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LASTING LEGACY OF CORRUPTION**WORLD 12**
MAY ISOLATED AS BREXIT STRATEGY HANGS IN BALANCE**SPORT 15**
GERMANY BEAT NETHERLANDS 3-2 IN EURO 2020 QUALIFIERSI'M Happiest ON A FILM SET:
KARAN JOHAR
13 VIVACITY

BHUBANESWAR, TUESDAY MARCH 26, 2019; PAGES 16 ₹3

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Rahul resurrests garibi hatao

In 'surgical' strike on poverty, Cong pledges ₹72k/yr to each poor family

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Forty-eight-year after Indira Gandhi came to power in 1971 on the ear-catching slogan of "Garibi hatao", her grandson Rahul Gandhi has reinvented the same theme by announcing his own version of "surgical" strike on poverty to revive the Congress fortune in the Lok Sabha elections.

As part of the Congress manifesto for general elections, Congress chief Rahul Gandhi said 20 per cent families in poorest of the poor category will be given ₹72,000 each annually as a minimum income.

Making the announcement at a Press conference post the Congress Working Committee meeting, the Congress chief said, "The time for change has come. This will be a 'final assault' to eradicate poverty in the country."

The party manifesto is being framed by a committee headed by former Finance and Home Minister P Chidambaram.

Citing the examples of farmers' loan waiver schemes in three States — Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh — the Gandhi scion said if the party is voted to power the Congress will identify such families who live below the poverty mark and help them to live decent life. He said the scheme is part of the party's plan to ensure minimum income guaranteed to every person in the country.



Congress president Rahul Gandhi addresses a Press conference at party headquarters in New Delhi on Monday

GROUND BREAKING

- The final assault on poverty has begun. We will wipe out poverty from the country, said Rahul
- I promise that there will be justice for the poor. The Congress guarantees that 20 per cent families belonging to poorest of the poor category in India will be given ₹72,000 each annually
- This is a historic scheme which has not happened anywhere in the world. It is an extremely powerful, ground-breaking and well-thought through idea. We have consulted many economists on the scheme, said the Congress president

through idea. We have consulted many economists on the scheme. It will be a fiscally prudent scheme," Rahul said

Accusing the Prime

Minister of giving money to the rich and not the poor, Rahul alleged the poor have suffered in the last five years and "We are going to provide justice to them". If Narendra Modi can give money to the rich people in the country, then Congress can give the poor this money," he said.

"Narendra Modi is creating two Indias in the country and we will not allow it, there will be only one India," he said.

Asked where the money will come from and whether it will affect the economy, Rahul

claimed there is enough money in India and the Congress guarantees that 20 per cent poorest families will be given ₹72,000 per year.

Remember that in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan, I had promised that in 10 days farmers will be given a loan waiver. I am promising you today that justice will be done. Scheme will be on a phase basis. First a pilot project will be run then scheme will run," he said. He claimed that everyday your money is being taken away and "we will show you what is happening. We have been studying this for the last 4-5 months".

The working committee, which is the party's highest decision-making body, will give a final go-ahead to the manifesto.

The meeting was chaired by Rahul and attended by former PM Manmohan Singh, Priyanka Gandhi, Ahmed Patel, Ghulam Nabi Azad, Mallikarjun Kharge, and AK Antony.

Though the much awaited meeting ended without an

unanimous decision, the party insiders said alliance between the Congress and the AAP will take place irrespective of the inherent difference between their ideologies.

Finally the leaders left it on the Congress president to take the final call on pre-poll alliance with the AAP in Delhi.

Meanwhile, the sources said six leaders in the party — Sheila, three working presidents Devender Yadav, Rajesh Lilotia, Haroon Yusuf, and former Delhi Congress presidents JP Agarwal and Tajdar Babar — are opposed to the alliance, while former Delhi presidents Ajay Maken, Subhash Chopra and Arvinder Singh Lovely are in the favour of a pre-poll alliance with the AAP. Congress general secretary and Delhi incharge PC Chacko has backed Lovely, Maken and Chopra contention.

According to a senior party leader, Maken strongly supported an alliance with AAP saying the Congress would not be able to win any seat in Delhi on its own.

Reacting to Maken's reasoning, Rahul asked him what the party under his stewardship has done in the last four-and-a-half-year if it cannot contest on its own.

According to a senior party leader present in the meeting, Chacko handed over signed letters of 12 district Congress presidents, leaders of the party and party councillors in all three municipal corporations, to buttress the demand for alliance with the AAP.

The AAP has been dangling olive branch to the Congress for an alliance in the Lok Sabha polls Delhi to stop the BJP from certain victory on all seven seats.

Cong-AAP tie-up likely even as hiccups remain



Congress president Rahul Gandhi, ex-PM Manmohan Singh, senior leader AK Antony, and Delhi Congress president Sheila Dikshit among others at Congress Working Committee meeting in New Delhi on Monday

Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

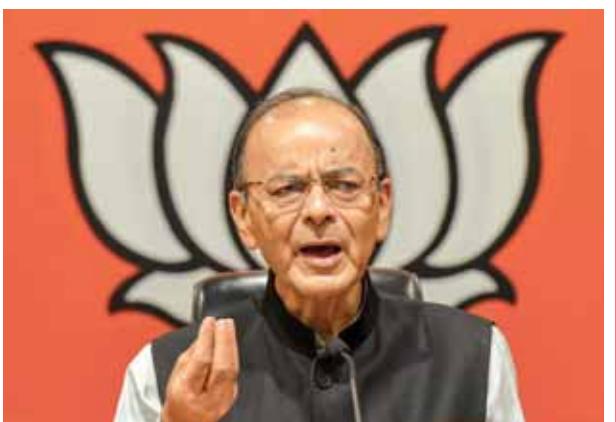
Leaders leave it to Rahul to take final call

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH/CHANDAN PRAKASH ■ NEW DELHI

Senior leaders of the Delhi Congress, including its Delhi unit president Sheila Dikshit, discussed the possibility of an alliance with the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Delhi with party president Rahul Gandhi and other senior leaders on Monday. The meeting has gained importance in the light of the Congress and the AAP finally agreeing to form an alliance to prevent the BJP from retaining all the seven Lok Sabha seats in Delhi.

According to a senior party leader, Maken strongly supported an alliance with AAP saying the Congress would not be able to win any seat in Delhi on its own.

People won't buy Cong's chhal, kapat, says Jaitley



Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley addresses a Press conference at the party headquarters in New Delhi on Monday

Congress plan will create incentives against work: NITI Aayog's vice chief

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley on Monday described as "fraud" and humbug Rahul Gandhi's announcement to provide ₹72,000 yearly to the 20 per cent of the poorest of the poor in the country saying the poor are receiving one and half times more in the Modi regime. People won't be taken in by "chhal kapat" of the Congress, said Jaitley.

Niti Aayog Vice-Chairman Rajiv Kumar and the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) too criticised the pre-poll announcement by Rahul.

Addressing a Press conference here, Jaitley said the Congress regimes have defrauded poor in the name of "Garibi Hatao" but only "redistributed poverty" in the country. He said UPA's ten-year rule was replete with "chhal, kapat and dhokha". He said Congress promised only one time waiver of ₹70,000 crore to farmers but actually gave only ₹52,000 crore. Similarly, in MNREGA, Jaitley said, the Congress announced it will spend ₹40,000 crore but spent only ₹28,000 crore.

Jaitley said the Congress

which opposed the Modi Government's Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) is now saying it would use the same in providing money to poor and without any financial burden.

This is jugglery, he said. The Finance Minister said the Modi Government was already providing ₹5.34 lakh crore to poor. "We are giving much more to poor and the total amount would exceed ₹7 lakh crore," he said.

"The Congress is misleading poor in the name of removing poverty in 50 years... but poor would not be trapped in the fraudulent trap of the Opposition party," the Finance Minister said, adding, the Modi Government has built "assets" (sadhak) for the poor in forms of road, money in banks, house, electricity".

In another tweet, he said the cost of the minimum income guarantee scheme at 2 per cent of the gross domestic product and 13 per cent of the budget will "ensure" that real needs of people remain unsatisfied.

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Naresh Goyal, wife deboard Jet; lenders take cockpit control

PTI ■ MUMBAI/NEW DELHI

Giving up chairmanship Gafer more than 26 years, embattled Jet Airways' founder Naresh Goyal on Monday quit as a board member, with the lenders taking control of the cockpit and deciding to infuse ₹1,500 crore immediately into the ailing airline.

Struggling to stay afloat amid a debt burden of over ₹8,000 crore, the board of the country's first private full service carrier also approved conversion of banks' debt into equity and induction of nominee directors of the lenders, who would become majority stakeholders. Expressing happiness over the lenders' decision, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said India needs more airlines, "otherwise airfares would rise". Banks have kept self interest in mind by trying to keep it as a going entity so that they can recover their dues," he said in Delhi hours after the airline's board cleared the debt resolution plan.

Bringing an end to weeks of uncertainty over the future of the cash-strapped carrier, the board has approved immediate fund infusion of up to ₹1,500 crore by lenders as well as conversion of debt into equity.

Naresh Goyal, his wife Anita Goyal and Etihad Airways' nominee director Kevin Knight have quit the board. Gulf carrier Etihad, a strategic partner, holds 24 per cent stake in Jet Airways while Naresh Goyal has a shareholding of 51 per cent.

Goyal's stake would come down to 25 per cent while that of Etihad would reduce to 12 per cent. The consortium of Indian lenders, led by State Bank of India (SBI), would become the majority shareholders of Jet Airways, the airline said in a statement.

The airline said two nominees of the promoter and one nominee of Etihad Airways would continue on the board, which would also see induction of two people nominated by the lenders.

For the second-phase polls

Manoj Tiwari woos Sapna Chaudhary to dance to BJP's tune

SAPNA SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

A day after famous Haryanvi singer and dancer Sapna Chaudhary claimed that she has not joined the Congress, Delhi BJP president Manoj Tiwari met her and said he will be happy if she campaigns for the BJP in the Lok Sabha elections. Sapna

much hyped news of joining the Congress was circulated with her pictures with Priyanka Gandhi Vadra. Tiwari accused the Congress of using the Haryana performer's picture without her consent. "The Congress has used her old pictures to spread the rumour that she has joined the party and will contest from Mathura.

245 Assembly, 30 LS candidates file papers

Bhakta, Chandra Sekhar, Puspendra, Ramesh in 1st-phase polls

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A total of 245 candidates have filed nominations to contest elections from 28 Assembly constituencies and 30 candidates to fight polls from four Parliamentary constituencies in the State in the first-phase polls scheduled to be held on April 11, according to an official release on Monday.

Of the above candidates, as many as 207 filed for Assembly seats and 22 for Lok Sabha seat for Berhampur, Deepak Majhi, Ramesh Majhi, and Balabhadra Majhi for Nabarangpur and Saptapuri, Ulaka, Kaushalya Hikaka, Jayaram Pangi for Koraput seat will face voting in the first phase.

to be held for five Lok Sabha and 35 Assembly seats on April 18, as many as 96 candidates have filed papers for Assembly seats and 21 for LS seats.

Bhakta Charan Das, Puspendra Singh Deo, Basant Panda for Kalahandi Parliamentary constituency, Chandra Sekhar Sahu, Bhrugu Baxipatra and CS Naidu for Berhampur, Deepak Majhi, Ramesh Majhi, and Balabhadra Majhi for Nabarangpur and Saptapuri, Ulaka, Kaushalya Hikaka, Jayaram Pangi for Koraput seat will face voting in the first phase.

The SC rejected the submission of Yadav's counsel that the notice to the CBI be kept at abeyance in the wake of upcoming general elections.

The SC said, "There was a status report (of 2007 by CBI) saying that prima facie case is made out. We are entitled to know what happened to the investigation".

The SC directed CBI to apprise it within two weeks of the status of probe in alleged disproportionate assets case against SP leaders Mulayam Singh Yadav and Akhilesh.

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CAPULE
CONGRESS REBEL ENTERS FRAY AGAINST GOWDA

Bengaluru: JD(S) patriarch and former Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda on Monday filed his nomination from Tumkur as the ruling alliance candidate, but will have to face a rebel candidate from alliance partner Congress.

SC FOR MORE VVPAT MATCHING IN POLLS

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Monday favoured increasing the random physical verification of VVPAT slips in the Lok Sabha and Assembly polls and told the EC that "no institution should insulate itself from improvement, including the judiciary".

DMRC STAFFER'S BODY FOUND IN METRO BHAWAN

New Delhi: The body of a 33-year-old DMRC employee was found in the basement of the Metro Bhawan, police said on Monday. The deceased identified as Mahesh Prajapati, hailed from Varanasi and was residing in Govindpuri area of the national Capital.

ED LEAKING PROBE DETAILS TO MEDIA: ROBERT VADRA

New Delhi: Robert Vadra on Monday claimed before a Delhi court that Enforcement Directorate has been leaking details of his interrogation to the media to "embarrass" and "humiliate" him on account of a "political vendetta", a charge strongly denied by the probe agency.



who joined the party on Sunday, was declared as the party nominee for this Parliamentary seat. Acharya's nomination as the BJP rival against Patnaik and not as a candidate in any other constituency sprang surprise in view of Hinjili known as a BJP stronghold, from where the Chief Minister has been elected in the last four elections since 2000 by vast margins of votes with his rivals losing their deposits. Acharya's claim that "the BJD fortress in Hinjili has

crumbled by now" has no buyers except diehard BJD members.

Naveen Patnaik, accompanied by several western Odisha BJD leaders, filed his nomination papers at the Padampur Sub-Collector's office.

Notably, the Congress has declared Ripunath Seth as its candidate for Bijeupur while the BJP is yet to announce its nominee for constituency

SC seeks status of CBI investigation into Mulayam, Akhilesh's assets

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday directed CBI to apprise it within two weeks of the status of probe in alleged disproportionate assets case against SP leaders Mulayam Singh Yadav and Akhilesh.

The SC rejected the submission of Yadav's counsel that the notice to the CBI be kept at abeyance in the wake of upcoming general elections.

The SC said, "There was a status report (of 2007 by CBI) saying that prima facie case is made out. We are entitled to know what happened to the investigation".

BJP names candidates for 2 LS, 9 Assembly seats

Kharabela gets K'mal LS, Prakash Cuttack LS seat

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) announced candidates for two Lok Sabha and nine Assembly seats in the State on Monday.

As per the list, Kharabela Swain, who rejoined the party on the day, will contest from the Kandhamal Lok Sabha seat while former State and CRPF DGP Prakash Mishra will fight from the Cuttack Parliamentary constituency.

Swain, who was elected to the Lok Sabha thrice on a BJP ticket from Baleswar, formally rejoined the saffron party here. "Inspired by the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi,

I rejoined the BJP to dethrone the corrupt and inefficient BJD Government in Odisha," said Swain.

Similarly, former DGP Mishra, had joined the BJP on Sunday. Among the nine Assembly seats declared on Monday is Rishabh Nanda, son of BJPs Rajya Sabha Member Prashant Nanda, who will fight from the Begunia Assembly segment on a BJP ticket. Rishabh too has recently joined the party. Others include Dinesh Jain from Jharsuguda, Debendra Mahapatro from Rairakhol, Badrinarayan Dhal from Bhandarpokhari, Pradeep Nayak from Bhadrak, Debanarayan Pradhan from Phulbani, Samapad Swain from Paradip, Narendra Nayak from Jayadev and Biswaranjan Jena from Jatni.

BJP has, so far, declared candidates for 17 Lok Sabha seats and 130 Assembly segments.

Ex-BJP VP Rajkishore joins BJD

Says Dharmendra can't even win Ward Member election

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

In a major blow to the BJP, the party's former State vice-president Raj Kishore Das joined the BJD on Monday along with his supporters. At an induction programme in the Naveen Niwas, BJD supremo Naveen Patnaik welcomed Das and his supporters into the party fold.

Das, considered a heavyweight in Mayurbhanj district, had submitted his resignation from the primary membership of the BJP on March 23.

Later, without taking name, Das obviously challenged



Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan to contest against him from the Morada Assembly constituency. He said Pradhan, who is "dreaming to be Chief Minister," cannot even win a Ward Member election.

He further said BJP functionaries are being tortured and God would never forgive the leaders for this and punish them. The BJP's pride would be destroyed in Mayurbhanj, where the party would get zero results, he claimed.

pioneer interview of the week

Naveen, Mamata move on women reservation praiseworthy



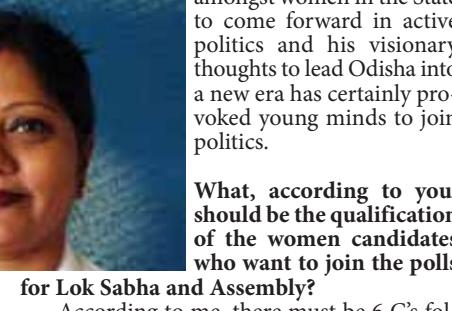
supported the women reservation Bill, but still it didn't get the majority support finally.

The recent announcement of Naveen Patnaik and Mamata Banerjee for 33% and 41% of reservation for women has been welcomed by many. What's your response to this?

My hearty thanks to our esteemed Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik and West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee for their exemplary moves. Even when the Bill of reservation is still pending at the Centre, regional parties are taking exemplary decisions which are challenging and praiseworthy. In our State, former CM Biju Patnaik had made history by giving reservation to women in panchayat level before the women reservation Bill was mooted and his son Naveen Patnaik is following in his footsteps, giving ample opportunity and support to women leadership by giving 33% reservation in his BJD for Lok Sabha and also by urging the Centre to pass the women reservation Bill.

Why is the Opposition at the national level not following the examples set by Naveen Patnaik and Mamata Banerjee? How do you look at the 33% reservation of Patnaik?

One needs a lot of guts and a certain feminist approach to take these decisions. In most of the parties across the country, the topmost leaders are always male; and for centuries now, they have been enjoying the power and status and are unwilling to give up even a portion of that for women to exercise. The decisions taken by Naveen Patnaik has brought up confidence amongst women in the State to come forward in active politics and his visionary thoughts to lead Odisha into a new era has certainly provoked young minds to join politics.



What, according to you, should be the qualification of the women candidates who want to join the polls for Lok Sabha and Assembly?

According to me, there must be 6 C's followed by the leaders to contest the polls. Those are: C-Strong Character, C-Non Communal, C-Non Casteist, C-Non-Corrupt, C-Creative mind and C-Connected with community along with minimum understanding about the Constitution of India.

Would you either join Parliament or Assembly polls if given ticket by BJD or any other party?

When I was a student in 1990, I worked with Biju Patnaik and Rabindra Ray as Students' Union president of my college in Kendrapada district. I could have continued in politics, but unfortunately of these two stalwart leaders Biju Patnaik died before I took a decision and Rabindra Ray quit active politics during that time. I couldn't find a good mentor under whom I would have continued my political aspirations. During the time of my Government job days, I took leadership of the trade union of all Odisha Municipal Unions. After quitting my job when I began social work, I enjoyed the leadership of mass as a social leader. If I get a chance to be a political leader, I would like to serve my motherland sincerely and dedicatedly. Of course, I would like to work with an esteemed leadership who promotes women leadership with respect.

Though we call our motherland 'Bharat Mata' and women consist of half of the population and we worship goddesses as our culture, we have a typical male-dominating society along with a partial mindset which is not allowing women as leaders. There are many reasons given by our previous parliamentarians, who mostly are male. But I don't think women cannot take leadership upfront to rule the country if chance is given. Of course, many male leaders

'Don't destroy bond among forests, rivers, communities'

3rd Odisha River Conf held at Baripada

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Rivers cannot exist without healthy forests and healthy natural forests cannot exist without local indigenous communities, said Water Initiatives Odisha convenor Ranjan Panda while addressing the 3rd Odisha River Conference that kick-started on Sunday at Baripada.

The Water Initiatives, Gram Swaraj and Vasundhara along with 35 partner organisations organised the conference with the theme 'Promoting the Forest-River-Communities nexus for Conservation of Rivers and Combating Climate Change.'

Panda further added, "It is high time we explored the inter-relationship between forest, river and communities. There is an urgent need to discuss more on this subject and to bring the communities to the mainstream discourse of river and forest conservation."

He suggested that two important factors need to be brought into the purview – rights of the local and indigenous communities over forests and water; and role of forests in building climate resilience.

Prof Ashok Panigrahi, a noted conservationist, who joined as chief guest, said for-



est-water-communities inter-relationship is an important discourse in view of the recent Supreme Court order on eviction of forest dwellers whose claims over forest land they have been cultivating and inhabiting on were rejected.

If the forest dwellers are going to be evicted from the land, neither the forests nor the wildlife are going to be protected and it would sound the death knell of the streams and rivers that originated from forests, he cautioned.

BV Subba Rao from Centre for Resource Education and Management, Hyderabad said the land-water-forest-human relationship is age-old. However, the emotional bond between the three is no more there.

Bishakha Bhanja of Water

Aid lamented, "It is unfortunate that efforts of women go unrecognised even though they have a great contribution for conservation of water and forests."

Among others, Deepak Pani, secretary, Gram Swaraj, Sneha Mishra, Aaina, Ashok Biswal, The Nature Conservancy, Bhopal and Dr Hemant Kumar Sahoo, Vasundhara spoke.

More than 200 people including those from basin communities, forest dwellers, farmers and fisher folks along with civil society representatives, academicians, senior journalists, river and water experts from across the country participated.

The Odisha Water Honours were given away during the inaugural session.

Neck-and-neck fight likely in Bargarh LS seat

As BJD, BJP veterans in fray

PNS ■ JHARSUGUDA

Preparations for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections are in full flow in Bargarh Lok Sabha seat where two heavyweights, BJP national secretary Suresh Pujari and Rajya Sabha member Prasanna Acharya will be in the fray. Though the Congress has also fielded a new candidate Pradeep Devata, but a stiff contest is expected between the BJD and the BJP.

In 2014 elections, a tough contest took place between the BJP and the BJD as both were new to the constituency and party symbol played a decisive



role. In 2019, both the BJD and the BJP have changed their candidates. Congress is further weakened in the region after the exit of Jharsuguda MLA Naba Kishore Das who recently switched over to the BJD.

For the Assembly election, the BJD has given tickets to mostly senior members in all seats under Bargarh

Parliamentary constituency. The Bargarh Parliamentary constituency comprises of seven Assembly seats like Padampur, Bijepur, Bargarh, Attabira, Bhatli, Jharsuguda and Brajarajnagar. Even Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik is contesting from Bijepur to influence western Odisha voters. This is touted as a political masterstroke of Chief Minister given the tough challenge the party will get from the BJP. From all these equations, it is clear that the BJD is not ready to cede ground on the Bargarh seat.

From the BJP side, nobody appears so influential except firebrand leader Suresh Pujari. The party will hope to exploit the cracks in the BJD to the hilt.

Pravat lobbies for son's ticket

PNS ■ ATHAGARH

Banki BJD MLA Pravat Kumar Tripathy during a workers' meet on Sunday refused to contest the coming elections.

He said that he has written in this connection to the party high command, but he wants his son Devi Ranjan Tripathy to be the BJD candidate from Banki. Tripathy told that since his name has been wrongfully entangled in a chit fund case, he decided to quit elections but

was dedicating his son to the service of the Banki people and has sought the cooperation of the workers.

But people of Banki seem to be critical of the family politics of Tripathy.

Why has the desired reservation for women not been implemented in the country yet?

Though we call our motherland 'Bharat Mata' and women consist of half of the population and we worship goddesses as our culture, we have a typical male-dominating society along with a partial mindset which is not allowing women as leaders. There are many reasons given by our previous parliamentarians, who mostly are male. But I don't think women cannot take leadership upfront to rule the country if chance is given. Of course, many male leaders



terms of world class content for young audience, especially in animation, I am very hopeful that I would be able to gather more knowledge and have some mutual col-

laboration to strengthen our cultural relationships. I am definitely thankful to BUFF, Julia Jarl & Daniel Lundquist for this opportunity," said Jitendra.

We wanted to initiate youth into volunteerism and foster political engagement by creating a platform for them to volunteer. Our other aim was to sensitise the youths to issues faced by people in the slums, children and the elderly when they go to conduct activities," Pooja Mishra, coordinator of the event, said

been celebrating Days of Service twice a year, on Gandhi Jayanti and on the 4th Sunday of March since 2011.

Apart from Bhubaneswar, it was conducted in 10 cities across India including Cuttack, Angul, Mumbai, Pune, Hyderabad, Bangalore and Delhi.

The Bakul Foundation has

'CEO not allowing KALIA disbursement' BJD alleges BJP pressure

PNS ■ CUTTACK

Former DG of Odisha Police Prakash Mishra, who joined the BJD on Sunday and was given the party ticket to contest from the prestigious Cuttack Lok Sabha seat, on Monday said he was highly impressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's commitment to build a strong and prosperous India.

"Having watched the prime minister very closely during my

New Delhi tenure, I thought of getting associated with him and assisting him in accomplishing his vision," Mishra, said here.

Mishra was very uncertainly removed as DGP in July 2014 by the Naveen Patnaik Government.

The State Government also registered a fake graft case against him, which, however, was quashed by the Orissa High Court.

