

INDIAN CHRONICLE

18 May, 2024 | Saturday | Volume No:12 | Issue No:83

Pages: 8+8

www.indianchronicle.com

Published from : Ranga Reddy (Telangana State)

₹ 3

TTD to release Arjitha Seva tickets for August, 2024 tomorrow

The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) has announced that the quota of Arjitha Seva tickets for the month of August will be released online at 10 am on the 18th of this month. To secure these service tickets, devotees must register online before 10 am on the 20th of May. The tickets will be allotted through electronic dip, so devotees are encouraged to register promptly. For those who obtain tickets in the Lucky Dip, payment must be made between the 20th and 22nd of May by 12 noon to secure sanctioned tickets. TTD has urged devotees interested in availing various services, including booking Srivari Arjitasevas and darshan tickets, to visit the official website <https://tdevasthanams.ap.gov.in> for online bookings.

India and Russia set to discuss visa-free tourism agreement in June

GNS News Agency, May 17

India and Russia are poised to begin a landmark dialogue that could lead to visa-free tourist exchanges between the two countries, aiming to significantly enhance tourism flows. The first round of discussions is scheduled for June. Nikita Kondratyev, Director of the Department of Multilateral Economic Cooperation and Special Projects at Russia's Ministry of Economic Development, shared details about the upcoming talks at the Russia-Islamic World: Kazan Forum 2024. The event, held in Kazan, Russia, served as a platform for Kondratyev to highlight the advances in negotiations on group visa-free trips. "We are nearing the final stages of internal coordination with the Indian delegation and will soon discuss a draft agreement," Kondratyev explained. Further expressing optimism about the timeline, Kondratyev stated, "I think that in June we will hold the first consultations with them to discuss the draft agreement. We plan to sign by the end of the year. This initiative is part of Russia's broader strategy to enhance international tourism and cultural exchange. Earlier in February, the ministry had announced its intention to implement visa-free exchanges with India by the end of 2024, underscoring the strategic importance of India in Russia's tourism and economic plans.

Russia's visa-free tourism program isn't exclusive to India. The country successfully launched similar initiatives with China and Iran starting August 1, 2023. These agreements have facilitated easier group travel, fostering greater understanding and cooperation between Russia and these nations. The proposed visa-free arrangement with India, if successful, is expected to open new avenues for travellers, enhance cultural exchanges and economic ties between the two historically cooperative nations. With the formal talks set to begin in June, stakeholders in the tourism industry are keenly watching for what could be a significant boost to tourism and people-to-people relations between India and Russia.

Congress slams PM Modi's 'bulldozer' remark, calls UP CM Yogi Adityanath 'anti-reservation'



GNS News Agency, May 17

The Congress on Friday responded to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's remarks where he said that INDIA bloc allies should "learn from Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath where to run bulldozers". In a video shared on X, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh cited an article on Adityanath's website to claim that it reflected the chief minister and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's (RSS) "anti-reservation mindset". Follow full coverage of Lok Sabha elections here.

In the video, Ramesh also showed where the article was on the UP CM's website and said it might not be available for long. He also cited portions of the article which according to Ramesh, reflected an anti-reservation mindset. "The outgoing prime minister today said that the INDIA bloc should learn from Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath where to run the 'bulldozer'. See how Yogi's 'bulldozer' is against the reservation system for Dalits, tribals, and backward classes!" "The prime minister should clearly say that he is supporting Yogi because of his views on reservation. This is the secret behind his slogan of '400 paar'. He wants to do this so that with a majority of 400 seats in the Parliament, he can amend Babasaheb Ambedkar's Constitution and snatch the right of reservation from Dalits, tribals and backward classes," Ramesh alleged. On Friday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi claimed the Samajwadi Party and the Congress would run a bulldozer over the Ram temple in Ayodhya if they came to power. In a sharp jibe at the INDIA bloc allies, he further said that the former must take tuition from Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath to learn "where to run bulldozers".

PM Narendra Modi to INDIA bloc: 'Learn from Yogi Adityanath where to run bulldozer'

GNS News Agency, May 17

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday claimed the Samajwadi Party and the Congress will run a bulldozer over the Ram temple in Ayodhya if they come to power. In a sharp jibe at the INDIA bloc allies, he further said that the former must take tuition from Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath to learn "where to run bulldozers". "If SP and Congress come to power, Ram Lalla will be in a tent again and they will run a bulldozer on Ram temple. They should take tuition from Yogi ji, where to run a bulldozer and where you shouldn't," PM Modi said at a rally in Uttar Pradesh's Barabanki. PM Modi further said the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance is working for the betterment



of the country. On the other hand, the INDIA bloc, he said, is creating disturbances. "As the elections further, the INDI alliance members are beginning to fall apart," PM Modi added.

PM Modi said the INDIA alliance is in the Lok Sabha elections' fray in order to foment instability in the country. He said the BJP will score a hat-trick by winning three consecutive

Lok Sabha elections. PM Modi took a sharp jibe at Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, saying he has found a new aunt in Mamata Banerjee. "The Samajwadi prince (Akhilesh Yadav) has found refuge under a new aunt (Mamata Banerjee). This new aunt is in Bengal. And this aunty has told the INDI alliance that I will support you but from the outside," PM Modi added. Akhilesh Yadav

calls his former ally, BSP chief Mayawati, bua (aunt). PM Modi claimed that the Congress's alleged plan to reverse the Supreme Court's judgement on Ayodhya could become a reality. "Some people may wonder how this can be possible. Don't be in any confusion... during the freedom struggle where there talks about dividing the country, then people used to say a country can't be divided. However, it happened, they did it. They can go to any extent; their track record is such. For them, country is nothing, family and power is everything," he added, per PTI. PM Modi is currently on an interview spree. Over the past few days, he has spoken to several media houses. In a recent interview with News18, PM Modi said he would never do "Hindu-Muslim" in politics.

'Adani-Ambani to khatakhat...I can make PM Modi say anything': Rahul Gandhi in Raebareli

GNS News Agency, May 17

Rahul Gandhi campaigning in Raebareli, the second seat that he is contesting from in the Lok Sabha election 2024, said he has the power to make Prime Minister Narendra Modi say anything. "I said Narendra Modi never takes the name of Ambani, Adani. After two days, he took Adani, Ambani names. Then I said we would credit money to bank accounts khata-khat. Narendra Modi repeats 'khata-khat' in his speech. Tell me what you want to hear from Narendra Modi, I will make it happen in two minutes. And also tell me if you don't want Modi to say something. I will make that happen as well," Rahul Gandhi said. "Modi is accepting his defeat. I can give it in writing that Narendra Modi will not remain the prime minister on



June 4," Rahul Gandhi said. The Lok Sabha campaign in Raebareli where Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav was also present, was a special one as Sonia Gandhi addressed the rally at the end. In her address, Sonia Gandhi who represented the seat in the Lok Sabha before shifting to the Rajya

Sabha this year thanked Raebareli for giving her a chance to serve as the MP for 20 years. "This is the biggest asset of my life. My head bows down in front of you in respect. Raebareli is my family and Amethi is my house. I have many fond memories associated with these two places. The relationship is as pure as Ma

Ganga. Indira Gandhi had a special place in her heart for Raebareli. I saw her working closely. She was very attached to Raebareli. I raised Rahul and Priyanka on the lessons that Indira Gandhi and Raebareli taught me -- to respect all, to protect the weak, to fight injustice..," Sonia Gandhi said.

Swati Maliwal assault case: Cops, FSL team visit Delhi CM's house; likely to collect CCTV footage



GNS News Agency, May 17

New Delhi: Delhi Police personnel along with a Forensic Science Laboratory team on Friday visited the residence of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, days after Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MP Swati Maliwal was assaulted there, sources said. According to sources, police might recreate the crime scene and collect relevant CCTV footage of the alleged incident. On Friday, soon after recording her statement before the magistrate, Swati Maliwal took to X, saying "the truth will be revealed to everyone as soon as the CCTV footage of the house and the room is checked". Maliwal was allegedly assaulted at Arvind Kejriwal's residence on Monday. An FIR was filed on Thursday against CM Kejriwal's personal secretary Bibhav Kumar. The FIR has been registered under sections 308, 341, 354 D, 506, and 509 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) at Civil Lines police station. A video from the

Delhi CM's house of the alleged assault incident is also doing rounds on social media in which an altercation can be seen taking place between the staff deployed in the CM's residence and the AAP Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal on Friday recorded her statement at the Tis Hazari court here in connection with the matter. Chilling details of the incident have also started emerging, with the lodging of the First Information Report (FIR) and subsequently the surfacing of a purported video of the incident. In the FIR, Maliwal accused Kumar of hitting her in the chest, stomach and the pelvic area with legs.

Malkajgiri corporator reportedly kidnapped from office

Hyderabad: A group of persons had reportedly kidnapped Malkajgiri corporator V Shraavan, while he was at his office on Thursday afternoon. In a video captured by the surveillance cameras, around 10 persons came to the office of the corporator located in Malkajgiri and whisked him away in a SUV.

According to local reports, some policemen had arrested and taken away the corporator in connection with a case. However, the Malkajgiri police said they don't have any knowledge about it.

Defence Industrial Corridor will transform Bundelkhand: PM Modi



GNS News Agency, May 17

Hamirpur, UP: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday highlighted the significance of some major projects, including the establishment of a Defence Industrial Corridor (DIC), that will transform the entire Bundelkhand region in Uttar Pradesh. Laying out his detailed vision for the development of Bundelkhand, PM Modi asserted that he wants the region to become the centre of industry and employment. "The BJP government is building two defence corridors in the country. Modi decided that a defence corridor would be built in Bundelkhand, the land of heroes. Our effort is that the youth do not have to leave Bundelkhand. Our resolve is that Bundelkhand should become the centre of industry and employment," the Prime Minister said while addressing a public meeting in Hamirpur.

It was in February 2018 that Prime Minister Modi announced that one of the country's two Defence Industrial Corridors (DICs) will be set up in the Bundelkhand region passing through six nodes of Agra, Aligarh, Lucknow, Kanpur, Jhansi and Chitrakoot. "There is a possibility of Rs 20,000 crore investment in this corridor, providing employment to almost 2.5 lakh people. Yogi ji's government is also going to industrialise Purvanchal and Bundelkhand by creating Purvanchal Expressway and Bundelkhand Expressway," said PM Modi.

Race on for TPCC president post

GNS News Agency, May 17

Hyderabad: With the Lok Sabha elections done, the race for Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) president post is on among the State Congress leaders. At present, Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy is serving as the TPCC president. In the wake of Lok Sabha elections, the party high command had made it clear to the State leaders that the Chief Minister would continue as the TPCC president.

Now that the elections are done, a few probables are already making their moves to impress the State leadership and party high command as well. Among many, the names of TPCC working president Mahesh Kumar Goud, AICC Spokesperson Madhu Yashki Goud, TPCC working president T Jagga Reddy and AICC Secretary Sampath Kumar are doing rounds among Congress party circles. Generally, it has been a practice that if a BC community leader was made TPCC president, a forward caste leader was offered the Chief Minister post. Considering the fact that Revanth Reddy being the, probabilities of nominating a BC community leader as the new TPCC president were high, opined a senior leader from the State Congress. Though Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka was Deputy Chief Minister, one cannot rule out the option of high command announcing an SC community or ST community leader as the next TPCC president, the leader stressed. Among all these contenders, Gandhi Bhavan sources said a section of leaders were in favour of Mahesh Kumar Goud to be the new TPCC president. Admitting that he too was in the race, Mahesh Kumar Goud said every Congress leader had the right to become the TPCC president. "I am a senior party worker and trying my best to become the TPCC president," Mahesh Kumar Goud had said to mediapersons on Thursday. Depending on the candidate's eligibility, the AICC would take a call accordingly. If someone else has better qualifications than me, the party high command would offer the post to that person, he added. Going by the Gandhi Bhavan sources, the exercise to appoint the new TPCC president would be completed by June end or July first week before the local body elections. EOM

Trinamool moves ECI against Abhijit Gangopadhyay's remarks on Mamata Banerjee

GNS News Agency, May 17

Kolkata: The Trinamool Congress on Friday moved the Election Commission of India (ECI) against the former judge of Calcutta High Court and BJP nominee from Tamluk Lok Sabha seat in East Midnapore district, accusing him of making derogatory remarks about Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee at a public meeting recently. In its plea, the Trinamool has urged the poll panel to bar Gangopadhyay from addressing public meetings, holding roadshows, or giving interviews to the media. The remarks by Gangopadhyay were made at a public meeting

in Haldia district on Wednesday. They were made public after a purported video emerged online a day later in which Gangopadhyay could be heard wondering about the amount at which CM Banerjee was getting sold.

The Trinamool has also requested the Commission to ensure that no other BJP leader makes such derogatory remarks about the Chief Minister in the future. "We have lodged a complaint with the Chief Electoral Officer against the vulgar and objectionable remarks made by Abhijit Gangopadhyay against the Chief Minister.

Indian Chronicle

English Daily

Deadly oversight

THE collapse of a massive illegal billboard following a storm in Mumbai that claimed the lives of 16 people and injured 75 — all passersby — has exposed a troubling nexus between negligence, corruption and regulatory failure. The disaster underscores the human cost of systemic oversight and dereliction of duty.

The billboard, weighing 250 tonnes and far exceeding permitted dimensions, was erected in blatant violation of civic guidelines. The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) had raised concerns about the hoarding two years ago, yet no substantial action was taken to address the hazard. The failure to enforce regulations or dismantle the illegal structure exemplifies the dangerous complacency and possible corruption in municipal circles. Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident. Last June, a huge hoarding on a highway near Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu collapsed, killing three workers on the spot. The police said it had been installed without authorisation by the civic body. In 2019, a young woman died in Chennai when an illegal banner fell on her. Such incidents point to a pattern of negligence and regulatory lapses that put lives at risk. Culpability extends beyond the advertising agency behind the billboard. The BMC, which allowed this violation to persist despite knowledge and prior warnings, bears significant responsibility. The filing of a culpable homicide case against the advertising agency owner, Bhavesh Bhande, is a necessary but insufficient step. Accountability must be comprehensive, holding all parties responsible for this preventable tragedy. The announcement of compensation by CM Eknath Shinde does not suffice to address the underlying regulatory rot. This mishap should prompt an overhaul of regulations governing outdoor advertising and other hazardous structures.

MP Ravneet Bittu occupied the govt house illegally, took time to apply right rules and recover rent: Ludhiana admin replies to EC



GNS News Agency, May 17

With Ludhiana MP Ravneet Singh Bittu filing a complaint with the Election Commission alleging that the no-dues certificate (NDC) for his Ludhiana government house was deliberately delayed to thwart his nomination filing, the district administration has submitted that the delay happened after it was found that the BJP leader was occupying the house illegally since 2016 and it took time to apply the right rules and recover the due rent from him.

The reply, however, adds that two employees of Ludhiana Municipal Corporation (MC) have been suspended who kept Bittu's letter demanding NDC pending since May 2. An excerpt from the reply filed to Punjab chief electoral officer, by the Ludhiana Municipal Corporation commissioner, via district magistrate, states: "The delay for issue of NOC may also be attributed to the fact that the house was not allotted to MP Ravneet Bittu by any agency, and he occupied the house illegally without any authority. Being a peculiar situation, it demanded applicability of right rules for demanding the due rent from him due to unauthorized occupation. The employee responsible for keeping the letter of NOC pending has been suspended."

