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PRISON AS PROTESTERS RALLY

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LUCKNOW, THURSDAY APRIL 18, 2019; PAGES 16 ₹3



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BJP pits Pragya against Digvijay

Bhopal battle set to catch nation's eye

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Setting the stage for an epic battle in Bhopal, the BJP on Wednesday fielded Sadhvi Pragya Singh Thakur, facing trial in Malegaon blast case, in Lok Sabha elections, against Congress heavyweight and former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Digvijay Singh.

Out on bail, Sadhvi joined the BJP only hours before the party announced her name as its candidate from Bhopal. This is being seen as a clear attempt by the BJP to bring the Hindutva plank at the centre stage of polls in the State, where the BJP had won 27 out of 29 seats in 2014 LS polls.

"I will contest the election from Bhopal and win. Former Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan is with me," Sadhvi said after emerging out of the BJP office at Bhopal.

In a way, the face-off between Digvijay and Sadhvi will also be seen as a battle between the hardcore Hindutva represented by the likes of Digvijay and equally dyed-in-the-wool "secularism" propagated by the likes of Digvijay.

At a rally in Odisha, BJP president Amit Shah on Wednesday described Digvijay as the "creator" of "saffron terror" phrase. The BJP has decided to take the matter to the



Sadhvi Pragya Singh Thakur arrives at the Madhya Pradesh BJP headquarters in Bhopal on Wednesday

people's court by fielding Sadhvi against Digvijay, he said, accusing the Congress of defaming India by coining terms like "Hindu terror" and "saffron terror".

Referring to the acquittal of

several accused, including Swami Aseemanand, in Samjhauta Express blast case, Shah attacked the Congress and said people of Bhopal will punish Digvijay and Congress president Rahul Gandhi.



Digvijay Singh participates in a religious procession on the occasion of Mahavir Jayanti in Bhopal on Wednesday

A senior BJP leader said the party decided to field Sadhvi, who joined the party hours before her candidature was announced, against Digvijay as the latter has been one of the most visible "anti-

Hindutva" faces of the Congress.

Also being a high-profile seat as the Madhya Pradesh capital, it can help rally support for the BJP across the State and even outside, he added.

Digvijay has been a bitter critic of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), the ideological guide of the BJP, and had allegedly linked it to the 2008 Mumbai terror attack carried out by Pakistani terrorists.

The BJP also decided to field KP Yadav from Guna, a seat held by senior Congress leader Jyotiraditya Scindia who is contesting from there. The BJP has named Raj Bahadur Singh and Ramakant Bhargava as its nominees from Sagar and Vidisha respectively.

External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj had won from Vidisha in 2014 but she is not fighting polls this time due to health reasons.

Born in Bhind district of Madhya Pradesh, Sadhvi has had a long association with the Sangh Parivar. A post-graduate in history, she worked with the RSS student wing Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad and Durga Vahini, women's wing of the Vishva Hindu Parishad.

Arrested in the 2008 Malegaon blast case, she was given a clean chit by the National Investigation Agency (NIA), but the trial court refused to discharge her from the case.

The court dropped the charges under the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA) against her, and she is now being tried under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act. She was granted bail by the Bombay High Court in 2017.

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ADMK, BJP stakes high in 2nd phase

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The second phase of Lok Sabha polls for 95 seats will decide the fate of several stalwarts, including Union Ministers Jitendra Singh, Jugal Oram, Sadananda Gowda and Pon Radhakrishnan, former Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda and DMK's Dayanidhi Maran, A Raja and Kanimozhi. Altogether 1,600-odd contestants are in the fray from 11 States and the Union Territory of Puducherry.

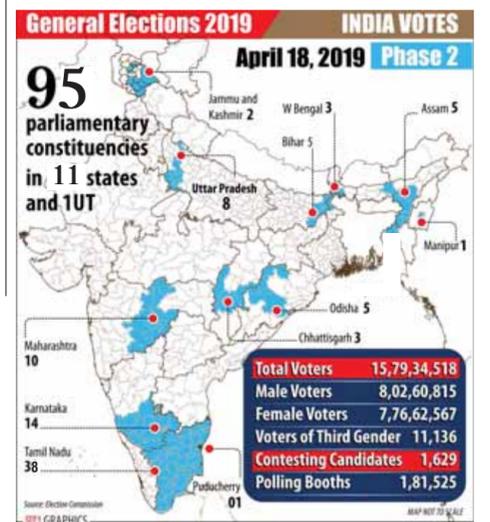
Thirty eight of the 39 Lok Sabha seats in Tamil Nadu will go to polls and bypolls will be held in 18 Assembly constituencies. The Election Commission cancelled the polling in Vellore Lok Sabha seat, which is currently repre-

sented by the AIADMK, following recovery of huge amount of cash allegedly from an associate of a DMK leader.

The EC also announced postponement of polling in Tripura (East) Lok Sabha seat to the third phase on April 23, saying the prevailing law and order situation there is not conducive for free and fair polls.

The stake is high for the AIADMK which had swept the polls in 2014 and has gone from one internal crisis to another after the death of its supreme leader J Jayalalithaa. The party has formed a strong alliance with PMK and DMDK to take on the might of DMK-Cong-Left alliance, which is expected to win at least two-thirds of the 39 seats, as per various opinion polls.

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50 killed as rain lashes Raj, MP, Guj

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As many as 50 people died and several others injured due to unseasonal rain, dust storm and lightning in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat. It has caused damage to property, wheat crops, mango, and potatoes and vegetables in north, central parts of the country.

It is estimated that properties and crops worth several hundred crores have been damaged. Several cattle were also killed in rain-related incidents.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), unseasonal rain, thunderstorm, lightning and high speed wind were caused by active Western Disturbance (WD) over eastern Iran that is moving towards east-north-eastwards across Afghanistan, Pakistan and northwest India.

According to IMD, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Bihar, Gangetic West Bengal and Delhi-NCR on Wednesday witnessed squall (wind speed reaching 60-70 kilometres per hour) accompanied with hail and lightning.

The IMD has issued an amber-coloured warning for parts of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab,



A woman tries to prevent rainwater from entering her house during heavy rain at Nagercoil in Kanyakumari district on Wednesday

Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Haryana, Punjab and Bihar. An amber colour warning indicates that authorities have to remain alert for any weather-related exigency. The situation is expected to remain the same in the next two-three days in North-East and southern parts of the country.

As per IMD, Kerala, Telangana, Sikkim, Karnataka, Assam, Jharkhand, Meghalaya, West Bengal, Arunachal Pradesh and Puducherry may witness rain, thunderstorm with gusty wind on Thursday, while West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala,

Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura, and Odisha are likely to get rain and thunderstorm on Friday.

Several parts of north and central India have been witnessing thunderstorms, dust storms, lightning and heavy rain since Sunday.

According to reports, Rajasthan witnessed the maximum casualties with 21 people killed in overnight rain-related incidents followed by Madhya Pradesh where 15 were killed. 10 people were killed in Gujarat, three were killed in Maharashtra.

Prime Minister Narendra

Modi took to twitter in the morning to express anguish over the loss of lives in the rain in Gujarat and announced relief. Soon afterwards Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Kamal Nath hit out at the Prime Minister, accusing him of being concerned only about his home State Gujarat.

The PM in a tweet later said, "PM @narendramodi has expressed grief at loss of lives due to unseasonal rain and storms in MP, Rajasthan, Manipur & various parts of the country".

"An ex gratia of ₹2 lakh each for the next of kin of those who lost their lives due to unseasonal rain & storms in MP, Rajasthan, Manipur & various parts of the country has been approved from the PM's National Relief Fund. ₹50,000 each for the injured has also been approved," the PMO said.

Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh said the Government is closely monitoring the situation in rain-hit areas and is ready to provide all possible assistance to States affected by rain and thunderstorm. Officials of the Agriculture Ministry said the assessment of loss of crops is being carried out.

Continued on Page 7

Stage set for polls on 8 UP seats in round 2 today

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Amidst tight security arrangements, eight Lok Sabha constituencies in Uttar Pradesh will go to polls in the second phase of election on Thursday. The polling on Thursday will seal the fate of 85 candidates contesting on different symbols.

Chief Electoral Officer of UP, L Venkateshwarlu said in Lucknow on Wednesday that all arrangements had been completed for the smooth conduct of polling in the second phase.

"We have asked the district authorities to provide hassle-free environment for voters to increase polling percentage and also ensure facilities like drinking water, shed, power and other basic amenities at all booths so that voters did not face inconvenience during voting," the Venkateshwarlu said.

Out of the 85 candidates

in the poll fray in the second phase, 19 have declared criminal cases against them (about 23 per cent) while 14 have declared serious criminal cases, as per election watchdog ADR. Out of all candidates contesting the polls, a total of 34 (about 41 per cent) are crorepati.

The constituencies going to poll in the second phase are witnessing triangular contests between the Bharatiya Janata Party, Congress and Samajwadi Party-Bahujan Samaj Party-Rashtriya Lok Dal alliance. The constituencies going to polls in the second phase are Agra, Aligarh, Amroha, Bulandshahr, Fatehpur Sikri, Hathras, Mathura and Nagina.

While caste and communal polarisation play a crucial role in the general elections in UP, the major issues of jobs, agricultural stress can swing votes in the favour of the opposition parties.

Former cine star and BJP candidate from Mathura, Hema Malini, is the richest candidate in the second phase with total assets of over Rs 250 crore. BJP candidate from Amroha, Kanwar Singh Tanwar, has assets worth over Rs 182 crore. The candidate with lowest assets is Amedkari Hansuram Amedkari, who is fighting as an Independent candidate from Agra. He has declared total assets worth Rs 1,200.

Phase two polls in western UP are crucial for the Narendra Modi-led BJP, which won all these seats in the 2014 Lok Sabha election. Riding the crest of the Modi wave, the BJP along with ally Apna Dal had won on as many as 73 of the 80 Lok Sabha seats in UP.

The saffron party had also won all seats that went to polls in phase 1, including Kairana, Muzaffarnagar, Saharanpur, Bijnor, Meerut,

Baghat, Gautam Buddha Nagar and Ghaziabad, in 2014. In UP, Akhilesh Yadav's SP is contesting on 37 seats while Mayawati's BSP has fielded its candidates on 38 seats. Their ally Ajit Singh's RLD is fighting on three seats. The Congress is fighting on its own.

Some high-profile seats going to polls in this phase are Fatehpur Sikri, Agra, Mathura, Aligarh and Nagina.

The UP Police have deployed over one lakh security personnel in 10 communal sensitive districts. The central para-military forces personnel conducted flag marches in the constituencies to instil confidence among the voters. Liquor shops will remain closed till the end of polling in these constituencies while inter-state borders with Delhi, Haryana and Uttarakhand have been sealed.

Joy of Flying grounded

In red, Jet Airways suspends all ops as banks refuse to grant bailout fund

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Teetering for over four months due to cash-drought, Jet Airways, flying for over 25 years, on Wednesday said its last flight will takeoff on Wednesday night, after its lenders refused to offer a ₹400-crore lifeline.

"With immediate effect, we are compelled to cancel all our international and domestic flights. The last flight will operate today," Jet Airways informed the exchanges.

The airline said the decision follows the lenders refusing to offer a lifeline. "Since no emergency fund-



ing from the lenders or any other source is forthcoming, the airline will not be able to pay for fuel or other critical services to keep the operations going... And has decided to go ahead with temporary suspension of operations," it said.

The last flight of the airline, left the Amritsar airport at 10.30pm for New Delhi.

After a board meeting on Tuesday, the management had authorised chief executive Vinay Dube to make one last

appeal to the lenders for an emergency ₹400 crore funding, and if not the demand is not met, take a final call on the future of the airline on Wednesday.

On Tuesday night, Jet Airways — which carries the slogan "the joy of flying" — was informed by SBI, on behalf of the consortium of lenders, that they were unable to consider its request for critical interim funding, the airline said in the statement.

AAP rejects 'only Delhi' offer as Cong refuses to share Haryana

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

After a fresh round of discussion for the Congress-AAP alliance in Delhi and neighbouring States of Haryana and Punjab, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Wednesday said the Congress has refused to form an alliance in Haryana and thus the party does "not want a tie-up only in Delhi".

While AAP leader and Rajya Sabha member Sanjay Singh said alliance talks between the AAP and the Congress was called off following disagreement over tie-up in Haryana and Delhi, senior Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad, who was part of the discussion on Wednesday, presented a defensive statement and said as par-

liamentarians they keep meeting and declined to state anything about the meeting.

Alliance talks between AAP and Congress has been called off following disagreement over tie-up in Haryana and Delhi. The Congress has refused to form an alliance in Haryana, and we do not want a tie-up only in Delhi," said Sanjay Singh, who earlier held a meeting with Azad following the fresh rounds of expression by party chiefs — Rahul Gandhi of the Congress and Arvind Kejriwal of the AAP.

On his part, Azad said he was not aware of any alliances, particularly in Haryana of which he is also incharge. "Who is doing the alliance? As for Haryana there no such talks," said Azad.

When asked about AAP leader Sanjay Singh meeting him, Azad said as Member of Parliament we keep meeting each other so nothing new should be read about. Both Azad and Singh are members of the Rajya Sabha.

When specifically asked in the Press conference about the Congress-AAP alliance for Delhi Lok Sabha seats, Azad said he is not aware as he is not the AICC incharge of Delhi.

In very defensive answer about alliances, Azad said the Congress is always open to alliances as the party has done it in Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Jammu & Kashmir.

According to the sources, Singh proposed 6:3:1 seat sharing in Haryana in which



'Alliance talks between AAP and Congress has been called off following disagreement'

Congress would fight from six seats, while the Jannayak Janata Party (JJP) would field its candidates for three seats and one candidate would be fielded by the AAP.

Continued on Page 7

CAPSULE

NAMO TV TO FOLLOW SILENCE PERIOD: EC
New Delhi: NaMo TV, sponsored by the BJP, cannot display 'election matter' during the silence period prescribed in the electoral law in a particular phase of the poll, the Election Commission has concluded.

MAOISTS STRIKE ON POLL EVE: KILL POLL OFFICIAL Phulbani (Odisha): The Maoists struck on the eve of second phase election in Odisha, gunning down a woman poll official and setting ablaze two poll vehicles and a motorbike on way to booths on Wednesday.

U-TURN: RAVAN WON'T FIGHT AGAINST MODI
New Delhi: Month after he announced to contest against PM Narendra Modi in Varanasi, Bhim Army founder Chandrashekhar Azad aka Ravan on Wednesday rescinded his decision, saying his outfit will support the SP-BSP-RLD alliance.

Yogi takes lunch at Dalit's house

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath continued to send out subtle political messages on the second day of his three-day curfew on campaigning in the ongoing Lok Sabha election by visiting a Dalit's home for lunch and meeting triple talaq victims in Ayodhya on Wednesday.

Yogi offered prayers at Hanumangarhi temple and recited Hanuman Chalisa. In the evening, he went for darshan of Ram Lalla and then took part in aarti on the banks of the Saryu river.

The Chief Minister started his Ayodhya sojourn by visiting the house of Mahavir, a Dalit, at Suthati Malin Basti and had food with the family members.

Mahavir's wife Savitri said that the visit of the Chief Minister to their house was like god paying them a visit.

Meets triple talaq victims in Ayodhya

"We did not have enough to offer. The Chief Minister had roti and sabzi and later took gur (jaggery) and water," she said. Savitri told reporters that the Chief Minister was pained at the condition of her house and offered help to get it repaired.

Before lunch, Yogi met a six-year-old girl, Neha Soni, and took her on his lap after which the girl came up with several innocent questions.

When the Chief Minister asked whether she was afraid of coming there, the girl said where was the fear when Yogi was there. She even sang a song, much to the amusement of the Chief Minister.

Later, Yogi went to nearby Ashrafi Bhawan on foot and spoke to the people standing in the by-lanes. He also spoke to students and enquired about their studies. He even assured houses to some.

Yogi went to Maniram Das Chhavan to meet Mahant Nriya Gopal Das and later to Digambar Akhada.

The day for the Chief Minister started with meeting triple talaq victim Nazia. Earlier, Nazia along with her sister had met Yogi Adityanath at his official residence in Lucknow and sought financial help.

Meanwhile, Bhojपुरi actor Ravi Kishan met the Chief Minister to seek his blessings before launch of his poll campaign from Gorakhpur.

"I took the blessings of the Gorakshnath temple mahant and Chief Minister of UP before launching my campaign. After his blessing, no one can defeat me now," Kishan said.

The Bhojपुरi actor-singer has been fielded as BJP candidate from Gorakhpur Lok Sabha seat, represented by Yogi



BJP candidate from Gorakhpur, Ravi Kishan, met Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath at the latter's Kalidas Marg official residence in state capital on Wednesday to seek his blessing

Adityanath for five times before he became the Chief Minister of the Uttar Pradesh in March 2017.

However, in the bypoll to the Gorakhpur seat, Samajwadi Party candidate Praveen Nishad, who was supported by Rashtriya Lok Dal and Bahujan Samaj Party, was declared elected, defeating the BJP candidate.

The Chief Minister also met divyang girls at Government Blind College and

enquired about their studies and facilities being provided to them.

On Thursday, the last day of his ban, Yogi is likely to go to Varanasi, the parliamentary constituency of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The Election Commission had banned Yogi from campaigning for 72 hours starting 6 am on Tuesday for delivering a speech which violated the Model Code of Conduct.

Akhilesh asks Kannauj voters to beware of BJP machinations

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav cautioned voters of Kannauj Lok Sabha constituency to be vigilant against Bharatiya Janata Party machinations ahead of polling.

The SP chief's wife Dimple Yadav is seeking re-election from Kannauj for a third time. Kannauj goes to polls in the fourth phase on April 29.

"Ever since the SP defeated the BJP in the Gorakhpur Lok Sabha bypoll in March 2018, (Chief Minister) Yogi Adityanath is keeping a close tab on Kannauj seat," Akhilesh said while addressing an election meeting in support of his wife at Chhibramau on Wednesday.

Exhorting the cadres of Bahujan Samaj Party and Samajwadi Party, Akhilesh said, "Close your ranks and shun differences... Persuade voters of other parties and respect them."

"No one in political circles ever imagined that SP and BSP would agree to join hands and contest election in alliance. The unthinkable has happened, and it has rattled the BJP. So beware of conspiracies of the ruling



SP president Akhilesh Yadav (centre) announcing Poonam Sinha's (left) candidature from Lucknow. Also in picture is MP from Kannauj Dimple Yadav

party," the SP chief cautioned. He added, "BSP chief Mayawati will come to this constituency next week to address a joint rally of alliance leaders at Tirwa in Kannauj district."

Dimple Yadav was first elected unopposed from Kannauj in the Lok Sabha bypoll in June 2012. The seat was vacated by Akhilesh Yadav as he took over as UP Chief Minister in March 2012. Dimple was re-elected from Kannauj in 2014 general election, defeating her nearest rival and BJP's Subrat Pathak by a slender margin of 19,907 votes.

The Samajwadi Party has

not lost from Kannauj, better known as the perfume capital of India, since 1998 and the Yadav family has been holding the seat for the last 20 years.

Both Congress and BJP have won this seat once each, in 1984 and 1996 respectively. Dr Ram Manohar Lohia had also contested parliamentary election from this high-profile constituency and had emerged victorious.

Poonam named SP candidate from Lucknow

Lucknow (PNS): The SP-BSP-RLD alliance on Wednesday announced Poonam Sinha, wife of Congress candidate from Patna Sahib Lok Sabha seat in Bihar Shatrughan Sinha, as its official candidate from Lucknow to challenge Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh. Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav made this announcement at a press conference here on Wednesday. Poonam Sinha will file her nomination papers from Lucknow as SP candidate on Thursday, the last date for filing nominations. Polling for the Lucknow parliamentary seat will be held in the fifth phase on May 6.



NOTICE

My ISC Intermediate Index No. B/8794/130 Year 2012 Mark Sheet has been missed. Mohit P. Rai S/o Shyam Prakash, D-2106, Indira Nagar, Lucknow.

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E-Tender works: Tender Notice No. DYCE-CON-LIN-42-2019
 On behalf of the President of India, Chief Administrative Officer/Con, N. E. Railway, Gorakhpur invites the following E-works Tenders:-

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1	DYCE-CON-LIN-42-2019 Dated-07-05-19	Construction of station building, Signal building, platform, PP Shelter, FOB, circulating area and miscellaneous related work at Paitipur, Munda Gopal, Mahmoodabad, Babupur, Sariya and Shankpur stations including rake handling platform at Mahmoodabad station in connection with doubling of Burhwal-Sitapur section of Lucknow Division of N.E. Railway.	₹ 31,97,67,784.85	₹ 17,48,800/-

Cost of Tender Form: ₹ 10,000/-
Completion Period: 09 Months

● **SI No.-1:-** The last date/time of submission of E-Tender on 07-05-2019 upto 15:00 hrs. and will be opened at 15:30 hrs. on same day in the office of Chief Administrative Officer/Con/North Eastern Railway, Gorakhpur. ● Detailed tender notice, eligibility criteria, terms & conditions is available on website <http://ireps.gov.in> and Tender Notice is also available on website www.ner.indianrailways.gov.in ● In case any disparity arises between Hindi and English version of tender notice, English version will hold good and will be followed.
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18

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PAN Card
6

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of Ministry of Labour
7

MNREGA Job Card
8

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Smart Card
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of Ministry of Labour
9

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11

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12

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Gang issuing fake degrees, marksheets busted; 6 held

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

With the arrest of six persons, including a former employee of Lucknow University, the Lucknow police claimed to have busted a gang duping unsuspecting people by providing fake degrees and mark-sheets at Rs 1 lakh to Rs 1.5 lakh each.

The racketeers had fleeced more than 300 gullible youths by giving them fake marksheets and degrees of Lucknow University, Kanpur University, Delhi University, Awadh University and several other universities. The gang was busted after one Saurabh Yadav of Jankipuram lodged a case with the Hasanganj police and senior officers were assigned the probe.

Those arrested were identified as Khirodhan Prasad aka Gangesh of Gudamba, Nayab Husain of Thakurganj, Ravindra Pratap Singh of Barabanki, Deewan Singh of Indira Nagar, Deepak Tiwari of Madaion and Madhurendra Pandey of Hasanganj.

"The accused had been running the racket for the past several years and had issued over 300 fake marksheets and degrees to unsuspecting persons. The racket was operative on a large scale. We could not find much time to interrogate them. We will quiz them further after seeking court's permission," ASP (trans-Gomti) Amit Kumar said.

He said Ravindra was the principal at a school in Barabanki while Khirodhan had two cases pending against him at



The racketeers had fleeced more than 300 gullible youths by giving them fake marksheets and degrees of Lucknow University, Kanpur University, Delhi University, Awadh University and several other universities

Vikas Nagar police station. Khirodhan was said to be the brain behind the racket while Nayab, who is a peon at a university, was second-in-command. "Khirodhan started practising law after he lost his job at Lucknow

University due to his involvement in a similar fraud several years ago," the ASP said, adding that the police action so far was just the tip of the iceberg.

"The role of several employees of different universities has surfaced in the investigation as of now. The accused have disclosed their names and we are preparing to lay our hands on them," he added.

It surfaced during interrogation that Khirodhan, the mastermind, and his men used to scout for youths desirous of scoring good marks in the exams at undergraduate and post-graduate levels. The miscreants used to eye these youths and lure them with the option to earn fast bucks. The sources said Khirodhan and his men had amassed huge wealth by running the racket. "The gang would prepare the marksheets and degrees using scanners. The marksheets and degrees provided by them looked genuine. The miscreants were helped by employees of the universities. Nayab Husain worked as a peon in the record section of a university and he used to provide inputs to his mentor Khirodhan.

"He used to get Rs 10,000 for each paper he used to steal from the record room," sources said. The ASP said he doubted that the marksheets and degrees issued by the gang were used by job-seekers for getting government jobs.

"As for government jobs, there is a through checking of documents. However, the job-seekers could get away with fake degrees and marksheets in private companies," he added.



Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh, who filed his nomination papers on Tuesday in a bid to retain Lucknow Lok Sabha constituency, take part in a hawan before the inauguration of his election office in Halwasia, Hazratganj, on Wednesday

Sanjay Nishad takes Rajbhar's place in BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

After Suheldeo Bhartiya A Samaj Party (SBSP) chief Om Prakash Rajbhar abandoned ally Bharatiya Janata Party and decided to field candidates in Uttar Pradesh, the BJP started propping up Nishad Party by attaching prominence to its president Sanjay Nishad in poll campaign.

BJP spokesman Manish Dixit said that Sanjay Nishad would accompany Maneka Gandhi during her roadshow in Sultanpur on Thursday. He will also be present at the Sultanpur collectorate where Maneka will file nomination papers. The same day, Nishad will address a rally of the BJP candidate from Machhlishahr, VP Saroj, and later in the evening, address a rally in Varanasi. A senior BJP leader said that members of Nishad Party would be asked to address rallies or accompany BJP leaders where Nishad community was in sizeable number.

Nishads are bracketed with Mallah community whose traditional occupation centres around fishing and rowing boat in rivers. In UP, Nishads are among 17 OBC communi-



ties, who have been demanding Scheduled Caste status. Former Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav had twice sent a proposal to provide SC status to Mallah community but it was stayed by the court.

In UP, seven Nishad castes, namely Manjhwar, Gaur, Turha, Kharot, Kharvar, Beldar and Koli are recognised as

Scheduled Castes while the other sub-castes have been accorded OBC (Other Backward Class) status.

According to an estimate, Nishad community comprises 17 per cent population of the state and a majority of them live in eastern UP.

Nishad Party had joined the BJP as an ally but Sanjay Nishad's son Praveen Nishad joined the BJP and has been fielded from Sant Kabir Nagar. Incidentally, Praveen Nishad is the sitting MP from Gorakhpur, a seat which he had won on SP ticket in the bypoll after Yogi Adityanath resigned from Lok Sabha after being elected to UP Legislative Council on becoming the Chief Minister of the state.

The BJP contested the 2017 Assembly election with SBSP as an ally and its chief Om Prakash Rajbhar was made a Cabinet minister.

In the last two years, BJP and SBSP have enjoyed a blow hot, blow cold relation with Rajbhar intermittently threatening to walk out of the alliance. "Nishad Party is compensating the loss we may suffer from the SBSP decision to field candidates from 25 constituencies," a BJP leader said.

Ajit, Jayant to campaign for alliance

Lucknow (PNS): With the end of polling in the Lok Sabha constituencies that the Rashtriya Lok Dal is contesting, party chief Ajit Singh and his son Jayant Chaudhary will now campaign for SP-BSP-RLD alliance partners in the remaining phases of election.

"Both leaders are chalking out a schedule to address public meetings across Uttar Pradesh. The schedule will be finalised after Thursday when polling in Mathura and adjacent constituencies is over," said RLD national spokesman Anil Dubey. From Mathura seat, RLD candidate Kunwar Narendra Singh is in the fray in the second phase poll. Ajit Singh and Jayant, who contested from Muzaffarnagar and Baghpat respectively, undertook a whirlwind campaign in west UP and were supported by top leaders of SP and BSP.

Dubey said that while the schedule would be finalised by the SP-BSP in consultation with the RLD, Ajit Singh and Jayant Chaudhary were in the list of star campaigners. Meanwhile, RLD state president Masood Ahmad said that BJP star campaigners were using derogatory words against SP-BSP-RLD leaders in their speeches as they knew it that they would be defeated at the hustings.

Man sets neighbour's shanty on fire to settle scores with him

Five huts, including his own, reduced to ashes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

To settle scores, a man allegedly set afire his neighbour's shanty in Aliganj around 1 am on Wednesday. The fire spread to other shanties, rendering the dwellers homeless. The accused's own hut was also gutted in the process.

Mannan Khan of a slum area Near Naveen Galla Mandi in Aliganj, had an enmity with his neighbour Mansharam. "My family members and I were asleep when around 1 am on Wednesday, I woke up to commotion outside my shanty and spotted Mansharam outside. He threw some burning object at my shanty and soon, it went up in smoke. I got nervous but decided to save my family first instead of dousing the fire. As I raised an alarm, other dwellers

joined hands with me and we started rescuing the children who were fast asleep. Five shanties were destroyed before the flames were doused," he said. The police said the shanties of Mannan, Qayyum, Jaleel, Rehmtul Nisa and also of Mansharam were reduced to ashes. However, no casualty was reported, the police said.

The investigation officer said a case was registered against Mansharam on the complaint of Mannan. However, Mannan failed to explain as to why Mansharam played the mischief.

Contrary to his claim, sources said Mannan had also lodged a complaint against Mansharam in the past. "Mansharam is looked as an unscrupulous element in the locality and his neighbours do

not like him to visit their dwellings. He was upset with Mannan over the complaint against him and wanted to settle scores with latter," the police sources said.

Meanwhile, two persons duped a realtor and his colleague in Vibhuti Khand on Wednesday. The accused sold the victims synthetic moissanite instead of diamond and took Rs 2.5 lakh from them. As per reports, the complainants, identified as Nagesh Singh and Vishal Khanna (both of Chinhat), met one Sunil Yadav on April 15. Sunil told them that he could help them in purchasing genuine diamond as he knew a merchant.

