

OPINION 8
LESSONS FROM MEMORY

WORLD 12
UK MOTHER URGES THIEF TO RETURN DEAD DAUGHTER'S LOCK OF HAIR

SPORT 15
OSAKA, ZVEREV CRASH OUT OF MIAMI MASTERS

DEHRADUN, MONDAY MARCH 25, 2019; PAGES 16 ₹2



the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com



KANGANA TO PLAY THALAIVI JAYALALITHAA 13 VIVACITY

CWC call on AAP ties today

Cong to strategise its campaign in Opp-ruled States, give manifesto final shape

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress Working Committee (CWC) on Monday is likely to take the final call on AAP-Congress alliance in the national Capital and also strategise on how to run the party's campaigns in Opposition-ruled States like West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh without annoying its prospective post-poll allies.

Sources said the Congress leadership will also give a final shape to the party's manifesto which may include among others populist programmes like employment guarantee schemes, loan waivers to farmers, and welfare schemes for youth and women voters.

The CWC, which is the apex body of the grand old party, will also discuss possible star campaigners for the party in the General Elections. Sources said there could be gag orders to certain leaders as

some of the comments and barbs by party's senior leaders gave opportunities to ruling parties to embarrass the Congress. The Congress leaders will discuss and cons of aligning with the AAP. While the opinion within the Congress is divided on this issue, NCP Chief Sharad Pawar is actively involved in getting the two parties together.

The issue has divided Delhi Congress unit between two camps — one led by former Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit and another by former Union Minister Ajay Maken and AICC Delhi incharge PC Chacko. Sources said the AAP, which wrested power from Congress four years ago, is keen to take on BJP in an alliance with the Congress despite conflicting utterances by senior leaders of both the parties. Delhi has seven Lok Sabha seats, all represented by BJP now.



The other issue that the party may discuss was the nature of campaign to be run by in Opposition-run States. The need to do this was felt after Rahul Gandhi's vitriolic attack on Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during his



poll campaign in Malda. The party manifesto for the Lok Sabha election is being framed by a committee headed by P Chidambaram, which has some other members too. The Congress has already

people from different sections of society and held several rounds of consultations with them across the country, to include their views in the manifesto. It has also launched an online portal to seek views and expectations of people from the grand old party ahead of the Lok Sabha polls. The top party leaders have promised to make the manifesto a comprehensive document that will include views of all sections.

"The contents of the manifesto will be discussed at the CWC to be chaired by Congress president Rahul. Top Congress leaders, including former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, senior Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi, Ahmed Patel, AK Antony, Ghulam Nabi Azad, P Chidambaram, Mallikarjun Kharge, Ambika Soni and Anand Sharma, will be present at the meeting," said a AICC leader.

Siddharamaiah, Oomen Chandy, Tarun Gogoi and Harish Rawat will attend the meeting. Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and Jyotiraditya Scindia, who took charge last month as AICC general secretary UP east and UP west respectively, will also be present.

The party also released its ninth list of 10 candidates for the Lok Sabha elections, fielding former Finance Minister P Chidambaram's son Karti Chidambaram from Sivaganga in Tamil Nadu. Karti is facing trial in corruption cases, including the INX media money laundering case. Former NCP leader Tariq Anwar was nominated by the party for the Katihar Lok Sabha seat in Bihar, which he currently represents.

The party also fielded its former general secretary BK Hariprasad from the Bangalore South constituency in Karnataka.

BJP kick-starts UP poll campaign, invokes Pulwama



BJP national president Amit Shah being garlanded, along with Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, during an election rally ahead of Lok Sabha elections 2019 in Agra on Sunday

Shah, Rajnath, Yogi hold Vijay Sankalp rallies across State

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Bharatiya Janata Party on Sunday began its Lok Sabha campaign in a big way in Uttar Pradesh with senior party leaders, including party chief Amit Shah, holding Vijay Sankalp rallies across the State invoking nationalism in the context of Modi Government response to the Pulwama terror attack.

Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh addressed a rally in Lucknow from where he is seeking re-election, while Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath addressed a gathering in Saharanpur, the constituency that will go to polls in first phase on April 11. Another Union Minister Mukhtar Abas Naqvi addressed a meeting in Rampur.

"In this election Opposition is defaming the valour of Indian Army. This is not acceptable to the people of

this country. The people will teach a bitter lesson to the political parties who are raising questions about Pulwama attacks and subsequent Indian action," Shah said while addressing a rally in Agra.

Incidentally, all the top leaders of the BJP referred to Pulwama attack and Pakistan in their addresses. Rajnath too accused some Opposition parties for questioning Armed forces in the wake of the IAF air strike inside Pakistan after Pulwama terror attack.

"Some leaders are asking how many people were killed in that attack. This is questioning as if whether air strike had actually happened or not," he said. Yogi even equated one of the candidates in Saharanpur as damaad (son-in-law) of Azhar Masood and asked people to defeat the candidates who talk the language of terrorists.

Uttar Pradesh, a home to 22 crore people, sends maximum 80 MPs to the Lok Sabha. In 2014 election party, with its ally Apna Dal, 73 seats were won with the BJP bagging 71 constituencies. This year the party has set a target to win 74 seats.

CAPSULE

SAPNA CLAIMS SHE HASN'T JOINED CONG

New Delhi: Within hours of Uttar Pradesh Congress chief Raj Babbar welcoming her into the party fold, Haryana singer-dancer Sapna Chaudhary on Sunday claimed she has not joined the Congress and accused it of using her old pictures with Priyanka Gandhi Vadra.

CONGRESS FIELDS KC FROM SIVAGANGA

New Delhi: The Congress on Sunday released its ninth list of 10 candidates for the Lok Sabha elections, fielding former Finance Minister P Chidambaram's son Karti from Sivaganga in Tamil Nadu. Karti Chidambaram is facing trial in corruption cases, including the INX media money laundering case.

11 TN FISHERMEN HELD BY SRI LANKAN NAVY

Rameswaram: Eleven fishermen from Tamil Nadu have been arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy for allegedly fishing near Nedumtheevu in the island nation's waters, an official said here on Sunday.

IT IS FOR ADVANI TO CLEAR THE MIST: UMA

New Delhi: BJP leader and Union Minister Uma Bharti on Sunday said it is for LK Advani to clear the "mist", after the veteran leader was not named as a party candidate for the Lok Sabha elections.

JAWAN MARTYRED IN CEASEFIRE VIOLATION

Jammu: A soldier was martyred on Sunday when Pakistani troops violated the ceasefire by targeting forward posts and villages with heavy caliber weapons and rockets along the LoC in Jammu & Kashmir's Poonch and Rajouri districts.

LS POLLS: EC ORDERS 26L BOTTLES OF INDELIBLE INK

New Delhi: Ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, the EC has ordered 26 lakh indelible ink bottles worth ₹33 crore.

2 Hindu girls kidnapped, converted, married in Pak

War of words between Swaraj, Pak Min ensues on Twitter

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A war of words erupted on Sunday between External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and Pakistan's Information Minister Fawad Chaudhary over reports of abduction of two Hindu teenaged girls and their forcible conversion to Islam on the eve of Holi in the Sindh province.

In a tweet, Swaraj sought a report from Indian envoy in



Pakistan Ajay Bisaria on the reported abduction of the girls and their forcible conversion to Islam.

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has ordered a probe into the matter. Responding to Swaraj's tweet,

Chaudhary said, "Maam its Pakistan's internal issue and (be) rest assured it's not Modi's India where minorities are subjugated, it's Imran Khan's Naya Pak where white colour of our flag is equally dearer to us."

"I hope you'll act with same diligence when it comes to rights of Indian minorities," he said.

Swaraj, in her response to Chaudhary, said she had only asked for a report from the Indian High Commissioner in Islamabad about the kidnapping and forced conversion of two minor Hindu girls to Islam.

"This was enough to make you jittery. This only shows your guilty conscience," she said.

Akhilesh to fight from Azamgarh, MSY among SP star campaigners

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav will contest from Azamgarh Lok Sabha seat in Uttar Pradesh, which was represented by his father Mulayam Singh Yadav.

While the 79-year-old SP patriarch will contest from "safe seat" Mainpuri, the party on Sunday made a volte face and included its founder Mulayam Singh Yadav's name in its list of "star campaigners", a day after leaving him out of it. Also, the SP announced that senior leader Azam Khan will contest from Rampur.

The list released by senior SP leader Ram Gopal Yadav included the names of party



chief Akhilesh, Azam, Dimple Yadav and Jaya Bachchan among others, besides Ram Gopal Yadav himself.

At present, the SP patriarch represents Azamgarh constituency. He had represented Mainpuri three times earlier in 1996, 2004 and 2009.

264 bustards block Ratlam-Vadodara NH

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

A central environmental panel has spiked the National Highway Authority of India's proposal to construct the Rs 1078.40-crore 211-km-long eight-lane road (newly declared NH 148N) connecting Madhya Pradesh's Ratlam district to Vadodara in Gujarat. It said the road may threaten the habitat of the highly endangered Lesser Floricans in the adjoining Sailana Kharmor Wildlife Sanctuary in Ratlam district.

In a meeting held recently, the Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) of the Union Environment Ministry sought detailed information on the impact of the project on the smallest agro-grassland bustard which are in the danger of becoming extinct from India. The last census in 2017

had put their number to just 264. This variety of bustard is found in the four States — Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra.

The proposed project is a part of Delhi-Mumbai Expressway under Bharatmala Pariyojana as per the guidelines of the Ministry of Road, Transport and Highways. The length of the proposed alignment is 31 km which is located within 10 km radius from the boundary of Sailana Kharmor Wildlife Sanctuary. Curiously, while deliberating the proposed project at its recent meeting the EAC members found that plans pertaining to air, water, noise and soil quality monitoring locations along the proposed alignment were not submitted.

Also, even though the proposed alignment was located within 10 km Salina Kharmor



Wildlife Sanctuary, in the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA)/Environment Management Programme (EMP) report, details of sanctuary, flora and fauna and con-

servation plan were not included. The EIA consultant of the project is M/s Enviro Infra Solutions Pvt Ltd, Ghaziabad.

The EAC also noted that the land acquisition for the proposed alignment was approximately 336.72 ha out of which 41.82 ha is forest land. Approximately 2,438 number of trees are likely to be cut.

For want of requisite information, the panel deferred its nod to the project and sought cumulative impacts of the project activities on the habitat of wildlife, such as Lesser Florican, direct loss of habitat at intersection locations particularly on account of damage to the existing vegetation due to construction activities and transport and degradation of habitat quality due to construction activities and construction camps, and human use of water resources.

Cong gets lion's share of seats in grand alliance

JMM, RJD, JVM-P get 4, 1, 2 seats respectively

SAURAV ROY ■ RANCHI:

The grand alliance partners on Sunday announced their seat sharing equation for the 17th General Elections in Jharkhand in presence of JMM supreme Shibu Soren, State Congress president Ajoy Kumar, JMM Executive President Hemant Soren and JVM-P chief Babulal Marandi in Ranchi.

The Indian National Congress (INC), which will play the role of a big brother in the grand alliance, will contest seven of 14 Lok Sabha seats, Jharkhand Pradesh Congress Committee State President Ajoy Kumar said.

The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) will contest four seats while Jharkhand Vikas Morcha-Prajatantrik (JVM-P) and Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) will contest two and one seats respectively, he added.

Addressing the media at the residence of former Chief Minister Shibu Soren, Kumar said that his party will field candidates for Ranchi, Khunti, Lohardaga, West Singhbhum, Hazaribag, Dhanbad and Chatra. JMM will field candidates for Dumka, Rajmahal, Giridih and Jamshepur, while JVM-P will contest from Kodarma and Godda, he added.

The grand alliance has unanimously decided to leave Palamu seat for Lalu Prasad-led RJD. However, RJD in a separate press conference on Sunday said that it may walk out of the alliance and contest Chatra as well as Palamu constituencies. "We are still in talks with the



JMM chief Shibu Soren, JVM-P Chief Babulal Marandi, JMM Executive president Hemant Soren, JPCC president Ajoy Kumar, Congress senior leader Alamgir Alam join hands at a press conference after announcing seat sharing equation of Grand Alliance in Ranchi on Sunday

RJD. There is no question of a friendly contest in any constituency," said Kumar.

The grand alliance partners have unanimously decided that the INC will play the leading role in the General Elections while JMM will take over the charge of the leading ally in the assembly polls slated later this year.

The seat sharing equation was decided after several rounds of meetings between JMM leaders, JVM-P chief and Congress President Rahul Gandhi in the national capital during the last couple of weeks, sources said.

"The JMM had earlier insisted on giving at least one seat to the Communist Party of India (CPI) after its senior leader D Raja met Hemant Soren in Jharkhand seeking participation in the alliance. "We still want them (CPI) to join us if they can come to a consensus and are ready to leave the Kodarma seat," Kumar said.

After several efforts in the past to form a grand alliance, the idea has finally become a reality because of the efforts of Guruji (Shibu Soren), Babulal

Marandi and Rahul Gandhi, said Hemant.

"It has been finalized that we will not only contest the Lok Sabha elections as a team but also go to assembly polls as allies. A blueprint for the same will be prepared soon," he said.

In a couple of days, the alliance partners will meet again and decide their course of action, he added.

Meanwhile, Jharkhand's first Chief Minister Babulal Marandi said that the grand alliance was the need of the hour to combat communal forces.

"The BJP has destroyed the basic democratic structure of the country by influencing constitutional bodies like the CBI. They are spewing communal venom in the society and we have united to prevent further damage," he said.

Riding the Modi wave, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won 12 of 14 Lok Sabha seats in Jharkhand in 2014. While the JMM won the remaining two seats, the Congress and JVM-P failed to win any seat in Jharkhand.

9% CRPF men suffer from obesity, diabetes

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

In a shocking revelation about the health of the CRPF personnel, over nine per cent of the total strength of the world's largest paramilitary force is sick and placed under low medical category (LMC).

Out of a total strength of 2,43,000 men in CRPF under the command of Force's chief Director General RR Bhatnagar, as many as 22, 120 personnel are placed in the low medical category, according to official data.

Of the 22,120 LMC cases, 85 per cent of the figure constitutes pure medical cases implying diseases such as hypertension, obesity and diabetes. The remaining 15 per cent are mostly accident/incident related LMC cases. Bhatnagar is reportedly



force who are already stressed due to continuous deployment in hard areas," the official said.

The paramilitary has cited LMC cases as a reason not to enhance the retirement age from 57 to 60 years. While BSF has an LMC of 5.5 per cent, the ITBP has 6 per cent sick personnel, the Intelligence official said quoting from the minutes of the meeting held at the Home Ministry for enhancing the retirement age.

The Home Ministry is holding consultations with the paramilitary leadership to enhance the retirement age from 57 to 60 years following a directive from the Delhi High Court that had in an order issued on January 31 this year to make the retirement age uniform for all the ranks to 60 years. Two rounds of meetings have been held at

the North Block in this connection under the chairmanship of Additional Secretary (Police) in the Home Ministry Praveen Kumar Srivastava.

At present, the retirement age is 57 years from the rank of Constable up to the rank of Commandant.

However, if an officer is promoted to the rank of Deputy Inspector General, he or she is eligible to retire at the age of 60 years.

During the meeting held by Srivastava, Additional Director General (Personnel) of CRPF Atul Karwal said that the number of LMC personnel will increase significantly if the retirement age is increased to 60 years as 2-3 per cent LMC cases increase in proportion with the increase in age of the personnel.

opposed to enhancing the retirement age from 57 years to 60 years and has advocated a status quo in the superannuation of the personnel up to the rank of Commandant, said a senior official of the

Intelligence wing of the CRPF posted in the paramilitary directorate here. "Putting a spanner in enhancing the retirement age will only breed resentment among the various ranks of the

Time to act; TB is preventable and curable



DR GAURAV SANJAY

Tuberculosis is preventable and curable. It is time to act, to find, treat and end this disease at a time when a quarter of the world's tuberculosis patients live in India.

Tuberculosis bacilli (TB) have lived in symbiosis with mankind since pre-historic time. TB is recorded in Indian, Egyptian, Greek, and Roman civilisation as far as 5000 years ago.

Each year, we commemorate World Tuberculosis Day on March 24 to raise public awareness about the devastating health, social and economic consequences of TB and to step up efforts to end the global TB epidemic. The date marks the day in 1882 when Dr Robert Koch announced that he had discovered the bacteria that causes TB.

TB remains one of the

world's deadliest killer infections. Each day, nearly 4500 people lose their lives to TB and close to 30,000 people fall ill with this preventable and curable disease. According to National TB statistics India 2016 report, it is estimated that about 40 per cent of the Indian population is infected with TB bacteria, the vast majority of them have latent TB rather than active TB disease. The theme of World TB Day 2019 was - 'It's time' - to find, treat and end TB to ensure no one is left behind.

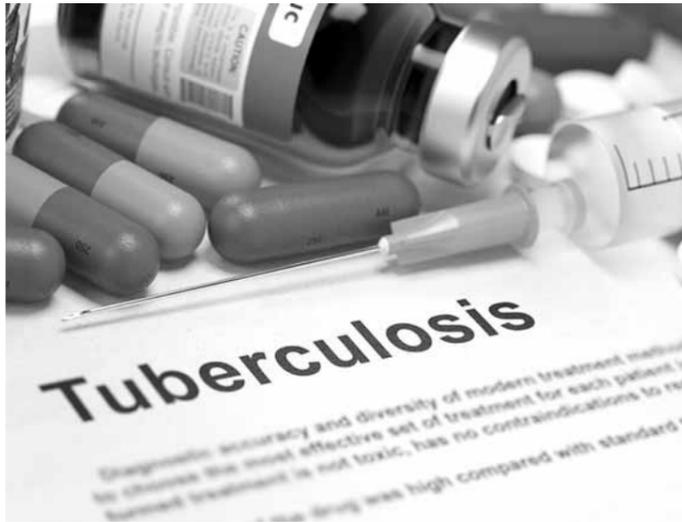
According to a WHO report, one third of the population of the world is infected with TB. Out of this, 95 per cent of the mortality due to TB occurs in developing nations. Twenty five per cent of these deaths can be reduced with proper and timely treatment. The main symptoms of TB are general malaise, weakness, loss of appetite, loss of weight, low grade evening fever and can be associated with cough, bowel disturbances, lymph nodes swelling, pain in joints and back with difficulty in walking etc.

I strongly believe that if the culprit is to be killed then first he should be caught and then be properly identified after investigation. As for identification of the culprit a photograph is needed, it is also required for identification of the diseases. Photo of the

disease can be taken with simple test. As every bacterium has a specific character so does the TB bacterium. A drop of TB pus is required to identify TB bacteria or a tiny bit of appropriate tissue is required to find TB granuloma. These tests can be done in most of the labs. The treatment of TB should be started only after confirming its diagnosis. This ensures better treatment of the disease.

Thousands of people were dying all over the world before 1947 because there was no drugs available against TB bacteria. But after the invention of anti tubercular drugs, the numbers of deaths have been significantly reduced. The anti-TB drugs are very effective. The perceptible results can be seen within three weeks. Many patients get symptomatic relief due to which they get a false impression that the diseases has been fully cured and many a time the patients do not re-visit their doctors and stop their medication themselves. However, it is advised that patient should take medication for the entire period (six months to 1.5 years) as per doctor's advice and should follow up at the required intervals.

If patients break the treatment regime in between, the infection can



reoccur and then the same medications are not effective due to drug resistance. They then have to be prescribed secondary line drugs which are more expensive, more toxic and have to be taken for a prolonged time.

In addition to medications, operations are also needed in some TB cases. If operation is needed, it is desirable to consult an experienced surgeon. Surgery is not necessary for every patient. It

is needed only in those patients who are on anti TB drugs but are not improving or have deteriorated during treatment, or the patients have the pus formation in spinal TB and have subsequently developed paralysis during treatment.