But by then, he lost the race

as a top contender for the post of CBI Director.

Cuttack will vote in the third phase on April 24 along with five other Parliamentary constituencies in the State and 42 Assembly segments.

The BJD and the Congress have not yet announced their candidates for the Cuttack LS seat, which has returned the BJD's Bhartruhari Mahtab continuously in last five elections.

He questioned as to why the State's scheme has been stopped while the Centre's PM-Kisan Yojana is still continuing even after enforcement of the mode code of conduct by the Election Commission of India (ECI).

He said the matter would be brought to the notice of the ECI on behalf of the BJD soon.

"The CEO has stopped

'CEO not allowing KALIA disbursement' BJD alleges BJP pressure

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Biju Janata Dal (BJD) on Monday alleged that the State Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), pressurised by the BJD, is not allowing the State Government to disburse the KALIA scheme funds to farmers.

Addressing a Press meet here, BJD spokesperson Sasmit Patra alleged that the CEO is creating hurdles in making the KALIA assistance money reach out to the genuine beneficiaries.

"The CEO has stopped

distribution of KALIA money after implementation of election model code of conduct putting the livelihood and future of lakhs of farmers in the State at stake," said Dr Patra.

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the distribution of KALIA money after implementation of election model code of conduct putting the livelihood and future of lakhs of farmers in the State at stake," said Dr Patra.

He questioned as to why the State's scheme has been stopped while the Centre's PM-Kisan Yojana is still continuing even after enforcement of the mode code of conduct by the Election Commission of India (ECI).

He said the matter would be brought to the notice of the ECI on behalf of the BJD soon.

"The CEO has stopped

'CEO not allowing KALIA disbursement' BJD alleges BJP pressure

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Biju Janata Dal (BJD) on Monday alleged that the State Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), pressurised by the BJD, is not allowing the State Government to disburse the KALIA scheme funds to farmers.

CHAMPUA ASSEMBLY SEAT

BJD, BJP yet to decide as aspirants vie for tickets

PNS ■ CHAMPUA

Although the Congress has declared the name of Jadumani Barik as its candidate for the Champua Assembly seat but the BJD and the BJP are yet to do it resulting in uncertainty among the aspirants.

After the visit of Champua Independent MLA Santanat Mahakud to Naveen Niwas some days back, it was speculated in the political circle that either Sana himself or Meenakshi Mahanta as his

protégé may be made BJD nominee for the minerals rich Champua seat but situation changed the next day when Nalita Mahanta, one of the close aids of Sana and hundreds of Sana followers led by Kusha Apat joined the BJD in protest against the decision of the Sana to lobby for Meenakshi.

Sources close to supporters of Sana said the candidature of Sana in BJD is opposed by local Minister Badri Narayan Patra who is rather projecting Kusha Apat while former

Champua MLA Jitu Patnaik is lobbying for Reena Barik, who is working president of BJD, Keonjhar unit.

Out of total seven Assembly constituencies in the Keonjhar Parliamentary constituency, the BJD has declared the names of six constituencies except Champua. Although ShreeManta Kumar Tripathy and Murali Kumar Sharma are two strong contenders of BJP for the seat, but the possibility that Kusha might join BJP if he is denied ticket in the BJD is not ruled out.

In Subarnapur

Youths want jobs, not blank poll promises

PNS ■ SONEPUR

While the parties have been using local youths for election campaigning, the BJD has gone a step ahead in wooing the section by spending Rs 1.5 lakh on each unit of the Biju Yuva Bahini in Subarnapur district.

The youth wing organises conventions for the young voters across the district to widen their vote base. Similarly, the Centre's Ministry of Skill Development has been channelling funds to skill the youths and enhance their job prospects.

With elections drawing near, young voters get enthusiastic to exercise their franchise.

However, corruption at grassroots level, rising unemployment, stunted growth in the industrial sector and lack of initiatives to provide quality education have put them in a quandary with regard to choosing their potential leaders.

The implementation of the Skill Development schemes by the State or Central Governments, however, has failed to inspire the youths. What has created doubts among them is the party hopping tendency of the leaders who have been guided by their own vested interests and not that of the voters.

A young businessman Gyana Naik, hailing from Tarbha block, said all pro-

grammes implemented by either the State or Central Governments are guided by electoral calculations. "I had requested local leaders, especially from the ruling party, for loan assistance to open my own shop but to no avail," he added.

Youngsters say that rather than draining the State exchequer by forming youth wings, parties should divert funds for education and employment opportunities. Steps should be taken to equip the youths for innovation and entrepreneurship for assured gateways to jobs. 'Earn while you learn' policy should be introduced to eradicate unemployment. These are the deciding factors, they opined.

INBRIEF

55 BJD WORKERS JOIN TIRUPATI PARTY



Paralakhemundi: BJD workers numbering 55, including 40 women, of Gummia block joined Tirupati Panigrahi's Independent Party here on Monday. They said they were impressed with Panigrahi's development works in the area.

RITURAJ SAHU NEW INS CHILKA COMMANDING OFFICER

Chilika: Commodore Rituraj Sahu took over as the Commanding Officer of the Indian Navy's premier Sailors' Training Establishment INS Chilka, as well as the Naval Officer-in-Charge (Odisha) on Monday. He took over the charge from Commodore Manish Misra, VSM at a ceremonial parade. The Officers and men of INS Chilka

gave Misra a warm send off on completion of his three years tenure and he expressed his gratitude to all shipmates for their support and their dedicated efforts.

KANDHAMAL BOOK FAIR CONCLUDES

Phulbani: The 12-day-long Kandhamal Pustak Utsav, which was organised with many book and handicrafts stalls, concluded here on Monday. Different quiz, dance, song competitions were held. Odisha Union of Journalists' president Prasanna Mohanty, senior administrator of Phulbani Biswanath Barik and Dr Bibhuti Acharya were guests in the concluding ceremony. Pustak Utsav committee president Kausik Sahu gave a vote of thanks.

SARAT DEB DEATH ANNIV OBSERVED IN ALI

Ali: The Sarat Kumar Deb Smriti Committee organised a meeting to observe the 31st death anniversary of Sarat Kumar Deb here on Monday under the chairmanship of committee president Jagatananda Bal. Committee secretary Ramesh Chandra Panda read out the annual report. Raja Sabha member Pratap Keshari Deb, BJD Kendrapada district president Dhruba Charan Sahoo, Rajanikantha Panchayat Samiti Chairman Sabitri Das and Aul Panchayat Samiti Chairman Jharana Dash attended as guests. They spoke about the achievements, roles of Deb for public as Minister, Leader of Opposition and MP.

PANCHUDOLA YATRA IN ATHAGARH TODAY

Athagarh: The Panchudola Yatra, a famous festival of Athagarh, would be observed on Tuesday with all religious fervour. Over a hundred Bimans (palanquins) carrying idols of Lord Krishna and Goddess Mahalaxmi would be congregated at the Jhulana Temple. In the evening, they would move in a procession with traditional cultural dances and bursting of firecrackers through the town. Afterwards, different bazaar associations will organise melody, drama, record dances, dandanaacha throughout the night. The Bimans will return to their respective villages following which people of Athagarh will play Holi as per the traditions of the Gadajat culture. Here, people don't observe Holi on its yearly Tithi.

N'NAGAR SISHU MANDIR OBSERVES WATER DAY

Brahmapur: The NCC cadets of Saraswati Sishu Vidya Mandir, Neelakantha Nagar here observed the World Water Day. On the occasion, a drawing competition was organised on the topic 'Water Conservation' and later a rally was taken by the cadets where the public were sensitised on solutions of water woes. School Principal S Mohan Rao attended as guest and flagged off the rally. 1 (O) CTC NCC, Bam Havildar PK Mohanty and school NCC officer Santanu Kumar Behera coordinated the programmes.

SAMBALPUR CDVO JR CLERK HELD TAKING BRIBE

Bargarh: Vigilance officers on Monday arrested Sambalpur CDVO office's Junior Clerk S Sankar Reddy for demanding and accepting bribe of Rs 4,000 from Madhusudan Majhi, a retired Statistical Enumerator, for facilitating him to withdraw his salary of sick period of 83 days. Reddy was caught near the Sambalpur Treasury Office with the bribe money. Investigation was still in progress.

WORKER DIES IN L&T DHAMRA LNG SITE MISHAP

Dhamra: A 36-year-old worker died at Ashwini Hospital, Cuttack after sustaining injury at the Larsen and Turbo (L and T) Hydro Carbon site in the Dhamra Port premises. The deceased worker SK Halim was a resident of Murshidabad in West Bengal. The auxiliary hook block of the crane caused the injury to Halim. An investigation is being carried into the matter. The Directorate of Factory and Boiler has been intimated about the incident.

MYSTERY SHROUDS MAN'S DEATH IN HOTEL IN DEOGARH

Deogarh: Investigators are probing the death of a man, whose body was found from a hotel room here. Bijay Sarangi was found dead in a room of Hotel Mamata on Sunday evening. The 42-year-old hailed from Balabhadrapur in Dhenkanal district. Police reached the spot after the hotel staff informed them. Postmortem report would reveal the cause of death, police said.

IN JSPUR

1 dies, another hurt in bike-truck collision

PNS ■ JAGATSINGHPUR

A person was killed and another suffered critical injuries after the bike they were riding on collided with a Hyva truck on National Highway-55 near Jagodhari in the district on Monday.

The deceased was identified as Suryakanta Satpathy in Teratanga village under the Balikuda police station in the district. The incident took place when Suryakanta along with his friend Muna Das of Alabbara village was going to Cuttack at around 5.30 am. Due to foggy conditions, the bike collided with the truck coming from opposite direction.

The truck driver fled from the spot after the mishap.

Later, the injured person was shifted to the SCB Medical College Hospital in Cuttack from the District Headquarters Hospital (DHH) after his condition deteriorated.

Hemananda's daughters in rival camps in S'garh



Sunita fights for LS on BJD ticket, Anita for Assembly as Cong nominee

PNS ■ ROURKELA

Former Chief Minister Hemananda Biswal's two daughters, Sunita Biswal and Anita Biswal, are set to lock horns as they are going to fight elections from the Sundargarh Lok Sabha and Sundargarh Sadar Assembly seats on BJD and Congress tickets, respectively.

The two siblings will be seen in campaigning against each other even as Anita's seat comes under elder sister Sunita's Lok Sabha constituency.

Though Hemananda

Biswal, who was elected as MP of Sundargarh on a Congress ticket in 2009 election, is a native of Laikera area under neighbouring Jharsuguda district, both Sunita and Anita have married in Sundargarh district.

Following the announce-

ment of names of both the sisters by the rival parties, the battle lines have been drawn now for a fight between two siblings.

Both the sisters however do not feel uncomfortable in contesting from opposite parties. "I am thankful that BJD chief Naveen Patnaik gave me the

opportunity to contest from Sundargarh LS seat as a part of his initiative to give more opportunity to women candidates," Sunita said, adding, "I know that my sister and my father are representing Congress party, but I would be fighting a battle of principle and I am confident of a victory."

Anita Biswal said she has been given the opportunity to contest from Sundargarh Sadar Assembly seat on a Congress ticket, Anita said, adding, "I will give my best in this election to fetch wins for me and Congress MP candidate George Tirkey as well."

She said she feels very comfortable as her father is a Congress's cadre leader.

Samanta files papers for K'mal LS seat

PNS ■ PHULBANI



KIIT and KISS founder Kalyan Samanta filed his nomination papers as the BJD candidate for the Kandhamal Lok Sabha constituency here on Monday.

Samanta, accompanied by thousands of BJD workers and supporters from seven Assembly constituencies, came in a rally to file papers at the Collector's office.

Among others, former MP Sugrib Singh, SDC Chairman Rodan Mallick, Baliguda MLA Rajib Patra, BJD district president Saroj Karna and Dasapalla panchayat samiti Chairman were pre-

sent.

Notably, Kharabela Swain, who rejoined the BJD on Monday, will be Samanta's rival candidate.

Land mafia grabs valuable temple land in Keonjhar

HC moved against bid to amend OHRE Act

MALAY MOHAPATRA ■

KEONJHAR

By this, the local trust board or advisory committees have to take approval of the Government through the Debottar Commissioner in matter of temple property and the decision of the Government will be final and binding on the temple trusts.

The Government authorities will be the appointing/nominating authorities of trustee members and Executive Officers.

By this, the local trustees or managing boards have little power to exercise for the welfare, management and protection of the temple deity and property.

There is possibility of misuse of power by the Government authorities as Debottar deals with invaluable wealth and landed property. One Rajkishore Nanda has filed a case in the Orissa High Court to stay the recent Gazette notification on amendment of OHRE.

In the meantime, to weaken the Debottar Offices working as caretakers of these temples, the State Government has tried to amend the Odisha Hindu Religious Endowment Act (OHRE) and centralize more power with the Government.

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The Marphatdars (custodians) have managed to loot temple wealth, valuable deity land in favour of their families

and well-wishers finding flaws in the Endowment law in many places.

The enforcement and eviction of land by Debottar or Trusts has become impossible due to lack of adequate staff which in turn has favoured the encroachers. It is even difficult to evict or restore deity land encroached by influential persons in spite of court orders in favour of the deity.

For instance, Sri Baladev Jee temple has about 22,000 acres of land during takeover by Debottar but most of the land is encroached or not in present possession of the temple. Recently, more than 200 encroachment cases have been booked in Keonjhar town alone but not a decimal has been evicted so far.

The advisory board of the temple has not been constituted since last few years awaiting the decision of the Government.

Hence, instead of strengthening the Debottar and temple trusts with the Government will not only weaken the temple management but also widen the gap of local devotees with the temple, lawyer Debasish Dash alleged.

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IN TIGIRIA
Youth's body found in village pond
Police suspect murder

PNS ■ ATHAGARH

A body of an unidentified youth was found floating in a pond at Kalibiri village under the Tigiria police station on Monday morning.

When villagers went to the pond for bath, they located the body and informed police and fire brigade about it.

The Fire Services personnel fished out the body and rushed it to the Athagarh Sub-Divisional Hospital for post-mortem.

The body had cut marks in the throat. The Tigiria police registered a case and began inquiring into the incident. The police suspected that someone killed the youth and then threw the body into the pond.

Huge crowds at Ganjam Sub-Collector office As many file nominations on last day of 1st-phase polls



PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

of supporters to file papers for their respective constituencies. The traffic in the city remained crowded till afternoon.

According to information, BJD's Nandini Devi, Surjya Narayan Patro and Bikram Panda filed nominations for Sanakhemundi, Digapahandi and Berhampur, respectively. BJD's Bibhuti Jena, Kahnlu Charan Pati, Pinki Pradhan filed papers for Gopalpur, Berhampur and Digapahandi, respectively. Congress' Ramesh Jena and Lingaraj Choudhury for Sanakhemundi and

Malkangiri ASI, S'pur clerk held taking bribe

PNS ■ CUTTACK

Similarly, Sambalpur Chief District Veterinary office Junior Clerk S Sankar Reddy was caught taking bribe of ₹4,000 from complainant

Madhusudan Majhi, former Statistical Enumerator, for drawal of his salary for the sick period of 83 days sanctioned by the authority as commuted leave on April 19, 2018

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His residential Government quarter at Sambalpur and house at Khallikote in Ganjam district were searched.

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Naba, Radha, Ramesh file papers for J'suguda

**RAJ KUMAR SHARMA ■
JHARSUGUDA**

BJD star campaigner Naba Kisore Das on Monday filed his nomination papers as BJD nominee for Jharsuguda Assembly seat.

He was accompanied by many supporters besides son, Visual and daughter, Niki during filing of papers.

Bearing party flags and shouting slogans in support of CM Naveen Patnaik, BJD party workers and supporters followed Das in a rally.

BJD senior leaders Tapas Ray Choudhury, Sandeep Awasthi, Pintu Padhi, Sidharth Sarkar, Manoranjan Mohapatra

among others were present.

Das reached the sub-collector office around 1.30 pm and submitted 4 sets of nomination papers to the sub-collector cum returning officer (RO) Shiva Toppo.

He stated the local media persons that his priority is development of town and villages, irrigation, promotion of industry and job to the unemployed youths. Das has represented Jharsuguda seat twice in 2009 and 2014 and enjoys a massive support base in the constituency.

Similarly, BJP MLA Radharani Panda filed two sets of nomination for Brajrajnagar seat .CPI candidate Ramesh



Das has represented Jharsuguda seat twice in 2009 and 2014 and enjoys a massive support base in the constituency

Tripathy filed nomination for Brajrajnagar on the day as well. Besides, independent can-

diate Ajeya Kumar Mandal and Har Prasad Meher from Samata Kranti Dal filed nomination for the Brajrajnagar constituency.

Radharani Panda came with a rally from Beheramal along with party workers. Husband advocate Sudhansu Purohit and district BJP office bearer were there during her nomination. Similarly Congress Bargarh MP candidate Pradeep Debita, CPI trade unionist Anit Chakraborty and senior CPI leaders were present with CPI alliance candidate Ramesh

Tripathy. The last date for filing of nomination papers is March 26.

872nd SBI branch opens at Xavier campus

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The State Bank of India (SBI) inaugurated its 872nd branch in its Bhubaneswar Circle at the Xavier University Campus here on Monday.

Xavier University Vice-Chancellor Prof Fr Paul Fernandes inaugurated the branch in the presence of SBI Bhubaneswar circle CGM Praveena Kala, GM (Network-1) Devi Shankar Mishra, DGM (BO) Rajay Kumar Sinha and Regional Business Office-3 Regional Manager Satanarayana Panigrahi.

This is the 50th branch in the Khordha, Nayagarh region and would be of immense help for meeting the banking needs of the university



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ing needs of the university and nearby institutions like Skill Development, ICT, Institute of Mathematics, OEC College, Aryan Institute of Technology along with inhabitants of villages in and around Sunderapada and Jatni area.

'No irregularity in Prakruti Mitra Award'

Beach Council refutes Puri hoteliers' allegation

PNS ■ PURI

No irregularities were committed in giving the Prakruti Mitra award to the Beach Protection Council of Orissa (BPCO), a State-level NGO working for the protection of 480-km sea beach, in 2011-12.

Beach Council president Jagannath Bastia stated this, reacting to the allegations made by the Hotel Association of Puri (HAP) in this regard.

"The Prakruti Mitra award is meant for organisations not for individuals."

There is no provision for self nomination for the award.

The Forest and Environment Department has given the award to the council on the basis of the recommendation of district Collector, Puri after field visit of the district-level selection committee," Bastia said, adding that he has not committed any fraud or cheating to get the award.

He said the Hotel Association of Puri has filed a complaint against him in the Court of SDJM, Puri with false and baseless allegations with a intention to harass him as he

had filed a writ appeal in the Orissa High Court against the Hotel Association pertaining to demolition of 316 illegal buildings.

The Beach Protection Council has also filed a PIL in the High Court seeking eviction of illegal encroachments of powerful hoteliers from along the Puri sea beach.

Besides, the BPCO has requested the State Vigilance Director to conduct an inquiry into the alleged financial irregularities committed in organising Puri Beach Festival.

Bastia refuted the hotel association's allegation of criminal conspiracy to get the Prakruti Mitra Award.

HC refuses bail to Punjil Meher

PNS ■ CUTTACK

The Orissa High Court on Monday refused to grant bail to Balangir parcel bomb blast accused Punjil Meher and dismissed his bail application saying the petitioner's plea was devoid of merit. A college teacher by profession, Meher was arrested in April 2017 for his alleged involvement in the gruesome incident of sending a bomb in a parcel as wedding gift, which exploded killing the groom and his grandmother and injuring the bride.

"The nature and gravity of accusation, the shocking impact of the crime on the family

A college teacher by profession, Meher was arrested in April 2017 for his alleged involvement in the gruesome incident of sending a bomb in a parcel as wedding gift

ily of the victims and collective conscience of the society, the severity of punishment in case of conviction, the conduct of the petitioner in trying to escape from jail custody and chances of tampering with the witnesses, I am of the humble view that the petitioner does not deserve to be released on bail," Justice SK Sahoo said and, accordingly, dismissed the bail application.

ECoR announces ₹50K award

To Fire Services of Puri for promptly dousing Tapaswini Express fire
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The East Coast Railway (ECoR) General Manager has announced an award of ₹50,000 for the Fire Services of Puri for its prompt action in dousing fire in three coaches of the Tapaswini Express recently.

The fire teams would be felicitated and awarded with the announced money at a special Railway function to be held soon, informed an official

The GM also appreciated the prompt and active action of the Government Railway Police and the Railway Protection Force (RPF) personnel

release.

The GM also appreciated the prompt and active action of the Government Railway Police and the Railway Protection Force (RPF) personnel. They would also be awarded by the GM, said the release.

Tuberculosis Day observed in Brahmapur

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

The Rotary Club Brahmapur Central, the Indian Chest Society, the National College of Chest Physicians, the IMA and the Jai Jagannath Morning Walk Club jointly observed the World Tuberculosis Day with this year's theme "It's time to end Tuberculosis" here on Sunday.

The day was observed under the chairmanship of Prof Dr Narayan Mishra. On the occasion, a mobile workshop and a rally were organised and an awareness programme was conducted in the slum areas near the railway station and bus-stand here.

Among others, Rotary



Club Brahmapur central president G Srinivas Rao, Ajit Kumar Prusty, Dr Smiti Begrey, Asha Mishra, Ladu Kishore Patro, Kailash Mahapatra, Deepak Padhi, Jagannath Padhi Subash Patro and Dr Prabean Kumar Rath were present.

Implement Govt health schemes properly: Experts

CYSD holds talk on health inequality in Odisha

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The CYSD, on the occasion of its 37th Foundation Day organised a panel discussion "Health inequality and inequity in contemporary Odisha" here.

Eminent persons including chief guest CEO Oxfam, India Amit Behar, mentor and co-founder, CYSD Jagadananda, Directorate of State Institute of Health and Family Welfare Dr Lalit Mohan Rath, Public Health Specialist and Adjunct Additional Professor, IIPHB Dr Bhuputra Panda and Additional Professor, PHFI Dr Shridhar Kadam participated in the panel. The programme was moderated by Akshay Kumar Biswal.

Speaking on the health

inequality, Behar said, "Inequalities differ from country to country, State to State and in Odisha it differs from district to district.

Again if we are looking for inequalities among the communities then again adivasis and weaker sections are comparatively more vulnerable than upper caste and other caste people."

Dr Panda said, "We need to plan and implement policies keeping in mind those who need the services the most. We also need to monitor programmes closely, and critique policies using objectively verifiable indicators."

Encouraging decentralised shared governance, better intersectoral coordination and



strengthening health systems building blocks would improve

equity in health and the factors contributing to it."

Jagadananda said, "The Government should focus on proper implementation of schemes and programmes

which may eradicate the inequality level from the backward communities."

The findings of health inequality and inequity in Odisha as per CYSD are the total no of PHCs in the State is 1,305 and the total bed strength in the PHCs is 1,026.

But as per the present data, 13.36 per cent PHCs are having indoor beds. Being the major cornerstone of rural health services most of the PHCs don't have adequate facilities.

As per IPHS guidelines, every PHCs should have at least 4-6 beds. As per the data of Directorate of Health Services, 2018, 13 districts didn't have a single bed in their respective PHCs.

Anaemia is more prominent in women and children than male. Out of 30 district women and children are anaemic in 11 districts. More

than 70 per cent women are anaemic in four districts like Sundargarh,

Sambalpur, Malkangiri and Nabarangapur. At the same time, more than 70 per cent children of Sundargarh, Subarnapur, Malkangiri, Nabarangapur, Sambalpur and Koraput districts are anaemic.

As per the sample registration system (SRS), 2016, the death rate in Odisha is highest in the country which stands at (Male: 8.5, Female: 7.1) as against 6.4 (Male: 6.8, Female: 5.9) of the country as a whole, a sharp 1.4 points below the national death rate.

It is observed that, malnourishment is very prominent in most of the tribal dominated districts of Odisha. Besides, 34.1 per cent children are stunted followed by 20.4 per cent wasted and 35.1 per cent children underweight.

BJP

may not repeat its Punjab candidates

MONIKA MALIK ■ CHANDIGARH

Saffron brigade may not lay its bet on the tried and trusted soldiers to hold the fort in the crucial 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

As the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is expected to announce the names of its candidates by this week for Punjab, it has been learnt that the saffron party would not repeat the faces which had earlier represented the party.

So much so that the party may even replace its sitting MP from Hoshiarpur and the Union Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment Vijay Sampla. In fact, the party is trying to

romp home to victory by relying on the star power.

BJP contests on three seats — Amritsar, Gurdaspur, and Hoshiarpur — in coalition with the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), which fields its candidates from remaining 10 seats, in Punjab.

Even as Sampla is hopeful of being re-nominated from Hoshiarpur, his not-so-friendly relations with the party's state president Shwai Malik and the presence of his anti-group in his segment may cost him the seat.

The state BJP leaders had held a series of meeting in the national capital and had handed over the panel of names to the central leadership for tak-

campaigned for the party during the 2014 Lok Sabha and 2017 assembly elections.

