

DMK, AIADMK spar in RS ahead of Tamil Nadu polls

NEW DELHI: The battle for Tamil Nadu played out in the Rajya Sabha on Friday with arch-rivals DMK and AIADMK claiming victory for their parties in the April 23 state assembly polls.

While DMK leader P Wilson blamed the ruling NDA for not doing anything for the state and depriving its people of their share in central funds, AIADMK leader M Thambidurai accused the ruling DMK of indulging in corruption and not allowing the implementation of central schemes in Tamil Nadu. The two leaders were speaking on the Finance Bill in the Upper House, which returned it to the Lok Sabha after a brief discussion. In her reply to the Bill, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman also attacked the DMK for depriving the people of the state of the benefits of many central schemes.

She also criticised the DMK for the plight of women in the Southern state.

Wilson said the Union government collected over Rs 5.99 lakh crore in tax returns from Tamil Nadu

during the three financial years from 2022-23 to 2024-25. For every one rupee collected, the state received only about 23 paise from the central divisible pool of taxes.

"This is nothing short of fiscal injustice. A comparison with other states reveals the magnitude of this imbalance," Wilson alleged.

Drawing a comparison with other states, he said that while Uttar Pradesh contributed Rs 3.62 crore in taxes to the Union government over the same three-year period, the funds devolved to the state from the central taxes amount to over Rs 6.03 lakh crore. This means that for every one rupee of tax revenue collected by the Centre from UP, it receives Rs 1.66 back from the share of central taxes.

He said the disparity becomes even more striking in the case of Bihar. The taxes collected from Bihar during the three years total to over Rs 49,200 crore, while the funds devolved to the state from the Central taxes amount to over Rs 3.38 lakh crore. In ef-



fect, for every one rupee of tax collected by the Union government from Bihar, the state receives Rs 6.9 back from the share of the central taxes. "Tamil Nadu, one of the country's strongest economic contributors, receives only a fraction of what it contributes. Meanwhile, several states that contribute far less receive significantly larger transfers. The people of Tamil Nadu deserve a fair and equitable share of the resources they helped generate. "If the principle of cooperative federalism is to

have any real meaning, the Union government must address this glaring disparity and ensure that the distribution of the national resources does not systematically disadvantage high-performing states like Tamil Nadu or penalise them for the same," Wilson alleged. He said if the Union government truly believes in cooperative federalism, it must answer a simple question. Why is Tamil Nadu paying one rupee and getting 23 paise from the Central divisible pool of taxes?

Accusing the Centre of withholding the state's rightful funds and then turning around to preach fiscal morality, Wilson said all this is while the Centre's own debt continues to balloon and its interest burden tightens like a noose.

"Several crucial central scheme funds owed to TN remain pending. According to a detailed representation made by the TN government, the Union government owes more than Rs 10,000 crore across various schemes," the DMK MP said.

Bihar Gov, CM, BJP national president attend Ram Navami Shobha Yatra in Patna

PATNA: Bihar Governor Syed Ata Hasnain, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and BJP national president Nitin Nabin attended the Ram Navami Shobha Yatra in Patna.

The CM inaugurated the programme by lighting the ceremonial lamp.

A total of 52 Ram Navami tableaux were felicitated by the CM and other leaders at Patna's Dak Bungalow Chauraha here.

Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary, Nitish Kumar's son Nishant Kumar, Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Jha, Lok Sabha MP Manoj Tiwari and senior Bihar ministers, including Vijay Choudhary and others, were also present during the occasion.

A massive crowd gathered to watch the tableaux in the procession.

Earlier in the day, devotees thronged temples across Bihar on the occa-



sion, offering prayers and celebrating the festival with religious fervour.

BJP president Nitin Nabin offered prayers at several temples in the state capital Patna, including the famed Mahavir temple.

Speaking to reporters, Nabin extended greetings to people across the country and said the values embodied in Lord Ram's life should guide everyone.

Recalling his association with the Mahavir temple, Nabin said he has been vis-

iting the shrine since childhood and described it as a major centre of faith.

He also paid tribute to his teacher, the late Acharya Kishore Kunal, for his role in developing the shrine.

The chief minister extended greetings to the people on the occasion.