If a hump has developed in spinal TB, then operation is needed to aspirate the pus and clean the bone and to correct the hump with the help of spinal implants. For correc-

tion of the hump, the author has developed a technique in which half of the diseased vertebra is removed and two separate vertebra are converted into one and a half vertebra into a single block. After a proper surgery and completion of tuberculosis treatment the patients can achieve their pre operative status.

In my opinion inadequate investigation, delayed or wrong diagnosis and improper treatment are the main

cause of failure of treatment. Doctor can be blamed for empirical treatment / wrong diagnosis but patients are to be blamed for irregular and inadequate duration of treatment.

Inadequate dose for inadequate duration is main cause for multi drug resistance tuberculosis (MDR-TB) or extensive drug resistance tuberculosis (XDR-TB). MDR/XDR-TB is a major problem not only in our country but in the whole world. This is a man made catastrophe. The reason for the inadequate dose could be poverty, non availability of TB drugs, non availability of trained paramedical and medical staff and dis-continuation of TB drugs abruptly.

Some physicians in our country or in the other countries are influenced by whims without any fact which makes them think that every infection in the spine is a TB infection but it is not so. Because of this misunderstanding they treat all patients of spine infections with the anti tubercular drugs. It was found in a research that nearly 20 per cent of the spine infections are due to pyogenic or non tubercular bacteria.

Empirical anti tubercular treatment not only cause unnecessary financial burden to the poor patients but rampant use of TB drugs in non

tubercular infection and has caused the incidence of MDR/XDR-TB to rise in our country.

As we know, most of the anti-tubercular drugs are metabolised in the liver and at times this un-monitored drug toxicity can lead to drug induced liver injury which can even lead to the death of the patient. Tubercular infection is considered to be social stigma in our country.

According to the first national anti TB drug resistance survey 2014-16, India recorded more new TB patients annually than any other country, contributing to 27 per cent of the world TB burden. More than a quarter of TB patients in India have drug resistance to one or other anti TB drugs. The treatment success rate among MDR-TB in India about 46 per cent and death rate is around 20 per cent as against the global level of treatment success rate of 52 per cent and death rate 17 per cent. It is said that MDR-TB is 6.19 per cent among all TB patients with 2.8 per cent among new and 11.60 per cent among previously treated TB patients. The incidence of XDR-TB was 1.3 per cent.

(The author is an orthopaedic and joint replacement surgeon based in Dehradun)

Management seals HMT plant, workers protest

PNS ■ HALDWANI

The management of the Hindustan Motor Tools (HMT) plant at Ranibagh locked the factory late on Friday night eliciting strong opposition from the factory workers. The employees of the HMT factory were angered on reading the lock-out notice pasted by the authorities. Terming the lock-out as illegal, the worker averred that the case was still pending in the high court. On Saturday, the factor workers met the police DIG Ajay Rautela stating that the management wrongfully locked the factory on Friday night.

They further averred that presently there are 143 persons employed in the factory who have not received their salaries since January 2016 till date though salary slips are being provided. The daily attendance of the employees was also being registered through bio-

metric means. A petition is also pending in the high court on this issue. According to sources, the management locked the factory after a stay on it was quashed by a single bench of the high court recently.

It is pertinent to mention here that earlier the office bearers of the Ranibagh HMT Karmchari Sangh had filed a petition in the High Court stating that the Central Government had issued an order dated November 17, 2016 for closure of the HMT plant at Ranibagh. The petitioner had pleaded that the order for closure of this HMT plant is not correct while also stating that



an audit was conducted by two specialist agencies of the said plant and neither of the agencies had recommended closing down the plant.

The petition also stated that the dispute of the employees wages with the plant management is continuing. The plant cannot be closed without resolving the dispute on the subject of service period. The petitioners had stated that they had been working since 1998 and that the employees had not committed any mistake.

Hundreds of students pledge for water conservation

PNS ■ HARIDWAR

In partnership with the Global Interfaith WASH Alliance, Ganga Action Parivar, Swarovski and Divine Shakti Foundation, youngsters gathered on banks of Ganga in Rishikesh pledging to work together to save water and keep the environment clean.

A 12 year old boy Abhinav, said, "We humans are the creator of problems of water and we humans have to create solutions to it as well." Shubham expounded on the crucial importance of planting trees, saying, "Trees give oxygen, fruits, food, shade for humans and animals alike. Trees are very important for all of us if we want to keep surviving on the earth." The day concluded with a mass rally on the banks of Ganga and the tying of Ganga Rakhis (sacred threads), which the children themselves made and dipped in to the Ganga as part of a mass vow to save and protect nature.

According to NITI Aayog, nearly 60 crore people across India may have no access to drinking water by the year



2030, placing our nation in imminent crisis. At the same time the lifeline rivers like the Ganga, remain polluted, with some three billion litres of sewage and tonnes of trash entering the river every day.

The participants were members of the Water School Programme, which has been enabling children from across the region to learn inspiring lessons about nature and its role in their lives, including

hands-on classroom experiments, tree plantations, mass clean-ups, special events and more. As a result, children are motivated and mobilised as champions for a clean, green and water-secure future said

the head of Parmarth Niketan, Chidanand Saraswati.

The Water Day event began with an art competition, during which hundreds of children from across the region demonstrated their talent to share their own unique messages about water. Children also shared their own unique viewpoints, inspiring all with thoughts that often surpassed their ages.

A dance was presented on the theme song of Beat Plastic Pollution India campaign launched on the UN Environment Day which encouraged everyone to pledge to reduce one time use plastic and polythene pollution as these accumulate, choking up rivers, waterways, sewage systems and contaminate the soil.

Forty five years of Chipko which brought Uttarakhand region into global focus

The movement inspired eco-conservation world over

JASKIRAN CHOPRA ■ DEHRADUN

Forty five years ago, in the month of March began a movement in the Uttarakhand region which became famous throughout the world. It has acted like a beacon of hope for environment conservation and inspired conservation efforts across the globe down the decades.

March 26 is a landmark day in the history of this mountain region which brought it on the global environment conservation map. In fact, it was on this day, forty five years ago, when people around the world came to know of a unique environment protection initiative. It has also inspired many an effort at ecological conservation in Uttarakhand over the years. The movement is even more relevant today for a world facing global warming and climate change. The need for protecting our forests is more urgent now. This movement has been successful in bringing about legislation to protect the

Himalayas against contract felling by non-violent means. It remains a tremendous inspiration to grassroots environmental movements in other parts of India and around the world. The "Chipko Women", all those years ago, showed their commitment and responsibility towards the future of their own people and nature.

On this day in 1974, 27 women and girls from Reni village in Chamoli district saved their communal forest from clear felling. They were led by Gaura Devi and their action began a decade of "Chipko" actions by women throughout this hill region. The world-famous "Chipko" movement took place in the Lata and Reni villages in the vicinity of the Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve. Villages of the Niti Valley celebrate the anniversary of the Chipko Movement every year. They hold a mass meeting in Lata village, Gaura Devi's ancestral home before proceeding to Reni village, Gaura Devi's adopted home, for a mass rally. The Chipko movement represents a milestone both globally and locally. The women of Chipko showed us that social and ecological justice go hand in hand. Their peaceful demonstrations fostered a sense of conservation that still exists today in the villages of the Niti valley.



Gaura Devi led the first all-women action to save their community forest and mobilised the women of this region to protect their natural heritage. During the activist phase of Chipko in the 1970s, the courage and vigilance of Uttarakhandi women saved

may forests and earned them a hallowed place in the history of the global environmental movement.

Standing in front of the trees that had been marked for felling, Gaura Devi addressed the men: "Brothers! This forest is the source of our livelihood.

If you destroy it, the mountain will come tumbling down onto our village." She then placed herself in front of a gun brandished by one of the men. "This forest nurtures us like a mother; you will only be able to use your axes on it if you shoot me first." Initially met with abuse

and threats, the women refused to move out of the way of the lumbermen. Composed of mountain farmers from Himachal Pradesh who understood only too well what Gaura Devi was talking about, the lumbermen quickly lost heart. After a three day stand off, they

finally withdrew without having accomplished their task.

From this action, Chipko was to emerge as a peasant movement in defence of traditional forest rights, continuing a century-long tradition of resistance to state encroachment. After Reni, in 1975, the

women of Gopeshwar, in 1978, of Bhyudar Valley (threshold of Valley of Flowers), of Dongari-Paitoli in 1980, took the lead in protecting their forests. In Dongari and Paitoli, the women opposed their men's decision to give a 60 acre Oak forest to construct a horticulture farm. They also demanded their right to be associated in the management of the forest. Their plea was that it is the woman who collects fuel, fodder and water. The question of the forest is a life and death question for her. Hence, she should have a say in any decision about the forest. Now they are not only active in protecting the forests but are also in afforesting the bare hillslopes.

The Chipko Movement had led to the emergence of a series of environmental groups and movements across the country, making the people aware of the need to conserve the environment and biodiversity.

In July 1991, at the age of 66, Gaura Devi died quietly in the mountain village of Reni. Her story has been told to children in the hill region down the years. She is almost seen as a modern day "Jhansi ki Rani" whose bravery in the face of odds, despite being an illiterate woman, has become legendary as far as environment conservation goes.

Cong lists candidates for 5 seats

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

After much dillydallying, the Congress also released the names of its candidates from the five Lok Sabha constituencies of Uttarakhand late on Saturday night. AICC general secretary and former chief minister Harish Rawat will contest from Nainital-Udham Singh Nagar constituency, Rajya Sabha MP Pradeep Tamta will contest from Almora-Pithoragarh constituency, Ambrish Kumar will contest from Haridwar, Pradesh Congress Committee president Pritam Singh will contest from Tehri while Manish Khanduri who has recently joined the party will contest from Garhwal constituency.

According to sources, there was much deliberation and difference of opinion on fielding Rawat from Nainital-Udham Singh Nagar though finally his demand was approved. Rawat is considered to be the strongest of the Congress candidates. Currently a general secretary of AICC and Assam in-charge, Rawat won the parliamentary elections from Almora constituency thrice consecutively from 1980 onward though he also lost four times later. He was elected from the Haridwar constituency in 2009 and was also made a union minister in



the UPA government. He became the chief minister of Uttarakhand in 2014 but later also lost from two seats while contesting in the 2017 Vidhan Sabha elections.

Pradeep Tamta is considered to be one of the senior party leaders from Uttarakhand and is a Rajya Sabha member. He was elected to the Assembly after creation of Uttarakhand but later also lost in 2007. Later, he was elected from the Almora parliamentary constituency in 2009 but later lost the election from this constituency in 2014.

The PCC president Pritam Singh is also the Chakrata MLA and has served twice as cabinet minister in the Uttarakhand Government. He is considered to be an influential leader of the Jaunsar-Bhawal region of the state, representing it five times in the Assembly.

The Congress candidate from Haridwar constituency,



Ambrish Kumar was first elected as an MLA from Haridwar on the Samajwadi Party ticket in 1996. Later he lost the assembly elections twice on the SP ticket in 2002 and 2007. He was a likely candidate from the Congress from here in the 2012 assembly elections but on failing to get a party ticket, he contested as an independent candidate without success. He was fielded by the Congress in 2017 but failed to win the election.



The party's candidate from Garhwal constituency- Manish Khanduri is known mainly as the son of BJP MP and former chief minister Bhuwan Chandra Khanduri. He recently joined the Congress party in the presence of its national president Rahul Gandhi in Dehradun. Before joining the Congress, little was known about Manish Khanduri as far as politics or public life is concerned. He has been active in the media industry for nearly two decades.

Modi, Shah, Union Ministers & others to campaign in U'khand

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Bharatiya Janata Party national president Amit Shah and a number of Union ministers along with state leaders of the party will be campaigning in Uttarakhand for BJP candidates in the Lok Sabha elections. This was revealed in the first list of star campaigners comprising 40 names released by the party.

Apart from Modi and Shah, the star campaigners of the BJP in Uttarakhand include Union Ministers Rajnath Singh, Arun Jaitley, Nitin Gadkari, Nirmala Sitharaman, Thaawar Chand Gehlot, JP Nadda, Smriti Irani, Uma Bharti and Rajya Vardhan Singh Rathore. The other star campaigners of the party include the party's state in-charge Shyam Jaju, MP Hema Malini, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Haryana chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar, Himachal Pradesh chief minister Jayram Thakur, Shaanawaz Hussain and MP Manoj Tiwari. From the state level, the star campaigners listed by the party include chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat, BJP

Apart from Modi and Shah, the star campaigners of the BJP in Uttarakhand include Union Ministers Rajnath Singh, Arun Jaitley, Nitin Gadkari, Nirmala Sitharaman, Thaawar Chand Gehlot, JP Nadda, Smriti Irani, Uma Bharti and Rajya Vardhan Singh Rathore

state president and Nainital-Udham Singh Nagar candidate Ajay Bhatt, Rajya Sabha MP Anil Baluni, former CMs and MPs Bhagat Singh Koshiyari, Bhuwan Chandra Khanduri and Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' along with cabinet ministers Prakash Pant, Madan Kaushik, Satpal Maharaj, Yashpal Arya, Harak Singh Rawat, Subodh Uniyal, Arvind Pandey, State ministers Dhan Singh Rawat, Rekha Arya, former chief minister Vijay Bahuguna and party's state office bearers Khajan Das, Naresh Bansal, Gajraj Singh Bisht and former MP Balraj Pasi.

Final day of nomination, BJP, Congress candidates to file nomination today

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Monday being the last day for filing of nominations in the Lok Sabha elections here, the five candidates of the Congress and three remaining candidates of the BJP will be filing their nominations today. The BJP candidates Tirath Singh Rawat from Garhwal and Mala Rajya Laxmi Shah from Tehri had filed their nominations earlier.

The BJP candidates from Nainital-Udham Singh Nagar, Haridwar and Almora-Pithoragarh constituencies will be filing their nominations today. Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat will be present during filing of nominations by candidates of Haridwar - Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' and Almora-Pithoragarh- Ajay Tamta while MP and former chief minister Bhagat Singh Koshiyari will be present during the filing of nomination for the Nainital-Udham Singh Nagar constituency by party candidate and BJP state president Ajay Bhatt.

The BJP State media in-charge Devendra Bhasin informed that party candidate and BJP State president Ajay

CHIEF MINISTER TRIVENDRA SINGH RAWAT WILL BE PRESENT DURING FILING OF NOMINATIONS BY CANDIDATES OF HARIDWAR

Bhatt will file his nomination from the Nainital constituency at Rudrapur on Monday. MP and former CM BS Koshiyari along with other senior party leaders are also slated to be present on the occasion. CM Trivendra Singh Rawat and other party leaders will be present as party candidate Nishank files nomination from Haridwar. The CM will also be present during filing of nomination by the Almora candidate Ajay Tamta. After filing of the nomination, a public gathering will be organised in the afternoon in Almora.

Meanwhile, all the five candidates of the Congress will also be filing their nominations today.



A shuttler in action during para-sports competition in Dehradun on Sunday

Pioneer photo

UKD announces candidates from 5 constituencies

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Uttarakhand Kranti Dal (UKD) announced its candidates from the five parliamentary constituencies here on Sunday. Expressing the need for the development of Uttarakhand, party president Diwakar Bhatt stated that the public should see and give a chance to the party that is responsible for the formation of the state.

He informed that the party is fielding Shanti Prasad Bhatt from the Garhwal constituency while DD Sharma will file nomination from Tehri, Surendra Kumar Upadhyay will file nomination from Haridwar, Vijay Pal will file nomination from Nainital-Udham Singh Nagar and KL Arya will file nomination from Almora-Pithoragarh constituency. Bhatt further informed that the party has also



formed five management committees for the campaign of the candidates in the five constituencies.

Addressing the media in the press conference Bhatt said, "The main issues related to our state Uttarakhand have not been considered seriously by successive state governments. Government schools are getting closed in the rural areas, poly-

technic and such other institutes are losing their value. Migration is another big problem of the state with once thriving villages with hundreds of residents in the past now swiftly deteriorating into ghost villages. These are some issues which should be taken up by our candidates contesting the election."

Referring to BJP and Congress, Bhatt said, "Both

the national parties have governed the state for last 20 years but even after that none is aware of the main issues of our land. I want to keep my point in front of the public that it's time to change the doctors who have been treating the state so far. Now it's time to give a chance to us as we have built a house (Uttarakhand) from scratch."

Probe ordered into jail 'party'

PNS ■ HARIDWAR

Following complaint by prison guards, a probe has been ordered by the inspector general (prisons) on the recent party carried out in the Haridwar prison. Some prisoners had allegedly indulged in liquor drinking and non-vegetarian foods in a party to celebrate Holi festival.

District prison Roshnabad has often been in limelight on account of 'perks' enjoyed by some of the prisoners, be it usage of mobile phone or video

making. In the year 2018, over 10 mobile phones were recovered from the prison. A prisoner had also made a video which went viral. Now recent- ly a party organised by gang leader Sunil Rathi has increased the troubles of the prison officials.

Some jail guards had complained to IG PVK Prasad of some prisoners violating the prison rules and merrymaking in a party during Holi festival. It is learnt that prisoners had arranged liquor and non-vegetarian food inside the prison.

BSP candidate served notice for violating MCoC

PNS ■ HARIDWAR

Assistant returning officer has issued a notice to BSP candidate from Haridwar constituency— Antariksh Saini regarding violation of model code of conduct while going for filing his nomination papers. The contestant has been asked to respond within three days stating the reason for his non-compliance to the model code of conduct.

BSP contestant Saini took his supporters in eight cars while going to file his nomination papers at collectorate

Roshnabad while he had taken the permission from the election commission for only five cars. After the report of the team ARO issued the notice to the candidate.

The supporters of Antriksh Saini had to reach district collectorate from his camp office located in Laksar. Saini had taken permission for five vehicles from the district election officer but when the surveillance team in-charge Rajiv Arya reached the site, he found three extra vehicles with party banners and flags pasted on Tempo Travellers

accompanying the candidate's motorcade. One vehicle had lot of promotional material of the political party. Confiscating all of the promotional material the team sent the report to ARO. Speaking to The Pioneer, Assistant Election Officer and SDM Sohan Singh said that for taking more than the permitted number of vehicles, a notice was issued to Saini. If he is unable to give satisfactory response within three days, action would be taken against him under the bylaws of election commission.

SP not to field candidate from Garhwal



PNS ■ DEHRADUN

As part of its electoral Alliance finalised with Bahujan Samaj Party earlier, the Samajwadi Party was to field its candidate from Garhwal while the BSP was to field its candidates from the remaining four constituencies. However, now the Samajwadi Party has decided that it will not field its candidate from the Garhwal constituency.

The SP state coordinator and former State president Satyanarayan Sachan said, "After consultations with senior leaders in the state, we have decided that we will not field our candidate from Garhwal constituency. Our party workers will mobilise the voters to cast their votes against the BJP. We have entered an alliance with the BSP and will give our full support to them."

Adding further in this he said, "As Garhwal is one of the prominent seats, we have decided to focus our efforts on ensuring that the BJP candidate is rejected by the voters. We have reached this decision after a detailed discussion among the party leaders."

It is pertinent to mention that SP had shortlisted the names of some contenders for its ticket from the Garhwal constituency. However, the party decided at the last moment to desist from contesting the parliamentary election in Uttarakhand.

Will not contest poll, will continue serving people, says Kothiyal



PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Ending speculation about contesting the election as an independent candidate from Garhwal constituency, former principal of Nehru Institute of Mountaineering, colonel (ret'd) Ajay Kothiyal announced that he will not be contesting the election this time. He will continue to work for social welfare through his initiatives involving the youth and locals of the state.

