

NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

'Mehangai Manav' Strikes Again: Rahul Slams PM On Fuel Hike

NEW DELHI, MAY 25: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday launched a scathing attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the latest fuel hike, saying 'mehangai manav' has struck again and he has just one job of making promises during elections and attacking people's pockets at other times.

Petrol and diesel prices were raised by Rs 2.61-2.71 per litre on Monday, marking the fourth increase in less than two weeks as state-owned fuel retailers continued to pass on rising international oil prices to consumers.

"Mehangai manav' Modi strikes again. He raises petrol and diesel prices in installments — ensuring that your pockets are quietly picked, bit by bit," Gandhi said in his post in Hindi on X.

"For months, I had been warning of an impending economic storm. But Modi Ji, true to form, was busy with elections at the time and the moment the elections ended, he hiked the prices of petrol and diesel by Rs 8," the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha said.

And, this upward trend will only continue, he added. "Mehangai manav' Modi has just one job: promises



during elections, and attacking people's pockets at other times," Gandhi said. With the latest revision, cumulative increases in petrol and diesel prices have nearly touched Rs 7.5 per litre since fuel price revisions resumed on May 15 after a prolonged freeze, stoking concerns over inflationary pressures and higher transportation costs across the economy.

The latest revision pushed petrol prices higher by Rs 2.61 per litre and diesel by Rs 2.71, according to industry sources.

Petrol prices were raised to Rs 102.12 a litre in Delhi from Rs 99.51 previously, while diesel rates were increased to Rs 95.20 per litre from Rs 92.49.

In Chennai, petrol is priced at Rs 107.77 and diesel at Rs 99.55.

Prices vary across states due to local taxes.

State-owned Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) together control 90 per cent of India's fuel market.

The back-to-back increases come after global crude oil prices surged more than 50 per cent since late February following US-Israeli strikes on Iran and disruptions to shipments through the Strait of Hormuz, a critical global oil transit route.

Fuel retailers had in the first two-and-a-half-months of the conflict kept pump prices low despite rising input costs, a move the government said was aimed at shielding consumers from inflation. Opposition parties, however, accused the government of delaying price revisions until after key state elections.

The May 15 increase came after the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) expanded its electoral footprint by winning three of five state and UT elections, including West Bengal. (AGENCIES)

'Mantri Pradhan' should resign, 'Pradhan Mantri' owes answers: Cong on CBSE glitches

NEW DELHI, MAY 25: With the CBSE set to engage IIT-Madras and IIT-Kanpur experts to address technical challenges in its post-result services portal, the Congress on Monday attacked the government, saying the 'Mantri Pradhan' should step down and the 'Pradhan Mantri' owed people an explanation for why the minister was being allowed to continue.

Congress general secretary in-charge of communications, Jairam Ramesh, said the CBSE introduced an On-Screen Marking (OSM) system for Class 12 board examinations, which has thrown into chaos the academic futures of lakhs of children across the country.

"The Grade 12 pass percentage has declined by an unprecedented 3 percentage points (from 88% to 85%), and the process has been plagued by irregularities — blurred and illegible answer sheets, erroneous marking,



incorrect answer sheets being attributed to students, payment delays, and outrageous revaluation fees being demanded from students," Ramesh said on X.

The education minister, who is presiding over "total institutional collapse", has finally woken up to this "tragedy" more than a week after it first came to light, the Congress leader said.

"He's portraying himself as some saviour by bringing in IIT-Kanpur to help ad-

dress these technical issues. The question really is why these issues were not anticipated? Why did the CBSE and the ministry not plan carefully before adopting this OSM system? Why did it take the minister so long to respond to this issue?" Ramesh said.

"The Mantri Pradhan owes the country his resignation, and the Pradhan Mantri owes us answers to why this minister — who is openly disrupting the future of India's

students with his ineptitude — has been allowed to continue for so long," he said.

The education ministry on Sunday said that the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) will engage experts from the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, and IIT-Kanpur to address technical challenges in its post-result services portal.

The move comes amid complaints from students and parents over glitches in the CBSE re-evaluation process.

The ministry said Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan has given directions to depute teams of professors and technical experts from IIT-Madras and IIT-Kanpur to examine all technical issues reported since the rollout of this year's post-examination re-evaluation services and assist the CBSE in ensuring a glitch-free process.