"We were taken to a shop in Akriti Tower in Vibhuti Khand where one Sonu showed us several pieces of diamond. We

selected two pieces and paid Rs 1.5 lakh and Rs 1 lakh respectively. Later, we came to know that the diamond pieces were actually synthetic moissanite and worth only Rs 2,000 each," they stated in their complaint.

DUPED

Meanwhile, the debit card of an armyman's wife was cloned and over Rs 41,000 were withdrawn in Cantonment police station area. The complainant, identified as Mata Devi, told the police that she got a message of cash deduction on her mobile phone on April 15. "I was told that the cash was transferred to the bank account of one Nitin. I had my debit card but still the cash was transferred. Also, my husband did not make any transaction," she told the police.

Man set afire by wife for his dark complexion

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

In a bizarre incident, a woman torched her husband as she was unhappy with his dark complexion, in Bareilly on Monday. The accused was arrested after the victim named her for the murderous act in his dying declaration. A case was registered in this regard and the woman was sent to jail.

As per reports, Satyaveer Singh (25) of Khurd Fatehgarh locality of Bareilly was married to Premshree two years back and the couple also had a six-



month-old daughter.

In his dying declaration, the victim said that since his marriage, his wife cursed him for his dark complexion and frequently abused him.

Singh said on Monday afternoon, while he was having

a siesta, Premshree came there and doused him with kerosene. As the husband tried to flee, the wife threw a burning match stick and set him afire.

Singh rushed out of the house calling for help after which some neighbours doused the fire and shifted him to the district hospital and called the police. Station house officer of Khurd Fatehgarh police station, Sahadev Singh, said that Singh's dying declaration was recorded and subsequently his wife was arrested on Tuesday evening.

Congmen sulking over Krishnam's candidature

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

Congress ticket seekers for Lucknow constituency are feeling cheated by party general secretary and UP east in-charge Priyanka Gandhi Vadra after the party announced to field an 'outsider', Acharya Pramod Krishnam, from this prestigious seat to fight against Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh. The leaders, preferring anonymity, maintained that their hopes were dashed as once again the party leadership fielded an outsider and left them to ask the locals to vote for Krishnam.

Krishnam convened a meeting around 4 pm on Wednesday, ostensibly to cool down agitated leaders but failed to reach Lucknow till 8 pm. A press conference called by him at 7 pm also could



not start due to this. Interestingly, some Krishnam supporters uploaded a message in his name on social media on Wednesday afternoon saying that he did not want to indulge in a show strength akin to Rajnath Singh that created a traf-

fic chaos for the locals, particularly schoolchildren, who were stranded for hours in the traffic jam in scorching heat. The message said that Krishnam would keep the filing of his nomination a low key affair by walking from

Salempur House in Kaiserbagh to collectorate and file his papers on Thursday. The move was reportedly made as the Congress candidate was probably aware of little local support.

Reacting to Krishnam's candidature, a former MLA said that Priyanka Gandhi Vadra had said that in the absence of a prominent face, a local leader would be fielded from Lucknow. "Now since Priyanka has given us a 'big face' in the form of Pramod Krishnam, who came at the fifth place in the last election and could manage only 16,000 votes in his hometown Sambhal, we will be compelled to seek vote for him despite knowing that the party has lost the battle before it started." However, Pramod Krishnam exuded confidence of defeating Union Home minister Rajnath Singh.

WEATHER TURNS PLEASANT



Overnight dust storm, overcast skies and some drizzle in the afternoon made the weather pleasant on Wednesday

Only 6 women in fray from Lucknow, Mohanlalganj

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

Among the 41 nominations which have been filed for Lucknow and Mohanlalganj Lok Sabha constituencies till April 17, only six women had filed their papers for these seats. Women activists in the city state that there are several reasons for the discouraging response in the field of politics. They also feel that women candidates should come up with issues which are strong and women-centric.

Among the women who had filed their nominations were Qaiser Jahan, for the 35 Lucknow Lok Sabha constituency and she has retired from the Red Cross Hospital as a government employee. She said that she was contesting elections for the first time. "I have been in the field for long and hence I feel that I will be able to do this job well and help

in removing unemployment and corruption." Incidentally she has never stood for the elections earlier.

Sangeeta Singh, who has been practising at the Supreme Court, Delhi, and is a candidate of the Rashtriya Rashtriyawadi Party (RRP) has filed her nomination for the 35 Lucknow Lok Sabha constituency.

She said that the main aim of her party was to get the poll symbols removed. "The tickets of the parties get sold for huge amounts of money. Our tagline is 'Chehre pe chunav ladein' she said. A native of Gonda and daughter of a petrochemical engineer, Sangeeta has done her law through the self-finance course of Lucknow University and is a former alumna of Isabella Thoburn College. A resident of Mall Avenue, she shuttles between Lucknow and Delhi. This is the first time that

she is standing for elections and she has not even stood for the Bar elections. She said that she had been a social activist and played the biggest role of humanitarianism. The advocate said that she would work for the education and security of women. "A woman can educate her family and there can be no development in the absence of education." On being asked as to what took her so long to come in the election fray she said that with big names around it takes some time to prepare oneself.

Sangeeta said that she had done extensive work in the area of stray animals and dogs. "I have worked for slum dwellers. I am fighting for democracy and good work. I want to do some actual work and I came to fight for my rights," she said.

Neelam Saroj, a housewife from Kakori, filed her nominations from the Bahujan Om

Party for the Mohanlalganj Lok Sabha constituency. She said her main issues were unemployment, education and health. She said that it was important for the housewives to step out. For one who has never fought elections earlier Neelam says there is no fixed time to fight for elections and she chose to do it after her marriage.

Kamala Devi, who had filed her nomination for the Lucknow Lok Sabha constituency, is not even ready to interact with the media preferring that the questions be directed to her aide.

The others who have filed their nominations include Radha Rawat and Rashmi Rawat. Another woman activist, Madhavi Kukreja, admitted that there were not enough women who were joining the political arena. "Women can make a dif-

ference only after the reservation bill for them is passed. It is also important that the bigger political parties field women because then only they can win. I have worked extensively in the rural area and have found that only women backed by men win in the panchayat elections," she said. She further pointed out that it was important that women come forth with issues which help the fairer sex.

When asked about the fact that some of those who may have filed their nominations may not be serious contenders for the job, she said that at least they stepped out for filing their nominations. The former Vice-Chancellor of Lucknow University, Roop Rekha Verma, said that politics in India was becoming dirtier. "You look at the discourses which are being made these days. There are no talks of achievements, argu-

ments and statistics. It's only allegations and dirty language, abuses and creating a rift in the public by raising Dalit issues or Hindu-Muslim ones. This increased criminalisation is not allowing women to enter politics who cannot stoop to this level. There is also the question of resources. There is a likelihood that lesser women will enter politics in the coming days," she said.

Renu Mishra from the organisation, AALI, which works for ensuring the legal rights of the people, said that it was indeed unfortunate that among the 50 per cent of the population which comprised women there were a select few who ventured into politics. She said that those who had stepped out and filed their nominations should be given due credit for the fact that they had the guts to step out and at least make the effort.



(Top) A shobha yatra taken out in Aminabad to mark Mahavir Jayanti on Wednesday. (Above) Women taking part in the procession dancing to celebrate the occasion

Solar lights, bitumen roads in Gomti Nagar Extension soon

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

In a bid to make Gomti Nagar Extension pollution-free, Lucknow Development Authority (LDA) has planned to install solar lights on streets and public places, construct plastic waste-based bitumen road and plant saplings. The residents will be given the option to have solar energy for domestic use or stick to the conventional means.

The LDA administration is taking the initiative to install solar lights on streets and at public places on an experimental basis. If the projects yields desired results and get positive response from the residents, it would be extended to other housing schemes and societies, public places and commercial estates. The solar energy project will be funded by the Central government. The ministry concerned is giving incentive to the government agencies engaged in developing housing schemes and private builders to promote and popularise solar energy for domestic use.

LDA Vice-Chairman PN Singh said that Gomti Nagar Extension had been chosen as it was still in developing stages and it would be one of its most



important projects. Plastic material will be blended with bitumen for road construction. The LDA administration, with the assistance of the Union ministry, will design the solar power grid. LDA chief engineer IS Singh said the solar power energy would be regularly monitored and there would be thorough auditing to derive the consumption of a consumer.

The cost per unit will be decided later on. However, it is expected to be cheaper than conventional energy. The project will be launched in June.

Meanwhile, the LDA v-c has directed the officials concerned to start clearing unwanted vegetation in and around the existing road network in Gomti Nagar Extension. The civic authorities have assured supply of plastic waste to the LDA administration at reasonable rates.

Simran looking forward to savouring kebabs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

Actress Simran Kaur, who was in the city for the second time, said she was looking forward to savouring the mouth-watering kebabs and the famous chaat of Lucknow. The actress was in the city for the promotion of her show 'Aghori'.

She said she loved Lucknow for the beautiful language which the locals speak. "I belong to Delhi and I have not heard in any other city the beautiful manner in which the people of Lucknow speak. Even when the Lucknowites fight, they do it sweetly. The people and culture of Lucknow are so welcoming," she said.

About the show, she said she was excited because it had a different theme. "The show is a love story and explores what if a girl happens to fall in love with a seemingly ordinary man, only to discover later that he is actually an 'Aghori'. The story revolves around the lives of Kamakshi and Ishan who fall in love with each other and vow to spend their lives together. But she is oblivious to the world that Ishan is an 'Aghori'. When Kamakshi finds out Ishan's truth, it brings the twist to the story," she added.



About her character, Simran said: "The concept of the show is unheard of, hasn't been explored on Indian television and the intrigue surrounding the show are what drew me to it. Kamakshi is a strong and level-headed person who falls in love and gets married to someone who she isn't aware is an 'Aghori'. Little does she know that her life is about to take an unusual turn," she added.

She admitted that the mere mention of 'Aghoris'

triggers an image of fear, intrigue, mystique and bafflement in our minds, simply because very little is known about this exclusive cult of sadhus. "One's instant visualisation of an 'Aghori' is that of an ash-smeared man with intense eyes, and sporting dreadlocks. But do you know that a man who looks no different than you or me, has a day job and seems well-adjusted socially could also be an 'Aghori'. They are people who could be healers," she added.

Easter Triduum begins with Maundy Thursday

Lucknow (PNS): The traditional Easter Triduum (three days) begins with 'Holy Thursday', also called 'Maundy Thursday'. Father Donnie Desouza from St Cathedral Church said a special holy mass would be held in the evening during which Bishop Gerald John Mathias would wash the feet of 12 church members following the example of Jesus Christ, who did this act of love and humility before his crucifixion.

The Catholic Church also considers this day as the day of the institution of Catholic Priesthood and of Holy Eucharist. "Good Friday will be observed on April 19 to commemorate the crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ on the cross for the salvation of mankind. The main ceremonies are to be held in the evening hours with the 'Way of the Cross' and 'Passion of Lord Jesus Christ' to be held the evening to correspond to the time when Jesus died on the cross," he explained.

He said that Holy Saturday (April 20) was a day of silence, hope and expectation for Christians as they await the resurrection of Jesus. While the morning is spent in silent prayers, the solemn Easter vigil will be held on Saturday night in various churches across the city, especially St Joseph's Cathedral in Hazratganj.

CITY BRIEFS

DIOS NOTICE TO SCHOOL

The district inspector of schools (DIOS) has served a notice on La Martiniere Girls' College for increasing the fee by 14 per cent. According to DIOS Mukesh Singh, a complaint was given by parents of a student. "We have also put a stop to the fee hike since no proposal to that effect was forwarded to us by the school," he said. Under the state government's directions, schools can increase fees only as per a formula worked out for the same.

TRAINING

Turtle Survival Alliance India Programme, in association with Uttar Pradesh Forest and Wildlife department, conducted a capacity-building training for turtle trade control for 208 frontline forest department staff from 15 divisions, including three turtle trade sensitive zones of UPFWD, through four one-day trainings in respective areas. The main purpose was to provide the frontline staff with the skills of turtle identification as well as provide primary care and

legal support in the event of confiscations. The trainings benefited forest staff from Kanpur, Kanpur Dehat, Unnao, Lucknow, Amethi, Barabanki, Sultanpur, Ayodhya, Ambedkar Nagar, Fatehpur, Etawah, Mainpuri, Auriaya, Farrukhabad and Agra. The project was supported by the Auckland Zoo. The inaugural training workshop on turtle trade control was aimed at providing information, support and training to rangers and frontline staff for turtle trade control. It was held at the Nawabganj Bird Sanctuary. A total of 68 forest frontline staff from Lucknow, Unnao and Kanpur actively participated in the workshop.

PINK BUS SERVICES

The Lucknow region of Uttar Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation has started pink bus services for Varanasi and Haridwar. Regional manager, UPSRTC, PK Bose said they were getting 20 per cent load for Varanasi and 50 per cent for Haridwar.

He said they had 17 services of these buses to various destinations from Lucknow. He admitted that the load factor was not very high currently and that they were expecting better results in the coming days.

PANAMA DISEASE

Banana tissue culture companies are seeking MoUs with CISH for technology incorporating the protection against Panama disease at nursery stage. CISH director Shailendra Rajan said that the technology developed by Indian Council of Agricultural Research could play a major role in the control and spread of the devastating disease and causing loss of several crores of rupees. Farmers are now well informed and discard the planting material of the company not performing well and plants are attacked by the disease. Banana plant tissue culture companies are seriously thinking about making their plants immune at an early stage with the help of ICAR Fusicot technology.

100 'Gauraiya Mitras' felicitated

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

The Wildlife Institute at Lucknow University felicitated 100 'Gauraiya Mitras' at a programme organised at the institute on Tuesday. Coordinator, Wildlife Institute, Amita Kanaujia said that these 'Gauraiya Mitras' had helped in an extensive manner by sending emails on the count of sparrows during the census held on March 20 last.

She said that the 'Gauraiya Mitras' were given one sparrow house and certificate each. "There are more than 7,000 sparrows in the city as per the sparrow census carried out by the Wildlife Institute of India and the Biodiversity Lab of Lucknow University," she said.

She further pointed out that the increase in the number of sparrows could be attributed to the fact that there have been a lot of efforts which have been made in the direction of the conservation of sparrows. "We are making a database



of all the people who have responded to us. These people have made a pro active endeavour towards the conservation of the sparrows," she added.

She said that since 2009, an appeal was being made to the general public every year to count sparrow in and around their garden, house on March

20. "For that a counting form was distributed every year with awareness material. This activity forces the public to think about the sparrow if it is not found around their garden. Hence, people were forced to make efforts to bring them back," she said. The count showed 2,503 in 2013, 3,362 in

2014, 5,637 in 2015, 6,036 in 2016 sparrows and 7,066 in 2017.

She said that in a study they had conducted recently on sparrows in Lucknow showed many areas appeared as a dense, highly developed core, surrounded by irregular rings of diminishing development.

Two members of an inter-state gang of gun-runners arrested by STF

Huge cache of firearms recovered

PNS ■ ALLAHABAD

The Special Task Force (STF) team in association with the Daraganj police claimed to have arrested two members of an inter-state gang of smugglers and recovered a huge stock of firearms manufactured in Madhya Pradesh from their possession. The culprits used to supply firearms in Allahabad and its adjoining districts with the help of their associates.

Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Navendu Kumar said that the STF team and the Daraganj police led by station house officer (SHO) Vineet Singh laid a trap near the Lallu tent house godown and nabbed two persons identified as Rajendra Kumar, a resident of Jhansi and



Shambhulal, a resident of Naini area. Seven semi-automatic pistols of .32 bore, seven magazines, a .38 bore revolver, several mobile phones and some cash were recovered from them. The arrested culprits said that their gang had around seven persons in it. While giving details they disclosed to the police that they used to pool

cash for purchasing firearms from Bhola Jutt, a resident of Badwan district in Madhya Pradesh. They used to purchase a pistol at a price ranging from ₹8,000 to 10,000 and a revolver at a price ranging from ₹6,000 to ₹7,000. The gang members used to bring these firearms to Allahabad and sell a pistol for a price

ranging from ₹25,000 to ₹30,000 while a revolver for a price ranging from ₹15,000 to ₹20,000 to their prospective customers. While Shambhulal ran a bamboo shop in Naini area, Rajendra owned a shop where he sold construction materials and also took contracts for desilting canals, the ASP added.

Dalit girl gangraped

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

Three youths were accused of raping a Dalit girl after spiking her drinks at a hotel in Naka. Police registered a case a day after probing the allegations and securing a CCTV footage showing the prime accused with the girl.

ASP, West, Vikas Tripathi said the prime accused Afzal had been arrested and the hunt was on for his aides. He said the girl had been friends with Afzal for the last three years. On Tuesday night, Afzal took the girl to the hotel and raped her. Later, his accomplices reached there and they also raped her. He said the police were raiding the houses of the accused. The police recovered a footage in which Afzal was seen entering the hotel, he added.

Recording brain activity among patients of depression!

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

Dr Shrikant Srivastava, head of Geriatric Mental Health, King George's Medical University, and his team of research workers (Anamika Srivastava and Soumyajit Sanyal) are currently involved in understanding the changes happening in the brains of depressed older adults, using electroencephalography (EEG) brain mapping.

"The study is first of its kind in India though EEG has been used primarily to diagnose epilepsy. EEG measures the electrical activity of the brain and this is carried out by placing wires on the head," doctors said. A senior doctor said that electrical wave patterns over the surface of the head as measured by EEG are commonly referred to as brain waves. "Currently, two studies

on brainwave pattern are underway on patients of depression. The first one aims to study the changes in brainwaves, taste thresholds and memory functions in cases of depression before and after treatment. The department is undertaking this research considering the outcomes of various researches stating that drugs administration overtime decreases the thresholds for sweet, salt and bitter sensations," he added. This study also explores any related mental changes such as memory associated with pre-treatment and post-treatment stages.

The second study has been submitted with the purpose to explore brainwaves profile and mental functions like memory status among greater age range of 30 years to 70 years among people down with depression and their healthy counterparts.

World Heritage Day: Free entry to ASI monuments

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

There will be free entry to the Archaeological Survey of India monuments on World Heritage Day to be celebrated on Thursday. A senior ASI official told this reporter that no ticket prices were being realised across the country as a part of the celebrations.

He said that they were encouraging cashless transac-

tion among the visitors. "For every domestic visitor, Rs 5 will be discounted if cashless transaction is opted for. The foreign visitors will be given a rebate of Rs 50 in case of cashless purchase of tickets," he said.

Commenting on the number of people visiting the ASI monuments, he said it was almost the same as in the past years, with only a slight increase or decrease due to

changes in weather.

Asked whether ASI was making any efforts to popularise the monuments, he said the Tourism department had extensively publicised the 'Adopt a Heritage' scheme under which the Residency of Lucknow was also listed.

"However, the monument has not been adopted so far," he said, adding that there were a total of 59-60 monuments

under ASI. "Conservation of monuments is a continuous process. However, people often write on the walls and spoil the exteriors," he pointed out.

Amongst the most popular monuments of the city include Bada Imambara, Chhota Imambara, and Residency. World Heritage Day will be celebrated with several programmes by school children in the city.



Lucknow (PNS): As many as 168 musicians from 17 countries and 13 Indian states have assembled in Lucknow to perform together on April 20 in a concert to be hosted by City Montessori School. The combined talents of Vienna University Philharmonic Orchestra,

India National Youth Orchestra and Choir and musicians from the Dominican Republic, will perform a selection of inspiring compositions, including pieces from Borodin's Polovetsian Dances, Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker Ballet, and Grieg's Peer Gynt suite.

Gehlot in soup over comment on Prez



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Wednesday landed in a huge controversy after its senior leader and Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot said Ram Nath Kovind was made the President of India because of caste considerations.

While the BJP called the comment "anti-Dalit, anti-poor and anti-constitutional" and demanded an apology and strong action, Gehlot said it was unfortunate that his comments during a Press conference have been misquoted by a few media houses. Gehlot told reporters that ahead of the 2017 Assembly elections in Gujarat, the BJP was worried about its chances of forming the Government and the choice of Presidential candidate was made with votes in mind.

"People even say that Ram Nath Kovind was made

President considering the Gujarat assembly elections in 2017. I was reading an article. He (Prime Minister Narendra Modi) was afraid that he was not going to form the government in Gujarat. BJP chief Amit Shah might have given him suggestion after which it was decided to make Ram Nath Kovind the president," Gehlot had said.

"(Lal Krishna) Advani was left out though he had to become the President. People of the country had expectation that he (Advani) will get the honour which he deserved but was deprived. Though it is BJP's internal issue, I am discussing it because I read an article," the Rajasthan chief minister added.

Besides demanding an apology from Gehlot, the BJP urged the Election Commission to take cognisance of the matter and take

action against him. "It is very unfortunate that Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, a senior Congress leader who himself is on a constitutional post made casteist remark against the President, who is the custodian of the Constitution," BJP spokesperson GVL Narasimha Rao said.

"A very low attack by the Congress against the highest constitutional functionary in this country," the BJP said at a press conference held in Delhi within hours of Gehlot's self goal.

"Is the Congress against a person who comes from a poor background and belongs to the Dalit community? President Kovind is a highly accomplished individual. This is a condemnable statement. We expect apology and strong action," the BJP's GVL Narasimha Rao said. Rao said the remark showed "anti-Dalit" mindset of the Congress.

Seeking to damage control following an outrage, Gehlot said: "I have the greatest regards for the President of India, and personally for Ramnathji whom I have met in person and highly impressed with his simplicity and humbleness," Gehlot said in his clarification after the outrage.

The Chief Minister's Office said it was not Gehlot's personal opinion, he was quoting from an article he had read.

EC forms high-level committee to review biopic on PM Modi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Following the directions of the Supreme Court, the Election Commission (EC) on Wednesday set up a high-level committee to review the biopic on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and furnish its recommendation by April 18. For its part, the BJP wrote a letter to the EC over a biopic allegedly being made on West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and demanded the Commission to review the movie before its release in a similar way the biopic of Modi was reviewed.

"This is to draw your attention to the news in the media that a biopic allegedly of Mamata Banerjee will be released on May 3, 2019 [named Baghini]," the BJP said in the letter.

According to EC, senior Deputy Election Commissioner Umesh Sinha, Deputy Election Commissioners Sandeep Saxena and Chandra Bhushan Kumar, Senior Principal Secretary KF Wilfred, Director General Dhirendra Ojha and Delhi Chief Electoral Officer Ranbir Singh will be the member of the committee which will review the Modi biopic. The EC has asked the producers of the film to arrange for a screening for a committee set up for the purpose.

The Supreme Court on Monday directed the Commission to watch the full biopic on Modi and take an informed decision on banning its pan India release by April 19. A bench headed

by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi also directed the poll panel to submit its decision to the court in a sealed cover and said it will consider the matter on April 22.



The Modi biopic, starring Vivek Oberoi and directed by Omung Kumar, tells the story of PM Modi's rise to power from his humble beginnings. Acting on the complaints of political parties, including the Congress, the poll panel had asserted that any biopic material with the potential to disturb the level playing field should not be displayed in areas where Model Code of Conduct was in force.

On the other hand, the biopic on West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee "Baaghini" is being released on May 3. The EC has asked for a report from West Bengal Chief Electoral Officer over the biopic. "BJP requests the Election Commission of India and its representative in West Bengal the CEO to review the said biopic before release, on similar lines that was done by the EC in the case of another biopic depicting Narendra Modi," the letter read.

NaMo TV will have to follow silence period as per model code: EC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission (EC) has made it clear that the NaMo TV will have to comply with the 48-hour 'election silence period' ahead of every phase of voting. "Live coverage

Section 126 of the Representation of the People Act "prohibits" display of any "election matter" by means of "cinematograph, television or other similar apparatus", 48 hours before the hour fixed for conclusion of poll in a particular constituency.

This phase is called the 'silence period' as it allows a voter to make up his or her mind on whom to vote without being influenced by political campaigning. Section 126 is not applicable on the print media.

The direction, sources said, was issued to bring clarity on the applicability of 'silence period' on NaMo TV.

On Thursday last week, the EC had concluded that since NaMo TV is sponsored by the BJP, all recorded programmes displayed on the platform should be pre-certified by media certification and monitoring committee of Delhi and all political publicity contents being displayed without pre-certification should be removed immediately.

After the Congress filed a complaint with the poll panel about the channel disturbing the level playing field, the EC had asked the Delhi CEO to file a report on the issue.

Earlier, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting told the poll panel that it was an advertising platform that did not require a license from the ministry. The Delhi CEO had approved the logo of NaMo TV, which the BJP said is part of the NaMo App that it owns, but did not "certify" the content as it contained the old speeches of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Bhim Army chief's U-turn, says will support gathbandhan

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Having asserted to contest against Prime Minister Narendra Modi from Varanasi, Bhim Army chief Chandrashekhar Azad on Wednesday made a U turn saying his outfit will support the SP-BSP alliance so that the Dalit votes remain intact to defeat the BJP.

Chandrashekhar's remarks comes a few days after Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati termed him a BJP agent and accused him of dividing Dalit votes.

The Dalit group's founder also said the Bhim Army will support the SP-BSP alliance if it fields Satish Chandra Mishra, Mayawati's general secretary and Brahmin face of the BSP, from the Varanasi seat.

Earlier, the Bhim Army chief had accused Mishra of misleading Mayawati and conspiring against the Dalit group. "I have decided not to contest from Varanasi because I do not want that my decision should strengthen the BJP or Modi in anyway. We all want to defeat the BJP," he said.

On Mayawati's criticism of him, he said, "Our own people are calling us agents of the BJP, but I still want her to become prime minister."

At an event to mark BR Ambedkar Jayanti in Madhya



Pradesh's Mhow on April 14, he had said that the Bhim Army and not Mayawati was the "real well-wisher" of Dalits.

Chandrashekhar said that if the SP-BSP alliance fielded Mishra from Varanasi, they will also be able to get some upper caste votes.

He had earlier attacked Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav "for giving promotion to officers who inflicted atrocities on dalits".

"His (Akhilesh) father says in Parliament that he wants Modi to become prime minister again. They are agents of the BJP, not me. They call me an agent for questioning them.

Yes, I am an agent of B R Ambedkar... If my own people were not in my way, I would have shown you (Akhilesh) that if we can vote you down to power, we can pull you down too," he had said.

Cong: Modi Govt protecting those involved in DeMo scam

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Wednesday accused the Modi Government of "protecting" those involved in illegal exchange of money post-demonetisation by not ordering a probe into video tapes released by the party even as it put forth another set of clips showing people involved in the "loot" claiming proximity to the powers-that-be.

Simultaneously, the party also accused the Centre of targeting opposition leaders by using agencies like the Income Tax department and Enforcement Directorate. It said the people of India will give a befitting reply to the BJP in these elections.

Senior party leader Kapil Sibal asked why the "chowkidar" (the watchman) was "asleep" when all this happened. He alleged the absence of any investigation into the videos given as "proof" indicated that "those involved in this loot are being protected". Prime Minister often refers to himself as "chowkidar" (the watchman) emphasising his tough stand on corruption.

"It now appears that the decision to demonetise may have helped criminals to monetise by looting the treasury and the poor," Sibal claimed. Those who have collaborated with corruption cannot pretend to be clean, he told a press conference, where he played the

WHY THE CHOWKIDAR WAS ASLEEP WHEN ALL THIS HAPPENED, ALLEGED KAPIL SIBAL

fresh videos purportedly showing how huge amount of money was exchanged in connivance with bank officials and some others close to the people in power.

He, however, did not authenticate the videos and there was no immediate comment available from the BJP or the government. The party released similar videos on March 26 and April 9.

Sibal alleged that in the April 9 "expose", the party had indicated the alleged involvement of one Rahul Ratharekar, a field assistant, and sought to prove his identity through his identity card, which was seen in the videos released that day.

He claimed that soon after the videos were released on April 9, the Cabinet Secretariat issued a statement claiming that "Rahul Ratharekar had been a Constable level employee of the Cabinet Secretariat but was dismissed in June, 2017 (after 5 years of service) on suspicion of his role in exchange of old currency notes, post-

demonetisation".

"This statement clearly demonstrates that the expose made on the scam, as reflected in the videos shown on March 26, 2019 and April 9, 2019, is genuine and the events seen in the video reflect the manner in which these exchanges took place. "The involvement of government functionaries, bankers and state authorities clearly demonstrate a conspiracy to loot the treasury in a manner never seen before," he alleged.

When asked about the IT and ED raids, Sibal claimed that BJP is "flooded" with money and yet authorities are targeting the Opposition which is facing a cash "drought". "We all know that if any party is flooded with money, it is the BJP. The opposition is going through a drought period. And who is being targeted, those who are suffering from drought and those who are flooded are not being targeted. That's the beauty of Indian democracy and this government," Sibal said.

Election officials had Tuesday held searches at the residence of DMK leader Kanimozhi in Tuticorin in south Tamil Nadu from where she is contesting. Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala alleged that motivated I-T raids is the only tool left with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and said the people can see through this.