Addressing the media here on Sunday, Kothiyal said that apart from working for the reconstruction of Kedarnath post the 2013 disaster, he also initiated the Youth Foundation. In the past five years, thousands of youth were trained by the foundation to prepare them for recruitment in the armed forces. Training was also provided to girls aiming for recruitment in the armed forces or self-employment. He said, "The way for continuing my service to the society through politics was also open for me. During discussions with my friends and well-

wishers, it was unanimously suggested that I contest as an independent candidate from the Garhwal constituency. However, when I thought over it, I realised that I do not know politics. During my interaction with leaders of national political parties in recent days, it became clear that I cannot fit in the mould of the national political parties. However, I am sure that the work we are doing is going in the right direction and we will put further effort into it. I have three major areas of focus now- the energetic youth looking towards me with expectations, the women who played a major role in State formation and need to have their burden decreased and strengthening the capable ex-servicemen who reside in the remote villages in the mountains. I have decided that I will invest my powers in facilitating a better future for the youth, women and ex-servicemen of the State. Heeding my inner voice, I have decided not to contest the Lok Sabha election from Garhwal constituency," he added.

Women politicians advocate larger role for women



PNS ■ DEHRADUN

With most parties having fielded their candidates from all or some of the five parliamentary constituencies of Uttarakhand, out of the two national parties the Bharatiya Janata Party has fielded one woman candidate while the Congress has fielded all male candidates.

The Pioneer talked to the women members of political parties about their views on the apparently less preference being accorded to women as candidates in the parliamentary elections. A majority of women



politicians opined that both big and small political parties talk of women empowerment but do not follow up when it comes to when it comes to acting in support of their views. Further, the women too seem to take limited interest in this.

Congress Mahanagar chief and PCC spokesperson Kamlesh Raman said, "I agree with the fact that women are given less preference when it comes in giving a ticket to any women candidate interested in representing the party from any of the constituencies. I think women also need to grow in this field more so that



they are given preference. Also, the government should also reserve seats for women. If seats were reserved for women, only women would have been fielded by all parties from such a constituency. There is also a need to change the mentality regarding women political leaders, as now women are not behind men in any field."

Pradesh Congress Committee spokesperson Garima Dasauni said, "I think women are already burdened with so many things that even if they want to do something in this field they are stopped. Also no political party, public



or voters should think that women are not good enough to lead. There is nothing that we are not able to do. If a woman can manage her family properly she can do everything."

BJP Mahanagar chief Brijesh Gupta said, "We are very happy that Mala Rajya Laxmi Shah will represent the party in the election from Tehri. I think that women get the chance or not we form and put together pieces of everything. In a political party, we form force and bring every member together which is a more important job to do."

BJP women's wing office



bearer Praveen Sharma said, "I think that women should be given a chance to not only be members of the party but also to represent the party on the prominent seats. It is very important that women grow up and take an interest in this specific field."

Uttarakhand Kranti Dal (UKD) women wing member Rama Chauhan said, "Yes I believe that it is very important that women should be given a chance to be selected as candidates in elections. The ratio of women in politics has been less in comparison to men which needs to be changed."

Priyadarshini Scindia's name for Gwalior crops up

FIANS ■ GWALIOR

The Gwalior unit of Madhya Pradesh Congress has recommended the name of party General Secretary Jyotiraditya Scindia's wife Priyadarshini as the Lok Sabha candidate from the constituency. The Congress workers passed a resolution in this regard on Sunday.

A meeting of the Congress district unit, called on Sunday at party office to discuss the potential candidates, unanimously passed a resolution supporting Priyadarshini's candidature from the seat. Gwalior Congress chief Dr Devendra Sharma and rural unit chairman Mohan Singh Rathore have jointly sent the recommendation letter to party President Rahul Gandhi.

"People of Gwalior want Jyotiraditya to contest, but if

PEOPLE OF GWALIOR WANT JYOTIRADITYA TO CONTEST, BUT IF THAT COULD NOT BE POSSIBLE THEN PRIDARSHINI MUST BE THE CONGRESS CANDIDATE FROM THE CONSTITUENCY

that could not be possible then Pridarshini must be the Congress candidate from the constituency," state minister Imarati Devi said.

Earlier, ministers in the Kamal Nath government had proposed Priyadarshini's name as party candidate for the seat.

Metabolic Conclave in Dubai Hyperthyroidism mgmt in pregnancy stressed

PNS ■ BRAHMAMAPUR

The Global Cardio Diabetes Academy, Dubai, UAE organised a Metabolic Conclave 2019 on this year's theme "Update on Thyroid Disorders".

Being invited, Brahmampur endocrinologist Dr Sunil Kumar Kota spoke on management of hyperthyroidism in pregnancy and mentioned that around 1 in 2,000 pregnant women suffer from hyperthyroidism (excess thyroid hormone levels in blood).

Dr Kota explaining about the usage pattern, side effects and monitoring of patients to the audience said if the disease is not treated adequately it can give rise to complications like miscarriage, hypertension, heart failure, fetal growth restriction, preterm delivery and increased perinatal mortality.

In the meeting, about 40 expert endocrinologists from various parts of globe and around 250 doctors from south Asia and Middle East participated in the conference.

BJP workers burn effigies of KV, Sangita

PNS ■ SONEPUR

The announcement of tickets by the BJP has led to discontent among a section of its workers who burnt effigies of former MP Sangita Singh Deo and her husband and BJP Legislature Party Leader KV Singh Deo. After the party preferred a turncoat, Ashok Pujari, who recently came from the Congress to the BJP and who is uncle of BJD candidate Niranjan Pujari for the Sonepur Assembly seat, and Raghunath Jagdala, an officer of the Merchant Navy,

who also came to BJP 20 days ago for the Birmaharajpur Seat, supporters of BJP leaders Baldev Bedbadi and Anand Barik, who were seeking tickets for the two seats, respectively, held an emergency meeting and charged the party high command for ignoring dedicated workers and giving preference to relatives of rival candidates.

More than 450 workers burnt effigies of Singh Deo couple at Sonepur bus stand on Sunday, alleging that KV had taken over Rs 2 crore from opposition parties.

If BJP wins, Modi will be PM forever: Kejriwal

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday claimed that if the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) forms the next Government at the Centre, Narendra Modi will become Prime Minister of the country forever as there will be no election after the 2019 polls.

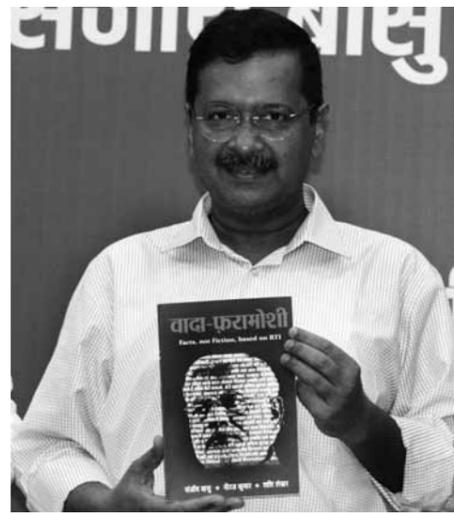
Virtually seeking to stoke fears of an impending end of democracy in the country, Kejriwal alleged that the Modi Government is "following" German dictator "Adolf Hitler's tactics" to run the country.

While making the allegations, Kejriwal appealed to the people to ensure the defeat of the saffron party. "Today, every patriot should have only one motive to stop the Modi government from coming back to power again at any cost... If they (BJP) come to power in 2019, he (Modi) will be the prime minister forever," he said. If Modi becomes the prime minister again there will be no election in the country, warned Kejriwal.

He was speaking at a function to unveil a book "Vada Faramoshi", a compilation of replies under the Right to Information Act to queries on the Central government's works. The book was written by Neeraj Kumar, Sanjoy Basu and Shashi Shekhar.

The chief minister made the claim referring to the recent incident involving a "brutal" attack on the members of

LOK SABHA ELECTIONS



Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal launches a book titled 'Vada Faramoshi', written by Neeraj Kumar, Sanjoy Basu and Shashi Shekhar, at Constitution Club in New Delhi on Sunday

Muslim family in Gurgaon, and said the people from minority community were being "beaten up, harassed and murdered today without any fault".

"I am also a Hindu and have read Ramayana, Bhagwat Gita and Hanuman Chalisa but did not find it written anywhere that beat people by entering in their houses. The Hindu religion does not teach

us this," he said.

Democracy means discussing the work done by the Government, he said, adding that inciting Hindu and Muslim and discussing it is not a democracy.

"Today, anyone who questions the Modi government is labelled an 'anti-national'," he added. The seven Lok Sabha seats in Delhi will go to polls on May 12.

AAP to fight poll in UP, Bihar, fields three candidates from each State

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party will contest the Lok Sabha polls in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, and has fielded three candidates in each of the States, senior leader Sanjay Singh said on Sunday.

In Uttar Pradesh, the AAP has fielded Yogesh Dahiya from Saharanpur, Satish Chandra Sharma from Aligarh and Shweta Sharma from Gautam Budh Nagar for the polls, Singh said in a tweet.

The party is likely to contest the Lok Sabha polls from 25 seats in Uttar Pradesh. For rest of the seats, the process to select candidates is in the final stage, Singh said.

In Bihar, Aleemuddin Ansari has been fielded from Kishanganj, Raghunath Kumar from Sitamarhi and Satyendra Kumar from Bhagalpur, he said in another tweet.

"The Political Affairs Committee (PAC) of AAP has given its approval for three names in Uttar Pradesh. Yogesh Dahiya from Saharanpur, Prof Shweta Sharma from Gautam Buddha Nagar and Satish Chand Sharma from Aligarh will be AAP's candidates," Singh said.

While Saharanpur and Gautam Buddha Nagar will vote on April 11 in the first of the seven-phase general elections, Aligarh will go to the polls on April 18. While Kishanganj and Bhagalpur will vote in the second phase on April 18, Sitamarhi vote in the fifth phase on May 6.

Electioneering gathers momentum in Uttarakhand

FIANS ■ DEHRADUN

With the BJP and Congress announcing their candidates for the Lok Sabha polls in Uttarakhand, electioneering on Sunday picked up momentum. The process of filing nomination papers ends on Monday.

Both the parties placed orders for election materials that would be distributed to candidates in a day or two.

So far, only two candidates of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) -- Maharani Rajyalakshmi Shah (Tehri) and Tirath Singh Rawat (Pauri) -- have filed their nomination papers.

Its other three candidates, Ajay Bhatt from Nainital, Ajay Tamta from Almora and Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank from Haridwar, will do so on Monday.

The party has prepared a list of 40 star campaigners which includes Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP President Amit Shah and Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat. "Roadshows, election rallies and other campaigns have started. We have already defeated the Congress on this," claimed a BJP leader.

Taking a lead over the Congress, candidates from the BJP started campaigning from their areas after their candidature was announced on Thursday.

Former Chief Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank

THE PARTY HAS PREPARED A LIST OF 40 STAR CAMPAIGNERS WHICH INCLUDES PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI, BJP PRESIDENT AMIT SHAH AND CHIEF MINISTER TRIVENDRA SINGH RAWAT

and BJP candidate from Pauri Tirath Singh Rawat had organised a series of road shows since Friday. Rawat filed his nomination on Friday.

On Saturday, most Congress candidates reached their constituencies.

Manish Khanduri started his campaign on social media even before his name was officially announced on Saturday night.

"All our candidates are now busy preparing for the elections. We have started campaigning," said Vijay Sarswat, a state party spokesman.

Saraswat said the party had invited Congress President Rahul Gandhi and General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi to campaign in the state.

Liquor shops warned over selling on basis of coupons

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Excise department has issued a warning to liquor vend owners across the city to desist from selling liquor in bulk on the basis of a coupon or token. The warning has been issued in the wake of apprehensions that political parties may buy liquor in large quantity by dubious means and then distribute the same among voters to influence them.

Delhites will vote to elect their seven representatives to the Lower House of the Parliament on May 12. "A circular directing liquor shops across the national capital to strictly follow opening and closing time of their establishments and should regulate liquor sales and the details of the day proceeds should be stored in their computers," an



official said. According to the official, any violation of the order will be viewed seriously and strict action taken against liquor outlet as per the Delhi Excise Act, 2009 and the Delhi Excise Rules 2010. "Liquor outlets have

also been asked to maintain up to date brand-wise stock register. Also, no sale will be done on the basis of coupon or token," he said. The circular stated in view of the Lok Sabha polls, the licensee such as L-6 (liquor shops), L-7 (retail vend of Indian liquor in private sector), L-10 (retail vend of Indian liquor to holders of license shopping malls and shopping complex at airport).

The Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) office had on March 19 said a total number of 257 FIRs were registered in the Excise Act and 263 persons were arrested in the Act.

"Till date, two litre, 257 bottles, 33,385 quarters of Indian Made Foreign Liquor and 223 bottles, 131 half, 64,908 quarters of country liquor and 412 bottles of beer were seized," the CEO office said in its statement.

NAVEEN HOLDS FIRST POLL CAMPAIGN RALLY 'BJD to sweep all 21 Lok Sabha seats'

Party to play key role in making Central Govt: Patnaik



PNS ■ NAYAGARH

Chief Minister and Biju Janata Dal (BJD) supremo Naveen Patnaik is confident that his party will sweep the Lok Sabha polls in the State by winning all 21 seats.

"The BJD will win 21 Lok Sabha seats in the upcoming elections and there will be no place for other political parties in the State," asserted Patnaik during his first election campaign rally in Nayagarh district on Sunday.

He said the BJD would have a "key role" in formation of the next Government at the Centre as no national party would get a majority.

Hitting out at the BJP for the Centre's negligence and step-motherly attitude towards Odisha over several key issues,

Patnaik alleged that the Centre has ignored the State's interest in the Mahanadi water sharing dispute and in case of the Andhra Pradesh Polavaram irrigation project.

"The Centre supported Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh in the Polavaram and Mahanadi cases, respectively, sidelining the interests of Odisha," said he, adding that Odisha has also remained neglected by the Centre in the banking and telecommunication sectors.

Patnaik remarked that while heads of political parties contend everything when coming to power, the 4.5 crore people of Odisha hold the remote control of the State's administration and are the high command in the State.

He also targeted the Centre

on the Special Category State issue. "We have been fighting for Special State Category to Odisha. It was promised by the BJP during the 2014 elections. After forming Government at the Centre, the party forgot it. Is not it the Centre's negligence?" he asked.

Patnaik claimed that the BJD has given importance to women in distribution of tickets for the upcoming polls. "I have nominated Pramila Bisoi from Mission Shakti as the candidature for Aska Lok Sabha seat," he said, asking the gathering with his style "Apana Mane Khushi ta?...Mu bi bahut khushi."

The Biju Janata Dal is the only party in India that has given 33% reservation to women for Lok Sabha polls," he pointed out.

J'Khand: Cong, JMM, JVM-P announce seat sharing, RJD unhappy

FIANS ■ RANCHI

The Congress, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) and the Jharkhand Vikas Morcha-Prajatantrik (JVM-P) on Sunday announced an alliance in the state for the Lok Sabha battle but the RJD boycotted the deal after it was given only one seat to contest.

JMM chief Shibu Soren and Executive President Hemant Soren, state Congress President Ajay Kumar and JVM-P President Babul Marandi were present at a joint press conference but no one from the RJD attended it.

"We have agreed to fight the elections in an alliance," said Shibu Soren.

Giving details, Ajay Kumar said the Congress, JMM, JVM-P and RJD will fight on seven, four, two and one Lok Sabha seats respectively.

The Congress will contest from Ranchi, Lohardaga, Chatra, Hazaribagh, Koderma, Chaibsa and Khuti seats, JMM from Jamshepur, Giridih, Rajmahal and Dumka and JVM-P from Godda and Koderma seats. Palamau seat has been left for the RJD.

But in the Assembly elections, the opposition parties will contest under leadership of JMM leader Hemant Soren. JMM will fight most Assembly seats.

Hemant Soren said: "The grand alliance is not only for Lok Sabha but will continue in

THE CONGRESS WILL CONTEST FROM RANCHI, LOHARDAGA, CHATRA, HAZARIBAGH, KODERMA, CHAIBSA AND KHUTI SEATS, JMM FROM JAMSHEDPUR, GIRIDIH, RAJMAHAL AND DUMKA AND JVM-P FROM GODDA AND KODERMA SEATS. PALAMAU SEAT HAS BEEN LEFT FOR THE RJD

the Assembly elections too. While forming the alliance we have decided to send a person belonging to the Muslim community to the Rajya Sabha in 2020."

The alliance also decided to suspend party leaders who try to fight the Lok Sabha polls as rebel candidate from any seat.

Asked about the RJD's unhappiness over the seat sharing, Ajay Kumar said the party had been given Palamau seat. "Talks are on to convince RJD to be part of the alliance."

In a separate press conference, RJD leader Sanjay Yadav said that his party will contest on both Palamau and Chatra seats "come what may".

Mahagathbandhan is 'Mahamilavat': Jayant



PNS ■ JAMSHEDPUR

Union Minister of State for Civil Aviation, Jayant Sinha, on Sunday said that the Union Government has opened doors of opportunity in Jharkhand and people will give a befitting reply to opposition's divisive policies in the Lok Sabha election.

He was addressing BJP workers at the party's 'Vijay Sankalp' programme at Michael John auditorium in Bistupur. Sinha said the opposition parties are power mongers and they have united against Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Calling the Mahagathbandhan as 'Mahamilavat', Sinha said, "The opposition parties have entered an alliance out of fear of Modi, but the people of the country will give them a befitting reply."

He also motivated the workers to get ready for next election. He deliberated minutely on issues pertaining

to the strengthening of the booth committees.

Sinha highlighted development projects, undertaken by the Central Government, in Jharkhand, including the multi-purpose Konar dam in his home district Hazaribagh. He claimed that the India's first Prime Minister Pt Jawaharlal Nehru had visited Hazaribagh 64 years ago for the multi-purpose project, but it was only after Modi came to power that the dam saw the light of the day.

He added that the demand for an airport in Dalbhumgarh remained unfulfilled for decades but the Modi Government recently laid its foundation. "The new airport will also generate employment. More and more people will benefit from it," he Sinha said.

He hailed the relentless effort of local BJP MP Bidyut Baran Mahato, who will contest the election from

Jamshedpur parliamentary seat for the second term. Sinha said the NDA has opened bank accounts for poor people, constructed toilets, and distributed LPG gas connections, all in a span of 60 months.

He said that the BJP workers are determined to bring a complete majority in the Centre again under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and asked the party members to inform the voters that if Congress comes to power than the country would witness anarchy like situation.

Sinha also motivated the workers to get ready for polling. He deliberated minutely on issues pertaining to the strengthening of the booth committees.

Jharkhand is set for a four-phase Lok Sabha election for 14 constituencies on April 29, May 6, 12 and 19.

Social media on tight EC leash during LS polls

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

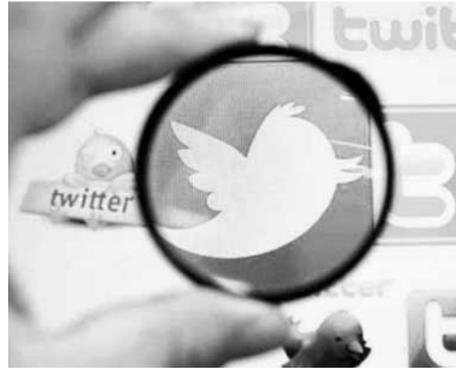
As the countdown to the 2019 general elections begin, the Election Commission (EC) has directed chief electoral officers of all States and Union Territories (UTs) to appoint nodal officer to check misuse of social media and intimate it by March 25. Besides, the Commission has also appointed Dilip K Verma Secretary, Sayyid Rechashmi Deputy Director Arun Kumar Palani, Deputy Director as nodal officers to look into misuse of social media during polls. Political parties use social media platforms as well as friendly websites to trumpet their 'achievements' while discrediting their rivals by spreading canards and untruths during polls.

