageddon tiebreaker after suffering a bit through the Classical game too while Vaishali went down to world women's champion Wenjun Ju of China who outplayed the Indian in the endgame.

With four rounds still to come in both sections, Carlsen is now followed by Nakamura on 11 points while Praggnanandhaa is still third on 9.5 points in all.

Alireza is on fourth spot with eight points in all and Caruana follows him with 6.5 points. Surprisingly, China's Ding Liren seems completely out of sorts with just 2.5 points thus far, needing a miracle to come back in the tournament. — PTI



Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan plays a shot against Ukraine's Elina Svitolina during their fourth round match of the French Open at the Roland Garros Stadium in Paris on Monday.

— AP

Sabalenka rolls, Medvedev out

Paris, June 3: Aryna Sabalenka's dominant run at the French Open continued Monday with a 6-2, 6-3 win over Emma Navarro to reach the quarterfinals. The Belarusian, ranked second in the world, is now one win away from her seventh straight Grand Slam semifinal appearance. She will face the winner of the match between Varvara Gracheva and Mirra Andrejeva in the quarterfinals.

Other results included No. 12 Jasmine Paolini defeating Elina Avanesyan 4-6, 6-0, 6-1, and No. 4 Elena Rybakina advancing past Elina Svitolina 6-4, 6-3. Paolini and Rybakina will meet in

the quarterfinals.

"She's a tough opponent. She's moving well and hitting the ball quite heavily. I'll have to focus on my footwork," Rybakina, the 2022 Wimbledon champion, said of Paolini.

With temperatures in Paris approaching 22 degrees Celsius, the absence of rain allowed the matches on Court Philippe Chatrier and Court Suzanne Lenglen to proceed with an open roof.

It is far from the scorching heat Alex De Minaur grew up with back home in Australia. The 11th-seeded De Minaur rallied to come out 6-7(2) 6-3 7-6 (10-8) winners in the men's doubles third round.

quarterfinals at Roland Garros since Lleyton Hewitt in 2004. Medvedev had some treatment on his right foot during the second set.

BOPANNA-EDBEN ADVANCE

Meanwhile, Rohan Bopanna and Matthew Ebden erased a one-set deficit to edge past the fighting pair of N. Sriram Balaji and MA Reyes-Varela Martinez in the Super Tie-breaker, moving to the quarterfinals.

The second-seeded Indo-Australian pair kept its cool in crunch moments to come out 6-7(2) 6-3 7-6 (10-8) winners in the men's doubles third round. — Agencies

ADDP REVOKES BAJRANG'S BAN

New Delhi, June 3: The National Anti-Doping Agency's Disciplinary Panel (ADDP) on Monday revoked the provisional suspension imposed on Bajrang Punia till NADA issues a Notice of Charge to the wrestler, who had refused to provide his sample for dope test after the selection trials in March.

NADA had suspended Tokyo Games bronze medallist Bajrang on April 23 and subsequently the world governing body UWW also took similar action.

The trials to pick the men's national team for the Asian Olympic Qualifiers in Bishkek were held in Sonapat on March 10 and Bajrang had walked off the venue without providing his urine sample after losing a bout. — PTI