The three-time Congress MP, now the BJP candidate from Ludhiana, had filed his nomination on May 10. That day he alleged that even as he had applied for the NDC with the civic body on May 2, it was only issued at last minute on May 10. Bittu had further alleged that he was served a notice by MC on the night of May 9 over WhatsApp stating that he was never allotted the house officially, and he has to pay Rs 1.82 crore as pending rent, to obtain the NDC. Bittu said that he had to pledge his ancestral land and jewellery to clear the dues in such short time, and never before in eight years, he was served a notice about pending house rent. The Ludhiana civic body commissioner, Sandeep Rishi, in his reply to Bittu's complaint, further submitted that in 2015, the house in question (kothi number 6, Rose Garden), was transferred by the civic body to the deputy commissioner, Ludhiana (general pool) for allotment at their level.

But recently on May 8 after Bittu applied for NDC, Ludhiana DC communicated to MC that the house was never allotted to anyone and was never taken over by district administration. So Bittu's occupation of the house since 2016 was found to be unauthorized. As per rules, MC got market rates assessed by Public Works Department (PWD), and total pending rent for eight years (since January 1, 2016) was calculated as Rs 91.08 lakh but since the occupation was illegal, Bittu was served notice to pay double the amount as penalty (Rs 1.82 crore). The MC commissioner further submitted that the notice was sent to Bittu via e-mail, WhatsApp and a call was also made to him late night on May 9. After Bittu cleared the dues, he was issued the NDC within one hour on the morning of May 10, says the reply.

It further states that two employees from MC's drawing branch — Vivek Parbhakar, inspector and Paramjit Kaur, peon — have been suspended for delay in putting up the letter before higher officials. Confirming the suspension of two employees, Rishi told The Indian Express: "I have written to local bodies department recommending action against three other officials — Assistant town planner (ATP), head draftsman and draftsman — who took Bittu's application for NDC lightly and delayed the process. However, the inadvertent delay happened after it was found that he was never allotted the house via DC office and never paid the rent".

Punjab's women commission seeks inquiry into video showing Channi touching Jagir Kaur's chin, she says 'out of respect'



GNS News Agency, May 17

The Punjab State Commission for Women Monday sought an inquiry into a video clip purportedly showing Congress leader Charanjit Singh Channi touching the chin of former Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) president Jagir Kaur. Meanwhile, Kaur, a Shiromani Akali Dal leader, came out in support of the former chief minister, saying she did not find anything inappropriate in the Congress leader's behaviour and perceive it to be respectful. Taking suo-motu notice of the video clip that has been shared multiple times on social media, the state women commission's chairperson wrote to the Punjab director general of police, asking him to file a status report in this regard by Tuesday. The commission also said Kaur is a former cabinet minister and former chief of the SGPC, an apex body of gurdwaras. Channi had met Kaur on Friday while filing his nomination papers for the Lok Sabha polls from Jalandhar. Kaur was accompanying Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) candidate Mohinder Singh Kaypee. In the clip, Channi is seen holding Kaur's hands and bowing down before her. Then both engaged in a banter during which Channi touched Kaur's chin with his hand. Both leaders and their supporters then burst out laughing. Meanwhile, Channi said Kaur is like her elder sister and a motherly figure and

added that he bowed down before her when he met her. Reacting to the development in a Facebook post, Kaur said Channi held her hands with respect and bowed down. He also touched her chin in a respectful manner, she said. "On May 10, when we went to submit the nomination papers of Kay Pee, Channi was there with his family... In a cordial atmosphere, everyone exchanged greetings... Mr Channi humbly greeted me and showed his respect... In this pleasant and respectful atmosphere, Mr Channi also touched my chin gently. I perceive all these events as respectful and harmonious," said Kaur. She said social media as well as several television channels removed "the part of felicitations expressed towards me, leaving only a brief clip, thus distorting the entire context". She described it as "full of mischief" and said it was painful for her, her family and her well-wishers.

Phillaur MLA Vikramjit Singh Chaudhary, a known Channi baiter, demanded action against the former CM claiming that his behaviour towards a Sikh woman was "disrespectful". He had also demanded legal action against the Channi under Sections 295A and 354A for hurting religious sentiments and outraging the dignity and modesty of a woman. Channi, the Congress's Lok Sabha candidate from Jalandhar, came under fire from various political leaders recently for his "poll stunt" remark. He had called the Poonch terror attack, in which an Indian Air Force (IAF) soldier was killed, a "stunt" aimed at helping the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) win the Lok Sabha polls. A soldier was killed and four were injured as terrorists ambushed an IAF convoy in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district last week. Replying to a question on the attack, Channi had said, "Yeh stuntbaazi ho rahi hai, hamle nahi ho rahe (These are all stunts, not attacks)." "Whenever elections are near, such stunts are performed to make the BJP win. There is no truth in it," he had said.

Panel not in place, Bajwa steps up to campaign for Congress candidates

GNS News Agency, May 17

Leader of the Opposition in Punjab Partap Singh Bajwa has taken centre stage to campaign for the party candidates even as the Congress high command is yet to announce campaign committee for June 1 Lok Sabha polls in the state. At least four senior-most Congress leaders in Punjab The Indian Express spoke to said that it was (non-formation of the party's campaign committee in Punjab) "unusual" and that "the committee should have been formed by now". Another senior party leader said there had been "much delay" in constituting the committee and that "it should be better avoided now to prevent any likely bickering at this stage over the selection of campaign committee members".

One of the four party leaders who expressed concern about the "delay" in formation of the campaign committee said that "there had been discussions to constitute the committee about 10 days ago". He added that "the committee should be in place in a couple of days". The other leader said, "I have learnt that a draft has been prepared for constituting the committee, but I don't know when exactly it will take shape." For May 19, 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the Congress had formed the campaign committee in the beginning of February that year. The 21-member committee was headed by the then CM Captain Amarinder Singh. For February 20, 2022 Vidhan Sabha polls, the Congress had declared campaign committee before mid-December 2021. Former CM Rajinder Kaur Bhattal had headed the party's election campaign committee in 2014 Lok Sabha polls. With a number of big guns of the party in the fray for June 1 polls, Leader of the Opposition Partap Singh Bajwa has emerged as a star campaigner, shuttling between constituencies. A short



video of Bajwa getting off a chopper on his Facebook page is reflective of his visits from one constituency to another as he addresses poll meetings and accompanies party candidates to file nomination papers.

Punjab Congress chief Amrinder Singh Raja Waring is contesting from Ludhiana and has largely been confined to the constituency where he takes on BJP candidate Ravneet Singh Bittu. Warring too accompanied few candidates in filing of their nomination papers. On Monday, he flew to Ropar to be with party candidate from Anandpur Sahib Vijay Inder Singla to file nomination. Another heavyweight, former CM Charanjit Singh Channi, is contesting from Jalandhar and is busy in his election campaign there. Former Punjab deputy chief minister Sukhinder Singh Randhawa is Congress candidate from Gurdaspur and Congress MLA from Bholath Sukhpal Singh Khaira is contesting from Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann's pocket borough of Sangrur.

Team formed to probe assault allegations against Rae Bareilly SP

GNS News Agency, May 17

Allahabad High Court, theft cases, assault allegations against Rae Bareilly SP, UP SIT, who is SP Agarwal, Uttar Pradesh, UP news, indian express news. The court ordered that the SIT should comprise officers senior to the officers facing the allegations, including SP Agarwal.

FOLLOWING A directive by the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court, a two-member team headed by an Inspector General of Police rank officer has been formed to probe allegations that a 29-year-old man was assaulted and falsely accused in theft cases after he allegedly refused to give his vehicle to police personnel who claimed to be acting at the behest of the Superintendent of Police (SP), Rae Bareilly, Abhishek Kumar Agarwal. In its order issued last week, the court had directed the Uttar Pradesh Director General of Police (DGP) to constitute a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to investigate the allegations. The court ordered that the SIT should comprise officers senior to the officers facing the allegations, including SP Agarwal.

The two-member team includes Inspector General (Lucknow range) Tarun Gauba and Deputy Inspector General of Police Vinod Kumar Singh, who is with the UP Police's security wing. "We have begun our probe," said Tarun Gaba. The court had directed the team to submit a report within two months, with the next hearing scheduled for July 3. The petitioner, Gomati Mishra (70), alleged that her son Alakh Mishra was arrested by the police on the intervening night of March 30 and 31. The entire episode was captured on a CCTV camera at a petrol pump from where the arrest was made, according to the petitioner. However, the police recorded his arrest only a day later in a theft case, the petitioner claimed. The petitioner alleged that her son, who holds an MBA degree and does not have any criminal record, was falsely implicated in a theft case because he refused to provide his taxi (private vehicle) to Rae Bareilly SP Abhishek Agarwal when asked to do so by some of Agarwal's subordinate officers. In its order, the court said that "in the given circumstances, we find it a fit case to refer the matter to the Director General



The two-member team includes Inspector General (Lucknow range) Tarun Gauba and Deputy Inspector General of Police Vinod Kumar Singh, who is with the UP Police's security wing. "We have begun our probe," said Tarun Gaba.

of Police, UP, Lucknow, who shall get a SIT constituted of persons superior to the police officers concerned to investigate the entire incident."

In her petition, Gomati Mishra sought directions to register an FIR against all the "erring" police personnel at Kheero and Sarauni police stations in Rae Bareilly who were involved in the "wrongful confinement, custodial torture and filing of false cases" against her son, Alakh Mishra. She also requested a "fair investigation" into the three cases in which her son was booked, as well as compensation from the state government for the violation of his Fundamental Right guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution. She also sought directions to preserve footage of the CCTV installed at the petrol pump and Kheero police station in Rae Bareilly.

From May 19, Congress to kick off roadshows with top guns

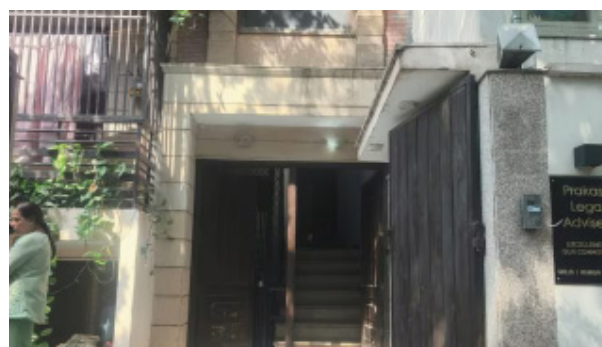


GNS News Agency, May 17

Starting May 19, the Delhi Congress will start organising roadshows featuring the party's top rung for its Lok Sabha campaign in Delhi. Leaders likely to be in attendance include Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi, said sources. The party has upped its game plan and is set to host townhalls to note voter grievances, while a control room has been set up in the three constituencies where its candidates are contesting to monitor the campaign. DPCC interim president Devender Yadav Monday said their campaign will include both traditional and modern ways of campaigning. "Our team will implement a strong strategy for the polls so we can become a strong alternative to the BJP," he said.

The party also plans to launch a campaign, "Pehla vote Congress ko", to attract first-time voters. "We want to attract first-time voters through our outreach... tell them why their first vote should go for the Congress... mainly, due to BJP's hateful ideology," said Yadav. Yadav further said that 5-6 "townhalls" will be organised to understand issues faced by the voters and solve them at the earliest. "Dates will be announced soon... Rahul Gandhi will also attend some of these discussions," he added.

Jangpura doctor's murder: A theft in same building — one floor above — 6 years ago still unsolved



GNS News Agency, May 17

On September 18, 2017, a group of burglars masquerading as workers of a packer and mover company broke into a flat in Jangpura Extension and looted everything — from cameras to computers to furniture, commode seats and jewellery — they could lay their hands on. The family had been away. Several hours after the break-in, a neighbour saw that the apartment's door was broken and alerted the owners. A case of theft was subsequently registered at Hazrat Nizamuddin Police Station. Six years, seven months and 25 days later, burglars struck again. This time they sneaked into the ground floor flat in the same building on Friday afternoon, killed the owner, 63-year-old Dr Yogesh Chander Paul, and looted cash and gold. "I filed a complaint and followed the case for six months and there was no headway... I lost interest and didn't follow up with the police after that," said Mehak Sethi, a lawyer, whose flat was broken into in 2017. When contacted about the earlier case, a police officer involved in the current investigation told The Indian Express on condition of anonymity, "This incident took place (in 2017) and a case was registered but I don't know what happened in that investigation. I will have to check the records." Police had arrested the Pauls' 60-year-old house help, Basanti, and two of her alleged accomplices, in connection with his murder. Police said they will now probe her role in the 2017 robbery as she had been working for the Sethis since 2008.

Police also claimed that Basanti was at the spot on the day of the murder. "She came to Sethi's house at 12.30 pm and left at 1.30 pm when Dr. Paul was walking back home from his clinic... she entered along with Dr Paul. She opened the door for the burglars — which explains why the door was not broken and it was a friendly entry. She also took Molly, the family's pet beagle, inside the washroom... the dog did not bark as it knew her," claimed a police officer. During questioning, police also found that "Basanti and the other accused wanted to break into Sethi's flat. After the murder, the burglars went up to Sethi's flat around 4 pm. But it was locked. Sethi was out of town for work and his wife had stepped out to meet a friend, the officer said.

"The burglars didn't try to forcibly break in," he said. Police claimed Basanti stayed at Paul's flat for a while after the burglars left. "She left the building after some time to avoid detection," they said. Sethi, meanwhile, said he had called Basanti after he learnt of the murder. "I asked her (Basanti) where was she. She said she was in her room and was going to come to Dr Paul's house soon. I told her about the murder... She sounded shocked... and came and joined the mourners," he said. An officer said they were checking Basanti's Facebook profile as she had purportedly uploaded photos from inside the flats of Sethi and Paul: "We are checking why she did this... if it was an attempt to make the co-accused aware of the structure of the houses." On Sunday, DCP (Southeast) Rajesh Deo had said that "while at work, Basanti used Facebook Messenger to video call the accused and show them the layout of the house, entry and exit routes, where valuables were kept". Meanwhile, a group of residents held a protest outside the Jangpura police post on Sunday against the "deteriorating law and order situation" in the locality and the murder of Dr Paul. Kapil Kakkar, president of the Jangpura RWA, said they have written to the Lieutenant Governor to find a permanent solution. He also said residents of the locality will now have to upload details of house help, such as their Aadhaar card number, on their website to ensure such an incident is not repeated.

Kashmiri girl, who chose Tricity after terrorists entered her school campus, tops Mohali



GNS News Agency, May 17

When Aieda Younis's family realised that she had missed her studies for 100 days in a session due to unrest in Jammu and Kashmir in 2017, the parents made a sacrifice to ensure that both the girls are able to pursue their dreams of becoming doctors. While Aieda's father, who is a bank manager in Jammu and Kashmir, stayed in the valley, her mother Usra Nayeem moved with her two daughters here in the Tricity. Aieda topped Mohali with 98.6 per cent in the CBSE Class 10, results of which were declared here on Monday noon. A student of The Gurukul, Zirakpur, she aspires to become a doctor as she says that it works well with her belief to "save humanity".

In 2017, when the child was in DPS school in Kashmir, she was petrified with the unrest. Terrorists had entered the school campus on an off day and were hiding there when an encounter with the forces had broken. Though the children were safe, the terrorists hid inside the building after the ambush. The continuous unrest hit

Aieda's studies to such an extent that she sat at home for 100 days in a session without attending the school. And then the family realised, that's not how the child could pursue the dreams of becoming a doctor. While her eldest daughter is pursuing Class 12 in medical stream in the same school, her mother Usra is also a teacher at the school. Praising the "remarkable dedication, perseverance, and academic excellence" of Aieda, her school's principal Heena Sharma while speaking to The Indian Express said that her achievement reflects the collective efforts of school's dedicated faculty, supportive parents, and motivated students. "I am immensely proud of Aieda Younis and look forward to witnessing her continued success and contributions to society," she added. Aieda, who scored perfect 100 in Mathematics, Science and Information Technology, credited her success to perseverance and hard work. "I believe when you just put in quality hours of study coupled with hard work, you will surely succeed. Even if one revises what is done in the school, that clears your basics and doubts if any."