LS elections: 41K para forces will be deployed in Bengal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A contingent of 41 battalions (41,000 personnel) of Central paramilitary forces will be deployed in West Bengal for the conduct of the Parliamentary polls in West Bengal for the remaining 40 seats in six phases.

The polls for two seats were held in the first phase on April 11. For three seats, it will be held on Thursday in the second phase. The significant deployment comes in the backdrop of reports of violence in the past elections, officials said, adding the number of the forces is the maximum to have been deployed in the State.

The State has a total of 42 Parliamentary constituencies and elections are being held in a staggered manner in seven phases.

Elections to two constituencies was held in phase one on April 11 with 8,400 paramilitary men on the ground for conduct of the polls in Coochbehar and Alipurduar, while three seats will go to polls on Thursday in the second phase. The state will have seven-phased polls with the elections ending on May 19.

For polls in three seats of Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling and Raiganj on Thursday, as many



as 19,400 personnel are deployed for the conduct of free and fair polls.

The idea behind significant deployment of Central forces is 85 to 90 per cent of the polling booths in the State are covered by the paramilitary forces to check any incident of voter intimidation, booth attack or looting of EVMs as was witnessed the panchayat polls held in the State last year and the Assembly polls in 2016.

In view of the past trends, a number of polling booths have been declared sensitive from the standpoint of possible violence and suspicion of distribution of poll inducements, officials said.

About 2.7 lakh Central paramilitary forces are being mobilized for the conduct of Lok Sabha polls that began on April 11 and will end on May 19. The counting of votes is scheduled for May 23.

Congress leader Chaturvedi miffed over reinstating 'lumpens' in party

New Delhi: A day before the second phase of elections, Congress faced an embarrassment from within as a senior spokesperson took to social media to criticise the party leadership. Congress national spokesperson Priyanka Chaturvedi on Wednesday expressed her displeasure after her party decided to reinstate eight leaders who had allegedly "threatened" her at a press conference in Mathura recently.

"Deeply saddened that lumpen goons get preference in the party over those who have given their sweat and blood," Chaturvedi said while retweeting the Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee letter suspending action against the accused. The leaders, who reportedly made a ruckus out of the press briefing, were reinstated by Congress General Secretary incharge of Western UP Jyotiraditya Scindia on the grounds of apology tendered.

"Having faced brickbats and abuse across board for the party but yet those who threatened me within the party getting away with not even a rap on their knuckles is unfortunate," she said. The UPCC letter, mentioned Chaturvedi's complaint about "undignified behaviour" by eight leaders at press conference regarding Rafale deal. In the letter, the eight leaders were told not to do anything in the near future that will tarnish the party's image.

Twitter takes down Yogi's controversial tweet on EC's request

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Two tweets by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath with communal overtones have been taken down by Twitter following a directive from the Election Commission. The tweets posted on April 5 had referred to the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) as a "green virus".

The IUML had moved the commission against the tweets and had urged it to block Adityanath's twitter account.

"The tweets have been removed from the timeline of the Twitter account of the UP CM," an official said.

A message in place of the tweets reads, "This Tweet from @myogiadityanath has been withheld in India in response to a legal demand."

The development comes after the EC Monday imposed a 72-hour campaigning ban on the chief minister for making communal remarks at a recent election meeting in Meerut.

The ban came into force from Tuesday morning.

"If the Congress, the SP and the BSP have faith in Ali, then we too have faith in Bajrang Bali," Adityanath had said at the rally, attracting the ire of the EC.

He had also been making the "green virus" remark at election rallies across Uttar Pradesh.

Social networking platforms Twitter, WhatsApp and Facebook had removed more than 500 posts, advertisements, accounts and other objectionable content found to be violating the model code of conduct (MCC), following directions from the EC, between April 10 and 11.

"Facebook - 468 posts were reported and removed. The posts included violations of MCC and voter misinformation. One post from Karnataka, two posts from Assam and the remaining from Telangana. 32 ads active in Telangana were removed," the EC had said on April 11.

Experts brainstorm outcome of Sea Vigil exercise

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

All the stakeholders in maritime security including the Indian Navy and several other agencies conducted a brainstorming exercise over the outcome of the 'Sea Vigil' exercise — the first-of-its-kind multi-agency drill covering the entire 7,516 km-long Indian coastline and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

The debriefing was held on Tuesday after the Sea Vigil drill was conducted on January 22 and 23 in which 13 coastal States and Union Territories along with all maritime agencies participated to check the efficacy of maritime security and surveillance in the seas.

Nearly 150 ships, 40 aircraft and a number of other strategic assets of the Navy and Coast Guard were part of the exercise which, according to

the Navy, was "unprecedented" in its scale and size. Navy officials said here on Wednesday the debriefing on the exercise was held on Tuesday during which significant results achieved in the course of the two-day drill were deliberated upon.

The debriefing was chaired by Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff Vice Admiral Murlidhar Sadashiv Pawar, and was attended by top functionaries of the Navy, Indian Coast Guard and concerned union ministries, agencies and representatives of the coastal states.

"He complimented the strong inter-agency coordination and interoperability achieved during the exercise and reiterated the need for flexibility and agility to deal with security challenges," Navy Spokesperson Captain DK Sharma said here.

Ex-Kolkata CP: I was targeted by CBI in chit fund scam

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former Kolkata Police Commissioner Rajeev Kumar alleged in the Supreme Court that he was targeted by CBI in the Saradha Chit fund case due to "mala fide intent" and "conflict of interest" of former interim CBI director M Nageshwara Rao as his family members were under the scanner post-demonetisation.

Kumar alleged that post demonetisation in November 2016, investigation was initiated into some shell companies that prima facie were involved in receiving huge deposits and a FIR was registered.

During the probe of shell companies, role of one firm Agela Mercantiles Pvt Ltd came under the scanner for collecting money from public unauthorisedly, he said, alleging that during further investigation of the case names of wife and daughter of Rao have come to light and the matter is being further probed. "The mala fide intent of the

petitioner/CBI herein especially in light of the fact that February 3, 2019, a Sunday, was the last day in office of the interim CBI Director, is writ large on account of the conflict of interest, in the instant matter," Kumar said in his 89-page affidavit.

It said that after the demonetisation, on receipt of information, the West Bengal Police initiated investigation into some shell companies that prima facie appeared to be actively involved in a scam, wherein these companies were receiving huge sums of deposits.

"Taking due cognizance, a FIR was registered in this regard, being Bowbazar...Dated January 27, 2017. That, during the investigation into the said case, role of one company, namely Agela Mercantiles Pvt Ltd (AMPL) came under the scanner in connection with various dubious transactions and also for collecting money deposits from the public unauthorisedly," it said.



Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Portuguese Minister for National Defence João Gomes Cravinho at South Block in New Delhi on Wednesday PTI

FARM DISTRESS, DEVELOPMENT, NATIONALISM TAKE LEAD

Western Uttar Pradesh will be a test case in the second phase of the general elections on April 18 when polling will be held for 95 Lok Sabha seats. There are serious farmers issues at stake there, yet they could be subsumed by the discourse on nationalism. Across the country, there are other constituencies where farm distress will be a factor, like the Marathwada region, or backward Raiganj in West Bengal, where agrarian crisis is a reality. The question in Srinagar will be about keeping the separatists at bay. In the 2017 by-elections, which former Jammu & Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah won, the voting percentage was an abysmal 7.2 per cent, the lowest ever recorded till then for a Lok Sabha election. The big story will be in Tamil Nadu — polls to all Lok Sabha seats will be held in a single phase. Right now, it is a bipolar election — between the AIADMK and DMK. The subplot will be provided by the election results — to see whether either the UPA or the NDA has been able to get a toehold in the State

FOLLOWING ARE SOME OF THE KEY CONSTITUENCIES THAT WILL GO TO POLLS TODAY

MAHARASHTRA	UTTAR PRADESH	TAMIL NADU	KARNATAKA	BIHAR
<p>NANDED SITTING MP: Ashok Shankarrao Chavan, Congress KEY CANDIDATES: Ashok Chavan (Congress), Chikhalkar Pratap Govindrao (BJP), Abdul Samad (Samajwadi Party) MAIN ISSUES: This is an economically backward portion in the Marathwada region, where farm distress and water scarcity are main issues. Even though this is not a reserved constituency, the Scheduled Castes population has a significant vote base</p> <p>AMRAVATI SITTING MP: Anandrao Adsul, Shiv Sena KEY CANDIDATES: Anandrao Adsul (Shiv Sena) and Navneet Kaur Rana (Yuva Swabhimani Party), supported by the Congress-NCP alliance MAIN ISSUES: Farm distress, farmers' suicides and water scarcity. This is a reserved constituency in which Buddhist Dalits wield significant influence</p>	<p>BULANDSHAHR SITTING MP: Bhola Singh, BJP KEY CANDIDATES: Bhola Singh (BJP) and Yogesh Verma (BSP), candidate for the SP-BSP-RLD, and Bansil Lal Pahadia (Congress) MAIN ISSUES: This is a reserved constituency for the SCs. Farm-related issues have a major role here. Bulandshahr is also a communally sensitive area and a campaign that focuses on this could find takers among voters</p> <p>MATHURA SITTING MP: Hema Malini, BJP KEY CANDIDATES: Hema Malini (BJP), Narendra Singh (RLD) candidate for the SP-BSP-RLD and Mahesh Pathak (Congress) MAIN ISSUES: The strong nationalistic narrative associated with the Government of PM Narendra Modi finds resonance in this constituency. It got a fillip following the Balakot air strike. However, that does not overshadow issues related to farmers — the problems of the sugar mills are well known</p>	<p>KARUR SITTING MP: M Thambi Durai, AIADMK KEY CANDIDATES: M Thambi Durai (AIADMK) and S Jothimani (Congress) MAIN ISSUES: This is a textile hub but suffers from poor industrial development and an absence of good road connectivity. Industrial pollution is caused by textile dyeing units. Problems are added by water scarcity</p>	<p>BANGALORE NORTH SITTING MP: DV Sadananda Gowda, BJP KEY CANDIDATES: DV Sadananda Gowda (BJP) and Krishna Byre Gowda (Congress) MAIN ISSUES: Development issues take centre stage in this constituency with a large number of electors — infrastructure, public transport, sanitation and drinking water. The issue of job opportunities is also likely to play a part in the election</p>	<p>PURNEA SITTING MP: Santosh Kumar Kushwaha, JD(U) KEY CANDIDATES: Santosh Kumar Kushwaha JD(U) and Uday Singh alias Pappu Singh (Congress), who is the candidate for the Congress-RJD combine in Bihar MAIN ISSUES: Issues of development could be overshadowed by caste and nationalism issues. The contest could see clash between Hindutva politics of BJP and Muslim-Yadav vote bank of the Congress-RJD candidate, who is a Rajput</p>
		JAMMU & KASHMIR	HASSAN	WEST BENGAL
		<p>SRINAGAR SITTING MP: Farooq Abdullah, National Conference KEY CANDIDATES: Farooq Abdullah (National Conference), Sheikh Khalid Jehangir (BJP) and Agha Syed Mohsin (PDP) MAIN ISSUES: The issue on test here will be democracy and India. A bypoll in 2017 had registered a mere 7.2% voter turnout to elect Farooq Abdullah, lowest ever for an election</p>	<p>HASSAN SITTING MP: HD Deve Gowda, JD(S) KEY CANDIDATES: Prajwal Revanna (JDS) and A Manju (BJP) MAIN ISSUES: BJP candidate A Manju joined the BJP from the Congress party recently which makes the contest interesting. The constituency is dominated by Vokkaligas, who will be looking for support from other communities. Hassan is located along the Cauvery basin and is rich in cash crops. Naturally, the politics of the region is also determined by water availability</p>	<p>RAIGANJ SITTING MP: Mohammad Salim, CPI(M) KEY CANDIDATES: Mohammad Salim (CPI(M)), Deboshree Chaudhury (BJP), Deepa Dasmunshi (Congress) and Kanaialal Agarwal (TMC) MAIN ISSUES: It has nearly 50% Muslim population and there is possibility of communal polarisation. However, Salim is keen to keep political discourse on development and agrarian issues</p>

Drought trouble for BJP-Sena

TN RAGHUNTHWA ■ MUMBAI

With absolutely no wave in the air and severe drought conditions spelling trouble for the ruling Sena-BJP alliance, the Opposition Congress-NCP alliance smells a real opportunity to improve vastly upon its miserable 2014 tally of two in the second phase of polls for 10 Lok Sabha seats in Maharashtra scheduled for Thursday.

Like in the case of seven constituencies of eastern Maharashtra that went to polls a week ago, the ten poll-bound constituencies — six of which fall in Marathwada, three in Vidarbha region and one in western Maharashtra — have been reeling under one of worst agrarian crises that the state has witnessed in recent decades, a situation that has made matters very difficult for the ruling saffron alliance.

Though it attempted to ease the farmers' distress through its Rs 34,022 crore loan waiver scheme, the BJP-led saffron alliance has lost the perception battle against the Opposition which has made agrarian crisis a major issue in the polls. No wonder that there are not many takers for chief minister Devendra Fadnis' claim that the saffron alliance government has waived farm loans amounting to nearly Rs 24,000 crore and benefitting 51 lakh farmers (out of the total 89 lakh beneficiaries).

Notwithstanding the claims that the Maharashtra government has extended relief to the affected farmers, the suicides by farmers are continuing unabated in Vidarbha and Marathwada regions. More than 300 debt-ridden farmers have committed



suicide during the three months of the current year. With the Modi magic not working on ground and anti-incumbency factor weighing it down, the BJP and Shiv Sena — which had collectively won eight out of ten seats in the 2014 Lok Sabha polls — are struggling to retain its hold in more than half the poll-bound constituencies.

On the contrary, the Congress — which had picked up the only two seats it had won in the 2014 polls in Maharashtra from Marathwada — and the NCP — which had bagged all its four seats from western Maharashtra in the previous polls — are showing signs of making a recovery this time around.

The constituencies that are going to polls on Thursday are: Hingoli, Nanded, Parbhani, Beed, Osmanabad, Latur (SC), all from Marathwada, Buldhana, Akola, Amravati (SC), all from Vidarbha and Solapur (SC), which is in western Maharashtra.

The main contests are between the BJP-Sena combine and Opposition Congress-NCP in a majority of the constituencies. In a few of the constituencies like Akola, Osmanabad and Solapur, the Dalit-Muslim front of Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) are threatening to cut into the tra-

ditional Congress-NCP votes. At stake are the reputations of senior leader and former Union Home Minister Sushil Kumar Shinde (Solapur), former chief minister Asho Chavan of the Congress Ashok Chavan (Nanded) and late BJP leader Gopinath Munde's daughter Pritam Munde (Beed).

Shinde, who suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of Sharad Bansode of the BJP by a massive margin of 1,49,784 votes, is taking on BJP's Mahaswami Jaisiddheshwar Shivacharya and Bharip Bahujan Mahasangh leader Prakash Ambedkar, who is also contesting from his home constituency of Akola.

Chavan, who was incidentally one of the two Congress candidates (out of its 26 candidates) elected to Lok Sabha in 2014 polls from Maharashtra in the face of a fierce Modi wave, is seeking re-election against BJP's Pratap Patil-Chikhalkar in his home constituency of Nanded in Marathwada region. Barring four terms, Nanded has been under the control of the Congress since 1952. While late S B Chavan represented the constituency twice (1980 and 1984), Ashok Chavan himself was elected to Lok Sabha once in a bye-election in 1987, following the resignation of his father. Late S

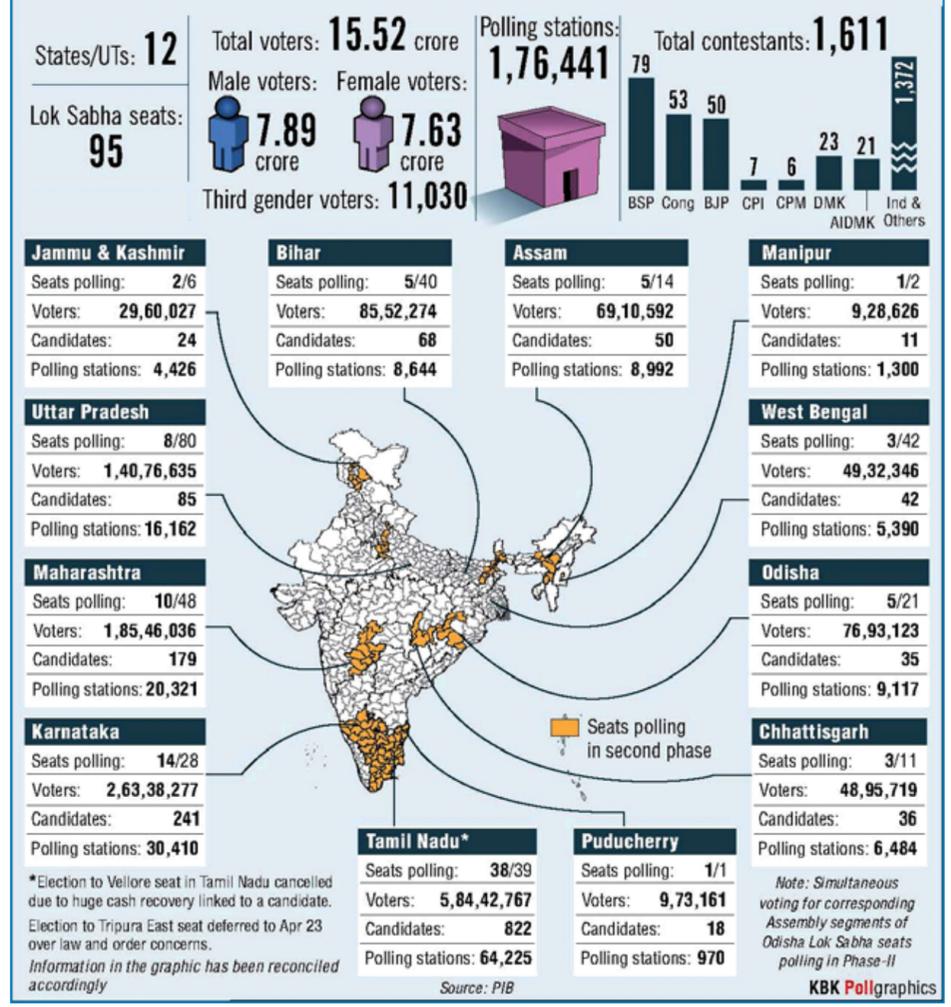
B Chavan's son-in-law and Ashokrao's brother-in-law Bhaskarrao Khatgaonkar has represented the constituency thrice (1998, 1999 and 2009). In 2014 LS polls, Chavan romped home comfortably. Pritam Munde, daughter of late senior BJP leader Gopinath Munde, is re-contesting the polls on a BJP ticket from Munde's home constituency of Beed against the NCP's Bajrang Sonawane. The contest in Beed has become a prestigious battle between Pritam's sister and a minister in Maharashtra Cabinet Pankaja Munde and her cousin and leader of the Maharashtra Legislative Council Dhananjay Munde of the NCP. Dhananjay had rebelled against his late uncle Gopinath Munde and joined the NCP when the latter was still alive.

In the politically significant constituency of Osmanabad in Marathwada, NCP's Ranajagitt Patil is taking on his cousin and Shiv Sena nominee Omraje Nimbalkar. Ranajagitt Patil is the son of Maharashtra's senior former minister and Sharad Pawar's close confidant Padamsinh Patil. Padamsinh is one of the nine accused others in the much-discussed murder case of 2006 in which Congress leader Pawanraje Nimbalkar and his driver Samad Abdul Wahid Kazi at Kalamboli, near Panvel, were shot dead on February 3, 2006.

TOP CANDIDATES

<p>TAMIL NADU THOOTHUKUDI Kanimozhi Karunanidhi (DMK) and Tamilisai Sounderrajan (BJP)</p> <p>NILGIRIS (SC): A Raja (DMK) and M Thiagarajan (AIADMK)</p> <p>SIVAGANGA Karti P Chidambaram (Congress) and H Raja (BJP)</p> <p>CHENNAI CENTRAL Dhayanidhi Maran (DMK), Sam Paul (PMK) and KKSM Dehlan Baqawi (SDPI)</p>	<p>UTTAR PRADESH MATHURA Hema Malini (BJP), Mahesh Pathak (Congress), Kunwar Narendra Singh (RLD)</p> <p>FATEHPUR SIKRI: Raj Chahar (BJP), Raj Babbar (Congress), Guddu Pandit (BSP)</p> <p>AGRA (RESERVED) SP Singh Baghel (BJP), Preeta Harit (Congress), Manoj Soni (BSP)</p> <p>ALIGARH Satish Gautam (BJP), Bijendra Singh (Congress), Ajit Baliyan (BSP)</p>	<p>BIHAR KATHAR Tariq Anwar (Congress) and Dulal Chandra Goswami (JDU)</p> <p>ASSAM SILCHAR Sushmita Dev (Congress), Rajdeep Roy (BJP), Nazia Yasmin Mazumdar (NPP)</p> <p>JAMMU & KASHMIR UDHAMPUR Dr Jitendra Singh (BJP), Vikramaditya Singh (Congress), Choudhary Lal Singh (Dogra Swabhimani Sangathan)</p>	<p>MAHARASHTRA AKOLA Sanjay Dhore (BJP), Hidayat Patel (Congress) and Prakash Ambedkar (Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi)</p> <p>LATUR Machindra Gunwantrao Kamat (Congress), Sudhakar Tukaram Shrangare (BJP)</p> <p>NANDED Ashok Chavan (Congress), Prataprao Patil Chikhalkar (BJP)</p>
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FACTFILE — PHASE II



CAPF IN 80% BOOTHS, BUT WB VOTERS WANT MORE

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Voters on Wednesday asked for 80 per cent CAPF coverage of polling booths even as Bengal prepared for second phase of elections for three parliamentary constituencies of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Raiganj on Thursday amid tight security bandobast.

In an apparent bid to avoid electoral violence like in the first phase the Commission has appointed senior IAS officer

Ajay V Nayak as the Special Observer. He will work in tandem with Special Police Observer Vivek Dubey.

The ECI has requisitioned 195 companies of Central forces for the three constituencies out of which 64 companies will alone be used for Raiganj witnessing a four-cornered contest featuring outgoing MP of CPI(M) Md Salim, Congress' Deepa Dasmunshi, TMC KL Agarwal and BJP's Supriyo Sarkar.

Darjeeling which also has

a history of political violence will be manned by 69 companies of CAPF whereas Jalpaiguri will get 52 companies of central forces, EC sources said. Out of 69 companies for Darjeeling seat 31 companies will be deployed at Darjeeling, 29 companies at Siliguri and 9 company at Kalimpong.

Police Observer said about 80 per cent of the booths would be manned by the CAPF while the armed State police will handle the remaining booths.

TAMIL NADU VOTERS TO DECIDE PALANISWAMY'S FATE TODAY

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

More than 5.86 crore voters spread across 38 Lok Sabha constituencies in Tamil Nadu will march to the polling booths on Thursday to cast their votes to elect 38 law makers who would represent them for the next five years.

Though there are 39 Lok Sabha constituencies in the State, the President of India heeding the request of the Election Commission of India rescinded the election from Vellore following large scale seizure of cash from the resi-

dence and business premises of the DMK candidate Kathir Anand. The date for the new election from Vellore would be announced afterwards.

Along with the 38 Members of Parliament, electorate in 18 Assembly constituencies will elect their legislators to fill the vacancy caused by disqualification of some of the AIADMK MLAs by the Speaker. Though there are 22 vacancies in the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly, election for the remaining four seats would be held on May 29. The results of all the elections would

be announced on May 23.

The high decibel campaign for the Lok Sabha and 18 Assembly by-election came to an end on Tuesday evening. Four more Assembly constituencies in the State would elect their representatives on May 19 as the Election Commission could declare the schedule to these constituencies only after getting clearance from the Madras High Court which was hearing petitions with respect to these constituencies.

Hence a total of 22 by-elections are being held in Tamil

Nadu. What is unique about the bye-election is that if the DMK manages to win 21 of the 22 seats, then there would be a change of Government in Tamil Nadu. The DMK alliance has 97 members as of now and requires 21 seats to unseat the AIADMK Government which has only 113 members (excluding the Speaker). M K Stalin, the DMK chief has been claiming from day one onwards that his party would win all the 22 seats. If Edappadi Palaniswamy's AIADMK wins five seats, he would get the absolute majority but it would be advisable if

he has at least 130 MLAs for smooth sailing in the House.

The April 18 election in Tamil Nadu would go down in history as the most fiercely fought poll. By Tuesday evening, when it was time for switching off microphones and loud speakers, Stalin raked up the refusal by Edappadi Palaniswamy administration to intern his father M Karunanidhi at the Marina Beach. It was at the instance of the Madras High Court which overruled the Opposition from the AIADMK-led Government that

Karunanidhi could be buried in Marina Beach though there are no rules which mandate that a former chief minister should be buried at Marina Beach.

While the DMK-led Secular Progressive Alliance began the campaign much earlier and with a clear advantage over the AIADMK-led front, the latter picked up momentum and caught up with the rivals. Though two more parties, AMMK of TTV Dhinakaran and MNM of film star Kamal Haasan are also in race, it is widely believed that they would end up as 'also rans'.

Vellore election: HC upholds ECI's decision

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

The Madras High Court in Wednesday upheld the decision of the Election Commission rescinding the Lok Sabha election from the Vellore parliamentary constituency in Tamil Nadu. A Division Bench consisting of Justices S Manikumar and Subramaniam Prasad dismissed the petitions filed by AC Shanmugham, the AIADMK candidate and an independent candidate seeking an order from the court for quashing the Election Commission's decision. President Ram Nath Kovind rescinded the Vellore Lok Sabha election on Tuesday. The judges said the EC which has the power to issue notification for conducting elections, also has the power to recommend for cancellation if it has arrived at the view that it is necessary to halt the election.



Didn't fall prey to Pak: Modi

PTI ■ SURENDRANAGAR/HIMMATNAGAR/ANAND

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said

he did not fall prey to Pakistan's nuclear blackmail, because India has the "mother of nuclear bombs".

Addressing three poll rallies in his home State, Modi also claimed that the then UPA Government arrested BJP president Amit Shah and some police officers in Gujarat to topple the State Government then headed by him.

At a campaign rally at Surendranagar, Modi referred to the surgical strikes and air strikes by India inside Pakistan in response to terrorist attacks in Uri and Pulwama.

"Earlier, terrorists from Pakistan would come here and go back after conducting an attack. Pakistan would threaten us, saying it has the nuclear bomb and will press the button (if India retaliated).

"We have nuclear of nuclear bombs (the mother of nuclear bombs). I decided to tell them, do whatever you want to do (but we will retaliate)," the Prime Minister said.

"In the past our people would weep, go around the world saying Pakistan did this, did that...It is now Pakistan's turn to weep. "Didn't our jawans kill them by entering their houses? Shall we not kill them by entering their houses? Shall we not take revenge for our martyred soldiers?" he asked the large crowd which

replied in the positive. "Today is Mahavir Jayanti, the day to observe peace. But when shall we have peace? Will anyone listen to a weak man making an appeal for peace or to the warning of a strong man who can flex his muscles? Only the peace appeal of a strong man will be respected, not that of a weak person," Modi said.

He also alleged that the Congress spoke ill of the armed forces. "You must have seen how the character of the Congress party has changed in this election. The way the Congress spreads lies, and questions the country's military, saying its seniors are street goons, the Air Force chief is a liar...If you say something like this, will it not make Pakistan happy?" he said.

Modi also slammed the Congress for seeking proof of action against terrorists. "When

we conducted surgical strike, Congress questioned us. When we conducted air strike, it asked for proof. Do you (Congress) trust your own sons or Pakistan's rhetoric?" the PM said.

Earlier, speaking at a poll rally in Himmatnagar, Modi said the then UPA Government arrested BJP president Amit Shah and some police officers in Gujarat to topple the state Government then headed by him. Modi also said this election will decide if nationalist forces will rule the country or those who want to help the "tukde tukde gang" by scrapping sedition law. "From 2004 to 2014, there was a 'remote control government' and you know who was in control. In those 10 years, those sitting in Delhi tried to damage the interest of Gujarat and acted as if the state is not in India," Modi said.

All PM does is tell lies: RaGa



Congress president Rahul Gandhi offers prayers at Thirunell Temple in Wayanad district on Wednesday

PTI

Wayanad/Alathur: Launching a blistering attack on Narendra Modi, Congress Chief Rahul Gandhi said all that the Prime Minister "does is tell lies and steal from the poor people."

Rahul, who addressed three election rallies in his Wayanad Lok Sabha constituency, spread over the districts of Wayanad, Malappuram and Kozhikode and campaigned in Thirithala in Palakkad district, attacked Modi and RSS and touched on corruption.

"All the PM does is tell lies and steal from the poor people. Six airports were given to his friend Adani on the day the Pulwama attack took place. And he (Modi) says they were fighting black money. Modi said demonetisation was to fight black money, but it destroyed the Indian economy. Fifty lakh people lost their jobs after demonetisation," the Congress chief said while winding off his campaign at Thirithala on Wednesday.