He said Lord Ram's life symbolises love for humanity, harmony, tolerance, sacrifice and righteousness, and wished people a joyful and peaceful celebration.

Himachal govt mulling to reintroduce lottery to shore up revenues: CM Sukhu

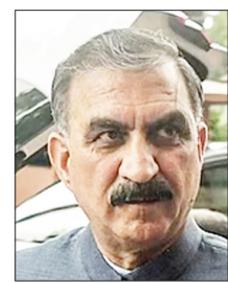
SHIMLA: In view of the state's financial situation, the Himachal Pradesh government is considering reintroducing lottery within the state to create new sources of revenue generation, Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh said during the Budget session of Assembly on Friday.

In a written reply to a query by BJP legislators Rakesh Jamwal and Sudhir Sharma, Sukhu said that Goods and Service Tax (GST) is levied on lottery ticket sales at a rate of approximately 40 per cent of the ticket's face value.

The state is suffering a loss not only in the revenue derived from levying GST but also due to the illicit sale of lottery tickets from other states within its territory, the reply said.

A positive outcome of the lottery business is its potential to generate employment alongside revenues, and therefore, a proposal to reintroduce the lottery in Himachal Pradesh is currently under the government's consideration, Sukhu said.

Lotteries are being operated smoothly in other states such as Kerala, Punjab, Maharashtra, Goa and Arunachal Pradesh, with no major adverse social effects, he said.



The lottery system was discontinued in Himachal Pradesh via a notification issued by the finance department on February 28, 2004.

The department, however, no longer possesses records of the specific reasons that led to its discontinuation.

Before the ban, lotteries involving fewer than three digits were prevalent in the state. However, in light of the adverse social effects associated with such schemes, the Centre, in compliance with Supreme Court directives, has since amended the relevant regulations.

Consequently, single-digit or double-digit lotteries can no longer be operated, reducing the likelihood of the adverse effects associated with the previous system.

EC suspends Basanti PS officer for failing to tackle BJP-TMC clashes

KOLKATA: In a first this election season in West Bengal, the EC on Friday ordered immediate suspension of Basanti Police Station Inspector-in-Charge Avijit Paul for allegedly failing to tackle BJP-TMC clashes on March 26, according to a notice issued by the poll panel. The poll panel described it as "serious negligence and dereliction of duty" on the part of the officer. Several people, including police personnel, were injured in the clash at Basanti Bazar under Baruipur Police District.

"It has been observed that the officer failed to make adequate police arrangements despite having prior information regarding public programme of two political parties," the notice said.

"Further, the Central Armed Police Force has been made available for the last few days. Despite this, he did not requisition CAPF for maintenance of law and order," the notice added in justification of the EC's action. Directing departmental proceedings against Paul, the poll body also ordered his replacement and sought a compliance report, it said.

Dust-mitigation measures in Delhi-NCR from April 1

NEW DELHI: Installation of low-cost air quality sensors, dust screens, wind barriers, spraying of water mist and covering of construction material and waste are among stronger dust-mitigation measures laid down by the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) for construction and demolition projects in Delhi-NCR, officials said on Friday.

The statutory direction number 97 by the CAQM to strengthen dust mitigation in construction and demolition projects and to streamline management of demolition waste in the region is set to be implemented from April 1.

The direction was first issued on February 20 after the commission noted that dust from construction and

demolition remained a consistent contributor to elevated particulate matter (PM10 and PM2.5) levels in the ambient air quality across NCR.

Addressing a press conference, SD Attri, technical member of the CAQM, said despite the existing statutory guidelines and periodic inspections by state pollution control boards, there were gaps in compliance of dust mitigation norms.

"Road dust and dust from construction and demolition activities are an important source of pollution in Delhi-NCR... Dust contributes 15 per cent to pollution during the winter season, and 27 per cent during the summer season. That is why it is important to control such activities to improve the air quality in the region," he said.

"The statutory direction has six key mandates, such as municipal corporations/development authorities in the region have to establish construction and demolition water collection points, intermediate waste storage facilities, and processing facilities with at least one collection point per 5 km by 5 km grid," he added.

Another mandate is that building plan approving authorities have to obtain a declaration of estimated demolition waste for projects, involving more than or equal to 200sq m area, where demolition prior to construction or re-construction is involved.