US Secretary Of State Marco Rubio Visits Taj Mahal With Wife

AGRA, MAY 25: US Secretary of State Marco Rubio visited the Taj Mahal with his wife Jeanette Rubio on a searingly hot Monday morning, describing the famed Mughal era monument as "one of the love treasures of the world".

Rubio, who is on a four-day visit to India, arrived at the Kheria airport in Agra in a special aircraft around 10 am and travelled by car to a hotel near the eastern gate of the Taj Mahal before proceeding to the monument in a golf cart amid heavy security arrangements, local officials said.

Thank You For Allowing Us To Visit One Of The Love Treasures Of The World,"



Rubio wrote in the visitors' book.

The US secretary of state, who was accompanied by US Ambassador to India Sergio Goro, spent around an hour at the 17th-century marble mausoleum. The ambassador also joined the Rubios

for a photograph at the UNESCO World Heritage site.

Security was tightened around the Taj Mahal during the high-profile visit, and tourists already present inside the monument complex were temporarily asked to move out by security person-

nel, officials said.

Rubio will also travel to Jaipur before returning to New Delhi on Tuesday morning to attend a meeting of Quad foreign ministers.

The visit to the Taj Mahal comes amid scorching weather conditions in Agra, which was among the hottest places in Uttar Pradesh on Sunday, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

According to the IMD's weather chart issued on Monday morning, Agra recorded a maximum temperature of 45.4 degrees Celsius on Sunday, while the minimum temperature settled at 32.8 degrees Celsius. (Agencies)

Excise case: HC lists CBI plea against Kejriwal, Sisodia's discharge on July 16

NEW DELHI, MAY 25:

The Delhi High Court on Monday listed for hearing on July 16 the CBI plea against the trial court order discharging AAP leaders Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia and Durgesh Pathak and other accused in the liquor policy case.

Justice Manoj Jain noted that three 'vakalatnama' appeared to have been filed on behalf of the three unrepresented AAP leaders, who had earlier boycotted the hearing before Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma, and deferred further hearing to await the presence of the counsel, considering that lawyers were abstaining from work in the high court today.

A 'vakalatnama' is an authorisation letter submitted by an advocate to represent a party in court.

"If they have filed vakalatnama, on the next date we can see which date can be given and a schedule can be drawn... It seems some vakalatnama has been filed," the judge observed, as he listed the case for hearing on July 16.

Even as Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for



the CBI, urged that the matter be listed on Wednesday for fixing the hearing schedule before the summer vacation, Justice Manoj said the court was giving priority to matters concerning life and liberty.

The judge also said that Wednesday was a declared holiday for the high court on the occasion of Eid al-Adha.

The excise policy case came before Justice Jain after Justice Sharma released it from her board earlier this month after initiating contempt action against Kejriwal, Sisodia, Pathak and others for their alleged "vilifying" social media posts against her.

When the matter was listed before Justice Jain on May 19, he had asked the CBI to inform the AAP leaders about the change of bench.

On February 27, the trial court discharged former Delhi chief minister Kejriwal, Sisodia and 21 others in the liquor policy case, ruling that it was wholly unable to survive judicial scrutiny and stood discredited in its entirety.

The CBI moved the High Court and, on March 9, Justice Sharma's bench stayed the trial court's recommendation on the initiation of departmental action against the CBI's investigating offi-

cer in the liquor policy case.

While issuing notice to all 23 accused on CBI's plea against their discharge, Justice Sharma said certain observations and findings of the trial court at the stage of framing of charges prima facie appeared erroneous and needed consideration.

Subsequently, Kejriwal, Sisodia, Pathak and some other respondents sought Justice Swarana's recusal in the case on an apprehension of bias and conflict of interest.

After Justice Sharma dismissed their applications seeking her recusal in the case on April 20, Kejriwal, Sisodia and Pathak wrote to Justice Sharma, stating they would not appear before her personally or through a lawyer and would follow "Mahatma Gandhi's path of Satyagraha".

On May 14, Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma, however, initiated criminal contempt proceedings against them and other AAP leaders for their "vilifying" social media posts against her and said that the matter would be sent to another bench. (PTI)

Leaders keep wary eye on Belarus after Russia's biggest missile attack of year on Ukraine

KYIV, MAY 25:

Belarus' exiled opposition leader visited Kyiv on Monday as the Ukrainian capital cleaned up after Russia's biggest missile attack of the year, and world leaders kept a close eye on how much support the Belarusian government is ready to provide for Moscow's all-out invasion of Ukraine.