She told this correspondent that that her aspiration to become a doctor goes well with her belief: "When you save one person, you save humanity". "And this way I want to serve people and also my parents, when they get old. That is the reason I want to become a doctor," she concluded. Meanwhile, Aarush Dhiman of the same school scored 98.4 per cent in the exam, followed by Varishti Garg who secured 98 per cent. As many as 68 students of the school appeared in the CBSE Class 10 examination, out of which seven students have scored 95 per cent and above, and 17 have secured 90 per cent and above.

On May 25, pay me back for work I have done: AAP's Mahabal Mishra appeals to former constituents in West Delhi

GNS News Agency, May 17

At dusk last Tuesday, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) workers were busy corraling a crowd at gali no. 11 in Dwarka's Dabri for a Jansabha where the party's West Delhi candidate, Mahabal Mishra, was set to speak. Mishra, 70, isn't a stranger here. He has been active in the Capital's political corridors for the last three decades. "If any work has been done after independence here, it has been done by Mahabal Mishra ji... we are indebted to him..." several men sporting AAP's scarves said. They were referring to work done during Mishra's former stints — first as a councillor from Dabri in 1997; as MLA from Nasirpur in 1998 and 2003 and then Dwarka in 2008; and as the MP from West Delhi in 2009 — during his years in the Congress. Mishra quit the party in 2022 and joined the AAP and is now the consensus candidate of both parties in the Lok Sabha polls. His main opponent is BJP's Kamaljeet Sehrawal. Around 7 pm, Mishra and his son, 41-year-old Vinay — AAP's Dwarka MLA — arrived. On the stage, Vinay pointed towards his father and asked: "How many of you have visited his house?" Almost the entire crowd raised their hands in response. "In times of calamities, do you want Delhi Police, Income Tax, and ED to come to your house or Mahabal Mishra ji to come to your house?" he asked, prompting contemplative murmurs in the gathering. Rajeev Ranjan, a resident of Dabri, said many of them support the Mishras. "Most kids in this locality go to the school built by them which has great facilities... the colonies were regularised by them... we support them as they have been extremely accessible to all of us."

A known face in the city's rural belt, Mishra has been hosting several small meetings to connect with residents — 10 on weekdays and 15 over the weekend. So far, he has held roughly 10 meetings in Dwarka — the family's stronghold — apart from meetings in the other 9 assembly constituencies. The AAP won all 10 seats in West Delhi in the 2020 Assembly polls. Addressing the crowd, Mishra said, "... You used to get electricity by putting a hook on the main line, who got you proper power connections?" "Mishra ji, the crowd responded in unison. "Who got you water connections? Who built your roads? Who got this drain constructed? Who built the flyover of Janakpuri? Who built Dilli Haat? Who brought the Metro?" he asked. "Mahabal Mishra ji," the supporters shouted.

"Brothers," he suddenly raised his pitch and continued, "when all the work was done by Mahabal Mishra ji, why have you been voting for the BJP?..." "You took my name in so many developmental tasks that I got com-



pleted... don't I deserve to be repaid for this? he asked rhetorically. "Make sure on May 25 (polling day), you pay me back for the work I've done," he said. Mishra then left for Shivpuri — a kilometre ahead. Here too, he reminded people of the developmental works he had accomplished during his previous stints as an elected representative. Shanti Atri, 47, another housewife who lives in Shivpuri, said: "He (Mishra) solved the area's drainage issues. We had no drains earlier. Unfortunately, the final work to cover the drain was yet to start when his term ended." She said this work wasn't taken up by the BJP MP (Parvesh Verma) who succeeded him (Mishra). Mahabal Mishra and his son next addressed a meeting of the Shri Kutch Kadva Patidar Samaj, where several Patel families live in a colony. "When the MCD sent its bulldozers to remove this colony decades ago, I stood with you all," he told the gathering. "I ensured it (demolition) does not happen. You had called me Mahabal Patel... If you call me a Patel, then show me Patel brotherhood," he appealed. Around 50 members of the Patidar Samaj, who gathered to listen to Mishra, assured their support only because of their "personal connect and not because they support (his) party".

Soon after the meeting, Vinay Mishra spoke to The Indian Express: "... we've been associated with this constituency since 1997, we know the issues. Our focus is on young people between the ages of 18 and 24 years. They rely on WhatsApp which has pushed them away from real issues and history. We've set up an exclusive social media team so we can talk to the youth." Mahabal Mishra, meanwhile, promised several fresh projects if elected. He told The Indian Express that he will set up "a skill developmental centre for job creation and employment, a Delhi University West campus, and improve Metro connectivity between Najafgarh, Dhansa and Bijwasan".

'Youngsters need jobs, not promises': Cyber security expert vows to address unemployment in Anandpur Sahib if elected

GNS News Agency, May 17

Unemployment is the biggest issue in Anandpur Sahib, according to cyber security expert Harwinder Karwal, who is running as an Independent candidate from this constituency in Punjab in Lok Sabha elections 2024. Karwal is among the most highly educated candidates at Anandpur Sahib. His affidavit states that he holds an MSc in Chemistry, an MBA, an MSc in IT, a BEd, and two certificate courses in cyber security, infrastructure security, and attack methodology in IT and ITS cyber security from the US Department of Homeland Security. Karwal stated that he is an educationist and independent education content creator. He has declared movable assets worth Rs 5.01 crore and immovable assets worth Rs 10.43 lakh. Speaking to The Indian Express, Karwal said his students convinced him to contest the elections. He added that he has been into education research for the past 30 years. "Youngsters need jobs and not promises; the other issue is the bad road infrastructure," Karwal said.

When asked how he would solve the unemployment problem, Karwal said he has a blueprint and will work on giving youngsters jobs. "I am also teaching technology, including artificial intelligence. I have planned and will provide jobs to youngsters," Karwal claimed. Karwal's wife is also an educationist. The couple lives in their native Golian village in Hoshiarpur district. His son is studying engineering, while his daughter is in



Class 7. "I prefer to live in my village and serve my people; I am contesting the elections so that I can help youngsters to become competent in the field of new technological innovations and skills," Karwal said. Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD)'s Prof Prem Singh Chandumajra is looking to reclaim the Anandpur Sahib seat from the Congress. Vijay Inder Singla has replaced sitting MP Manish Tewari as the Congress candidate as the latter has been fielded in Chandigarh this time. The other major candidate in the fray is Malwinder Singh Kang of the Aam Aadmi Party. All 13 seats of Punjab will go to poll in the seventh and final phase of Lok Sabha elections 2024 on June 1.

Supreme Court reserves order on contempt notice issued to Ramdev, Balkrishna, Patanjali Ayurved



GNS News Agency, May 17

The Supreme Court on Tuesday reserved its order on the contempt notice issued to yoga guru Ramdev, his aide Balkrishna and Patanjali Ayurved Ltd in the misleading advertisements case. A bench of Justices Hima Kohli and Ahsanuddin Amanullah noted that the counsel appearing for the firm has sought time to file affidavit indicating the steps being taken to recall the advertisements of those products of Patanjali whose licences have been suspended.

"Orders are reserved on the contempt notice issued to respondents 5 to 7 (Patanjali Ayurved Ltd, Balkrishna and Ramdev)," the bench said. During the hearing, Indian Medical Association (IMA) president R V Asokan unconditionally apologised to the bench for his statements made against the apex court in a recent interview to the PTI where he answered questions about Patanjali Ayurved's misleading advertisements case. "You can't sit on a couch giving an interview to the press and lampooning the court," Justice Kohli told Asokan. The bench told the IMA's counsel that at this stage, the court was not inclined to accept the affidavit of apology tendered by the IMA president.

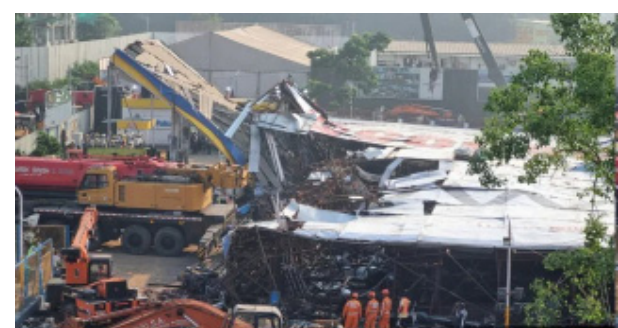
While hearing the matter on May 7, the top court had termed as "very, very unacceptable" the statements made by Asokan. The Uttarakhand State Licensing Authority (SLA) had earlier told the apex court that manufacturing licenses of 14 products of Patanjali Ayurved Ltd and Divya Pharmacy have been "suspended with immediate effect". The apex court is hearing a plea filed in 2022 by the IMA alleging a smear campaign by Patanjali against the Covid vaccination drive and modern systems of medicine.

Mumbai hoarding owner booked in rape case, fined at least 21 times for illegal billboards in past

GNS News Agency, May 17

The owner of the illegal hoarding, which collapsed on the petrol pump in the Ghatkopar area of Mumbai on Monday following gusty winds and rain leading to 14 deaths so far, was booked in a rape case by the Mumbai police earlier this year. The Pant Nagar police, under whose jurisdiction the Mumbai hoarding collapse incident took place, on Monday night registered a First Information Report (FIR) against Bhavesh Prabhudas Bhide, 51, the director of Ego Media Pvt Ltd which had the contract for the hoarding on a 10-year lease.

As per court documents, a rape and molestation case was registered against Bhide at the Mulund police station on January 24 this year. He was eventually granted anticipatory bail by the Bombay High Court. "A rape case was registered against him. A chargesheet has already been filed in the matter," said Ajay Joshi, Senior Inspector, Mulund Police Station. Bhide, who contested as an Independent candidate in the 2009 Maharashtra Assembly elections, had then declared 21 instances where he was fined under the Mumbai Municipal Corporation (MMC) Act for putting up banners without permission and two offences related to the Negotiable Instruments (NI) Act that usually pertain to cheque bouncing. Apart from this, as per submissions he made while contesting the 2009 Assembly polls in Maharashtra from Mulund, Bhide declared he had been charged under sections 328 (putting hoarding without permission) and 471 (fines) of the MMC Act on 21 occasions and had two cases under the NI Act. The status of the cases is unclear. In the latest FIR



registered against him at the Pant Nagar police station on Monday night in connection with the Mumbai hoarding collapse incident, he was charged under sections 304 (culpable homicide), 338 (causing grievous hurt), 337 (causing hurt by negligent act), 34 (common intention) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). The Ghatkopar hoarding situated beside a petrol pump at Pant Nagar on the Eastern Express Highway (EEH) measured 120 x 120 as against the permitted size of 40 x 40 feet. On Monday, Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) chief Bhushan Gagrani said the Ghatkopar hoarding was illegal as the civic body had not permitted erecting it. "The location where the incident occurred has four hoardings set up on the Railway land and one of them has collapsed. The BMC had been objecting to (setting up) hoardings for one year," said Gagrani.

Maharashtra launches entrance tests for 5-year integrated courses in hotel management and planning



GNS News Agency, May 17

Candidates seeking to study hotel management and planning in Maharashtra through integrated courses will now have to appear for Common Entrance Tests (CET). The Maharashtra Common Entrance Test Cell has launched two new CETs—for the M.HMCT Integrated and M.Planning Integrated courses—to be held on May 24 and 25, respectively. Integrate courses essentially mean a combination of courses of bachelor's and master's levels. They ensure that once you enroll for a degree course after Class 12, you will continue until the postgraduate level in the same course at the same institute. Otherwise, students have to reapply for admissions after completing graduation. From the academic year 2024-25, the

M.HMCT Integrated CET will determine admission to a five-year integrated degree in hotel management and catering technology, whereas M. Planning will determine admission to a five-year integrated degree in planning. Wednesday (May 15) is the last day to register for the two tests. Registration details and sample questions are available on the Maharashtra CET Cell's website. Mahendra Warbhuvan, commissioner of the CET cell, said, "Students who have passed Class 12 are eligible to appear for these two new CETs which are going to confirm admission to integrated courses in HMCT and Planning. This means candidates will not have to go through the entire cycle of admission after graduation. Once their admission is confirmed for bachelor's degree it will carry on for masters in the same course."

Both these tests will be computer-based exams in the format of multiple-choice questions for 100 marks. For M. HMCT, questions will be based on reasoning (verbal as well as arithmetic) and English language and general awareness including questions on culture; current national, international affairs; trade and commerce; sports; scientific inventions and discoveries; travel and tourism etc. Students appearing for M. Planning will have to study the physics, chemistry, mathematics (PCM) group curriculum applicable for the MHT-CET. Candidates who have passed Class 12 examinations and obtained at least 45 per cent marks in aggregate are eligible to appear for these tests.

Delhi High Court asks ECI to inform about norms on preservation of CCTV footage during polls

GNS News Agency, May 17

The Delhi High Court recently asked the Election Commission of India (ECI) to inform about the guidelines in place for the preservation of CCTV footage during the election process. The High Court was hearing a petition by Advocate Mehmood Pracha who contested as an Independent candidate from the Rampur Lok Sabha constituency in Uttar Pradesh. In his plea, Pracha said after the elections were held on April 19 he had requested the poll body to direct the preservation of all relevant videos recorded during the election process but he did not receive any response. A single judge bench of Justice Sachin Datta in its May 10 order issued notice to the poll body. "The ECI is directed to file an affidavit as regards the videography/CCTV coverage which is maintained with regard to the EVMs after the conduct of First Level Check (FLC) till the stage referred to in para 6.1.1(e) of the Manual on Electronic Voting Machine (Edition 8 August 2023). The affidavit shall also indicate the applicable norms/guidelines laid down/ being followed for the preservation of the video/CCTV footage at various stages of the electoral process," said Justice Dutta.

The plea said the ECI's Manual on Electronic Voting Machine provides for various safeguards for main-



taining transparency of the election process through videography and CCTV coverage. The plea also said it was imperative to protect the footage for 45 days from the date of the election of the returned candidate in case an election petition has to be filed in terms of Section 81 of the Representation of the People Act. "The Manual mandates CCTV coverage of the security measures for polled EVM strong rooms. The Manual mandates constant Videography of all the entry points of the Polled EVM strong room. The CCTV footage is imperative in the event of a challenge to the polling results," the plea added.

'Evaluation over, Classes 10, 12 results likely by May-end': President of Tripura Board of Secondary Education Dhananjay Gan Choudhury



GNS News Agency, May 17

A day after the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) announced its Higher Secondary and matriculation results, the Tripura Board of Secondary Education (TBSE) on Tuesday said it is hoping to announce its board results by the end of May. Speaking to the media, TBSE president Dr Dhananjay Gan Choudhury said, "We have already completed evaluation of answer scripts of Classes 10 and 12. The post-evaluation processes that are a part of our procedure before the final announcement of results are now on. We are hoping to announce the board results by the last week of May."

The TBSE-conducted Higher Secondary (Class 12) examinations were held from March 1 to March 30. The Madhyamik or Class 10 examinations started from March 2 and ended on March 23. The state education board said that around 33,000 students had appeared for their Madhyamik examinations while over 23,000 students appeared in their higher secondary exams this year.

year back in 2023, the board examinations saw 43,730 candidates appear for their Class 10 board exams and 38,125 appear for the Higher Secondary board exams. On why the number fell this year, the state board chief had earlier said that several Tripura schools had been sorted separately under the Vidyajyoti project, which is under the CBSE. The Madhyamik exams were conducted across 68 centres and the Higher Secondary examinations were conducted across 60 centres across eight districts of the state. The Tripura state board examinations were conducted amidst heavy controversies this year as the state board chief had gone back on his words thrice over the choice of script for the Kokborok examinations. The state government finally stepped in and said the examinations would be conducted in both Bengali and Roman scripts. The controversy started after the board president said it would not allow students to write their Kokborok paper answers in Roman script, citing lack of sufficient qualified evaluators. Kokborok is the lingua franca of the majority of the state's tribal population.