All praise for Wayanad, the second constituency from where Rahul is contesting for which he was attacked by Modi and BJP, Gandhi said he wanted to represent the remote district as the "beautiful place" symbolises different ideas and cultures.

Addressing a rally in Nagpur last week, BJP presi-

dent Amit Shah had chided Rahul for selecting his second seat in north Kerala, saying "when a procession is taken out there, it is difficult to make out whether it is India or Pakistan."

Shah was referring to the IUMs green flags during Rahul Gandhi's roadshow in Wayanad on April 4 after filing his papers. Rahul also said the saffron party was arrogant and believed that they can re-define Indian history.

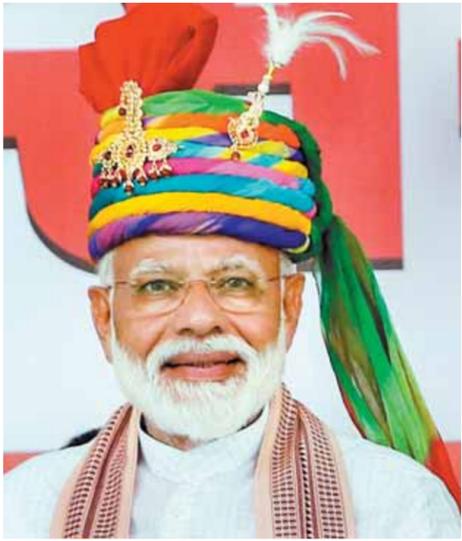
"Only the Indian people can define, decide about the country. It does not matter that Uttar Pradesh is much bigger than Nagaland. The voice of all Indians matter. This is the fight that is taking place. Why do these people want to define India? The entire goal to re-define India is to steal from India. The entire idea is to create two Indias. One India for the Ambanis, Adanis, Nirav Modis, Mehul Chokisies, Vijay Mallays and one for others," Rahul said lashing out at the PM.

He also said poor farmers who took meagre loans of around Rs 20,000 were behind bars for non-repayment while the rich who availed loans over Rs 35,000 were walking free. Continuing his tirade against Modi and the RSS, the Congress president said issues of Kerala should be

decided by the people and not by Modi or the RSS chief.

In three rallies in Wayanad, he tore into BJP-led NDA Government and said the saffron party was only interested in imposing its ideology on people of the country. "Who is Mohan Bhagwat to teach us about culture and history? Kerala should be run by the people of Kerala. This is same sentiment in State after State," he said, addressing a rally in Wayanad.

Taking a jibe at Modi, Rahul said he was not here to tell his "Mann Ki Baat", but understand the various difficulties, including the night travel ban, man-animal conflicts and lack of medical facilities being faced by the people here. "I understand there are complex problems here. There are man-animal conflicts. There is a conflict between development and environment. I want to see a solution. I don't believe in imposing a solution. I believe in the wisdom and intellectual of our people in resolving such issues," Rahul said. "I am not like the Prime Minister. I am not going to make false promises and tell you I will give you two crore jobs or Rs 15 lakh in bank accounts or that I will give farmers whatever they want. I am not going to lie to you. Because I respect your intelligence, your wisdom," he added.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi at a rally at Himmatnagar in Sabarkantha district, on Wednesday

PTI

Modi: Pawar serves only one family

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Slamming NCP chief Sharad Pawar for raising questions about his family, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday took a vicious dig at Pawar for "serving" only one special (Nehru-Gandhi) family from Delhi for some many decades.

"You (Pawar) are elder to me. You have a right to say whatever you want to. Pawar can say anything as per his understanding and values. But, let me tell you that the life that Modi is leading is based on the inspirations of various families. I have been inspired by the family traditions of the greats like Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev Rajguru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Veer Savarkar and others," Modi said.

Modi said the NCP chief would have learned more about family traditions if the latter had taken inspiration from late Y B Chavan whom Pawar considered his "mentor". "I know it is beyond your capacity to lead the life of Modi. But, please learn from the families of those who sacrificed their lives to the country."

"But your model is a special family (Nehru-Gandhi) from Delhi. You have learned things only from them and you have been serving only that family," Modi said.

Addressing a public rally in Solapur, Modi said he had been at the receiving end of abuses from Opposition leaders. "Despite that, I have been sincerely working for progress of nation and empowerment of poor people.

Exhorting the people to vote for a "stable" and "strong" government, Modi said. "In 2014, you gave me a full majority and I could work with full strength to take firm decisions and work for public welfare. You have witnessed how I ran the country past five years."

"The country needs a strong Government, not a 'major' (helpless) one. Only the BJP can provide a strong government not the Congress-NCP alliance... Even in your villages, you want a tough cop, not a 'dheela-dhaala' (weak and loose) policeman. The same is required for running such a vast country, we need a strong leader," Modi said.

Defeat Gabbar Singh PM: Didi

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Asking the voters to shun the Congress and the Left for their RSS links Mamata Banerjee said on Wednesday appealed to the voters to send maximum number of Trinamool Congress MPs to Parliament "so that Bengal takes the lead in forming a Government in Delhi" by removing the "Gabbar Singh of a Prime Minister."

Attacking Narendra Modi for disturbing the peace of the country in his bid to divide votes, Banerjee said "Modi Babu thinks that he is the most powerful person in the country. In his lust for power he has set one community against the other and has divided India as never before. If he is not defeated this time then he will demolish the democratic set up of the country once and for all."



Equating the Prime Minister with as dreaded a person as Gabbar Singh of Sholay fame Banerjee said "today whenever the people hear of his name they think that Gabbar Singh has come. He scares everybody into submission like the Bargis (the Maratha invaders of Bengal of early 17th century) used to do." Banerjee was addressing a

huge rally at Kandi in Murshidabad which has three parliamentary constituencies traditionally dominated by the Congress and the Left.

Attacking the Prime Minister for trying to suppress voice of Opposition she said "whenever anyone raises his voice against the Prime Minister officers of Income Tax and Enforcement Directorate are sent to his house... See what they are doing against Chandrababu Naidu in Andhra Pradesh, Kumaraswamy in Karnataka and MK Stalin in Tamil Nadu."

It was this habit of dubbing the opposition to silence with the help of central agencies that the people would not take kindly. "The BJP will be defeated for this haughtiness of theirs." Attacking the Congress for having been a "stooge of the CPI(M) all these years," she said.

50-yr-old held for raping minor niece

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 50-year-old man was arrested on Wednesday for allegedly raping his minor niece multiple times in Dwarka's Najafgarh area. According to a senior police official, a 13-year-old girl approached them on Tuesday and alleged that she was raped by her maternal uncle multiple times.

"The victim's mother had died 12 years ago when she was six-month-old and soon after her father also went missing. Later, she started living with her uncle," said the senior police official.

"She said that she to live in her uncle's house at Najafgarh area and alleged that she was raped at least four to five

times when she was alone. They had shifted to a rented accommodation in nearby area around two months ago," said the senior police official.

"After her medical examination, a case under section 376 (Punishment for rape) of the Indian Penal Code and 6 POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) has been registered and the accused has been arrested on Wednesday," the senior police official added.

The accused works in a tyre puncture shop and has two married sons and three daughters. "The victim was the only child of her parents. She was school dropout and had studied up to fifth standard," the senior police official added.

BJP wants TMC leaders to be jailed for Bangla actor in rally

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Not happy with mere cancellation of the business visa of Bangladesh cine star Firdaus for taking part in an election rally favouring Raiganj TMC candidate Kanhaia Lal Agarwal, the BJP on Wednesday upped the ante against the facilitators of the incident demanding "exemplary punishment — if possible incarceration and even cancellation of the candidature — against those who flouted the visa rules and used the foreign actor for electoral purpose."

Bengal BJP vice president JP Majumdar said "it is not enough to send the actor back or cancelling his visa. The BJP also wants the people who



Firdaus

used him by flouting the visa rules to be jailed and if possible the candidature of the candidate concerned cancelled."

The saffron leadership had launched a formal complaint with the Election Commission even as its leaders from Delhi questioned Mamata Banerjee's secular credentials. "This is the way she is trying to send communal signal to the electorate by bringing Bangladesh stars to

influence a particular community in the elections," said BJP leader GVL Narsimha Rao.

TMC leader and outgoing Serampore MP Kalyan Banerjee however said he had "no information of any electoral law that debars foreign citizens in taking part in election rallies."

Elsewhere, the BJP and the CPI(M) launched another complaint against a TMC MLA from Chakdaha, Jharna Ghosh for "inciting her party men to chase away the CRPF with broom sticks."

JP Majumdar quoted Ghosh citing a video footage "telling her party women to chase away the CRPF with brooms as 'during a battle no rule but only victory matters'

Priyanka pose no threat to Modi: Naqvi

Mumbai: Union Minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi on Wednesday said Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra poses no threat to Prime Minister Narendra Modi even if she contests against him from Varanasi Lok Sabha seat.

He also criticised Congress president Rahul Gandhi for creating a "fake narrative" against the BJP. "Someone is going to be there in the fray (from Varanasi). But Priyanka does not pose any challenge to Modi. The so-called 'mahagathbandhan' (grand alliance) is already falling apart..." Naqvi said.

"I am not even sure how many parties will contest against Modi in Varanasi, but the outcome is not going to be different. Modi will definitely win the seat," the BJP leader added.

There has been a speculation that Priyanka Gandhi Vadra may take on Modi from Varanasi seat. She formally entered politics and was appointed the Congress general secretary for eastern Uttar Pradesh in February. PTI

Traders to attend Modi meet on April 19

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Thousand of traders from Delhi and other States of the country will participate in a convention to be addressed by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi on April 19. Meeting has been convened by the Delhi BJP and the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) at Talkatora stadium.

Praveen Khandelwal, Secretary General of CAIT said the Bharatiya Jantata Party (BJP) has included core and fundamental issues of the business community which include formation of a National Traders Welfare Board, a national policy for retail trade, pension to traders above the age of 60 years, accidental insurance of ₹10 lakh to traders who are registered under Goods and Services Tax, Vyapari Credit Card on pattern of Kisan Credit Card to traders etc.

Khandelwal further said that it is gratifying that BJP has included the most important

issues of trading community in its election manifesto which has encouraged the traders across the Country and traders really wish to compliment and congratulate the Prime Minister for such a positive step.

He said on the one side the traders will thank the Prime Minister on the other side the Prime Minister will talk about greater participation of traders in national economy and development of the Country.

"The BJP manifesto has included various issues of all sections of traders which also include Loans up to ₹50 lakhs without any collateral guarantee to MSME, technology centre across the Country to develop skills of startups and other traders, minimum purchase of 10 per cent by Government departments from women entrepreneur, he said, adding that these steps will not only strengthen the domestic trade but will also enable small traders to make large exports to other Countries.

ADMK, BJP STAKES...

The presence of TTV Dinakaran's AAMK could hurt the AIADMK prospects on many seats as he is fighting for the legacy of Jayalithaa. These Lok Sabha elections in Tamil Nadu are the first ever after the demise of Dravidian stalwarts J Jayalithaa of AIADMK and M Karunanidhi of the DMK.

The fledgling Makkal Needhi Maiam of actor-politician Kamal Hassan will make its debut in the polls.

The BJP had 27 of the 94 seats at stake in the second phase in the last Lok Sabha polls. The Congress had won 12 of these seats in 2014, the Shiv Sena and the BJD 4 each, the JD(S) and the RJD two each and the AIUDE, the NCP, the JD(U), the PDP, the AINRC, the PMK, the CPI(M) and the TMC one seat each. Besides Tamil Nadu, polling will also be held in 14 seats in Karnataka, 10 in Maharashtra, eight in Uttar Pradesh, five each in Assam, Bihar and Odisha, three each in Chhattisgarh and West Bengal, two in Jammu & Kashmir and one seat each in Manipur and Puducherry. Elections will also be held in 35 Assembly constituencies in

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Odisha. Other prominent candidates in fray include Congress leaders Verappa Moily and Raj Babbar, National Congress president Farooq Abdullah and BJP's Hema Malini. In Odisha, Chief Minister and BJD president Naveen Patnaik is contesting from his home turf Hinjili in Ganjam district and Bijepur in Bargarh. Among others, Union Tribal Affairs Minister Oram of the BJP, BJD's Rajya Sabha MPs Prasanna Acharya and Achyut Samant, BJP nominee and three-time MP Kharabela Swain are in the fray this time.

Even though security was heightened, Maoists gunned down a polling officer in Kandhamal district of Odisha on Wednesday when she was leading a team of poll personnel to a booth in Phulbani Assembly segment.

It is a high-stake battle for the ruling Congress-JD(S) alliance in Karnataka as any adverse result is likely to have an impact on the longevity of the coalition Government in the State. The BJP is deter-

mined to improve its tally compared to last time riding on the Modi wave. A total of 179 candidates are in the fray in Maharashtra in the 10 constituencies spread in parts of Vidarbha and Marathwada regions. Former Chief Ministers Ashok Chavan and Sushilkumar Shinde of Congress are contesting from Nanded and Solapur seats respectively. Cinestars Hema Malini and Raj Babbar are among the 85 candidates from Uttar Pradesh, whose electoral fate will be decided on Thursday. The eight Lok Sabha seats, where polling is scheduled to be held, were won by the BJP in 2014. In Jammu & Kashmir, authorities have deployed over 80 companies for election duty in the twin constituencies of Srinagar and Udhampur. Thursday's polling in Srinagar will be keenly watched within and outside Kashmir as the constituency recorded an all-time low of 7.2 per cent voter turnout in the 2017 by-election, marred by violence on polling day that left

nine people dead and scores of others injured.

Fate of 68 candidates will be decided in Bihar by 86.01 lakh voters across Bhagalpur, Banka, Kishanganj, Katihar and Purnea Lok Sabha constituencies. Five seats in Assam will see polling on Thursday and one seat in Manipur. The past few days have seen hectic campaigning by top leaders including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP chief Amit Shah, Congress president Rahul Gandhi and a host of Union Ministers.

There was lot of drama during electioneering as several leaders like Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Union Minister Maneka Gandhi, BSP chief Mayawati and SP leader Azam Khan made controversial remarks, prompting the Election Commission to bar them from campaigning for varying periods over violations of the moral code of conduct.

In West Bengal, the EC has deployed 194 companies of Central forces in the three

constituencies going to polls to cover 80 per cent of the 5,390 booths for free and fair polling. The fight for the lone Lok Sabha seat in Puducherry is expected to be mainly between the ruling Congress, which has put up former Speaker V Vaithilingam and the Opposition AINRC's K Narayanasamy. The Lok Sabha polls are being held in seven phases for 543 seats on April 11, April 18, April 23, April 29, May 6, May 12 and May 19, and counting will be on May 23.

AAP REJECTS...

But the Congress proposed a 7:2:1 seat-sharing formula in which seven Congress candidates, two JJP candidates and one AAP candidate would contest the polls, the sources added. A day earlier a meeting was also held at Kejrival's residence during which senior AAP leaders Manish Sisodia, Gopal Rai, Sanjay Singh and Satyendra Kumar Jain were present. Following the meeting, the party said it is ready to have

further discussion with the Congress and had appointed a representative to take the matter forward. The AAP has appointed Singh to hold the alliance talks. AAP sources said if the Congress wants alliance only in Delhi then it has to be in the 5:2 ratios and if an alliance is sealed for Delhi and Haryana then the ratio can be 4:3 in the national Capital and 6:3:1 in Haryana.

"Party president Rahul has made it pretty clear that an alliance can be formed just in Delhi in a ratio of 4:3," said a senior Congress leader of Delhi unit in response to a question on alliance. "People have expressed their doubts to us over the AAP, despite that we have shown a big heart and for a common objective we have agreed to form an alliance in Delhi," the leader said.

The AAP has already announced its candidates of the seven parliamentary constituencies in Delhi, while the Congress has finalised names of its candidates which could be announced soon.

BJP PITS PRAGYA...

Six people were killed and over 100 injured when a bomb went off near a mosque in Malegaon in north Maharashtra, on September 29, 2008. According to the prosecution, it was the handiwork of a Hindu extremist group. The BJP has been holding Bhopal Lok Sabha seat, where about 4.5 lakh of the 18 lakh voters are Muslim, since 1989. In the 2018 Assembly elections, the Congress won three out of the eight Assembly segments in the Bhopal Lok Sabha constituency, and in the remaining segments the BJP's victory margin decreased.

50 KILLED AS...

According to Rajasthan Relief Secretary Ashutosh AT Pednekar, 21 people died due to unseasonal rain. "4 deaths were reported in Jhalawar, Udaipur and Jaipur each, two each in Jalore and Bundi and one each in Baran, Rajasamand, Bhilwara, Alwar and Hanumangarh, Pednekar said. Compensation of Rs 4 lakh

each has been announced to the families of victims. Rain claimed three lives each in Indore, Dhar and Shajapur, two in Ratlam and one each in Alirajpur, Rajgarh, Sehore and Chhindwara districts in Madhya Pradesh. In Ahmedabad, Gujarat Government's director of relief G B Manglpara, told PTI that at least 10 people have died in the rain and dust storm reported from various areas including districts in North Gujarat and Saurashtra region. Also, a portion of a tent erected for Prime Minister Modi's rally in Himmatnagar town of North Gujarat was also damaged in the dust storm, an official earlier said. Farmers of these States have suffered a lot due to unseasonal rain and thunderstorm and high wind speed that damaged their crops wheat, mango, potatoes and other vegetables. "Due to thunderstorm and gusty wind, the mango crop which at this time of year is about 80 gm to 150 gm in size, have been dropped. This will mean a loss of crop. Moreover, cloudy weather and unseasonal rain also increase the risk of the crop getting pest infected and diseased," said a farmer.

Women's right to pray

SC admits plea on allowing women inside all mosques, citing its Sabarimala ruling on gender parity at faith shrines



All religions are free of gender bias except that rituals and customs associated with their practice have been set by patriarchal orders that have now acquired the solidity of established tradition. And much as shrine trusts try to legitimise the male monopoly as ordained by divinity, fact is seclusionist practices, probably necessitated by their context in the historical timeline, need to change as dynamism is at the core of all religions. For if god created woman to equalise Creation itself, there's no reason why she should

be denied the right to worship and pray. Of course, it is tricky business, especially when it comes to jurisprudence on cultural practices related to religion. This is one of the reasons why the Supreme Court used the precedent of its ruling on Sabarimala to hear a plea seeking the unhindered access of Muslim women to all mosques across the country. The petitioners argued that the *Quran* "does not differentiate between man and woman. It speaks only about the faithful. But Islam has become a religion in which women are being oppressed." When it comes to Islam, its own theologians insist that the Prophet believed in the equality of women and allowed them in mosques. Both genders have the equal right to offer prayers at the Kaabah in Mecca. At the time of the Prophet Mohammed, Muslim women participated in wars, worked as nurses and doctors, owned and operated businesses and were actively involved in public religious life, according to Muslim women's rights activist Naish Hasan. Yet it is the Muslim leadership's misogynist interpretations of the *Quran* and *Hadith* that have a hegemonic hold on authenticity. Any confinement in later years may have been necessitated to protect women from abuse of war and crusades but has now been conveniently codified by radical sects and self-proclaimed groups to stifle reform detrimental to their interests. But women are a valid constituency in the socio-political matrix of our times and are now claiming their religious rights in the public space. So though the apex court argued that a mosque is a non-State entity and the fundamental right to equality could, therefore, be invoked against the State, not against individuals, the petitioners argued mosques do get substantial grants from States. By that logic they are subject to the jurisdictions of courts as they are maintained with public money. And worshippers are as much entitled to personal and religious freedoms as enshrined in the Constitution for citizens. At present, women are allowed to offer prayers at mosques under the Jamaat-e-Islami and Mujahid denominations but are barred from others.

Though the top court took up the public interest plea against the backdrop of Sabarimala, fact is that the Bombay High Court had ruled much earlier in favour of women that let them enter the mosque at Haji Ali. This happened after sustained campaigns. Sadly, the real purpose of these rulings, to ensure that divinity is gender-neutral and equally accessible, has got lost in the sea of rampant politicking and votebank politics. Be it the shrines of Shani Shingnapur, Sabarimala or Haji Ali, women have always had to negotiate their divine right through the legal route. And such battles will end up messy till we effect a mindset change, one where we see the man-woman balance or the *prakriti-purush* narrative as part of a universal natural order than as part of the limited human domain. The Supreme Court knows this best when it allowed women of all ages to enter the shrine of the celibate Lord Ayappa. A clutch of women devotees and the powerful Nair community claimed that Kerala has one of the highest development indices for women and those of reproductive age stay away to honour the "eternal celibate" status of Lord Ayappa and his asceticism. Though they may have no rationale to explain why their god should not be universal and be selective instead, fact is this cultural marker is now a rallying point, strong enough to gather political traction. What then is most important? A gender-neutral and informed approach to scholarship of texts as well as unity of all affected women's groups, be it Hindu, Muslim or others, to challenge the obnoxious.

The cuckoo clock

Banning Tik Tok won't stop the spread of pornography, frankly nothing may



When the first camera-enabled phones came out, the Nokia 7650 in fact, a senior journalist mentioned that we have opened a Pandora's Box by giving easy access to photography and videography devices in the hands of everyone. Without the slight control of a film processing shop, the world changed. Today mobile phones sell on the basis of how good and powerful their selfie cameras are. And smartphone cameras have changed the way we communicate with each other and even consume

media. Many media houses are talking about a pivot to 'Mo-Jo' meaning mobile journalism.

But like with any technology, the ability to misuse also arose very quickly. A famous video of a Delhi schoolgirl involved in a sex act made headlines across the country back in 2002, and that was just the start of the garbage heap. The advent of the hand-held computers that we call smartphones today made matters worse. Because while they enabled the rise of applications that allow people to share anything and everything, people literally shared anything and everything. In the Philippines and to an extent across South Asia, young girls and boys are exploited and made to perform using such apps, which keep the identities of the abusers completely secret. It is alleged that the Tik Tok application was one of those apps that allowed sexual exploitation to take place very openly and instances have emerged of young women and clearly underage girls performing using this application. But banning this is not the solution, many other messaging and sharing applications have similar privacy issues and short of banning smartphones, nobody can really control such content from spreading. So stopping Tik Tok is like lighting a coil to prevent mosquito bites, it might temporarily solve the problem but is not a long-term solution. Once the Pandora's Box had been opened, it could not be shut again, and this is the same here. What we can do is better educate young children to raise their voices if they are being abused. And also have far better vigil of the digital environment. Policing is inadequate in the physical world but that is no excuse to not be better prepared online. Banning is not the only solution.

opinion

The Easter question

Determining Easter's placement has been a subject of major controversy in the past. Ironically, it was this row that triggered the reform of the Julian calendar in 1582



PRIYADARSHI DUTTA

This time, Easter has tested the patience of its believers, almost to the limit. It usually happens exactly one month after the Spring Equinox. The festival shifts irregularly in the compass of 35 days, ranging from March 22 to April 25. But this shift is not akin to that of a Hindu festival, say Holi or Ram Navami. All Hindu festivals follow a pendulum-like trajectory while shifting as per the lunar *tithi* year-on-year.

The Easter is reckoned according to three factors — Spring Equinox (March 21), full moon and day of the week (Sunday). It is the principal movable feast in the Christian liturgical calendar. Notwithstanding its irregularity, future Easter dates could be predicted hundreds of years in advance, algorithmically. However, determining its placement has been subject to major controversy in the past. Ironically, it was this controversy that triggered the reform of the Julian calendar in 1582 by Pope Gregory XIII.

Easter celebrates the supernatural Resurrection of Jesus Christ after his mortal death on the Cross. While the Resurrection is in the domain of belief, his death may be a historical event. There must have been a date for it as per the Julian solar calendar, applicable throughout the Roman world then. The Romans were the masters of Israel-Judea during the lifetime of Christ. Though Jesus was crucified according to the orders of a Roman Governor viz, Pontius Pilate, the date of his crucifixion was either not recorded as per the Julian calendar or at any rate not available to us. In fact, it was never available to the Church, which led to a lot of kite-flying.

But evidence in the Gospel shows that Jesus was crucified around the Passover feast of the Jews. The Jews celebrate the Passover feast — in remembrance of their deliverance from Egyptian captivity by Moses — on the 14th day of the month of Nisan of the Hebrew calendar. Each month of the Hebrew calendar begins on the morrow of the new moon (which is actually no-moon or *anavasya*), the 14th day would be full moon. On that day, every Jewish family eats the ritually slaughtered and roasted Passover lamb. Jesus had occasionally likened himself to a lamb in the Gospel. His martyrdom coinciding with the Passover feast carries a religious analogy. His last supper is believed to be the Passover feast meal.

The Jewish calendar is lunisolar, which means an intercalary month is added (as in the case of *Vikram Samvat* in India) to keep it abreast of seasons. The Nisan is a spring month. But in ancient times, intercalation was not done through any algorithm but by an arbitrary decision taken by the Jewish grand assembly viz, Sanhedrin, based in Jerusalem. Sanhedrin was in existence till the destruction of ancient Israel in 70 AD. Thus, a day cannot be transposed from the old Jewish calendar to Julian Calendar with reliability.



One good way of determining Easter for the Church was to consult the Hebrew calendar itself. This was exactly what the early Eastern churches, which were in closer communication with the Jews, did. Thus, they celebrated the Easter feast on full moon on the month of Nisan, regardless of other factors. But for the Western churches, headquartered in Rome, the day of the week was equally important. The concept of the week, as a grid of seven days, was incorporated into the Julian calendar by the Church. The week is astronomically an arbitrary concept and ancient Romans were ignorant of it. The Roman Church emphasised the fact that Jesus rose from the dead on a Sunday, which is celebrated every week in the form of a Sunday mass. Thus, Easter must be held on no other day except Sunday. Since the Gospel says he rose from the day on the third day he was crucified, Friday became his day of crucifixion. This is called "Good Friday."

During the first century AD, the churches in the East and the West mutually tolerated, celebrating Easter on different days. But towards the end of the century, there was a heated exchange among correspondences on the subject between Polycrates, the bishop of Ephesus and Victory, the bishop of Rome (equivalent to Pope). Victor sternly severed the whole Eastern Church from being in communion with the

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 ONE GOOD WAY OF DETERMINING THE EASTER FOR THE CHURCH WAS TO CONSULT THE HEBREW CALENDAR ITSELF. THIS WAS EXACTLY WHAT THE EARLY EASTERN CHURCHES, WHICH WERE IN CLOSER COMMUNICATION WITH THE JEWS, DID. THUS, THEY CELEBRATED THE EASTER FEAST ON FULL MOON ON THE MONTH OF NISAN, REGARDLESS OF OTHER FACTORS
 ”

Roman Church. This was indeed the beginning of a split in the Church into Western and Eastern domains, which was completed a thousand years later in 1054 AD. The Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325 AD ruled that Easter should be celebrated on Sunday, following the full moon, following the Equinox.

If the full moon happens to coincide with the Equinox as it happened this year or previously in 1981, one will have to wait for the ensuing full moon to apply the formula. But if the full moon occurred even a day later (provided it is not as late in the week as of Saturday) the Easter could be marked on that very Sunday. But in the latter case, the full moon should occur latest by Friday. This because Good Friday has to precede the Easter.

The Equinoxes and Solstices together form the four pillars of the tropical calendar inaugurated by Julius Caesar in 44 BC. These astronomical phenomena were known to the ancient Greek astronomers long before. But Caesar made it an integral part of the Western calendar, though it was not necessary that the year or month should begin from those points. In innovating quadruple leap year, Caesar had assumed the length of a tropical year to be 365 days and six hours; whereas in reality, it was 11 minutes shorter (365 days five hours 48 minutes and 46 seconds). The surplus 11¼ minutes remaining unadjusted

led to the Julian year overshooting the natural year by three days in the course of four centuries. Thus, by the time of the Nicaean Council in 325 AD, the Spring Equinox had shifted from original March 24 to March 21.

But in the absence of a corrective mechanism, the Equinox shifted to March 11 over the next 12 centuries. The Church might not have bothered itself with Equinox but for determining the Easter. How Equinoxes and Solstices had shifted over age is pithily described in a letter written by French theologian and astronomer Cardinal Pierre d'Ailly (1350-1425) to Pope (now regarded as Anti-Pope) John XXIII Baldassare Cossa in 1411.

Pierre d'Ailly's ambitious plan to reform the Julian calendar could not be taken up at the Ecumenical Council at Rome in 1412 nor at the Council of Constance in 1414-18. But it created a tempo which culminated in the Gregorian reform of the calendar in 1582. By cancelling 10 days from the calendar in 1582, the Spring Equinox was restored to March 21 as in days in Nicaean Council in 325 AD. Pope Gregory XIII wanted a fixed date for Easter, like Christmas, a demand that continued to be echoed till the 20th century by various stalwarts. This, however, has not come about.

(The writer is an independent researcher)

SOUNDBITE

Priyanka Gandhi will be seen the way India sees a thief's wife. She will have no impact on the outcome of Lok Sabha polls.

Union Minister
—Uma Bharti



I think I have to start talking to you guys about this new song and video I'm putting out this week because I'm so excited.