Belarusian opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya arrived by train in Kyiv for her first visit to the city, a day after French President Emmanuel Macron spoke by phone with President Alexander Lukashenko, who has governed Belarus with an iron fist for more than three decades.

The French leader "underscored the risks for Belarus of allowing itself to be dragged into Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine," according to a presidential aide in Macron's office who spoke on condition of anonymity in accordance with the presidential palace's practices.

Macron also spoke Sunday with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who in recent days has increasingly warned that Belarus could provide a launchpad for Russia to open a new front in northern Ukraine.

With the full-scale invasion more than four years old, the Russian army is locked in a hard and costly slog on the 1,250-kilometre (780-mile) front line that mostly snakes through east-



ern and southern Ukraine. With American-made air defence missiles in short supply because of the Iran war, Russian missiles are harder for Ukraine to stop.

US efforts to stop the fighting have made little progress and have now stalled.

Sunday's heavy bombardment included Russia's powerful hypersonic Oreshnik ballistic missile, which can carry multiple warheads. Russian President Vladimir Putin has boasted that it can plunge to a target at speeds up to Mach 10.

Zelenskyy said Ukrainian intelligence services had received tip-offs from the United States and European countries that Russia was preparing to launch an Oreshnik.

At least 87 people were wounded in Kyiv, including three children, in the barrage, Zelenskyy said Mon-

day. Twenty-one people were hospitalised.

The intense assault damaged buildings across the city, including near government offices, residential buildings, schools and a market, Ukrainian authorities said. Shattered glass still littered sidewalks on Monday.

Macron's call with Lukashenko was their first since 2022, shortly after Russia launched the all-out invasion on Feb. 24, 2022, when Belarus' government allowed Moscow to use the country's territory as a platform to send troops into neighbouring Ukraine.

A terse readout released by the Belarusian presidential press service said that the call took place "on the French side's initiative" and that the two leaders discussed "regional issues" and the relations of Belarus with the European Union and France.

Tsikhanouskaya, the Belarusian opposition leader in exile, said Sunday that France is trying to prevent Belarus from being dragged into the Russia-Ukraine war.

"The main goal — to warn Lukashenko that dragging Belarus into the war would be unacceptable," Tsikhanouskaya told The Associated Press.

"Lukashenko's regime knows well what needs to be done to improve ties with the European Union, but it isn't happening; instead, hybrid attacks, nuclear blackmail and threats to the entire region continue," she said.

Lukashenko relies on the Kremlin for cheap energy, loans and other support. Russia and Belarus held joint nuclear drills last week.

Zelenskyy has repeatedly warned that Belarus could increase its support for Moscow. (AP)

Cycling could be accessible tool for improving brain health, review finds

NEW DELHI, MAY 25: A review of nearly 90 studies across 19 countries, including the US, Canada and several European countries, where cycling was tested as an intervention has found that the physical activity can be an accessible tool for improving brain health and overall well-being, such as through better moods and increased social connections.

Researchers from Outride, a US-based non-profit, The University of Oklahoma and Loma Linda University, said that with increasing mental health challenges and low physical activity levels, identifying low-cost, effective ways to support both well-being and movement throughout the lifespan is critical.

The findings, published in the journal Frontiers in Sports and Active Living, suggested that cycling — particularly outdoors and consistently — offers the most benefits across well-being domains.

"This review demonstrates that going for a bike ride can support everything from boosts in mood, to increases in social networks, to improvements in cognition," lead author Lauren Schuck,



senior research manager at Outride, said.

The analysis also linked cycling to improvements in reaction time, attention, and indicators of brain function associated with focus and cognitive performance.

"Results indicate positive impacts of bicycling on well-being, including improved mood, reduced depressive symptoms, increased social connection, and enhanced

cognitive functioning, especially among interventions occurring outdoors and over multiple sessions," the authors wrote.

In practice, cycling can take on many forms of biking such as school-based riding programs, community group rides, stationary biking at gyms, and active commuting, all which provide opportunities to support mental well-being and brain health

in everyday life, they said.

The team added that cognitive benefits from cycling tended towards an "inverted-U pattern" — while moderate intensity can support cognition, overly intense exertion can temporarily impair it, they said. More research is needed among youth, older adults, and underserved communities, especially in real-world settings, the researchers said. (Agencies)