He later said he would allow both scripts in keeping with the tradition of the last 18 years. However, a few hours later, he again went back on his words and said his "higher authorities" had instructed him to allow Roman script alone. After an indefinite strike across the state and four U-turns, the board finally announced that it would allow both Roman and Bengali scripts. The issue had seen a political and ethnic storm brew up as the then prime opposition party TIPRA Motha, which is now a partner of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in state government, had threatened to stall normal life in the state if both the scripts aren't allowed.

Ivory, rhino horn trafficking has declined but global problems persist: UN report



GNS News Agency, May 17

With all-round efforts and monitoring, elephant ivory and rhinoceros horn trafficking has shown a decline globally, however, there is no clear reduction in wildlife trafficking, the third edition of the United Nations' World Wildlife Crime Report said. "The good news is that data shows a decline in ivory trade. We still have some large seizures, but overall triangulating data, the seizures and the prices all point to a shrinking market for ivory. Efforts on the demand side such as closure of Chinese markets and clamping down of organised crime groups have helped," said Angela Me, chief of the Research and Trend Analysis Branch, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), during the report launch in Vienna on Monday.

The report by UNODC said that over the past decade, poaching, seizure levels and market prices have "declined solidly" for ivory and rhino horn. The report analysed global data and trends in wildlife trafficking from the period 2015-2021 and found that seizures of wild animals and plant species were recorded in 162 countries. These involved 4,000 plant and animal species and 3,250 of those were protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), a global treaty. The treaty regulates trade in animals and plants based on the level of threats they face. Elephants, crocodilian species, corals, carnivores, snakes, turtles, rosewood, pangolins, turtles and tortoises and bivalve molluscs were the animal and plant species that figured most commonly in seizures made of wildlife and their body parts.

In terms of broad markets, rhinos, pangolins and elephants were the top three traded wildlife species. In plants, cedars, rosewoods and agarwood were high in demand. In cases of certain plants and animals, like or-

chids, for instance, the rarity of species is a driving force behind the trade. Key among the drivers behind wildlife and plant trafficking were reasons such as food, medicine, animal collection, pet trade and making fashion products and adornments out of body parts. The report noted that each category of demand comprises its own set of trade dynamics. For instance, the report pointed out, the factors that affect demand for python skins for fashion trends are different from those that affect demand for its meat or pet trade. India too has seen a spate of wildlife seizures at airports, seaports and land borders, especially in states such as Mizoram and Manipur. The Department of Revenue Intelligence seized 1,652 mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibian species in 2022-23, as per the Smuggling in India Report 2022-23. About 40 per cent of the seizures were classified as threatened or near threatened species.

Wildlife crime control expert and Chief Executive Officer of Wildlife Trust of India Jose Louies said that India is witnessing a shift in illegal trade as the demand for live animals, especially exotic ones as pets, is on the rise. The involvement of educated people on both, demand and supply sides, is seen, Louies said, citing the use of the internet to carry out such trade. "The traditional definition of a wildlife trafficker is changing. There are people buying, selling and bartering animals on the internet. The exotic pets can also turn invasive and pose a threat to our local ecosystems and wildlife. This poses a threat to our local ecosystems and species," Louies said. The UN report, too, noted that among the harms of illegal wildlife trade are issues such as biodiversity degradation, the threat of extinction and the threat of invasive species taking over local habitats. An award-winning journalist with 14 years of experience, Nikhil Ghanekar is an Assistant Editor with the National Bureau [Government] of The Indian Express in New Delhi. He primarily covers environmental policy matters which involve tracking key decisions and inner workings of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. He also covers the functioning of the National Green Tribunal and writes on the impact of environmental policies on wildlife conservation, forestry issues and climate change. Nikhil joined The Indian Express in 2024. Originally from Mumbai, he has worked in publications such as Tehelka, Hindustan Times, DNA Newspaper, News18 and Indiaspend. In the past 14 years, he has written on a range of subjects such as sports, current affairs, civic issues, city centric environment news, central government policies and politics. ... Read More

INDIA allies CPIM, Congress hold protests in Agartala to demand jobs, safety of women

GNS News Agency, May 17

The protest march by the INDIA allies was a part of the weeklong (May 13 to May 18) statewide agitation started on Monday. The protest march by the INDIA allies was a part of the weeklong (May 13 to May 18) statewide agitation started on Monday. Amid the Parliamentary elections, the INDIA alliance partners — CPI(M) and Congress — on Tuesday took out a protest march in Tripura's capital city of Agartala to demand jobs, civic amenities, safety for women and others. The protest march by the INDIA allies was a part of the weeklong (May 13 to May 18) statewide agitation started on Monday. The march was led by party secretary Jitendra Chaudhury. The weeklong agitation has been called to demand pro-people steps, including provision of work under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act and the Tripura Urban Employment Programme, clearing pending wages of the workers among others.

"There is no existence of the state government in Tripura. Footsteps of famine are being heard in the rural and hill areas. There is no job in the villages for the past six months but the government is silent. The fuel crisis in the state surpassed the previous records. Protesting against all these issues, we have started an agitation from Monday (May 13) which will continue till May 18," said Chaudhury. He further added that like petrol pumps, long queues of vehicles are also seen near the CNG

stations and raised doubt on the situation as CNG comes from Tripura and not from any other state.

Chaudhury also said the recent storms have uprooted several electricity poles but the restoration works have not been undertaken even after a week. Chaudhury visited Longtraivalley, Chhamanu in Dhalai district on Monday and interacted with the people and later highlighted the "pitiable conditions of the roads and power supply" in these areas. Meanwhile, Tripura Pradesh Mahila Congress, a frontal wing of the Tripura Pradesh Congress Committee, protested in front of the West Agartala Women Police Station demanding police to take immediate action against the culprits involved in two separate crimes against women. Speaking to the reporters about these cases, the party said that a minor girl was abducted and allegedly molested and a housewife was gangraped after being abducted at two separate places in Agartala. The party claimed the police have taken no action. "Crimes against women are increasing under the BJP-led state government. We came to the police station to know what steps they have taken so far. We found out that though cases have been filed, no action has been taken as yet. We demand police to take strict action against those having involvement in these incidents and ensure reduction of crimes against women in future," said Shreyasi Laskar, leader of Tripura Pradesh Mahila Congress.

'Exam did not go well': Second NEET aspirant goes missing from Kota in a week



GNS News Agency, May 17

National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test, NEET, NEET aspirant goes missing, Kota, Indian express news, current affairs A week ago, on May 6, another 19-year-old preparing for NEET had gone missing after leaving a note that said he did not want to study further. A native of Rajasthan's Gangapur district, he had been living in Kota to prepare for NEET. For the second time in a week, a NEET coaching student in Rajasthan's Kota has gone missing after leaving a note mentioning studies.

Originally from Bihar, the 19-year-old was prepar-

ing for the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (undergraduate) for the last two years while living at a paying guest accommodation in Kota. His younger brother had also moved in with him a month ago, police said. It was at around 1 am Sunday, a week after the exam, that the student departed from his room after leaving a note that said: "My exam didn't go well. Find me around Kota Barrage." After the landlord informed police, a missing persons case was registered. The family has also been informed and the student's father reached Kota later in the day. Police searched for the 19-year-old at Kota Barrage as well as at the railway station, and said they were hopeful of finding him soon.

Kunhadi police station SHO Arvind Bhardwaj said the student was good in studies and had scored well in exams. "He was stressed out after giving the exam. His younger brother said that when he opened his eyes at 2 am, his brother was not in the room... We are continuously working on the case. We are investigating the matter by looking at CCTV footage. We are hopeful that the student will be found soon," Bhardwaj said. A week ago, on May 6, another 19-year-old preparing for NEET had gone missing after leaving a note that said he did not want to study further. A native of Rajasthan's Gangapur district, he had been living in Kota to prepare for NEET.

'You can't sit on a couch giving interview to press, lampooning court': SC rejects IMA president's apology

GNS News Agency, May 17

Refusing to accept his unconditional apology, the Supreme Court on Tuesday posed some tough questions to Indian Medical Association (IMA) president R V Asokan, over his "damaging" statements against the apex court in an interview to PTI where he answered queries about Patanjali Ayurved Ltd's misleading advertisements case. "You cannot sit on a couch giving an interview to the press and lampooning the court," a bench of Justices Hima Kohli and Ahsanuddin Amanullah told Asokan, while making it clear that at this stage, the top court will not accept his affidavit tendering apology. "We are the first one to uphold the freedom of speech, the right of free speech and right of thought but there are times when there has to be a self-restraint," Justice Kohli observed, adding, "We did not see it in your interview, that is the point." Asokan, who was present in the court, offered an unconditional apology to the bench and prayed for clemency. "Your conduct is not something which we can condone so easily," the bench told him and asked him why he made the statements in a pending matter where the IMA is the petitioner. The bench said that with 45 years of experience in the profession and his role as the IMA president, he was expected to have more sense of responsibility while giving the interview. "You can't vent your internal feeling in the press like this. That too, against an order of this court," Justice Amanullah said. Terming his statements "very unfortunate," the bench said though he has unconditionally apologised, the other part was whether the court will accept such an apology after the "kind of damaging statements" he had made. It said the IMA was the one which dragged Patanjali Ayurved Ltd to the court claiming they were taking the whole world for a ride, they were misrepresenting and denigrating the allopathy. "You are aware of the fact that we took whatever you said seriously enough to call the other side and make them explain and their apologies did not impress us, not once, not twice, more than three times, because we thought it was not coming from the heart. We have the same to say for your affidavit," the bench said. "Just because we are indulgent does not mean that anyone can get away with saying anything," it observed, while saying the court was not at all happy with Asokan's affidavit. It said he was leading a team of members of IMA which according to him has 3.5 lakh doctors across the country. "What kind of example is this voluntary association's president setting for the rest of his colleagues?" it said, adding, "And why you also did not give a public apology? Why did you wait till you had to come here?" "After all, we have been able to uphold the Constitution to the best of our ability," Justice Amanullah ob-



served. He said the judges do not react to the amount of criticism personally they face for the orders. "For the simple reason that personally, they don't have any ego. But when it comes to this institution, you have attacked the institution. Your comment was on the institution," Justice Amanullah said. "Personally, we are magnanimous, we don't take it otherwise. We can do that because we are entitled to take action. But we don't do that because we don't have any ego," he said. The bench told senior advocate P S Patwalia, appearing for IMA, that at this stage, the court was not inclined to accept the affidavit of apology tendered by Asokan. "We have taken a cue from what your lordships have observed. We need one chance, we will correct it," Patwalia said. The bench said, "We are not questioning his competence. We are not questioning any of his professional conduct. We are questioning something entirely different. He is a litigant before this court. Your intentions are shown only by your conduct. We don't have any mechanism to know what is going in in your heart and mind." The bench said it was not too sure about his affidavit and his intent at this moment and "we don't propose to accept it." "Probably too little too late," it observed, and posted the matter for further hearing in July. On May 7, the top court had termed as "very, very unacceptable" the statements made by Asokan in a recent interview to PTI. Expressing displeasure over Asokan's comments a day before the top court was slated to hear the matter, the bench had sought his response on an application filed by Patanjali Ayurved Ltd, which had urged the court to take judicial notice of the statements made by him. In an interaction with PTI editors on April 29 for its programme @4 Parliament Street, the IMA president had said it was "unfortunate" that the Supreme Court criticised the association and also some of the practices of private doctors. Asokan was replying to a query about the Supreme Court's observations during a hearing on April 23, when it had said while it was pointing one finger at Patanjali, the remaining four fingers were pointed towards IMA.

Spam no more: Govt to soon finalise draft rules on unwanted business calls, messages

GNS News Agency, May 17

unwanted business calls, unwanted business messages, spam calls, spam messages. Department of Consumer Affairs (DoCA), Indian express news, current affairs The DCA system aims to create a unified platform for subscribers to register their consent digitally for receiving commercial communications. The consent can also be revoked. Closing in on spam calls and messages, the Centre will soon finalise its guidelines to check unsolicited business communication, it is learnt.

The draft Guidelines for the Prevention and Regulation of Unsolicited and Unwarranted Business Communication, 2024 are ready and were discussed "in detail" on May 10 at a meeting of a committee set up by the Department of Consumer Affairs (DoCA) earlier this year. The meeting was chaired by Secretary, DoCA, Nidhi Khare, and attended by representatives from Department of Telecommunications, Telecom Regulatory of India (TRAI), Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI), Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL), Vodafone, Reliance and Airtel.

"The draft guidelines define various important terms, applicability with appropriate illustrations and provide that the guidelines shall not be in derogation of any other law. The draft guidelines also list out various types of communication that will be deemed to be unsolicited/ unwarranted communication," the official cited above said. "Various suggestions were received by the committee members on these aspects. Based on these suggestions, the department (DoCA) will soon finalise the Guidelines for Unsolicited and Unwarranted Business Communication, 2024," the official added.

The draft was prepared by a subgroup of the committee, which was set up by DoCA in February. According to officials, during several meetings, there was "general consensus" among the committee members that unwarranted commercial communication was "a huge cause of concern and needed to be dealt with proactively". "It was further pointed out that despite numerous measures taken by TRAI and the Department of



Closing in on spam calls and messages, the Centre will soon finalise its guidelines to check unsolicited business communication, it is learnt.

Telecommunication (DoT), the number of pesky and fraudulent calls remain unabated," an official said. Earlier this year, TRAI recommended all telcos activate caller name display on phones. It also asked smartphone makers to enable this feature.

At the meeting, the official said, it was also brought to the notice of the committee that TRAI, under the Telecom Commercial Communications Customer Preference Regulations, 2018, had already advised 'principal entities' such as banks, financial institutions, insurance companies and trading companies to develop and deploy a Digital Consent Acquisition (DCA) system. The DCA system aims to create a unified platform for subscribers to register their consent digitally for receiving commercial communications. The consent can also be revoked. "Secretary DoCA appreciated the various steps being undertaken by different regulators and also suggested to promote robust inter-ministerial/ departmental communication and cooperation so that the interest of the consumers could be duly protected under the mandate of Consumer Protection Act, 2019," the official said.

Antony Blinken in Kyiv, reassures US support to Ukraine's fight against Russia



GNS News Agency, May 17

Antony Blinken's visit comes less than a month after US Congress approved a long-delayed foreign assistance package that sets aside \$60 billion in aid for Ukraine. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrived in Kyiv on Tuesday on an unannounced diplomatic mission to reassure Ukraine that it has American support as it struggles to defend against increasingly intense Russian attacks. "We know this is a challenging time," Blinken said in the Ukrainian capital where he met with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. The visit comes less than a month after Congress approved a long-delayed foreign assistance package that sets aside \$60 billion in aid for Ukraine, much of which will go toward replenishing badly depleted artillery and air defence systems. Assistance from the new package "is now on the way", Blinken said, adding that some of it has already arrived in Ukraine.

He said the aid would "make a real difference" on the battlefield where Russia's army has in some areas seized the initiative against Kyiv's depleted forces. On his fourth trip to Kyiv since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, Blinken will underscore the Biden administration's commitment to Ukraine's defence and long-term security, US officials said. They noted that since President Joe Biden signed the aid package late last month, the administration has already announced \$1.4 billion in short-term military assistance and \$6 billion in longer-term support. It is "trying to really accelerate the tempo" of US weapon shipments to Ukraine, national security adviser Jake Sullivan said.