Municipal corporations and development authorities have to ensure that the proponents of such projects deposit the demolition

waste at the designated collection point or stage/processing facility and obtain a receipt for it.

Agencies responsible for issuing completion certificates/occupation certificates in the cities concerned have to verify the receipt of deposit of demolition material submitted by the project proponent, prior to the issuance of these certificates.

There must be safe transportation and disposal of the construction and demolition waste under the statutory direction.

Also, governments of the Delhi-NCR region have to establish an integrated web portal, geo-tag waste collection points and storage and processing facilities, and carry out GPS tracking of transportation of construction and demolition waste.

Vehicle carrying 20 illegal LPG cylinders seized in Maruti Kunj

GURUGRAM: A vehicle carrying 20 illegal LPG cylinders allegedly for black marketing was seized, and the driver was arrested during a raid in the Maruti Kunj area on Friday, an official said.

The joint operation of Haryana's chief minister flying squad and the Food and Civil Supplies Departments led to the recovery of 20 domestic LPG cylinders, including 18 filled and two empty cylinders, he added.

Acting on the information received by the CM Flying squad, the team stopped a vehicle at Maruti Kunj for inspection, officials said. After the driver, Ankush Yadav, a resident of Uttar Pradesh's Sultanpur, failed to provide a satisfactory answer about the cylinders. The officials arrested him and seized the gas cylinders and the vehicle, they said.

Delhi Police, C-DOT sign MoU to boost smart policing capabilities

NEW DELHI: The Delhi Police has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Centre for Development of Telematics to enhance technology-driven policing and strengthen operational capabilities, an official said on Friday.

The collaboration aims to leverage indigenous and secure telecom solutions developed by C-DOT to improve communication systems, surveillance, cybersecurity and emergency response mechanisms within the force.

According to a statement, the partnership will facilitate the deployment of advanced applications tailored for modern policing needs. Among the key technologies is a Facial Recognition System (FRS), which will assist in identifying suspects, missing persons, and repeat offenders by matching images with existing databases.

"A unified communication platform, SAMVAD, will enable secure messaging, audio and video calls, and data sharing among various police units, while

SAMVAD Prime -- a handset-based secure messaging system -- will be used for sensitive communications among senior officers and operational teams," read the statement.

C-DOT Meet, a web-based video conferencing solution, will support briefings, coordination and training sessions, while the Mission Critical Services (MCX) platform will ensure secure and low-latency communication during emergencies, disaster response and large-scale law-and-order situations.

Sopana Sangeetham artiste joins IUML

MALAPPURAM: Sopana Sangeetham artiste Njerlath Harigovindan joined the IUML here on Friday.

IUML state president Sayyid Sadiq Ali Shihab Thangal welcomed him into the party at Panakkad.

Speaking to reporters, the Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Akademi award winner said he was drawn to the IUML's ideology that values humanity.

He said that at a time when people are being divided in the name of caste and religion, he, as a responsible artiste, stands against such divisive tendencies.

He added that he would take part in UDF election campaigns across the state during the election period.

Sopana Sangeetham is a form of devotional music traditionally performed near the sanctum sanctorum of temples.

No deadlock in DMK alliance, seat-sharing talks over: VCK chief Thirumavalavan

CHENNAI: VCK chief Thol Thirumavalavan on Friday said seat-sharing talks within the DMK-led alliance have been concluded and dismissed reports of any deadlock or internal friction.

Addressing reporters after signing the formal agreement, Thirumavalavan said, "There is no such deadlock as is being projected. When more than 10 political parties are in an alliance and individual discussions are held, delays are natural when multiple parties express interest in the same constituencies. That is the reality."

The VCK leader stated that the official announcement regarding the specific constituencies allotted

to each partner would be made by DMK president M K Stalin.

The DMK has allotted 8 seats to the VCK for the upcoming assembly election.

Thirumavalavan noted that the discussions were held in a cordial atmosphere and his party has secured the constituencies it desired.

The VCK chief further stated that Chief Minister Stalin is expected to officially announce the full list of constituencies for all alliance partners either on Friday night or Saturday morning once the remaining minor discussions are completed.

He took a swipe at critics and rival camps, suggesting that those

waiting for a conflict to erupt within the DMK alliance would continue to be disappointed.