In its communiqués to the States and Union Territories, the EC also stated that cases of

violation of Model Code of Conduct on social media pertaining to the concerned States and UTs will immediately be intimated to the grievance officer of the concerned social media platforms.

The States and UTs will also intimate to the Commission's grievance officer of violations of MCC/instructions issued by the Commission, who will examine the matter instantly. After the appraisal of Director General (Media) or at appropriate level in the Commission, it will write to the grievance officer to take up the action.

The EC has decided that in case any violation of model code of conduct or any other Commission's instructions or court's order related to poll matters is observed on social media platform, the same shall be forwarded to the grievance officers appointed by the



social media platforms viz Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and WhatsApp. In its communiqués to States and UTs, the EC said that the provisions of the Model Code of Conduct and related instructions of the Commission issued from time

to time shall also apply to the content being posted on the internet including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube by candidates and political parties.

Social media platforms and the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI)

- Political parties use social media platforms as well as friendly websites to trumpet their 'achievements' while discrediting their rivals by spreading canards and untruths during polls
- The Election Commission (EC) has directed chief electoral officers of all States and Union Territories (UTs) to appoint nodal officer to check misuse of social media and intimate it by March 25
- The poll panel has also appointed Dilip K Verma Secretary, Sayyid Rechashmi Deputy Director Arun Kumar Palani, Deputy Director as nodal officers to look into misuse of social media during polls
- Social media platforms and the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) early this week presented a 'Voluntary Code of Ethics for the General Election 2019' to the EC
- The platforms and the Commission have developed a notification mechanism by which the electoral body can notify them of potential violations under Section 126 of the Representation of the People Act, and on other matters

early this week presented a 'Voluntary Code of Ethics for the General Election 2019' to the EC. 'This code will become effective and will enter into force on March 20, 2019,' they said in a statement, adding that it would remain operational

during the election. The code's purpose is to identify measures that the platforms can take to increase confidence in the electoral process. It is also to safeguard against misuse that vitiates the 'free and fair character' of the Lok Sabha polls.

According to the code, the platforms will endeavour to, 'where appropriate and keeping in mind the principle of freedom of expression,' deploy appropriate policies and processes to facilitate access to information on electoral matters. Campaigns will be organised to create awareness, including on electoral laws and other instructions from the Election Commission of India (EC).

The platforms and the Commission have developed a notification mechanism by which the electoral body can notify them of potential violations under Section 126 of the Representation of the People Act, and on other matters.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched his #MainBhiChowkidar campaign on Twitter, to counter the Congress' narrative of #ChowkidarChorHai'. The

Congress, on the other hand, has taken to social media to constantly attack the Central Government for lack of jobs, the alleged scam in the Rafale deal, demonetisation, GST implementation and farmers' distress.

The #ChowkidarChorHai campaign was launched by the Congress to attack Modi and the Centre over Rafale deal.

During the five States Assembly elections last year the dissemination of fake information through social media was reportedly a major influencing factor. The political parties had formed thousands of WhatsApp groups ahead of the polls. Though WhatsApp has now limited the number of forwards by an individual user to five, there is still scope for its misuse. Besides social media platforms, motivated websites can play ample mischief and mislead the electorate.

EC orders 26L bottles of indelible ink

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, the Election Commission (EC) has ordered 26 lakh indelible ink bottles worth ₹33 crore. The seven-phase election will begin on April 11 and conclude on May 19. In the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the poll panel had bought 21.5 lakh phials, 4.5 lakh less than this year. The semi-permanent ink is applied to the forefinger of electors to prevent them from voting more than once under rules mandated by the EC. The indelible ink was formulated as a deterrent against voting twice. The stain lasts several days before starting to fade.

Mysore Paints and Varnish Ltd, a Government of Karnataka undertaking, is the only authorised manufacturer of indelible ink for the EC. Managing Director, Mysore Paints, Chandrashekar Doddamani said that the company has received an order for 26 lakh phials of 10cc each from the EC. 'The expected turnover is approximately ₹33



crore," he said.

The order, Doddamani said, is higher than the last general elections by 4.5 lakh phials. In this election, nearly 90 crore people are eligible to cast their votes for which the EC will set up nearly 10 lakh polling stations across the country.

In 1962, the Election Commission, in collaboration

with the Law Ministry, National Physical Laboratory and National Research Development Corporation, had made an agreement with Mysore Paints for supply of indelible ink for Lok Sabha and Assembly elections. Since then, it has been supplying the ink for elections in India.

A bottle of indelible ink

contains 10 cubic centimetres (cc). As per modern measurement methods, one cubic centimetre is equivalent to one milli litre. Mysore Paints exports indelible ink to more than 30 countries across the globe.

Soon after the note ban, the company was asked to provide indelible ink to banks to mark

Mysore Paints and Varnish Ltd, a Govt of Karnataka undertaking, is the only authorised manufacturer of indelible ink for the EC. Managing Director, Mysore Paints, said that the company has received an order for 26 lakh phials of 10cc each from the poll panel

customers exchanging defunct currency notes to check suspicious deposits. Grappling with unending queues and frayed tempers in banks and to check operation of syndicates after the note ban, the government had introduced the system of marking customers exchanging defunct currency notes with indelible ink.

Centre enhances VIP cover of UP Dy CMs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has sanctioned an upgraded and fresh VIP security cover to the two Deputy Chief Ministers of the BJP-led Government in Uttar Pradesh in view of possible threats to them during the ongoing Lok Sabha polls, officials said.

They said while the existing central paramilitary commandos contingent of Deputy CM Keshav Prasad Maurya has been enhanced to an all-India level, another Deputy CM of the State, Dinesh Sharma, has been accorded a similar paraphernalia, afresh.

While Maurya already had a 'Y+' category cover of the CRPF during his movement in UP, he will now have the sanctioned 3-4 armed commandos for security across the country. Sharma has been given the same category of VIP security cover on an all-India basis, they said.



The 'Y+' cover has about 3-4 commandos who are armed with sophisticated rifles like AK-47s and possess mobile armour gadgets.

The two UP politicians are expected to traverse the length and breadth of the country during the Lok Sabha polls, that will see its first polling day on April 11, and hence the cover has been sanctioned, they said.

A report prepared by central security agencies formed the basis of this security



upgrade for the two, they said. The two were appointed Deputy CMs of the Uttar Pradesh in 2017 when BJP came to power and Yogi Adityanath was made the CM.

The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) has a dedicated VIP security wing and it guards as many as 76 personalities in the country including BJP president Amit Shah.

The force has four battalions, comprising over 4,000 personnel, for this task.

Taxmen told to step up vigilance to curb illegal flow of currency, liquor

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) has asked its field officers to step up vigilance in order to check illegal movement of currency, liquor and gold in the run up to general elections beginning April 11.

It has also asked the tax officers to share intelligence and seizure information with other Government agencies on real-time basis. The CBIC's instructions follow a multi-departmental meeting called by the Election Commission earlier in the month on sharing of intelligence with a view to checking illegal activities.

In its instructions, the CBIC said, "All out efforts should be made to detect and seize illicit currency, liquor, gold, FICN (Fake Indian Currency Note), NDPS (Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances), and other contraband items. Strict vigil should be maintained on domestic as well as cross border movement of vehicles, trains, and private chartered

In its instructions, the CBIC said, "All out efforts should be made to detect and seize illicit currency, liquor, gold, FICN (Fake Indian Currency Note), NDPS (Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances), and other contraband items. Strict vigil should be maintained on domestic as well as cross border movement of vehicles, trains, and private chartered flights as well as commercial flights."

General elections for the 17th Lok Sabha will be held in seven phases beginning April 11 and will continue till May 19. Counting of votes will take place on May 23.

It said the field formations and officers should be duly sensitised to step up the preventive vigilance mechanism to rule out illicit movement of currency and commodities and conduct effective checking and surveillance during the election period to curb illegal activities.

"Intelligence units under your jurisdiction may be directed to gather information and develop intelligence to effectively accomplish this task. Mobile squads and special teams may be constituted to

target sensitive areas, commodities and suspicious entities," the CBIC said, adding that information should be shared with the board on a daily basis. It said coordinated efforts on the part of different government agencies is required and hence it is imperative that intelligence and detection/seizure information be shared with other agencies on a real-time basis. Close coordination has to be maintained with election authorities as well, it added.

The EC in its multi-departmental meeting had underlined the need for greater coordination among different Government agencies to keep a tab on expenditure incurred by candidates and political parties.

BJP announces names of nine more Lok Sabha candidates

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Sunday released a list of its nine more Lok Sabha election candidates, taking the total number of names announced by it to 306. Six candidates are for Chhattisgarh and one each for Meghalaya, Maharashtra and Telangana. The party had earlier announced that none of its nine sitting Lok Sabha members from Chhattisgarh will be fielded in the polls, a move aimed at any perceived anti-incumbency they may have after the saffron party suffered a big defeat to the Congress in the assembly polls.

Putting to rest speculation on whether former Chhattisgarh chief minister Raman Singh will be fielded from his home constituency Rajnandgaon or not, the BJP named Santosh Pandey its candidate from the seat.

It has fielded Jyoti Nand Dubey from Korba, Arun Saw from Bilaspur, Vijay Baghel from Durg and Sunil Soni from Raipur in the State.

CPI fields Kanhaiya from Begusarai

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former JNU students' union leader Kanhaiya Kumar will contest from Begusarai Lok Sabha seat in Bihar as the CPI nominee. Begusarai has been Left stronghold for decades, but the RJD-led Opposition alliance refused to accommodate CPI in the mahagathbandhan.

"Kanhaiya Kumar will be our candidate from Begusarai seat. CPI (ML) has pledged their support to us too," senior CPI leader D Raja said. Candidates for two more seats are yet to be finalized by the central leadership, he added.

As part of the seat-sharing pact of the 'mahagathbandhan', the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation (CPI-ML), the biggest Left party in Bihar, got one seat from the Rashtriya Janata Dal's (RJD) share of 20.

In Begusarai, Kumar will be pitted against the BJP's Giriraj Singh.

An influential upper caste Bhumihar leader, the Union minister has been shifted from his Nawada seat. The mahagathbandhan is yet to announce its candidate, but there is speculation that the



JNU Students Union former president Kanhaiya Kumar addresses a Press conference ahead of Lok Sabha Election 2019 in Patna on Sunday

RJD will repeat Tanveer Hasan as its nominee.

The presence of Kanhaiya will give nightmare to Giriraj Singh who would have to ensure that firebrand student leader, who has been visiting

this constituency for the last one year, does not cut into the Bhumihar vote bank. Both Kanhaiya and Giriraj belong to the same Bhumihar caste.

Kumar came into lime-light after the 2016 Jawaharlal

Nehru University sedition controversy.

The student leader, accused of raising anti-India slogans on the varsity campus with nine others, has been charged with sedition by the Delhi Police.

India cut TB deaths among HIV+ people by 84% ahead of target

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India achieved 84 per cent reduction in tuberculosis (TB) deaths among people living with HIV by 2017 — three years ahead of the target, said a report by The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS).

A report released last week showed that India is among the five low or middle-income countries — Eritrea (83 per cent), Djibouti (78 per cent), Malawi (78 per cent) and Togo (75 per cent) — that achieved or exceeded the target of a 75 per cent reduction in TB deaths among people living with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), by 2017, three years ahead of the 2020 target.

According to the World Health Organisation, globally, TB deaths among people living with HIV have fallen by 42 per cent since 2010, from 5,20,000 down to 3,00,000 in 2017.

"TB should be a disease of the past. It has been treatable and preventable for decades. Years of neglecting the rights of the world's poor to basic health care, food and shelter have let TB take hold and allowed resistance to build," Michel Sidibe, Executive Director of UNAIDS, said in a statement.

TB is the top infectious killer worldwide, claiming around 4,400 lives a day.

It also remains the leading cause of death among people living with HIV, causing one in three AIDS-related deaths. In



According to the World Health Organisation, globally, TB deaths among people living with HIV have fallen by 42 per cent since 2010, from 5,20,000 down to 3,00,000 in 2017

2017, 1.6 million people died from TB, including around three lakh people living with HIV.

"People living with HIV are especially at risk. There is still a chance for many countries to meet the target, but we have to act now it's time to end TB and AIDS," Sidibe said.

The report also showed that between 2010 and 2017, in around 40 countries the number of TB deaths among people living with HIV rose. Integrating TB and HIV

services, using community-based approaches to find, diagnose and treat the missing cases can help countries reduce the death rates, the UN health body suggested.

Meanwhile, Union Health Secretary of India, Preeti Sudan at an event here stressed on the importance of more sensitive and responsive doctors, paramedics, frontline health workers and community partners, while dealing with TB patients.

According to the Ministry, India is now closest ever to covering all TB cases with 21.5 lakh new TB patients notified in 2018. "With the aim of universal access to free diagnostics and treatment services, path breaking policy changes have been introduced; universal

drug susceptibility testing has been rolled out and shorter and newer treatment regimen has been expanded countrywide.

"India is moving towards an injection free regimen. Private sector engagement has been elevated as one of the highest priorities with strengthened regulatory measures, collaborative incentives and scale up of successful Patient Provider Support Agency (PPSA) interventions which led to a 35% increase in TB notification from the private sector. The Nikshay Poshan Yojana has benefited 15 lakh TB patients for nutrition support with Rs. 240 crore disbursed as DBT since April 2018," said the Ministry in a statement.

BJP-SHIV SENA LAUNCHES JOINT CAMPAIGN

It is not 56-party grand alliance but a 56-inch chest that is needed to govern country: Maha CM Devendra Fadnavis



Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and Shiv Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray during a rally in Kolhapur on Sunday

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Ridiculing the Opposition "Mahaghatbandhan" for being a 56-party grand alliance, Maharashtra chief minister Devendra Fadnavis said on Sunday that "it is not a 56-party grand alliance but a 56-inch chest that is needed to govern the country".

Launching a joint campaign of the BJP-Shiv Sena alliance along with Sena president Uddhav Thackeray at a large public rally at Kolhapur in western Maharashtra, Fadnavis said, "They (the Opposition) say that they are an alliance of 56 parties. I would like to know from them how of the 56 parties are registered entities. Are they just parties picked up from the streets?...I would like to tell them what is needed to govern the country is not 56

party grand alliance, but a 56 inch chest that we have with us".

Singling out NCP chief Sharad Pawar and the Congress for criticism, Fadnavis said, "The Opposition is not getting candidates to field in the Lok Sabha polls. They are changing the candidates every day. Their captain (Sharad Pawar) has withdrawn from Madha constituency. Here is the captain who wanted to open the innings but has become a 12th man and a non-playing captain. As a result, the people have made up their mind to support the BJP-Sena alliance in Maharashtra and ensure the return of the Narendra Modi-led NDA at the Centre".

"Ours is not an alliance formed merely grab power but an alliance that is formed on the basis of ideology. It is not for becoming either a Chief

Minister or a Prime Minister. BJP and Shiv Sena are ideologically aligned parties. We are proud that we are Hindutvadi parties. Our Hindutva is not a narrow ideology. Our Hindutva transcends all barriers region, language etc. Ours is an alliance that takes along all people who love this country", the Chief Minister said.

Maintaining that the BJP-Sena alliance was "nationalist" at heart, Fadnavis alluded to the presence of RPI (A) in the saffron alliance-led "Maha Yuti" and said: "Ours is a combination of Shiv Shakti and Bhim Shakti. We have taken a plunge into electoral battle with nationalistic fervour".

Fadnavis, who listed out the achievements of the Narendra Modi government and the saffron alliance government led by him in the state,

It is not for becoming either a Chief Minister or a Prime Minister. BJP and Shiv Sena are ideologically aligned parties. We are proud that we are Hindutvadi parties. Our Hindutva is not a narrow ideology. Our Hindutva transcends all barriers region, language etc. Ours is an alliance that takes along all people who love this country
DEVENDRA FADNAVIS

said, "You (Congress-NCP alliance) bring your report of your government for 15 years and we will show our report

card of governance in the state for four and a half years. You will get to see that we have accomplished during the last four and a half years more than what you could do during year 15-year rule".

Hitting out at the Congress and NCP for spreading "misinformation" during the 2014 Lok Sabha and Assembly poll campaign that the leaders from Vidharbha would mete out a step-motherly treatment to western Maharashtra, Fadnavis said, "The Modi Government has taken more decisions favouring sugar-rich western Maharashtra than the previous UPA government. In the process, we the leaders from Vidarbha have disproved that we harm the interests of western Maharashtra. Development statistics prove that campaign carried out by

the Congress-NCP alliance was false one".

Slamming the Opposition parties for demanding proof of casualties in the IAF's air strikes on terror camps in Pakistan, Fadnavis said: "The Opposition parties have no concern for our defence forces. They have concern for Pakistan.... Our IAF diminished the terror camps in Pakistan. Unlike in the past, it is our political leadership at the Centre that gave a go-ahead to our defence forces to carry out air attack on the terror camps in Pakistan".

Coming down heavily on NCP President Sharad Pawar for wanting to remain in power, Thackeray said: "In neighbouring Pakistan, cricketer Imran Khan became the Prime Minister but here PM-aspirant became the ICC chief. He just wants to cling to power".

Mamata's nephew attacks BJP for 'vendetta politics'

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Tirnamool Congress MP Abhishek Banerjee on Sunday hit strongly back at the BJP Government for maligning his name by falsely implicating his wife in an alleged gold smuggling case at Netaji Subhas International Airport in Kolkata.

"There is a false and fabricated charge being brought against my wife implicating her in a gold smuggling case he said. "I must clarify that this is out and out false. Those who fail to take me on politically are trying to implicate my family members, which is a mean way of doing politics," Banerjee said who is also the nephew of Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said asking "is this being done because I am the only person to have filed a suit against BJP president Amit Shah?"

Wondering as to why the FIR in the stated case was filed about a week after the incident allegedly took place he challenged the "customs authorities to produce a single CCTV footage to prove their charges. If they can prove it I will quit politics. Let alone 2 kg of gold being smuggled by my



wife, let them show even 2 gram that costs Rs 7,000 in the market I will leave politics." Banerjee said his wife had gone to Bangkok from where she originally belonged "for medical treatment." He said, "subsequently I will present all the related documents before the authorities and the court stating how my wife had gone to Bangkok to address a medical condition."

Questioning why the authorities who had allegedly intercepted Banerjee's wife with 2 kgs of gold failed to confiscate the precious article inside the airport premises he dismissed charges that the State Police had intervened in the affair to secure his wife's release.

Apart from serving libel notices to certain sections of

the tele media Banerjee had also filed a police complaint stating how his wife was harassed by the customs authorities at the airport while she was returning from Bangkok.

Had his wife been carrying unaccounted gold and had the State police interfered in the matter then "why the CISF under whose jurisdiction the area falls was not called to act," he said.

Attacking the Centre for making issues personal he said "those who are calling themselves as chowkidars are themselves harassing the common people," adding it was beneath his and his family's dignity to make personal attacks on fellow politicians.

"It is not our way of doing politics or else we could easily have asked how the son of Amit Shah could convert his resources worth Rs 50,000 to Rs 50 crore in a year's time."

Among various persons the Banerjees have served libel notice to CPI(M) central committee member Sujan Chakrabarty who said he will not withdraw his tweet and dared Banerjee to file a libel suit against him.

Jagan a ganja plant in Tulsi garden, says Chandrababu

IAN S ■ KADAPA (ANDHRA PRADESH)



Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister and TDP president N Chandrababu Naidu addresses a rally ahead of Lok Sabha elections 2019 in Kadapa on Sunday

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Sunday termed YSR Congress Party chief YS Jaganmohan Reddy a "ganja plant", as the war of words during campaigning by major contenders for next month's Assembly elections intensified.

Campaigning in Jaganmohan Reddy's home district of Kadapa, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) President said the Kadapa district which gave birth to great personalities like Annamayya, Veera Brahmendra Swamy and Yogi Vemana was like a Tulsi garden.