"What I am going to suggest is that the level of intensity being exhibited right now in terms of moving stuff is at a 10 out of 10," Sullivan told reporters at a White House briefing on Monday. Artillery, air defence interceptors and long-range ballistic missiles have already been delivered, some of them already to the front lines, said a senior US official travelling with the secretary on an overnight train from Poland. Blinken will "send a strong signal of reassurance" to Ukrainian leaders and civil society figures he will meet during his two-day visit, said the official, who spoke to reporters on condition of anonymity ahead of Blinken's meetings. In a statement released after Blinken's arrival, the State Department said he would hold talks with Zelenskyy and other top Ukrainian officials

to discuss battlefield updates, the impact of new US security and economic assistance, long-term security and other commitments, and ongoing work to bolster Ukraine's economic recovery. Delays in US assistance, particularly since Israel's war with Hamas began to preoccupy top administration officials, triggered deep concerns in Kyiv and Europe. Blinken, for example, has visited the Middle East seven times since the Gaza conflict began in October. His last trip to Kyiv was in September 2023.

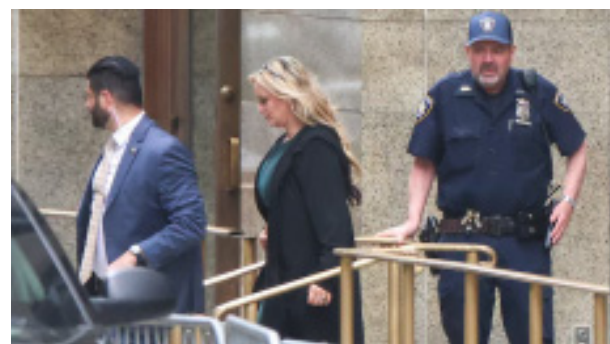
The US official added that Blinken also would give a speech later Tuesday extolling Ukraine's "strategic successes" in the war. It is intended to complement a Blinken address last year in Helsinki, Finland, deriding Russian President Vladimir Putin for Moscow's strategic failures in launching the war. Since the Helsinki speech, however, Russia has intensified its attacks, most noticeably as the US House sat on the aid package for months without action, forcing a suspension in the provision of most US assistance. Those attacks have increased in recent weeks as Russia has sought to take advantage of Ukrainian shortages in manpower and weapons while the new assistance is in transit. Top Biden administration officials and Ukrainian national security officials held a call on Monday "about the situation on the front, about the capabilities that they are most in need of, and a real triage effort to say, 'Get us this stuff this fast so that we can be in a position to effectively defend against the Russian onslaught'", Sullivan said. Zelenskyy said over the weekend that "fierce battles" are taking place near the border in eastern and northeastern Ukraine as outgunned and outnumbered Ukrainian soldiers try to push back a significant Russian ground offensive. The new Russian push in the northeastern Kharkiv region and a drive into the eastern Donetsk region come after months when the roughly 1,000-km frontline barely budged. In the meantime, both sides have used long-range strikes in what largely became a war of attrition. Zelenskyy told Blinken that Ukraine urgently needs two Patriot air defence systems to protect Kharkiv.

The senior US official said despite some recent setbacks, Ukraine could still claim significant victories. Those include reclaiming some 50 per cent of the territory Russian forces took in the early months of the war, boosting its economic standing and improving transportation and trade links, not least through military successes in the Black Sea. The official acknowledged that Ukraine faces "a tough fight" and is "under tremendous pressure" but argued that Ukrainians "will become increasingly more confident" as the new US and other Western assistance begins to surge. Blinken said Sunday that there was "no doubt" the months-long delay in aid caused problems but that "we are doing everything we can to rush this assistance out there." "It's a challenging moment," he told CBS' "Face the Nation". "We are not going anywhere, and neither are more than some 50 countries that are supporting Ukraine. That will continue, and if Putin thinks he can outlast Ukraine, outlast its supporters, he's wrong."

Stormy Daniels wore bulletproof vest to Trump trial fearing a 'nut'

GNS News Agency, May 17

Adult entertainer Stormy Daniels wore a bulletproof vest to the court in New York for the Donald Trump hush money trial. Her lawyer, Clark Brewster, has revealed that Stormy Daniels was scared of "what a nut could do" and took precautions. The whole world read adult entertainer Stormy Daniels' testimony against former US President Donald Trump last week about their alleged sexual encounter in the hush money case. But did you know that Stormy Daniels wore a bulletproof jacket to the court? The adult entertainer's lawyer, Clark Brewster, has revealed that Stormy Daniels was so scared for her life that she wore a bulletproof jacket to and in the courtroom in New York. Brewster said she was scared of "what a nut could do to her". She was taking the witness stand to discuss the details of her alleged sexual encounter with Trump in a hotel in Lake Tahoe, US. Daniels' testimony is an important development in the trial and she was being cautious. "She was concerned about the security coming in to New York," Clark Brewster, her lawyer told CNN. "She wore a bulletproof vest every day until she got to the courthouse," he added. "I can tell you that before she came on Sunday she cried herself to sleep. She was paralysed with fear, not of taking the stand or telling her story, but what some nut might do to her. And I'm genuinely concerned about it as well." The lawyer must have been referring to Trump's supporters. People backing Trump have been violent at times, as was witnessed during the Capitol Hill storming on January 6, 2021. Daniels, who has acted in several adult movies, was heard for about seven hours, and she discussed the details about a 2006 sexual encounter with Trump. Daniels clarified to the jury how



she was not forced physically or in any other way to have any physical relationship with Trump. She was also not under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time. Her lawyer further discussed how she lives in an area which does not have enough security provisions. Before leaving home, she also wore a necklace made by her daughter for her. Daniels' statement was much awaited in the trial, and she faced rigorous cross-examination during the trial. Trump's team claimed her testimony could not be trusted. Her lawyer even revealed he could hear Trump "cursing audibly". As for how Daniels felt, "she was pretty nonplused by him. She really didn't pay much regard to him. She heard him cursing in the courtroom, but I don't think that impacted her at all."

They were really trying to make her feel ashamed in some way of her profession. "I think that she would be more inclined to hope that the jury does the right thing and finds and conviction", he concluded.

Donald Trump praises fictional killer Hannibal Lecter while speaking on migrants

GNS News Agency, May 17

Former US President Donald Trump praised Hannibal Lecter, a fictional serial killer and cannibal from the Oscar-winning movie "The Silence of the Lambs", while speaking of concerns over migration ahead of the presidential elections. At a rally in New Jersey, Trump claimed that migrants crossing the border were violent criminals as he went on to praise Lecter, calling him "a wonderful man".

"Has anyone ever seen 'The Silence of the Lambs'? The late, great Hannibal Lecter. He's a wonderful man," Trump said. "He often times would have a friend for dinner. Remember the last scene? 'Excuse me, I'm about to have a friend for dinner,' as this poor doctor walked by," the Republican leader said. Turning his focus on the migrant crisis, Trump said migrants were entering the US "totally unvetted" and destroying "our country".

"We have people that have been released into our country that we don't want in our country, and they're coming in totally unchecked, totally unvetted. They are destroying our country, and we are sitting back and we better damn well win this election, because if we don't, our country is going to be doomed. It's going to be doomed," Trump said. The former President had previ-



ously compared migrants to Lecter. In the past, Trump has praised Lecter as "legendary" and a nice fellow. The New York Times reported. "The Silence of the Lambs" is one of several references that Trump frequently invokes during his rallies. Hannibal Lecter was played by Anthony Hopkins, winning an Oscar for his performance.

White House plays Saare Jahan Se Accha, serves golgappa, samosa



GNS News Agency, May 17

The White House celebrated Asian American Heritage Month with a reception featuring Indian music and food. The Marine Band played the popular Indian patriotic song 'Saare Jahan Se Accha Hindustan Hamara' twice over. Guests were treated to Indian street food, including golgappa and samosa, and khoya made in the White House. White House played Saare Jahan Se Accha. The White House's Marine Band played 'Saare Jahan Se Accha Hindustan Hamara', a popular Indian patriotic song, at a reception on the occasion of the Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) Heritage Month.

The White House's Marine Band played 'Saare Jahan Se Accha Hindustan Hamara', a popular Indian patriotic song, at a reception on the occasion of the Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) Heritage Month. The reception also featured Indian street food, including golgappa (pani puri) and khoya (sweetmeat). This was the second time in less than a year that 'Saare Jahan Se Accha' was played at the White House. Last time it was played was during the State Visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi on June 23, 2023. This reflects the strong US-India relationship, according to Indian-American community leader Ajay Jain Bhutoria.

At a reception with President Joe Biden and Vice-President Kamala Harris, celebrating the AANHPI Heritage Month, the song 'Saare Jahan Se Accha Hindustan Hamara', written by Mohammad Iqbal during India's Independence struggle, was played twice by the White

House Marine Band upon the request of Indian Americans invited by the president for the annual event, reported news agency PTI. "This was an amazing celebration of the White House's AANHPI Heritage Month at the Rose Garden. The best part was that as I walked into the White House, I was greeted by the musicians playing 'Saare Jahan se Accha Hindustan Hamara'," Bhutoria said. The reception also featured Indian street food, including golgappa (pani puri) and a sweet dish khoya. This is a recent addition to the White House menu, alongside the traditional samosas. "Last year when I was here, there were golgappas/pani puri. This year too, I was looking for them and then suddenly, one of the servers brought in the pani puri/ golgappa. That was amazing. The taste was dingy and a little spicy. Perfect!" Bhutoria told PTI after attending the AANHPI reception in the Rose Garden of the White House on Monday evening. Bhutoria met White House executive chef Cristeta Comerford and asked her about the golgappa during the event.

"I asked her, did you make the golgappas in the White House? She said, yes, we made everything in the White House," Bhutoria was quoted as saying by PTI. Bhutoria believes the growing popularity of golgappa in the US is due to American officials trying the street food while travelling in India. "A lot of US administration officials, whether officials from the State Department or the White House, have travelled to India many times. I'm sure their counterparts over there say that of all the street foods, you need to try golgappa," Bhutoria said. The guests included scores of Asian Americans and several Indian Americans, including US Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy, who played an important role in the fight against Covid-19. He enthralled hundreds of viewers by playing drums at the event held at the White House. The Indian American surgeon general showcased his drumming skills for a few minutes. The month of May is celebrated as Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) Heritage Month. AANHPI encompasses cultures from Asia and the Pacific Islands of Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia, including around 50 ethnic groups and 100 languages. The month was chosen because the first Japanese immigrant arrived in the US in May 1843. It also honours the Chinese immigrants who helped finish the transcontinental railroad in May 1869.

Europe's most wanted migrant-smuggler 'The Scorpion' arrested in Iraq

GNS News Agency, May 17

Barzan Majeed, considered to be Europe's most wanted migrant smuggler, has been arrested in Iraq's Kurdistan region after two years on the run. Nicknamed 'The Scorpion', Majeed and his gang of human traffickers smuggled around 10,000 migrants in boats and lorries across the English Channel. An investigation carried out by the BBC to locate the absconding human smuggler tracked him down to Iraq's Sulaymaniyah city. "Maybe a thousand, maybe 10,000. I don't know, I didn't count," he told the BBC during a call last month regarding the number of migrants he had trafficked from the city. "God (writes it down) when you're going to pass away, but this is sometimes your fault. God doesn't never say 'Go inside the boat'."

In a series of tweets on Monday, the UK's National Crime Agency (NCA) thanked the BBC for "highlighting his case, and remain determined to do all we can to disrupt and dismantle the criminal networks involved in smuggling people to the UK, wherever they operate". According to the NCA, Majeed was detained on May 12 by Kurdish security forces. "Majeed, who had previously lived in Nottingham, was the subject of an NCA wanted appeal in November 2022 after he was convicted of people smuggling offences in his absence in Belgium, following a joint UK-Belgian investigation," the Agency tweeted. Speaking to the BBC, an official of the Kurdistan Regional Government said officials used the British broadcaster's findings to locate Majeed. "The arrest was made outside his home, they arrested him the moment he stepped out of the home and arrested him without any major problems," the official was quoted as saying to the BBC. "We are now looking at charges against him here first and foremost, and then we will be discussing with European police and



prosecutors who want to question him and deal with him."

Majeed's gang is believed to have controlled much of the people-smuggling trade between Europe and the UK between 2016 to 2021. Twenty-six gang members were arrested and convicted at courts in the UK, France and Belgium following a two-year international police operation. However, Majeed, who managed to evade arrest and was absconding, was tried in absentia at a court in Belgium and convicted of 121 counts of people-smuggling. In October 2022, he was sentenced to 10 years in jail and fined 968,00 euros.

When the BBC found him last month, Majeed agreed to meet at a mall in Sulaymaniyah and said at the time that he wasn't the leader of the gang. Without showing any remorse for the migrants, he said, "Nobody forced them. They wanted to. They were begging the smugglers, 'Please, please do this for us', Sometimes the smugglers say, 'Just for the sake of God, I will help them', And then they complain, they say, 'Oh this, that...' No, this is not true."

Indian-origin Nazi sympathiser pleads guilty to crashing truck near White House

GNS News Agency, May 17

An Indian-origin man in the US has pleaded guilty to attacking the White House with a rented truck in May 2023 with the intent of replacing the democratically-elected government with a dictatorship fuelled by the ideology of Nazi Germany, according to a US attorney. According to the plea agreement, Sai Varshith Kandula (20), of St. Louis, Missouri, crashed a rented truck into the White House perimeter, and he was attempting to gain access to the White House to seize political power. US Attorney Matthew Graves on Monday said Kandula intended to replace the democratically elected government with a dictatorship fuelled by the ideology of Nazi Germany and for himself to be put in charge of the US. Kandula admitted to investigators that he would have arranged for the killing of the US President and others if necessary to achieve his objective. His actions were calculated to influence or affect the conduct of government by intimidation or coercion, the Department of Justice said.

According to court documents, Kandula flew on a commercial flight from St. Louis, Missouri, to Washington DC in the afternoon of May 22, 2023, connecting via another airport on a one-way airline ticket. Kandula arrived at Dulles International Airport at about 5.20 pm and rented the truck at 6.30 pm. He stopped for food and gas and then drove to Washington DC, where he crashed into the barriers protecting the White House and President's Park at 9.35 pm at the intersection of H Street, Northwest, and 16th Street, Northwest.

Kandula drove onto the sidewalk, sending pedestrians running from the scene. After striking the barriers, the truck backed up in reverse, then lurched forward, striking the metal barriers a second time. The second impact disabled the truck which began smoking from the engine compartment and leaking fluids. Kandula exited the vehicle and went to the back of the truck. From a backpack, he removed a flag and a three-by-five foot red-and-white



banner with a Nazi Swastika in the centre and brandished it. US Park Police and US Secret Service officers arrested Kandula at the scene and took him into custody. His actions caused \$4,322 in damage to the National Park Service and over \$50,000 in damage to U-Haul International.

This amount included costs for repairing the metal bollard barriers to their original condition and ensuring structural soundness, oil and chemical removal, spill cleanup, and disposal of fluids from the crashed U-Haul, and the cost of the destroyed U-Haul truck, federal prosecutors said. "Kandula planned the attack for several weeks. Prior to renting the truck and crashing it on White House grounds, he made several attempts to gain access to vehicles or armed security guards. For example, on April 22, 2023, Kandula requested 25 armed guards and an armoured convoy from a security company located in Virginia," the press release said. "On May 4, 2023, Kandula attempted to contact several other companies in an attempt to rent a large commercial tractor-trailer truck, a dump truck, or another large truck. Kandula was unsuccessful in arranging for security guards or a tractor-trailer truck or dump truck. Kandula had attempted to arrange for the services of these security guards and the use of large vehicles in order to carry out his offence against the US Government," it said.

