

HOLIDAY NOTICE
On the occasion of May Day today all offices of The Echo of India, Kolkata will remain closed and there will be no edition of the paper on May 2.

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Pedestrians on the city street during the rains on Monday—Arijit Ganguly

Cong moves HC challenging SEC announcement of poll dates

Poll panel holds meeting with state govt, discusses security

KOLKATA, APRIL 30 /- The West Bengal Congress today moved the Calcutta High Court challenging the announcement of dates for panchayat elections in the state in phases and asked for a new schedule for the polls. It prayed that the SEC be directed to issue a fresh notification announcing the dates for the election process from nomination to the counting of votes. Moving an appeal against a single-bench order that disposed of their petition without any intervention or direction to the SEC, state Congress general secretary Ritju Ghosal submitted before a division bench that the West Bengal Panchayat Act 2006 mandates a single notification for the election process.

Referring to the Act, Ghosal submitted before the division bench comprising Justice B Somadder and Justice A Mukherjee that the Act states all the dates from the nomination to the declaration of the results have to be announced in a single notification. Justice Somadder told Ghosal that since the Act says "by notification", it is a question of interpretation of the statute on whether there is a bar on more than one notification for the announcement of dates for the local body elections. Ghosal claimed the law makers had intended the announcement be made through a single notification and prayed for a rollback of the notifications by the SEC and a direction to the commission to make a fresh notification announcing all the dates.

Justice Subrata Talukdar had on April 20 quashed the commission's order cancelling the extension of the date for filing nominations as issued by it on April 10. The court had directed the commission to issue a fresh notification extending the date for filing nominations upon consultations with the state and the major collective stakeholders. Justice Talukdar had directed the commission to then reschedule the dates in the election process as per the statutory framework. The SEC had on April 21 issued a notification allowing the filing of nomination on April 23 and also notified the dates for scrutiny and withdrawal of nominations. Meanwhile, the West Bengal State Election Commission (SEC) today held a high-level meeting with state government officials to discuss security arrangements for the May 14 panchayat polls in the state. State Election Commissioner A K Singh held the meeting with DGP of West Bengal police, ADG (law and order), among others, SEC sources said.

"We have asked the state government to ensure adequate security arrangements in each and every booth and polling premises to ensure free and fair polls," an SEC official said. According to sources, the commission is of the opinion that security arrangements need to be ensured for holding free and fair elections. Opposition parties in West Bengal during the meeting with SEC on Saturday had expressed grievances over the upcoming single-phase panchayat polls and the security arrangements for the same. The SEC had then said it would talk to the state government and ensure proper security arrangements. Apart from security arrangements, the SEC is also concerned about the huge number of polling personnel that is needed to conduct the polls in more than 58,000 booths of the state.

State forms SIT to probe into charges of meat being sourced from dumpyards

KOLKATA, APRIL 30 /- The West Bengal government has constituted a special investigation team (SIT) to examine the allegations of processed meat being sourced from dumping grounds, a senior official said today. Last week, the Union government had seized 20 tonnes of rotten meat, suspected to be of dead animals and sourced from dumping grounds, meant to be supplied to canteens and departmental stores in the state as well as neighbouring Jharkhand, Odisha and Bihar. So far, 10 people, including a leader of a political outfit, have been arrested in connection with the case. The state enforcement branch has also started to investigate into the matter simultaneously. According to SP (Diamond Harbour) Koteswar Rao, several teams have been deployed in greater Kolkata and outside West Bengal to trace the culprits involved in the business of selling meat of dead animals. "We are conducting raids to get hold of the culprits involved in the incident. Officers all over the district have been alerted to keep a tab on those who are involved in selling meat of dead animals," Rao said. The police suspect that as many as five influential individuals are scattered in different parts of the state including others in the neighbouring states. We are trying to establish the chain. The racket seems to be quite an organised one," he said. Currently, the state department is preparing a detailed report on the matter. "We are chalking out a detailed report on this matter. Once it is complete, we will submit it to chief minister Mamata Banerjee," consumer affairs minister Sathan Pandey said. The West Bengal government has directed all police stations in the metropolis and the districts to keep a watch on the sale of meat in their areas, officials said.