"In this Tulsi garden, a ganja plant (cannabis) has also grown. He is Jaganmohan Reddy," said Naidu, while addressing an election rally at Budvel.

Naidu, who had earlier described Jagan, as the leader is popularly known, as the "brand ambassador of crimes", alleged that the YSRCP President was the only leader in the country who had 31 criminal cases against him.

Terming Jagan as the only problem of the state, the TDP chief urged people to ensure that YSRCP was wiped out in the polls.

Naidu wiped out that Jagan was threatening violence. "People should be alert because those who killed their own uncle can do anything," said the TDP leader, referring to the recent murder of Jagan's uncle YS Vivekananda Reddy.

The Chief Minister said the murder case had more twists than a detective novel and alleged that Jagan was trying to use Vivekananda Reddy's murder for political mileage.

Elections to the 175-member Andhra Assembly and all 25 Lok Sabha constituencies are scheduled on April 11.



'PRIYANKA DOESN'T KNOW MEANING OF CHOWKIDAR'

Muzaffarnagar: Newly-appointed BJP vice-president Uma Bharti on Sunday hit out Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra for the latter's remarks that 'chowkidars' (watchmen) of the saffron party were working only for the rich people. Bharti said Vadra did not know the meaning of 'chowkidar', saying that watchmen work in villages for the security of the poor. Earlier in the day, Congress general secretary Vadra, who is also the incharge of east Uttar Pradesh, took a swipe at the BJP leaders, saying these "chowkidars" (watchmen) were only working for the rich and not bothered about the poor. Launching the BJP's campaign in Muzaffarnagar constituency, Bharti appealed to the people to support sitting MP Sanjeev Balyan.



GRAND ALLIANCE HAS REACHED 'EXPIRY DATE': NAQVI

Rampur: Taking a swipe at the opposition grand alliance, senior BJP leader Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi Sunday said the "so-called mahaghatbandhan" is an "adulterated product" which has reached its "expiry date" even before its manufacturing. Addressing the "Vijay Sankalp Sabha" in Rampur, Naqvi said the country doesn't need a "Mahamilawati (super adulterated) government", and instead wants a tested and decisive government that can move forward towards commitment to a "New India".

GOOD PERFORMANCE WILL PUSH BJP'S TALLY TO 300: BSY

Bengaluru: The BJP is optimistic about performing well in states where the party did not have much presence earlier which will help push its overall tally to 300 in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, the party's Karnataka unit president B S Yeddyurappa said here. In Karnataka too, the BJP is "doing well" in Hyderabad-Karnataka region and "already has good presence" in Mumbai-Karnataka and Central Karnataka, the former chief minister said, and claimed if the party wins 20 to 22 seats in the state, it would lead to collapse of Congress-JD(S) coalition government due to infighting.

Minority community upset with Cong leaders: Bishops write to High Command

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

Though the Congress had successfully negotiated with the DMK and walked away with nine Lok Sabha seats from where the party would field its candidates for the upcoming elections, the non-inclusion of minority communities in the list has upset the spiritual and community leadership in the State.

Four bishops from the district of Kanyakumari had written to the Congress High Command urging it to field one or two candidates belonging to the Christian community in the April 18 election. But the list released by the party High Command does not have even a single person for the

Christian community and this has caused heart burning among some sections.

Interestingly, the Bishop Council of Tamil Nadu had issued a communique during the 2016 Assembly election asking the laity not to vote for the BJP or the alliance in which the Hindutva party was a constituent. Kanyakumari district has a Christian population of 47 per cent, according to the 2011 Census of India.

It was widely believed that the Congress may field Christian candidates at Kanyakumari and Tirunelveli. Peter Alphonse, an articulate speaker who represented the Congress in channel discussions is a familiar face in the State and that had made him a

strong contender.

But when the names of part candidates were announced the name of Peter or for that matter any Christian candidate were absent. Peter himself was upset but chose not to aggravate the situation and decided to bid his time till the elections are over. "It is true that the minorities have been alienated because of the non-inclusion of any candidates from the sections. We will take up the issue after the election," Peter told reporters at Chennai.

A source in the Catholic church told this newspaper that the bishops from the district of Kanyakumari had written a letter to Mukul wasnikm in the AICC General Secretary in charge of Tamil Nadu that the Christian community in the State were fac-

ing an existential crisis because of the predatory policies and projects promoted by the sitting MP Pon Radhakrishnan, who is also the minister for shipping and surface transport.

The Church leaders were upset over the move by the minister to push through an international container terminal at Kulachel, which the bishops believe would lead to large scale displacement of fishermen, who all belong to the Christian community.

The Congress High Command on Sunday completed the list of party candidates who would contest from the State by announcing the name of Karti Chidambaram as its nominee from Sivaganga parliamentary seat.

RJD, Congress announce candidates for five LS seats for 2nd phase polls in Bihar

Patna: The RJD and the Congress, partners in the opposition Grand Alliance, Sunday announced the names of candidates for five Lok Sabha seats going to the second phase of polls in Bihar on April 18.

The Congress has named its candidate for Kishanganj, Katihar and Purnea seats while the RJD has named two sitting MPs of the party as candidates for Banka and Bhagalpur Lok Sabha constituencies. Releasing its ninth list of candidates for the Lok Sabha elections, the Congress announced the candidature of Dr Mohammad Javed from Kishanganj, Tariq Anwar from Katihar and Uday Singh alias Pappu Singh from Purnea.



YSR Congress president YS Jagan Mohan Reddy addresses an election campaign in Guntur on Sunday

CONG FIELDS HARIPRASAD FROM B'LRURU SOUTH

Bengaluru: Senior Congress leader BK Hariprasad has been named the party candidate from the high-profile Bangalore South constituency. The name of Hariprasad, currently a Rajya Sabha member, was among the 10 candidates in various states released on Sunday after a meeting of the Central Election Committee.

PROBE ORDERED AGAINST CONG CANDIDATE IN ASSAM

Guwahati: An enquiry has been ordered against Congress candidate for Karimganj Lok Sabha constituency, Swarup Das, for alleged forgery of his caste certificate. The Karimganj seat is reserved for Scheduled Caste and will go to polls in the second phase on April 18.

PM INSPIRES PEOPLE TO VOTE

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday appealed to prominent personalities from different fields to inspire people to vote in the Lok Sabha elections. As part of his "#VoteKar" campaign on Twitter, the Prime Minister urged personalities from the fields of sports, entertainment, and media to create increased voter awareness. "My fellow Indians, the time has come to say-#VoteKar. In the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, ensure that you as well as your family and friends turnout in record numbers. Your doing so will have a positive impact on the nation's future," he tweeted.



Modi doesn't need PM's chair, chair needs him, says Maurya

IAN S ■ LUCKNOW

Asserting that Narendra Modi remains the first choice for the post of Prime Minister, Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya said that Modi does not need the chair, but it is the chair that needs him.

In an interview to IANS, Maurya also said that the alliance between the Akhilesh Yadav-led Samajwadi Party, Mayawati-led Bahujan Samaj Party and the Ait Singh-led Rashtriya Lok Dal will fail in the state as the people are with Modi and the BJP-led NDA will win more than 73 seats that it won in 2014.

"In the 2019 elections, people of the country have two options in front of them. One is Modi and another is (Congress President) Rahul Gandhi or a dozen other leaders.

"So, the people are left with a choice of only one candidate — Modi. The post of Prime Minister is very big. And I can say that Modi does not need the chair but it is the chair that needs Modi," Maurya said.

Commenting on the SP-BSP-RD alliance in the state, the BJP leader said that fear is its basis. "This alliance has failed in the State. They have done an alliance and announced their candidates but the graph of the BJP is rising.

"People have understood their plans and have formed an alliance with Narendra Modi... we are hopeful of getting more than 73 seats," Maurya said.

The BJP leader said the party was also confident of winning the Amethi parliamentary constituency represented by Rahul Gandhi. Asked about Bhim Army

chief Chandrasekhar wanting to contest against Modi, he said: "BJP never looks at who will contest against Modi and what will be its effect on the elections." "We know the people of Varanasi will support Modi and this time we will get a much bigger mandate," he said adding that the caste or religion card will no longer work.

Commenting on the opposition parties accusing the BJP of politicising the armed forces and posters being brought out by the party leaders with images of Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman, he said: "For the respect of soldier and the security forces, the entire country is united. And those who will insult the Army will not be accepted by the people."

After the Modi government came to power, surgical strikes happened twice and

once we carried out an air strike against terror outfits in Pakistan. Demanding evidence of the results of the surgical strike and the air strike is respect or disrespect," he asked.

Responding to a question about situation in UP after the Pulwama terror strike that left 40 CRPF troopers dead, he said: "The condition in the state always remained in favour of Modi even before Pulwama happened. There is also no effect of Priyanka Gandhi Vadra or Rahul or Akhilesh or Mayawati." The BJP had won 71 out of 80 seats in the state in 2014 Lok Sabha polls, while its ally, the Apna Dal won 2. The Congress won two and the SP five.

The seven phased Lok Sabha elections are scheduled from April 11 to May 19. Counting of votes will take place on May 23.



POST-CHAVAN TAPE ROW

Congress replaces Chandrapur candidate

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

After the audio tape controversy involving Maharashtra Congress president Ashok Chavan, the All India Congress Committee (AICC) on Sunday replaced Vinayak Bangade with Suresh alias Balu Dhanorkar, a former Shiv Sena MLA, as its official candidate from Chandrapur Lok Sabha constituency in eastern Maharashtra.

A day after an audio tape in which Chavan is heard telling a party activist from Chandrapur that he was not getting his due within the party planned resign from his post as the State Congress chief, the AICC apparently took cognisance of the former Chief Minister's grievance and replaced Bangade with Dhanorkar as the party candidate from Chandrapur.

Dhanorkar, who had been elected as a Shiv Sena MLA from Bhadravati-Warora Assembly constituency, resigned from the Sena and joined the Congress recently in the hope that he would be a given a ticket to contest the Lok Sabha polls. He had been lobbying for the Congress ticket.

Bhadravati-Warora Assembly constituency is one of the Assembly segments of the Chandrapur Lok Sabha constituency.

However, Bhangade's nomination as a Congress candidate from Chandrapur came as a nasty surprise to Dhanorkar's supporters.

Bhangade's nomination had sparked protests within the local party workers and there was a vociferous clamour for his replacement with Dhanorkar.

An embarrassed Chavan

Bhadravati-Warora Assembly constituency is one of the Assembly segments of the Chandrapur Lok Sabha constituency

However, Bhangade's nomination as a Congress candidate from Chandrapur came as a nasty surprise to Dhanorkar's supporters

An embarrassed Chavan had on Saturday dismissed speculation about his impending resignation as the Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee president, after an audio tape in which he is heard telling a party worker that "No one is listening to me. I am planning to resign" had gone viral in the State

In the mobile conversation, the caller had voiced resentment over the nomination of Vinayak Bangade as a Congress candidate for the Chandrapur Lok Sabha seat and said that the party cadres were opposed to Bangade's candidature



Ex-Sena MLA Dhanorkar is new candidate, Chavan re-nominated as candidate from Nanded

Chavan, who was incidentally is one of the two Congress candidates (out of 26 candidates) elected to Lok Sabha in 2014 polls from Maharashtra in the face of a fierce Modi wave, has been wanting that his wife Ameeta to contest from his home constituency of Nanded in Marathwada region. Ameeta Chavan had won the Bhokhar seat in Nanded district in the 2014 Assembly polls.

However, the Congress — in its list released on Saturday night — named Chavan as its candidate from Nanded — a nomination that came as a surprise to the former CM.

Barring four terms, Nanded has been under the control of the Congress since 1952. While late SB Chavan represented the constituency twice (1980 and 1984), Ashok Chavan himself was elected to Lok Sabha once in a bye-election in 1987, following the resignation of his father.

Late SB Chavan's son-in-law and Ashokrao's brother-in-law Bhaskarao Khatgaonkar has represented the constituency thrice (1998, 1999 and 2009). In 2014 LS polls, Chavan romped home comfortably.

In a related development, the Congress on Sunday named four Lok Sabha candidates for eastern Maharashtra — Hidayat Patel (Akola), Kishor Uttamrao Gajbhaye (Ramtek-SC), Suresh Dhanorkar (in place of Vinayak Bangade from Chandrapur), Subhash Wankhede (Hingoli).

to resign".

A former Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Chavan was questioned about the audio tape in circulation at a news conference called to announce the formalisation of the seat-sharing arrangement among the "Mahaghatbandhan" constituents in the State.

Playing down the import of the leaked audio tape, Chavan had said that a private conversation had no relevance in politics. He had clarified that he had no plans to quit as the MPCC chief.

Chavan, however, admitted that there were certain issues relating to the nomination of a candidate for Chandrapur. "But, it is our internal matter and I would not like to discuss it publicly," he said.

Meanwhile, the Congress has re-nominated Chavan as its candidate from his home Lok Sabha constituency of Nanded in Marathwada.



Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) president Sharad Pawar, Congress leader and former Maharashtra Chief Minister Prithviraj Chavan, former Sikkim Governor Shrinivas Patil, Republican Party president Jogendra Kawade, Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghatana chief Raju Shetti, NCP leader Ramraje Naik Nimbalkar, NCP candidate from Satara Lok Sabha Constituency Udaynaraje Bhosle being garlanded during the Lok Sabha election campaign rally, in Karad, on Sunday

Cong 'banking on lies', might win polls in Pak: Ram Madhav

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

BJP national general secretary Ram Madhav Sunday said the Congress might win an election in Pakistan if it contests from there as the opposition party is "banking on lies" and the neighbouring country.

Addressing a press conference here, Madhav also claimed that the statements of the Congress leaders are retweeted more by the people of Pakistan than their counterparts in India.

"Their comments are more retweeted and publicised by the people of the neighbouring country than our own. The Congress might win an election in Pakistan if it contests from there. This is the condition of our main Opposition party,"



the BJP leader said.

"The Congress does not have any issue to really take on our Government, our leader and our party. It is banking on lies and Pakistan," the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader said.

Pointing out that the Congress is fighting a "clueless battle", Madhav said, "Nobody in the country is understanding what it wants to say and in which direction it wants to take the country. The people are also not understanding if the Congress is fighting for India or Pakistan."

Alleging that the Congress leaders are "doubting" the credentials of the Indian Army, the

senior BJP leader said the opposition party was not only questioning the success of the BJP-led government, but also making "derogatory remarks" about the Army.

When asked about the allegation of former Karnataka chief minister BS Yeddyurappa allegedly paying a bribe of Rs 1,800 crore to top BJP leaders, Madhav said, "It is bogus news...the Congress has no issue today to confront us and it is only banking on lies."

"And when was it distributed? In 2011. Was Congress party sleeping then when they were in government? The slip was accessed from the house of a Congress leader," he added.

"On the contrary, some good cartoons are being made on the Congress. All these negative campaigns of the Congress are useful for making good memes and cartoons in social media. Other than that, there is no impact on the public," he added.

BJP will win Amethi: Goyal

PTI ■ BAREILLY

Railways Minister Piyush Goyal exuded confidence on Sunday that the Bharatiya Janata Party would win the Amethi Lok Sabha seat, which is represented by Congress chief Rahul Gandhi.

"In the past five years, notable work has been done in every sector. The BJP will win more seats as compared to the previous election. The BJP will also win Amethi — the traditional seat of the Congress," Goyal said at the party's "vijay sankalp sabha" here.

The Union Minister attacked Gandhi over reports that the Congress leader might also contest from Wayanad in Kerala.

"He (Rahul) is running away from UP. Far from UP, he is going to Kerala and will contest the elections from there. Smriti Irani will register a massive win from Amethi," Goyal said.

Priyanka's influence 'bound to grow' in party in long term, says Tharoor

Thiruvananthapuram:

Though Uttar Pradesh is her 'karm-bhoomi' for now, Priyanka Gandhi Vadrá's influence in the Congress is "bound to grow" in the long term, party leader Shashi Tharoor said here. Priyanka, 47, was appointed AICC general secretary of Eastern Uttar Pradesh on January 23 this year, marking her formal entry into politics. The party is hoping that the move will boost its prospects in the politically crucial state which sends 80 MPs to Lok Sabha.

"She (Priyanka) is a very impressive lady, who speaks well, speaks with confidence, idiomatic and fluent Hindi. She is very comfortable in public gaze and reminds a lot



of people of her grandmother," Tharoor said when asked about Priyanka Gandhi's formal plunge into politics.

"That's on the very upbeat side. Perhaps more modestly one should say, she is at the moment general secretary for one-half of Uttar Pradesh. And that's going to be her karm-bhoomi. That's where she will

be working in the immediate prospect. But in long term I think her influence in the party is bound to grow and her popularity among the people has already been established," Tharoor told PTI in an exclusive interview.

Priyanka recently launched the party's polls campaign in eastern UP with her three-day 'Ganga yatra' on boat, where she reached out to voters residing along the banks of the holy river.

On the poll alliances of the Congress in various states, Tharoor said it varies from State-to-State. "Each state has got a different logic. We have possible alliance with some parties in some states and are fighting against them in another state," he said.



Union Home Minister and BJP candidate from Lucknow Lok Sabha seat Rajnath Singh being garlanded in Lucknow on Sunday

Treatment meted out to Advani 'shameful', people will give befitting reply: Shatrughan Sinha

Patna: Actor-turned-politician Shatrughan Sinha, the sitting BJP MP from Patna Sahib who has been denied a ticket by the party this time, has accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of treating party patriarch LK Advani in a "painful" and "shameful" manner.

In a series of tweets on Saturday, Sinha claimed that the BJP's decision to not give ticket to Advani, the sitting MP from Gandhinagar, and to field party president Amit Shah from the seat "has not gone down well" with many people.

"Sirji... It is worrisome, painful and according to some even shameful... That which your people have done was the most expected and awaited... Orchestrating the departure of a

most respected friend, philosopher, guide, father figure and ultimate leader of the party, Shri LK Advani from the political arena/election," Sinha tweeted.

Advani has served as Union Home Minister and Deputy Prime Minister. He was also the national president of the BJP more than once. He is often credited with helping the party create a national footprint within a decade of its formation through active participation in the Ayodhya movement.

In another tweet, Sinha deplored "the replacement of Mr Advani by none other than the man who is also the president of the party and whose image or personality is no match nor even a patch on him".

Temperatures soar in Kerala, 2 die of suspected sunburn

Thiruvananthapuram:

At least two persons have died of suspected sunburn in Kerala in the last two days even as the weathermen have warned that the maximum temperature was likely to be two to three degrees above normal in 11 districts in the next two days.

According to the Indian Meteorological Department, maximum temperature was very likely to be above normal by 2 to 3 degrees Celsius in 11 districts, including Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Pathnamthitta, Alapuzha, Ernakulam, Palakkad and Kannur, till March 26.

A 42-year-old man from nearby Parassala died Sunday, while a 60-year-old man was found in Kannur with sun burns. Though there were sunburns on their bodies, only a post-mortem would reveal the actual cause of death, health department sources said.

An RSP worker in Kollam, who was campaigning for sitting MP NK Premachandran, suffered sunburns and a three-year-old child playing in front of her house also suffered sunburns in Kasaragod. With mercury levels soaring in Kerala, the labour department has issued an order, making it mandatory to give breaks to workers till April 30 to avoid sunstroke.

Strong retaliatory action against Pakistan Army

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

In a strong 'retaliatory' strike Indian army is learnt to have inflicted heavy casualties and 'flattened' several bunkers and 'strategic structures' of Pakistan army along the line of control in Poonch and Akhnour sectors in the last 24 hours.

Following these punitive strikes tensions escalated further in the region.

In the heavy exchange of fire, an Indian Army jawan also received critical injuries late Saturday evening and later he succumbed in the nearest field hospital in Poonch on Sunday. In the last one week three Indian soldiers have attained martyrdom in Sunderbani and Poonch sectors.