Blackstone, Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, GIC want a bite of Haldiram's snacks: Report



than 150 restaurants selling local food, sweets and western cuisine. It also has a popular snacks business for which the deal talks are currently ongoing, said the sources, who declined to be named as the discussions are private. The consortium, led by Blackstone, has submitted a non-binding bid for a 75% stake and the talks are in early stages, the sources said, adding that the final percentage and valuation has not yet been decided.

GIC and ADIA – both investors in Blackstone's funds – are part of the non-binding bid, the sources added. India's Economic Times newspaper first reported the deal talks. Haldiram's CEO Krishan Chutani, ADIA and Blackstone declined to comment while GIC did not immediately respond. Last year, Reuters reported India's Tata Group was in talks with Haldiram's to acquire a majority stake in the entire snacks and restaurants business. Haldiram's at the time was seeking a valuation of \$10 billion. Those talks have ended and no Tata deal is in the works, a third source with direct knowledge said on Tuesday.

A consortium including Blackstone, Singapore state fund GIC and Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA) is in talks with India's Haldiram's for a majority stake in its snacks business at a valuation of up to \$8.5 billion, two sources with direct knowledge said.

Haldiram's, a household name in India, has more

Retail inflation eases to 11-month low. Will RBI cut key rates soon?

Retail inflation in India dropped to its lowest point in 11 months in April, prompting speculation about potential changes to the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) key interest rates. However, economists feel that the central bank will maintain its stance and keep the key interest rates unchanged due to steady inflation and concerns about rising food prices. Data released by the government on Monday showed that retail inflation stood at 4.83% in April, marking a marginal decline from 4.85% in the previous month.

Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist, Head Research and Outreach, ICRA Ltd, said the moderation in inflation was "led by a larger deflation in the fuel and light segment, and softer prints for the clothing and footwear, and pan, tobacco and intoxicants groups". Despite two consecutive months of retail inflation staying below 5%, the RBI is unlikely to hastily implement interest rate cuts, given certain underlying considerations.

RBI unlikely to change rate stance The RBI has maintained its benchmark interest rate at 6.5% for over a year, maintaining a relatively cautious stance due to inflation remaining above its target of 4%. Economists now anticipate that rate cuts may not occur until the final quarter of the year, especially as they anticipate the RBI will wait for signals from the US Federal Reserve before making any moves. Citigroup Inc economists have adjusted their projections, now foreseeing the RBI adopting a neutral stance in August rather than their earlier estimate of June. Citigroup's economists Samiran Chakraborty and Baqar Zaidi wrote in a note that "waiting until August for stance change would help the RBI avoid any early market pricing of rate cuts, a better view of the monsoon and the global monetary policy dynamics". No respite from rising food prices

While retail inflation witnessed a marginal decline, rising food prices remain a concern for the RBI. In April, inflation in the food and beverages group rose nearly 7.9%. ICRA's Aditi Nayar said, "Inflation in the food and



beverages group inched up to 7.9% in April 2024 from 7.7% in March 2024, although this was not broad-based, and was led by higher prints across just four of the 12 sub-groups, namely cereals, meat and fish, oils and fats, and fruits. "Inflation in the vegetables and pulses categories remained in double-digits for the sixth and eleventh consecutive month, respectively, thereby contributing to the elevated food and beverages print. Notably, inflation in spices eased to single digits in April 2024 after a gap of 22 months," Nayar added. She went on to say that the food and beverages inflation could rise above the 8% mark in May 2024. "With continued uncertainty, especially on the risks to the food inflation trajectory after Q2 FY2025, the chance of a stance change in the upcoming June 2024 monetary policy review appears rather dim," Nayar said. Upasna Bhardwaj, Chief Economist at Kotak Mahindra Bank, also agreed that there might be an extended period of inaction regarding the RBI's stance on policy rates. "Unchanged headline and core inflation reading from previous month will continue to provide respite to the MPC. However, erratic weather and heatwaves should keep the overall sentiment cautious. We do not expect much change to RBI's narrative for now, as a prolonged pause in policy rates remains the base case," Bhardwaj said.

AC prices may increase soon, blame the heatwaves



Heatwaves in India are typically accompanied by a surge in the demand for air conditioners, driving up its prices. The situation this year remains the same as heatwaves across India have brought a sharp rise in the demand for air conditioners, leading to potential shortages in the market. Major AC manufacturers such as Voltas, Daikin, and Blue Star have reported that the industry is facing a scarcity of products and models due to the unprecedented demand driven by scorching temperatures prevailing over the past six weeks.

As temperatures climb, sales have begun to surge notably in the Northern regions, fuelling the shortage. Industry executives have projected a decline in sales, estimating a loss of around 400,000 to 500,000 units, amounting to Rs 1,200-1,500 crore in potential business. The extended period of heatwave conditions since late March in Southern and Eastern India, coupled with above-average temperatures in the West, has pushed AC sales to record levels this year. This unexpected surge has caught the industry off guard, with production planning falling short of meeting the soaring demand for summer.

Manufacturers are facing challenges in increasing supplies due to lengthy lead times for component procurement, often up to two months. Additionally, import restrictions on ACs and critical components are further limiting the ability to raise supplies to meet the increased demand. "The market demand is much more than the production which was planned for the summer. The North has picked up in the last 10 days, while demand is still robust in South, West and East. Some companies are facing a shortage in certain models," said Jawa.

Pradeep Bakshi, managing director of Voltas, indicated that the industry could have accommodated at least a 20% increase in sales if stocks had been adequately replenished. "There are import restrictions and local contract manufacturers are not equipped to cater to this demand-supply mismatch," Bakshi was quoted by The Economic Times (ET). Government restrictions on importing gas-filled ACs have added to the challenges faced by manufacturers. Importing ACs without pre-filled gas incurs additional costs for gas charging, making it economi-

cally unviable for companies to supplement the shortfall. Moreover, the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) has imposed quality control regulations on copper products used in ACs, restricting sourcing to BIS-certified factories. This has posed a challenge as BIS is not certifying factories in China, affecting the availability of critical components needed for AC production.

Blue Star's managing director, B Thiagarajan, told ET that April witnessed a substantial growth in AC sales, ranging from 70% to 90%, leading to shortages in various regions. Although sales may have peaked in April, the industry is expected to grow by 30-40% in the April-June quarter. Nilesh Gupta, director of Vijay Sales, said that despite manufacturers facing shortages of specific models, the consumer demand during the heatwave is boosting sales across brands, as quoted by ET. "However, in a heatwave-like situation, the consumer is ready to buy any brand boosting sales of everyone," said Gupta. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast a new heatwave spell commencing on May 16 over Northwest India, including states like Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, and Bihar.

Kia unveils revamped EV6 electric vehicle

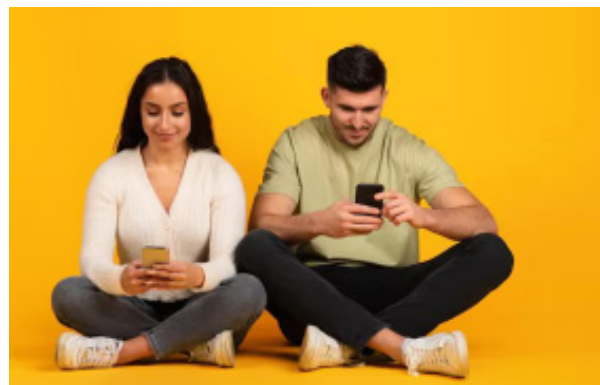
Seoul: Kia, South Korea's second-largest automaker, on Tuesday announced the release of a redesigned and upgraded version of its EV6 electric vehicle, which was first introduced in 2021.

The revamped crossover SUV features a fresh design and is equipped with a fourth-generation 84 kWh battery and an advanced infotainment system based on Hyundai Motor Group's software defined vehicle (SDV) technology. Kia said it accentuated the dynamism of the new EV6 under the company's design philosophy named "Modern Contrast."

The company's Star Map lighting design is applied on the front and rear lamps, along with the addition of newly designed wing-shaped bumpers, reports Yonhap news agency. Internally, the face-lifted EV6 features a larger panoramic curved display and ambient lighting with dynamic graphics. The new EV6 is equipped with a fourth-generation battery, with its capacity boosted from the previous 77.4 kWh to 84 kWh. Under a single charge, the EV6's long-range two-wheel drive variant can travel up to 494 kms, compared with the 475-kms range for the previous model. Kia said it has begun receiving preorders, and the model is scheduled to be released next month.



Know all about this bedroom habit that might be ruining your sex life



In this chaotic world, personal space is vital, but it shouldn't come at the expense of intimacy. Every person wants to spend real quality time with their partner but taking your phone to bed may interrupt your healthy intimate/sex life. Ekta Dixit, mental health professional & relationship coach, says, "It is essential to spend quality time to strengthen your relationship."

What is parallel scrolling?

According to Radhika Mohta, a matchmaker and relationship coach, parallel-scrolling means when one person is physically present somewhere but is mentally somewhere else, it can be on their phone, tablet, laptop, or any other device. "When partners in their personal space are busy scrolling their phones," said Dixit, parallel scrolling, relationship advice, intimacy, communication, phone addiction, digital detox, sex life, quality time. Spend quality time to strengthen your relationship.

How does it affect relationships?

A rare radiation storm could hit the Earth again this week; here are some tips to stay safe

As we gaze up at the sky, marveling at the beauty of the cosmos, it's easy to forget that the sun holds immense power. Last week, our planet experienced a series of solar storms, and now, there are warnings of another potential threat looming: radiation storms. According to Daily Mail Online, "Scientists are warning about a new 'perfect storm' of rare space weather. The sun has been releasing powerful flares, emissions of electromagnetic radiation, which contain large quantities of charged particles that have accelerated in speed and increased in number due to the intense magnetic activity on the star's surface."

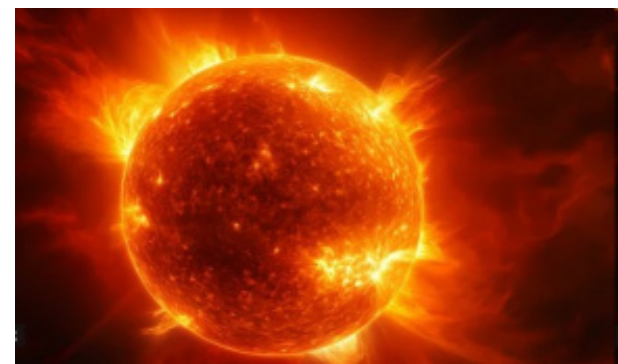
R. A. Singh, retired joint director and geography expert, Teria, Uttar Pradesh tells indianexpress.com, "The likelihood of a radiation storm hitting the Earth this week is heightened due to the detection of a coronal mass ejection (CME) that occurred recently." This event, he says, is a part of increased solar activity which typically releases plasma and magnetic fields towards the planet, causing geomagnetic storms and potential radiation hazards. According to Singh, this forthcoming solar storm is predicted to reach G2 (moderate) to G3 (strong) levels on the geomagnetic storm scale, which can affect satellite operations and power grids, and increase radiation levels on airline flights at high latitudes. The storm's interaction with Earth's magnetic field can also produce brilliant auroras visible at unusually low latitudes. "Precautionary tips to take when engaging in outdoor activities: For those planning to engage in outdoor activities this week, Singh recommends taking the following precautions when heading out: Monitor Space Weather Reports: Check forecasts regularly to stay updated on solar activity levels.

Use Radiation Shields: If engaging in activities at

Mohta said, "As a human beings, we seek attention. Regardless of sex, a person's bare minimum expectation is that you are listening to them." "Parallel scrolling leads to tension and conflict between partners because they feel disconnected in physical space, which creates distance at the emotional level," said Dixit. Dixit further added that it leads to comparison and a sense of inadequacy in the relationship as while scrolling a partner might see romantic content and start comparing their relationship with someone else relation. "Parallel scrolling made you half-mindedly present somewhere, and divided your attention. In such a case, the other partner might feel that he/she is not getting valued or heard. All this leads to a lack of communication in the relationship and partners start making assumptions in their minds", mentioned Mohta. This passive scrolling in personal space may be a reason that partners neglect important information. This habit not only takes a toll on mental health but physically too, because one person in a relationship may be feeling physically intimate but another one is busy scrolling their social media, Dixit added.

How to let go of it?

Mohta advised creating a mindful environment, whenever you are in your personal space don't bring your phone into your bedroom or put it in DND mode. Set boundaries, and fix your digital time. Be mentally present where are you physically so that the other person in the relationship feels valued. To maintain a healthy intimate relationship, Dixit added, don't scroll social media two hours before going to sleep to spend quality time. "Share highlights of the day with your partner. Partners may incentivise it, that if any of them break the rule will have to face punishment and that punishment could be subjective."



high altitudes or near the poles, consider using materials that provide radiation shielding. Stay Informed on Updates: Solar storm conditions can change rapidly, so keeping informed can help you adjust plans accordingly. Prepare for GPS and Communication Disruptions: Have physical maps and alternative communication methods ready in case of disruptions to satellite-based services.

Particular regions or demographics that may be more vulnerable to the effects of radiation during these event "Areas closer to the poles are typically more affected by geomagnetic and radiation storms. Individuals in these regions, especially those with ongoing health issues or pregnant, should take extra precautions," Singh advises. Stay indoors during peak radiation times and consult health professionals on additional preventive measures. For the most accurate and timely updates on solar weather and its potential impacts, monitoring official sources like the NOAA Space Weather Prediction Center is recommended.

Imran Khan says his tolerance for spicy, greasy, fried foods has gone down as he transitions into his 40s: 'It is so embarrassing...'

With age, you also experience changes — not just emotional, but also physical and internal (mainly of the body's metabolism and digestive capabilities). Actor Imran Khan also experienced something similar, about which he opened up in a freewheeling chat with Beverly White on Khaane Mein Kya Hai YouTube channel — stating that he has noticed a change in his taste preferences. "As I transition through my 30s into my 40s, one of the surprising things is my tolerance for greasy, spicy, fried food; it has gone down. It's very sad. Emotionally, I am not ready for that. There is a part of me that will look at the menu and see stuff like fried with cheese sauce and chillies...and [if I] take three bites into it, my stomach doesn't approve of it. It is so embarrassing," expressed Khan.

Is it normal to experience changes in our tolerance for certain foods as we age?

While there's no universal rule, some individuals may find that their tolerance for spicy, greasy, and fried foods decreases as they enter their 40s and beyond, said Dr Vinodha Kumary, deputy chief medical officer, Jindal Naturecure Institute. According to Dr Kumary, "As people age, their digestive systems may become less efficient. This can result in slower digestion and a reduced ability to tolerate foods that are heavy, spicy, or greasy." "Slower metabolism makes it more challenging to digest heavy, fatty foods efficiently. This can lead to discomfort, bloating, and digestive issues, prompting individuals to gravitate towards lighter, more easily digestible meals," said Dr Sangeeta Tiwari, clinical nutritionist at Artemis Hospitals. With age often also comes a greater awareness of health and wellness. "Many people become more mindful of their dietary choices and may choose to avoid foods that can cause digestive discomfort or contribute to health issues like heartburn, acid reflux, or gastrointestinal upset," shared Dr Kumary. Some individuals may develop sensitivities or intolerances to certain foods as they get older. "Spicy, greasy, and fried foods can be particularly problematic for those with digestive issues like irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) or gastritis," mentioned Dr Kumary. Moreover, hormonal fluctuations, particularly in women during menopause, can influence food preferences and tolerance levels. "Changes in estrogen levels



While there's no universal rule, some individuals may find that their tolerance for spicy, greasy, and fried foods decreases as they enter their 40s and beyond, shared Dr Vinodha Kumary, deputy chief medical officer, Jindal Naturecure Institute

can affect taste perception, appetite, and digestion, making certain foods less appealing or harder to tolerate," mentioned Dr Tiwari. While tolerance for these types of foods may decrease with age for some individuals, it's important to note that everyone is different. Like we train our muscles, we can also condition our nerves, said Tarundeep Singh Rekhi, a fitness expert. He believes that age is not a factor; rather, it's the consistency of our dietary habits that makes the difference. According to Rekhi, regular exposure to capsaicin desensitises our pain receptors, enabling us to tolerate spicier foods without discomfort. "Maintaining a consistent intake of spicy foods sustains this desensitisation, allowing for prolonged enjoyment. However, if there's a break in consumption, whether for detox or other reasons, the pain receptors regenerate, resulting in discomfort once more," said Rekhi.