'Black Cat' commandos set to be deployed in Kashmir

NEW DELHI, APRIL 30 /- 'Black Cat' commandos of the elite counter-terror force NSG are set to be deployed soon in Jammu and Kashmir to help security forces in dealing with encounters and hostage-like situations, officials said today. The ministry of home affairs is examining a proposal to deploy a contingent of the National Security Guard (NSG) commandos in the Kashmir Valley so that they can join the Indian Army, the CRPF and the state police when a high-risk security-related incident takes place. "We are planning to deploy the NSG in Kashmir. They are trained to deal with terrorists and hostage-like situations. We are mulling over it," an official told news agency PTI requesting anonymity.

Minister General of Police (DGP, Jammu and Kashmir, S P Vaid had also said recently that he has been working on the proposal. "Hope I will be successful," he had said. This is not for the first time that the NSG commandos, popularly known as 'Black Cat', would be deployed in Jammu and Kashmir. The commandos of the elite force have been deployed in the Valley in the past too. Their special skills of carrying out house intervention and hostage rescue can act as "clincher" during a terror siege, the official said. Union home minister Rajnath Singh, during a recent NSG event in Telangana, had said the government is planning as to how the force's role could be "enlarged" vis-a-vis the new security challenges faced by the country, as these commandos can play a "big role" in operations such as those where terrorists take a human as shield and enter civilian premises.

all villages in country now electrified: PM

NEW DELHI, APRIL 30 /- More than seven decades after independence, India has achieved electricity to all its villages after electricity reached Leisang village in Manipur. The target was achieved 12 days ahead of the deadline set by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "28th April 2018 will be remembered as a historic day in the development journey of India. Yesterday, we fulfilled a commitment due to which the lives of several Indians will be transformed forever. I am delighted that every single village of India now has access to electricity," Modi tweeted. As many as 18,452 villages were without electricity when the BJP-led government came to power in May 2014. Today, all of the country's 5,97,464 census villages have been electrified. Electrified means the village is connected to power grid. It essentially does not mean that all its inhabitants have access to electricity. According to government definition, a village is considered electrified if it has the basic electrical infrastructure and 10 per cent of its households and public places have power. "Leisang village in Manipur, like the thousands of other villages across India has been powered and empowered!" This news will make every Indian proud and delighted," Prime Minister said in another tweet. Modi had in his Independence Day speech in 2015, spoken of electrifying all villages within 1,000 days. The task, however, took 988 days to complete as an average of 16 and a half villages were electrified every day. "I salute the efforts of all those who worked tirelessly on the ground, including the team of officials, the technical staff and all others, to make this dream of a #PowerfulIndia a reality. Their efforts today will help generations of Indians in the coming years," Modi said.



S-400 Triumf deal likely to be signed before Modi-Putin summit

NEW DELHI, APRIL 30 /- India is likely to seal a nearly Rs 40,000 crore deal to procure S-400 Triumf air defence missile systems from Russia before top leaders of the two countries hold an annual summit around October, officials sources said. Negotiations for the deal are nearing completion and differences over price and other peripheral issues were almost bridged, they said. Sources told news agency PTI that both Russia and India were eyeing ink of the contract before summit talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin which may take place either in September or October in India. They said India was confident of finalising the mega deal with Moscow notwithstanding provisions of a US law that seeks to punish Russia for its alleged meddling in the American presidential election in 2016. Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), which came into effect in January this year, mandates the Donald Trump administration to punish entities engaging in significant transaction with the defence or intelligence establishment of Russia.

Kabul suicide bombings kill 25, including 8 scribes

KABUL, APRIL 30 /- A coordinated double suicide bombing by the Islamic State group hit central Kabul this morning, killing at least 25 people, including eight journalists, officials said. An AFP photographer and a cameraman for a local TV station were among the fatalities, the police said. At least 45 people were wounded in the twin attacks, according to Kabul police spokesman, Hashmat Stanekzal, who also added that four policemen were among those killed. The attack was the latest in a relentless string of deadly large-scale bombings and assaults that have struck Kabul and elsewhere in Afghanistan so far this year.