Singer
—Justin Bieber



On the issue of listing Azhar, China's position remains unchanged. The matter is moving towards the direction of settlement.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman
—Lu Kang



Sidhu's remote lies in Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan's hands. He keeps getting guidelines from there and acts accordingly.

Haryana Minister
—Anil Vij



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Find the truth

Sir — The Supreme Court has been just in allowing the use of the three leaked "classified" documents as evidence in the Rafale review case, dismissing the Government's objections. The monumental efforts put forth by Yashwant Sinha, Arun Shourie, Prashant Bhushan and N Ram to expose the murky Rafale deal deserve accolades.

One hopes that the Supreme Court will soon bring the case to its logical end after the recently procured evidence, shedding light on the wilful defaults in the surreptitious deal, is examined. Culprits must be brought to book.

Tharcus S Fernando
Chennai

Uphold sanctity of polls

Sir — This refers to the editorial, "EC's test of faith" (April 17). Following a severe stricture on the Election Commission (EC) by a Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi, the electoral body was forced to take a flurry of actions, leading

EC must be uniform, not impose selective curbs

This refers to the editorial, "EC's test of faith" (April 17). Thankfully, the Election Commission (EC) "woke up to its powers", to borrow the Supreme Court's phrase. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath had called the Indian Army "Modi's *sena*", referred to Muslims as a "green virus" and bragged "If they have Ali, we have Bajrangbali". Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief Mayawati had appealed to the Muslims to vote for the SP-BSP alliance and not allow the Congress to split their votes. Samajwadi Party leader Azam Khan had referred to "khaki underwear" to emphasise Jaya Prada's allegiance to the RSS. And Maneka Gandhi had threatened the Muslims to either vote for her or risk losing their rights to benefits.

While the EC acted against all the above mentioned leaders for their remarks, it found nothing wrong with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "majority, minority" comment in context of Rahul Gandhi contesting from Wayanad and his "impassioned plea" to first-time vot-

ers to vote for the Pulwama martyrs. As a constitutional body entrusted with the task of conducting free and fair polls, the EC must outgrow its awe of the Prime Minister and stop its selective and differential treatment of leaders. It must consider all leaders impartially and without bias.

G David Milton
Maruthancode



ers to vote for the Pulwama martyrs. As a constitutional body entrusted with the task of conducting free and fair polls, the EC must outgrow its awe of the Prime Minister and stop its selective and differential treatment of leaders. It must consider all leaders impartially and without bias.

Constitution and reprimanded it severely for failing to discharge its duties. Some leaders have regularly been violating the model code of conduct and were also on a spree of spitting hate speeches. Sadly, the EC failed to act and remained a mute spectator to such incidents. Now, the Supreme Court has done well to strengthen the EC to ensure just

country does not need a semblance of just and fair election, but a real "just and fair" election in every sense must take place and a real Government out of the will of the people must come to take the country forward. In this regard, the role of the EC is greater than what it playing now.

TK Nandan
Kochi

Complimenting EC

Sir — This refers to the editorial, "EC's test of faith" (April 17). It is shameful that the Supreme Court had to step in to remind the Election Commission (EC) about its constitutional powers. But it is encouraging that after being pulled up by the top court, the EC did take action against four errant political leaders who had made some shocking and divisive statements. The EC may be a toothless tiger but it deserves credit for having taken swift action against these leaders.

Sarita
Via email

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

In Dante's footsteps

A new book chronicles a hi-tech Hell, which is very different from what one finds in the sacred texts, and echoes our times



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

Charles Patterson's recently published novel, *In Dante's Footsteps: My Journey to Hell: A Modern Divine Comedy*, unfolds at two levels. At one, it is a set of intertwined narratives about the life of a young man, Thomas Aaron Reed III, who becomes a priest, leaves priesthood, journeys to Hell and returns. At another, it is an exploration of human conduct, values, emotions and aspects of morality.

The narratives unfold, smoothly and elegantly, around several themes. One of them is Thomas's relationship with his parents and another with Father Edward Tyler, who taught him Latin in school and accounted for his deep and abiding interest in Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy*, became his adviser and conveyed to him the invitation to travel to Hell under a newly-launched visitor's programme. The third is his reluctant entry into priesthood in deference to the expectations of his family; his father was a clergyman, his maternal grandfather a Bishop and paternal grandfather the dean of a theological seminary. An account of his life as a parish priest in north Connecticut and his departure from there on leave of absence to study theology in New York follows. Next comes the narrative about his life in the Big Apple, renunciation of priesthood and return to lay life as the writer of publicity material for an insurance company. Intermittently throughout, there are references to his relationship with Beatrice, his college girlfriend, who goes off his life and marries someone else, but is re-united with him on his return from Hell.

The most striking subject, of course, is his visit to Hell and back. Thomas does not get to see the "pure" Hell, the terrible place where doers of evil spend their days in suffering, and which is covered in thick mist. His tour is confined to what is called the administrative area, the tech room and the purgatories. There are besides visits to his father, conversations with Edward, meetings with God, referred to as the "Chief" by the spirits administering Hell and Satan, and his trial by the Crusaders, a bigoted lot to whom almost everybody else is a heretic, and escape therefrom.

Thomas's description of the parts of Hell he sees is very different from what one finds in the sacred texts of various religions, myths and epics. It is a happening place. A conference of tall eminences from all ages — from Socrates to Karl Marx — was going on during Thomas's visit. It is computer-age Hell. The Tech Room, the hub for communications within Hell and without, has an array of computers and electronic surveillance and communication equipment, and every visitor has to be "logged-in." The Crusaders can photograph and record everything happening on earth on video and have an "electronic sub-verbal monitor that picks up both thoughts and voices."

There are helicopters (called Beetles) for travel and the Satan appears "wearing jeans, boots, a lavender shirt and a brown felt cowboy hat." Nor is he the discernably fork-tongued evil described by the biblical texts. He argues persuasively and says that the difference between him and God is that while he is a realist, God is an idealist. The essence of realism, he holds, lies in the saying, "might is right." It is might that, while causing wars, crimes and violence, has also triggered the massive material progress that civilisation made through the exercise of power, which is at the core of might.

Here we are at the heartland of morality which, in turn, is at the core of the other issues the novel explores — human conduct, values, emotions and divine judgement. Can progress justify the wars that have devastated lives and lands, the Holocaust, the sustained subjugation of women and the savage treatment of all non-human living beings throughout the ages? There is doubtless punishment in the hereafter. Child and animal abusers, for example, go to "Pure Hell" "Wall-to-Wall" as do bystanders who watch and do nothing. Nevertheless, the world as it is, is moving more in the direction of material progress rather than frowning upon greed, crime, violence, celebrating power and turning its face against compassion.

In this sense, Satan is right in claiming before Thomas and Rachel, another visitor from earth, that he is winning and God is losing out. God himself recognises this and tells Thomas that he is sad and depressed. He, along with his companion Naomi, has left Heaven, which has become a very lonely place for dearth of people making it and come to live in a cave in the region of the purgatories. Yet, he tells Thomas, he has not given up hope as there are still many good, courageous and caring people doing their best to make the world more just and compassionate.

Compassion is at the heart of Patterson's concerns and an important part of it encompasses all non-human living beings. This has been most tellingly underlined in his landmark work *Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and The Holocausts*. It is very clearly manifest in the book under review. To cite just one example, on a hoarding in the purgatories is written, "As long as men kill animals, they will kill each other." (Hippocrates). Rarely have truer words been written.

(The writer is Consultant Editor, The Pioneer, and an author)

THE NDA PICKED RAM NATH KOVIND OVER LK ADVANI AS ITS NOMINEE FOR THE PRESIDENT'S POST BECAUSE OF HIS CASTE. —RAJASTHAN CHIEF MINISTER ASHOK GEHLOT



IT IS UNFORTUNATE THAT GEHLOT MADE A CASTEIST REMARK AGAINST THE PRESIDENT, WHO IS THE CUSTODIAN OF THE CONSTITUTION. —BJP SPOKESPERSON GVL NARSIMHA RAO

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

History speaks for itself

It's time for the voters to inform themselves of the INC's past and realise that it never really came around to re-modelling itself from being colonised subjects of the British, says B DEEPANJALI

By now, it's common knowledge that Mahatma Gandhi, without whom the call for independence from British rule would never have reached the Indian masses, had wanted the Indian National Congress (INC) to be disbanded after independence. That it was a party of the British and the Indian English-educated elite was clear to him and he knew that this was not what "freedom" truly meant. The purpose of INC as envisaged was to achieve independence from British Raj and to hand over the country to them on a platter. Gandhiji was clear that the INC needed to be disbanded after the British left India. But what he wanted did not happen. He increasingly became disillusioned after independence. After his assassination, pressure to have a truly representational democracy took a backseat and the corrupt cronyism of the INC held sway.

Gandhiji was indeed right about INC. It did not quite truly understand what nationalism was. It still does not and does not even seem to care about it. As the 2019 election campaign is in full swing right now, we can see how the grand old party relentlessly disparages the nation, fails to stand by our brave armed forces and even scoffs the country's phenomenal achievements — Mission Shakti and the testing of the first anti-satellite missile system that made us the fourth nation in the world to have this critical defence capability are a few examples. With 70 years of independence, we are now a witness to some of the most negative statements against the nation by INC members. So much so that today, even those Indians, who were supportive of the Congress, are stunned at the lows the party has taken.

In no other democratic country does the Opposition party ridicule the nation's achievements or take sides with the enemy country — when its soldiers have been massacred by terrorists like in Pulwama — as in India. For, their opposition is to the ruling party and never to their nation. The INC's behaviour as an Opposition party will be unthinkable say in Britain or the US where leaders' loyalty to their country remains unquestioned — it defines who they are as a people.

So, why is it that in India we have a party like INC, whose statements, like the one doubting the Balakot strikes, sound like they are the same as the ones made by politicians in Pakistan? Why is it that the leading Opposition party is unable to distinguish between the nation and the ruling party and spares no opportunity to belittle the country? It's, therefore, worth asking: Does this disconnect with the country have much deeper roots, going back to the formation of the INC itself?

INC still not rooted in India: The party was founded in 1885 by AO Hume, a British imperial civil service officer. But did the party ask for complete independence soon after it was formed? No. It was only after 44 years of its formation that the INC demanded *poorna swarajya* for India in December 1929. Until then, all that it meekly asked the British was a dominion status for the country. And who were the party's members? They were a part of the British elite — those Indians who were educated in England and who held wealth and social standing. The formation of the INC can itself be seen as a smart move by the British to maintain a sense of stability, badly shaken as they were by the First War of Independence or what they called the Mutiny of 1857. It is an undeniable fact that early members of the INC looked up to British education and governance as means to achieving a "stable India." There are documented references to past Indian presidents of INC eulogising the British Raj and one of its presidents, Pandit Bishan Narayan Dar,



even said that British rule in India was the "greatest gift of providence to his race."

Point to be noted here is that nowhere does the INC website mention about Hume. History of this party is one that was never actually rooted in India's cultural identity as a basis for nationhood. This is a deeper theme in itself.

In the historical context, recent public pronouncements by INC members, who have alarmed many Indians and provided fodder dangerously enough to Pakistan, bears reference to the party's history. The INC was indeed so cosy with the British that its prominent members failed to create a national identity that could resonate in its being — either before or after independence. The ones, who stood for a stronger and more assertive tone in demanding legitimate rights for the people, were staunch nationalists but were deemed as "extremists." And this is well-known viz, the divisions between the "moderates" and the "extremists" in the INC.

The firebrand, who gave the first clarion call for *swarajya* before Gandhiji, was Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, who said, "Swarajya is my birthright and I shall have it" in 1906. This call came at a time when the INC was led by the moderates (which was true for its first 20 years of existence, working only on policy changes through administrative means). INC's top leaders didn't really want to let go off the British rule as they thought of it as being beneficial to the nation. This can be seen in the stated position of several INC presidents of the early days.

What is INC's position on nationalism? The party has never come to terms with what its position on India as a nation is and what it means to be an Indian. This could be because like many Indians believe, there was no armed struggle by its members to achieve independence, no suffering and no pain. It was, in fact, the armed resistance by the Indian National Army (INA), led by Netaji Subhash Chandra

Bose, that pushed the British to the wall and raised the daunting prospect of an outright mutiny — the INA's contribution to India's independence is undeniable. The sacrifices made by INA soldiers are, however, not what we think about in the common narrative of India's independence.

Unlike other nations, India did not really win a war and defeat foreign forces to reclaim its sovereignty. So, post-independence, the INC captured national consciousness by means of educational propaganda that highlighted the party's role in the freedom struggle when the fact remains that none of the prominent leaders from INC lost their lives to gain independence. The great sons of India, who sacrificed their lives like Shaheed Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, Chandrashekhar Azad and Khudiram Bose, were not talked about in the public domain. Instead, India's freedom from the British was and is still showcased as being an INC affair, failing to highlight the internal struggles within the party in its early days with the "moderates" toeing the British line of administrative reform and discussions and "extremists" demanding freedom from foreign rule before Gandhiji came to India and led the struggle. Needless to say, these "extremists," or assertive nationalists, didn't really make it big in INC as time went on after independence.

This then is the problem with INC. It never believed in the main pillars that define a country — a unified core cultural identity and military strength that builds a nation. This is why when quite naturally all Indians would feel a swell of pride on the achievements of the military, Congressmen don't. The INC's disparaging stand on the brave and impactful Balakot strike by the Indian Air Force even disturbed former party leaders like Tom Vadakkam, who spoke about it later when he was asked as to why he decided to join the BJP.

A disconnect with India: With no clear

policy except for mentions like secularism, the party members' lack of national pride remained obfuscated from public knowledge all these decades except for the occasional mention of 1971 and Bangladesh (of course, it didn't explain why 90,000 PoWs had to be returned to Pakistan to keep alive the fire of hatred against India in them as free Pakistanis and go on to spawn anti-India terrorism). The truth of the INC — as a party still comprising the English-speaking elite, scoffing at all that is anti-theoretical to its understanding — is being exposed now. All of this reveals a well-entrenched disconnect with Indian ethos and pride of the people.

In the 10 years of UPA rule, there was nothing much to feel proud about but much to be disheartened about, including the cowardly silence by the Congress powers-that-be in Delhi after the horrendous Mumbai 26/11 attacks. But after losing power in 2014, party leaders have maintained a unified stance to run down India's significant achievements.

Since the last five years, India has touched significant highs on defence and technology fronts, something it had not pursued in its years in governance. So its principal strategy is to attack Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Given its origin, it is difficult for the INC to internalise the idea of India, the nation, its pride, its spirit and its civilisational sanctity. For it, poll time means reviving divisive agenda and let's not forget that the divide and rule policy worked well for the British, who inspired and founded the INC anyway. And so this saga endures. It is time for the voters to inform themselves of the history of the INC and realise that it never really came around to re-modelling itself from its British past as colonised subjects. And any party, which chooses to ally with the INC now, is also standing by the same credo of perpetuating that legacy.

(The writer is a social activist)

Gradual death of a geological marvel

It is baffling that the Aravallis, which were once a contiguous range, had to pay a heavy price due to human activities like mining. The range today has blunted, desertified and needs protection. The judiciary must intervene



KOTA SRIRAJ

The might of the mountain ranges is almost mythical. These natural formations have not only shaped history and topography but have also played a pivotal role in conserving the ecology. These once formidable ranges — be it the Western Ghats along the south-western coast of India or the Aravallis in the North — have existed unchallenged throughout the history of time. But the reign of supremacy for these colossal wonders seems to be waning thanks to deteriorating environmental and worsening climate conditions. The negative role played by mankind is unfortunately expediting the end of these marvels of nature.

The Aravalli mountain range is one of the oldest in the world. It

extends across more than 693 kms from Gujarat to Delhi (through Rajasthan and Haryana). The Aravallis, with their vast landscape and biological diversity, have shaped India's northern landscape in more ways than one.

They guide the monsoon clouds and act as a groundwater recharge zone. Thus, they are important for long-term ecological security of Indian cities. The Aravallis also help in preventing long-term desertification. They act as a barrier against the wind, carrying sand from the Thar Desert and prevent it from entering the Delhi-NCR region.

Greenery associated with this mountain range has been replaced with dry and dusty shrub-like environment. This is due to the mountain range being subjected to decades of abuse and threats from mining activities and large-scale real estate developments. The degradation of the Aravallis has led to a decline in wildlife habitat, thus adding to the animal-human conflict. The revival of the Aravallis has become almost an uphill



task, thanks to the many problems associated with it and the continuous intervention of humans. The situation has been exacerbated due to a decline in rainfall in the past few decades, which has led to the depletion of the groundwater table.

As the Aravallis paid the price of being close to human habitations, human intervention sadly did not stop at deforestation of the mountains. The real estate lobby and the mining mafia started eyeing the geological wealth of the mountain ranges. Political protection and apathy of the authorities further compromised the

already delicate condition of the range. And it's not that only the terrain has been affected. People and communities, who were dependent on the Aravallis, are now faced with an uncertain future. Further, large-scale mining with dynamites blowing up huge tracts of granite rocks caused relentless vibrations and tremors that led to the permanent displacement of many bird species that were native to the area.

Prosperity of a region is directly proportionate to the concern and care shown by the local people towards their natural assets and resources. This

is exactly the problem with conservation initiatives for the Aravallis as the people as also the officials have not realised the potential of natural marvel that they have at their disposal. They could only decipher the economic value of the range. As a result, this amazing creation of nature with all its unique flora and fauna was taken for granted and exploitation started to finish off large stretches.

To make matters worse, the Haryana Government recently passed an amendment in the Punjab Land and Preservation Act, a law that was drafted by the British in 1900. With a change in the law, it is now being feared that large areas of the Aravalli forest area, that were earlier protected, will now face the risk of being used for development purposes. But the Haryana Government defended the Act by stating that even though the protection of forests was its priority, the present scenario also required changes to be done, especially at a time when the State has to progress ahead.

This is shocking as the authori-

ties admit that the State's progress must happen at the cost of ecology and the environment.

There is no way to undo the damage done to the Aravalli range. Humans have exacted a terrible price from nature. The sad thing is that all of this is happening under the supervision of State authorities. Mining mafia trucks ply day-in and day-out, carrying loads of stone extracted from the quarries deep within the Aravallis.

In the midst of these dreary and grim conditions, all hope is not lost. The judiciary of India is playing a vanguard role by taking up critical issues pertaining to the well-being of the country and environment is certainly one of them. The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has intervened many times to ensure that the environment is safe. In matters pertaining to the Aravallis, too, the judiciary must intervene. This alone can stop the otherwise certain doom and death for the much-fabled Aravalli ranges.

(The writer is an environmental journalist)

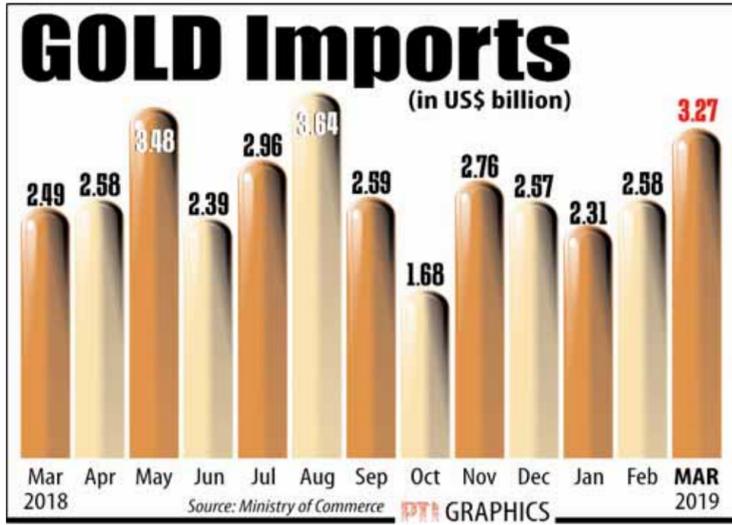


NOTRE DAME MUST BE A WARNING

The pain of witnessing the destruction of Notre Dame must be a goad to us all and a reminder of our obligation to protect what we have inherited and to pass it on in good condition to those who come after us. The estate is a known fire risk, and it is now high time our legislators decanted to temporary premises to allow the buildings to be made safe. (The Independent editorial)

TOPPERS

Scheme	NAV	1Yr %	Scheme	NAV	1Yr %	Scheme	NAV	1Yr %	Scheme	NAV	1Yr %
Reliance US Equity Opp Fund(G)	15.25	23.24	Kotak India EQ Contra Fund(G)	53.23	7.58	IDFC Multi Cap Fund-Reg(G)	94.01	-0.64	Equity Fund-Reg(G) Invesco India		
ICICI Pru US Bluechip Equity Fund(G)	27.6	20.95	Sundaram Fin Serv Opp Fund(G)	41.46	7.55	IDFC Core Equity Fund-Reg(G)	45.33	-0.73	Infrastructure Fund(G)		
DHFL Pramerica Global Equity Opp Fund(G)	18.58	20.34	UTI Equity Fund-Reg(G)	145.41	7.44	SBI Consumption Opp Fund-Reg(G)	119.99	-0.77	UTI LT Adv Fund-III(G)	13.99	-6.18
Franklin India Feeder - Franklin U.S. Opportunities Fund(G)	31.16	18.47	Canara Rob Consumer Trends Fund-Reg(G)	39.44	7.23	DSP World Gold Fund-Reg(G)	11.28	-0.79	L&T Midcap Fund-Reg(G)	135.86	-6.7
Tata Digital India Fund-Reg(G)	15.07	18.25	Franklin India Bluechip Fund(G)	476.65	7.09	UTI Core Equity Fund-Reg(G)	63.51	-0.82	L&T Large and Midcap Fund-Reg(G)	47.4	-6.74
SBI Technology Opp Fund-Reg(G)	65.56	16.76	Mirae Asset Great Consumer Fund-Reg(G)	35.27	7.03	Templeton India Equity Income Fund(G)	47.63	-0.89	Aditya Birla SL Dividend Yield Fund(G)	161.6	-7.02
Tata Index Fund-Sensex Plan(G)	96.37	15.37	DHFL Pramerica Large Cap Fund-2-Reg(G)	12.73	6.95	Edelweiss Long Term Equity Fund (Tax Savings)-Reg(G)	46.75	-0.95	UTI LT Adv Fund-IV(G)	10.73	-7.08
HDFC Index Fund-Sensex(X)	347.16	15.33	Franklin Build India Fund(G)	43.07	6.92	Principal Multi Cap Growth Fund(G)	145.09	-1.04	Invesco India Multicap Fund(G)	47.55	-7.24
SBI Banking & Financial Services Fund-Reg(G)	18.08	14.5	UTI Mastershare-Reg(G)	124.42	6.85	HDFC Focused 30 Fund(G)	79.36	-1.05	IDFC Focused Equity Fund-Reg(G)	37.02	-7.35
Reliance Index Fund - Sensex Plan(G)	19.29	14.45	HDFC Growth Opp Fund-Reg(G)	115.67	6.72	L&T Equity Fund-Reg(G)	82.82	-1.07	SBI PSU Fund-Reg(G)	10.46	-7.64
Franklin India Technology Fund(G)	164.55	14.17	Aditya Birla SL Banking & Financial Services Fund-Reg(G)	29.55	6.72	UTI Focussed Equity Fund-I(G)	13.77	-1.13	BNP Paribas Mid Cap Fund(G)	31.67	-7.73
Sundaram World Brand Fund-Sr II-Reg(G)	15.13	14.09	ICICI Pru Bluechip Fund(G)	42.81	6.63	Principal Personal Tax saver Fund	199.13	-1.14	Aditya Birla SL Midcap Fund(G)	290.87	-7.79
Sundaram World Brand Fund-Sr III-Reg(G)	15.31	14.04	Edelweiss Large Cap Fund(G)	35.83	6.61	Reliance Vision Fund(G)	544.27	-1.27	IDBI Midcap Fund(G)	10.99	-8.03
Aditya Birla SL Intl. Equity Fund-A(G)	21.17	14	UTI Banking and Financial Services Fund-Reg(G)	102.71	6.56	Sundaram Diversified Equity(G)	102.4	-1.54	Sundaram Infra Advantage Fund(G)	33.02	-8.2
ICICI Pru Technology Fund(G)	59.14	13.36	Principal Focused Multicap Fund(G)	64.69	6.5	Franklin India Prima Fund(G)	975.11	-1.57	Canara Rob Infrastructure Fund-Reg(G)	45.24	-8.38
HDFC Top 100 Fund(G)	503.58	13.32	Kotak Bluechip Fund(G)	236.96	6.5	Principal Tax Savings Fund	212.45	-1.61	Infrastructure Fund-Reg(G)		
Aditya Birla SL Global Real Estate Fund(G)	19.56	13.31				UTI India LifeStyle Fund-Reg(G)	25.69	-2.16	Kotak Infra & Eco Reform Fund(G)	20.22	-8.53
UTI Nifty Index Fund-Reg(G)	76.69	13.09				UTI Infrastructure Fund-Reg(G)	54.23	-2.2	IDFC Sterling Value Fund-Reg(G)	52.26	-8.71
IDFC Nifty Fund-Reg(G)	24.28	12.98				SBI Equity Opp Fund-Sr I-Reg(G)	16.04	-2.22			
HDFC Index Fund-NIFTY 50 Plan(G)	106.9	12.94				Reliance Consumption Fund(G)	65.9	-2.25			
Tata Index Fund-Nifty Plan(G)	70.96	12.88				Tata Equity P/E Fund(G)	135.96	-2.29			
SBI Nifty Index Fund-Reg(G)	100.96	12.54				BNP Paribas Multi Cap Fund(G)	46.96	-2.33			
DSP US Flexible Equity Fund-Reg(G)	24.98	12.49				Templeton India Value Fund(G)	261.96	-2.43			
Reliance Index Fund - Nifty Plan(G)	19.68	12.26				Sundaram Rural and Consumption Fund(G)	42.21	-2.54			
ICICI Pru Nifty Index Fund(G)	113.48	12.22				Tata Ethical Fund(G)	158.26	-2.55			
Aditya Birla SL Index Fund-Reg(G)	115.25	12.05				Motilal Oswal Midcap 30 Fund-Reg(G)	25.32	-2.59			
Franklin India Index Fund-NSE Nifty(G)	93.09	12				IDBI Diversified Equity Fund(G)	21.12	-2.81			
ICICI Pru Banking & Fin Serv Fund(G)	66.48	11.94				ICICI Pru Exports & Services Fund(G)	57.37	-2.86			
IDBI Nifty Index Fund(G)	21.69	11.89				ICICI Pru Value Fund-10(G)	11.56	-3.1			
Reliance Large Cap Fund(G)	35.85	11.86				ICICI Pru Dividend Yield Equity Fund(G)	17.12	-3.11			
Aditya Birla SL Digital India Fund(G)	53.39	11.51				SBI LT Advantage Fund-IV-Reg(G)	12.79	-3.12			
Baroda Banking & Fin Serv Fund(G)	23.33	11.47				ICICI Pru Value Fund-11(G)	12.15	-3.26			
Kotak US Equity Fund(G)	16.69	11.18				Edelweiss Eur Dynamic Equity Off-shr Fund-Reg(G)	10.98	-3.3			
Mirae Asset India Equity Fund-Reg(G)	51.76	11.13				IDBI Equity Advantage Fund-Reg(G)	26.53	-3.32			
HDFC Equity Fund(G)	681.48	10.41				DHFL Pramerica Euro Equity Fund(G)	13.43	-3.45			
Axis Bluechip Fund(G)	28.66	10.02				Principal Global Opportunities Fund(G)	28.73	-3.46			
Tata Banking & Financial Services Fund-Reg(G)	18.81	9.92				Tata Resources & Energy Fund-Reg(G)	14.44	-3.62			
SBI Magnum Equity ESG Fund-Reg(G)	105.6	9.77				SBI Contra Fund-Reg(G)	113.54	-3.74			
Mirae Asset Tax Saver Fund-Reg(G)	17.86	9.45				L&T India Value Fund-Reg(G)	36.3	-3.75			
Invesco India Financial Services Fund(G)	57.42	9.31				Aditya Birla SL Equity Advantage Fund(G)	405.73	-3.88			
Canara Rob Equity Diver Fund-Reg(G)	135.25	9.28				SBI LT Advantage Fund-II-Reg(G)	13.94	-3.88			
ICICI Pru Growth Fund-1(DP)	11.37	9.22				DSP Midcap Fund-Reg(G)	54.88	-3.89			
ICICI Pru Global Stable Equity Fund(G)	15.06	9.21				HDFC Small Cap Fund-Reg(G)	44.54	-3.94			
Canara Rob Bluechip Equity Fund-Reg(G)	24.96	9.19				Aditya Birla SL Global Commodities Fund(G)	12.52	-3.98			
Parag Parikh Long Term Equity Fund-Reg(G)	25.21	9.18				IDFC Tax Advt(ELSS) Fund-Reg(G)	56.91	-4			
ICICI Pru FMCG Fund(G)	245.57	9.05				Motilal Oswal Multicap 35 Fund-Reg(G)	26.13	-4.1			
Sundaram Select Focus(G)	180.96	9.03				L&T Tax Advt Fund-Reg(G)	54.11	-4.12			
Canara Rob Equity Tax Saver Fund-Reg(G)	65.82	8.99				Tata Infrastructure Fund-Reg(G)	55.95	-4.12			
Franklin India Focused Equity Fund(G)	42	8.96				UTI LT Adv Fund-V(G)	9.89	-4.27			
ICICI Pru Growth Fund-2(DP)	12.1	8.91				Sundaram Select Small Cap Series-IV-Reg(G)	14.3	-4.29			
ICICI Pru Multicap Fund(G)	299.35	8.72				Principal Emerging Bluechip Fund(G)	104.66	-4.43			
ICICI Pru LT Equity Fund (Tax Saving)(G)	385.41	8.68				Tata India Consumer Fund-Reg(G)	17.21	-4.46			
ICICI Pru Focused Equity Fund(G)	30.85	8.63				SBI Infrastructure Fund-Reg(G)	15.33	-4.46			
Reliance Banking Fund(G)	287.36	8.4				Invesco India PSU Equity Fund(G)	17.54	-4.47			
Axis Multicap Fund-Reg(G)	11.46	8.32				ICICI Pru Growth Fund-3(DP)	10.4	-4.5			
Kotak Standard Multicap Fund(G)	35.79	8.26				Sundaram Select Small Cap Series-III-Reg(G)	14.27	-4.55			
Reliance Pharma Fund(G)	153.69	8.19				Kotak Emerging Equity Scheme(G)	39.2	-4.6			
Kotak Tax Saver Scheme(G)	44.47	8.1				SBI Magnum Global Fund-Reg(G)	170.04	-4.89			
Mirae Asset Emerging Bluechip-Reg(G)	53.92	8.08				SBI LT Advantage Fund-I-Reg(G)	13.49	-5.06			
JM Core 11 Fund(G)	9.43	8.02				DSP India T.I.G.E.R Fund-Reg(G)	92.47	-5.1			
ICICI Pru Value Fund-15(G)	11.08	7.78				HDFC Mid-Cap Opportunities Fund(G)	55.8	-5.15			
Baroda Large Cap Fund(G)	14.68	7.62				Reliance Tax Saver (ELSS) Fund(G)	57.28	-5.16			
Reliance Multi Cap Fund(G)	99.89	7.59				ICICI Pru Value Fund-4(G)	21.6	-5.3			
						ICICI Pru Nifty Next 50 Index Fund(G)	25.19	-5.33			
						DSP Natural Res & New Energy Fund-Reg(G)	32.74	-5.39			
						Motilal Oswal Long Term Equity Fund-Reg(G)	17.24	-5.4			
						ICICI Pru Midcap Fund(G)	97.28	-5.42			
						IDBI Nifty Junior Index Fund(G)	21.43	-5.47			
						Baroda ELSS 96(G)	44.58	-5.49			
						Invesco India Feeder - Invesco Pan European	10.86	-5.97			
							17.2	-6.11			



China claims Masood Azhar issue at UNSC headed for settlement

PTI ■ BEIJING

China Wednesday dismissed reports that the US, the UK and France have served an ultimatum to Beijing to lift its "technical hold" by April 23 on branding Pakistan-based JeM chief Masood Azhar as a global terrorist by the UN but claimed the vexed issue was "moving towards settlement".