Responding to queries about the opposition alliances, Thirumavalavan claimed that parties in the AIADMK-led NDA were facing pressure to contest under BJP's symbol.

He alleged that parties like the Tamil Maanila Congress (M) were being coerced into contesting on the lotus symbol despite being allotted seats.

"We do not point out such issues in their camps, but even a slight delay in our alliance is labelled as a deadlock by some," he remarked.

Common man to benefit with reduction in petrol and diesel excise duty: Delhi BJP Chief

NEW DELHI: Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva welcomed the reduction in excise duty on petrol and diesel by the central government, and has described it as a people-centric decision that will provide significant relief amid the global instability in the energy sector.

Sachdeva said that presently in the energy sector, fluctuations in crude oil prices, disruptions in supply chains and inflationary pressures are being witnessed in countries across the globe.

He further said that during such a challenging international scenario, this decision by the centre to

reduce excise duty reflects that the government places interest of citizens at top priority.

The BJP leader said that the reduction in excise duty on petrol and diesel will benefit millions of people across the country, by saving the impact on factors like transportation costs, costs of important commodities, fruits, vegetables, grains, milk and others.

He further noted that farmers, small traders, auto-rickshaw drivers, taxi drivers, truck operators, and millions associated with the logistics sector will particularly benefit from this decision.

'Coal scam': Delhi court acquits Vijay Darda, former coal secretary HC Gupta

NEW DELHI: Holding that the allocation of coal blocks was part of a "policy decision" of a high-powered panel and the PMO, a special CBI court on Friday acquitted former MP Vijay Darda, his son Devendra Darda, and former coal secretary HC Gupta in a case related to alleged irregularities in allocation of the Bander coal block in Maharashtra.

Bringing down the curtains on the oldest pending coal block allocation case registered on March 27, 2014, Special Judge Sunena Sharma also acquitted M/s AMR Iron and Steel Private Limited, Manoj Kumar Jayaswal, Santosh Bagrodia and LS Janoti.

The judge cleared all accused of charges including criminal

conspiracy (Section 120-B IPC), cheating (Section 420 IPC), and various sections of the Prevention of Corruption (PC) Act.

The verdict said the evidence adduced by the CBI was "highly insufficient to conclusively establish any of the essential ingredients like deception, inducement, dishonest intention or wrongful gain for the alleged offence of cheating punishable under Section 420 (cheating) of the IPC."

Trashing the charge of criminal conspiracy against all the accused, the judge, in the 287-page verdict, said, "Even for the offence of criminal conspiracy, the prosecution case is based only on conjectures and surmises without there being any direct or indirect

evidence sufficient to draw anything reasonable, rational or conclusive."

"Moreover, the decision to carry out the exercise of allocating coal blocks was a policy decision, which was taken in accordance with the specific instructions of the 7th Energy Coordination Committee (ECC) and the PMO.

"In accordance with the extant guidelines, the Screening Committee recommended the allocation of Bander Coal Block to AMR (for its 0.3 MTPA capacity) jointly with M/s Century Textiles & Industries Ltd and M/s JK Cement Ltd and the said decision was unanimously taken after due deliberations on the information furnished by the applicants and

the feedback received from the State Governments and the Ministry of Steel," the verdict said.

"The decision to allocate the coal block, by no stretch of the imagination, can be said to be a decision taken 'without any public interest' especially, when there is no allegation of quid pro quo," it said.

The CBI alleged that M/s AMR Iron & Steel Pvt Ltd, represented by Manoj Jayaswal, had fraudulently obtained the Bander coal block by misrepresenting its financial strength and concealing previous coal block allocations.

The case rested heavily on the claim that Vijay Darda used his position as a Member of Parliament to influence the PMO

through recommendation letters.

In exchange for this alleged influence, the CBI claimed that Rs 24.60 crore was routed from Jayaswal's Abhijeet Group to a company owned by the Dardas (Asera Banka Power Ltd) under the guise of high-premium share purchases.

The verdict found a special mention of former coal secretary HC Gupta, a co-accused, and said, "However, before parting with this judgment, this court owes a duty to mention that HC Gupta... who had been summoned by the court on a closure report filed by CBI qua him, has been honourably acquitted for lack of any evidence for the alleged charges framed against him."