Fresh plea in SC against polygamy, nikah halala

NEW DELHI, APRIL 30 /- A woman, who along with her three minor kids were thrown out of the matrimonial home after her husband re-married, has moved the Supreme Court seeking to declare the practices of polygamy and 'nikah halala' among Muslims as unconstitutional. While polygamy allows a Muslim man to have four wives, 'nikah halala' deals with the process in which a Muslim woman, who wants to re-marry her husband after divorce, has to first marry another person and get a divorce from him after the consummation. The fresh plea assumes significance as the apex court, on March 26, has already referred to a five-judge constitution bench a batch of petitions challenging the constitutional validity of polygamy and 'nikah halala' among the Muslims. Rani alias Sabnam, in her petition filed through lawyer and BJP leader Ashwin Kumar Upadhyay, referred to the sequence of events in her life and said she had married one Muzammil on February 8, 2010 as per the Shariat rites and was blessed with two sons and a daughter. She said her parents spent about Rs five lakh, including gold and silver ornaments as dowry, in her marriage. However, she was later harassed and forced out of the matrimonial home here after her husband re-married. The woman, who is currently living with her children at the home of in-laws in Bulandshahr town of Uttar Pradesh after neighbours came forward in their support, has moved the top court for declaring these practices as unconstitutional. The instant petition raises an important issue of General Public Interest i.e. prevalent practice of Polygamy including Nikah-Halala which is unconstitutional and even then the same is prevailing in our country. The said practices which certainly come within the domain of personal law cannot be immune from judicial review under the constitution," it said.

Clive House, first brick-built house in city now lies in peril

DISHA MASCHAREK
KOLKATA, APRIL 30 /- Kolkata's Clive House, once the residence of India's first Governor General Robert Clive, is on the verge of extinction, thanks to the colossal apathy of government agencies, local administration and a legal battle at Calcutta High Court that has been going on for the last 13 years. The law suit was in fact filed by squatters within the premises of the 270-year old house, considered to be the first brick-built house of Kolkata, who want rehabilitation and suitable compensation before moving out. Come a natural calamity like cyclone, earthquake or heavy rains of medium scale and in all likelihood, the dilapidated building will be razed to the ground. And the casualty will not only be our



The houses that have been built inside Clive Houses premises...E01 photo

Legend has it that Robert Clive, in the year 1756, happened to go past Dum Dum area with troops of East India Company. He saw the house, that was probably that time was an abandoned indigo factory, situated on a mound. After the battle of Plassey he came and occupied the house and built another storey on the ground floor. The troops of the company used the large ground adjacent to the house as a shooting range and the sound that was produced gave the area its name of Dum Dum.

encroachment by just about 7/8 families comprising 25 people who have been staying there for the last 50 years. They have built a slum around the building and some have even built swank two-storied houses inside the premises in violation of all rules pertaining to protection of heritage buildings. They have put up bamboo fences on the doors of the building. According to local people the area has become a vice den with some young people indulging in anti-social activities. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), custodian of heritage buildings, which took over

compensation. The court issued an injunction on restoration and the case has been lingering for the last 13 years. We took the matter up with the state government too but got no help. Unless the court case is over we are really helpless," G. Maheswari, superintending architect, ASI, told The Echo of India. The same helplessness has been expressed by chairman of South Dum Dum Municipality, Panchu Roy in whose jurisdiction the building falls. "I really feel helpless. But you find rehabilitation for those who have built two-storied houses there. They have refused to vacate the land. I don't know what will happen to the building," Roy told The Echo of India. The encroachers, however say they would definitely vacate the premises if they were given proper compensation. "It's a major risk staying here as the house may crumble down any moment. But we don't know where to go with our families if we are just told to move out of the place," a resident of the area who requested anonymity told The Echo of India.