Ground reports claimed Pakistan army used heavy calibre of weapons and fired rockets to target Indian positions. In response, the Indian Army too inflicted heavy damage and casualties to Pakistan army.

Defence PRO in Jammu, Lt-Col Devender Anand said, "Grenadier Hari Bhakar received grave injuries during Cease Fire Violation on 23 Mar 19 in Poonch Sector. He was evacuated to nearest Field



Hospital for immediate medical treatment but later attained

martyrdom on 24 Mar 19'. The martyred jawan hailed from Nagaur district of Rajasthan and is survived by his parents.

Lt Col Anand said, "Unprovoked firing by Pakistan Army started in the evening of March 23, 2019, in which heavy calibre weapons and rockets were also fired".

Earlier, Rifleman Yash Paul of Mantalai area of Chenani attained martyrdom on March 21 in Sunderbani sector of Rajouri. Rifleman Karamjeet Singh of Moga had attained martyrdom on March 18 in Sunderbani sector of Rajouri.

Martyred jawan's body reaches Rajasthan

PTI ■ JAIPUR

The body of grenadier Hari Bhakar, who was killed in a cease-fire violation along the LoC in Jammu & Kashmir by Pakistani troops, reached here on Sunday and will be taken to his native village in Nagaur by road.

Bhakar was part of the 4 Grenadiers Regiment. The soldier was injured in the cross-border firing around 4 am on Sunday and was immediately taken to the nearest field hospital, where he succumbed to injuries, officials said. His last rites will be performed on Monday. Pakistani forces opened fire on the Shahpur and Kerni areas in Jammu & Kashmir's Poonch district around 5.30 pm on Saturday and it continued intermittently through the night, officials said.

11 TN fishermen held by Sri Lankan Navy

Rameswaram: Eleven fishermen from Tamil Nadu have been arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy for allegedly fishing near Neduntheevu in the island nation's waters, an official said here on Sunday.

The fishermen, hailing from Rameswaram, have been taken to Karainagar island, located around 20 km from Jaffna, Tamil Nadu Fisheries

Department Assistant Director Yuvaraj said.

Two boats belonging to the fishermen were seized, he said. Sri Lankan Navy personnel have allegedly damaged over 50 fishing nets and seized GPS equipment from them, Yuvaraj added. The incident forced fishermen in more than 500 boats to return without fishing, the official said. Reacting to the incident,

the leader of Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) S Ramadoss, who has forged an alliance with the AIADMK-BJP combine to contest the April 18 Lok Sabha polls in Tamil Nadu, said the NDA (National Democratic Alliance) government would create a separate ministry for the welfare of fishermen.

"In order to ensure that such incidents (action on

Indian fishermen by Lanka) do not recur and to retrieve the Katchatheevu islet, the NDA will take steps to form a separate ministry for the welfare of the fishermen community," Ramadoss said in a statement.

He urged the central government to raise the matter with Sri Lanka for ensuring the release of the arrested fishermen.

Focus on 'blue economy' will boost growth: V-P

PTI ■ PANAJI

Vice-President Venkaiah Naidu on Sunday said a focused approach in areas such as minerals and energy from oceans can help India become third largest economy in next 10-15 years.

Addressing scientists at the CSIR-National Institute of Oceanography near here, he said that at the same time, further degradation of marine ecosystems should be prevented.

"I strongly feel that focused approach in some of the areas such as minerals and energy from oceans can make India a global leader and serve our national goals," Naidu said.



Women participate during 'Basant Utsav' celebration in Guwahati on Sunday

India firm on terror

Boycotting Pak National Day and banning JKLF show the government's 'zero tolerance' template is here to stay



With its boycott of the Pakistan National Day celebrations in Delhi, on the ground that the Hurriyat leaders were invited there, the government has sent out a strong message that its security paradigm with our western neighbour was not just a Pulwama-specific counter-measure but had been reset for all time to come. And with its ban on the separatist outfit Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), the Government reminded that there would be "zero tolerance" to the terror machinery or its promoters in the Valley. So though past invitations to the Hurriyat have gone unchallenged diplomatically, henceforth any attempt by the Pakistan High Commission or Pakistan's leadership to engage with its leaders will not be overlooked. Its terse message came on a day when militants killed a 12-year-old boy whom they held hostage to instill fear among locals and disorient them further. India's stand is loud and clear, that its single-minded pursuit now would be to go after the terrorist networks hosted by Pakistan, take demonstrable action with on-ground proof and get diplomatic support from around the world and the region, which are equally afflicted with this brand of proxy warfare. It also made known that it had not been cowed down by China's technical hold on the UN proposal to designate Jaish-e-Mohammad chief Masood Azhar as a global terrorist. Instead, it would flush out threats as they emerged, now that it has an operational template post-Balakovt strikes, one that doesn't challenge the nuclear threshold and lies low on the escalation pyramid. Of course, in keeping with the goodwill that India has earned in graduating its fight against terror to a global mission, Prime Minister Modi showed that he was keeping diplomacy alive by sending a congratulatory message to his Pakistani counterpart Imran Khan on the latter's National Day, saying it was time that people of the sub-continent "work together... in an atmosphere free of terror and violence."

While driving home the point of terror subtly, he made sure that Khan would not walk away with the optics of making all the right noises, which he attempted duplicitously during Balakovt and opening of the Kartarpur corridor. Khan, too, didn't lie low and seeing that the message was not tweeted by Modi, he let the world know and showed he was big-hearted enough to share the good wishes from a neighbour. But not before playing the same theme song of resuming dialogue to "resolve all issues, especially the central issue of Kashmir." In other words, there was no overture of resolving terrorism before talks, apart from the cosmetic crackdown on some terrorist organisations to avoid being blacklisted by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). Pakistan must realise that its intransigence and coercion won't work anymore before India's monolithic response and determined self-preservation efforts against exported terror. For while it works for Pakistan to keep terrorism alive and festering, India is in no mood to be a victim and has now adopted a result-oriented, muscular approach.

There can be no dramatic change in Pakistan's policy of nurturing a terror factory which helps it keep its bargaining chip in the region. Then there is China, its all-weather friend, which humours it for its own sustenance as an economic imperialist in the region courtesy the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and immunity from *jihadi* terror in its Muslim-majority provinces. So it sent the People's Liberation Army Air Force Bayi Aerobatic team to the National Day celebrations to help Pakistan avoid international embarrassment at a time when India clearly has the tide of opinion in its favour post-Pulwama. And in Delhi, with most diplomats thinning out following India's boycott, the Chinese embassy got in its own personnel as "guests." However, post-Pulwama, even China cannot justify its selfish interests in the face of world censure on terror. And it wants to dehyphenate its economic interests in India from diplomacy, failing yet again to get Delhi on board for its transnational Belt and Road Initiative. It hasn't told Pakistan yet its status on the technical hold on Azhar but is gauging what it would lose if it allows it to lapse. India has forced a new scenario post-Pulwama. Question is to what extent will it impact its two neighbours to come out with an evolved response than stereotypes.

Batting for the BJP

Gambhir joins a long line of Indian cricketers who took up politics but rarely have the biggest names followed suit



The 'will he, won't he' drama surrounding Gautam Gambhir and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) finally came to a conclusion with the former Indian cricket opener joining the saffron party formally. While Gambhir has not commented on whether he will stand for the elections or not, it is almost certain that he took the jump after being assured of a Lok Sabha ticket, most likely from Delhi, the State he represented in cricket. Several Indian cricketers and sportspersons have taken the plunge into politics, notably BJP rebel and member of the 1983 World Cup winning team Kirti Azad and Punjab Minister Navjot Singh Sidhu but despite his undoubted success, Gambhir's mentor from Delhi and superstar Virender Sehwag, who was also being chased by the BJP, gave politics a pass. It is strange that the biggest superstars of Indian cricket over the past three decades have never formally entered politics. While Sachin Tendulkar did join as a nominated member of the Rajya Sabha, he did so as an apolitical appointment and his performance as a legislator left much to be desired. Others like Sunil Gavaskar, Kapil Dev, Rahul Dravid and despite the speculation, Saurav Ganguly, have all eschewed politics. Many of them rightly fear that their legendary cricket careers will be coloured by party ideologies and while Ganguly has entered cricket administration and Dravid the coaching set-up, politics is not their thing even though both of them would win their first elections handily.

There is a common joke doing the rounds in Chennai, where Tamil voters are looking for another iconic leader, that Mahendra Singh Dhoni will win by a landslide given his massive popularity in the southern metropolis and State where he captains the local Indian Premier League team. This is not a wrong conclusion, and across the world popular sportspersons have instant political recognition. But few have made the shift from sports to politics successfully as many sportspersons jump into politics in a hurry and without planning out either their political message or their ambitions. One hopes that Gambhir is able to avoid those pitfalls and has a proper vision for his constituents if he gets nominated for a Lok Sabha seat. Fame and fortune might bring you recognition but it doesn't assure political success. The field of politics is extremely different from the sports field.

Lessons from memory

It is worthwhile to recall an unforgettable side view of the moving procession of history, resulting in the crumbling of the old order and the birth of a new nation in our vicinity



ABHIJIT BHATTACHARYYA

If I remember rightly, it was Thursday, March 25, 1971, and my MA (History) final exam was round the corner. We in India then had the audible, omnipresent, omniscient and ubiquitous *All India Radio* but no electronic visuals. Hence, hearing the evening radio news and reading the morning newspaper were my childhood addictions, exam or no exam. My father — an extraordinary scholar of income tax law, English, Bengali and Sanskrit languages, Astrology (including charting a horoscope) and Economics, and a celebrity senior civil servant of the federal Government of India, who was originally born in and hailed from 2 Toynbee Circular Road, Tikatuli, Dhaka, (then East Pakistan) — was not the type to disturb his son for radio news during exam season. That day I, too, seemed to have something else in mind for emperor Ashoka and Buddhism as a possible question for my paper.

Nevertheless, there suddenly came a stentorian voice from our C-II 17 Wellesley Road, New Delhi — 110003 'radio room'. "Come immediately" was the two-word command. Usually serene, serious yet ever-smiling, my father suddenly lit upon hearing the *All India Radio* news that the charismatic Bengali leader, widely respected and revered as Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, had given a clarion call to the people of (then) East Pakistan, firing the first salvo at the West Pakistani Punjabi-speaking military junta from Dhaka's Ramna Maidan: "*Aamago share shaat koti zanagan re tomra dabayya naakhte parbaanaa* (You oppressive rulers, you will never be able to suppress me seven-and-a-half crore Bengali people)." We instantly felt the electrifying effect and potential tremor, almost after 24 years of Partition days, in the 'radio room' of the Hindu Bengali refugee in Lutyens' zone of New Delhi.

Thereafter, things moved at a high speed. Owing to his professionalism, probity and spotless past, my father was one of the two Bengali-speaking senior civil servants, whose residence was identified by the Government of India as an 'informal meeting point', should the need have arisen. My MA exam ended on Saturday, May 15, 1971, and results were out on Monday, July 05, 1971. I was happy with my result but was happier owing to the fast unfolding scenario of a possible emancipation of an enlightened and inherently simple Bengali-speaking people with whom we were so close in heart, mind and thought and shared history, geography, culture, language and tradition.

Soon, however, came Wednesday, August 18, 1971, the appointed date for an 'informal meeting', closely coordinated by Shri Ashok Ray, the then Joint Secretary of the Ministry of External Affairs, and other organisations of the State. Commencing at 5.30 pm and ending at around midnight, it was a party; a reunion of sorts, high on feeling and emotion, love, tears of joy, passion, fraternity and feasting. It was a gathering of 150 people of whom at least 80 were from the land of



Bangabandhu, including Janab Tajudin Ahmed. Half of them had escaped, God only knew how. At least two families had driven down in their 'Made in Japan' Nissan and Toyota cars, which were a rare commodity in India of 1971.

The outcome of the meeting was essentially a commitment to do everything necessary. The Government and the people of India were one with the Bengalis under Bangabandhu. All present in the meeting had the same goal, in different ways, irrespective of their nationality and ethnicity. I vividly recall one spontaneous and repeated slogan, "*Joy Bangla*", reverberating through the hot, humid night of that August day in 1971.

Two more meetings subsequently took place in two different places in Delhi, which I could not attend owing to my preparation for competitive exams. As things were heating up, I travelled to spend the winter with my maternal aunts in Asansol and Calcutta (as it was known then). My stay in Asansol lasted for five days as war broke out on Friday, December 3, 1971. I took a train the next day, December 4, 1971, for Calcutta. The three-hour journey was an experience by itself as the train moved with all lights off in the chair car. Howrah station was pitch dark but packed

“MAJ GENERAL SIRKAR, A SECOND WORLD WAR VETERAN WHO SAW ACTION ON SEVERAL FRONTS, WAS AN ARMoured CORPS OFFICER PAR EXCELLENCE (BELONGING TO CENTRAL INDIA HORSE). BEING A STRICT DISCIPLINARIAN, WITH FRUGAL HABITS AND EXEMPLARY PROBITY, HE NEVER SOUGHT PUBLICITY AND WAS NEVER FLASHY”

with passengers, police and Railway personnel. Home guards were extra vigilant, navigating all and sundry and the half-an-hour road to Alipore residence of my aunt took two hours like a Delhi-Calcutta flight as I reached at 11 pm.

The following day dawned with my frantic attempt to catch up with Major General Bishwa Nath Sirkar (whom I had known before) in Fort William, Headquarters of the Eastern Army Command. Maj General Sirkar, a Second World War veteran, who saw action on several fronts, was an armoured corps officer par excellence (belonging to Central India Horse). Being a strict disciplinarian, with frugal habits and exemplary probity, he never sought publicity and was never flashy. The Major General was handpicked overnight (rather plucked) by Army Chief Sam Manekshaw and transferred from the post of Military Secretary to a newly-created post in the Eastern Command Calcutta, exclusively for cooperation with the Mukti Bahini.

Consequently, whereas the world today knows who did what in 1971, hardly anyone can either remember or recall his invaluable contribution to/in the liberation movement of Bengalis in the East and the role he played in the actual combat of the

14-day war. After the 1971 war, Sirkar became Lieutenant General but resigned after a serious difference of opinion with the then Defence Minister of India. He had several years of service left at the time of his premature departure.

I remain eternally grateful to that great soldier and noble soul for helping me to "see the front" for two days after Sunday, December 12, 1971, when the writings were already on the wall. After a resounding firing to deter me from "seeing is believing", the gentleman in the General relented and "put me on" to Corps II, operating from Krishnanagar.

The rest, as they say, is history. At the age of 23, I had a remarkable, unforgettable side view of the moving procession of history, resulting in the crumbling of the old (dis)order and the birth of a new nation, not in the distant horizon but in our vicinity. Between 1947 and 1971 came alive two nations: The first under bondage; the second as an un-caged bird with the unrestricted horizon of thought and action as its domain.

(The writer is a former college lecturer and civil servant. Now a researcher, columnist, alumnus of National Defence College of India, advocate, Delhi High Court and Supreme Court and author)

SOUNDBITE

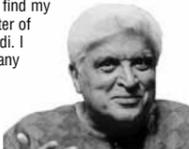
Goons of Hitler used to beat and kill innocent people. Later, police used to file complaints against the victims. Modi/ji is also doing the same.

Delhi Chief Minister
—Arvind Kejriwal



I was shocked to find my name on the poster of PM Narendra Modi. I have not written any songs for it.

Lyricist
—Javed Akhtar



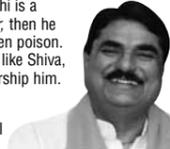
China has to think what signal it is sending to the world by putting a hold in the UN on a proposal to list Masood Azhar as a global terrorist.

Former foreign secretary
—S Jaishankar



If Rahul Gandhi is a Shiva avataar, then he should be given poison. If he survives like Shiva, then I will worship him.

BJP MLA
—Kamal Patel



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Fake news menace

Sir — This refers to the article, "Credibility at stake" (March 23) by Ajoy Kumar. The Election Commission (EC) move to put in place measures to curb fake news and misinformation on social media platforms sounds very nice but implementation of these guidelines still remains a task at hand.

Further, the EC has not made clarifications about specific penal provisions for those who violate the rules. It is known, with elections approaching, the menace of fake news is at an all-time high. In fact, it poses grave challenges to the democratic matrix of a country. Certainly, with the general elections approaching, this issue needs immediate attention and a permanent solution, too.

We must learn from international experiences. For instance, in 2017, the German Parliament had voted in favour of a law that included the provision to levy fines of up to 50 million Euros from popular social media companies such as Facebook and YouTube if they fail to remove hateful posts in a time-bound

Grounding of Boeing is good for people's safety

The international aviation industry is facing a turmoil in the wake of several nations banning the Boeing 737 MAX 8 aircraft. The Lion Air Flight Boeing 610 that crashed into the sea off Jakarta, had a defective Angle of Attack (AoA) sensors, which feed important information to the computer of the plane to stabilise the flight's nose with the wind flow. The software Maneuvering Characteristics Augmentation System (MCAS) acts on the feed of the AoA. The March 10 Ethiopian Airlines flight 302 crash that killed 157 people has raised serious questions over the Boeing 737 Max 8 jets. The Ethiopian flight, too, was plagued by a defective AoA and came down within minutes of take-off. The relation between the autopilot and MCAS has been a subject of discussion among aviation experts. It meant the pilots were not fully conversant with the system.

Many countries possessing Boeing 737 flights in their fleet have grounded all such planes, India being one among them. Amidst the ban spree, newly produced Boeing Max 737 have been confined to the factories. Few countries have



demand compensation from the Boeing 737 Max company for the losses incurred as a result of the flights being grounded, including SpiceJet of India. Legal action is contemplated by the dead passengers' kin and kin against the Boeing Max. Notwithstanding the huge loss of revenue to Boeing, it is clear that the 737 Max cannot fly unless the flaws are corrected.

Ganapathi Bhat
Akola

Her appearance in a burqa to express solidarity with the beleaguered Muslims sent a stern message that her heart beat for all, irrespective of their religion and culture. We, in this country, can't help but compare her approach to that of our rulers after the *fidayeen* attack in Pulwama.

Haridasan Rajan
Kozhikode

Shun archaic system

Sir — Most political parties have announced their first list of candidates for the upcoming elections. The Election Commission (EC) has over the years been successful in bringing out effective and necessary electoral reforms. However, as far as nomination and withdrawal of candidates go, the EC still accepts submissions in paper form only. Despite digitisation having replaced many paper-based formalities, it is ironical that the EC still adopts the archaic paper-trail based system to accept nominations from election candidates.

Varun SD
Bengaluru

Send your feedback to:
letterstopioneer@gmail.com

manner. Facebook introduced a scheme in Germany that lets users flag suspicious content. Why can't such initiatives be taken in India, too?

If the problem of fake news is not sorted out, Indian democracy will continue to be a kingdom of blinds, ruled by one-eyed kings.

Sameer Bhoi
Bargarh

Why we love Ardern

Sir — This refers to the article, "Mass murder most foul" (March 21) by Hiranmay Karlekar. A city named after the apostle of love, the merciful Jesus Christ, Christchurch, begged for mercy before the 'White supremacist Christian fundamentalist-racist' for minutes that didn't seem to

end. However, New Zealand's immediate response to the March 15 killings was exemplary, particularly the firm, sensitive and compassionate approach displayed by its Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern. Ardern exhibited a rare resolve in steadying the downcast nation. A visibly upset but resolute and empathetic Ardern wasted no time in reaching out to the minorities and reassure them.