Besides, the name of Union Minister Hardip Singh Puri is also being considered. Apart from that, names of Punjab BJP president Shwai Malik, Rajinder Mohan Singh Chhina who unsuccessfully contested 2017 by-election, BJP national secretary Tarun Chugh, and former Minister Anil Joshi were also in the reckoning.

After suffering a defeat by more than two lakh votes in 2014 elections, the saffron party is preparing to field a strong candidate for Amritsar seat, which witnessed a top-notch electoral fight between Capt Amarinder and Jaitley

in 2014. But after its sitting MP and former Union Minister Vinod Khanna's death, the party's candidate Mumbai-based businessman Swaran Salaria lost the seat to Congress' Sunil Jakhar in 2017 by-election. The party is now banking on Khanna's widow Kavita Khanna. Earlier, the party is planning to field Khanna's actor son Akshay Khanna from Gurdaspur, who had campaigned for his father during 2009 and 2004 elections. Other than one from the Khanna family, BJP's former state president Ashwani Sharma, former Minister Master Mohan Lal, and MLA Dinesh Babu are also in the race.

The saffron brigade had won Gurdaspur Lok Sabha seat

'Haryana AAP to take call on alliance with JJP by March 30'

NISHU MAHajan ■ CHANDIGARH

All political parties are bracing up for a fierce multi-cornered electoral battle in Haryana, two political players—Aam Aadmi Party and Jannayak Janta Party—are struggling to forge an alliance for ensuing Lok Sabha polls.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's AAP and Hisar MP Dushyant Chautala's JJP have been holding parleys for more than a month now to form an alliance to contest on 10 Lok Sabha seats in the state but have so far failed to resolve the deadlock on seat-sharing formula.

While the AAP has now announced to take a final call on forming an alliance by March 30, the JJP is keeping its doors open for an alliance with the AAP and also, exploring a possibility to tie up with Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD).

Post-Pulwama CRPF to get anti-mine vehicles

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Waking up from slumber post-Pulwama, the CRPF is going to procure a new fleet of mine protected vehicles (MPVs) and the small 30-seater bullet-resistant buses to ensure safety of its convoys in Jammu & Kashmir.

The Motor Transport branch of the paramilitary had been pressing for procurement of these vehicles for the last many years but confusion prevailed owing to lack of clarity from the top leadership that keeps changing stance after the change of the Force's chief, sources said.

The paramilitary has also decided to increase the number of its bomb detection and dis-

posal squads (BDDS) for the 65 battalions of the CRPF deployed in Jammu & Kashmir for anti-terror and law and order duties. The move comes against the backdrop of Pulwama suicide bombing by Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) that ripped a bus killing 44 personnel on February 14.

The MPVs are expected to ramp up the counter-IED capabilities of the paramilitary as there have been Intelligence inputs that the terror groups could resort to more and more IED attacks.

Earlier, about a dozen MPVs were diverted from the Naxal-hit States to Jammu & Kashmir.

Bullet-resistant armour plating of smaller buses is

more feasible than the standard sized buses with a capacity to carry 52 passengers. Armour-plating significantly enhances the weight of the buses and speed is significantly hit due to additional weight of the armour plates.

The additional BDDS squads with more equipment will help detect IEDs on the ground. As the armours will only give protection from firing, new standard operating procedures for convoy movement have been put in place to avoid any Pulwama-type attack.

The new SOP entails convoy movement by restricting the movement of civilian vehicles and regularly changing halting points.

In the wake of Pulwama

- The CRPF is also going to procure small 30-seater bullet-resistant buses to ensure safety of its convoys in Jammu & Kashmir
- The paramilitary has also decided to increase the number of its bomb detection and disposal squads for the 65 battalions of the CRPF deployed in Jammu & Kashmir for anti-terror and law and order duties
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attack, the CRPF had faced criticism for plying large convoys to ferry paramilitary personnel in operationally sensitive Jammu and Kashmir. Following this, the Union Home Ministry had announced last month that all jawans and officers of the paramilitary will get air courier facility for one year while going in to join duty or for tour and while proceeding on leave.

The CRPF cavalcade that came under attack on February 14 had 78 vehicles and the bus hit by the suicide bomber was fifth in line. The convoy was carrying over 2,500 CRPF personnel.



IN SHORT

SAJAN KUMAR'S PLEA: JUSTICE KHANNA REJECTS

New Delhi: Supreme Court judge Justice Sanjiv Khanna on Monday once again recused himself from hearing the appeal of former Congress leader Sajjan Kumar who has challenged the Delhi High Court verdict sentencing him to life term in a 1984 anti-Sikh riots case. On February 25, Justice Khanna had recused himself from hearing Kumar's appeal when he was sitting in a bench headed by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi.

SC DISMISSES PLEA ON 'TRIPLE TALAQ' ORDINANCE

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Monday dismissed a plea challenging the Constitutional validity of an ordinance which makes the practice of 'triple talaq' a punishable offence. A Bench comprising Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi and Justice Deepak Gupta dismissed a plea of a Kerala-based outfit Samastha Kerala Janmabhumi Ulema and said it will not like to interfere.

2019 Elections Battleground LOK SABHA & ASSEMBLY

Cong moves EC to stall Modi biopic

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A day after Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) threatened to stall the biopic on Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Maharashtra, the Congress on Monday moved the Election Commission (EC) to get the release of the biopic deferred till the final phase voting in the Lok Sabha polls (May 19), contending that it violates the code of conduct.

The Congress delegation that met the EC comprised of Randeep Singh Surjewala, Kapil Sibal, and Abhishek Manu Singhvi

- The Congress delegation that met the EC comprised of Randeep Singh Surjewala, Kapil Sibal, and Abhishek Manu Singhvi
- Three producers and actor belong to the BJP, the director is involved in Vibrant Gujarat. This is violative of all norms, Kapil Sibal said
- While MNS chief Raj Thackeray has accused the BJP of propagating their welfare schemes through moves like *Toilet Ek Prem Katha* and *Padman* and now PM Narendra Modi, the Congress has demanded that the release be deferred till the last phase of voting

complaint.

While MNS chief Raj Thackeray has accused the BJP of propagating their welfare schemes through moves like *Toilet Ek Prem Katha* and *Padman* and now PM Narendra Modi, the Congress has demanded that the release be deferred till the last phase of voting.

Opposition parties are contending that it would violate the model code of conduct and influence voters.

The model code of conduct is in place across India since March 10, when the EC announced dates for general elections and Assembly polls in four States. Earlier, the DMK and the CPI had already moved the EC seeking banning of biopic on PM Modi till election is over.

Ever since the movie was announced, the Opposition has

accused it of being political propaganda of the saffron party. In the movie, Vivek Oberoi will be seen in the lead essaying Prime Minister Modi. While actors like Boman Irani, Barkha Bisht Sengupta, Rajendra Gupta, Zarina Wahab, Darshan Kumar, Prashant Narayan, and Yatin Karyekar, will be in supporting role.

The movie was recently marred in a controversy regarding credits to for its lyrics being attributed to Javed Akhtar and Sameer Anjaan, who refused to have anything to do with the movie.

Later, it was producer Sandip Singh, who cleared the air and said it was due to the use of song *Ishwar Allah* from the film *1947: Earth* and the song *Suno Gaur Se Duniya Walon* from the film *Dus*, in the movie whose lyrics have been given by the two personalities.

Cong announces 10th list, 26 names cleared

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Monday fielded Sanjay Nirupam from the North West Mumbai as it released its tenth list, clearing 26 names for the Lok Sabha elections. The announcement of Nirupam's candidature came on a day he was removed as the Mumbai Regional Congress Committee chief (MRCC). Former Union Minister Milind Deora replaced Nirupam as MRCC chief.

Out of the 26 candidates announced by the party on Monday, 25 were for West Bengal. Mohammad Alam from Barrackpore, Mita Chakraborty from Kolkata Dakshin, Supra Ghosh from Howrah, and Pratul Saha from Hooghly were among those named in the list. With this, the party has announced a total of 253 candidates so far. The Congress also named four candidates for Assembly polls in Odisha.

It's homecoming for Sukh Ram

New Delhi: Former Union Minister Sukh Ram on Monday rejoined the Congress along with his grandson Aashray Sharma ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, with the party's saying his entry would boost its poll prospects in Himachal Pradesh.

"For me, it is like home-coming," said 93-year-old Sukh Ram who returned for the second time to the Congress which he had last left ahead of the 2017 Assembly elections to join the BJP. The Congress had sacked him in 1997 following his conviction in the telecom scam which occurred when he was a Union minister in the PV Narasimha Rao Government, but he returned in 2004.



Congress president Rahul Gandhi shakes hands with former Union Telecom Minister Sukh Ram after the former rejoined the Congress party in New Delhi on Monday PTI

SC for more VVPAT matching in polls

Apex court tells EC, 'no institution should insulate itself from improvement'

leaders, led by Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, seeking the VVPAT slips of at least 50 per cent of voting machines in each Assembly constituency be checked randomly in the Lok Sabha elections next month.

A Bench of Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi and Justice Deepak Gupta asked the EC to file its reply on affidavit indicating the reasons of its satisfaction that purity of elections can be maintained and is being maintained.

The court was hearing a

Commission of India (EC) is fully satisfied that the purity of the elections can be maintained and is being maintained. The Election Commission of India shall indicate the above in an affidavit the basis of satisfaction," the Bench said.

At the outset, the Bench told the Deputy Election Commissioner Sudeep Jain, appearing in person, whether the poll panel can increase the number of random physical verification of VVPAT slips with EVMs from the existing stipulation of only one polling station per Assembly segment.

Jain replied that the ECI has adequate reasons to

believe that there was no requirement for changing the present arrangement of random matching of VVPAT slips with Electronic Voting Machine for one polling per Assembly segment. PTI

It added, "The Election Commission of India shall also indicate that if the sample survey can be extended to a higher level... The affidavit shall be filed by 4 pm on March 28. The matter is listed for further hearing on April 1."

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Jain replied that the ECI has adequate reasons to

More continue to join BJP

DEEPAK K UPRETI ■ NEW DELHI

More political leaders joined the BJP on Monday as the party announced the names of candidates for two Lok Sabha seats, including that of former party MP Kharvela Swain, and 19 Assembly constituencies in Odisha.

Former RJD Jharkhand president Annapurna Devi and paralympian Deepa Malik also joined the party. Malik is the first Indian woman to win a medal in Paralympic Games.

Devi, a one-time close aide of RJD leader Lalu Prasad formally joined the BJP at the party headquarters in presence of party president Amit Shah.

She was denied the Lok Sabha ticket by the RJD in Jharkhand.

Former Odisha DGP Prakash Mishra — who joined the BJP on Sunday — has been fielded from Cuttack Lok Sabha seat, while ex-MP Kharavela



Para-Athlete Deepa Malik and INLD MLA Kehar Singh Rawat join the BJP, in New Delhi, on Monday PTI



Bharatiya Janata Party general secretary Bhupender Yadav presents membership slip to Jharkhand RJD president Annapurna Devi as she joins BJP, at party headquarters in New Delhi, on Monday PTI

Swain — who was re-induced into the party on Monday in Bhubaneswar — has been given a ticket from Kandhamal parliamentary constituency, currently a part of the country's Maoist belt. A three-time MP from Balasore, Swain had quit the BJP in 2009.

Swain was keen on con-

testing the general election from Balasore seat, but the party has already fielded Pratap Sarangi from the coastal constituency.

Malik, a famous para athlete, joined the BJP with the party asserting that her presence will strengthen the organisation.

With the BJP yet to

announce all its candidates in Haryana for the Lok Sabha elections, Malik may be in the reckoning for one of the seats, sources said.

She joined the BJP in the presence of the party's Haryana unit chief Subhash Barala and general secretary Anil Jain,

who is in charge of its affairs in

the State. "We welcome her into the party. She is an inspiration for all of us. She has made the country proud," Jain said.

Several political leaders have switched sides in last couple of weeks as political parties announced the lists of candidates for the Lok Sabha polls, beginning April 11.

EC to deploy more spl expenditure observers

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission (EC) is set to increase the number of 'special expenditure observers' to monitor illegal cash and inducements being given to voters during the Lok Sabha polls as it has identified about 120 expenditure sensitive constituencies till now in the country. The EC's special expenditure observers also reviewed the poll preparedness with the two special observers for the subject, Shailendra Handa (Maharashtra) and Madhu Mahajan (Tamil Nadu).

Earlier, the EC has appointed two retired Indian Revenue Service (Income Tax) officers as special expenditure observers for Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. This is the first time that such observers have been appointed for any polls in the country.

They said few more such observers could be appointed by the next week to oversee the work of about 800 Central expenditure monitoring teams and observers who track black money, liquor, drugs and other freebies given to voters illegally.

The maximum number of election expenditure observers are drawn from the Indian Revenue Service (Income Tax), while others belong to the IRS

view that the security situation is complex in the State given the heightened tension along the India-Pakistan border.

The three special observers are Vinod Zutshi and Noor Muhammad and retired IPS officer A S Gill. The observers have been tasked with making a real-time assessment of the situation by meeting political parties, district and State authorities and other stakeholders to enable the poll watchdog take a call on the issue.

The J&K Assembly's six-year term was to end on March 16, 2021, but it got dissolved after a ruling coalition between the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) fell apart.

The sources said the EC will now take a comprehensive view before taking the next call on the subject. Since the Jammu & Kashmir Assembly has been dissolved, the EC is bound to hold fresh polls there as well within a six-month period, which will end in May.

The Government is of the

state that the CRPF, the sources said, is of the view that elections should first be held in the "most difficult" parts of the State so that the force gets adequate time to dominate the area.

But, the State administration is learnt to be of the view that areas which have previously witnessed high voter turn-out should go to polls first to avoid a "drag down" effect on other constituencies.

The sources said the EC will now take a comprehensive view before taking the next call on the subject. Since the Jammu & Kashmir Assembly has been dissolved, the EC is bound to hold fresh polls there as well within a six-month period, which will end in May.

The Government is of the



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP national president Amit Shah during the BJP Central Election Committee (CEC) meeting for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, at BJP headquarters in New Delhi, on Monday PTI

SC DISMISSES PLEA SEEKING BAN ON ROADSHOWS, BIKE RALLIES

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Monday refused to entertain a petition filed by a former DGP of Uttar Pradesh and an environmentalist seeking a direction to the Election Commission of India (ECI) to ban roadshows and bike rallies during polls.

Singh, a former Director General of Police (DGP) of

Uttar Pradesh, and Agrawal had said in their plea that roadshows and bike rallies violate the ECI's instructions and cause damage to the environment.

The petitioners had said that roadshows and bike rallies during the election period cause air, noise pollution and traffic

jams, which result in inconvenience to the general public.

The plea had said that instructions issued by the ECI with regard to roadshows and political processions mandate that vehicles must be registered and a convoy cannot have more than 10 vehicles. PTI

HAL meets Tejas deadline

Rolls out 16th
Tejas LCA fighter
jet for IAF

KESTUR VASUKI ■ BENGALURU



Unperturbed by the criticism over delay in production and supplying of aircrafts and helicopters, the State-run Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) on Monday rolled out 16th indigenously built Light Combat Fighter Jet Tejas to Indian Air Force in initial operational clearance (IOC). The fighter jet will be inducted into 'Flying Daggers' air force squadron of the IAF.

"We have produced 16th LCA as per the target till March 31. The customer flights are expected to be completed by the end of March," HAL said in a statement.

The defence behemoth has an order from IAF for 40 LCAs (16 each in IOC and final operational clearance (FOC).

"The first aircraft in FOC con-

figuration may roll out by the end of this calendar year (2019)," HAL said. Production of the fighter began in 2014 with a capacity of eight aircraft per annum. A second production line has been set up at Aircraft Division in this aerospace hub, which carries out structural assembly, final assembly and equipping of the aircraft.

Recently HAL had received drawings and documents related to FOC with limited clearance for LCA (Tejas) from CEMILAC and ADA. With this HAL can start working towards productionisation of FOC standard fighter aircraft.

The production of LCA commenced in 2014 with a current production capacity of

eight aircraft per annum. A second production line has been established at Aircraft Division (Bangalore Complex), which is carrying out structural assembly, final assembly and equipping of the aircraft.

The first aircraft in FOC configuration may roll-out by the end of this calendar year. "LCA demonstrated its combat capability in the IAF's 'Gagan Shakti' exercise by firing the Air-to-Air BVR Derby missile. Two LCAs will be flying at the Langkawi International Maritime Aerospace Expo (LIMA-2019) in Malaysia beginning tomorrow. HAL team will be providing the technical support at the show" the statement said.

SP's Badaun MP disowns brother-in-law for joining BJP

Lucknow: A day after his brother-in-law joined the BJP, Samajwadi Party's Badaun MP Dharmendra Yadav on Monday said his name should not be linked with him as he cannot have any relation with any BJP leader.

Dharmendra Yadav's brother-in-law Anujesh Pratap Singh Yadav joined the BJP Sunday in Agra.

Reacting to the development, Dharmendra Yadav, said, "I have come to know that Anujesh joined the BJP. The media has presented him as my brother-in-law in their reports."

"I want to clarify that I cannot have any relation with any BJP leader, so I do not have any relation with Anujesh. I request the media not to report him as my relative," the third-term MP said in a statement.



PTI

TMC, MNM forge alliance for Andaman and Nicobar

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA



In an apparent bid to consolidate the Bengali and Tamil votes of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and with Mamata Banerjee deciding to field her party's candidate in the island constituency, Trinamool Congress on Monday struck an alliance with film star Kamal Haasan's MNM for the island constituency.

Haasan who came calling to Bengal's State secretariat at Nabanna in Howrah said after an hour-long meeting, the Chief Minister, that his party would back the TMC in Andaman.

Banerjee said, "we have formed an alliance with Kamal Haasan's party for the Andaman. He is giving us full support," adding the reason behind this alliance was the Tamil superstar's "good credentials among the masses." We are grateful to him that he came here," Banerjee said adding there will be a joint rally at

Andaman on April 6.

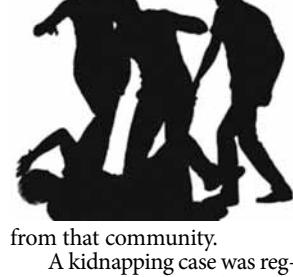
Haasan whose party was likely to contest all the seats in Tamil Nadu said the "meeting was excellent." He said, "We are proud to say that Makkal Needhi Maam is an ally with the Trinamool Congress for Andaman. We hope the relationship evolves in future."

In a parallel development

the Chief Minister mounted a scathing attack on the "forces that try to divide the society in the name of religion."

Addressing the devotees of a Hindu religious order at Baranagar in northern fringes of Kolkata, Banerjee said "religion brings humanity, culture, education, love and respect for others."

NCP corporator's husband hacked to death by mob in Beed



11 people, including two women, attacked and killed Gaikwad, 5 of whom have been arrested and charged with murder

from that community.

A kidnapping case was registered at the time with Purna police station, and the boy's body was found a few days later, enraging local residents and kin, an official said.

"The mob, which included the mother of the kidnapped minor boy, attacked Gaikwad suspecting he was helping the Shikalgari community members in the kidnapping case," said Inspector Balasaheb Pawar of Sambhajinagar police station.

The community's name is derived from an Arabic word for sharpening. PTI

He said 11 people, including two women, attacked and killed Gaikwad, five of whom have been arrested and charged with murder.

Efforts are on to nab the rest of the accused, he added.

The Shikalgari community is spread across the state and are traditionally engaged in making and sharpening weapons made from iron.

The community's name is derived from an Arabic word for sharpening. PTI

CONTROLS OF SERVICES IN DELHI

AAP Govt moves SC seeking larger Bench

New Delhi: The AAP Government on Monday moved the Supreme Court seeking constitution of a larger Bench to expeditiously decide the issue of control over administrative services in Delhi.

A Bench headed by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi told the Delhi Government counsel that it will look into the matter.

The apex court had on February 14 referred the issue of control of services to a larger Bench after delivering a split verdict.

The two-judge Bench had said the Centre should have the final word on posting and transfer of bureaucrats in the national Capital administration, but their disagreement on

finer details resulted in a split verdict and the matter got referred to a larger Bench.

The Bench, which was called upon to decide on six contentious issues pertaining to a long-running feud between the Central and the national Capital Governments, had given a unanimous verdict on the remaining five counts and had ruled that the Delhi Government's Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB) cannot probe the Centre's employees in corruption cases. Out of six contentious issues, the Delhi Government had won in three and lost to the Centre on two critical aspects of investigating power to probe central government employees and for setting up of enquiry commissions.

While it left for a larger bench to conclusively decide who will have control over administrative services in the national Capital, the apex court had unanimously ruled that the power to appoint enquiry commissions would rest with the Centre as "there is no 'State Government' in the Union Territory and the State Government (for this purpose) shall mean the Central Government".

In its 202-page verdict, the court had, however, held that the elected Delhi Government will have the right to appoint public prosecutors, to decide land revenue matters and also to appoint or deal with electricity commission or board. PTI

B'desh Home Minister to visit India next week



New Delhi: Bangladesh Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan is likely to visit India next week during which he is expected to discuss various issues, including anti-terror cooperation and movement of illegal immigrants, officials said.

According to the plan, Khan will have bilateral talks with Home Minister Rajnath Singh on May 1, where issues concerning both the countries will be discussed threadbare.

Anti-terror cooperation, movement of illegal immigrants, and smuggling of cattle, arms and ammunition and a few other issues are expected to be discussed during the talks which will also be attended by top internal security officials of India and Bangladesh, a Home Ministry official said.

However, no pact or memorandum of understanding will be signed during the

Bangladesh Home Minister's visit as the model code of conduct is in force due to the Lok Sabha election.

Radicalisation of youths and Rohingya refugees issues may figure in the dialogue, another official said.

During the delegation-level talks, steps to be taken to strengthen the existing mechanism to check movement of illegal immigrants and smuggling of cattle, narcotics and other items through the porous India-Bangladesh border will figure prominently, the official said.

India shares a 4,096-km-long border with Bangladesh. PTI

NCP releases manifesto for LS polls, promises talks with Pak

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

ity, income and access to market.

In its manifesto for the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) has promised open talks with Pakistan to discuss the issue of terrorism, undertake modernisation of Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and other Ordnance Factories, proper implementation of OROP and 33 per cent reservation to women in parliament.

In the manifesto released by its senior State leader and former Speaker in the State Assembly, Dilip Walse-Patil, the NCP also promised voters structural reforms to drive sustainable agriculture, a complete loan waiver to all farmers and initiative to compliment the Minimum Support Price (MSP) through a system of incentives and commission payments. The NCP said it was committed to provide adequate attention to promote agriculture growth, productiv-

Bangladesh". "We will work to move Russia away from getting too close to China and Pakistan by frequent high level exchanges. We will keep all channels open to China but demand that it opens its market to exports of Indian pharmaceuticals, agriculture products and IT services. We will continue to expand relations with the United States of America, including for import of defence equipment" the NCP manifesto said.

Slamming the NDA Government for its "miserable failure", the NCP stated in its manifesto: "The NDA Government, in five years, has failed miserably to contain terrorism. In these five years of NDA rule, there have been three terror attacks on military and para military forces under its nose. There has been a criminal failure of intelligence in preventing such attacks. No responsibility has been fixed. No one is held accountable".

Apart from opening talks with Pakistan during which we will insist on discussing terrorism, the NCP said it "will continue to be responsive to the newly elected Sheikh Hasina Government in

Mamata triggering constitutional crisis, says BJP

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Accusing West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of triggering a constitutional crisis and creating classes of VIPs and non-VIPs, the BJP on Monday charged the local Kolkata Police with threatening customs officials who checked luggage of Mamata's nephew and TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee's wife at Kolkata airport.

BJP spokesperson Shah Nawaz Hussain told reporters the State Government seems to be working to protect a family.

The Chief Minister should tell the people what was being brought in those suitcases that the Kolkata Police had to "terrorise" customs officials to prevent them from checking them, he said. He also alleged police

threatened the customs officials.

Abhishek, who is a Lok Sabha member, has claimed that his wife was chosen by customs officials because of her profile and rejected claims of BJP leaders that she was carrying anything in violation of laws. He charged a political vendetta behind the airport checking.

Rajya Sabha member Swapnil Dasgupta, who is affiliated to the BJP, asked why the Kolkata Police entered an area which falls under the jurisdiction of the customs department.

He said the TMC chief was creating classes of VIPs and non-VIPs with different sets of rules and laws. Mamata Banerjee is deliberately trying to provoke a constitutional crisis, he added.

He said the TMC chief was

Cong sacks Nirupam as State party chief

Milind Deora new president

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

had been appointed as the Mumbai Congress in March 2015, has been named Congress candidate from Mumbai North West which was represented in the past by late Gurudas Kamat.

Milind Deora, who has replaced Nirupam, is the son of late Congress stalwart Murli Deora who had been the Mumbai Regional Congress Committee (MRCC) president for a record 22 years from 1981 to 2003.

Milind, who was a junior minister in the Dr Manmohan Singh-led UPA government, is also the Congress candidate from Mumbai South.

