

Election Commission orders removal of West Bengal DGP, Home Secys in 6 States

NEW DELHI, Mar 18 (PTI)

SEEKING to ensure a level-playing field in the Lok Sabha elections, the Election Commission on Monday ordered the removal of the Home Secretaries of Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, and it also directed the shunting out of West Bengal DGP Rajeev Kumar.

Also, the Secretary of the General Administrative Departments of Mizoram and Himachal Pradesh have been removed.

The decision to shift the West Bengal DGP was taken as the officer was removed earlier too from active election management-related duty during the 2016 Assembly election in the State and in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the sources pointed out.

The EC has asked the State Chief Secretary to post Rajeev Kumar to a "non-election" related assignment, and, as an



BUREAUCRATIC RESHUFFLE: The Home Secretaries of Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand were removed as they were found to be holding dual charges in the offices of the Chief Minister in the respective States.

interim arrangement, post an officer immediately junior to him as DGP. The State has been asked to send a panel of three officers who would be posted as the DGP.

The Home Secretaries of Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar,

Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand were removed as they were found to be holding dual charges in the offices of the Chief Minister in the respective States. This may potentially compromise or be seen to be compromis-

Vivek Sahay
named new
DGP of Bengal

KOLKATA, Mar 18 (PTI)

FOLLOWING the instruction of the Election Commission of India (ECI), the West



Bengal Government on Monday appointed Vivek Sahay as the new DGP of
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ing the impartiality and neutrality required during the electoral process, especially in matters relating to law and order and deployment of forces, they noted.

The poll panel usually takes
(Contd on page 3)

N Korea fires short-range ballistic missiles after US-S Korea drills end

SEOUL, Mar 18 (AP)

NORTH Korea fired multiple short-range ballistic missiles toward its eastern waters on Monday morning, its neighbours said, days after the end of the South Korean-US military drills that the North views as an invasion rehearsal.

The launches were North Korea's first known missile testing activities in about a month. Outside experts earlier predicted North Korea would extend its run of missile tests and intensify its warlike rhetoric ahead of the US presidential election in November to boost its leverage in future diplomacy.



Japan's Defence Ministry said North Korea fired three missiles, two together at 7:44 am and the other about 37 minutes later. Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told a parliamentary session that the North Korean missiles landed in the waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan, all outside of Japan's

exclusive economic zone, and that no damage or injuries have been reported.

Kishida denounced North Korea's repeated ballistic missile tests as acts "that threaten the peace and safety of Japan, the region and the international society".

He said Japan strongly protested against North Korea over its testing activities, saying they violated UN Security Council resolutions that ban the North from engaging in any ballistic activities.

South Korea's military said it also detected "several" suspected short-range ballistic launches by North Korea on Monday morning.

Putin wins his fifth term in Russia polls



Russian President Vladimir Putin speaks during a visit to his campaign headquarters after a presidential election in Moscow, Russia on Sunday. (AP/PTI)

- Putin has led Russia as President or PM since December 1999
- PM Modi congratulated Putin saying, 'looking forward to boost time-tested ties'

MOSCOW, Mar 18 (AP)

PRESIDENT Vladimir Putin basked in an election victory that was never in doubt, as offi-

cialists said Monday that he had won his fifth term with a record number of votes, underlining the Russian leader's total control of the country's political system.

After facing only token challengers and harshly suppressing Opposition voices, Putin was set to extend his nearly quarter-century rule for six more years. Even with little margin for protest, Russians
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Bulgaria prez thanks PM for Indian Navy's anti-piracy operation



PTI

Navy on Saturday rescued seven Bulgarians who were part of a crew that was held hostage by pirates aboard a hijacked ship

That's What Friends Are For: India

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Bulgarian President Rumen Radev Monday thanked PM Narendra Modi for Indian Navy's anti-piracy operation that saw it successfully rescuing seven Bulgarians who were part of a crew that was being held hostage by pirates aboard a hijacked ship.

"My sincere gratitude to PM@narendramodi for the brave action of Navy rescuing the hijacked Bulgarian ship 'Ruen' and its crew, including seven Bulgarian citizens," said Radev in a social media post on X.

Bulgaria's deputy PM Mariya Gabriel had also expressed the same sentiment in a post on X on Sunday. "I express my gratitude to the Indian Navy for the successful operation to rescue the hijacked vessel Ruen and its crew members, including 7 BG nationals. Thank you for support and great effort. We continue to work together to protect lives of the crew," said Gabriel, who is also the minister of foreign affairs.

Jaishankar responded by saying, "That's what friends are for."

In an operation that lasted for 40 hours, Indian Navy on Saturday rescued a ship from Somali pirates off the Indian coast, rescuing the crew and ending a three-month takeover of the Maltese-flagged bulk carrier MV Ruen.