‘Salman Khan said Manoj Bajpayee deserves this award for Satya, don’t know why they gave it to me’: Actor recalls gesture



GNS News Agency, May 17

Manoj Bajpayee shot to stardom when he appeared in Ram Gopal Varma's film *Satya* as Bhikhu Mhatre and much like the audience, even the film industry was completely left in awe of his talent. *Satya* released the same year as *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* and in a recent interview, Manoj recalled how an award ceremony honoured Salman for *KKHH* instead of him, which left Salman shocked. Manoj further recalled that Salman accepted

the award on stage and "graciously" said that Manoj deserved this honour for *Satya*. In a chat with Pinkvilla, when asked about this award function, Manoj said that Salman and him were both competing for Best Actor in a Supporting Role. Salman was nominated for *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* and Manoj was nominated for *Satya*. He said, "This is absolutely true because we were all there. When they announced the name, the audience got quite upset and they were standing up and yelling for Bhikhu Mhatre."

He further recalled how Salman honoured Manoj on stage and said, "Salman, when he went on stage, very gracious of him, he said, 'I don't know why they gave it to me. Manoj deserves this.' He said that. To say something like that, one has to be large-hearted and Salman did that. I really felt good that there are such people in the industry." Manoj then added that the same award ceremony actually honoured him for Best Actor (Critics) for his work in *Satya*. Manoj is now looking forward to the release of his 100th film titled *Bhaiyyaji*. The film is directed by Apoorv Singh Karki, who also worked with Manoj in *Sirf Ek Bandaa Kaafi Hai*. The actor had recently shared that he has started shooting for the third season of Prime Video's *Family Man*.

Khatron Ke Khiladi 14 confirmed contestants list: Abhishek Kumar, Asim Riaz to be joined by Shilpa Shinde, Sumona Chakravarti, Samarth Jurel



It is time for *Khatron Ke Khiladi 14* and the new season is about to go on floors by the end of this month. While Abhishek Kumar, Nimrit Kaur Ahluwalia, Asim Riaz, Krishna Shroff, and Shalin Bhanot were already confirmed to join the show, now the makers have announced a confirmed contestant list for *Khatron Ke Khiladi 14*. Interestingly, the 13 names who will join the new season include many ex-Big Boss contestants too.

Other than the five confirmed contestants, the Colors TV team revealed that Sumona Chakravarti, Shilpa Shinde, Kedar Aashish Mehrotra, Samarth Jurel, Gashmeer Mahajani, Karan Veer Mehra, Niyati Fatnani, and Aditi Sharma complete the line up for season 14. Sumona said about his participating on the Rohit Shetty show, "I thought it was some sort of prank, but as the reality sank in, and the offer was confirmed, I was excited. I'm thrilled about the show taking its daredevilry to a new country. I am ready to push my boundaries and re-awaken the adrenaline junkie in me under the mentorship of the ultimate action king Rohit Shetty sir."

Bigg Boss 11 winner Shilpa Shinde calls the oppor-

tunity an honour. "I'm ready to give *Khatron Ke Khiladi* everything I've got. It is an honour to have the opportunity to learn from the incredible action guru Rohit Shetty sir himself. I'm excited about exploring and breaking the physical and mental barriers that have held me back until now. This is more than just a show."

Aashish Mehrotra, who recently quit *Anupamaa*, had already shared that his fans would see his real avatar on screen soon. "As an actor, I'm used to performing on stage or in front of the camera, but this reality show is a new adventure. I'll be stepping out of my comfort zone and facing challenges that will test my bravery and courage. I can't wait to confront my fears and keep the viewers on the edge of their seats." All the *Khatron Ke Khiladi* contestants have already begun preparations for the show, they will be flying out of the country to shoot for it by the end of this month. Reportedly, since Shalin has been the last contestant to be locked, he will join the team later. Some time back, *Indianexpress.com* had exclusively reported that *Khatron Ke Khiladi* will take place in Romania this year.

Ranbir Kapoor, Sai Pallavi's Ramayana to be the most expensive Indian film with Rs 835 crore budget: report

A new report has emerged claiming that *Ramayana* is being planned as a franchise, with the first part being budgeted at a jaw-dropping USD 100 million, approximately Rs 835 crore, making it the costliest Indian film of all time. Director Nitesh Tiwari's rumoured adaptation of the Hindu epic *Ramayana* reportedly stars Ranbir Kapoor and Sai Pallavi in the lead roles as Lord Ram and Goddess Sita.

Though there is no official word on its production status or details regarding its cast yet, director Nitesh Tiwari's rumoured adaptation of the Hindu epic *Ramayana* is currently one of the most anticipated Indian films. Ever since reports surfaced that Tiwari is planning the project with Bollywood star Ranbir Kapoor and South icon Sai Pallavi in the lead roles, portraying Lord Ram and Goddess Sita respectively, moviegoers and fans have been eagerly monitoring social media platforms for more information, but to no avail. Nevertheless, a new report has emerged claiming that the project is being planned as a franchise, with the first part being budgeted at a jaw-dropping \$100 million, approximately Rs 835 crore, making it the costliest Indian film of all time.

"*Ramayana* is not just a film but an emotion and the makers are leaving no stone unturned to make it a global spectacle," Bollywood Hungama quoted a source close to the project as saying. According to reports, Namit Malhotra, founder and non-executive director of Prime Focus Limited and CEO of its British-Indian subsidiary DNEG, is one of the producers of the project. The source further revealed to Bollywood Hungama that Malhotra is leveraging all his global experience to make this a true spectacle. "The \$100 Million [Rs 835 crore] budget is just for *Ramayana: Part One*. He plans to expand this further as the franchise grows. The idea is to take the audience on a visual treat with Ranbir Kapoor as Lord Ram. The film requires 600 days of post-production work, which in itself speaks volumes about the investment required to create some of the most original visuals on the spectacle. The idea is to take Indian Cinema at a global level," they added. A month ago, DNEG had released a statement on



its official website, following the publication of an article on Variety, announcing that Kannada superstar Yash and his production company Monster Mind Creations were joining the team creating *Ramayana*. "By joining forces to co-produce *Ramayana* we are bringing together our collective vision and experience to create an Indian film that will ignite excitement and passion in audiences across the world. *Ramayana* is woven into the fabric of our lives. We believe we know it well, yet each encounter unveils fresh wisdom, ignites new knowledge, and offers unique perspectives. This is a journey to share the *Ramayana* with the world, a testament to our commitment to creative exploration, bold visions and honest storytelling," Yash said.

"I am incredibly proud of what we are creating, and I cannot wait for the world to experience the very best of Indian culture and storytelling on cinema screens across the globe. In Yash, I recognise a similar aspiration to share the best of our culture with the world. Inspired by his journey from Karnataka to the incredible international success of *K.G.F: Chapter 2*, I can't think of a better partner to help create a major global impact with this, the greatest of all our stories," Malhotra added. Recently, a couple of photos purportedly leaked from the film's sets had surfaced online and instantly went viral on social media. The pictures featured both Ranbir Kapoor and Sai Pallavi, donning costumes and makeup seemingly for their roles in *Ramayana*.

Kiara Advani to represent India at Women in Cinema Gala dinner at Cannes

GNS News Agency, May 17

Actor Kiara Advani is all set to make her debut at Cannes Film Festival. The Kabir Singh star will represent India at Red Sea Film Foundation's Women in Cinema Gala dinner at the festival, emphasising India's growing influence in the global cinema landscape. It will be hosted by Vanity Fair at Cannes. The event brings together several women from around the world and recognises their contributions to the entertainment field. Cannes regular Aishwarya Rai Bachchan is also likely to attend the film festival.

Aditi Rao Hydari will also mark her presence at the gala as one of the brand ambassadors of L'Oréal Paris. Speaking to ANI, Aditi recently expressed her excitement about attending the Cannes Film Festival for the third time. "I have Lioness, which is an Indo-British production. It is headlined by two girls. There is Paige Sandhu from the UK. It's about the suffragette movement and I think a lot of people are very excited about it. So I'm so looking forward to starting that. I'm also in preparation, leaving for Cannes with L'Oréal



Actor Kiara Advani is all set to represent India at Red Sea Film Foundation's Women in Cinema Gala dinner at Cannes Film Festival 2024.

very soon. So I'm prepping for the work to be done there for that," she said. Aditi made her Cannes debut in 2022. She served gorgeous looks on the red carpet of the festival. She attended the film festival last year as well. In 2023, her first look at Cannes – off the red carpet – was a dreamy blue confection by Oscar De La

Renta which she wore for a L'Oréal shoot. During the opening ceremony, Oscar winner Meryl Streep will receive the honorary Palme d'Or. "I am immeasurably honored to receive the news of this prestigious award. To win a prize at Cannes, for the international community of artists, has always represented the highest achievement in

the art of filmmaking. To stand in the shadow of those who have previously been honored is humbling and thrilling in equal part.

I so look forward to coming to France to thank everyone in person this May," Streep said in a statement about this honour, as per *The Hollywood Reporter*.

First looks of Rajesh Kumar as Liaquat Ali Khan, RJ Malishka as Sarojini Naidu in Nikkhil Advani's Freedom at Midnight



RJ Malishka will play Sarojini Naidu, Rajesh Kumar will essay the role of Liaquat Ali Khan and KC Shankar will be seen as V P Menon in *Freedom at Midnight*. (Photos: Instagram/sonyliv) RJ Malishka will play Sarojini Naidu, Rajesh Kumar will essay the role of Liaquat Ali Khan and KC Shankar will be seen as V P Menon in *Freedom at Midnight*. Sarabhai Vs Sarabhai star Rajesh Kumar, Rocket Boys actor KC Shankar and popular radio jockey Malishka Mendonsa have joined the cast of Nikkhil Advani's upcoming series *Freedom at Midnight*, the makers announced on Tuesday. Advani's Emmay Entertainment has co-produced the political thriller, based on the book of the same name by Dominique Lapierre and Larry Collins, in association with StudioNext and Sony LIV. It intertwines lesser-known stories and pivotal moments from the era of British colonial rule, including the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947.

Malishka will portray the role of political activist and poet Sarojini Naidu, whereas Rajesh will be seen playing Liaquat Ali Khan, a close associate of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, and Shankar as constitutional adviser V P Menon, a key contributor in integrating princely states into independent India. According to the makers, *Freedom at Midnight* highlights several incidents from the year of India's independence and interconnected stories about crucial events and personalities who played a significant role in writing the country's history as we know it today. Sony LIV, while sharing the first look of the actors, in an Instagram post, wrote, "#FreedomAtMidnight shall illuminate with depth and authenticity the stories of prominent personalities, offering viewers a nuanced understanding of their struggles, triumphs, and sacrifices."

Malishka, expressing her excitement and reverence for portraying Sarojini Naidu, said in a statement, "I am truly humbled to portray Sarojini Naidu, the Nightingale of India, in *Freedom at Midnight*. Playing her is a challenge and honour, as my only reference point is what I've read about her and the discussions I've had about her with our director. I think she was a true representation of the Modern women of India who was not boxed by any limitations. She was not only a celebrated poetess and a freedom fighter but also a trailblazer for women in politics."

On preparing for the role of Liaquat Ali Khan, Rajesh shared, "Immersing myself in Liaquat Ali Khan's character has been a pivotal moment in my career." The actor added that through research and studying the former Prime Minister of Pakistan's life, mannerisms, and political expertise, he aims to portray the nuances of his persona on screen with authenticity. Immersion in Liaquat Ali Khan's character has been a pivotal moment in my career. "I eagerly anticipate the feedback from my fans and peers, as this marks an important milestone in my acting journey within this political thriller narrative," read

the statement. The makers had earlier revealed that actor Arif Zakaria will play the titular role of Mohammad Ali Jinnah while Ira Dubey will be seen playing Jinnah's sister Fatima. Jubilee star Sidhant Gupta has been cast to play Jawaharlal Nehru, Chirag Vohra of *Scam 1992* fame will portray Mahatma Gandhi while popular TV actor Rajendra Chawla will be seen in the role of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. Arif Zakaria will play Pakistan's founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah, while Ira Dubey will portray the role of Jinnah's sister Fatima in the upcoming political thriller (Photos: Instagram/sonyliv) Arif Zakaria will play Pakistan's founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah, while Ira Dubey will portray the role of Jinnah's sister Fatima in the upcoming political thriller (Photos: Instagram/sonyliv) "In preparing to portray Muhammad Ali Jinnah, I realised how important it was to depict him as a flawed and complicated human being rather than an untouchable hero," actor Zakaria said in a statement. Ira, expressing her excitement about portraying a personality like Fatima Jinnah in the series, shared, "Freedom at Midnight marks my second collaboration with Sony LIV after *Pottluck*. My role in this series is unlike any other I have played in the past, bringing me a unique yet challenging opportunity as an actor. Fatima's bond with her brother, Jinnah, and her influence on him is a lesser-known aspect. She played a significant role in his life, standing by him from the start until the end, and the series will shed light on this dynamic relationship." Advani serves as the showrunner and director on *Freedom at Midnight*, which is adapted for screen by Abhinandan Gupta, Adwitiya Kareng Das, Gundeep Kaur, Divya Nidhi Sharma, Revanta Sarabhai, and Ethan Taylor.

Jennifer Lopez reveals why she's 'super shy' when she is off stage

Los Angeles: Hollywood star and singer Jennifer Lopez is "super shy" when she is off stage and shared that some might think she is "standoffish" when that is not really the case.

"I know people think that's a crazy thing to say. I get super closed off... super friendly but also super shy. I think people read it like, 'Oh, she's like maybe standoffish or something like that', but it's not that," Lopez told US TV show 'Extra'. The 'Jenny From

The Block' hitmaker, who is now starring in the title role of 'Atlas' on Netflix, said that she is "worried" about the sudden rise of AI in real life as she discussed shooting some of the more intense scenes in the movie, reports *femalefirst.co.uk*.

"I am. I'm worried about that. I think it's a scary thing, and we have to be kind of be careful about it and really think about where it's going," she said.

"I thought it would be me, by myself, do the takes, be so fast, don't have to worry about anybody else not remembering their lines... First day, you're falling through the planets. It's all going crazy. Now, your leg's broke..."

"It was so high-intensity every day, and without having another actor kind of to give you half the energy, it's just all you. I was exhausted. I would leave the 'Atlas' set limping," she added.

Praggnanandhaa vs Magnus Carlsen again, this time on World No 1's home turf in Norway



Vaishali, meanwhile, will be part of an elite field that includes Women's World Champion Ju Wenjun, World No 4 Lei Tingjie, World No 7 Anna Muzychuk and Pia Cramling. The event has brought together some of the biggest names in the world after its inception in 2013.