An erstwhile Shiv Sena functionary, Nirupam is a two-term Rajya Sabha member and one-time Lok Sabha member from Mumbai North. Nirupam had over the past several months come in for severe criticism for his "ad hoc" style of functioning and his "failure" to take

senior leaders along. In a way, Milind Deora has also contributed to Nirupam's ouster. It may be recalled that on February 5, Deora had said that "infighting" was threatening "our base in Mumbai" and that the city party unit "cannot become a cricket pitch for sectarian politics, with leaders pitted against one other".

A day after he said he might even re-consider "if it is worth fighting elections or not", Deora said he was "disappointed" with "infighting" within the Mumbai Cong and indirectly blamed city party unit president Sanjay Nirupam for contributing to "sectarian politics" within the party set up.

In a series of tweets put on the sorry state of affairs within the Mumbai, Deora had said: "In a city like Mumbai, we need to bring people together. The Mumbai Cong cannot become a cricket pitch for sectarian politics, with leaders pitted against one other".

If you don't vote for Modi you commit sin: Jitendra

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

He is contesting from the same seat for the second time.

In 2014, Dr Singh had defeated Congress heavy weight Ghulam Nabi Azad by a margin of over 60,000 votes in his maiden outing in the Lok Sabha polls.

In the absence of Ghulam Nabi Azad in the fray Dr Singh is in the commanding position but facing numerous challenges as the electioneering is peaking.

Both Congress and the National Conference have fielded Vikramaditya Singh, son of Congress stalwart Dr Karan Singh, against him. Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) is also lending its support to him to consolidate secular votes and ensure defeat of BJP candidate.

Pak man living in India for 50 yrs to get c'ship: HC told

Mumbai: In a major relief to a Pakistani

national living in India for over 50 years, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs told the Bombay High Court on Monday that he will be granted Indian citizenship within 10 days.

Asif Karadia, whose parents are of Indian origin, had approached the HC in December 2016 when his previous long-term visa (LTV) expired and the authorities refused to extend the visa unless he produced a Pakistani passport.

Following much litigation and several orders of the court, the ministry finally confirmed before a bench of justices A S Oka and M S Sanklecha on Monday that Karadia will be granted Indian citizenship.

The bench accepted the statement as

an undertaking given by the ministry under oath, and disposed of Karadia's petition.

Karadia (53) had approached the HC through his counsels Ashish Mehta and Sujay Kantawala after his LTV expired and a deportation notice was issued against him.

Karadia told the HC that he did not have a Pakistani passport or any other valid identity documents issued by the government of the neighbouring country.

The petitioner said though he was born in Karachi, he was brought to India by his mother when he was a just a few days old and has stayed in Mumbai ever since.

His father and mother were born in Gujarat before the Partition, and his wife and three children are all Indian citizens, according to the petition.

Karadia said he had been living in India, earning a living by working at a local restaurant, paying taxes and had Indian ID proofs such as an Aadhaar

card, a ration card, a PAN card and even a voter ID card, but no passport.

His citizenship application too has been pending before the government for over seven years.

He, thus, urged the court to ensure the deportation notice against him was stayed, and his LTV extended till the government decides on his citizenship application.

In 2016, another HC bench had denied him any interim relief, observing that even if a person was entitled to an Indian citizenship, he or she could not "at any given time, be authorised to reside in the country without valid papers".

However, in January 2017, the court observed that Karadia's case was "unique" and in an interim order, directed the Maharashtra Government and the Centre to not take any coercive action against him.

Khaitan beneficiary of ₹850-cr slush funds generated out of Defence deals, says ED

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Monday alleged that Delhi-based lawyer and accused in the VVIP chopper scam Gautam Khaitan, has also been a beneficiary of ₹850 crore slush funds generated out of Defence deals.

The ED statement came after the

ROW OVER SIVAGANGA SEAT

Karti's name upsets Congress leader

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■



The Congress in Tamil Nadu, which is facing the wrath of the Christians for non-inclusion in the list of candidates selected for the Lok Sabha election, suffered another setback on Monday as a senior leader of the party went public and aired his displeasure for denying him the Sivaganga seat.

Sudarshana Nachiappan, a popular Congress leader, who had represented the Sivaganga constituency during 1999 to 2004 alleged on Monday that he was not considered for the constituency this time because of the pressure exerted by senior Congress leader P Chidambaram.

The Congress High Command had on Sunday nominated Karti Chidambaram as the party candidate from Sivaganga. The junior Chidambaram who had contested the seat in the 2014 Lok

Shabha election had forfeited his security deposit and had finished fourth in the race.

Karti, the one and only son of Chidambaram and Nalini Chidambaram, is facing investigations by the CBI and the ED in a series of cases including money laundering in the INX Media scam. He had told reporters that there were no criminal cases against him and he faced no case in any court. "There are only unfounded allegation against me and no courts has framed charges against me," said Karti while speaking to reporters.

C D Meyyappan, senior AICC member from the State who was the only leader avail-

able TNCC head quarters at Chennai said there were no major issues in the party as on Monday. "These are all initial hiccups which would be resolved in days to come. While the campaign picks up, the party leaders would put up all these issues behind them and focus on winning the election," said Meyyappan, former president of Tamil Nadu Youth Congress.

The Congress High Command has done a tight rope walking while selecting the ten candidates. "Since our party is too democratic, leaders express their disappointment in public. There is no need to worry as we are all united in ensuring the victory of the DMK-led front in the State," said Meyyappan.

The Bishop Council of Tamil Nadu had expressed their displeasure over the Congress High Command ignoring the plea of the Church that community members be included in the list of candidates.

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Two Union Ministers, Nitin Gadkari and Hansraj Aher of BJP, Congress leader and bitter Narendra Modi critic Nana Patole were among those who filed their papers, as the nominations for the Phase-1 of the Lok Sabha polls in Maharashtra ended on Monday.

Seven constituencies in eastern Maharashtra — Wardha, Gadchiroli-Chimur, Ramtek, Nagpur, Bhandara-Gondiya, Chandrapur, Yavatmal-Washim — will go to polls on April 11 in the first of the four-phased elections in the State. Accompanied by Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and other senior leaders from the BJP-Shiv Sena alliance, Gadkari filed his nomination papers in his home town of Nagpur.

Talking to media persons after filing the nominations, "I am overwhelmed by the response from the ordinary Nagpur citizens and the party workers... I am confident that

Nominations for first phase of LS elections end in Maharashtra

I shall win with a record margin and strengthen the hands of Prime Minister Narendra Modi."

Gadkari takes on Patole in Nagpur. It may be recalled that in December, 2017, Patole had resigned from BJP and his Bhandara-Gondiya Lok Sabha seat, citing 14 reasons which include 14 reasons including the increasing number of farmer suicides, demonetisation and GST. Before and after his resignation, Patole had criticised Modi. Former Shiv Sena MLA Suresh Dhanorkar, who was given the Congress ticket after resigned and joined the Rahul Gandhi-led party, filed his nomination for the Chandrapur seat. He was a last-minute nominee after the party on Sunday hacked the name of Vinayak Bangade following huge Opposition.

Former Union Minister and ex-Chief Minister Sushilkumar Shinde filed his papers from Solapur, while former state Congress President Manikrao Thakre filed his papers from Yavatmal-Washim.

FINALISE SEAT-SHARING DEAL IN 24 HOURS

BJP faces ally's wrath in UP



Lucknow: An ultimatum has been given to the BJP by its disgruntled ally and chief of Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party, Om Prakash Rajbhar, to finalise the seat-sharing process in 24 hours for the Lok Sabha elections in Uttar Pradesh. Rajbhar has demanded five seats out of 80 LS seats.

Rajbhar, who is a Cabinet Minister in the Yogi Adityanath Government, slammed the BJP for failing to decide on the NDA seat-sharing with all of its allies in UP. "We are fighting for our rights. We were called for a meeting with Amit Shah along with Apna Dal and our demands were asked. Seat-sharing was decided for the Apna Dal, but we are still being kept in the dark. I have given 24 hours to the BJP to take a decision on our seats else we will go our way," Rajbhar said.

The SBSP has demanded a list of five seats including Chandauli, Ghosi, Ambedkar Nagar, Jaunpur and either Malihshah or Lalganj.

"If Apna Dal was assigned seats then why a decision could not be taken on our demands? They (BJP) finalised alliances in Maharashtra, Goa, Bihar,

also dared CM Yogi to throw him out of the Cabinet.

The SBSP has been demanding the implementation of a sub-quota for Other Backward Classes (OBC) ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. "I will continue my fight for the poor. I am the only 72-year-old Minister who is fighting against a Chief Minister," the disgruntled Minister had said.

Moreover, Rajbhar had also announced that his party may go solo on all the 80 seats in UP in the general elections if the BJP decided to keep SBSP out of the coalition. The SBSP has four MLAs in the UP Assembly.

The Minister has been a frequent critic of Yogi Adityanath and has time and again claimed that his party was not getting the 'due respect'. He had also attacked the UP Government for renaming the cities of Mughalsarai and Faizabad. "They say they (the cities) were named after the Mughals. They have national spokesperson Shah Nawaz Hussain, Union minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, UP Minister Mohsin Raza, three Muslim faces of the BJP, change their names first," he had said.

AGENCIES

Consume poison, survive: Guj Minister's Shiva dare for Rahul

Ahmedabad: A Gujarat Minister on Monday tapped into controversy by asking Congress chief Rahul Gandhi to consume poison to check if he was indeed an 'avatar' of Lord Shiva as claimed by his party workers.

Addressing a gathering at Bardoli in Surat, Gujarat Tribal Development Minister Ganpat Vasava said Gandhi's "Shiva reincarnation" can be considered true only if he survives after having "500 grams of poison".

"People from the Congress claim Rahul Gandhi is an avatar of Lord Shiva. Now, since Lord Shiva used to consume poison to save people, I want Congress workers to make their leader drink 500 grams of poison,"

Vasava said.

"If he survives like Lord Shiva after consuming poison, we will all believe he is the true reincarnation of Lord Shiva" Vasava claimed.

The BJP minister's Shiva jibe incensed the Congress which called it "extremely unfortunate" and reflective of that party's "true character" and stemming from the fear of poll defeat.

"Such comments about our leader are extremely unfortunate. This shows the true character of BJP and its leaders. They are making such statements out of frustration as they are seeing defeat in the Lok Sabha polls," Gujarat Congress spokesperson Manish Doshi said.



Worker prepares election campaign material for Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) ahead of elections in Ahmedabad on Monday PTI

Chamling files nomination from 2 Assembly seats

Gangtok: Sikkim Chief Minister and Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) president Pawan Kumar Chamling, the longest serving Chief Minister of the country, on Monday filed his nomination papers from two Assembly constituencies.

Chamling, who has been in power since December 12, 1994 will fight to retain office for the eighth successive term.

The 68-year-old chief minister is seeking re-election to the state legislative assembly from Namchi-Singthang and Poklok-Kamrang seats in his native south Sikkim.

DELHI DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

E-TENDERING PRESS NOTICE NO. 32/FO/CE/RZ/DDA/2018-19

On-line percentage rate tenders are invited through E-Tendering for the following works by EE/RPD-7, EE/RPD-10 & EE/Eld.9, Madhuban Chowk, Sector-14, Rohini, Delhi-85 EE/RPD-1, Deepali Chowk, Sector-3, Rohini, Delhi-85, EE/EI.D-12, DDA office complex, Paschim Vihar, New Delhi-110063.on behalf of DDA from the approved and eligible contractors registered under Civil/Electrical category only of DDA & CPWD and those of appropriate list of MES, BSNL and Railways. Last date of submission of tenders is 04.04.2019 upto 3.00 PM.

1. NIT No. 96/EE/RPD-1/DDA/2018-19: Name of work:

M/o scheme under Nazul A/C-II, Rohini Zone. SH: Repair of boundary wall & footpath at Sector-14, Rohini(Behind Rohini Court) Green Belt. **Estimated Cost:** Rs. 19,84,641/-, **Earnest Money:** Rs.39,693/-, **Period of Completion:** Three months

2. NIT No. 97/EE/RPD-1/DDA/2018-19: Name of work:

M/o scheme under Nazul A/C-II, Rohini Zone. SH: Improvement of NHP near Pkt.5, Sector-25, Rohini. **Estimated Cost:** Rs. 18,40,763/-, **Earnest Money:** Rs.36,815/-, **Period of Completion:** Three months

3. NIT No. 99/EE/RPD-1/DDA/2018-19: Name of work:

M/o scheme under Nazul A/C-II, Rohini Zone. SH: Annual Maintenance contract of 11 nos. open gym having 14 nos. equipments each including SBR flooring in various DDA parks in Rohini Zone. **Estimated Cost:** Rs. 13,16,531/-, **Earnest Money:** Rs.26,331/-, **Period of Completion:** Twelve months

4. NIT No. 20/EE/RPD-7/DDA/2018-19: Name of work:

M/o various colonies under Rohini Zone. SH: Maintenance & scavenging of roads (30 mtr. & 60 mtr. R/W road) & repair of internal roads in Pkt.C-1 & C-2, sector-30 & Maintenance of internal water supply in Sector-29 (Pt.) & Sector-30 (Pt.), Rohini. **Estimated Cost:** Rs. 19,76,602/-, **Earnest Money:** Rs.39,532/-, **Period of Completion:** 3 months

5. NIT No. 19/EE/RPD-10/DDA/2018-19: Name of work:

Protection of vacant land in Rohini Zone. SH: Repair & raising of boundary wall, jungle cleaning, disposal of malba on different vacant DDA plots in Block-A, B & C, Mangolpuri Industrial Area, Phase-I. **Estimated Cost:** Rs. 21,34,083/-, **Earnest Money:** Rs.42,682/-, **Period of Completion:** 180 days

6. NIT No. 63/EE/Eld.9/DDA/2018-19 (Specialized Work):

Name of work: M/o scheme under Nazul A/C-II, Rohini. SH: Maintenance and Operation of sewage pump set, substation equipment, IEI and compound lighting etc. at SPS No.1 in Sector-26, Rohini Ph.IV. **Estimated Cost:** Rs. 10,17,774/-, **Earnest Money:** Rs.20,355/-, **Period of Completion:** Six months

7. NIT No. 71/EE/Eld.9/DDA/2018-19: Name of work:

M/o DDA Multistoried Zonal office building at Madhuban Chowk, Rohini. SH: Repairing & servicing of evaporative Air Cooler & Ceiling Fan. **Estimated Cost:** Rs. 8,53,844/-, **Earnest Money:** Rs.17,077/-, **Period of Completion:** One month

8. NIT No. 89/EE/Eld.12/DDA/2018-19: Name of work:

M/o parks/plantation, trucks and other equipments of Hort. Wing. SH: Augmentation of lighting in various parks/greens as per Annexure-A (Inventory) under Hort. Division-10, North zone. **Estimated Cost:** Rs. 19,52,657/-, **Earnest Money:** Rs.39,053/-, **Period of Completion:** 06 months

9. NIT No.90/EE/Eld.12/DDA/2018-19: Name of work:

M/o completed scheme of Nazul A/C-II under SWZ. SH: R/M/O of Unfiltered sewage treated water pump sets at Keshopur pump House. **Estimated Cost:** Rs. 7,19,028/-, **Earnest Money:** Rs.14,381/-, **Period of Completion:** 12 months

Note: 1:

For the works costing upto 60.00 lacs under B & R (Civil) category, the tenders shall be issued to the contractors registered with DDA only.

Note: 2:

For details of eligibility criteria and other particulars of all the tenders, please visit the website of Central Public Procurement Portal at <https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app>. For any assistance in e-tendering, please contact National Informatics Centre on 1800-3070-2232.

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Please Visit DDA's website: www.dda.org.in or Dial Toll free No. 1800110332

SEARCH FOR MISSING/KIDNAPPED GIRL



Monika Sharma

General Public is hereby informed that one girl (depicted in the photo) namely

Monika Sharma D/o Anil Sharma R/o RZF-32, Nihal Vihar, Delhi Aged-22

Years has been reported missing / kidnapped since 28.02.2019 from the area of P.S. Paschim Vihar West, Delhi

vide DD No.50-A dated 01.03.2019

lodged at Police Station Paschim Vihar West, Delhi

Complexion: Fair, Height: 5'4", Face: Long, I.D. Mark: Mentally disturbed Clothing: White Coloured Suit, Pink Colour Salwar and Jutti in feet.

Any person having any information/Clue about this missing girl, may inform SHO, Paschim Vihar West, Delhi at E-mail : cic@cbi.gov.in

Tele No.: 011-24368638 or 24368641

FAX No.: 011-24368639 SHO, Paschim Vihar West, Delhi

DP/2042/OD/19 Tel.: 011-25268394, 25280980

SEARCH FOR MISSING



KAJAL

General Public is hereby informed that one girl **Named: Kajal, D/o: Prem Prakash Rai, R/o: H. No. C-380, Aman Vihar, Kirari, Delhi, Age: 16 Years, Height: 4'6", Complexion: Fair, Face: Long, Wearing: Suit Red & White colour lines & Salwar White Colour and White Shoes in feet** has been missing/kidnapped since 16.02.2019. In this regard FIR No. 52/19, dated 16.02.2019 has been lodged at PS. Aman Vihar, Delhi. Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the missing/kidnapped girl but no clue has come to light so far. If anyone have any information about this missing/kidnapped girl please inform the undersigned.

**E-Mail ID: cic@cbi.gov.in
Fax: 011-24368639
DP/2661/RD/19**

NORTHERN RAILWAY

Tender Notice (Parking)

The Sr. Divisional Commercial Manager/Chg., Northern Railway, New Delhi invites sealed Quotations for the allotment of Cycle/Scooter contract at Narela Railway Station as per New Parking Policy issued by HQ office letter no. 120-MC-Parking-Policy-2015 dated 18.11.2016 for the period of 3 (three) months, detail is as under:-

S N	Railway Station	Stn Ctg	Type of Pkg.	Pkg. area (In Sq mtr)	*Reserve Price for three months (In Rs)	EMD @ 2% of Total Contract Value (In Rs)
1.	Narela (NUR)</td					

Another face of jihad

The abduction and forced conversion of two Hindu girls in Pakistan is another example of its attempts to infuriate India



This is a gross human rights abuse at so many levels — the abduction, conversion and marriage of two Hindu minor girls in Sindh district of Pakistan — that it merits not only India's but the world's concern. For it is about child abuse, possibly trafficking and slavery, a perverted suppression of free will, religious persecution of minorities and the propagation of a Salafi ideology-driven *jihad* of using women and girls as human shields to Islamise non-believers and for procreating a mass army of believers. Worse, use them to take care of the "needs" of *jihadi* warriors in conflict zones and birth their offspring. Considering that religious minorities comprise only about a minuscule three per cent of the Pakistani population with Hindus at one per cent, this would look like a systematic annihilation of that community. Had that nation really cared for preservation, it would have acted immediately on the complaints of the girls' brother and father and not attempted to put out a doctored video of the victims saying they converted to Islam voluntarily. Pakistan is not just hosting terror havens; so radicalised are its civil structures at the dictates of the Army, which in turn draws its strength from ideological extremists, that it has insidiously linked the war outside to the war within. India, despite the provocation of Hindus, has at this point been very graded and mature in its reaction, sending out a note seeking suitable remedial action to protect and promote safety, security and welfare of minority communities. And though Pakistan's Information Minister Chaudhry Fawad Hussain may have taken on External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj over the protection of minorities here, he would have done well to remember that their percentage is thriving and not as paltry as that of Hindus in Pakistan, amounting to 1.2 per cent.

Truth be told, Pakistan's *raison d'être*, of emerging as an Islamist State in opposition to a Hindu-dominated but a secular India, has dictated its policies no matter what its founding fathers felt. Its minorities have been under a siege for a long, long time. Pakistan even disowned the Ahmadis, declaring them non-Muslim by an official writ, and has been systematically targeting non-Muslim minorities such as Christians, Hindus and Sikhs, by destroying their identified neighbourhoods, attacking their faith shrines, killing them on trumped up charges to justify its cleansing efforts and converting them forcibly. Graves of Christians and Ahmadis have been vandalised while Hindus have been routinely kidnapped in Sindh and Balochistan provinces for ransom. Except now the forced ghettoisation is even more acute and anybody can be killed on the slightest pretext of blasphemy. In recent years, the number of Hindu persecuted returnees to India has been rising and the day is not too far when Hindu minorities won't find a place in Pakistan. The abduction and conversion of Hindu women is not new either. Though the case of Rinkel Kumari is well-known with a lawmaker aiding her conversion and marriage, around 20-25 kidnappings and forced conversions of Hindu girls are reported from Sindh every month going by a report of the Asian Human Rights Watch. The selective targeting of Hindu girls, therefore, looks like another ruse to rile India. Then there's Pakistan's infamous blasphemy law which allows it to book any minority citizen as guilty of harming Islamic interests by suspicion. No charges, nothing. Just a rabid vigilantism couched as law, which is the strictest among proclaimed Islamic nations. Asia Bibi, a poor Christian woman from Punjab, was the first woman in Pakistan's history to be charged with blasphemy and sentenced to death, though acquitted now. In 2012, a Pakistani Christian girl, Rimsha Masih, was accused of blasphemy though her case was dismissed too. For long the Pakistani civil society is a subterranean presence, completely subverted and defanged by the Army and radicalised religious groups. The whole nation has been held hostage, not just the Hindu girls. And it is in Pakistan's own interest to get back to civilities if it doesn't want to be proscribed as a failed state.

A lack of civility

In this age of widely-available cameras, instant uploads and viral videos, should our politicians be more circumspect?



Some of the comments by political leaders about their opponents, or even potential adversaries, have made headlines for all the wrong reasons. Many statements are often crudely misogynistic, sexist, racist and in some cases, openly advocate violence. In an era where widely-available camera technology on mobile phones allows people to record anything and everything, coupled with high-speed data networks that allow subscribers to upload and download video in seconds, a statement

could go from being uttered to becoming a viral sensation within hours if not minutes. But despite the shock and horror of some statements, most politicians and their voters shrug them off and the Election Commission remains a mute spectator. While the media makes a hue and cry, the attention deficit disorder on Indian television news channels ensures that the outrage is quickly forgotten and the cycle moves on to the next big thing to feign disgust at.

As the election of Donald Trump to the presidency of the United States proved, no matter what you say or do, from claiming to offend women sexually or even working alongside your nation's sworn enemy, your actions will not make an iota of difference. Possibly, as mankind has moved to the rapid news cycle and where catchphrases such as 'Make America Great Again' or in India 'Main Bhi Chowkidar' or 'Chowkidar Chor Hai', depending on your point of view, any publicity is good publicity for politicians. But that has for obvious reasons spelled doom for Indian policy — catchphrases have become the latest craze and have become viral on social media with few proper policy decisions being discussed. So much so that political manifestos, often released months ahead of an election, have now become almost unnecessary and only released just ahead of polling to garner some more media attention. While the Indian television media, no matter which languages it broadcasts in, is incorrigible, seemingly beyond repair and will continue to make heroes of politicians who are decidedly uncivil, maybe it is time for the Election Commission to set up a system of checks and balances to bring back a sense of civility in our public discourse. A series of escalating fines or deductions from a candidate's permitted expenditure, if he/she makes personal attacks on opponents that go beyond just policy, could be a corrective. And if that does not work, the threat of being debarred from elections must be there. Other than forcing the issue, there is no way to really address the situation, so such extreme measures must be taken.

Lasting legacy of corruption

There are invaluable proofs on how the Nehru-Gandhi family went about the business of funding their activities and election campaigns. Nobody can claim to be clean



A SURYA PRAKASH

The shrill and abusive attacks launched by Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his oft-repeated diatribe "Chowkidar Chor Hai" has brought the political discourse to a new low. By doing so, he carries on the family's tradition of disrespecting democratically-elected political leaders who do not belong to it. It also brings to the fore the debate on corruption, an issue which no member of the Nehru-Gandhi family has the moral authority to talk about. So, here is a quick look at how the Nehru-Gandhis have funded their politics.

During the Nehru era, the Congress collected funds from Indian industrialists and businessmen and sometimes this landed the party and the Government in trouble. For example, Mundra, an industrialist owning many companies and businesses, who had funded the Congress in the 1950s, ran into financial problems and signalled to the Government that it was payback time. The Nehru Government obliged him by directing the Life Insurance Corporation to buy his companies' shares at inflated prices. The then Finance Minister, TT Krishnamachari, who was obviously acting on orders from above, lost his job when the truth came out in what came to be known as the LIC-Mundra scandal.

However, things changed after Indira Gandhi engineered a split in the party in 1969. Soon after the break-up, she began relying heavily on the communists and so, naturally, the Soviets came to her rescue. Vasili Mitrokhin, who was in-charge of the KGB archives, made explosive revelations of the KGB's activities around the world. He talked about how the KGB funded the Congress in the 1971 elections and of how they even had moles in her Cabinet.

Many honourable citizens of the country, who have held key positions in politics, Government, bureaucracy and industry in the post-1970 era, have provided us invaluable evidence of how the Congress went about the business of funding its activities and election campaigns. These witnesses to that era say that the Congress decided on a new mode of raising funds — via commissions collected on mega international defence and other contracts. A very respected witness to this era was BG Deshmukh, who was Cabinet Secretary between 1986-89 and his autobiography — *A Cabinet Secretary Looks Back* — is very enlightening.