After the Pulwama attack, a fresh proposal to designate Azhar under the 1267 Al Qaeda Sanctions Committee of the UN Security Council was moved by France, the US and the UK.

However, China, a close ally of Pakistan, blocked the bid by putting a "technical hold" on the proposal. Following this, the US backed by the UK and France moved directly to UN Security Council (UNSC) to blacklist Azhar. China, a veto-wielding member of the UNSC, opposed the move, saying the issue should be resolved at the 1267 Committee itself which also functioned under the top UN body.

Reacting to reports that the three countries have fixed April 23 as a deadline for China to lift its technical hold in the 1267 Committee or else

they would press for a discussion on the issue at the UNSC itself, Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang said, "I don't know where you get such information."

He said both the UNSC and its subsidiary body 1267 Committee have clear rules and procedures. "You need to get clarification from the sources about where you get such information. China's position is very clear. This issue should be resolved through cooperation. We don't believe that any efforts without the consensus of members will achieve a satisfying results," he

said. "On the issue of listing Azhar, China's position remains unchanged. We also stay in communication with relevant parties. The matter is moving towards the direction of settlement," he said.

"The relevant parties are forcing new resolution through the UN Security Council. We firmly oppose that. In fact, the relevant discussion in UNSC, most member expressed wish that this issue should be discussed within the 1267 Committee and they don't hope to bypass it to handle the issue," he said. Without directly referring to the US, Lu said,

"We hope the relevant country can respect the opinion of most members of the UNSC to act in a cooperative manner and help this issue be properly resolved within the framework of the 1267 Committee."

Asked to elaborate on his assertion that the issue which had been pending for years due to series of technical holds put by China had moved towards resolution, Lu merely reiterated that the "matter is moving towards the direction of settlement". China which has been consistently blocking India, US, UK and France's moves to blacklist Azhar had stalled it once again at the 1267 Committee of the UN on March 14 by putting a "technical hold".

On April 1, China claimed that "positive progress" has been made to resolve the issue and accused Washington of scuttling its efforts by taking it to the UN Security Council.

China also came up with similar claims on April 3 responding to US State Department spokesman's comments that Washington will use all available resources to blacklist Azhar to ensure that he will be held accountable.

Mallya laments 'airline karma' for cash-strapped Jet Airways

PTI ■ LONDON

Embattled liquor tycoon Vijay Mallya on Wednesday took to social media once again, this time to express his solidarity with Jet Airways founder Naresh Goyal and repeat his own offer to repay all the money he owes to India's public sector banks. The 63-year-old, fighting his extradition to India on charges of fraud and money laundering amounting to an alleged Rs 9,000 crores, claims private airlines were discriminated against by the Indian government, which bailed out state-owned Air India but did not assist his own Kingfisher Airlines and now Jet Airways.

Even though Jet was a major competitor to Kingfisher at the time I feel sorry to see such a large private airline on the brink of failure when government used 35K crores (Rs 35,000 crores) of public funds to bail out Air India. Just being a PSU is no excuse for discrimination," Mallya wrote in his latest intervention on Twitter.

He added: "I invested heavily into Kingfisher which rapidly grew to become India's largest and most awarded airline. True, Kingfisher borrowed from PSU Banks as well. I have offered to



cel a string of flights amid a mounting crisis.

"Even though we were fierce competitors, my sympathies go out to Naresh and Anita Goyal who built Jet Airways that India should be extremely proud of. Fine Airline providing vital connectivity and class service. Sad that so many Airlines have bitten the dust in India. Why," Mallya questioned.

Mallya remains on bail as he awaits an oral hearing to be listed by the UK High Court for his appeal against his extradition ordered by Westminster Magistrates' Court in London last December and then signed off by UK home secretary Sajid Javid in February.

A first level of that written appeal has already been rejected by the High Court, where it will now be considered during a brief hearing to determine any grounds to grant permission for Mallya's appeal to proceed to appeal substantive hearing.

The businessman faces a series of unrelated legal battles in the UK courts, including a USD 40-million claim brought by drinks giant Diageo and an attempt by Swiss bank UBS to repossess his posh London home overlooking Regent's Park.

Notre Dame will be closed up to 6 years

Paris (AP): Notre Dame's restorer says he will close the burned-out Paris cathedral for up to six years. Bishop Patrick Chauvet acknowledged that the famed monument would close down for "five to six years" as he spoke with local business owners Wednesday, two days after a blaze torched the roof of the cathedral and brought down its spire.

Chauvet said "a segment of the cathedral has been very weakened" by the devastating fire. He did not elaborate which section he was talking about. He added it was unclear what the church's 67 employees would be doing in the future. The French prime minister has announced an international architects' competition to rebuild the spire of Notre Dame Cathedral.

Edouard Philippe is speaking following a special Cabinet meeting Wednesday held by French President Emmanuel Macron, focusing on the reconstruction of the cathedral. Philippe said the competition aims at "giving Notre Dame a spire adapted to technologies and challenges of our times." He said authorities have no estimate yet of the total cost of the renovation work. Macron said Tuesday he wants the cathedral to be rebuilt in five years.

Philippe said: "This is obviously a huge challenge, a historic responsibility." The Paris prosecutor's office says investigators looking into the causes of the Notre Dame fire have still not been able to look inside the cathedral, as it remains unsafe. Investigators will continue with interviews Wednesday, saying the inquiry will go on until prosecutors uncover "the truth and identify the origin" of the blaze.

On Tuesday, investigators spoke with around 30 witnesses, including employees of companies involved in the church's restoration and security personnel.

The Czech Philharmonic and other major Czech orchestras will join forces to play a fundraising concert to help restore Notre Dame Cathedral, heavily damaged by a devastating fire.

The Czech Philharmonic says the orchestras will perform Antonin Dvorak's "Stabat Mater" in St. Vitus Cathedral, a Gothic masterpiece, in Prague on Tuesday.

Pope Francis thanks firefighters on behalf of whole Church

Vatican City (AFP): Pope Francis on Wednesday thanked the firefighters who risked their lives to save the Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris on behalf of the entire Catholic Church. "The gratitude of the whole Church goes to all those who did everything they could, even risking their lives, to save the Basilica," he said during the weekly general audience in Saint Peter's Square.

Francis said he had been "very saddened" by the vast blaze on Monday which gutted the great Paris landmark, destroying the roof, causing the steeple to collapse and leaving France reeling in shock. A firefighter suffered injuries during the blaze, which at one point threatened to bring down one of the two monumental bell towers on the western facade of the cathedral that is visited by 13 million tourists each year.

UNESCO experts ready to assist reconstruction of Notre Dame

PTI ■ UNITED NATIONS

Two-thirds of the largely medieval roof of the famed Notre Dame cathedral in Paris have "gone" after the devastating fire, but UN cultural experts are standing by to offer help in rebuilding the iconic structure, UNESCO World Heritage Centre Director Mechthild Rosler said.

Rosler, who visited the site Tuesday, told UN News that the cathedral is a universal symbol and the centre of France and its devastation has left people across nations shocked.

She described seeing people praying outside the stricken symbol of the city and the nation, still trying to take in the scale of the disaster.

"I saw many, many people going from the Metro, to the site of Notre Dame, and I have to say many are still in a

state of shock, because it's not only the Christian community, it's a building for all of us," she said. "Really, it's a universal symbol and it's the centre of France... I think this is really shocking people profoundly and they lost something that is part of their identity."

Rosler said that a team of UNESCO experts is on hand to investigate the stability of the stonework and potential damage to stained glass windows, echoing a statement by the UNESCO Director-General, Audrey Azoulay, in which she announced that a "rapid damage assessment" would be carried out as soon as possible with the authorities. After visiting the site of Notre Dame on Monday night, Azoulay said "we are all heartbroken."

The Cathedral is part of the World Heritage site officially known as "Paris, Banks of the Seine", inscribed on the

World Heritage List, in 1991. "Notre Dame represents a historically, architecturally, and spiritually, outstanding universal heritage. It is also a monument of literary heritage, a place that is unique in our collective imagination," said the UNESCO chief, adding that the inferno which engulfed the cathedral, but appears to have left the medieval stonework intact, "reminds us of the power of heritage that connects us to one another. We are receiving messages of support from all over the world."

The cathedral, where construction began in the 1160s extending for more than a century, is considered to be the finest example of the French Gothic style of architecture, with its groundbreaking use of rib vaults and buttresses, stained glass rosettes and sculpted ornaments.



Cecile Deleville smiles during an interview with the Associated Press in Paris Tuesday April 16, 2019. For the 66-year-old Deleville, there is no replacement for Notre Dame, where she worshipped regularly, sometimes daily, for two decades. She said it's likely she would go to the nearby Left Bank church Saint Severin, which she had just exited before sharing her feelings.

Protectionism doesn't really help preserve jobs: Rajan

PTI ■ UNITED NATIONS

Protectionism does not really help preserve jobs and offers little defence against the job-destroying effects of automation and Artificial Intelligence, Former Reserve Bank of India Governor Raghuram Rajan has said, asserting that industrial and developing nations cannot afford to ignore the democratic reaction from those left behind by globalisation and technological change.



Delivering the keynote address at the 2019 ECOSOC Forum on Financing for Development at the UN Headquarters on Monday, Rajan said the open liberal democratic market system that brought the world enormous prosperity in the six decades or so after the second World War is now under attack. "Interestingly the critics are not the usual radical academics or leftist leaders, instead they come from some of the most prosperous nations in the world. These are nations that have benefited tremendously from the open world order," he said. Rajan, the Katherine Dusak

Miller Distinguished Service Professor of Finance at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business, said, "We know that protectionism does not really help preserve jobs. In this competitive world, jobs gained by a country in the protected sector are often lost in other sectors that are now rendered uncompetitive because they pay higher prices for inputs."

He added that protectionism offers "little defence" against the job destroying effects of automation and Artificial Intelligence, which often are the larger source of job losses. "The only guaran-

tee against redundancy is to help the workforce stay ahead through constant retraining. As populations age in industrial countries, more of them will become reliant on foreign demand from younger countries outside, especially developing countries and emerging markets to boost growth," he said. "Is it wise to block imports today from the very countries you will have to export to in the future? Probably not," he said.

Rajan said that while nations recognise the cost of protectionism, it is true that "we cannot afford to ignore the democratic reaction from those left behind by globalisation and technological change. This should be true both of industrial, countries and developing countries."

We have to pay more attention to those left behind." He added that if concerns of these people are to be addressed while preserving an open world, "we should start by recognising that the globalisation of trade and investment flows has disempowered people and their communities."

Bashir moved to prison as protesters rally

AFP ■ KHARTOUM

Sudan's military rulers have transferred ousted president Omar al-Bashir to prison, a family source said Wednesday, as demonstrators keep up their sit-in outside the army complex calling for a swift transfer to civilian government. Following the dramatic end to Bashir's rule of three decades last week, he was moved late Tuesday "to Kober prison in Khartoum," the source said without revealing his name for security reasons. Witnesses near the prison in north Khartoum said there was a heavy deployment of soldiers and members of a paramilitary group outside.

The 75-year-old's whereabouts have been unknown since a military takeover on Thursday, when the country's new rulers said he was being held "in a secure place". The detention of Bashir has failed to pacify protesters, who launched anti-government demonstrations in December and have for days been camped out in front of Khartoum's army headquarters. Sudan's military rulers have made some concessions to protesters,

including the sacking Tuesday of prosecutor general Omer Ahmed Mohamed, but demonstrators fear their uprising could be hijacked. "We faced tear gas, many of us were jailed. We have been shot and many have died. All this because we said what we wanted to," protester Fadia Khalaf told AFP. Officials say at least 65 people have been killed in protest-related violence since December, with some of those killed immortalised in a Khartoum mural. While there have been scenes of celebration — with demonstrators singing and waving their national flag — the protest site has grown more tense amid concerns the army will try to clear the sit-in with force.

"Now we fear that our revolution could be stolen, which is why we are keeping our ground here. We are staying here until our demands are met," said Khalaf. Earlier this week witnesses said several army vehicles had surrounded the area and that troops were removing the barricades which demonstrators had put up as a security measure. On taking power on Thursday the army



In this May 1, 2010 file photo, then Sudanese President Omar el-Bashir greets his supporters during a rally at a fair in Khartoum, Sudan. A Sudanese official and a former minister said Wednesday that the military has transferred ousted President Omar al-Bashir to the city's Kober Prison in Khartoum. The move came after organizers of the street protests demanded the military move al-Bashir to an official prison. AP/File

said a military council would run the country for two years, sparking an immediate backlash from protest leaders who have issued a series of demands.

Just a day later former defence minister General Awad Ibn Ouf stepped down as council chief, sparking jubilation on the streets of Khartoum. His successor General Abdul Fattah

al-Burhan oversaw weekend talks with political parties, which failed to make headway. Sudan's foreign minister has said Burhan is "committed to having a complete civilian government" and has called on other nations to back the council.

The military rulers dispatched an envoy to the African Union's headquarters in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa, but the regional bloc threatened to suspend Sudan over the coup.

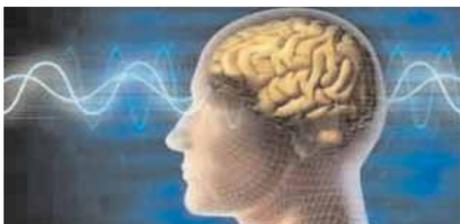
The 55-member union has given the military council just 15 days to hand over to civilian rule, while the United Nations has appointed a new envoy to work with the AU on mediating an end to the crisis. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have thrown their support behind the military, whose troops are set to remain in an alliance led by the Gulf powerhouses in Yemen.

Western powers which previously called on Bashir to heed protesters' demands have continued to back the demonstrators, pushing for a civilian administration in talks with military rulers.

Strong political beliefs may hamper ability to think logically

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

People's ability to think logically suffers when they are faced with arguments that go against their political belief systems, a study has found. The research, published in the journal Social Psychological and Personality Science, also shows that when confronted with the unsound reasoning of opposing groups, people become better able to identify flawed logic.



The researchers from the University of Virginia and University of California, Irvine

in the US studied ideological belief bias among 924 American liberals and conservatives from a website YourMorals.org. Visitors to

the site evaluated the logical soundness of classically structured logical syllogisms supporting liberal or conservative beliefs. Of 16 syllogisms, half

were structured as sound arguments, and half unsound. On average, participants correctly judged 73 per cent of the syllogisms. However, their ability to judge correctly depended on their political views.

"Liberals were better at identifying flawed arguments supporting conservative beliefs and conservatives were better at identifying flawed arguments supporting liberal beliefs," said Anup Gampa from the University of Virginia. The researchers also observed ideological belief bias effects among 1,489 partici-

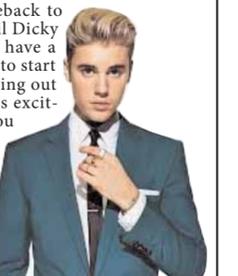
pants from ProjectImplicit.org. The participants in this study were trained in logical reasoning before evaluating political syllogisms using language similar to what they might encounter in popular media.

Even with the training, the ability to analyse arguments fell into the same patterns. They found similar patterns of bias in a nationally representative sample containing 1,109 liberals and conservatives.

In the era of fake news, these logical fallacies can be even more potent.

GLOBE TROTTER Bieber to return to music with Dicky's song

Los Angeles: Pop star Justin Bieber is set to make a comeback to the music scene with rapper Lil Dicky's upcoming track. Lil Dicky confirmed on Twitter that his new single, which is yet to have a publicly released title, will feature Bieber. "Hi, I think I have to start talking to you guys about this new song and video I'm putting out this week because I'm so excited. I've really never been this excited for anything in my life. So many things I want to tell you but I just want to start with two simple words: Justin Bieber," the rapper said in a video posted on the social media platform. The 25-year-old singer also confirmed the collaboration when he retweeted the clip and added, "Friday. Let's save the world @lildickytweets (sic)". Bieber had earlier said he is taking time off from his music career to focus on his personal life and mental health. He tied the knot with model Hailey Bieber last year.



Indonesia's Widodo set for 2nd term as Prez

AP ■ JAKARTA

Indonesian President Joko Widodo has won a second five-year term, preliminary election results showed Wednesday, in a victory for moderation over the nationalistic rhetoric of his rival, Prabowo Subianto. Vote counts from five independent survey groups showed Widodo with a clear lead over Subianto, a general during the era of the Suharto military dictatorship who warned Indonesia would fall apart without his strongman leadership.

The so-called "quick counts" from reputable survey organisations that use a sample of polling stations have been reliable in past elections. With an average of 80 per cent of sample polling stations counted, the five survey organisations showed Widodo winning 54-56 per cent of the vote, a modest improvement on his 2014 showing. Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation, is an outpost of democracy in a Southeast Asian neighbourhood of authoritarian governments and is forecast to be among the world's biggest economies by 2030.

A second term for Widodo, the first Indonesian president from outside the Jakarta elite, could further cement the country's two decades of democratization. Addressing jubilant supporters a few hours after polls closed, Widodo said he was aware of his lead and called for the nation to reunite after the divisions of the campaign.

"From the indications of the exit poll and also the quick counts, we can see it all, but we must be patient to wait for the official counting from the Election Commission," he said.

Subianto, who also lost to Widodo in the 2014 presidential election, had not yet conceded defeat. He said his campaign's exit poll and quick count showed that he had won but urged his supporters not to cause chaos.

His campaign team has alleged massive voter list irregularities, but analysts say the claims are absurd and designed to undermine the election. The balloting was a huge logistical exercise with 193 million people eligible to vote, more than 800,000 polling stations and 17 million people involved in ensuring the polls ran smoothly. Helicopters, boats and horses were used to get ballots to remote and inaccessible corners of the archipelago.

Conservative opponents had tried to discredit Widodo, a furniture exporter whose political career started as a small city mayor, as insufficiently Islamic. Widodo tried to neutralize the not-a-real-Muslim whispers with the selection of Ma'ruf Amin, the leading Islamic cleric in Indonesia, as his running mate, though he risked alienating progressive and moderate supporters. Pre-election polls consistently gave a lead of as much as 20 percentage points to Widodo, widely known by the nickname "Jokowi." "I've voted for Jokowi because five years in



Supporters of Indonesian President Joko Widodo celebrate during a rally in Jakarta, Indonesia, Wednesday.

office was not enough for him to complete his brilliant programs for infrastructure, health and education," said Eko Cahya Pratama, 43, after voting in Tangerang on the outskirts of Jakarta.

"For me, this country is better to be managed by a man with a clean track record rather than a dirty one in the past," he said. After the results became clear, hundreds of Widodo supporters marched through downtown Jakarta, some holding aloft a giant red and white Indonesian flag.

Widodo's campaign high-

lighted his progress in poverty reduction and improving Indonesia's inadequate infrastructure with new ports, toll roads, airports and mass rapid transit. The latter became a reality last month in chronically congested Jakarta with the opening of a subway.

A strident nationalist, Subianto ran a fear-based campaign, highlighting what he sees as Indonesia's weakness and the risk of exploitation by foreign powers or disintegration. His ultra-nationalist tactics preceded President Donald

Trump's polarizing rhetoric by several years and the party he founded in 2008, Gerindra, is officially known as the Greater Indonesia Movement. He has long been dogged by his dismissal from the military in 1998 after soldiers under his command kidnapped student activists, 13 of whom were never seen again.

"I promised that we will work for the good of the country," Subianto said after voting. "If it's chaos or not, it's not coming from us. But I guarantee that we don't want to be cheated anymore, that Indonesian

people don't want to be cheated anymore." Economic growth in Indonesia has been stable if unspectacular and inflation is low, maximizing the impact of poverty alleviation programs.

The U.N.'s Food and Agriculture Organization and other international agencies said earlier this month that the percentage of Indonesian children suffering from stunting — malnutrition that can result in lifelong physical and cognitive impairment — fell to 30.8 per cent from nearly 38 per cent between 2013 and 2018.

Pakistan's newly appointed foreign secretary assumes office

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's seasoned diplomat Sohail Mahmood on Wednesday took over as the country's new foreign secretary. Before being appointed as the foreign secretary, Mahmood served as Pakistan's High Commissioner to India. "Foreign Secretary Sohail Mahmood assumed charge and called on the Foreign Minister today," Foreign Office spokesman Mohammad Faisal said. Mahmood replaced Tehmina Janjua, who retired on April 16 after serving in the position for two years. Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi congratulated the foreign secretary on assuming charge. During the meeting, the two discussed the different contours of foreign policy. Mahmood was appointed as high commissioner to India in August 2017. He was serving as ambassador to Turkey when sent to India.

He previously also served at Washington and New York in addition to other posting in his long career.

In an interview to PTI before leaving for Islamabad this week, Mahmood said Pakistan is hoping for "re-engagement" with India after the Lok Sabha polls as structured dialogue will help the two countries understand mutual concerns, resolve

disputes and build the edifice of durable peace and security. Mahmood also said there was a need for an "objective" narrative about Pakistan in India which could facilitate peaceful, cooperative and good neighbourly ties. The relations between India and Pakistan remained tense since 2016. Their ties further nose-dived following a string of cross-border terror attacks in 2016 and India's subsequent surgical strikes.

Tensions flared up between India and Pakistan after a suicide bomber of Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Muhammed (JeM) killed 40 CRPF personnel in Kashmir's Pulwama district on February 14. Amid mounting outrage, the Indian Air Force (IAF) carried out a counter-terror operation, hitting the biggest JeM training camp in Balakot, deep inside Pakistan on February 26. The next day, Pakistan Air Force retaliated and downed a MiG-21 in an aerial combat and captured an IAF pilot, who was handed over to India on March 1.



6 killed in Libya capital as UN debates ceasefire

AFP ■ TRIPOLI

Rocket fire on the Libyan capital Tripoli, which the UN-recognised government blamed on military strongman Khalifa Haftar, killed six people ahead of a Security Council meeting on Wednesday over a ceasefire. Diplomats have long complained that Libyan peace efforts have been stymied by major powers backing the rival sides, with Haftar ally Russia quibbling over the proposed wording of the ceasefire demand even as the bombardment of Tripoli intensifies. Three of the six killed in the rocket fire on the south Tripoli neighbourhoods of Abu Salim and Al-Antisar late on Tuesday were women, said the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, or OCHA. Abu Salim mayor Abdelrahman al-Hamdi confirmed the death toll and said 35 other people were wounded. AFP journalists heard seven loud explosions as rockets also hit the city centre, the first since Haftar's Libyan National Army militia launched an offensive on April 4 to capture the capital from the government and its militia allies.

The LNA blamed the rocket fire on the "terrorist militias" whose grip on the capital it says it is fighting to end. The bombardment came as diplomats at the UN Security Council began negotiations on a British-drafted resolution that would demand an immediate ceasefire in Libya. The proposed text seen by AFP warns that the offensive by Haftar's LNA "threatens the stability of Libya



This Sept. 21, 2018 photo, shows fighters under the UN-backed government on the front lines during clashes in southern Tripoli. Libya is on the verge of an all-out war involving a rogues' gallery of militias, many of which are little more than criminal gangs armed with heavy weapons. The self-styled Libyan National Army, led by Field Marshal Khalifa Hifter, launched a surprise offensive to retake Tripoli on April 5, 2019 from the transitional government supported by U.N. and Western nations led by Fayez Sarraj.

and prospects for a United Nations-facilitated political dialogue and a comprehensive political solution to the crisis."

After Britain circulated the text late Monday, a first round of negotiations was held during which Russia raised objections to references criticising Haftar, diplomats said. "They were very clear. No reference anywhere," a council diplomat said. During a tour of the Tripoli neighbourhoods worst hit by the rocket fire on Tuesday night, unity government head Fayez al-Sarraj said the Security Council must hold Haftar to account for his forces' "savagery and barbarism." "It's

the legal and humanitarian responsibility of the Security Council and the international community to hold this criminal responsible for his actions," Sarraj said in footage of the tour released by his office.

He said his government would seek Haftar's prosecution for war crimes by the International Criminal Court in The Hague. "We are going to hand all the documentation to the ICC tomorrow (Wednesday) for a prosecution for war crimes and crimes against humanity," he said. At least 189 people have been killed, 816 wounded and more than 18,000 displaced since

Haftar ordered his forces to march on Tripoli, according to the World Health Organization. Britain was hoping to bring the ceasefire resolution to a vote at the Security Council before Friday, but diplomats pointed to Russia's objections as a hurdle.

The proposed measure echoed a call by UN chief Antonio Guterres, who was in Libya to advance prospects for a political solution when Haftar launched his offensive. Haftar, seen by his allies Egypt and the United Arab Emirates as a bulwark against Islamists, has declared he wants to seize the capital.

Mukesh Ambani, Katju, Guruswamy among TIME's list of 100 most influential people

PTI ■ NEW YORK

Reliance Industries Chairman Mukesh Ambani and public-interest litigators Arundhati Katju and Menaka Guruswamy, who spearheaded a historic legal battle for LGBTQ rights in India, are among the Indians who have been named by TIME magazine in its prestigious list of the 100 most influential people in the world. The Time 100 Most Influential People 2019 list was released Wednesday, naming the world's most influential pioneers, leaders, titans, artists and icons of the year. The list includes Indian-American comedian and TV host Hasan Minhaj, US President Donald Trump, Pope Francis, Chinese President Xi Jinping, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan, iconic golfer Tiger Woods and Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg.

Writing the TIME 100 profile for Ambani, Anand Mahindra, chairman of business conglomerate the Mahindra Group, said Ambani's father Dhirubhai was a visionary in Indian business, whose Reliance Industries conglomerate pioneered ways of targeting global scale. "But Ambani's vision is now even more ambitious than that of the father whose blessings he unfailingly invokes at the launch of each initiative," Mahindra wrote adding that the scale of his Reliance Jio mobile-data network, which has already connected over 280 million people in India



with low-cost 4G, is "impressive by any standard." Mahindra cites Ambani's promise in 2003 through an advertising tagline that his company would "put the world in the palm of your hand."