This year the biggest draw at Norway Chess will be to see 18-year-old Praggnanandhaa take on Magnus Carlsen in the classical format. The duo had famously met in the longer version of the sport at the FIDE World Cup final, where Praggnanandhaa had lost to Magnus Carlsen, but had secured his spot at the Candidates chess tournament. Before Norway Chess, Praggnanandhaa and Magnus Carlsen recently competed against each other at the Superbet Rapid and Blitz Poland, where the World No 1 had won the title despite a defeat to Pragg on the penultimate day. After the defeat to Praggnanandhaa, Magnus Carlsen said his "nervous system had just collapsed". Praggnanandhaa will compete in an elite field which includes Magnus Carlsen and Ding Liren at Norway Chess 2024. (Photos courtesy of Grand Chess Tour and Lennart Ootes) Praggnanandhaa will compete in an elite field which includes Magnus Carlsen and Ding Liren at Norway Chess 2024. The Norway Chess event will happen in a double round robin format. The classical games will have a time control of 120 minutes with an increment of 10 seconds after move 40. There's also a provision for Armageddon, where white gets 10 minutes, black gets 7. After move 41, there is a 1-second increment.

GNS News Agency, May 17

Norway Chess, one of the world's most prestigious chess tournaments hosted annually in Stavanger, will see Indian prodigy Praggnanandhaa in the six-player open category, facing off against some of the biggest names in the world like World No 1 Magnus Carlsen and current World Champion Ding Liren. The 18-year-old Pragg is not the only Indian competing at the event: also joining him are Indian Grandmasters Koneru Humpy, Vaishali Rameshbabu, who will both compete in the women's section at Norway Chess. Pragg will pit his wits against some of the biggest names in chess: World No 1 Magnus Carlsen, current World Champion Ding Liren, World No 2 Fabiano Caruana, World No 3 Hikaru Nakamura and World No 6 Alireza Firouzja. Koneru and

What BCCI wants from Team India's new coach: Able to deal with pressure of handling marquee players, have working relationship with fans



GNS News Agency, May 17

ICC mens CWC 2023, world cup FINAL, India Vs Australia Final, Ind vs Aus WC Final, WC 2023 Final, Narendra Modi stadium, Virat Kohli, Travis Head, Pat Cummins, Rohit Sharma, Mohammed Shami, Adam Zampa, Naredra Modi, WC 2023 winner, WC 2023 top performers, Indian Express News Team India head coach Rahul Dravid with captain Rohit Sharma after ODI World Cup final. The Board for Control of Cricket in India (BCCI) on Monday invited applications for the position of the Indian senior men's team head coach, where they also outlined the qualities it was seeking in the ideal contender. Some of the most notable requirements of the new head coach listed by the BCCI were: that the candidate "must be willing to meet work expectations and pressures associated with handling marquee athletes" and they should help in "developing a world-class Indian cricket team which delivers sustained success in all conditions and formats, inspiring current and future genera-

tions of cricketers and stakeholders with their approach to the game."

The deadline for the applications to be submitted is May 27, a day after the IPL 2024 final. The term for the role mentioned in the announcement by BCCI starts in July 2024 and stretches to December 31, 2027 – the year of the next ODI World Cup. Last week, BCCI Secretary Jay Shah had announced that the Indian cricket board will be inviting applications for the head coach's role 'soon', adding that the current men's team head coach Rahul Dravid – whose current contract with the national side comes to an end after the T20 World Cup in June – can re-apply for the same.

"Rahul Dravid's tenure is till the World Cup, we will be inviting applications soon for the post of head coach and if Dravid wants to re-apply, he can do it. We have decided the criteria. Thereafter we will invite applications for support staff in consultation with the Cricket Advisory Committee. The coach's tenure will be of three years," Shah had said. Dravid took over his role as head coach in November 2021 after India's exit from the T20 World Cup. The former India captain's initial contract with the men's team had come to an end following the ODI World Cup last year but his tenure was extended to this year's T20 World Cup in the Caribbean and the USA on the back of a runner-up finish at the home World Cup. But despite having led the dressing room during two finals finishes in the past year, under Dravid, India have been unable to end a 10-decade barren run of ICC trophies – their last piece of silverware still being the 2013 Champions Trophy win. India return to action at the T20 World Cup, with their opening fixture against Ireland on June 5 in New York.

Shyam Nikhil becomes India's 85th GM: Incredible tale of 12-year wait, four near-misses to earn final norm

GNS News Agency, May 17

In a sport often featuring teenage prodigies, Shyam Nikhil is the poster boy for patience. The Tamil Nadu chess player became an International Master (IM) at the age of 18 way back in 2010, before collecting two out of the three norms needed to become a GM within a year. By 2012, he had also crossed the threshold of 2500 rating points necessary to become a grandmaster. He seemed destined to become India's 28th grandmaster very soon, but fate had other plans. It took Shyam 12 more years to attain the elite status he was seeking. This week, the now 31-year-old from Tamil Nadu earned that third norm which will make him India's 85th grandmaster. His elevation is in stark contrast to that of Gukesh, who will challenge for the world chess championship crown later this year, was India's youngest-ever grandmaster at the age of 12.

What makes Shyam an outlier in Indian chess is the fact that stories like that of Gukesh – of kids earning their three grandmaster norms in their early teens – are commonplace. "It took a long time but it did finally work out. It was always there within striking distance. In these 12 years, I never felt that I won't be able to get it. Initially, I was very confident that I would get the third norm because I have the strength. But later on, because of outside pressures and so many misses, at some point I started to feel (the desperation) that I just need to get the third norm," a relieved Shyam tells The Indian Express from the UAE where he secured the norm at the Dubai Police Global Chess Challenge. During this testing period, it was his parents – K Ponnuswamy, who used to work as a data entry operator in the state express transport corporation, and mother P Santhi, a homemaker – who kept him going. "My parents are the ones who introduced me to chess and stood by me throughout, even when results were not in my favour. I want to dedicate this GM title to my parents." Shyam says before adding: "I missed the third norm on several occasions despite coming within touching distance. Just before this event in Dubai, I played a tournament in France where I missed the third norm by half a point. At an event in 2012, I had again missed the third norm by half a point. In 2020, in the last round of an event, I needed a win against a Russian GM. I was clearly winning, before I got into time trouble and lost. That miss was the most painful. If I had won, I would have earned the GM title and finished second in the event, which would have got me a prize money of Rs 4 lakh or something. I lost and ended around the 30th position, and took home Rs 10,000."

Another one of those near-misses came in 2014, when Shyam had everything in place to achieve the elusive third norm. The event was in India and since his first two norms had also come in India, rules dictated that he



needed to earn one abroad. Shyam Nikhil, a 31-year-old from Tamil Nadu, is now India's 85th grandmaster. (Photo courtesy Shyam Nikhil) Shyam Nikhil, a 31-year-old from Tamil Nadu, is now India's 85th grandmaster. (Photo courtesy Shyam Nikhil) When he finally got his third GM norm, many of his peers like Srinath Narayanan, who has now become a trainer, Shyam Sundar and Adhiban Baskaran sent him congratulatory texts. "I can't remember who among us became an IM first, but I was once the highest-rated among this group back in 2008. I was rated around 2375 back then. At some point, we were at the same level, but somewhere I lost momentum," Shyam admits. Prodigies like Gukesh became grandmasters so early in their careers by obsessively chasing the title in events around the world, almost living out of their suitcases. Gukesh's father also put his own career on hold to travel with him full time. For Shyam though, financial constraints meant he rarely got to play in European events, where he says it's easier to earn norms and rating points. What also held his quest for the third norm back was the fact that he was an up-and-coming player based out of Nagercoil in an era when chess engines and the internet were still to make their presence felt completely. "To play in Europe, you also needed to show bank statements and we didn't have that back then. I got to travel abroad regularly only from 2017 after joining the ICF, Railways," he says. Shyam admits that over the years, the third norm was not always at the forefront of his mind. "The primary focus at some point was just to improve my rating, because you have to maintain a good rating to make the cut for the Railways team at the Nationals. Only the top 10 players (top 7 by rating and top 3 finishers in the inter-railway competitions) get to play in the Railways team. If you're in the Railways team, you get extra leave for practice," says Shyam, who joined under the sports quota as a junior clerk and has since risen to become an office superintendent. Now that the long-awaited goal is finally achieved, what's the next target for him? "One is to improve my rating. But I definitely want to improve the quality of my chess," he says before adding with a grin, "I want to play games that are remembered."

Elon Musk predicts 'chess will be fully solved in 10 years'; Grandmasters react sharply to X owner's opinion

GNS News Agency, May 17

Elon Musk believes that the sport of chess will essentially 'be solved' within 10 years just like checkers was, in an opinion that drew sharp responses from some of the world's top grandmasters and others in the chess community. In the past, Musk had also controversially claimed that he found chess "too simple to be useful in real life" and has taken digs at former world champion Garry Kasparov, calling him an 'idiot'.

The latest hot take from Musk came on X after he had initially shared a cheeky photograph of a device that one social media user immediately linked to the unsubstantiated rumours that US grandmaster Hans Niemann was using a sex toy to cheat in games. Musk replied to that comment, stating that if the American had used a device "he deserved to win. At least once". Musk, who is the CEO of SpaceX and Tesla and owner of X, then added: "Computers are so much better than humans

at chess, it's absurd. I predict that chess will be essentially fully solved (like checkers) within 10 years." This drew sharp reactions from the chess community. Niemann himself waded into the conversation tweeting: "Although my innocence has been proven by multiple official chess organizations, I understand the comedic value behind this conspiracy theory. I look forward to becoming world chess champion, and letting the chess speak for itself." Emil Sutovsky, the CEO of chess' global governing body FIDE, replied: "Engines haven't advanced much for few years now. Even the task of solving all positions with 9 pieces can't be completed. It'll take years to cover 10 pieces, and you have 32. Engines are incomparably better than humans for 20 years now, but no checkers-type solution expected." Peter Heine Nielsen, who has been a trainer for both Viswanathan Anand and Magnus Carlsen, said: "From a technical aspect I quite agree with Musk's takes on chess."

IPL playoff scenarios explained after GT's elimination: Six teams battle for three spots



GNS News Agency, May 17

There are as many as six teams who have a shot at qualifying for the IPL playoffs. Gujarat Titans, Punjab Kings and Mumbai Indians are the three teams who cannot qualify for the IPL 2024 Playoffs anymore. RR's remaining matches against Punjab Kings and Kolkata Knight Riders are scheduled to be held at Barsapara Cricket Stadium, Guwahati. Rajasthan Royals are on 16 points. There are three other teams – Chennai Super Kings, Sunrisers Hyderabad and Lucknow Super Giants – who can reach 16 points (SRH can reach 18). RR are in a much better position for the IPL playoff. If LSG lose to DC on Tuesday, RR will qualify. But if LSG win, then one win will help RR qualify for the IPL Playoffs. Two wins will guarantee them a top-two finish, and even if they win one and have a net run rate above SRH, they will finish in top two. Even if RR lose both their matches, they are likely to be in the safe zone. Lucknow Super Giants have a considerable challenge ahead, given that their Net Run Rate stands at -0.769. It will take a gargantuan effort for them to improve their run rate and go past RR's (0.349), even with two wins in their remaining matches. Nonetheless, RR cannot afford to be complacent and must aim to secure wins in both matches.

CSK have played 13 matches with 14 points and a Net Run Rate of 0.528. Their last match, against Royal Challengers Bengaluru, is an away match at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium, Bengaluru on May 18. CSK's strong net run rate places them in a favourable position to secure a spot in the top four if they emerge victorious against RCB in their final match. However, should they fail to win against RCB, their qualification hopes will depend on other results. They would need either SRH or LSG to lose one of their matches and finish below 16 points in the standings to boost their chances. Additionally, if CSK suffer a loss, they must ensure that their margin of defeat is minimal to maintain their advantage over RCB in terms of run rate. Furthermore, if both SRH and LSG finish with 14 or fewer points, it creates the possibility for both CSK and RCB to qualify with 14 points each. SRH have two remaining matches, against Gujarat Titans and Punjab Kings, both scheduled to be held at Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium, Hyderabad, on May 16 and 19. Despite their current standing, SRH will aim to secure victories in these matches to further solidify their position for the IPL playoffs. SRH's superior run rate compared to LSG's provides them with a considerable advantage, and securing just one win in their two remaining games should be sufficient to ensure their qualification for the IPL playoffs.

Two victories could potentially elevate them to contention for a top-two finish. However, if they were to lose both matches, their IPL playoff hopes could be jeopardized, as both CSK and RCB could leapfrog them in the standings based on Net Run Rate. RCB have one more match left, against Chennai Super Kings, and it's a home match at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium, Bengaluru on May 18. It's a must-win match for RCB and even if they win, they will have to depend on the other results to go their way. They would need SRH to lose both and LSG to lose at least one of their two games. In any scenario, they would look to beat CSK (0.528) by a decent margin, which takes their net run rate higher than CSK's. If the other results go their way, RCB stand a good chance of qualifying for the IPL Playoffs with a better Net Run Rate than

CSK. DC have one more match left, against Lucknow Super Giants, and it's a home match at the Arun Jaitley Stadium, Delhi, on Tuesday. DC's best chance lies in SRH suffering significant defeats in their final two matches, CSK emerging victorious against RCB, and LSG winning no more than one game while maintaining a run rate below that of DC. With their dependence on so many difficult and complicated permutations, combinations, and calculations, their chances look slim. LSG have two remaining fixtures, against Delhi Capitals and Mumbai Indians, both of which are away matches scheduled to take place at Arun Jaitley Stadium, Delhi, and Wankhede Stadium, Mumbai, on May 14 and 17. LSG's low net run rate places them in a challenging position where they have to win both their matches to stay in contention. And not just that, they will need the other results to go their way, as even upon reaching 16 points, they could still find themselves trailing behind CSK and SRH, who boast of significantly better net run rates. Even in the scenario where the Rajasthan Royals were to lose both matches, the likelihood of LSG surpassing them in terms of run rate remains highly unlikely. Consequently, the probability of LSG qualifying for the IPL playoffs is very low.

Luis Suarez leads Inter Miami's comeback win in MLS

GNS News Agency, May 17

Washington: Luis Suarez continued his prolific scoring form as leaders Inter Miami recovered from a two-goal deficit to register a 3-2 away win over Montreal in Major League Soccer (MLS) on Saturday night.

Bryce Duke put the hosts ahead at Saputo stadium with a 22nd-minute strike after Jules Vilsaint's perfectly weighted pass on the counterattack. Vilsaint then put his name on the scoresheet by playing a slick one-two with Ariel Lassiter before cutting inside his marker and angling a shot into the far corner.

The visitors suffered a scare as Lionel Messi limped off the pitch in the 42nd minute, having appeared to injure his left knee following an ugly challenge from George Campbell, reports Xinhua. In his absence, Matias Rojas stepped up to curl home a free-kick after Suarez was fouled by Samuel Piette.

Messi, who was playing for the first time in Canada, returned to the pitch almost immediately after Rojas' strike. Inter's fans had even more reason to cheer four minutes later when Suarez tapped home at the far post after Julian Gressel's cross was unwittingly flicked into his path by Duke.

Suarez has now scored 12 goals and given seven assists in 15 matches across all competitions since joining Inter Miami in January. The Florida outfit continued to dictate play after the interval and Rojas turned provider as his clever run and pass set up Ben Cremaschi to tap home just before the hour. The visitors withstood a tense final half hour to secure their fifth straight MLS victory and maintain a three-point lead over second-placed Cincinnati in the 15-team Eastern Conference. Montreal are 12th, 12 points further back.