FIRST COLUMN

World's leading demagogue

Trump has his border wall and anti-Muslim immigration controls. Modi has Muslims both within India's borders and beyond. Erdogan just has New Zealanders to build a constituency



GWYNNE DYER

You can keep your Viktor Orbán, your Benjamin Netanyahu, your pathetic Boris Johnson. As for US President Donald Trump, he's really an icon of democracy, just slightly shop-soiled. The coveted title of World's Leading Demagogue has just gone to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. He may look like an ageing, disappointed post office clerk, passed over for promotion too many times, but he can take an ignorant remark from halfway around the planet and inflate it into an existential threat to Turkey's future. He's desperately trying to rally support for his Justice and Development Party (AK party) in the local elections due at the end of this month, so what better theme than the threat of an invasion by New Zealand?

"Your grandparents came here," he warned the savage New Zealand hordes, "and they returned in caskets. Have no doubt that we will send you back like your grandfathers." Erdogan had already warned the crowd up by showing them footage of the massacre of New Zealand Muslims in their mosques by Australian terrorist Brenton Tarrant, so they cheered that line. He was speaking at a rally commemorating the Ottoman empire's victory over British and allied troops who landed at Gallipoli, 200 km southwest of Istanbul, in 1915. ANZAC (Australian and New Zealand) troops played a big part in that First World War battle, which is one of the founding myths of modern Turkish nationalism.

So Erdogan's audience would not necessarily have giggled when he defiantly warned the evil New Zealanders: "We have been here for a thousand years and will be here until the apocalypse, God willing. You will not turn Istanbul into Constantinople." There he stood, metaphorical sword in hand, turning back the New Zealand neo-Crusaders single-handed, and the world heavyweight title for demagoguery was his. First, a couple of niggling details. Istanbul is Constantinople; the name hasn't changed. 'Istanbul' is just the Turkish pronunciation of the old Greek popular name for the city, 'Stamboul'. (The Turkish language does not like words to start with two consonants.)

Second, the Turks have not been there for a thousand years. They conquered the city in 1453, five-hundred-and-some years ago. Before that it was Christian for rather more than a thousand years. But you don't want to get caught up in the details when you're holding a flaming sword.

And third, I have never met anybody in Europe who wants it 'back'. It would be as ridiculous as somebody in the Muslim world wanting Granada or Seville back.

Oh, wait a minute. I have met Muslims who want Granada and Seville back. They tend to be of the Islamist persuasion, but there is a quite widespread conviction in the Arab world that the original 7th century conquests, that gave Muslims control of half of the then-Christian world, were legitimate, whereas the 12th century European counter-offensive that tried to take some of them back (the Crusades) was illegitimate aggression. It was really just the ebb and flow of empires, with religion mostly as cover. The Muslims (or at least the Ottoman Turks) were on the offensive again by the 15th century, almost reaching Vienna by 1688. Then the tide turned again and the British empire was almost at the gates of Istanbul in 1915. Nothing to get excited about — and now it's over.

It really is over. Legally, it has not been permissible to change borders by force since the UN Charter was written in 1945, and in fact few have changed. Militarily, modern technologies and methods of political mobilisation have made it ruinously expensive to sustain the long-term occupation of people who do not want to be occupied. So I think it will be hard for New Zealand to reconquer Istanbul even if it wants to. Turkey is safe. But the old tribal buttons are still there to be pushed, and there are plenty of populist demagogues willing to push them.

Trump has his border wall ('criminal' Mexicans) and his anti-Muslim immigration controls ('terrorist' Muslims). Orbán has the Jews (the enemy within Hungary's border) and Muslim refugees (the enemy without). Narendra Modi, now in election mode, has Muslims both within India's borders (cow-killers) and beyond them (Pakistani nukes and terrorists). And Erdogan just has New Zealanders. Must try harder.

(The writer's new book is *Growing Pains: The Future of Democracy and Work*)

POINT COUNTERPOINT

THOSE PARTIES THAT FALSELY CLAIM TO BE DR LOHIA'S FOLLOWERS ARE DESPERATE TO FORM AN OPPORTUNISTIC ALLIANCE WITH THE SAME CONGRESS.
 —PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI



THE BJP TRIES TO CO-OPT GANDHI, BHAGAT SINGH, SARDAR PATEL, AMBEDKAR AND LOHIA, BUT FOLLOWS PEOPLE WHO THESE LEADERS OPPOSED.
 —FORMER UTTAR PRADESH CHIEF MINISTER AKHILESH YADAV

Blazing bastions of India

Rae Bareilly and Amethi, the home ground of the Congress, have remained high on the agenda for political parties, who continue to field heavyweights to no avail



SAT PAL

Undoubtedly, there are many well-known dynastic bastions in our country but the electoral turf of Rae Bareilly and Amethi have remained the centre of attraction for politically conscious people and the common man alike. Since the State of Uttar Pradesh has been electing a maximum of 80 MPs to the Lower House of Parliament, ie Lok Sabha, the State is being considered of paramount importance. So are the two above stated parliamentary constituencies.

Rae Bareilly Lok Sabha constituency has been a stronghold of the Congress, which won 16 out of the 19 elections here, including two bypolls since 1952, the first general election in the country. The constituency came into limelight as Congress candidate Feroze Gandhi, husband of Indira Gandhi and son-in-law of the first Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, emerged victorious twice in 1952 and 1958. In due course, he came to be known as the best parliamentarian. He passed away on September 8, 1960, but the constituency remained with the Congress till the 1971 general election and thereafter, too, with a few breaks.

Feroze's wife and the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi selected this constituency to become an elected member of Lok Sabha after her elevation to the highest executive post of the country. She first contested in 1967 and then in 1971. By opting for this constituency, she converted it to a prized bastion which continues to be the same. Indira's relatives Arun Nehru and Sheila Kaul won the seat, both twice, a confidante and family friend Satish Sharma once and daughter-in-law Sonia Gandhi triumphed four times in 2004, 2006 bypoll, 2009 and the 2014 general election. This performance sheet, of course, suffices to substantiate the constituency as a proven dynastic bastion.

It is known to most politically conscious people that socialist leader Raj Narain locked horns with Indira Gandhi in Rae Bareilly constituency in 1971 and 1977 but the real surprising candidate was Gwalior's Rajmata Vijayaraje Scindia, who challenged Indira Gandhi from this constituency in the 1980 general election. As the Janata Party nominee, she was defeated by a margin of 1,73,654 votes. This was the only loss faced by the Rajmata whereas she won all elections of Lok Sabha and Assembly in her State of Madhya Pradesh as a Jana Sangh and earlier a Congress candidate. People in Rae Bareilly believed that the Rajmata was prompted to contest against Indira Gandhi to take revenge of the ill-treatment meted out to her in jail during Emergency.

Raj Narain was fielded as the candidate of the then grand alliance of Jana Sangh, Lok Dal, Congress Organisation and Samyukt Socialist Party to engage Indira Gandhi in her comfort zone and create a difficult situation for her. Raj Narain lost with a margin of 1,12,810 votes in 1971 and challenged her election in the Allahabad High Court, accusing her of misuse of official machinery. Justice Jagmohanlal Sinha unseated Indira Gandhi and barred her from holding any post and contest any elec-



tion for a period of six years on June 24, 1975, which resulted in the imposition of internal emergency in the country on June 26, 1975 and a crackdown against almost all Opposition leaders, who were put behind bars.

This so-called unprecedented Constitutional misuse brought all Opposition leaders on a single platform. After the Emergency by Indira Gandhi was lifted on March 21, 1977, the general elections were a contest between the Congress, led by Indira Gandhi and the newly-formed amalgamation of all parties, Janata Party, headed by Morarji Desai and inspired by Loknayak Jai Prakash Narayan. The results brought a new regime at the Centre. The Janata Party secured an absolute majority to unseat the Indira-led Congress, embarrassing her as it got the minimum ever seats in the Lok Sabha.

Raj Narain defeated her with a margin of 55,202 votes and he became the Union Health Minister though the Government could not last long due to factionalism and differences. The 1977 general election results highlighted the division of the regional narrative, the Janata Party dominant in the north, the Congress winning seats in the south. Of course, the chunky vote in the north led to the formation of the first non-Congress Government at the Centre.

Another surprising candidate, fielded by the Lok Dal in 1984 in this constituency, was the widow of Bhimrao Ambedkar, his second wife Savita, a Saraswat Brahmin. She had completed her MBBS in 1937 and married Ambedkar on April 15, 1948. Both Ambedkar and Savita converted to Buddhism at Nagpur on April 14, 1956. The couple lived in Delhi at Alipur Road. She used to take care of the ailing Ambedkar, who expired on December

6, 1956. After his death, Savita, known as Maisahab, had been feeling lonely, hence she shifted to a farmhouse in Mehrauli.

The Congress was keen to send her to Rajya Sabha but it is learned that she declined the offer. She, however, accepted Bharat Ratna on behalf of her late husband on April 14, 1990, from President R Venkatraman. It is yet to be understood how and why she agreed to contest an election from Rae Bareilly as she had earlier declined an offer for Rajya Sabha membership. But Savita Ambedkar was defeated by Arun Nehru with a margin of 2,57,553 votes.

As for the Amethi parliamentary constituency, close to Rai Bareilly, it came into existence in 1967 and remained a stronghold of the Congress as the party emerged victorious in 13 parliamentary elections out of 15, including two bypolls since 1967. It is still known as a pocketborough of the party nurtured by the Gandhis. It has been represented by Sanjay Gandhi once, Rajiv Gandhi four times, Sonia Gandhi once, Satish Sharma, a family friend of Rajiv Gandhi, twice and Rahul Gandhi thrice whereas Janata Dal nominee Ravinder Pratap Singh wrested this seat in 1977 and Sanjay Singh, coming from royal family and a BJP nominee, won from this seat in 1998 though he is at present with the Congress. Hence, this constituency is also a dynastic bastion.

In this constituency, two surprising candidates contested against Congress nominees in the 1984 and 1989 Lok Sabha elections. Indira Gandhi's daughter-in-law, Maneka Gandhi, contested as an Independent candidate against the oldest son of Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi in 1984. During election campaign, she was targeted for being a Sikh and a number of slogans were coined with vicious

intention. She lost with a margin of 3,08,878 votes. She was never defeated again in her electoral ventures and has been chosen seven times to the Lok Sabha from Pilibhit and Aonla as an Independent, Janata Dal and BJP candidate from 1989 to the 2014 parliamentary elections. Maneka continued to be a Minister in the Cabinet of three Prime Ministers. She formed Sanjay Vichar Manch immediately after the accidental death of her husband Sanjay Gandhi, which secured victories in Andhra Pradesh.

Another surprising candidate, Raj Mohan Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi and C Rajagopalchari and son of Devidas Gandhi, was fielded by the then Prime Minister VP Singh as Janata Dal candidate against Rajiv Gandhi in this constituency in 1989. Raj Mohan Gandhi is an intellectual, well-educated and a well-known scholar. It is beyond anybody's imagination why a person like him was made a scapegoat. He lost with a margin of 2,02,132 votes. After 15 years, he was once again offered a ticket by the Aam Aadmi Party to contest from the East Delhi parliamentary constituency in 2014 against BJP nominee Maheesh Girri. He lost with a margin of 1,90,463 votes.

Nobody was sure whether he was a surprising or willing candidate. The only consolation for Raj Mohan Gandhi in politics has been that he served as a Rajya Sabha member during 1990-1992 when VP Singh ruled the country. Despite party affiliations, Rajmohan Gandhi, who had been long associated with the *Hindustan Times*, would have contributed in the interest of the nation had he been given another chance to enter the Rajya Sabha. In the end, men and women of stature were compromised for just a poster value.

(The writer is a senior journalist)

Silent voter will make the right choice

The 2019 Lok Sabha election is not bereft of issues. Economic reforms, unemployment and farm crisis feature sharply this poll season. Only a change in the political scenario can make a difference. The churning will help reshape the future



SHIVAJI SARKAR

It's not an easy election for the voters, irrespective of who the parties give or deny tickets to even as voters toy between emotions and realities. They are wondering whether they should vote for emotions or keep in mind the problems faced by them. The choice is not easy to make. On the one hand, India's economic data is puzzling, on the other, preferences of the electorate are not static. Issues are there at hand but the Opposition is unable to articulate them and the ruling combine is carrying out a vociferous campaign. True, there is a dynamic person in Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who defies all Opposition logic, but there is also an emerging leadership, not so much in the *mahagathbandhan* — a

grand alliance of regional parties — but in the gradual rise of the Congress and its two leaders, Priyanka Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, who are the new soft faces of politics. The duo is trying to touch the core voter base with old linkages of region, caste and communities.

They are nudging the voters to rethink and have a look at financial, job and other such statistics. They are marching towards a gradual rise of votes for their party across the country. The Congress now has a Government or is part of the Government in five States — Punjab, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh — with 21 per cent of the population, up from two States with seven per cent population in 2017.

Meanwhile, the BJP has been watching every step of the Congress. They feel that the grand old party has only to gain in major States like Uttar Pradesh, an old Congress bastion, where it still has sympathisers. There is also an apprehension that Priyanka's "Ganga yatra" may impact the voters' minds as she embraces outsiders.

The Congress has had two major symbolic gains recently. First, Amrita

Pandey, who is the BJP's Uttar Pradesh president's kin, joined the Congress in Varanasi. Second, a few days ago, Manish Khanduri, son of senior BJP leader Bhuvan Chandra Khanduri, too, joined the party. Amrita said, "I decided to join the Congress as the future belongs to it." She accused the BJP Governments at the Centre and in Uttar Pradesh of doing precious little for the farmers, youth and other deprived sections of the society. Amrita is the narrative of the Congress. Other Opposition parties, being the fiefdom of families, are less into studying statistics. But the Congress is gradually harping on it. So far, the onslaught is soft but one that is difficult to ignore. Job data stands skewed and even the Government's debt and supposedly unstated figures in the Budget are being played up. An emotionally-choked campaign trail, post-Pulwama, created by the BJP is apparently covering these issues.

Figures, however, are telling and much of it have come from draft reports of parliamentary committees, NSSO and CAG. On issues of defence, too, the handling of the situation in the parlia-

mentary committee has not been deft. The Government is careful to not fall into the trap. The CAG pointed out to huge off-budget financing of about ₹4 lakh crore in 2016-17. It said it could pose a fiscal risk in the long term in case the entity that raises the funds fails to meet debt servicing. The jobs data row has led to top statisticians quitting their job. As official figures of NSSO, considered reliable, were not available, the not-so-firm figures of a private organisation, CMIE, got credence. The CMIE said that around 31 million unemployed Indians are seeking jobs, the highest since October 2016.

Then there are also figures of a decline in male (earlier it was female) labour force participation. Data from the NSSO's Periodic Labour Force Survey 2017-18 shows employed males at 28.6 crore in 2017-18, against 30.4 crore in 2011-12. This indicates that fewer males were employed in 2017-18. This saw a decline even in rural areas.

In India, the unemployment rate measures the number of people actively looking for a job as a percentage of the labour force. Unemployment rate in India increased to 6.10 per cent in

2018 from 3.52 per cent in 2017. The World Bank reported it in the latest report. Overall, labour force participation dropped in 2017. Such figures are always discomfiting for any Government, particularly when elections are around the corner. The Government is now coming out with figures of Mudra loans. However, the banks believe loans are adding to non-performing assets (NPAs) and are reluctant to proffer it.

Is there a discontent? Apparently, it is not being noticed. The BJP's charisma is covering it up but this hype can be deceptive as voters remain silent. This does not mean people are not aware of the problems. The cash dole — once a strict no-no for the BJP — of ₹6,000 a year to the farmers is a mixed bag. Farmers from western Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra want that the sugar mills must not sit over their dues of about ₹25,000 crore. The Government should pay it. This they consider is renegeing on the promise of doubling their income. No one, however, denies that the cash dole is a relief post-demonetisation.

So is the Congress connecting with

the rural masses? It is trying hard but its worker base is weak as is its reach. It is sending messages and holding on to people's issues and sometimes playing up emotive ones. The cow is holy for the BJP and is not so unholy for the Congress, Samajwadi Party or the Bahujan Samaj Party when it comes to Uttar Pradesh. Cow vigilantism and a check on smuggling to Bangladesh have added to the woes of farmers in this State and elsewhere. The Opposition is, therefore, silently taking out a campaign to counter *gau-mata* politics. Castes that used to collect and dispose of the carcasses are refraining from doing it, thus widening social tensions. It is also carrying out an emotional campaign against the BJP, which had promised to protect the cow. Further, rice-growing areas are facing another problem. As the rupee appreciates and the Government takes credit for it, the move has cost us rice exports. Rising prices are affecting the volume of Indian trade in Africa. All of this points to an all-out impending battle, the churning of which will help reshape the future.

(The writer is a senior journalist)



VOTE MARCH: A FORCE FOR GOOD

The June 2016 referendum was not meant to be a full stop in a conversation about politics in Britain. The People's Vote march will show that a higher ideal of democracy exists — that everyone can participate in shaping their life. Like the online petition to revoke Article 50 and cancel Brexit, the march will demonstrate that May cannot define the public; that voters have a will and opinions of their own. (The Guardian editorial)

Sebi seeks powers to inspect firms' records

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

With an aim to thwart financial frauds, regulator Sebi has sought powers to conduct inspection of books of accounts of listed companies for contravention of any securities law and also to take direct action against the fraudsters.

Besides, Sebi has proposed a heavy penalty for altering, destroying, mutilating, concealing or falsifying records and documents or other tangible objects with an intent to obstruct, impede or influence a legal investigation.

At present, Sebi is empowered to conduct such inspections in case of violations relating to insider trading and fraudulent or unfair trade practices.

However, the regulator has now asked the government that its power to undertake inspection of books at listed companies should be for contravention of any securities laws without limiting it to violations relating to one or two regulations, a senior official said.

The Sebi Act empowers the regulator to conduct inspection of any book, register or other documents and records of any listed company if it has reasonable grounds to believe that the company has been indulging in insider trading or fraudulent and unfair trade practices relating to securities markets.

In its new proposal, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has asked the

Government to broaden this power to all cases where the regulator suspects a violation of any securities law.

Sebi has also proposed that any disgorgement order for recovery of illegal gains should be applicable to all joint actors, without making it conditional on the gains or averted losses of the violators.

In another amendment to the Sebi Act, the regulator has sought to replace the term 'material or non-public information' with 'unpublished price sensitive information' to bring in greater consistency of legal phrases used for insider trading laws.

Also, the penalty for insider trading violations is currently imposed on those dealing in securities "on the basis" of material or non-public information, which the regulator has suggested changing to "while in possession".

Regarding the additional penalty, Sebi is of the view that there is a need to create an obligation on an individual not to alter, destroy, mutilate, conceal or falsify the records to hamper investigation and therefore all such acts should be treated as 'fraudulent' and actionable under the securities laws.

Such acts would lead to a minimum penalty of Rs 5 lakh, which may extend to Rs 10 crore or three times the amount of profit made from such an act, whichever is higher.

In another proposed amendment, Sebi has said no person should employ or assist in employing any device, scheme or artifice to manipu-

late books of accounts or financial statements of a listed company to directly or indirectly manipulate the share price, or to hide the diversion, siphon off the funds or assets or earnings of a listed firm or a proposed-to-be-listed company.

Sebi is of the view that it should be empowered to take direct action against perpetrators of financial frauds as such acts that have adverse impact on not only the shareholders of the company but also impacts the confidence of investors in the securities markets.

The primary responsibility of monitoring or supervision of books of accounts of companies is with the Ministry of Corporate Affairs under the Companies Act. However, Sebi has suggested that it should also be given powers to take direct action in case of fraud committed by manipulating books of accounts or of financial statements at listed companies.

Such acts typically are aimed at manipulating the share price, hiding fund diversions, misutilising the public issue proceeds or siphoning off the proceeds, assets or earnings of a listed company.

The proposed amendment has been made as per a recommendation of the Fair Market Conduct Committee, constituted by the regulator. Officials said the final decision on the proposed changes would be taken only after taking into account the views of the Finance Ministry and also of the Corporate Affairs Ministry in a few cases.