Deshmukh says, "The genesis of the Bofors affair lies in the practice initiated by Indira Gandhi and further refined by her son Sanjay Gandhi for collecting funds for the Congress. Till the middle of the 1960s, during the regime of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the collection of funds



for the party was a more transparent deal and business houses were also permitted to make open donations."

Indira Gandhi, he says, was in dire need of funds to fight elections and establish herself as the undisputed leader of the Congress. For this, she depended on loyal supporters like Rajni Patel and Vasantrao Naik. "Later, when she had established her supremacy in Indian politics, she decided that a far better way to collect funds for the party was through claiming cuts from foreign deals. Sanjay Gandhi perfected and refined this still further from 1972 onwards."

Deshmukh said when Indira Gandhi came back to power in 1980, he was Additional Secretary in the Ministry of Home Affairs. "My colleagues told me that in January 1980 itself, Sanjay Gandhi called senior officers from certain concerned ministries for giving orders, making deals and clearly and firmly told them how they should be finalised. Trusted senior officers were posted to Ministries such as the Defence and also to the Department of Defence Production. Even the death of Sanjay Gandhi in the mid-1980s did not change this practice."

The second unimpeachable witness is BK Nehru, a distinguished civil servant, Ambassador and Governor and uncle of Sanjay and Rajiv Gandhi. In his autobiography, *Nice Guys Finish Second*, he recalled that at Sanjay Gandhi's cremation, he asked Rajiv Gandhi "whether the money Sanjay had collected allegedly for

the Congress was safe?" Rajiv said, "All they found in the almirahs of the Congress office was ₹20 lakh." Nehru then asked Rajiv Gandhi how much Sanjay had. To which he said, "He (Rajiv) held his head in his hands and said crores and unaccounted crores."

Two more equally unimpeachable witnesses to this era are former President R Venkataraman and industrialist JRD Tata. In his autobiography, *My Presidential Years*, Venkataraman recounts a conversation he had with JRD Tata when the latter called on him in August 1987. Venkataraman said their conversation veered round to the statement Rajiv Gandhi had made in Parliament a few days earlier on the Bofors bribery scandal.

"Tata said that though it was quite possible that neither Rajiv nor members of his family had received any consideration in the gun and other defence deals, it would be difficult to deny the receipt of commissions by the Congress. That was because he (Tata) felt that since 1980, industrialists had not been approached for political contributions and that the general feeling amongst them was that the party was financed by commission on deals."

Since this was the established mode of fund collection, Bofors was certain to happen. In this scandal, Rajiv Gandhi and others were accused of taking kickbacks when India purchased field guns for its army from the Swedish arms manufacturer, Bofors. Rajiv Gandhi vehemently

denied this charge in Parliament. However, the Nehru-Gandhis have never been able to explain why Bofors remitted \$ 7.30 million into the account of Maria and Ottavio Quattroccchi soon after India sent the first tranche of payments to the company. The Quattroccchi moved this money around several banks in several locations and it was finally traced to the Channel Islands in the UK.

The Vajpayee Government got the UK Government to freeze the account but the Manmohan Singh Government asked the UK Government to withdraw the order, resulting in the Quattroccchi eventually getting away with the loot.

Why did this Italian knock off a commission when we bought field guns for our army? Why did Sonia Gandhi get the Manmohan Singh Government to de-freeze the account? These questions will continue to haunt the Nehru-Gandhis.

And if this was not enough, there are the Volcker Committee's conclusions on the "non-contractual beneficiaries" of Iraqi oil sales under the United Nations Oil-for-Food Programme, which said that the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein had funded the Congress. Also, it seems Saddam Hussein's Iraq was just one of the two nations that had supported Indira Gandhi's dictatorship during the Emergency!

Do we need to say more?
(The writer is Chairman, Prasar Bharati)

SOUND BITE

Priyanka Gandhi is a Siberian bird who migrates from one place to another after seeing weather conditions.

BJP leader
—Mohsin Raza

I have written films across all genres but comedy is the toughest. There is lot of hard work that goes into making comedy films.

Director
—Anees Bazmee

It is important that no stone is left unturned to get to the bottom of how this act of terrorism occurred and what, if any, opportunities we had to stop it.

New Zealand Prime Minister
—Jacinda Ardern

It was PDP-BJP Government led by Mehbooba Mufti that let RSS enter J&K and allowed it to take out processions brandishing guns and swords.

NC leader
—Omar Abdullah

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Welcome decision

Sir — This refers to the editorial, "India firm on terror" (March 23). India's refusal to attend Pakistan's National Day celebrations to protest the Pakistan High Commission's invite to Jammu & Kashmiri separatist leaders for the event is not only a step in the right direction but has sent a clear message to Islamabad that terror and peace cannot co-exist. Further, the Centre's ban on the Yasin Malik-led Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) — a dreaded terrorist outfit responsible for merciless killings and mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from the Valley before and after 1989 insurgency — though late is welcome.

Even as Pakistan has explicitly assured the international community that it will 'firmly' deal with terrorists housed in its soil, the rogue nation has been bluffing its way by not only allowing Jaish-e-Mohammed chief Masood Azhar to roam free but is also continuously engaging India in a proxy war and has resorted to indiscriminate firing and shelling across the Line of Control. This has

resulted in heavy casualties of our civilians and security forces.

Unless Pakistan proves its sincerity and shows concrete evidence that terror has been rootedin out of its soil once and for all, India telling in clear terms to Pakistan that there would be no India-Pakistan dialogue is apt and appropriate.

KR Srinivasan
Secunderabad

tion of the BJP, based on the criterion of age, it would be worthy of emulation by other parties too. For the journey to continue through time, every discipline, politics included, must be dynamic. It is a new BJP, not the party of the 80s or the 90s, for better or for worse.

JS Acharya
Hyderabad

The menace has started assuming enormous proportion to engulf the youth of this country. Youth are the asset of the nation.

A ban is unlikely to be an effective solution. Its implementation will not only require a consistent effort but will also push the sale underground. A better option, therefore, for the Government is to focus on raising awareness.

TK Nandan
Chennai

Think and vote

Sir — The 2019 Lok Sabha election will decide the future course for our country. Post the Pulwama incident, circumstances have changed. The Opposition is more divided than ever. Only a united force can change the present situation.

One only hopes that voters exercise their franchise in a way that ensures the protection of the rights of citizens, the Constitution and, most importantly, India's identity as a democracy.

Sunita
Via email

Old guard must make way for new players

This refers to the editorial, "End of Advani era" (March 23). Both the print and visual media, including the Opposition parties, are talking about the uncanny ouster of the BJP mardarshak LK Advani from electoral stakes. It is always a painful task in Indian politics for the old guard to yield ground to the younger lot or accept new ideas. So parties are often ruthless about keeping their ideological gurus from active electoral politics. Almost every political party goes through upheavals when leadership changes hands. Therefore, it is not surprising that in the ensuing Lok Sabha elections, the BJP is opting for younger faces in preference to the seniors, upsetting them in the process.

The induction of new blood in the party might enthuse the workers as they would begin to feel that they too might have a chance to progress in the party. Otherwise, they wouldn't stay invested enough.

Compared to other professions, age has been no bar for politicians in India. If indeed this is a principled deci-

sion of the BJP, based on the criterion of age, it would be worthy of emulation by other parties too. For the jour-

ney to continue through time, every discipline, politics included, must be dynamic. It is a new BJP, not the party of the 80s or the 90s, for better or for worse.

JS Acharya
Hyderabad

Territories of India have written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to enforce a ban on Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS).

A steep rise in the use of electronic cigarettes has made India the second largest population of smokers in the world. Doctors have warned of serious consequences if the Government fails to ban its use immediately.

Send your feedback to:
letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

The face of a city

It is disheartening that despite an overwhelming diversity and plethora of artists, India lacks a conducive atmosphere for public art



VIBHOR SOGANI

Public spaces are a reflection of a society and its culture. With urbanisation and integration of the global economy, it is essential to build an image of a city. Public art evidently contributes towards the visual quality of an urban environment. The fact that globally, citizens have successfully embraced public art and have engaged with it, indicates its importance in the urban context. Public art adds massive value to the social, cultural, economic and aesthetic value of a city. Urban design and public art contribute to its identity and legibility, encourage community pride while enhancing a visitor's travel experience.

These artworks represent our society, add uniqueness to our cities and define the values of our community. Art is a strong medium to propagate or spread message — it holds the power of creativity and can aesthetically express a cause, value or an issue that a society embraces. Since public art is accessible to all and is not confined to museums and galleries, the reach is immense and all-encompassing. It reflects upon who we are and what we like ourselves to be surrounded with while affecting the sub-consciousness of the community at large.

As citizens, we identify ourselves with the cities and remember those places that have been empowered with icons. Appeasing and engaging public art leaves an imprint on the mind, aids in navigation and gives directional instructions within the city. Thus, it manifests itself as a significant factor in the visual recognition of a particular area. Public art can become a symbol of a city, bring people together at a popular meeting place in order to facilitate interaction and communal gathering in public spaces. Different types of art can result in promoting various kinds of collaborations and engagement — static art can be quiet and contemplative; whereas dynamic art is often thought-provoking and open to various interesting interpretations.

Along with predominant social relevance, the cultural importance of public art is an integral component of its overall value. Inhabiting space on an everyday basis in the form of sculpture, statue and installation among others, it naturally gains recognition and cultural value. By augmenting and inducing the public space that it inhabits with meaning, tangible and intangible benefits make the artwork an integral and beloved part of the culture. These installations and artworks create unforgettable memories or what constitutes the image of a place or neighbourhood.

While many may believe that such art is a huge investment, its economic viability cannot be ignored. Not only does it provide professional opportunities to budding artists, but cultivates an environment in which the creative mind thrives. In India especially, artists are never given the professional recognition that they deserve and this is the means to propagate the inclusion of local artists, craftsmen and designers, recognising them as contributors to the economy while generating employment. Globally, public art serves as a catalyst to economic success, boosting the tourism sector and playing an important role in drawing crowds.

In the bustle of life, we often underestimate the power of a sensory experience — sometimes what we see and hear influences how we feel and think. Public art not only makes a space come alive but evokes emotion within the community. With rapidly changing urban development, the value of art and culture in Indian cities is fading away. The rich Indian landscape has a rather poor policy support towards the development of cultural infrastructure, unlike social and economic infrastructure like schools, hospitals and corporate offices. The approach of building an identity for the city is lacking. It is crucial for the Government to endow artists and their profession with social and economic recognition in order to promote them.

However, it is heartening to see that there has been progress in attempts to engage with public art projects. When we travel abroad, we are blown away with art installations that are beautifully woven into an urban space. On the other hand, in India, despite its overwhelming diversity and plethora of never ending artists, public murals and installations lack the aesthetic beauty that we are capable of constructing and curating. Indian cities possess a great opportunity to introduce contemporary art harmonised with the urban landscape. Cities that have an active and dynamic cultural scene are more attractive to individuals and businesses and help build a stronger visual identity. It is, therefore, incumbent on us as a society to encourage public art installations, sculptures, murals and similar initiatives while also being responsible about their outreach and impact on citizens.

IF ABHISHEK BANERJEE'S WIFE HAD NOTHING TO HIDE, WHY DID SHE AND THE WOMAN ACCOMPANYING HER RESIST THEIR LUGGAGE BEING CHECKED?

—BJP SPOKESPERSON
SHAHNAWAZ HUSSAIN

POINT COUNTER POINT



IF MY WIFE WAS CARRYING GOLD, WHY WAS IT NOT SEIZED? WHAT WERE THE CHOWKIDARS DOING? I WILL QUIT POLITICS IF CHARGES ARE PROVED.

—TRINAMOOL CONGRESS MP
ABHISHEK BANERJEE

analysis 09

Flying with a broken wing

The Jet Airways meltdown has been like a slow-motion car crash that has suddenly sped up. But what next for the airline and its founder Naresh Goyal?



KUSHAN MITRA

Many years ago when Air Deccan had just started its services, this columnist met GR Gopinath, founder of India's first low-cost carrier, in a south Delhi guesthouse. Gopinath is a man who is never shy to speak his mind. He made it very clear during my meet that his plans were being held up by Naresh Goyal, the founder chairman of Jet Airways. He called Goyal the best connected person in the Indian aviation sector and swore that Air Deccan would still manage to soar.

In fact, Gopinath reiterated these allegations in a column for *The Economic Times* last week as the Jet Airways crisis reached its endgame. This is not for the first time that Jet Airways is faced with an existential crisis. This could, however, be the first time that Goyal and his airline will not survive unscathed with the airline's very existence in doubt.

This was certainly not how Goyal or Jet Airways employees had thought their silver Jubilee year would come to an end. After all, the airline faced it all — change in ownership, regulations, Governments and even rivals — and survived everything. Jet is the only airline from the mid-1990s aviation boom — when the Government opened domestic services to private carriers — to have survived. This despite an almost public humiliation by Vijay Mallya when the bombastic businessman spoke of a potential Jet-Kingfisher merger after Jet laid off thousands of cabin crew amidst a payments crisis. Goyal and Mallya had a famous late night press conference where the latter almost lorded over the former.

Yet, the reticent and media-shy Goyal had the last laugh when Mallya came crashing down to earth harder than Icarus. But his battle with Mallya is what doomed both men as they went for ill-advised decisions to buy Air Sahara (Goyal) and Air Deccan (Mallya). These financially profligate decisions destroyed the finances of both the companies.

A decade after buying Air Sahara, Jet Airways was unable to fully integrate the airline into its operations, not for any fault of its own but the way the airline industry is regulated in our country. But as Mallya and Goyal fought, new entrants to the Indian aviation market, particularly Indigo, that flooded the market with capacity and lower fares, was what sounded the death knell for Kingfisher at first and also likely doomed Jet Airways into a long, slow decline.

One white knight that Jet Airways found was the Abu Dhabi-based airline, Etihad. Early in 2014, Etihad pumped in money into Jet Airways and made the Indian airline part of an ambitious global alliance of airlines that included the German carrier, Air Berlin; Italian national carrier, Alitalia; Serbian national airline JAT; and some other small airlines across the world. This was all part of a scheme to build traffic through its hub in Abu Dhabi to compete with the Dubai-based Emirates airline in a seeming clash of egos.

Since then though, Etihad has bled money and has shuttered many of its routes. It refused to sink more money in Air Berlin, which went bust last year and surrendered its stake in Alitalia that is currently on life-support in not a very different situation to Jet Airways. With Etihad's losses totalling over \$4 billion, there has even been murmurs that the airline will merge with Emirates.

That said, Etihad did initially express a desire to take control of Jet Airways, or as much as the Government's Foreign Direct Investment rules would allow. But Etihad demanded that Naresh Goyal step down from the board of the airline and cut his stake down to under a quarter in perpetuity. On that front, they were little different from the Indian banks, which have a major exposure to the airline, and who demanded the same: For Jet to survive, Goyal must go. Finally, he did.

Jet has been unable to pay its staff or even the leasing companies from whom it borrows planes. Over the past few years, Jet has been gradually selling its planes to these leasing companies before renting them back. This allowed them to generate a certain amount of cash upfront. But now, with little money in the back and no rescue plan, the airline has failed to make payments and barely 35 aircraft out of a fleet of over 140 are at one-time fly. This means that over a million seats have suddenly disappeared from the Indian market in less than a month with cancellations rife.

So, while the Jet Airways crisis did not impact the passengers in the past other than the occasional withdrawal of lounge access and the end of free meals on board, the spate of cancellations has meant that commuters are directly impacted with refunds being held up.

Worse still, several travellers, who booked their travel on low, cheap fares several months in advance, find that even with refunds they will



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Worse still, several travellers, who booked their travel on low, cheap fares several months in advance, find that even with refunds they will

be stuck with expensive last-minute fares today. With many travellers also having paid for hotels and other trip features in advance — and other airlines refusing to accept Jet Airways tickets, and in some cases being unable to cancel their tickets due to egregious fees — they are in a lose-lose situation.

So, should the Government and lenders step in? After having lost billions of dollars during the collapse of Kingfisher Airlines and learning that a grounded airline is worthless, the banks want to protect some amount of their money to find a suitable buyer for Jet Airways, which is what the provisional resolution plan suggested by the banks want.

But can the banks find a proper professional to run the airline? With Jet's pilots refusing to fly until their dues are cleared, with salaries not having been paid for months, even with Goyal's departure, the sun, which features prominently on Jet Airways' tail logo, is not shining brightly.

However, it remains a great asset. With air travel booming in India and airlines such as IndiGo suffering severe growth pangs, Jet Airways still has potential. The banks must be wary of what to do next but they should be willing to take a haircut on their loans because if they do not, the airline might never recover and the Indian taxpayer will end up holding the can for the airline industry once again, just like they did for Kingfisher Airlines and continue to do with Air India.

The bottom-line is that Jet Airways must survive for the healthy growth of the aviation sector in our country and as a corollary, the Indian economy.

(The writer is Managing Director, The Pioneer)

A case against shareholder interests

The idea floated by high-profile entrepreneurs, seeking dual-class share structure along with differential voting rights for founder-promoters of startups, is flawed. The Government must look for better ways to help small businesses

profits for three years to issue shares with differential voting rights (DVR) subject to a cap of 26 per cent of the total share capital. The lobby group wants the MCA to dispense with this caveat. Alternatively, the Ministry may consider allowing companies, who meet certain revenue threshold, to issue shares with DVR without having to meet the profitability criteria.

IndiaTech has also asked for increasing the current cap on shares with differential rights from existing 26 per cent to at least 51 per cent of a company's post-issue, paid-up equity share capital. It has also sought conversion of ordinary shares into equity shares carrying DVR and equity shares with DVR into ordinary shares.

Typically, startups work on an innovative idea that holds the potential for huge business opportunities. Seeing this, 'strategic' investors pump in equity capital, which in turn leads to an increase in their shareholding and corresponding reduction in the stake of a promoter. Depending on the scale

of investment, the former may even acquire majority stake, reducing the latter to minority. The intent behind issuing DVR is to nullify this outcome.

A share having differential right bestows its holder voting power that is greater than what is available to an ordinary shareholder. As a result, even with lower share in the total equity capital, the promoter will be able to hold on to the driver's seat (major beneficiaries are expected to be the so-called 'unicorns' — an acronym for start-ups which have a market capitalisation of over \$1 billion). The idea is flawed.

First, a fundamental tenet of corporate functioning is that the voting power of an investor has to be proportional to his investment or the shares held by him in the company. This applies to all investors, including the promoter. Yet, any attempt to give disproportionate voting rights to the promoter, which can only be at the cost of other investors, will be 'unfair' and 'discriminatory'.

Second, when strategic and

financial investors bring in funds, the promoter gains due to increase in business prospects and phenomenal growth in his personal wealth. Then, for him to also remain in the driver's seat — in so far as the management and control goes — sounds like having the cake and eating it too.

Third, in some cases, the promoter either exits or sells a portion of his/her shares at huge premium in the moolah (for instance, in Flipkart, one of the co-promoters sold his stake making billions of dollars). In such a scenario, he has to necessarily get reconciled to reduced or no control over the company.

Fourth, what makes one presume that the promoter alone is best positioned to run the affairs of the company in a manner so as to achieve the stated objectives? In fact, for strategic investors having made substantial investment, the sheer need to protect and grow it will make them eligible to take charge.

To expect that only the promot-

er is best suited to run (merely because he set up the company) is an untenable argument.

Even so, nothing prevents the strategic investors (albeit with majority stake) to vest the promoter with powers by passing necessary resolution in this regard. That indeed is the way forward instead of the founder-promoter wanting to ride piggyback on law-makers and regulators to indulge in muscle-flexing.

In their obsession to remain at the helm, come what may, the promoters of startups want the Government to even dispense with the profitability track record criteria. This is bizarre. It means that even when a promoter pushes the company into losses continuously and despite being reduced to a minority shareholder, he/she should have the eternal right to remain in command and control.

In the same vein, they want to have the flexibility of conversion of ordinary shares into equity shares carrying DVR and equity shares with DVR into ordinary shares.

This is done with an aim to enable all existing promoters to get into the driver's seat wherever the majority shares have slipped into the hands of strategic investors.

Letting the promoters have shares up to 26 per cent with DVRs — already allowed under the Companies Act, 2013 — was bad enough. To raise the cap to 51 per cent as demanded by the advocacy group, would substantially aggravate the imbalance.

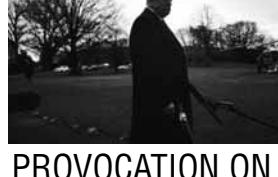
This could be counter-productive for none other than the startups themselves. This because faced with the denial of voting rights in sync with their share holding, strategic investors will be disinclined to pump in capital, thereby nipping the chances of their growth in the bud.

To sum up, the idea floated by high-profile entrepreneurs is flawed. The Government should dismiss it with the contempt it deserves. There are better ways of giving support to startups.

(The writer is a freelance journalist)



FOREIGN EYE



PROVOCATION ON THE GOLAN

Trump's proposed reversal of decades of US policy on the Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights has more to do with Israeli politics — or good sense. Trump, facing his own re-election, no doubt hopes his decision will build support among his base of pro-Israel evangelicals and American Jews. It's more likely to exacerbate divisions among Americans over his administration's unwavering support for Netanyahu.

(The New York Times)



UTTAM GUPTA

A advocacy group, IndiaTech, representing some of the most high-profile entrepreneurs, has made a submission to the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) and the markets regulator, Securities Exchange Board of India (SEBI), seeking a dual-class share structure along with differential voting rights for founder-promoters of start-ups that can encourage the country's most valuable companies to get listed on the domestic stock exchanges instead of overseas exchanges such as Nasdaq and New York Stock Exchange (NYSE).

At present, the Companies Act 2013, permits firms having consistent track record of distributable

Congress' promise to bust fiscal discipline: Niti VC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Niti Aayog Vice-Chairman Rajiv Kumar on Monday said Congress party President Rahul Gandhi's promise of providing ₹72,000 annually to five crore families if voted to power will create strong incentives against work and bust fiscal discipline.

At a press conference here, Gandhi announced that 20 per cent families belonging to the poorest category will be given ₹72,000 each annually as minimum income if his party comes to power.

"True to its past record of promising the moon to win elections, Congress President announces a scheme that will bust fiscal discipline, create strong incentives against work and which will never be implemented," Kumar said in a tweet.

In another tweet, he said the cost of the minimum income guarantee scheme at 2 per cent of the gross domestic product and 13 per cent of the budget will "ensure" that real needs of people remain unsatisfied.

Kumar also said the Congress party had promised 'Garibi Hatao' in 1971, 'One Rank One Pension' in 2008, food security in 2013 to win elections, but could not fulfil any of those.

The "same unfortunate fate" awaits the populist and opportunistic promise of minimum income guarantee, he added.

The Economic Advisory



Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) also criticised the pre-poll announcement by Gandhi in a series of tweets, but later deleted them after it was pointed out by a Twitter user that they were in violation of the model code of conduct.

EAC-PM had tweeted that in the last five years, a lot of hard work has gone into striking the right balance between economic growth, inflation and fiscal discipline. "INC's income guarantee scheme (as of 25/03/2019) would either upset this balance or severely cut critical government spending. Both options dangerous," it said.

Ratan P Watal, Rathin Roy and Ashima Goyal are also members of the council.

About 900 million are eligible to vote to elect the next Lok Sabha in seven-phased polling beginning April 11.

@sumedhbhagwat pointed out to EAC-PM members that the tweets were in violation of the model code of conduct, Council's Chairman Bibek Debroy deleted the messages on the micro-blogging site.

"Tweets being deleted. Thanks for pointing out," Debroy said in a tweet.

EAC-PM member Shamika Ravi also tweeted, "The ONLY detail that matters: will this be BUDGET NEUTRAL? In plain English: Are we to replace FOOD+FERTILISER+FUEL subsidies?"

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When Twitter user

₹ settles flat at 68.96 vs \$ ahead of RBI swap auction

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee ended almost flat at 68.96 per US dollar on Monday as participants preferred to wait on the sidelines to see the outcome of RBI's first-ever rupee-dollar swap auction.

The forex market sentiment revived towards the fag-end, offsetting early losses amid increased selling of the greenback by exporters, traders said.

At the Interbank Foreign Exchange market, the rupee opened on a weak note at 69.09 then fell further to 69.17 against the US dollar. The local unit, however, erased the initial gains and finished at ₹68.96, down by just 1 paisa over its previous close.

On Friday, the rupee had ended lower by 12 paise at 68.95 against the American currency on rise in demand for the greenback from importers and sell-off in domestic equities.

The rupee-dollar swap auction announced by the RBI earlier in March will infuse ₹5,000 crore into the system. The auction of \$5 billion for a tenure of three years will be conducted on Tuesday.

"The currency, sovereign-debt and credit markets are in the waiting mode to see the result of this new swap auction.

The move is largely being seen as one of RBI buying dollars to create domestic liquidity," said V K Sharma, Head PCG and Capital Markets Strategy, HDFC Securities.