"It won't be long before he delivers on that promise," he said. Award-winning actor Priyanka Chopra wrote a profile for Katju and Guruswamy, the pioneering women who led from the front in the fight to ensure equal rights for the LGBTQ community in India and were among the lead lawyers representing gay petitioners to have the ban on consensual gay sex struck down in the country.

Arundhati and Menaka have helped take a giant step for LGBTQ+ rights in the world's largest democracy. In their committed fight for justice, they have shown us that we as a society must continue to make progress, even after laws are changed, and that we must make an effort to understand, accept and love," Chopra said. The Supreme Court of India struck down Section 377 of the

Indian Penal Code in a unanimous vote in September 2018. The outdated legacy of the British colonization of India, Section 377 rendered all sexual activities "against the sexual nature" punishable by law.

Chopra said the "landmark judgment", overturning a 157-year-old law, was the outcome of a long-term campaign orchestrated by two "amazing" public-interest litigators, Katju and Guruswamy. In a profile for Minhaj, host of The Daily Show Trevor Noah wrote that five years after he first met Minhaj in 2014, "Hasan is still as fresh-faced as ever, but his voice booms across screens around the world, thanks to his groundbreaking Netflix show Patriot Act with Hasan Minhaj." "We've needed Hasan's voice since Donald Trump came down that golden escalator and turned immigrants and Muslims into his targets," Noah said, adding that Hasan's show "Patriot Act" is the manifestation of Hasan's "whip-smart commentary, charisma and sincerity. It's also a consistent reminder that Hasan is America. And America is Hasan."

The illustrious list also includes US Open winner Naomi Osaka, actor Mahershala Ali, Oscar-winning actor Rami Malek, former first lady Michelle Obama, South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa, Oscar-winning singer and actor Lady Gaga, Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Mohamed bin Zayed, Special counsel Robert Mueller and Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

Foxconn boss to run for Taiwan presidency



Taipei (AFP) — The boss of tech giant Foxconn said Wednesday he will be running for president of Taiwan — after securing the backing of a local Sea Goddess. Gou, who announced this week he was stepping back from front-line operations at the Apple supplier, said he would seek the nomination of the Beijing-friendly Kuomintang (KMT) opposition party.

"I am willing to join the party's primary. If I win I will represent the KMT in the 2020 elections," he said at a KMT meeting in Taipei. Gou also said he would "fully support" the party's candidate if he failed to secure the nomination. Earlier Wednesday while visiting a temple of local sea goddess Matsu in New Taipei city, the 69-year-old said the goddess "told me to step forward... to help the people."

Gou is expected to face KMT heavyweights including former party chairman Eric Chu and former parliamentary speaker Wang Jin-pyng, who have announced their intentions to run for president. Chu lost to incumbent President Tsai Ing-wen of the Beijing-sceptic Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in the 2016 presidential elections. Tsai, 62, has said she will seek re-election in the January 11 polls. She faces a challenge from pro-independence former premier William Lai in the party's primary. The DPP is set to announce its presidential candidate later this month.

Also known by its official name Hon Hai Precision Industry, Foxconn assembles Apple iPhones as well as parts and accessories for other international brands. Known for his aggressive deal-making, Gou has been snapping up investments from Japan to India in a bid to diversify from electronics assembly. Gou was born in 1950 in Taipei to parents who had fled the Communist victory in China's civil war. He studied shipping management in college while supporting himself with part-time jobs.

He started his business in 1974 making television parts with an investment of Tw\$100,000 (\$3,250 at current exchange rates) from his mother, and later began producing computer parts — eventually growing to become the world's biggest contract electronics maker.

CLIMATE PROTEST



Members of the so called "Red Brigade" march in disobedience on the street from Oxford Circus to Piccadilly Circus to protest in London, Wednesday. The group Extinction Rebellion is calling for a week of civil disobedience against what it says is the failure to tackle the causes of climate change.

For its health and yours, keep the cat indoors

Paris (AFP) — At least one running argument among cat lovers is now over: Whiskers, Lucy and Tigger are definitely better off staying indoors, scientists reported Wednesday. Pet cats allowed outdoors, in fact, are nearly three times as likely to become infected with pathogens or parasites than those confined to quarters, they reported in the Royal Society journal Biology Letters.

Two-legged house-mates should also take note because cats — a.k.a. Felis catus — can transmit some of those diseases to humans, the authors said. Intriguingly, the farther domesticated felines are from the equator, the more likely they are to be afflicted by some kind of bug or virus, if they spend time outdoors.

"Each degree in absolute latitude increased infection likelihood by four percent," said lead author Kayleigh Chalkowski, a researcher at the School of Forestry and Wildlife



Sciences at Auburn University in Alabama.

"You think of tropical regions as just having more wildlife, more parasites," she told AFP. "But it turned out that latitude had the opposite effect." To settle the indoor-vs-outdoor question once and for all, Chalkowski and colleagues combed through nearly two dozen earlier studies in which the prevalence of one or more diseases was compared across

interior and exterior environments. All told, the new study looked at 19 different cat pathogens in more than a dozen countries, including Spain, Canada, Australia, Switzerland, Germany, Pakistan, Brazil, the Netherlands and St. Kitts.

"This is the first time outdoor access as a risk factor for infection in cats has been quantified across a wide range of geographic locales and types of pathogens," Chalkowski said. The effects were consistent for almost all of the diseases, including feline roundworm and the single-cell parasite that causes toxoplasmosis, both of which can affect humans. This held true regardless of how they were transmitted — whether from soil, other cats, or prey such as mice and birds. "Basically, no matter where you are in the world, keeping your cat indoors is a great way to keep them healthy from infectious diseases," Chalkowski said by way of summary.

TEE OFF IN THAILAND

The Tourism Authority of the country has introduced the Thai Golf Passport as a travel loyalty programme to create a seamless experience for Indian golfers

From pristine sandy beaches to lush jungles, bustling busy cities and traditional villages, Michelin-starred menus to roadside noodle stalls, historic Buddhist temples to 21st century skyscrapers, Thailand could be truly amazing. The country also has world-class golf facilities.

The Tourism Authority of Thailand, New Delhi, has introduced a FAM trip to Thailand to explore the various possible ways to make 'Thai Golf Passport' a success and an exciting golf travel loyalty programme for those who pursue the sport avidly. The highlight of the event would be the Thai New Year — The Songkran Festival.

There are more than 200 golf courses around the country, by the sea, mountains, lakes, in the cities and even besides its airports. From Phuket to Bangkok and Pattaya, there are golf courses to suit different preferences.

Anil Dev, managing director, Golf Plus Monthly said, "When it comes to golf tourism, there is no destination which comes close to Thailand. The Thai Golf Pass is a unique programme that pushes players to experience the sport in this paradise. The programme has been appreciated by the golfing community in India as well as the various partners of the programme."

Besides networking with the golf suppliers, the delegates can experience the hospitality of the Zign Hotel in Pattaya and Centre Point Sukhumvit 10; the teeing off at the Chee Chan Golf Resort and Pattana Golf Club freezing tour of ice sculptures at the frost magical ice of Siam.

Rishi Tomar, chief operating officer, SLW Golf Management said, "The initiative was launched in India to offer Indian golfers a seamless experience in Thailand."

He added, "A number of quality service providers like Thai Airways, Cox & Kings, Callaway and other golf courses, resorts and hotels have come together to partner this initiative."

Isra Stapanaseth, director, Tourism Authority of Thailand, said, "I would like to congratulate all the partners of Thai Golf Pass,



Anil Dev and his team for the success of the project. With 'Amazing Thailand', golf paradise with more than 250 international standard golf courses, professional caddies, warm hospitality, wellness, food and entertainment, we look forward to Indian golfers being a part of this loyalty programme and experience services."

Commenting on the initiative's success, Chitrnanjan Bakhshi, business head, Golf Holidays, Cox & Kings said, "We believe in providing quality service to our customers and this initiative will also help in

validating this claim. We are proud to be associated with Tourism Authority of Thailand and this first-ever golf travel loyalty program."

Rajan Sehgal, president, Indian Golf Travel Association, said that golfing in Thailand is memorable. He said, "The programme is unique to India. While hotels and airlines have loyalty programmes, this will be a first of its kind where a country will be executing something like this. With well-maintained courses, professionalism, high connectivity and great hospitality, golfing in Thailand has always been a great



experience for me."

Adding to that, Meraj Shah, writer and producer, Wion Traveller, said, "I have been to Thailand for golfing many a times. I've played in Hua Hin, Pattaya, Phuket, Khao Yai, Chiang Mai, to name a few places. I couldn't be happier heading back to the same places. It's my favourite country to visit — for the golf, its food and beaches and its nightlife."

With NokScoot Airlines providing direct flights from Delhi to Bangkok, travel has become smooth and hassle-free.

Yodchai Sudhidhanakul, chief executive officer, NokScoot Airlines, said, "NokScoot has recently launched direct flights from Delhi to Bangkok, offering high service standards at affordable prices. We

hope to welcome more golfers from India to enjoy the world-class courses which the country has to offer, along with the famous Thai hospitality."

The programme will also give 'Amazing' rewards on redemption of loyalty points. With the fully-automatic and user-friendly online programme, it aims to bring all the suppliers under one platform.

The activities that began from December 2018 has the following focus points — To integrate their website with their travel partner websites; To host promotional events in India with three of them in Thailand; To increase the number of loyalty partners to 200; To increase membership base to cover 5,000 golfers.

Women must be revered



India has inherited a rich Vedic cultural legacy from its glorious past. It is also a well-known fact that all the *rishi-munis* and *yogis* accept Vedas as their soul. Rishi Kashyap after studying Vedas continuously for 300 years expressed his views that their knowledge is endless and eternal. So, it shall not be out of place to mention that women have always enjoyed high respect from the society in the Vedic period.

We must not forget the invaluable lesson from Atharvaved mantra — *Stree Hee Brahma Babhuvith* — which means that women have been given the title of Brahma. Even Yajyen considered woman as Brahma as she always gives Vedic advice to everyone.

If we delve deep into our history, especially of Vedic age, we discover various names like Sita, Ansuviya, Madalsa, Savitri, Bhamati, Katyayini, Lopamudra, King Janak's *acharya* Gargi and Kunti, who through their devotion, dedication and deep knowledge of Vedas enlightened mankind. There are numerous quotes in our scriptures including that the Devta always experiences divine pleasure and gives blessings to those who respect women.

A child owes a lot to his/her mother because she is the one who nurtures him/her from the beginning. Her teachings hold much more importance than even the teacher in the school. She is the moral builder, that is why we eulogise her by saying, "*Matri Devo Bhava*" i.e. serve the mother because she gives birth and nurses the child and "*Mata Nirmatri Bhavati*" i.e. mother constitutes the bright future of the child.

The veteran warrior and wise man of *Mahabharat*, Bhisma Pitamah is respected even today because his mother Ganga, gave him the right kind of education from the beginning. It was she who persuaded Guru Parshuram, the greatest teacher in weaponry and warfare at that time to teach him the skills of fighting. For the knowledge of scriptures, she sent Bhisma Pitamah to Brihaspati, the biggest scholar of Vedas at that time. Thus he became not only a good warrior but also a great scholar and spiritualist. The credit goes to none else but to his mother.

Women, after the *Mahabharat* period, due to the lack of knowledge of Vedas, have been mistreated and abused. By not educating them in the Vedas, we are depriving the country of the ability to be stronger.

There is the story of extreme

sacrifice by a wife for her ascetic husband. Once, there lived a philosopher, Vachaspati Mishr, who was married in his childhood. He forgot his wife as he was meditating intensely. After the death of her parents, the girl attained puberty and went to his ashram in the hope of a happy married life. Finding Vachaspati deeply engrossed in meditation, she decided not to disturb him. She started managing the affairs of the ashram and serving the *rishi* day in and day out. With the passage of time, she crossed the age of 75. One day when Vachaspati was busy writing a book in the light of an oil lamp, the flame started flickering. Seeing that the oil was finished, she tried to pour in some to replenish it. It was a moonlit night and the gleam fell on her face. He was surprised to see her and asked her who she was. The woman tried to make him remember their marriage during their childhood. When he came to know this, he felt ashamed that he could not look after his wife rather she was left to manage the affairs of his ashram. The aged *rishi* slowly started moving towards his wife to embrace her. Immediately she moved back and said that by serving him for several years, she had experienced the divine pleasure of maintaining Brahmacharya, so she should be allowed to remain so. The *rishi* stopped and went towards his seat. He asked her name. She replied that it was Bhamati. By then the *rishi* had completed his spiritual book based on Vedas but he was yet to give it a title and named it Bhamati.

Sometimes I wonder why the birth of a girl is not welcomed. Whereas Vedas preach that a daughter is a lamp and enlightens two houses — one of her parents' and the second of her husband's like *maa Sita*.

So, a family must rejoice at the birth of a daughter considering her as a pure blessing, harbinger of good fortune and glory to the family. As quoted above, woman is "Brahma", so a creator must be revered.

(The author, Swami Ram Swarup Yogacharya is the chief editor of *Ved Ishvareeya Vani*, a bi-annual magazine.)

Seven Indians in the 100 most reputable people list



The Reputation Management Consultancy in its Reputation Poll International announced the 2019 list of the 100 most reputable persons on earth.

The list features personalities from various sectors like entertainment, politics, religion, education, philanthropy, business, politics, etc, from 44 countries and recognises leaders who have discharged their duties and maintained a high level of credibility, and have kept exemplary reputation for public emulation.

Looking at the statistics, the USA had the largest share of reputed personalities in the list with a representation of 38 females, 61 males and 1 couple. According to the age, the oldest reputable person in the list is Queen Elizabeth II, 92, whereas, the youngest being Pakistani activist Malala Yuzafzai, 21.

The list features seven Indian personalities, five males and two females — Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Indian business magnate Mukesh Ambani, CEO of Google Sundar Pichai, Nobel Laureate Kailash Satyarthi,

THE LIST FEATURES PM NARENDRA MODI, MUKESH AMBANI, CEO OF GOOGLE SUNDAR PICHAI, NOBEL LAUREATE KAILASH SATYARTHI, WRITER ROBIN SHARMA, FOUNDER OF ALL LADIES LEAGUE DR HARBEEN ARORA, AND BIO-CHEMIST PRIYANKA JOSHI

motivational speaker Robin Sharma, founder and global chairperson of All Ladies League (ALL) and Women Economic Forum (WEF) Dr Harbeen Arora, and Bio-chemist Priyanka Joshi.

The list also features influential international personalities like Dalai Lama, Michael Bloomberg, Tim Cook, Michelle Obama, Xi Jinping, Pope Francis, Warren Buffet and Ismail Ahmed. There are also actors and persons from the entertainment industry like Ed Sheeran, Emma Watson, Nicole Kidman and John Legend.



Himalayan Heights Motorcycle Expedition reaches Karakoram Pass

The 11-member 'Himalayan Heights' Motorcycle Expedition, flagged off from Karu in Leh on April 7, traversed the challenging terrain of eastern Ladakh, across the Chang La pass. The expedition reached the mighty Karakoram pass situated at an altitude of 18,176 feet on the Karakoram range on Tuesday.

The joint expedition comprises six Indian Army personnel from the Army Service Corps, four from Royal Enfield and one from the Himalayan Motorsports Association. The Fire & Fury Corps and the expedition is celebrating the 20th Anniversary of Kargil Vijay Diwas, that marked the victory of the Indian armed forces over Pakistan in 1999.

With temperatures as low as -40 degrees Celsius, the feat is unprecedented over haz-

ardous and unforgiving terrains. In freezing winds, it is a remarkable tribute to the immortal courage and bravery of the Indian army. In a rare gesture of encouragement for the expedition members, Lt Gen YK Joshi, general officer commanding, Fire & Fury Corps reached the Karakoram pass to meet and motivate the riders.

Speaking on the occasion, Lt Gen YK Joshi lauded the efforts of the team, especially the two women officers from the army service corps and the woman member of the Royal Enfield team who "proved equal in strength, skill and spirit to the other members."

The expedition salutes the victory of the Indian army during the Kargil war of 1999. They aim to "remember, rejoice and renew" their spirit of fortitude, bravery and adventure.

NHPC follows Ambedkar vision



Hydroelectric power generation company, NHPC celebrated the 128th birth anniversary of Bharat Ratna Dr B R Ambedkar, the principal architect of the Indian Constitution and social reformer.

Balraj Joshi, chairman and managing director of NHPC along with N K Jain, director (personnel), and Janardan Choudhary, director (Technical), graced the occasion.

Joshi described the life of Dr Ambedkar as a "shining example for others to follow." He highlighted his role in the country's development and in laying down one of the most descriptive Constitutions in the world. A special highlight of evenings was a talk on *Manavta ka Uthhan* by Bodhisattva Bhante Dr Karunashil Rahulji.

A documentary highlighting the life and contributions of Dr Ambedkar was also screened during the event. Other attendants of the event were office-bearers of NHPC, SC/ST employee welfare association and OBC association.

CLW commemorates Ambedkar's birth anniversary

The 128th birth anniversary of Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar was observed in Chittaranjan Locomotive Works (CLW) administrative office.

Ram Prakash, Ravij Seth, B K Singh, S P Marandi along with senior officers and other members of SC/ST association garlanded the portrait of Dr Ambedkar and paid the tribute.

S P Marandi recalled the efforts of Dr Ambedkar on upliftment of socially downtrodden people and their rights in society. Sanjiv Kumar delivered a speech on political contribution of Ambedkar from national freedom struggle to strengthening of Indian democracy.



Praveen Mishra, general manager of CLW also expressed his respect to

Dr Bhim Rao and stressed upon to follow the path shown by him.

N F Railway celebrated the 64th railway week



N K Prasad, general manager inaugurated the programme

The N F Railway celebrated the 64th railway week with proper gaiety and merriment at Rang Bhawan, Maligaon.

N K Prasad, general manager of the construction organisation, who was the chief guest, gave away prizes to the awardees and also addressed to the congregation comprising of officers, staff and N F Railway fraternity.

In a nut-shell GM spoke to the gathering about achievement done in the previous year, ongoing projects

and also future projects to be undertaken.

A K Yadav, chief administrative officer cited last year's record breaking performance completion of Bogibeel Bridge Project in particular which was inaugurated by the PM on December 25, 2018.

A group cash prize was also awarded to the staff whose dedicated services made possible to complete India's longest Rail-cum-Road Bridge and Asia's 2nd longest Bogibeel Bridge Project.

Trend Glazer

Sidharth's next on forced marriages

Actor SIDHARTH MALHOTRA, who has wrapped up shooting his upcoming film *Jabriya Jodi*, said the romantic comedy film is based on *Pakadwa Vivah* (forced marriage), which is rampant in Bihar.

Sidharth said, "We have been shooting since last year. We created a lot of things of Patna in Lucknow. I think I haven't played this kind of role earlier in my career and for Parineeti also, it's a different world and role. We are really excited for the film."

He is glad to have collaborated with Parineeti Chopra again after *Hasee Toh Phasee*.



'For me, it is not about nationality or colour, but about identity. Is there something which you can put in your character that is uniquely you and that your people will identify with? It is less about roles and more about characteristics.'
—Vir Das



After nearly three years, EMRAAN HASHMI has signed a horror film *Ezra*, which is the Hindi remake of a Malayalam horror film.

Emraan said, "Horror is a genre with immense potential. A well-made horror film will always draw audiences in huge numbers to cinema halls. With *Ezra*, we hope to push the boundaries further and give the audience an experience that they will never forget. I'm happy to be associating with Kumarji (Mangat Pathak) and Abhishek (Pathak) on this film and with Jay (Krishnan) at the helm of things all I can say is be prepared for one hell of a spooky ride."



Turner thought about suicide

Game of Thrones star SOPHIE TURNER said that she used to think about suicide a lot after being branded fat and a bad actress.

Turner, who is in therapy and medication, also credited her fiancé Joe Jonas with helping her through depression, admitting "when someone tells you they love you every day it makes you love yourself."

She said that she first began having mental health issues when she was 17, explaining that living at her parents' home while she worked and her friends and brothers were away at university, was a triggering factor.

"I've suffered with depression for six years now. The toughest part for me is getting out of bed and the house. Learning to love yourself is the biggest challenge," she said.



AMAZING GRACE

While comparisons with Chandramukhi are inevitable, actor MADHURI DIXIT tells SAIMI SATTAR that it is the treatment of Bahaar Begum in *Kalank* which sets it apart

As soon as the teasers of *Kalank* came out, the comparisons between Madhuri Dixit's portrayal of Chandramukhi in *Devdas* and Bahaar Begum in the new film became inevitable. However, Madhuri feels that while the appearance might be similar, in grain, they are different women. "Bahaar Begum is a very reticent person. She is an introvert and is emotionally scarred because of a past tragedy which has made her what she is. She is silent, yet conveys a lot through her eyes. As compared to her, Chandramukhi wore her heart on her sleeve. Her love for Devdas was there for everyone to see. She could go all out and sing *Maar Daala*," says the actor, who critics say, "lit up the screen in every frame" in her newest outing.

Madhuri, known for her dancing prowess, reunites with Sanjay Dutt in *Kalank*, to whom she was rumoured to be romantically linked in her younger days. But she values the co-star bit. Besides, she stepped into the shoes of Sridevi who was supposed to essay the role before her tragic death. She says, "There was an emotional context to taking up the role. They were about to start and then things went haywire. Karan (Johar) is a friend and I decided to help them."

The film talks about 'Eternal Love' and Madhuri believes that it does exist. "I am a romantic person and I do believe it exists as whether you find it or not is your journey. There was a dialogue in *Dil To Pagal Hai* where I said *Kahin na kahin, koi na koi mere liye banaya gaya hai... aur kabhi na kabhi main usse zaroor milungi*. And I used to believe in that and I did meet Ram (Shriram Madhav Nene). He is my soulmate," she says.

The film also stars younger actors Varun Dhawan, Alia Bhatt, Sonakshi Sinha and Aditya Roy Kapur and she says, "The characters are complicated as their lives are not straight and each of their paths is interwoven with the others. All characters have a lot of angst and regrets. They are all grey and that is what makes the story interesting."

She is all praise for the four with whom she has worked this time around. "They are very professional. They are always on time. They learn their lines and work hard."

While the youngsters often imbibe the nuances of acting from her, there are tricks that they have taught her. "You see a new side to everything with them. It is wonderful to see this generation which is not only acting in movies but has a presence on the social media. There are so many different things that they do. You get to learn from them and they get to learn from us. So we inspire each other. It is a symbiotic relationship. There is a lot of synergy," she says and as someone, who too has signed up on various platforms, goes on to add, "I enjoy social media as it is a great tool to connect directly to fans. One can voice anything that has happened or if you have been misquoted, you can reach out to your fans directly through Twitter. You can share things whenever you want to."

Not just the stars, but even the way that the film industry functions has changed drastically since the time she made her debut in *Aabdi* in 1984 and ruled the silver screen during the



'MEN PERCEIVE WOMEN IN A DIFFERENT WAY. EARLIER, IT WAS A VERY PATRIARCHAL, MALE-DOMINATED VIEW THAT WAS PUT OUT IN FILMS. THE THOUGHT PROCESS OF THIS GENERATION IS VERY DIFFERENT WHICH IS REFLECTED IN THE SCRIPTS'

greater part of the nineties. Madhuri saw both commercial and critical success and received six Filmfare Awards, which she topped up with a Padma Shri in 2008. She says, "Films are made professionally now. When I was doing a film like *Tezaab*, the only women that we saw on the sets were the co-stars, hairdressers and me. There were only two women directors, Sai Paranjpye and Aparna Sen. Women could only be hair dressers and not make-up artists as men blocked their entry and made sure that they were confined to one role. However, when I walk on to the sets today, there seem to be women everywhere. There is no concept of you can do this and you can't. Every department has women."

This is also reflected in the kind of stories that are now being told. With more women writers, there are characters with more flesh and blood. "Men perceive women in a different way. Earlier, it was very patriarchal, male-dominated view

that was put out in the films. Women are no longer caricatures. They are not victims or avengers, they are roles and characters. The thought process of this generation is very different and this is reflected in the scripts. Otherwise, you wouldn't have a *Badhaai Ho*, *Gulaab Gang* or *Deedh Ishqiya*," says the actor who proved her acting chops with a film like *Mrittyudand* (1997) by Prakash Jha. She also famously served as a muse for painter MF Husain who made *Gaja Gaminii* (2000) starring her.

So, would she say that it is a better time for women like Alia to be in the films as there are more roles for women? "Why just them?," she asks and adds, "It's a great time for me as well. The audience has matured and wants to see different kinds of subjects. In *Andhadhun*, Tabu's character is so different from the usual."

Clearly, there is a lot more on the anvil from the actress.

Photo: Pankaj Kumar



War of words

KANGANA RANAUT's tirade against ALIA BHATT wasn't enough. Her sister RANGOLI CHANDEL joined in as did actors SONI RAZDAN and RANDEEP HOODA

If actress Kangana Ranaut's tirade against Alia Bhatt wasn't enough, the former's sister Rangoli Chandel entered the 'war of words' zone, as did the *Raazi* actress' mother Soni Razdan and co-actor Randeep Hooda.

Kangana has been calling out Alia since earlier this year for not supporting her film *Manikarnika: The Queen of Jhansi*, and had claimed this was all part of a "strange sort of racket" in a section of the film industry. She had also called Alia a product of Karan Johar's "nepotistic gang."

Ever since, Kangana has made several references regarding Alia, the latest being over her "mediocre" performance in the otherwise widely lauded *Gully Boy*.

But Alia said, "I respect Kangana's work a lot and I respect her opinion. If she feels a particular way she must have reason to feel that way. I would rather remember how much she had praised me after watching *Raazi*. And I'd just like to focus on my work. Maybe she will appreciate me again if I work hard enough."

The controversy took a different turn with Kangana's sister hitting out at Alia and her mother Soni Razdan, calling them "non Indians who are living off this land, using and abusing its people and its resources, lying about intolerance and spreading hatred."

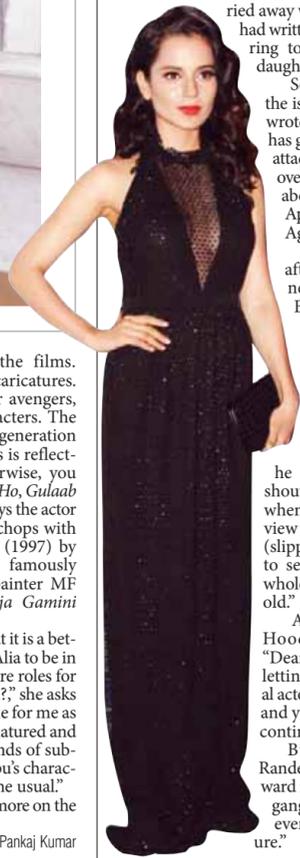
"Time to think about their agenda and not to get carried away with their provocations," Rangoli had written on social media recently, referring to an article about the mother-daughter duo's British passports.

Soni finally broke her silence over the issue. In a now-deleted tweet, she wrote, "Mahesh Bhatt is the man who has given her a break... She goes on to attack his wife and daughter over and over again. What is left to be said then about abusing and hatred I wonder. Apart from character of course. Agenda. What's hers?"

Rangoli had a response soon after. "Dear Soniji, Mahesh Bhatt never gave her a break. Anurag Basu did. Mahesh Bhattji works as a creative director in his brother's production house. Please note that he doesn't own that production house. After *Woh Lamhe*, when Kangana refused to do a film written by him called *Dhokha*, where he wanted her to play a suicide bomber, he got so upset that he not only shouted at her in his office, but later when she went for *Woh Lamhe* preview to a theatre, he threw a *chappal* (slipper) on her. He didn't allow her to see her own film. She cried the whole night, and she was just 19 years old."

Alia's *Highway* co-star Randeep Hooda also stepped in, saying, "Dearest Alia, I'm so glad you are not letting the opinions of very occasional actors and chronic victims affect you and your work. Kudos to you for your continued efforts to outdo yourself."

But Rangoli retorted saying Randeep has been pushed to come forward in Alia's support as the "nepotism gang" didn't have the courage. She even called him a "permanent failure."



WORLD HERITAGE DAY



Preserve the past

The dictionary defines heritage as 'features belonging to the culture of a particular society, such as traditions, languages, or buildings, that were created in the past and still have historical importance'. So when one talks in terms of places, the United Nations has selected some which can be considered as humanity's most significant locations. These cover patches which range from historical icons like Venetian Lagoon to the Imperial Palace in Beijing and the Chartres Cathedral. This World Heritage Day, here is a list of some of mankind's highest achievements as well as natural wonders which should feature on every traveller's wishlist.

CHINA
With 52 noteworthy sites, China ranks second in UNESCO's World Heritage List. The Imperial Palace of the Qing Dynasty consists of 114 buildings constructed between the years 1625-26 and 1783. It contains an important library and testifies to the foundation of the last dynasty that ruled China before it expanded its power to the center of the country and

moved the capital to Beijing. This palace then became auxiliary to the Imperial Palace in Beijing. This architectural edifice offers important historical testimony to the history of the Qing Dynasty and to the cultural traditions of the Manchu and other tribes in the north of China.