Eye on future wars, Army raises elite tech unit

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The Army has now raised a Signals Technology Evaluation and Adaptation Group (STEAG) as an elite unit to undertake research and evaluate futuristic communication technologies like AI, 5G and 6G, machine learning, quantum technologies, and the like, for military applications.

"Communications are an important component of military operations. In fast-evolving technologies for the battlefield, the side with better communications and ability to connect various constituents for information sharing will have an edge over its adversary," a senior officer said on Monday.



STEAG will be a first of its kind unit and will be headed by a colonel-ranked officer

Headed by a Colonel-rank officer, STEAG will be the nursery for nurturing and developing tailored technologies spanning the complete spectrum of wired and wire-

less systems to include electronic exchanges, mobile communications, software defined radios, electronic warfare systems, 5G and 6G networks, quantum technolo-

gies, AI and machine learning.

"It will be the first of its kind unit to be equipped with the capability to harness niche technology, leverage cutting-edge solutions and identify suitable use cases for defence applications by fostering collaboration and partnership with the academia and industry," the officer said.

STEAG will carry out technical scouting, evaluation, development, management of core ICT solutions, and provide user interface support by maintenance & upgradation of contemporary technologies available in the environment. "It will help bridge the divide between the armed forces on one hand and the industry and academia on the other," he added.

West decries 'polls without choice' as sham; China, N Korea hail re-election

London: Western govts lined up on Monday to condemn Vladimir Putin's landslide election victory as unfair and undemocratic, but China, India and North Korea congratulated the veteran Russian leader on extending his rule by a further six years. The contrasting reactions underscored the geopolitical fault lines that have gaped wider since Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine two years ago, triggering the deepest crisis in relations with the West since the end of the Cold War.

Arriving in Brussels, EU foreign ministers roundly dismissed the election result as a sham ahead of agreeing sanctions on individuals linked to the mistreatment and death of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny. "Russia's election was an election without choice," German foreign minister Annalena Baerbock said at the start of the meeting. Playing on Moscow's reference to its war in Ukraine as a "special military operation", France's foreign mini-

Reuters



An anti-Putin protester in London

ster Stephane Sejourne said Paris had taken note of the "special election operation". UK foreign secretary David Cameron said the election outcome highlighted the "depth of repression" in Russia. "Putin removes his political opponents, controls the media, and then crowns himself the winner. This is not democracy."

France, Britain and others condemned the fact that Russia had also held its election in occupied regions of Ukraine

that it claims to have annexed during the war. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Russia's election had no legitimacy. "It is clear to everyone in the world that this figure (Putin)... is simply sick for power and is doing everything to rule forever," Zelenskiy said.

A White House spokesperson said Russia's election was "obviously not free nor fair".

In sharp contrast, Chinese President Xi Jinping congratulated Putin, and said Beijing would maintain close communication with Moscow to promote the "no limits" partnership they agreed in 2022, just before Russia invaded Ukraine. "I believe that under your leadership, Russia will certainly be able to achieve greater achievements in national development and construction," Xi told Putin in his message.

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi, accused by the West of supplying weapons to Russia, also extended congratulations to Putin. REUTERS

IT SECTOR TO SEE 3-5 PC GROWTH IN FY25, HIRING TO BE MUTED: ICRA

MUMBAI, Mar 18 (PTI)

INDIAN IT sector's revenue growth is expected to come at a tepid 3-5 per cent in FY25, a domestic rating agency said on Monday.

The sector's hiring will "remain muted" in the near-term until the growth momentum picks up, ICRA Ratings said. However, the companies' profitability is expected to be resilient amid concerns on topline growth, it said, adding the operating profit margins for the USD 250 billion Indian IT sector will come at a healthy 21-22 per cent in FY25.

The agency said in the first nine months of the ongoing 2023-24, the industry has posted a revenue growth of just 2 per cent, as against 3-5 per cent it had estimated for the sector



in the past.

The topline growth for the first nine months of FY23 had stood at a healthy 9.2 per cent.

Persistent macroeconomic headwinds in key markets of the US and Europe, which has led to lower discretionary IT spends by corporate has led to expectations of tepid revenue growth even in FY25, its sector head Deepak Jotwani said.

He, however, added that critical spending and cost optimisation deals continue to gain traction, supporting the growth prospects for the Indian IT serv-

ices companies to "some extent."

The agency expects pick-up in the growth momentum once the macroeconomic headwinds subside on strong order books and deal pipeline of most companies and tech spends becoming far more integral to overall capital allocation for corporate after the pandemic.

While it expects hiring activity to remain muted, the agency said the attrition levels will stabilise over the near term, inching closer to the long-term average of 12-13 per cent, as overall slowdown in growth momentum and strong hiring in the previous fiscal has corrected the demand-supply mismatch witnessed earlier.

The agency maintained its stable outlook on the sector for the new fiscal.