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Sensex sinks as recession fears spark global sell-off

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex spiralled lower for the second straight session Monday and cracked below the key 38,000-mark, with banking and retail counters taking the biggest hit amid a global sell-off triggered by renewed fears of a recession.

The BSE Sensex tumbled 355.70 points to end at 37,808.91 while the wider NSE Nifty plunged 102.65 points to 11,354.25. The Sensex has now lost over 575 points in two sessions. Investor sentiment dampened after weaker-than-expected economic data from the US and Europe last week stoked fears of a global slowdown. The trade worries between the US and China too added to the woes, brokers said.

Most other Asian markets ended sharply down, while European shares were trading lower in their opening sessions.

Besides, investors preferred to keep their portfolios at a low ebb ahead of fiscal 2018-19 coming to an end, they added.

The 30-share Sensex, after opening lower at 38,016.76, stayed in the negative territory through the session and slipped below the 38,000-mark to touch a low of 37,667.40 on mounting selling pressure in sync with the global sell-off.

However, flag-end buying at lower levels trimmed losses to

some extent. The benchmark finally ended at 37,808.91 -- down by 355.70 points or 0.93 per cent.

The 50-issue NSE Nifty too cracked below the 11,400-mark and hit a low of 11,311.60, before finishing 102.65 points, or 0.90 per cent down to 11,354.25.

Meanwhile, domestic institutional investors (DIIs) sold shares worth Rs 657.37 crore, while foreign funds remained net buyers, pumping in Rs 1,374.57 crore in Friday's trade, provisional data showed.

"Lingerong concern on global economic slowdown dragged down the domestic indices, the consolidation was broad based where mid and small-cap underperformed. US bond yield has fallen as risk appetite of investors to equities reduced due to fear of US recession."

"Consolidation may extend in the near term. However, domestic macro-economic sentiment remains strong. Stability in oil prices and increase in FII inflow in expectation of earnings revival and formation of stable government reflects the strength of the market," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

Vedanta Ltd was the top loser in the Sensex pack, falling 3.28 per cent, followed by Tata Motors at 2.31 per cent. Other laggards included Yes Bank 2.18 per cent, M&M

2.11 per cent, ICICI Bank 2.07 per cent, HDFC 1.95 per cent, Kotak Bank 1.92 per cent, Sun Pharma 1.91 per cent, Axis Bank 1.78 per cent, SBI 1.44 per cent, RIL 1.26 per cent, L&T 1.21 per cent and Bharti Airtel 1.09 per cent.

HCL Tech, Asian Paints, Hero Motocorp, IndusInd Bak, TCS, Infosys, ITC Ltd, Maruti Suzuki, Tata Steel, HUL and Bajaj Auto too ended lower with fall of up to 1.04 per cent.

In contrast, ONGC spurted 3.90 per cent, Coal India 2.09 per cent, PowerGrid 1.56 per cent, NTPC 1.19 per cent, Bajaj Finance 0.56 per cent and HDFC Bank 0.15 per cent.

Sector-wise, the BSE realty index emerged as the worst performer by sliding 1.83 per cent, followed by metal 1.30 per cent, bankex 1.29 per cent, teck 1.12 per cent, auto 1.10 per cent, capital goods 0.96 per cent, IT 0.86 per cent, FMCG 0.83 per cent, healthcare 0.48 per cent and consumer durables 0.46 per cent.

On the other hand, oil and gas gained 1.40 per cent, PSU 0.91 per cent, infrastructure 0.70 per cent, PSU 0.47 per cent and power 0.46 per cent.

The broader markets saw investors cutting down their exposure, which pulled down the BSE small-cap index by 1.16 per cent and the mid-cap gauge by 1.06 per cent.

L&T wins contracts for building hosps, complex, manufacturing capacity

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Infrastructure company Larsen & Toubro (L&T) Monday said it has won various contracts across India, including for construction of hospitals in Jharkhand, a commercial complex in Hyderabad and a manufacturing facility in Gujarat.

The company said the orders fall under "large" category which ranges between Rs 2,500 crore and Rs 5,000 crore as per its classification of contracts.

"The construction arm of L&T has secured orders from prestigious clients across different states in India," L&T said in a statement.

The buildings and factories business has secured an order from the Jharkhand State Building Construction Corporation Ltd to construct two 500-bed hospitals at Jamshedpur and Dumka, respectively, it said.

It has also secured an order from a leading developer to construct a 108-metre tall commercial complex at Raidurgam in Hyderabad.

"Spread across a built-up area of 3.6 lakh sq mt, the project will comprise leasable area, high street retail frontage, grand retail plaza, recreational activities, landscape areas, and amenities like multi-level car parking spaces. The scope of work includes civil, structural works, architectural finishes and MEP works," the statement said, adding the project is to be completed in 32 months.

The company said it has also secured an order from a renowned construction machinery manufacturer to construct a manufacturing facility in Gujarat. The water and effluent treatment business has received four orders

from the Public Health Engineering Directorate, Government of West Bengal, for the design and construction of intake well, water treatment plant, intermediate pumping station, groundwater reservoirs, overhead reservoirs, transmission mains, water distribution network and metering works in various blocks of Bankura district in West Bengal.

The business has also secured another repeat EPC (engineering, procurement and construction) order from the Andhra Pradesh Capital Region Development Authority for the investigation, design and construction of water supply, sewerage, roads, drains, culverts, utility ducts for power, reuse waterline for Krishnapalem(P) and Venkatapalem (P) in Amaravati City.

Another EPC order has been secured from Faridabad Smart City Ltd for laying of civic infrastructure, construction/upgradation of roads networks (Phase 1&2), underground cabling of HT/LT transformers, street lighting and landscaping works, among others.

The company said it has also secured an order from Patna Smart City Ltd for retrofitting and re-development of storm water drains, development of smart road network as per urban street design principles, development of footpaths, utility corridor, streetscaping, vendor and parking zone creation, installation of street furniture with smart street lighting, smart bus stops and allied works in Patna.

L&T is an Indian multinational company engaged in technology, engineering, construction, manufacturing and financial services with over USD 18 billion in revenue.

BUSINESS CORNER

WEAK EXPORTS, RURAL DISTRESS, UNCERTAINTY OVER ELECTION OUTCOME TO DRAG DOWN IP: REPORT

New Delhi: India's industrial production is expected to stay muted in the near term, owing to weak exports, rural distress, credit constraints and uncertainty over the election outcome, a report said on Monday. According to Dun and Bradstreet's (D&B) latest Economy Forecast, the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) is likely to have grown by 3-3.2 per cent during February 2019. As per the IIP data in January released by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), the growth in industrial production declined to 1.7 per cent as against 7.5 per cent a year ago, owing to subdued performance of the manufacturing sector, especially capital and consumer goods. "Given the headwinds in the global economy and domestic structural bottlenecks, the concerns to growth remain heightened," said Arun Singh, lead economist, Dun & Bradstreet India. Singh further noted that in the short term, the risks remain accentuated as the concerns on the global front are growing while, domestically, the uncertainty on the outcome of the election will tend to keep the investment activity subdued. On the prices front, the report said, reversal in food prices that have remained unusually low are likely to push up inflation. Moreover, the election-related spending and expected lower kharif crop output would exert additional inflationary pressures. D&B expects the CPI inflation to be in the range of 2.6-2.8 per cent and the Wholesale Price Index-based inflation to be in the range of 3-3.2 per cent during March, respectively. According to Singh, some of the key risk factors for the Indian economy are stressed assets in the banking sector, decline in tax mobilisation through GST, ailing rural economy and concerns in key sectors such as telecom, power and real estate. He also said, "We hope that the recent efforts to strengthen the balance sheets of the banking sector and corporates turn the wheels of the domestic investment activity. Further, the business and consumer confidence could get an impetus once the uncertainty over the election outcome gets over."

HYUNDAI INKS WAGE DEAL WITH WORKERS, TECHNICIANS TO GET HIKE OF ₹25,200 PER MONTH OVER 3 YRS

New Delhi: Hyundai Motor India Monday said it has signed a wage settlement agreement with the workers of its Chennai plant, under which the technicians will get an average salary increase of Rs 25,200 per month spread over three years. The three-year wage settlement will be implemented with retrospective effect from April 2018 and will remain effective until March 2021, Hyundai Motor India Ltd (HMIL) said in a statement. The wage settlement agreement was signed between the company's management and the recognised union, the UUHE (United Union of Hyundai Employees), it added. "As per the agreement, technicians will receive an average salary increase of ₹25,200 per month spread over three years," the company said. Technicians will receive 55 per cent of the increased salary in the first year, 25 per cent in the second year and 20 per cent in the third year. This would mean a monthly salary raise of ₹13,860 will be given in the first year, ₹6,300 in the second year and ₹5,040 a month in the third year," HMIL said.

NIFTY 50

SCRIPT	OPEN	High	Low	LTP	CHANGE
NIFTY 50	11395.65	11395.65	11311.60	11354.25	-102.65
IOC	157.00	165.90	155.00	164.15	7.10
ONGC	152.00	160.55	150.70	159.00	6.65
HINDPETRO	267.00	275.60	266.25	275.00	6.65
COALINDIA	233.00	239.45	231.35	237.20	5.25
POWERGRID	197.20	203.50	191.00	201.65	3.15
BPLC	378.75	385.25	375.05	383.95	5.00
NTPC	133.85	137.50	133.75	135.75	1.10
GAIL	348.70	350.35	343.00	351.40	2.45
DREDGY	274.90	279.00	272.65	276.00	14.70
BAJFINANCE	280.40	286.00	281.00	285.00	14.35
BAJAJ-AUTO	293.80	296.50	291.25	296.30	10.60
ADANIPORTS	358.90	363.00	355.15	361.20	0.45
HDFCBANK	226.00	228.75	225.00	227.00	1.85
TECHM	792.00	795.45	786.40	788.20	-0.55
HINDUNILVR	1674.00	1687.50	1660.00	1676.00	-2.05
CPILA	525.60	528.70	516.20	526.00	-0.80
HCLTECH	1029.90	1029.00	1011.83	1017.70	7.15
ASIANPAINT	1465.70	1475.60	1451.50	1460.00	-11.25
INDUSINDBK	1682.34	1699.55	1675.00	1682.90	-15.70
RELIANCE	1330.60	1336.95	1316.70	1328.00	-13.75
EICHERMOT	2139.00	2139.00	2105.95	2119.40	-25.45
HEROMOTOCO	259.40	260.88	257.05	257.00	-31.30
INFY	742.40	742.40	730.55	733.95	-9.15
TCS	2007.80	2007.80	1977.20	1980.80	-24.85
ITC	297.00	297.00	293.20	294.25	-3.95
BHARTIARTL	332.90	334.90	323.20	327.15	-4.40
TATATESTEEL	512.80	517.70	507.05	515.90	-2.50
MARUTI	651.50	662.00	649.10	652.00	-32.70
GRASIM	815.00	817.00	808.00	815.00	-5.10
AXISBANK	1029.90	1029.00	1011.83	1017.70	7.15
TATAMOTORS	174.40	174.40	170.50	171.35	-0.85
LT	1387.00	1389.00	1370.10	1375.10	-19.60
AIRBUS	752.70	755.00	741.15	745.35	-11.70
ULTRACEMCO	391.10	391.10	385.00	386.00	-60.75
SUNPHARMA	468.50	469.45	461.20	465.00	-8.25
IUBLHSGFIN	718.95	721.80	707.00	712.40	-12.80
HTC	1976.90	1976.90	1938.20	1944.65	-36.90
KOTAKBANK	1325.95	1330.85	1303.20	1309.00	-27.25
YESBANK	250.00	252.00	246.10	247.40	-5.20
HINDALCO	206.50	206.50	201.90	204.75	-4.35
ICICIBANK	387.95	387.95	382.50	383.40	-8.40
M&M	672.00	675.00	663.40	668.40	-15.00
UPL	930.00	931.70	905.80	913.85	-21.10
TATAMOTORS	173.70	173.80	170.55	171.00	-4.40
JSWSTEEL	282.00	282.00	276.00	276.95	-8.80
VEDL	170.70	171.00	167.75	168.20	-5.70
INFRAFTEL	314.55	314.55	304.75	304.95	-11.15
ZEEL	431.00	439.80	414.05	416.25	-18.60

NIFTY NEXT 50

SCRIPT	OPEN	High	Low	LTP	CHANGE
NIFTY NEXT 50	2706.70	2707.50	2735.00	2742.35	-36.75

SCRIPT	OPEN	High	Low	LTP	CHANGE
COALINDIA	232.15	238.50	231.50	236.80	5.15

SCRIPT	OPEN	High	Low	LTP	CHANGE
ACC	1566.30	1592.00	1563.00	1583.50	0.55

SCRIPT	OPEN	High	Low
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May isolated as Brexit strategy hangs in balance

AFP ■ LONDON

Accused of presiding over an unprecedented national humiliation in her chaotic handling of Brexit, British Prime Minister Theresa May has all but lost control of her party and her Government.

The Conservative leader has in the past won praise for her determination and ability to survive what has often felt like one long political crisis since the 2016 referendum vote to leave the European Union.

But her approach to the endgame, refusing to accept MPs' opposition to her divorce deal and agreeing to delay Brexit to try for a third time to get it through, has prompted frustration and anger on all sides.

Ministers from both the pro- and anti-Brexit camps in her cabinet have in recent weeks joined scores of Conservative MPs in defying the government in parliamentary votes.

And this weekend, after yet another bruising Brussels summit for the prime minister, British newspapers were full of moves by her colleagues to oust her.

In an editorial, Conservative-supporting Spectator magazine suggested May was the "worst prime minister in our history".

It condemned her "lack of imagination, inability to lead a team or solve complex problems" -- although it also accused the ruling party itself for failing to find a better leader.

May's former director of communications, Katie Perrior, wrote in The Times newspaper that the prime minister was a "passenger at the time when the country needed a rally driver".

She backed a suggestion made by some MPs that May offer to quit if parliament backs her divorce deal, allowing someone else to lead the next stage of the EU negotiations.

The top selling The Sun



tabloid also embraced this plan, praising May's "remarkable resilience in the face of repeated humiliations, but saying it was 'time to move on'."

"She has lost the backing of much of the country and now her party," the paper said.

May took office after the 2016 referendum, and despite having campaigned to stay in

serious problem after a disastrous snap election in June 2017, when May lost her parliamentary majority.

She was forced to strike a deal with Northern Ireland's pro-Brexit Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), and since then has struggled to keep her party and its allies together.

Naturally reserved and reliant on her husband Philip and a few close aides, May often says she is just quietly "getting on with the job".

But in the last election, she struggled to engage with voters and was dubbed the "Maybot" after churning out the same answers and speeches over and over again.

May's legacy from her previous role as interior minister has also been called into question in recent months, with growing criticism of her crackdown on irregular migration.

However, May has been written off before.

She has survived the resig-

nations of a string of high-profile Brexit supporters, notably former foreign secretary Boris Johnson, and has endured constant sniping from MPs on the sidelines.

She won a leadership challenge within her own party in December, a victory that made her immune from a similar challenge for a year, even if she had to promise to quit before the next scheduled election in 2022.

As a result, it is not clear how MPs might depose her now if she refuses to quit.

May's critics are deeply divided, and their inability to unite behind a rival candidate has foiled previous attempted coups. Her finance minister, Philip Hammond, condemned any talk of replacing May as "self-indulgent", warning that the problem remained what to do about Brexit.

"This is not about the prime minister or any other individual, this is about the future of our country," he said.

EU completes no-deal Brexit preparations

AFP ■ BRUSSELS

to apply overnight, threatening havoc in almost every domain of life. May has been seeking to rally support for her twice-rejected deal, but there is speculation that if she fails, she could allow MPs to vote on what happens next.

The commission outlined measures in 13 key areas, from rules on flying and road transport to travel regulations, fishing rights and banking -- while stressing that they would only reduce the disruption, not prevent it altogether.

The EU's contingency measures will not -- and cannot -- mitigate the overall impact of a 'no-deal' scenario, nor do they in any way compensate for the lack of preparedness or replicate the full benefits of EU membership," the commission statements said.

The gloomily worded statement, just days after Brussels agreed to postpone Brexit from its previous March 29 deadline, piled fresh pressure on Prime Minister Theresa May as she gathered her cabinet to discuss the way forward.

Unless British lawmakers approve a withdrawal agreement to ease the country out of the bloc, EU rules and agreements built up over 46 years of membership will cease

Macron under fire for lecturing elderly woman hurt at protest

AFP ■ NICE (FRANCE)

France's Emmanuel Macron was accused Monday of lacking empathy after criticising an elderly "yellow vest" protester who was badly injured during a demonstration in Nice at the weekend.

Macron has repeatedly been accused of harbouring an arrogant, dismissive attitude towards ordinary people who complain about having difficulties making ends meet.

Last year he famously told an unemployed gardener, who complained about not finding work after sending out hundreds of job applications, that he only had to "cross the road" to find work. He also told elderly citizens protesting over pension cuts that the French should moan less, and described people who took to the streets over his reforms to the labour code as "slackers".

Trump, who had said before Mueller's conclusions were relayed to Congress that the report should be released, called the outcome a "complete and total exoneration" despite Mueller's caveat on obstruction.

Echoing Trump, Sanders said the American public knows "there was no collusion, they know there was no obstruction and it's a complete and total exoneration of the President."

Attorney General Bill Barr,

however, concluded that there was insufficient evidence to bring obstruction of justice charges against Trump.

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Attorney General Bill Barr,

Ex-official: Duterte photographed with drug-linked Chinese

AP ■ MANILA

A former senior Philippine police official says President Rodrigo Duterte has been photographed with two Chinese men involved in illegal drugs and sent a report to warn him about the two.

Dismissed Senior Superintendent Eduardo Acierto told a news conference

late Sunday that he's unaware what government action has been taken after he submitted his report about the Chinese men to top police officials starting in December 2017.

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Trend Blazer

'Equality begin with headlines'

Actor ARJUN KAPOOR has pointed out the need of gender equality in news headlines. On social media, Arjun pointed to an article which read: "It's Kartik Aaryan vs Arjun Kapoor! Pati Patni Aur Woh to clash with Panipat on December 6, 2019."

He then commented, "I think we ought to include Kriti Sanon, Bhumi Pednekar and Ananya Panday's names when we refer to our films. It's high time, equality must begin with headlines."

Arjun has often spoken on women empowerment. He also starred in *Ki & Ka*, which delved upon gender stereotyping. *Panipat* is directed by Ashutosh Gowariker.



'Thank you Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the compassion with which you work for our country. Yes! It is through our vote we ensure a government we need and we deserve. So my fellow Indians! Please vote in the coming elections to keep the flag of our democracy flying.'

—Anupam Kher



Actress DEEPIKA PADUKONE unveiled the first look from the forthcoming film



Chhapaak in which she will be seen playing real life acid attack survivor Laxmi Agarwal. She tweeted the first look from the film, directed by Meghna Gulzar. In the image, the *Padmaavat* star is seen with prosthetics of scars and burns on her face. Deepika captioned it, "A character that will stay with me forever..."

Malti. Shoot begins today. Releasing on January 10, 2020." The actress will turn producer with the film. "It's a very important story and it's a true life incident, so hopefully good things will come out of it," she had said earlier.

'Heartbreaking to see my dad die'

Actor IDRIS ELBA says watching his father Winston die of lung cancer was heartbreaking. In an interview, the *Luther* actor opened about his father's illness and why did he get a tattoo of 'one life' on his forearm.

He said, "That's it. That's all we've got. I watched my dad die, and he and I had big plans. I never got to show him the fruits of my labour. We talked about things he could have if I made it, then he got sick. It was heartbreaking." This encouraged Elba to get 'one life' tattooed on his arm, so that he doesn't forget to grab every opportunity thrown at him.



THE 'TALLEST' SHORT PRIME MINISTER

At the trailer release of *The Tashkent Files*, Lal Bahadur Shastri's son SUNIL SHASTRI and his grandson SANJAY NATH SINGH tell SAIMI SATTAR what it means to live without a sense of closure about the death of the second Prime Minister of the country

If there was a whodunnit in Indian politics that would require the combined skills of Agatha Christie, Alfred Hitchcock and Sherlock Holmes, Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri's suspicious death in Tashkent on January 11, 1966, would certainly qualify as one. Maybe given the international angle that the conspiracy has, since he died in what was the former Soviet Russia during the Cold War, a Robert Ludlum might even be summoned to shew up the forces.

The Tashkent Files, a film by director Vivek Agnihotri, is the first one to be dedicated to the attempts of "honest journalists" to answer some questions related to his death. To be released on April 12, in the thick of the election season, the trailer launch saw the late Prime Minister's family turn out in full force. Sunil Shastri, his son, was just 15 when Lal Bahadur was sworn in as Prime Minister on June 9, 1964 and can recollect his death clearly. "There was always a doubt in my mind about the manner in which he died. As a teenager, it really had an effect on me. Of course, much of it has to do with my mother, Lalita Shastri, who spoke about it at length in an interview in a weekly Hindi newspaper and also in her book, *Mere Pati Mere Devata*," says Sunil.

There are many things that have given rise to the belief that the death, which was attributed to a heart attack, was not normal. "Initially, my mother and the rest of the family were not allowed near his body. When we were, his face was smeared with sandalwood paste but it was apparent that his body had turned blue. There were white marks and he had bled from his nose and back. Yet no post mortem was conducted," he says.

The concerns of the family revolve around not just the lack of an autopsy but the fact that all the documents related to his death have not been made public. There is the correspondence between the Ministry of External Affairs and the Indian Embassy after the death of the Prime Minister that is classified. The entire lot of papers related to the Raj Narain Committee, constituted by the Janata Party in 1977 to look into the mysterious death, remain untraceable from the Parliament's library. Despite repeated attempts by the family as well as others, documents related to his accidental death remain classified as under Section 18 (1) of the RTI Act they can cause "national unrest and upheaval and international embarrassment" as per the Prime



Sunil Shastri and Sanjay Nath Singh

Minister's Office. But Sunil wants to know, "How will the revelation of the truth affect these?"

There were other issues that indicate a cover-up. Two people, his personal physician, Dr R N Chugh, and his assistant, Ram Nath, who had accompanied him to Tashkent, were killed in road accidents.

"Before his death, whenever we questioned Ram Nath, who my father treated like a son, he always cried and seemed to be under a lot of pressure. The mystery deepened when he met with one accident where he lost his legs and then another where he completely lost his memory. Dr Chugh too died in an accident while going back to his house along with his family," he says.

Veteran journalist Kuldip Nayyar, who was the Prime Minister's press advisor from 1960 to 1964 and travelled with him extensively, including on the fateful Tashkent tour was one of the first people to see his body and covered it with the Indian flag. Lalita Shastri did tell him about the marks and cuts on Shastri's body, which he documented in his book

Beyond the Lines that was published in 2012. But what is even more telling is that Nayyar, towards the end of his life, did tell the family that he believed that the Prime Minister died mysteriously.

Rumours swirled at the time of his death about the involvement of his powerful rivals in the Congress who, supposedly along with Russia's help, eliminated him as within the 18 months that he was the Prime Minister, his popularity was unprecedented and growing. Of course, another theory attributed the deed to the CIA which wanted to arrest India's march towards becoming a nuclear power. However, Sunil refuses to agree or dismiss any of the theories. "Let the film be released and we will talk about it," he says with a laugh in a grandfatherly tone.

The family does feel that there is a lot in store for it with the release of the film. "We approached every government, Congress and non-Congress, including the one led by Chandrashekhar, but no action was taken. The film has given us the only ray of hope as we are yet to get a closure," he says.



'HE (LAL BAHADUR) IS VERY DIFFICULT TO EMULATE FOR THE SIMPLE REASON THAT

ANYTHING HE PREACHED, HE PRACTISED ON HIMSELF AND HIS FAMILY FIRST. DURING SHASTRI VRAT, THE ENTIRE FAMILY, INCLUDING MY THEN TWO-YEAR-OLD SISTER, DID NOT EAT'

two countries, India agreed to return the strategic Haji Pir pass to Pakistan which it had captured in August 1965 against heavy odds and at a huge human cost. This move was unpalatable to most Indians.

However, Sanjay Nath Singh, the son of Suman, Lal Bahadur's daughter and Vijay Nath Singh, says that unlike the popular theory that the last person that he spoke to was his mother, it was his father that the late Prime Minister talked to as he wanted to discuss the reaction to the agreement among the countrymen. "He told my father that 'when I come back, I will put before my countrymen something that would make them forget the Agreement.' The decision was taken in consultation with other people and was not done under any pressure."

The trailer hints that the surprise here was none other than the Indian National Army leader Subhash Chandra Bose. He or someone who bears a striking resemblance to him is standing behind the Russian premier in a photograph that was clicked after the signing of the agreement.

According to the Tashkent Agreement signed with the Pakistani President General Mohammed Ayub Khan and mediated by Soviet premier Aleksey Kosygin on January 10, for the ceasefire of hostilities between the

between the two countries. Coincidentally or we can say ironically, the death of Bose is another incident of modern Indian history that is still shrouded in mystery despite several commissions and enquiry. Singh asks, "Isn't it really surprising that the death of the second Prime Minister outside the country is not questioned by anyone, including journalists, and his own party members?"