ITALY
Italy is home to 53 UNESCO world heritage sites, which is more than any other country. Apart from these must-sees, it also has the largest number of cultural sites that one must experience. Celebrated throughout the world for its singular beauty, Venice and its lagoon were added

to the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 1987.

INDIA
World Heritage sites aren't simply ancient stones. UNESCO's list also includes natural wonders — the Kaziranga National Park, situated in Assam. It is one of the last areas in eastern India which

is undisturbed by a human presence. It is inhabited by more than 2,000 rhinos and is home to a large breeding population of elephants, wild water buffaloes and swamp deer.

FRANCE
France boasts of 41 heritage sites preserved under the

UNESCO. Though it had more than 1.3 million visitors each year, after the devastating fire, Chartres Cathedral or Notre Dame is now off the list of visitors for six years — the time that it will take to rebuild. Admire it from afar or better still take part in the process of rebuilding by contributing to the national fund set up by the French government for the purpose.

SPAIN
Spain is home to a staggering 45 UNESCO sites, third in number only to Italy and China. Mérida, a model Roman city was established in 25 BC and according to UNESCO is a "remarkable example of a Roman city built according to all the Roman urban design rules." From an Amphitheatre to an intricate water supply system, the city offers a glimpse into the ancient past. Apart from this, another must-visit place is the Toledo — situated in central Spain. This city of three cultures was added to the UNESCO list for its extensive history spanning 2,000 years, as well as for its many years of co-existence among Jewish, Christian and Muslim groups, earning it the nickname City of three cultures. Synagogues, mosques and churches are some of the popular sites.

DE LIGHT-FUL

Ajax captain scores via header to help young Amsterdam side beat Juventus 2-1 (3-2) and enter Champions League semis



Matthijs de Ligt celebrates past Juve goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny after scoring his side's second goal AP

AFP ■ TURIN

Ajax stunned Juventus to reach the Champions League semi-finals for the first time since 1997 as Matthijs de Ligt's thumping second-half header secured a 2-1 second-leg victory in the last eight in Turin on Tuesday.

Cristiano Ronaldo, bidding for his sixth Champions League title, scored a 28th-minute header to put Juve ahead after a 1-1 first-leg draw, but Donny van de Beek levelled for Ajax before half-time.

Teenage centre-back De Ligt struck midway through the second period, though, to seal a 3-2 aggregate win and set up a last-four clash with either Manchester City or Tottenham.

The young Dutch side had already eliminated three-time defending champions Real Madrid en route to the quarters, overturning a 2-1 home defeat against the Spanish side with a memorable 4-1 victory at the Santiago Bernabeu.

Juventus had been looking to reach the Champions League semi-finals for the third time in the past five seasons.

But Ronaldo, who scored an away goal last week with a diving header in Amsterdam, was Juve's only weapon against the impressive Dutch side.

The 34-year-old was signed for 100 million euros (\$117 million) last summer from Real Madrid in a bid to win the European trophy for the first time since 1996, when they beat Ajax in the final.

"Ajax deserved to qualify," said Juventus coach Massimiliano Allegri.

JUVE FORCED TO RESHUFFLE

Allegri had been forced to reshuffle his defence because of injuries, with Paulo Dybala returning in place of the injured Mario Mandzukic, while captain Giorgio Chiellini was also sidelined.

Ajax's defence took a hit when Noussair Mazraoui, who had replaced the suspended Nicolas Tagliafico, limped off on 11 minutes with an ankle injury, with Daley Sinkgraven coming on.

Ajax goalkeeper Andre Onana dived to keep out a scorching Dybala half-volley in the 20th minute.

But Ronaldo latched onto a Miralem Pjanic corner with a downward header that left Onana with no chance.

It was the Portugal star's 126th Champions League goal and sixth of this campaign, having now scored in his past six European games against Ajax, netting nine goals in total.

But Van de Beek soon silenced the cheers of the home crowd when he controlled a wayward Hakim Ziyech shot six minutes later, rolling the ball past Szczesny to cancel out Juventus' away goal and make it 2-2 on aggregate.

Teenage striker Moise Kean replaced Dybala after the break, but it was the Dutch who turned on the style, with only Szczesny's reflexes keeping Juventus in the tie.

The Polish keeper denied Ziyech from close range with one hand, and minutes later tipped Van de Beek's curling effort

TUESDAY'S VICTORY MEANS AJAX HAVE PLAYED 16 GAMES IN THIS SEASON'S COMPETITION, LOSING ONLY ONCE, AT HOME TO DEFENDING CHAMPIONS REAL MADRID IN THE LAST ROUND. THEY RESPONDED WITH A MEMORABLE 4-1 SECOND-LEG VICTORY AT THE SANTIAGO BERNABEU



Nadal steamrolls to opening Monte Carlo win

AFP ■ MONTE CARLO

Rafael Nadal charged out of the blocks on Wednesday to hammer Roberto Bautista Agut 6-1, 6-1 in his opening match at the Monte Carlo Masters.

The 11-time champion showed no sign of the knee problems which forced him to quit ahead of an Indian Wells semi-final against Roger Federer a month ago.

The 32-year-old had expressed pre-tournament caution regarding the health of his knee — a worry which appeared to be groundless after a 76-minute masterclass.

Nadal collected the opening five games of the afternoon in 17 minutes as he set the tone for another dominant display in the principality.

He was equally in control during the second set, where he saved three break points in the fourth game and two more in the sixth.

"It was a great start, it's good to be back here," the 17-time Grand Slam winner said.

"I've had some great moments on this court, I really enjoy playing here."

"It's not easy to come back from injury, I had to do a lot of mental work as well to be prepared."

"I tried to play solid, dominate with my forehand when I had the chance."

Bautista Agut has now lost to his Spanish countryman in all three of their meetings, while



Rafael Nadal returns a shot during his first round clash against Bautista Agut ATP/Twitter

Nadal improved his incredible record here to 69-4 as he takes aim at a fourth consecutive title at the event.

Third seed Alexander Zverev rediscovered traces of his best form with a 6-1, 6-4 defeat of Felix Auger-Aliassime.

The German, locally based, reached the third round as he tamed the 18-year-old who broke through for a Miami semi-final last month.

UPBEAT ZVEREV

The 21-year-old Zverev played the semi-finals in Monte Carlo a year ago but has yet to hit his stride this season.

That may be starting to change.

Canadian Auger-Aliassime has made a fast rise in the rankings from 175 a year ago to his



current position of 33rd.

Zverev swept the opening set in 30 minutes but had to get through a series of three straight breaks of serve between him and his opponent before finally advancing in 78 minutes.

The third seed broke six times and will next face Italy's Fabio Fognini, who reached the third round when French opponent Gilles Simon was unable to play their match due to back problems.

Greek sixth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas moved ahead, defeating Mikhail Kukushkin 6-3, 7-5.

Britain's Cameron Norrie defeated Marton Fucsovics of Hungary 7-6 (7/3), 6-3, while Pierre-Hugues Herbert stunned 2018 finalist and fifth seed Kei Nishikori 7-5, 6-4.



Ajax players celebrate after quarter final win AP

"It's an incredible evening for Ajax and its players and also for Dutch football. Once again we eliminated the favourites." —ERIK TEN HAG

"It's bizarre, it's not normal. I have no words for it. We have shown once again that we are very strong and that we can make it difficult for large teams." —MATTHIJS DE LIGT

"In the first half they were slightly better and deserved to take the lead. But apart from the first five minutes of the second half, we dominated after the break and were well worth our victory. In fact, we probably should have won by more." —FRENKIE DE JONG

over the bar. The Juventus back-line struggled with the pace of the Dutch team with Pjanic doing well to deny Ziyech a tap-in.

But Ten Hag's side's incessant pressure paid off with 19-year-old skipper De Ligt towering above Alex Sandro and Daniele Rugani to head home Lasse Schone's corner on 67 minutes.

Ziyech looked as if he had fired a third past Szczesny, but his goal was ruled offside after a VAR check.

And the Dutch visitors held on, with Ronaldo unable to make a difference after his incredible hat-trick had pulled Juventus into the quarter-finals in the last-16 win over Atletico Madrid.

Four-time winners Ajax won their third consecutive title in 1973 at the expense of Juventus, and last lifted the trophy in 1995, with their last semi-final appearance ending in defeat by Juve 22 years ago.

Juventus now turn their focus back to Serie A where they can win an eighth consecutive title on Saturday.

OBLAK SIGNS NEW ATLETICO CONTRACT



Jan Oblak trains during practice session ATM

AFP ■ MADRID

Atletico Madrid goalkeeper Jan Oblak has signed a new contract until 2023, the club announced on Wednesday.

Oblak's commitment comes as a boost to Atletico, with the 26-year-old establishing himself as one of the world's finest goalkeepers since joining the club in 2014.

"Jan Oblak has extended his con-

tract with Atletico Madrid until June 30, 2023," a club statement read.

"The Slovenian player has signed his new contract that commits him to our club for four more seasons."

Oblak's previous contract contained a release clause of 100 million euros, which is likely to have been increased, rather than removed, in his new deal. According to reports in the Spanish press, the adjusted release clause will be 120 million euros.

Injured Neuer dismisses retirement rumours, eyes return

AFP ■ MUNICH

Injured Bayern Munich goalkeeper Manuel Neuer on Wednesday quashed rumours of his imminent retirement and says he wants to return in time to face RB Leipzig on the penultimate day of the Bundesliga season.

"It is difficult to say when I will be back but I think Leipzig is a realistic target," he said at a press conference, with league leaders Bayern away to third-placed Leipzig on May 5.

Neuer, 33, was substituted off during Bayern's 4-1 win over Fortuna Duesseldorf last Sunday after aggravating a recurring calf injury.

The knock sees him sidelined at a crucial phase of the season, with Bayern seeking to stay a point ahead of Borussia Dortmund in the Bundesliga title race and bidding to reach the German Cup final.



Neuer has had a relentless struggle with injury in recent years, and after the club announced that he would give a press conference on Wednesday, there was some speculation that he might be about to end his



Lionel Messi celebrates with teammate Philippe Coutinho after scoring his second goal against Man Utd UCL/Twitter

Mess(i)merised

AFP ■ BARCELONA

Lionel Messi pounced on two Manchester United mistakes to score twice and end their hopes of another comeback at Camp Nou as Barcelona breezed into the Champions League semi-finals on Tuesday.

After an excellent start, United were undone twice in four minutes by Messi, who first nicked the ball off the careless Ashley Young and then watched as a weak shot from distance squirmed underneath David de Gea.

Philippe Coutinho, in perhaps his best performance of the season, added a third with a curling effort into the top corner and by the end, an out-classed United might have been relieved the score was not more traumatic than 3-0, 4-0 on aggregate.

A dizzying opening spell, in which Marcus Rashford had hit the crossbar, was long-forgotten, even if it could offer Barca's next opponents some encouragement.

Liverpool, who take a 2-0 lead to Porto on Wednesday, are now the most likely obstacle between them and their first Champions League final since they last won this tournament in 2015.

Instead, United's pair of early errors made this another night about Messi and ensured any faint hopes of repeating the comeback against Paris Saint-Germain, or even the famous 1999 rescue act against Bayern Munich, on this same pitch, were dashed.

Messi now has his 109th and 110th Champions League goals and, potentially, three extra matches to reduce the gap on Cristiano Ronaldo's 126, after Juventus were dumped out by Ajax. Barcelona's fans celebrated that too.

They could have hardly have asked for a better start.

"We put on a spectacle. But we came out cold and looked nervous in the first five minutes. We cannot come out like that in a Champions League match. Five bad minutes can knock you out." —LIONEL MESSI

"You can plan as many tactics as you like. But if you give him (Messi) time and space, he will score." —OLE GUNNAR SOLSKJAER

"We have had five difficult minutes because they started strong. But then there were another 85 minutes where we were not too bad." —ERNESTO VALVERDE

United were brilliant for eight minutes and could have been ahead within 30 seconds as Rashford raced onto a curving Paul Pogba pass and toed away a shot, which Marc-Andre ter Stegen bravely left to graze his own crossbar.

MAGIC MESSI

Barca were flustered, so much so the crowd even cheered with relief when Arthur Melo played his team's first convincing pass.

Then, Barcelona had their own eight-minute flurry as United almost conceded a penalty, ruled out after Fred took the ball before bringing down Ivan Rakitic, and then did concede, twice, to Messi.

Both could have been avoided, even if Young's turn on the edge of his own box was punished in devastating fashion. Young lunged in to atone for his mistake but Messi skipped away from him, poked it through Fred's legs and then whipped the ball into corner. The second was simpler.

Fred and Scott McTominay closed in on Coutinho and the ball spilled out to Messi, whose dribbling shot with his right foot should have drawn a routine save. Instead, De Gea let it squirm under his body for 2-0.

Pogba lashed out at the increasingly influential Arthur and Barca could have had a third before half-time, De Gea scrambling across to save on the line when Sergi Roberto should have finished.

Messi could have had his hat-trick too after Suarez found him with a superb cutback and there was an almost comical sequence in the second half when Leo played with his United chasers before finally being bundled over by McTominay.

Rashford might have made it interesting if he had controlled Pogba's ball over the top but Barcelona were in exhibition mode, helped by a vintage Coutinho curler after he had cut inside from the left.

Messi even attempted a bicycle kick and there were celebrations from the home fans when news went round that Ajax had taken the lead in Turin. They believe this is their year.



Bancroft hits 151 on Durham ODI debut

AFP ■ LONDON

Cameron Bancroft hit an unbeaten 151 on his one-day debut for Durham as the disgraced Australia batsman started to repay the English county's faith in him.

Bancroft was banned for nine months after being caught in the Australia ball-tampering scandal during their tour to South Africa last year.

The 'sandpaper-gate' incident during the Newlands Test against South Africa also led to Bancroft's Australia team-mates Steve Smith and David Warner receiving year-long suspensions.

After returning in Australia's Big Bash League in December, and playing a role in the back end of Western Australia's current Sheffield Shield campaign, Bancroft has joined up with Durham with a view to making Australia's Ashes squad.

Durham, now under a new Australian director of cricket in Marcus North, attracted criticism in some quarters when they recruited Bancroft.

But the 26-year-old was controversially appointed Durham captain and, making his maiden limited overs appearance, Bancroft piled up the runs in their One-Day Cup clash with Northamptonshire at Chester-le-Street on Wednesday.

Bancroft, who played in the 2017-18 Ashes, plundered five sixes and eight fours in a 188-minute stay at the crease.

He and Michael Richardson put on 208 for the fourth-wicket before the latter was ousted in the final over.

Durham went on to score 342 for five from their 50 overs.

LEADERBOARD	
RUNS	400 David Warner (SRH)
WICKETS	17 Kagiso Rabada (DC)
6S	402 ARCHER IS ONE PLAYER IN OUR TEAM WHO HAS DELIVERED IN EVERY GAME. HE HAS BEEN EXCEPTIONAL
4S	918 — PADDY UPTON



Ponting surprised at 'X-factor' Pant's exclusion

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Australian great Ricky Ponting on Wednesday expressed surprise at Rishabh Pant's exclusion from India's World Cup squad, saying he could have been the X factor in the playing eleven.

Ponting met Pant on Monday night, hours after the India squad was announced with Dinesh Karthik being preferred over the 21-year-old for the reserve wicketkeeper's slot.

"Yes I was surprised when he was left out of the Indian squad. I thought he would be in and he would be in the starting eleven. I thought someone like him batting at four or five could have been that X factor and the difference between India and the other teams," said the Delhi Capitals head coach.

Ponting had nothing but words of encouragement for the star Delhi Capitals player.

"One thing we know about Indian cricket that there is a lot of depth around in batting and this time Rishabh has missed out. Knowing what he is like and the talent he has, I would be surprised if he doesn't play in at least three world cups before his career is over.

"I had a quick chat with him. He seems to have taken it pretty well. There is no doubt that he is disappointed, he would have loved to be in that squad but the thing he still has to remember is, potentially he will get the opportunity to play in three to four World Cups.

"What is negative thing for the Indian team is positive for Delhi capitals. Really happy that the decision has been made and he can focus on the back half of the tournament."

Pant at times has been criticised for throwing away a good start. Asked if that could be the reason selectors did not pick Pant, Ponting said: "I don't know the selection criteria. Don't know why he is not being picked. I don't know why the other guys have been picked ahead of him. To be honest it is none of my business.

"Though I don't think he is impatient, he is a very smart player. I think he sums up situations and conditions really well. But they obviously have their reasons for not picking him and I am not going to comment on that.

"I actually think he missing out you will see a different player in the IPL. His determination will shine through and I am sure he will score heavily in the back half of the tournament," he said.



Sunrisers register easy win over Chennai on home soil



PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Sunrisers Hyderabad defeated Chennai Super Kings by six wickets in their Indian Premier League match here on Wednesday.

Earlier, Sunrisers Hyderabad bowled a nagging line and length to restrict Chennai Super Kings to 132 for five.

Leading the side in the absence of Mahendra Singh Dhoni, who was rested for the game because of back spasm, Suresh Raina opted to bat after the coin landed in his favour. But the decision did not work wonders for the visitors as the Sunrisers bowlers produced a disciplined effort to pick up five wickets for 22 runs.

Opener Faf du Plessis top-scored with a 31-ball 45 and added 79 runs for the opening wicket with Shane Watson (31). CSK did not have much to cheer about after that as the hosts made a remarkable comeback. Ignored for the World Cup, Ambati Rayudu remained not out on 25 off 21 balls.

While leg-spinner Rashid Khan was the most successful

bowler with economical figures of 2/17 in four overs, seamers Bhuvneshwar Kumar (0/21) and Khaleel Ahmed (1/22) were also miserly.

In a manner least convincing, CSK found their first boundary when Watson's thick edge went flying over the slip cordon.

Du Plessis drove Khaleel over



It was a quite beginning for CSK as Bhuvneshwar conceded just one run in the opening over. Complementing his senior pace partner, Khaleel also bowled a tight first over, giving away only three runs.

his head for a boundary in the fourth over, a proper cricketing shot this time around, and CSK followed that with a flurry of four and sixes.

While Watson found the fence four times, Du Plessis hit two max-



imums to up the ante at the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium. Having added 79 runs in just under 10 overs, Watson was bowled by left-arm spinner Shahbaz Nadeem, giving the home fans something to cheer about after a prolonged wait.

The Australia's dismissal triggered a collapse, from which the Super Kings struggled to recover.

Back spasm rules out MS

Struggling with back spasm, Chennai Super Kings skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni was on Wednesday rested for their IPL clash against Sunrisers Hyderabad, the first time he is not leading the yellow brigade since 2010.

Suresh Raina was handed over the captaincy for the away game at the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium. "Dhoni wanted to take some rest, he'll be back in the next game," Raina said at the toss.

The decision to rest the veteran was a precautionary measure. The two-time World Cup winning captain had suffered the injury against Kolkata Knight Riders and after that game, Dhoni had said, "It's a little tight right now but hopefully, it will get better". Ahead of the match, Dhoni was seen warming up by playing some football before Raina walked out for the toss.

This is only the fourth time Dhoni is not playing for Chennai Super Kings in the cash-rich league. Dhoni has been in good form for Chennai Super Kings in the 2019 IPL, leading the team's run chart with 230 runs from eight matches, including two fifties.

CSK, who have won seven out of their eight matches in this Indian Premier League so far, need another win to secure a play-off berth.

BRIEF SCORES: Chennai Super Kings: 132/5 in 20 overs (Faf du Plessis 45; Rashid Khan 2/17)

Sunrisers Hyderabad: 137/4 in 16.5 overs (Jonny Bairstow 61 not out, David Warner 50; Imran Tahir 2/20).

Capitals eye home gains against MI



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Rishabh Pant will be in focus after his fiercely-debated World Cup exclusion when a buoyant Delhi Capitals aim to replicate its stellar away form at home against the Mumbai Indians here at Feroz Shah Kotla on Thursday.

Pant has been mum on being ignored for the World Cup in favour of Dinesh Karthik and it would be interesting to see how the 21-year-old's bat responds to the disappointment. With 10 points from eight games, both teams are on course to make the play-offs. While that counts as familiar territory for three-time IPL champions Mumbai Indians, Capitals are in the middle of a remarkable resurgence, having not finished in the top-four since 2012.

The celebrated duo of head coach Ricky Ponting and mentor Sourav Ganguly has managed to instill belief in the team members and that is visible on the field. The team now seems to believe that it can win the title after a long spell as the perennial underachiever of the competition.

The South African pace combine of Kagiso Rabada and Chris Morris have delivered for the team. Even in the previous game against Sunrisers Hyderabad, the two pacers shared seven wickets to fashion an unlikely win for Capitals who successfully defended 155 by bowling out the hosts for 116.

West Indies pacer Keemo Paul too has come to the party in the last two games by picking

up five wickets. The batting unit, led by captain Shreyas Iyer, is also hitting its strides with Dhawan back among the runs following a few quiet games.

His opening partner is due for a big knock after making little impact in the last five games. But the centre of attention will be Pant, who will be playing his first game after missing out on a World Cup spot, a decision that has divided opinions.

The focus will also be on the Kotla pitch which has already copped criticism for its slowish nature. Ponting had described it as the "worst possible" track for the home team after a loss earlier in the tournament.

Apart from the super over game against KKR, the other two matches here have been low-scoring affairs with the home team ending on the wrong side of the result on both occasions.

Like Capitals, Mumbai is also getting better with each game and look a more potent outfit with the return of Lasith Malinga. Hardik Pandya is also firing on all cylinders.

Capitals got the better of Mumbai Indians at Wankhede earlier in the competition, so expect the Rohit Sharma-led squad to come back harder at Kotla.

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Karunaratne to lead SL

AFP ■ COLOMBO

Veteran pacer Lasith Malinga was sacked as ODI skipper with Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) on Wednesday naming Test captain Dimuth Karunaratne to lead the country at the 50 over World cup in England beginning May 30.

The World cup squad will be announced on Thursday, SLC said.

"Karunaratne's appointment was ratified by the Minister of Telecommunications, Foreign Employment and Sports Honorable Harin Fernando," Sri Lanka Cricket said in a release.

31-year-old Karunaratne, who didn't play a single ODI since the 2015 World Cup, has only featured in 17 ODIs and averages 15.83 with a high score of 60.



He will replace Malinga, who had captained the team during the 0-5 loss to South Africa in the ODI series.

Malinga, who led Sri Lanka to a World T20 trophy in 2014, had personal disagreements with the team management and certain senior players, which also soured his stint as captain.

Karunaratne, a Test opener, forced himself into the ODI captaincy following his success in the Test arena. He led Sri Lanka

to a historic 2-0 Test triumph in South Africa and made Sri Lanka the only Asian side to win a Test series in South Africa.

The other option was Angelo Mathews, who has been Sri Lanka's ODI captain in two separate stints before. But Mathews is said to have declined the offer to captain citing his disagreements with coach Chandika Hathurusinghe.

The news will come as a blow for Malinga, who had played a domestic match in Kandy, only 14 hours after playing an IPL match for his franchise Mumbai Indians in Mumbai, earlier this month.

Apart from Malinga and Mathews, Sri Lanka had also tried Dinesh Chandimal and Thisara Perera to lead the side at various stages over the past two years since the retirement of Kumar Sangakkara and Mahela Jayawardene in 2014.

Pant, Rayudu named India's standbys for WC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



Young wicket-keeper Rishabh Pant and veteran batsman Ambati Rayudu were on Wednesday named among the standbys for India's World Cup squad, reigniting their dashed hopes of making the trip to the UK in case an injury setback hits the side.

Speedster Navdeep Saini also found a place in the list of three back-ups for the mega-event starting on May 30.

With the ICC doing away with the practice of letting countries announce a 'probables' list before the final squad, the BCCI also has the option of including anyone apart from these three but it is unlikely to happen.

"Just like ICC Champions Trophy, we have three standbys. Rishabh Pant and Ambati Rayudu are the first and second standbys while Saini is the bowler in the list. So if anyone gets injured, as per requirement, one of the three will

be going," a senior BCCI official said on Wednesday.

While Khaleel Ahmed, Avesh Khan and Deepak Chahar will be travelling with the team purely as net bowlers, they can also be drafted in if the management feels so.

"Khaleel, Avesh and Deepak are not designated standbys. In case of bowlers, that possibility is there but when it comes purely to batsmen, it will be either Rishabh or Rayudu," the official said.

In other developments, there will be no Yo-Yo Test for the World Cup-bound players as the IPL is going to end only on May 12, just a few days before India head to the UK.

"The players are already in the middle of a gruelling T20 season. Once the IPL ends, they will need recovery time.

"It's not like that there is a gap between two series and you are having a test. If you are tired, the results may vary," the official explained.



Pak to name WC squad with two reserves

PTI ■ KARACHI

Batting concerns over the form and fitness of some of their players, the Pakistan selection committee headed by Inzamam-ul-Haq has decided to announce the World Cup squad on Thursday with two reserves.

The selection committee has decided to utilise the five-match one-day series against England and some side matches as the barometer for making changes in the 15-member World Cup squad, if required, by the deadline of 23rd May.

"The selectors after consulting head coach, Mickey Arthur have more or less decided on the 15-member World Cup squad and two reserves who will be on the flight to England for the World Cup and before that play at the one-day series against England and some side matches," said a source close to the selectors on Wednesday.

"The concerns are over the fitness of left arm spin allrounder, Imad Wasim, the present form of experienced left arm pacer, Muhammad Amir and a debate on who will be the reserve opener in the World Cup.

The source said Imad would be picked in the squad with the other left-arm spin allrounder Muhammad Nawaz among the reserves so that if Imad is unable to be 100 percent fit before the World Cup he can be replaced.

Muhammad Amir managed to snap just five wickets in his last 14 ODIs and the source said selectors and team management have some reservations over the form of the experienced pacer.

Fakhar, Imam, Harris, Babar Azam, Shoaib Malik, Muhammad Hafeez, Muhammad Rizwan, Sarfaraz Ahmed (Capt), Shadab Khan, Faheem Ashraf, Junaid Khan, Emdad Wasim, Shaheen Shah Afridi and Muhammad Aamir are certain selections while for the one slot the toss up is between Abid Ali and hard-hitting middle order batsman, Asif Ali.

"The reserve players will include Muhammad Nawaz and Muhammad Hasnain."

Archer given chance to stake WC claim

AFP ■ LONDON

England chief selector Ed Smith is confident the call-up of uncapped all-rounder Jofra Archer will have no adverse affect on team morale in the run-up to the World Cup.

Rising star Archer was included on Wednesday in a 17-man squad for next month's one-day internationals against Ireland and Pakistan.

The dynamic Barbados-born Archer was left out of the 15-man preliminary World Cup squad also announced by tournament hosts England.

But he could have as many as six one-day internationals — one against Ireland and five against Pakistan — to stake his claim before England confirm their final World Cup squad on May 23.

Sussex pacer Archer, 24, has an English father and holds a British passport.

He completed a three-year qualification period on March 17 after the England and Wales Cricket Board changed its residency rules.



Under the previous system, he would not have been eligible until the winter of 2022 after a seven-year residency.

Archer and another Barbados-born Sussex player Chris Jordan were both added to the 15-man squad that played a one-day series in the West Indies earlier this year.

They were also included in the 14-strong party for a one-off Twenty20 against Pakistan. Archer has been impressing in the Indian Premier League, where he took three for 15 for the Rajasthan Royals against Kings XI Punjab on Tuesday.

"The selection panel has been impressed with Jofra Archer's performances in domestic and franchise cricket," said Smith. "He is a very talented and exciting cricketer."

"In line with ICC regulations, we have to name a preliminary squad of 15 for the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup before April 23.

"However, all 17 players named in the Royal London ODIs against Pakistan can stake a claim to be in the final 15-man squad, finalised at the end of that series."

SHASTRI TELLS EXCLUDED BUNCH NOT TO LOSE HEART

PTI ■ DUBAI

India coach Ravi Shastri on Wednesday said he would have preferred a 16-member World Cup squad instead of the mandated 15 and urged those who missed out to "not lose heart".

India on Monday announced a 15-strong squad for the mega-event, starting May 30, and the omissions of young keeper-batsman Rishabh Pant and veteran Ambati Rayudu triggered a debate on the choices made by the selectors.

Shastri steered clear of commenting on the furore.

"I don't get involved in selection. If we have any opinion, we let the captain know," Shastri was quoted as saying by the Sport360 website.

"When you only have 15 to pick, there is bound to be someone or the other who misses out, which is very unfortunate. I would have preferred 16 players. We had mentioned to the ICC that in a tournament that long, 16 players makes sense. But the dictat was 15," he added.

Shastri said those who missed the final 15 should look ahead as opportunity can knock anytime.



"They (who missed out) shouldn't lose heart. It's a funny game. There could be injuries. So you never know when you could be called up," he said.

When pressed on Vijay Shankar's selection for the No 4 slot months after captain Virat Kohli declared Rayudu as the front-runner for the position, Shastri said the spot remains a flexible one.

"Total flexibility (on No 4 position) depending on conditions, opposition. I would say the top three... but after that you can be very flexible," he said.