But irrespective of his short tenure and untimely as well as mysterious death, even 53 years after his death, Lal Bahadur's name is spoken with nothing short of awe. While other Indian Prime Ministers might have been divisive figures with their loyal band of supporters and dissenters, Lal Bahadur continues to evoke nothing but praise. "He is very difficult to emulate for the simple reason that anything he preached, he practised on himself and his family first. During *Shastri Vrat*, the entire family, including my then two-year-old sister, did not eat," he says referring to the famous austerity drill where, in order to battle the chronic food shortage that the country faced, he gave up eating one meal in a week before asking the country to follow suit. He even motivated the country to maximise the cultivation of food grains by ploughing the lawn himself at his official residence.

Pooja, Singh's wife, recalls her mother-in-law cooking the peels of every vegetable. "Karela (bitter gourd), tori (snake gourd) peels were cooked. The skin of singhada (water chestnut) was used to make pickle. I came from a fairly affluent family and I was surprised. My mother-in-law told me that the family had seen poverty and nothing was wasted."

Interestingly, for the strong spine he possessed, he was not dour and did have a sense of humour. "When leaving for Tashkent, my father, a diminutive man who stood at 5'2", was asked how he would stand up to the towering physical presence of General Ayub who was one feet taller than him? He replied, 'The Indian Prime Minister would look up while the Pakistani President would have to look down while talking to each other,'" says Sunil.

But even his opponent had nothing but praise for him. General Ayub believed that he was the person "who could have brought India and Pakistan closer."

Clearly, they do not make men or statesmen like him any more. Or even when he was alive.

Photo: Pankaj Kumar

The time is right

Filmmaker VIVEK AGNIHOTRI tells CHAHAK MITTAL that his research would have taken around 10 more years if he just depended on national archives or other documents and records to find proper facts for the film



unjustified. The youth is taking interest in the country. Why do you think all these big star-based films are not working? People are preferring more realistic elements and content that can relate to the real life stories of the common man," says Vivek.

As a filmmaker, he felt that he could bring it back to people's conscience now that reaching them is easier, especially due to social media. He says, "Now is the right time when they could question the manner of his death again. It is something that had to be questioned irrespective of its timing."

At that time, no one, including the journalists, officers or even other people in authority questioned the manner of his sudden death. Imagine, a PM goes on an international trip for a political treaty, and just dies... Even an autopsy on the body was not conducted. Isn't it questionable? The silence around it made me curious."

For Vivek, once he picked up the project, it transcended to more than just a film. "It became my right as a citizen of India to know what happened to the second PM of India. It was not just a murder mystery anymore. It became a

web of questions about how India and its democracy became a victim to the Cold War between USA and USSR? What were the policies of our leaders and the government and how were they correct for the country? How would have India shaped up if Shastri was alive? A lot of things opened up and helped me understand India better," he says.

With the film, the director says, he also aims to question the democracy and people's right to information. While going through the research for the film, there was a stage of frustration when he wasn't able to find any way out. It was indeed tough to get the right data.

"I filed a number of RTIs and received no response. I checked the records, approached national archives and read books from public libraries, and didn't find any answer. It was the most shattering and frustrating moment in the whole journey," he tells us, adding, "All the evidence was destroyed. Hence, we didn't have much information that we could have referred to. Things were beyond forensic control now. Documents and many files from the Parliament itself were missing. It would have taken more than a decade had

I depended on them."

It was then the idea of crowd-sourcing came to his mind and called out the public to reach to him in case they have any related information. Well, surprisingly, "within hours so many people wrote to us that the server got jammed. That's where I found a new direction."

However, in this social-media, fake news-led world, how to differentiate between facts and fiction? "I am intelligent," laughs Vivek and goes on to add that they tried to "cross-reference" the overlapping facts and figures. He explains, "If a hundred people are on side A, and the other hundred people on side B, then we struck out the commonalities between both the sides and dug out the real matter. We kept finding the common lines and counter questions regarding each thing."

The film, he says, proceeds exactly in the way that the research happened — one thing gets added to the other the moment it's discovered.

Well, the film's release date (April 12) too raises certain questions given that General Elections are round the corner. However, the director counters that why are dates assigned to directors and actors? "Nobody questions why Salman Khan only releases his film on Eid or Akshay Kumar on August 15 or January 26. If they have a reason, here, it's a political season, so why not? Such a film would anyway have grabbed equal eyeballs irrespective of when it releases," he laughs as he signs off.

Photo: Pankaj Kumar

I'm happiest on a film set: KJo

Going down memory lane and reminiscing his journey in the film industry, Karan said, "I don't like taking it slow. I'm the happiest on a film set because where else can I sing, dance, laugh, cry and still be at work? You are god when you're a filmmaker, you can create a world, destroy or re-create it, you can do whatever you want."

When Karan was notified about his statue being made at Madame Tussauds, he said he was overwhelmed by the news and spoke of the excitement he shares with his mother. He said,

"I share a close bond with her. I feel more engaged with the parental aspect of things. Now I have a new gaze on everything my mother went through."

Turning the conversation around his persona, he was asked that how does he manage to keep cool with all the ups and downs in life. He said, "We're in the kind of profession where everything is in front of the media. Paparazzi follows you everywhere. They capture your airport look, gym look, even out of the bed look. If you're in the show business, you have got to show yourself and therefore look good."

In one of the segments in the show, Karan received a special video message from actress Alia Bhatt as she talked about Karan's "flawless" character. Alia asked Karan, "Now that you have Yash and Roohi in the Johar family, who are my siblings too, the only question I want to ask is have you forgotten that I am your daughter? Am I still your daughter?" As a reply, he said, "Of course. How can I forget that Alia is my first child?"

(The show stars on Zee Café at 10 pm, every Sunday.)



The Asta Guru Modern Indian Art auction celebrates the modernist mood in myriad ways, presenting stellar works from various iconic artists. By UMA NAIR

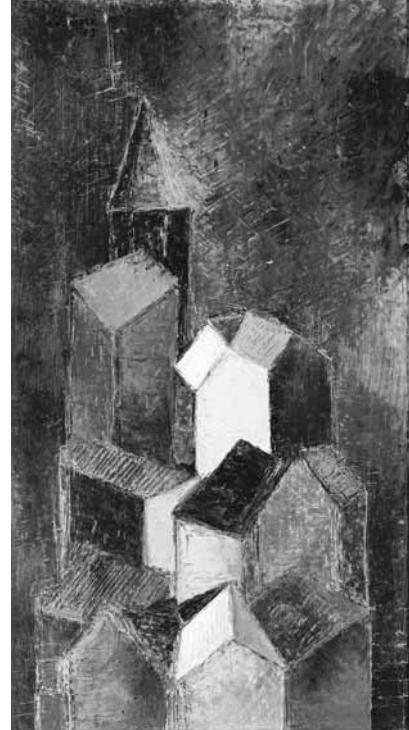
Francis Newton Souza's *Last Howl from the Cross*, two works by Akbar Padamsee, a landscape by Ram Kumar, a fervent figurative from Jogen Chowdhury, and Nandalal Bose's *Arjuna* are a few works that hold their own. Among sculptures, it is the revered Himmat Shah's sculpture that extols the modernist mood in myriad ways. All these stellar works, which are iconic in symbolism and the transcending trajectory of artistic evolutions, are being auctioned at the Asta Guru's Modern Indian Art auction.

NANDALAL BOSE'S ARJUNA

Nandalal Bose's *Arjuna*, a magnificent tempera on silk, painted in 1944, is a national treasure and it is the first time it is being showcased to the public. It belongs to a freedom fighter and one of the pioneers of modern art in India. The painting was inspired by Tagore's dance drama *Chitrangada* based on the *Mahabharata*. The painting shows a reclining Arjuna in the forest with an intriguing expression on his face. Historian R Siva Kumar says, "We never thought that the later version would ever be seen. We thought that the 1938 one at NGMA was the only one that we would see. Every piece of Nandalal Bose is a rare gem and bears the tag of a 'national treasure.'

F N SOUZA'S LAST HOWL FROM THE CROSS 1963

Souza used to attend Mass with his grandmother every day and as a little boy he would watch the priests closely and be fascinated by the rituals of Catholicism including the crucifixion and the stained glass windows. But over the years his admiration also turned into deep criticism of the orthodoxy and the practices of the church and its many clergy. This work, *Last Howl from the Cross* 1963 was exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery, London, in 1964 in a show titled *The*



Akbar Padamsee

Human and the Divine Predicament, this canvas resembles Souza's contentious 1959 painting, *Crucifixion*, which is currently part of the Tate's permanent collection.

In this revolutionary piece, the iconic image of Christ's crucifixion is rendered with malevolence rather than empathy. The gaunt martyr appears grotesque with his bared, fang-like teeth, vacant eyes and tangled, spiked hair. Like the figure they supposedly mourn, Souza has disfigured and distorted the men and women at the base of the cross, who appear to be heckling rather than grieving for the crucified figure. Thus, the mood set by the artist is one of revulsion



F N Souza



Jogen Chowdhury

rather than piety, recalling medieval scenes of heretics burning at the stake.

AKBAR PADAMSEE'S CITYSCAPE AND METASCAPTE

Akbar Padamsee's *Cityscape* 1957 and his *Metandscape* are two riveting works. *Cityscape* is a meditation on the beauty of nocturnes in myriad colours on line, form and movement. Painted from top to bottom, it has cubist geometry, it is also a meditation on the very act of painting. This early cityscape has only a few buildings at close range but in the vertical clusters of geometric shapes



Nandalal Bose

In F N Souza's revolutionary piece, the iconic image of Christ's crucifixion is rendered with malevolence rather than empathy. The gaunt martyr appears grotesque with his bare, fang-like teeth, vacant eyes and tangled, spiked hair

JOGEN CHOWDHURY'S DANCER 1999

One artist who has always stood apart in figurative splendour is Jogen Chowdhury. His *Dancer* 1999 is a splendid creation in contours curves and cohesive beauty. Jogen has often included references to popular visual culture in his work and this is one of them. Over the period of 1970s onwards, he developed his own unique approach for the treatment of his subject. He drew inspiration from folk art sources, including *Kalighat* and *Battala woodcuts*. Jogen references local traditions and popular visual culture to comment on the complexities and contradictions of Bengali middle-class society. He combines fantasy with reality to produce subjects that are often grotesque, distorted and caricatures but they revel in the fluidity of finesse.

Jogen Chowdhury's subjects are usually rendered against a black background, their fluid contours tightened with cross-hatching and heightened with touches of colour. The absence of a background allows the viewer to focus purely on the central character, evoking a sense of human alienation. His figures are woven into a shape with a spidery web

of dense cross hatched lines, fleshed out with a hint of colour added with a soft dry pastel. "We did not have electricity in our houses and I had to read by the hurricane lantern. I had to fall back on black and white because we did not have enough light. We had a miserable state of living when we came to Kolkata as refugees. The criss-crossing lines, too, may be carrying traces of the environmental and mental complications of that time."

HIMMAT SHAH

Himmat Shah's sculpture is a joy to behold. Spartan primal and deeply philosophical Himmat's sculpture is a blend of the smoothed aesthetics of Brancusi and the cubist flavour of the yesteryear. Himmat has always admired both Brancusi and Henry Moore and created works that are born of modernist idioms. This work too belongs to the solitude that is Himmat's own leitmotif. It has about it an aristocracy and a signature that harks back to early ages even as it speaks to us as a canticle of contemporary wisdom.

(The auction will begin from March 27 to March 28 in Mumbai.)

Fifty shades of sand

The All India Studio Pottery Exhibition showcased stoneware and ceramic niceties from humble pots to platters and a few items of sculpture, says U NAIR



Four galleries full of stoneware and ceramic niceties that stemmed from humble pots to platters and a few items of sculpture. The AIFACS and Delhi Blue Pottery Trust presented the All India Studio Pottery Exhibition 2019, which was a treat for tired eyes. There seemed to be more work in stoneware, you could not help but stand and gaze quietly at the buff shades that is soothing to the sight.

STONEWARE SHEEP

It is called stoneware due to its dense and stone-like character. After being fired, this type is impermeable (waterproof) and usually opaque. In its natural state, stoneware clay is grey but the process of firing turns it into light-brown or buff coloured, and different hues may then be applied in the form of glazes. Generally speaking, stonewares are fired at temperature between 1,100-1,300 degree celsius.

And so back to the most loved pieces for this critic. On top of my list is Chitra Sharma and her small quaint sheep, hand-moulded and curious in terms of the many details and the impeccable nature of her composition. Small and immaculately thrown,

the viewer is mesmerised by the soft transparent glaze that has strips of various lengths ringing the sheep's bodies. They have a Biblical perfection and are born of a different spirit, and one readily reckons that she must be discovered in depth of details and compositions; pieces like this are incredibly hard to fire, as all kinds of accidents can occur in the kiln like cracking, warping and running of glazes, but here were four sheep that alluded all kinds of parts and places including the snow-filled mountain tops.

TWO PLATTERS

There were a number of platters on view too, but it was that of Archana Singh and Bipasha Sengupta that stood out for their simplicity and patterns of both minimalist moorings as well as the eternal lotus leaves. Archana's deft architectural drawing done by ceramic pencil on stoneware, high fired at 1,280 degree celsius, and was finished with a transparent glaze. It was softly stirring to the senses while Bipasha Sengupta's stoneware platter with resplendent lotus leaves and flowers done as an outline in black slip with transparent glaze spoke at once of the spiritual fervour and

the pensive beauty of the lotus leaves that have always been a subject of great interest and intrigue to artists of different mediums.

MAN AND NATURE

If there was a well-crafted, calculated work, it was that of Aarti Paliwal. Likewise, as a represented ceramicist she is highly skilled, and reflects a certain sophistication in her cup that speaks of man and nature. Each detail that she evokes in her pieces is sheer perfection. This being so, there are a few signs of the ecological aesthetic that regards such 'flaws' as stone bursts, cracked lips and unevenness as part of the beauty of imperfection in her magnificent cup and saucer.

"My ceramic work is inspired by humans, natural forms and textures — trees, rocks, mushrooms, the human figure, modern surfaces and the fusion of traces of human activity in relation to nature," Paliwal explains. "I see my work as a personal journey exploring identity, connecting to roots and expressing the process of evolution and the layering of human destruction that makes up a whole. My forms are a reflection of man's relationship with natural forms. What attracts me to the universal world is the changes that happen;

it is as if we are looking at differing life forms and how we impact nature in a destructive way."

BIRD HEADS AS A SUBJECT

Anjali Jaggi's rooster heads, done in transparent glaze with red slip, were a candid stoneware set that also spoke of the spirit as well as the technique. It is an inspiration that holds one's attention. Not all the works were worthy of scrutiny or intensity. Whatever the cause of the exclamations, whether a neatly turned bowl or a sculptural entity, what entices is the endearing quality of ceramics and stoneware.

LIVELY VISUALS

There were lively visuals of decorative ceramic artworks, and a myriad of colours and designs that would tingling your senses. Among the simpler creations, one work was Manoj Kumar's small fish, made of stoneware and high fired in transparent glaze with red and black slip. The small plate held its own because it ascertained to the truth that this is a highly expressive way of working and at its most basic relies solely on the hands as tools. On display one saw a varied working range, from intricate and intimate processes to a whole body experience.

Stoneware varies greatly in scale and style: from figurines delicately modelled with thumb and forefinger in the palm of the artist's hand, to vigorous works produced by hurling wet clay at a structure to build up form, and everything in between. Creating with clay can be fast and immediate, also small and expressive, conjuring up images of the first figures of ancient times, whose features were squeezed out of wet clay to resemble animals and human forms.

In subtle and varied hues this was an exhibition that showed deft handling and unending passion and one must remember yeoman's service done by Ravi and Leena Batra for the inspiration and infrastructure that Delhi Blue pottery provides potters of all ages.

The man of steel

Through his three-dimensional, hologram-like mirrored sculpture, artist ANISH KAPOOR delineates empty spaces with geometry, says U NAIR

Turner Prize winner, Anish Kapoor creates elegant minimalist sculptures that combine simple materials, geometric shape and organic form to generate maximum impact.

ELEGANT MINIMALIST SCULPTURES

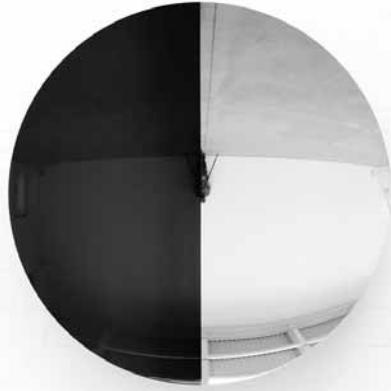
After first establishing his reputation in the 1980s with biomorphic sculptures in limestone and other natural materials, Kapoor began to explore the theme of "the void" in large-scale stone works, some with defined insides and outsides and others that clearly delineate empty spaces. In 2006, he installed *Sky Mirror* at Rockefeller Center, a 23-ton, three-story stainless steel sculpture that reflected the New York skyline. He described the massive work as a "non-object" because its reflective surface allowed it to disappear.

DRAWING THE HUMAN IMAGE IN

An understanding of the shiny steel as well as the physicality of the concave sculptural circular, oval or elliptical creations becomes an expressionist and experimental vertiginous depth which draws viewers who walks toward his works to understand the sensorial impact of nothingness. Kapoor has said that he "wishes to make sculpture about experience that is outside material concern," and he always manages to succeed in stirring multiple human responses to his work as he cuts through class, barriers and time.

MODERNIST

Split as a sculpture is striking, it carries within a Zen auratic mood within its stainless steel sculptural ferment, and it must be seen apart from the "transcendentalisation" of the viewer. What entices and enchants is the vivid materiality, the modernist celebration of geometry, even as it sub-



ly transcends changing appearances as humans who walk in front of the steel coalesce into slim gradients of animated legions. Kapoor revels in his craftsmanship, and you know that he has a deep understanding of physicality to give the sculpture's concave centre the lustre required to turn it into a mirror.

Kapoor invites the silent spectator to morph into mirrored spectator who remains strongly three-dimensional, belonging at once to a hologram-like ecstacy.

The effect is a new remoteness that is born of the shiny luminosity and the humans that become part of the reflection become the insignia of the sculpture and therein lies the delight. It was at the Hong Kong Art Fair 2010 that I experienced the purity as well as the juvenile delight Kapoor could give his spectators with his lush highly polished steel sculptures.

STEEL AND COLOUR

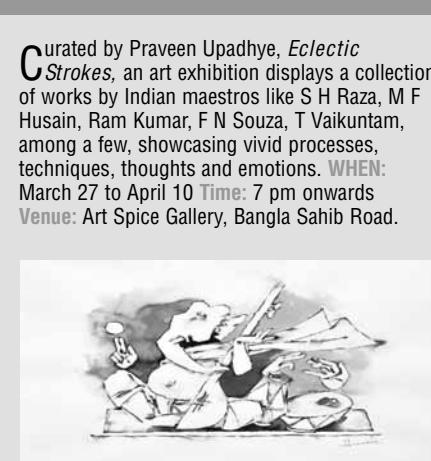
He also engages and revels in his sculpture — the steel and the colour give us an amalgam of the raw and refined, and like one critic in London said "he has fine-tuned the tension between the opposites, creating an opportunity for reparative unity that the ready-made unity of his globes — the foreordained unity of the circle."

Curated by Alka Pande, Visual Arts Gallery presents *No Number, No Name*, an exhibition of paintings, photographs, video works by Singapore-based, Indo-British artist Kavita Issar Batra.

The works present a lens on society through natural, organic materials that litter our streets and pavements. WHEN: March 27 to April 6 TIME: 10 am to 8 pm WHERE: Visual Arts Gallery.



Arsheen Mathur, disciple of Smt. Sindhu Mishra, presents *Sita-Ram* — a distinctive approach, Bharatanatyam performance in the presence of Padma Bhushan Shri Raja and Radha Reddy, Guru Smt Rani Khanam and Smt Usha R. K. WHEN: March 30 TIME: 6 pm onwards WHERE: LTG Auditorium, Mandi House.

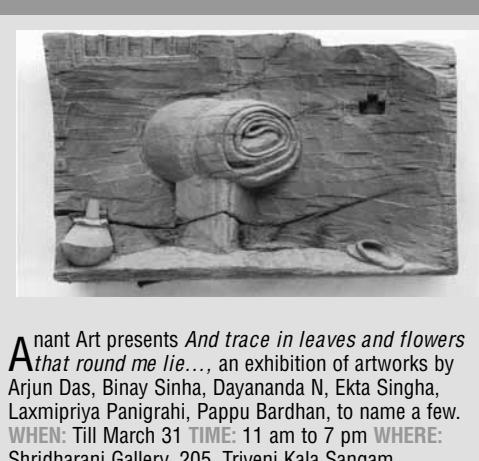


Curated by Praveen Upadhye, *Eclectic Strokes*, an art exhibition displays a collection of works by Indian maestros like S H Raza, M F Husain, Ram Kumar, F N Souza, T Vaikuntam, among a few, showcasing vivid processes, techniques, thoughts and emotions. WHEN: March 27 to April 10 TIME: 7 pm onwards WHERE: Art Spice Gallery, Bangla Sahib Road.

Korean Cultural Center presents *Annual Flower* exhibition with the theme of urban garden, bringing works by 21 artists. The idea, conceptualisation and the execution of the exhibition took three months. The extravaganza has not only used dry leaves, fruits and flowers, but also other material, such as cotton, wool threads and PVC films. TIME: 9 am to 5 pm WHEN: Till April 18 WHERE: Korean Cultural Center, Lajpat Nagar.



WATCH OUT



Anant Art presents *And trace in leaves and flowers that round me lie...*, an exhibition of artworks by Arjun Das, Binay Sinha, Dayanand N, Ekta Singh, Laxmipriya Panigrahi, Pappu Bardhan, to name a few. WHEN: Till March 31 TIME: 11 am to 7 pm WHERE: Shridharani Gallery, 205, Triveni Kala Sangam.



Curated by Alka Pande, Visual Arts Gallery presents *No Number, No Name*, an exhibition of paintings, photographs, video works by Singapore-based, Indo-British artist Kavita Issar Batra. The works present a lens on society through natural, organic materials that litter our streets and pavements. WHEN: March 27 to April 6 TIME: 10 am to 8 pm WHERE: Visual Arts Gallery.

Sindhu, Srikanth seek to reclaim crowns

Top Indian shuttlers look to get back into winning ways as country's premier BWF tournament kick starts today

PNS/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI

Former champions P V Sindhu and Kidambi Srikanth will look to shrug off their erratic form and ensure an Indian sweep at the \$ 350,000 India Open, which is shorn of star power this time.

With Saina Nehwal pulling out of the country's blue-riband tournament after failing to recover from acute gastroenteritis, the onus will be on Sindhu and Srikanth to keep the tricolour flying at the business end of the tournament starting on Tuesday.

Olympic Silver-medallist Sindhu, who claimed the World Tour Finals in December last year, will be the firm favourite to secure the women's title after receiving the top billing following the pullout of Chinese top seed and reigning All England champion Chen Yufei due to medical reasons.

The absence of Japanese players will also help Sindhu's case.

Sindhu had a decent start to the new season with a quarterfinal finish at the Indonesia Masters but a first-round exit at the prestigious All England Championship came as a major jolt.

The Indian ace however will draw inspiration from her performance in the last two editions where she had reached the finals and claimed the title in 2017.

Sindhu will open against compatriot Mugdha Agrey and is expected to face fast-rising Danish Mia Blichfeldt, seeded eighth, in the quarterfinals. A win is likely to pit her against Chinese third seed He Bingjiao.

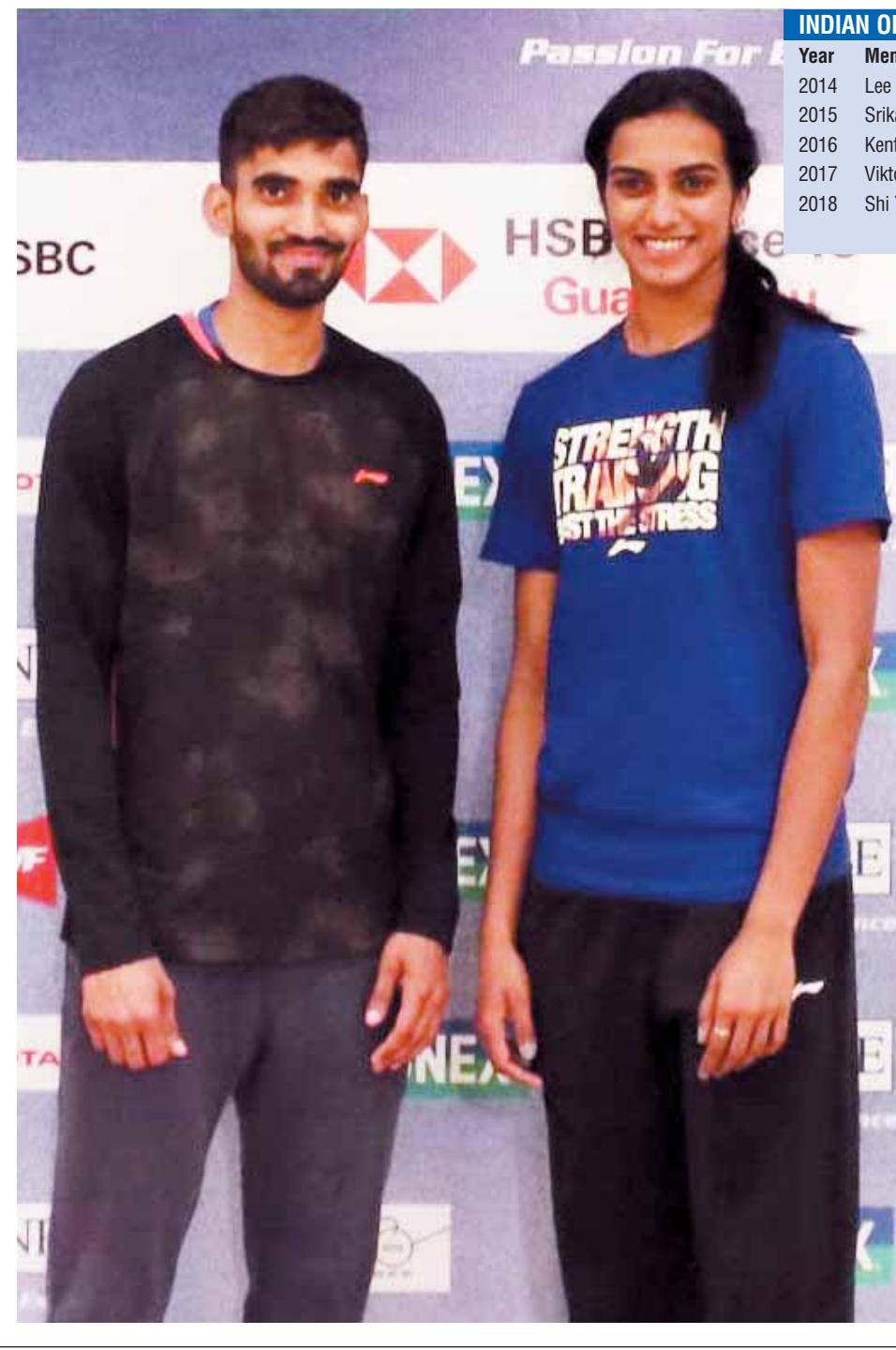
Youngsters Vrushali Gummadi and Sai Uttejitha Rao Chukka will also be in the fray in women's singles at the World Tour Super 500 event.

The tournament will hold a lot of prominence for third seed Srikanth, who has endured a title drought for the last 17 months.

With defending champion and top seed Shi Yuqi pulling out, Srikanth will be at the forefront along with former world champion Viktor Axelsen, who had claimed the title in 2017 after three back-to-back finals.

The 26-year-old Srikanth, who clinched the title in 2015, will begin his campaign against familiar foe, Hong Kong's Wong Wing Ki Vincent, and might come across fellow Indians Sameer Verma or B Sai Praneeth later as both are in the same half of the draw.

Fifth seed Sameer, after reaching the semifinals at the World Tour Finals, will open against Denmark's Rasmus Gemke,



INDIAN OPEN WINNERS (Last 5 years)

Year	Men's Singles	Women's Singles
2014	Lee Chong Wei (Malaysia)	Wang Shixian (China)
2015	Srikanth Kidambi (India)	Saina Nehwal (India)
2016	Kento Momota (Japan)	Ratchanok Intanon (Thailand)
2017	Viktor Axelsen (Denmark)	PV Sindhu (India)
2018	Shi Yuqi (China)	Zhang Beiwen (United States)

Faisal Features

while Praneeth faces a qualifier.

RMV Gurusaidutt too is in the same half and will start against Thailand's Sittikhom Thammasin.

Praneeth, who had clinched the 2017 Singapore Open for his first maiden Super Series title, is coming into the tournament after securing a final spot at the Swiss Open and he will look to extend his good run.

The other half of the men's singles draw will have HS Prannoy, Subhankar Dey, Ajay Jayaram and Parupalli Kashyap.

Prannoy is coming to the event after competing at the Asia Mixed Team championship and will take on Thailand's eighth seed Kantaphon Wangcharoen.

Subhankar, who had stunned Asian Games champion Jonatan Christie of Indonesia on way to a quarterfinal finish at the Swiss Open, will open against fourth seed Indonesian Tommy Sugiarto.

Ajay and Kashyap, two careers marred by injuries, will look to continue their comeback with first-round matches against Chinese Taipei's Wang Tzu Wei and Hong Kong's Lee Cheuk Yiu respectively.

In doubles, sixth seeds Manu Attri and B Sumeeth Reddy will lead the challenge in men's doubles, after Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty withdrew with the former still recovering from a shoulder injury.

Arun George and Sanyam Shukla will also be a pair to look out for after they stunned World No 14 pair of Liao Min Chun and Ching Heng last week at Hong Kong.

In women's doubles, Ashwini Ponnappa and N Sikki Reddy and Meghana Jakkampudi and Poorvisha S Ram will be in fray, while Pranaav Jerry Chopra and Sikki will be the best hope in mixed event.



Kidambi Srikanth returns a shot during his match

BWF/File Picture

It's irritating to lose close q/f matches: Kidambi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian ace Kidambi Srikanth said it was irritating to lose close quarterfinals in a titleless season and stressed on the need to get physically and mentally tougher to win medals at the World Championship and Olympic Games.

Srikanth, who had clinched four titles in 2017, lost nine quarterfinals and two semifinals while reaching the finals only once at the Commonwealth Games in the last 15 months.

"I think the series of quarterfinals are more irritating for me than losing in the first round," Srikanth said on the eve of the India Open.

"I think I have been consistent against a few players and then not able to get that win against a few others at quarterfinals and semifinals, that is what I'm working on — to last the whole week."

"Probably, if I can do well in next 3-4 months before the World Championship. If I can get better physically and tougher mentally, I think I can do well at World Championship," he added.

Srikanth had suffered a

leg injury at the 2017 Senior Nationals and ever since he has been troubled by small injury woes, especially related to his ankle, which affected his performance.

"I'm working on my fitness, I had too many injuries in late 2017 and 2018 and so if I can keep working on my fitness then I will have a great chance to win titles," he said.

"That is what worked for me in 2017, because I could sustain an hour and half hour. But 2018 and early 2019, I had some injuries and withdrew from tournaments."

Srikanth said he just wants to focus on improving the little things and maintain his momentum to do well at the Olympics.

"I couldn't produce the results that I wanted to but still I'm happy with my improvement. So I am in that process now," he said.

"I'm not desperate, I just want to improve on different things, to be able to pull out crucial points in tough matches and be more consistent. All I am working on now is to do well at the Olympics."

"I'm not desperate, I just want to improve on different things, to be able to pull out crucial points in tough matches and be more consistent. All I am working on now is to do well at the Olympics."

SINGLES

STUANI HELPS URUGUAY WIN CHINA CUP

SHANGHAI: Stand-in forward Cristian Stuani scored his third goal in two games as Uruguay taught Thailand a footballing lesson to win the China Cup with a 4-0 victory on Monday. The 2018 World Cup quarter-finalists hardly missed the injured star striking duo of Luis Suarez and Edinson Cavani as they made it seven goals in two games. Unmarked Inter Milan midfielder Matias Vecino headed home after just six minutes and it was 2-0 on 38 minutes when Gaston Pereiro prodded in after the Thai defence went AWOL. Stuani, starting because of the absence of PSG's Cavani and Barcelona's Suarez, made it 3-0 just before the hour with a close-range bullet header from a corner. Substitute Maxi Gomez made it 4-0 two minutes from the end of normal time with goalkeeper Siwarak stranded out of position. Earlier in the day, Uzbekistan defeated Fabio Cannavaro's China 1-0 to leave the hosts last of the four teams involved.

VIJENDER INJURED, DELAYS US PRO DEBUT
NEW DELHI: Indian boxing star Vijender Singh's much-awaited professional debut in the USA, scheduled for April 12, was on Monday postponed after he injured himself during a sparring session in Los Angeles. The 33-year-old, India's first Olympic and world championships medalist in boxing, was to make his US debut at the Staples Center on the Vasiliy Lomachenko-Anthony Crolla undercard. "I got hurt during a sparring session on Friday. My left eye has received two kinds of stitches and doctors have told me they would remove the just the external stitches on coming Friday," Vijender said from his training base. Asked if the new schedule for his debut US fight has been decided, the Haryana pugilist said, "It will only be known once my injury heals. It is going to take some time."

PKL: 29 PLAYERS RETAINED
NEW DELHI: A total of 29 players have been retained by their respective franchisees of the Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) under the 'Elite Retained Players' category, the organisers announced on Monday. The number of retained players for the upcoming season, starting July 19, has increased from the previous season's 21. The non-retained players will go under the hammer at the auctions, to be held on April 8-9.

The League this time introduced a new category where a franchise can retain a New Young Player, once his two-year contract is completed under the 'Retained Young Players' category. These retained young players are over and above the existing cap of six "New Young players" that a franchise can have. Experienced players such as Rohit Kumar (Bengaluru Bulls), Fazel Atrachali (U Mumba), Pardeep Narwal (Patna Pirates), Deepak Hooda (Jaipur Pink Panthers), Joginder Narwal (Dabang Delhi K.C) and Maninder Singh (Bengal Warriors) have also been retained by their respective teams.

RHOE WINS WORLD CUP GOLD MEDAL
NEW DELHI: Sheeraz Sheikh was the best-placed Indian with a score of 48 out of 50 in the men's skeet event at the International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) Shotgun World Cup in Acapulco, Mexico. In the women's event, American legend Kimberly Rhode nailed her sixth ISSF World Cup stage Gold over the last two years on Sunday. Sheeraz was placed 22nd in the pecking order on count-back with 14 others in a field of 95, shooting the same score.

Four, including world champion Vincent Hancock of the USA, shot a perfect 50 while 12 others missed one bird each. Among the women, Kimberly shot 57 to leave New Zealand's Chloe Tipple way behind in Silver medal position with a score of 48. The American legend has won a total of 54 international medals, including 30 Gold in a remarkable career spanning over three decades.

Agencies

FINCH PUNISHES PAK IN AUS WIN

AFP ■ SHARJAH

Aaron Finch struck back-to-back centuries to lead Australia to another thumping eight wicket victory over a hapless Pakistan in the second one-day international in Sharjah on Sunday.

The Australian skipper smashed 143-ball 153 not out for his 13th ODI hundred — also his highest score in ODIs — to anchor Australia's comfortable chase of a 285-run target in 47.5 overs which gave them a 2-0 lead in the five-match series.

Finch, who scored 116 in Australia's eight wicket win in the first game at the same venue on Friday, put on a solid 209-run opening wicket stand with Usman Khawaja who made 109-ball 88.

Finch struck six sixes and 11 boundaries in a dominating innings, improving on his previous highest one-day score of 148 against Scotland at Edinburgh in 2013.

Bayern stopper Manuel Neuer may also come under pressure for his place after De Ligt beat him with a flying header just after the restart. Neuer, 32, was also slow to react as Depay pounced for the equaliser.

Dutch 'keeper Jasper Cillessen was left with little chance after Gnabry ended his mazy run by outwitting Virgil Van Dijk before sending a rasping long-range effort into the bottom corner in the early action.

MODRIC POWERLESS

Chelsea star Hazard celebrated his 100th cap by scoring the opener in their 2-0 win over Cyprus in Group I with Michy Batshuayi grabbing the second as Real Madrid's Thibaut Courtois went largely untested in the Belgian goal.

Ballon d'Or winner Luka Modric was powerless to stop beaten World Cup finalists Croatia from slipping to a 2-1 defeat to Hungary in Group E on Sunday as Mate Patkai notched a 76th minute winner in Budapest.

Croatia had struggled against Azerbaijan in their opening qualifier last Thursday before escaping with a 2-1 win, but they made the perfect start in the Hungarian capital when Ante Rebic put them ahead on 13 minutes.

But Hungary pulled level through Adam Szalai's fifth goal in as many games and with a quarter of an hour left, 31-year-old Patkai scored his first international goal to pull off a famous victory.

The world number one was getting incredibly frustrated, he received a warning for racquet



The victory becomes more memorable as it was 100th one-day international match between the two countries.

Finch and Khawaja thrived against the novice attack, with Finch striking two sixes in the final overs while Khawaja's knock had eight boundaries.

Finch completed his hundred with a couple off debutant Hasnain on his 97th ball, making successive hundreds for a second time in his career. He scored consecutive hundreds against England in Australia last year.

Khawaja fell to leg-spinner Yasir Shah with 76 needed while Glenn Maxwell cracked two sixes in his 19 before he was run out.

Pakistan owed their total of 280-7 — after winning the toss — to Mohammad Rizwan's maiden century.

Rizwan, only playing because regular keeper and skipper Sarfraz Ahmed has been rested for the series — added 52 for the third wicket with Haris Sohail (34) and an invaluable 127 for the fifth wicket with stand-in captain Shoaib Malik.

Richardson took 2-16 in the

second one-dayer in Sharjah on Sunday but fell awkwardly on his bowling arm and left the field in the 11th over.

"Unfortunately it's a dislocated shoulder for Jhye Richardson," Cricket Australia tweeted.

The governing body added on its website that the 22-year-old — who

has gone from strength to strength in recent months — would fly back to Perth on Monday and undergo scans to assess the damage.

Losing another quick bowler is a big blow for Australia barely two months out from the World Cup with Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood also battling injuries.

4-6-4.

In the women's draw, Simona Halep kept alive hopes of regaining the world number one ranking on Sunday, beating Polona Hercog 5-7, 6-7 (7/1), 6-2 to reach the last 16 where she will play Venus Williams.

Halep, 27, lost her place at the top of the rankings following Naomi Osaka's triumph at the Australian Open earlier this year.

But with the Japanese faltering on Saturday, Halep can return to the position she last held at the end of 2018 if she lands the Miami Open for the first time.

Defending champion John Isner blew Spain's Albert Ramos-Vinolas off court with serves touching 139 mph as the American sealed an ultimately comprehensive 7-5, 6-7 (8-6) win to set up an intriguing match with Kyle Edmund in the last 16 after the British number one impressively saw off Canadian Milos Raonic 6-

abuse and was furious for allowing a 3-1 lead to slip in the second set.

But his opponent couldn't keep the pressure on and when Djokovic managed to get 3-1 ahead in the

final set, this time

there was no way

back for the 28 year

old from Azul who rightly received an ovation from the center court crowd for his monumental efforts.

Djokovic

is

the

best

player

in

the

world

right

now

and

he

LEADERBOARD

RUNS	85	David Warner (SRH)
WICKETS	3	Imran Tahir (CSK)
6S	43	I HAVE SEEN RISHABH GETTING MATURE IN HIS GAME AND HE WILL WIN MANY MORE GAMES
4S	98	RICKY PONTING

IPL 2019

UNIVERSE BOSS ARRIVES WITH BANG

Gayle smashes 47-ball 79 as Kings XI post 184-4 against Rajasthan Royals



PTI ■ JAIPUR

Chris Gayle struck a belligerent half-century to guide Kings XI Punjab to a challenging 184 for four against Rajasthan Royals in their opening Indian Premier League match on Monday.

Opening the innings, Gayle started in an uncharacteristic fashion but grew in confidence as the innings progressed. He scored 79 off 47 balls and hit eight boundaries and four sixes in the process.

Besides Gayle, young Sarfaraz Khan (46 not out off 29 balls) also played a good hand.

But Rajasthan's decision to bowl first on a two-paced wicket was bang on target as K L Rahul lasted just four balls before edging an outgoing Dhawal Kulkarni delivery to wicketkeeper Jos Buttler, who took a brilliant one-handed catch.

Gayle and Mayank Agarwal (22) then struggled to hit big shots against Kings XI's disciplined bowling as they garnered just 32 runs in the powerplay overs.

The duo finally broke their shackles, hitting Jaydev Unadkat for a four and six to yield 13 runs of the bowler's opening over.

Gayle then opened up his arms again and hit Krishnappa Gowtham for a maximum in the first ball of the ninth over.

But Gowtham broke the 54-run stand



BETWEEN GAYLE AND AGARWAL AFTER THE LATTER WAS HOLED OUT A LONG-OFF BY KULKARNI.

Brought back into the attack in the 12th over, Unadkat was taken to the cleaners by Gayle as he hit the left-arm pacer for three consecutive fours and then a straight six over the bowler's head to bring up his fifty in 33 balls.

Unadkat's second over, that produced

17 runs, opened the floodgates for Kings XI

as Sarfaraz too joined the party and together with Gayle punished the bad deliveries.

After playing cautiously initially, Gayle went on a rampage, stood on his crease and clobbered Ben Stokes (2/48) for two boundaries and six before being holed out at mid-wicket fence by Rahual Tripathi in the fifth ball of the same over.

Gayle and Sarfaraz added 84 runs for the third wicket and in the process gave Kings XI the much-needed momentum.

After Gayle's dismissal, Sarfaraz took the onus on himself and took Kings XI past the 180-run mark.

HEAD TO HEAD
DC VS CSK
NEW DELHI
TUESDAY | 8:00 PM

PNS/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI

The shrewd tactician in Mahendra Singh Dhoni will be plotting a rampaging Rishabh Pant's downfall when Chennai Super Kings face Delhi Capitals in an Indian Premier League encounter on Tuesday.

It will be a battle where experience will be pitted against youth and astuteness will square off against flamboyance when the King faces his heir apparent on what is expected to be another sluggish Feroz Shah Kotla track.

Pant has once again set the tone with a magnificent 78 off 27 balls in Delhi Capitals' 37-run away win against Mumbai Indians.

CSK, with their experience of winning important moments, will certainly make Capitals wary.

However, Chennai Super Kings will be a different challenge for the Capitals, who don't have an enviable record against Dhoni's men at their home ground.

The nature of the Kotla track makes CSK favourites with their spin troika of Harbhajan Singh, Ravindra Jadeja and Imran Tahir having already hit the straps in the low-scoring opener against the Royal Challengers Bangalore.

A look at Pant's track record indicates that he has had problems against slow bowlers and Dhoni, who has seen enough of the youngster, will love to exploit the chinks in his armoury.

The Kotla pitch, which gets slower with passage of play, might force Dhoni to start with his pacers and keep Harbhajan and Tahir for the overs when

Up Next

CSK battle against spirited Capitals



LAST YEAR'S MATCHES

- Delhi Capitals defeated Chennai Super Kings by 34 runs at Delhi
- Chennai Super Kings beat Delhi Capitals by 13 runs at Pune

FOR THE RECORD

- Rishabh Pant's strike rate against Mumbai Indians in the last match, 288.88, is the highest in all 50 plus innings for Delhi Capitals in IPL. Overall it is the third best for them.
- Mahendra Singh Dhoni who scored 487 runs at 32.46 in 19 innings of 21 matches against Delhi Capitals, needs just 13 runs to become the eighth batsman to score 500 runs against them in IPL.

Faisel Features

Pant is expected to be in action.

Harbhajan, after his man of the match performance against RCB, will be relishing the challenge of bowling to a left-handed batsman, who loves to play his shots.

Having disposed off Virat Kohli and AB de Villiers in the first match, The Turbanator won't mind showing Pant the dug-out way.

While CSK will expect their batsmen to score more freely at the Kotla, Capitals would want their opening bowlers Trent Boult and Ishant Sharma to be a bit more economical.

Chennai won't focus on Pant alone: Fleming

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Capitals star Rishabh Pant might have played a stellar role on Sunday to win them the opening game against Mumbai Indians, but Chennai Super Kings coach Stephen Fleming made it clear that overplanning keeping one player in mind wouldn't help the team.

"You have to respect so many players in the tournament and he is one of them. But there are others as well. Have to be sure you don't overplan. He is one of the great young prospects in Indian cricket. But there is Shikhar Dhawan, Colin Ingram, captain Shreyas Iyer. One thing is to find a weakness, but have to use it well. You must focus on own strength," he explained.

Asked if the conditions in Ferozeshah Kotla will help the Chennai side as CSK too

banks on spin on their home ground in Chepauk, Fleming said: "The last game was difficult for the batters. The bowlers excelled. The fact that we use spinners is one or our tactics, we have seaming bowlers as well to exploit situations. We will spend time to look at the conditions. Getting the combination right is important."

Fleming was all praise for senior spinner Harbhajan Singh and said that the off-spinner will definitely be considered for Delhi game.

"He was fantastic in the first game. Experience is important. There are a lot of left-handers in the Delhi side. That was discussed in the RCB game as well. We will look to consider that. It is about the skill sets we have. It was a compliment to not having to stick to the overseas quota. We will consider it again tomorrow," he said.

SIDENETS



RUSSELL ONE OF MOST POWERFUL HITTERS: KALLIS

KOLKATA: Iconic all-rounder and Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) head coach Jacques Kallis on Monday said that Andre Russell is one of the most powerful hitters he has seen. Russell walked in to bat when KKR needed 68 off 27 balls against SRH on Sunday and the big-hitting Caribbean all-rounder first hit Siddharth Kaul for 19 runs in the 18th over and smashed 21 more off Bhuvneshwar in the 19th to steer KKR home with two balls to spare. "In terms of finishing, he is one of the most powerful hitters that I have seen," Kallis said.

"It was a good knock. He timed it well. And there were issues, the light wasn't incredible. But it was some of the best ball striking I have seen in a long time," said the former South Africa all-rounder.

leading up to the World Cup. Hopefully I get some game time here and can contribute to some good performances. And then hopefully the England selectors will be watching them," said Denly, who recently made his Test debut for England in the lost series against the West Indies.

MALINGA LIKELY TO PLAY NEXT TWO MATCHES

NEW DELHI: Lasith Malinga is likely to be available for the next two IPL matches for Mumbai Indians after Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) softened its stance on the participation of the veteran pacer in a domestic ODI tournament. SLC had earlier announced that only those

players would be eligible for selection in the World Cup squad, who would compete in Super Provincial One-Day domestic tournament, slated from April 4 to 11. The diktat had forced Malinga to make himself unavailable for Mumbai Indians' first six matches. However, according to a report, the SLC had changed its stance after a few calls by BCCI. SLC Chief selector Anshanta de Mel said that Malinga's place in the World Cup bound squad is guaranteed, so he is free to participate in the IPL. "We have no issues if he goes to IPL — the board had given him a no-objection certificate already, so he's free to go. Anyway he has been one of our best bowlers in one dayers, so there's no question about his place in the team," Mel said.

'GLAD TO BAT AT ANY POSITION'

PTI ■ MUMBAI

I will be first to hang boots when time comes: Yuvraj on retirement



Important to groom Rishabh as he is next big thing: Yuvi

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Rishabh Pant is an outstanding talent and should be groomed properly so that he becomes the next big thing in Indian cricket, feels India's 2011 World Cup hero Yuvraj Singh.

Yuvraj's comments came after Pant showed his heroics with the bat once again and played a match-winning unbeaten 78 off just 27 balls for Delhi Capitals against Mumbai Indians in the lung opener between the two sides.

"I can't really say about (World Cup) selection but Rishabh was outstanding today," 37-year-old Yuvraj said at the post match media conference.

"He (Pant) had an outstanding season last year as well. He is playing well in Test matches as well. To score two hundreds overseas at such an age (21 years) shows his character. It is important that we groom him well and hopefully he is the next big thing for us," said Yuvraj.

Yuvraj said that skipper Rohit Sharma's early dismissal had an effect as they were chasing a big total.

"Losing Rohit early (was one of the reasons), de Kock was going well but (we) lost his wicket. (Kieron) Pollard came and quickly lost his wicket. We really couldn't get partnerships going. The wicket was more of 180-190 wicket, 215 (213) was quite a match-winning score," said Yuvraj, who also lauded Delhi's bowling attack.

Bumrah's shoulder scans are clear: BCCI official

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



playing for India. I was playing for U-14s and U-16s. So till the time, I enjoy playing cricket, I am going to play."

done in the morning and BCCI was kept in Mumbai while the team has already left for Bengaluru, the official said. "Since the reports came late and the team has already left, he is travelling separately."

DENLY EYEING WC SPOT THROUGH IPL

KOLKATA: England all-rounder Joe Denly is looking at the ongoing Indian Premier League to impress upon the national selectors and guarantee his place in this year's World Cup squad. Denly's form in white ball cricket for Kent in 2018 has brought him on the selectors' radar for a spot in England's World Cup squad. Denly hopes to get selectors' attention by doing well for Kolkata Knight Riders in the IPL. "I want to play as many games as I can. It's important that

players would be eligible for selection in the World Cup squad, who would compete in Super Provincial One-Day domestic tournament, slated from April 4 to 11. The diktat had forced Malinga to make himself unavailable for Mumbai Indians' first six matches. However, according to a report, the SLC had changed its stance after a few calls by BCCI. SLC Chief selector Anshanta de Mel said that Malinga's place in the World Cup bound squad is guaranteed, so he is free to participate in the IPL. "We have no issues if he goes to IPL — the board had given him a no-objection certificate already, so he's free to go. Anyway he has been one of our best bowlers in one dayers, so there's no question about his place in the team," Mel said.