Karnataka Govt nixes suspension of Ola cabs licence



PTI ■ BENGALURU

The Karnataka Government on Sunday revoked the suspension on mobile application-based taxi aggregator Ola Cabs after it agreed to pay a fine for the operation of bike taxis 'illegally'.

The cabs would resume service from Monday.

The State Government had on March 22 suspended the licence of Ola Cabs for the next six months with immediate effect saying that it was running bike taxis without permission.

The suspension was lifted after the executives of Ola Cabs had a detailed discussion with State Chief secretary T M Vijay Bhaskar and other senior officials.

Speaking to PTI, minister for social welfare Priyanka Kharge said, Ola Cabs officials met the officials of state trans-

port department, including the chief secretary, and the issue was sorted out."

To a question when the services would resume, the minister said the suspension has been revoked and the cab operator can resume service from March 25.

Asked why action was not taken against the other bike taxi services, which are similar to Ola Bike, Kharge said, "Probably nobody had brought it to the notice of the Government."

Earlier, Kharge had tweeted, "Ola Cabs will run their business as usual from tomorrow. However there is an urgent need for policies to catch up with new technologies and also industries too should work closer with the Government to help evolve policies for innovations."

Ola Cabs refused to comment on the matter.

FPIs invest ₹38,211 cr in Mar on improved global liquidity



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign investors have poured in a net amount of ₹38,211 crore in the domestic capital markets in March so far, mainly on account of improved global liquidity.

In February, foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) had put in a net amount of ₹11,182 crore in the capital markets — both debt and equity.

Analysts attributed the increase in infusion to a shift in stance on monetary policy outlook by various central banks globally.

According to depository data, foreign investors

pumped in a net sum of ₹27,424.18 crore in equities, while the debt market saw a net infusion of ₹10,787.02 crore during March 1-22 — taking the total to ₹38,211.20 crore.

As per Harsh Jain, chief operating officer of Groww, the cooling of US-China trade war and no hike in interest rates by the US Fed has made India attractive to FPIs. Other factors like stable crude oil prices have also helped.

After a shaky start this year, FPIs have made a "confident comeback" into the Indian equity markets, noted Himanshu Srivastava, senior

analyst manager research at Morningstar Investment Adviser India.

"In January, the US Fed announced a pause in rate hike, followed by China and European Central Bank providing stimulus for their economy. This bolstered the risk-on sentiments resulting in foreign flows taking a U-turn and to make their way back into emerging markets like India," Srivastava said.

Improvement in the country's macro outlook as well as expectations of formation of a stable government post elections has improved India's prospects, he added.

M&A deal value drops 34% to \$1.24 bn in Feb

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The value of merger and acquisition deals in February slumped 34 per cent to \$1.24 billion compared to the year-ago period, according to a report.



Leading consultancy Grant Thornton's report showed that number of M&A transactions last month rose marginally to 44 last month whereas the same was at 40 in February 2018.

In February last year, the total value of M&A transactions had touched \$1.9 billion.

"While February 2019 recorded same number of deals valued and estimated at over \$100 million as witnessed in February 2018, the high valued deals totalled to only \$0.9 billion compared to \$1.5 billion in February 2018," it said.

Pankaj Chopda, Director, Grant Thornton India LLP,

said the shortening of the run-up period to the national elections will only deepen the wait and watch approach in the deal environment in the short term and much is expected post the results of the general elections.

Regarding last month, he noted that M&A transactions were dominated by cross-border transactions as against a mix of cross-border and merger transactions in the same period a year ago.

"The month of February recorded the highest volumes in seven months, demonstrating the strong urge to expand outside local territory surpassing global headwinds," he added.

US to host Chinese trade delegation

AP ■ WEST PALM BEACH

The US will host a delegation from China led by Vice Premier Liu He early next month, following a trip by US officials to China in an effort to improve trade relations, the White House said on Saturday.

White House press secretary Sarah Sanders said President Donald Trump is sending US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin to Beijing starting next week, joined by deputy US Trade Representative Jeffrey Gerrish and other senior Trump administration officials.

Vice Premier Liu He and other Chinese officials meet with officials in Washington starting April 3, Sanders said.

The trade dispute began last year after the US made several complaints, including that China was stealing US trade secrets and was forcing companies to give them technology to access its market.

Trump imposed tariffs on \$250 billion of Chinese imports, about half what the United States buys from that country.

China retaliated with tariffs



on about \$110 billion of US items.

China's commerce ministry had previously said Lighthizer and Mnuchin would be in China on Thursday and Friday for the eighth round of trade negotiations.

The scheduled talks suggest the two sides believe they can make at least some progress.

Trump said Thursday at the White House that, "Talks with China are going very well."

Administration officials say they speak with their Chinese counterparts on a nearly daily basis.

Business lobbyists say that a key sticking point is what type of enforcement mechanism will be included in the agree-

₹ 3 lakh crore pvt power investment at risk as discoms delay payments

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

As much as ₹3 lakh crore of investment in a dozen power plants of the private sector is at risk of turning into NPA as States buying power have not been making payment for months, official data and sources said.

According to data available on the PRAAPTI portal of the Ministry of Power, 12 power generating companies belonging to firms such as GMR and Adani Group and public sector generators like NTPC have about ₹41,730 crore outstanding from state distribution companies (discoms) as of December 2018.

Dues as on date run into an estimated ₹60,000 crore, half of it being towards independent power producers in power sector.

The Bharatiya Janata Party-ruled Uttar Pradesh has the most outstanding dues of ₹6,497 crore, followed by Maharashtra at ₹6,179 crore. Other states not paying power generating companies on time include Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Telangana, Andhra

Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Punjab.

According to PRAAPTI portal, Uttar Pradesh takes 544 days to clear its dues while Maharashtra takes 580 days.

More than 80 per cent of the outstanding is accounted for by India's most industrialised states such as Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu who are biggest consumers of electricity. The top-10 states take an average of 562 days for payments.

Sources said the delay in payment is posing severe working capital issues at the private power plants.

Delay in realisation of receivables from the state distribution companies (DISCOMs) weakens the ability of project developers to service debt in a timely manner and leads to exhaustion of working capital in some cases, they said adding delayed payments risk projects being termed non-performing assets (NPAs) under the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) new classification rules.

Distribution, product innovation key drivers for growth: Thomas Cook India

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Travel services firm Thomas Cook India is betting big on enhanced distribution with special focus on tier-II and III cities and product innovation to drive growth, a top company official said.

The company currently offers services like foreign exchange, corporate travel, leisure travel, insurance, visa and passport services and e-business.

The firm's strategy includes a two-pronged initiative of enhanced distribution for increased penetration into viable source markets coupled with product innovation to target high potential emerging segments like regional tours, ladies first, theme park holidays and millennials, Thomas Cook India Chairman and MD Madhavan Menon told PTI.

The enhanced distribution is with special focus on tier-II and tier-III cities, he said.

"Technology will continue to drive our initiatives and empower our customers both external and internal..." Menon added.

Highlighting the importance of small towns and cities as turning points in growth, he said: "Regional India's tier-II and III cities and towns are emerging as strong power-drivers in our growth story across our travel and foreign exchange businesses and will continue to form a key focus area to catalyse under-leveraged potential."

Besides setting up company-owned branches, foray into such opportune markets will also include the franchise route that enables quick turnaround in establishing our presence and catering to local demand, he added.

"Our unique regional tours launched to leverage the high and potential regional and tier-II and III markets are seeing strong demand due to inclusions of a local 'son-of-the-soil' Thomas Cook Tour Manager to create guid-

ance/reassurance, local food on tour to add the comfort of home-cooked food, and brochures in local languages," Menon said.

From a foreign exchange business perspective, while the retail segment will be significant for future growth, the company will continue to focus on the increasing card penetration as Indian consumers move towards digital money, he said.

"We also envisage benefits accruing from the progressive turnaround of our international inbound businesses (DMS - Destination Management Specialist companies), domestic and e-business," Menon said.

When asked if the company was looking for more acquisitions going forward, Menon said: "Yes, we have had at least one acquisition a year over the last few years. And while there is no acquisition currently on the table, we are open to exploring opportunities as and when they may arise."

DoT asks State Govts not to disconnect BSNL, MTNL electricity connections

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Department of Telecommunications has asked State Governments not to disconnect electricity connections of State-owned BSNL and MTNL on account of pending dues as they are providing strategic services for the upcoming elections, sources said.

BSNL has already cleared 90 per cent of its power dues and is expected to clear the rest in the next 15-20 days.

"A letter from the Department of Telecom has been sent to state chief secretaries requesting them to avoid disruption in BSNL and MTNL electricity connections because it is providing strategic support to state machineries for managing elections," an official told PTI.

When contacted, BSNL Chairman and Managing Director Anupam Shrivastava said, "We have cleared 90 per cent of the dues for electricity

connections.

Now around ₹250 crore is left, which will be cleared in next 15-20 days. There were some disconnections that took place but all of them have been restored now."

MTNL Chairman and Managing Director P K Purwar said, "MTNL has no pending electricity dues. All payments are up to date till February-end."

Both BSNL and MTNL were unable to pay salaries to their employees for the month of February.

The Government released pending dues of ₹171 crore to cash-strapped MTNL for paying February salaries while BSNL has cleared salary dues of around ₹850 crore from its internal accruals.

Malaysia threatens EU fighter jet boycott over palm oil

AFP ■ KUALA LUMPUR

Malaysia may retaliate against an EU plan to curb palm oil use by purchasing new fighter jets from China instead of European arms companies, its leader said on Sunday.

The Southeast Asian country is the world's second largest palm oil producer after neighbouring Indonesia, and recently threatened to challenge the bloc's plan to phase out its use in biofuels at the World Trade Organisation.

Both Malaysia and Indonesia have been at loggerheads with EU lawmakers over the crop's cultivation, which has caused rampant deforestation and destruction of wildlife.

In his strongest statement yet on the proposed curbs, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said his country could look elsewhere to upgrade its ageing air force fleet of Russian Mig-29 fight-



ers — in effect abandoning plans to purchase France's Rafale jet or the Eurofighter Typhoon.

"If they keep on taking action against us, we will think of buying airplanes from China or any other country," he was quoted as saying by the official Bernama news agency.

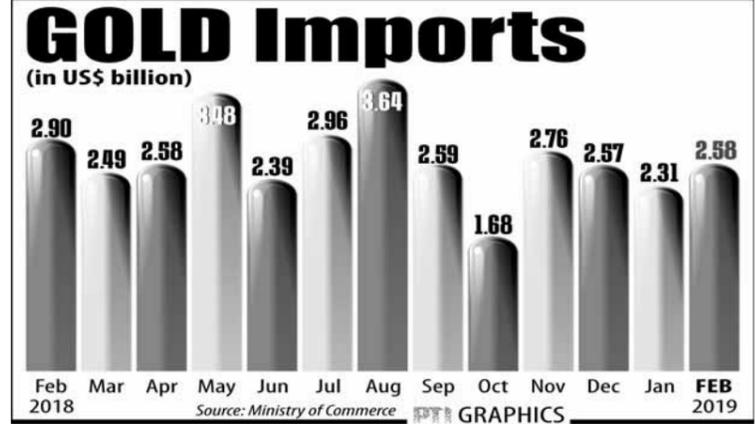
But the premier said he was not "declaring war" on the EU as his country needed goods from the bloc, many members

of which are among Malaysia's top trading partners.

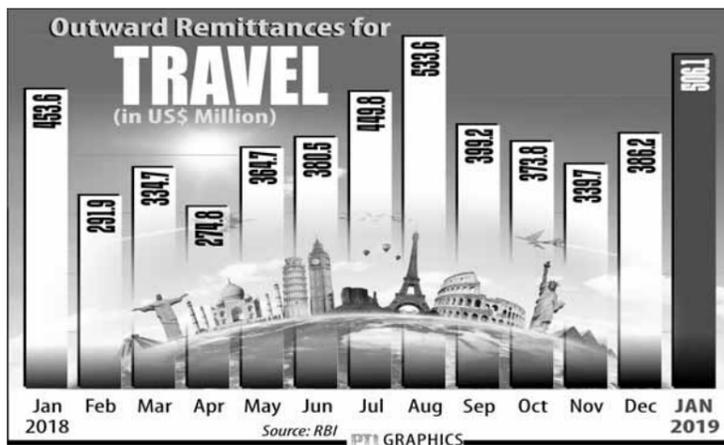
Mahathir's remarks come ahead of a five-day international defence exhibition starting Monday on the resort island of Langkawi, where representatives of global weapons manufacturers have gathered.

Any EU palm oil curbs could seriously hurt farmers who represent an important voter base in both Malaysia and Indonesia.

Scheme	NAV	1Yr%							
Tata Digital India Fund-Reg(G)	14.99	22.27	Tata Large Cap Fund(G)	216.09	8.43	SBI BlueChip Fund-Reg(G)	38.50	4.53	
SBI Banking & Financial Services Fund-Reg(G)	17.48	21.00	ICICI Pru Multicap Fund(G)	289.97	8.31	Edelweiss Large & Mid Cap Fund-Reg(G)	30.78	4.50	
DHFL Pramerica Global Equity Opp Fund(G)	18.25	19.59	ICICI Pru LT Equity Fund (Tax Saving)(G)	372.50	8.26	Reliance Value Fund(G)	72.73	4.45	
ICICI Pru Technology Fund(G)	59.41	16.70	ICICI Pru Bluechip Fund(G)	41.71	8.25	Franklin India Equity Advantage Fund(G)	79.65	4.39	
Tata Index Fund-Sensex Plan(G)	93.72	16.47	Reliance Capital Builder Fund-II-B(G)	12.98	8.10	BNP Paribas Long Term Equity Fund(G)	37.13	4.36	
HDFC Index Fund-Sensex(G)	337.44	16.42	Axis Long Term Equity Fund(G)	42.94	7.97	HDFC Capital Builder Value Fund(G)	296.67	4.26	
SBI Technology Opp Fund-Reg(G)	64.66	15.99	Kotak Bluechip Fund(G)	230.61	7.90	DSP Equity Opportunities Fund-Reg(G)	218.44	4.05	
Reliance US Equity Opp Fund(G)	14.70	15.99	Invesco India Largecap Fund(G)	28.43	7.81	UTI LT Equity Fund (Tax Saving)-Reg(G)	86.41	4.04	
Reliance Index Fund - Sensex Plan(G)	18.76	15.61	Franklin India Focused Equity Fund(G)	40.54	7.68	HDFC TaxSaver(G)	520.54	3.99	
HDFC Top 100 Fund(G)	491.85	14.75	Reliance Close Ended Equity Fund-II-A(G)	18.24	7.66	Principal Dividend Yield Fund(G)	52.30	3.91	
Franklin India Technology Fund(G)	162.29	14.59	Axis Focused 25 Fund(G)	26.68	7.49	ICICI Pru Value Discovery Fund(G)	144.42	3.83	
Tata Banking & Financial Services Fund-Reg(G)	18.28	14.58	Franklin India Taxshield(G)	565.47	7.43	SBI Magnum TaxGain'93-Reg(G)	142.07	3.80	
Aditya Birla SL Global Real Estate Fund(G)	19.48	14.41	Sundaram Large and Mid Cap Fund(G)	33.86	7.37	Tata Mid Cap Growth Fund(G)	138.12	3.67	
HDFC Index Fund-NIFTY 50 Plan(G)	103.93	14.40	ICICI Pru Global Stable Equity Fund(G)	14.86	7.37	IDBI India Top 100 Equity Fund(G)	23.49	3.66	
UTI Nifty Index Fund-Reg(G)	74.55	14.30	Principal Focused Multicap Fund(G)	62.40	7.36	ICICI Pru Large & Mid Cap Fund(G)	319.21	3.31	
IDFC Nifty Fund-Reg(G)	23.61	14.27	Invesco India Growth Opp Fund(G)	33.72	7.35	Canara Rob Emerg Equities Fund-Reg(G)	92.44	3.20	
Tata Index Fund-Nifty Plan(G)	69.01	14.18	Invesco India Tax Plan(G)	50.39	7.28	ICICI Pru Value Fund-9(G)	12.32	3.18	
Axis Bluechip Fund(G)	27.88	14.12	UTI Value Opp Fund-Reg(G)	60.95	7.27	Aditya Birla SL Tax Relief '96(G)	31.11	3.15	
Baroda Banking & Fin Serv Fund(G)	22.62	13.90	DSP Tax Saver Fund-Reg(G)	47.40	7.15	JM Value Fund(G)	31.72	3.13	
SBI Nifty Index Fund-Reg(G)	98.18	13.83	Invesco India Contra Fund(G)	47.74	7.14	DSP Global Allocation Fund-Reg(G)	11.95	3.06	
Franklin India Feeder - Franklin U.S. Opportunities Fund(G)	29.85	13.82	Franklin India Bluechip Fund(G)	464.59	7.04	IDFC Multi Cap Fund-Reg(G)	91.88	3.04	
Reliance Index Fund - Nifty Plan(G)	19.14	13.55	BNP Paribas Large Cap Fund(G)	86.11	6.98	Franklin India Opportunities Fund(G)	73.95	2.97	
ICICI Pru Nifty Index Fund(G)	110.38	13.49	HDFC Growth Opp Fund-Reg(G)	113.27	6.97	SBI Tax Advantage Fund-III-Reg(G)	23.43	2.97	
ICICI Pru US Bluechip Equity Fund(G)	26.64	13.41	Franklin India Focused Equity Fund(G)	222.76	6.91	ICICI Pru R.I.G.H.T Fund(G)	41.79	2.83	
ICICI Pru Banking & Fin Serv Fund(G)	63.74	13.40	Aditya Birla SL Frontline Equity Fund(G)	222.76	6.91	ICICI Pru Value Fund-3(D)	10.52	2.63	
Aditya Birla SL Digital India Fund(G)	53.12	13.31	L&T India Large Cap Fund-Reg(G)	26.62	6.85	SBI Equity Opp Fund-Reg(G)	15.60	2.53	
Aditya Birla SL Index Fund(G)	112.13	13.25							
Franklin India Index Fund-NSE Nifty(G)	90.58	13.18							
Axis Multicap Fund-Reg(G)	11.16	13.07							
IDBI Nifty Index Fund(G)	21.09	13.05							
Canara Rob Equity Tax Saver Fund-Reg(G)	64.21	12.61							
HDFC Equity Fund(G)	664.67	12.48							
Mirae Asset India Equity Fund-Reg(G)	50.47	12.37							
SBI Magnum Equity ESG Fund-Reg(G)	103.10	12.26							
Reliance Large Cap Fund(G)	34.66	12.24							
Reliance Pharma Fund(G)	149.88	12.15							
Canara Rob Equity Diver Fund-Reg(G)	132.43	11.93							
Invesco India Financial Services Fund(G)	55.74	11.68							
Canara Rob Bluechip Equity Fund-Reg(G)	24.41	11.67							
UTI Equity Fund-Reg(G)	141.07	11.33							
ICICI Pru FMCG Fund(G)	238.65	11.26							
ICICI Pru Growth Fund-2(DP)	11.77	11.14							
Mirae Asset Tax Saver Fund-Reg(G)	17.35	11.12							
Kotak India EQ Contra Fund(G)	51.99	11.04							
Aditya Birla SL Banking & Financial Services Fund-Reg(G)	28.51	10.50							
Mirae Asset Emerging Bluechip-Reg(G)	52.40	10.47							
Sundaram Select Focus(G)	176.60	10.39							
Canara Rob Consumer Trends Fund-Reg(G)	38.76	10.30							
Kotak Standard Multicap Fund(G)	34.87	10.29							
Axis Midcap Fund(G)	35.76	10.10							
Aditya Birla SL Intl. Equity Fund-A(G)	20.70	10.04							
JM Core 11 Fund(G)	9.13	9.95							
Reliance Banking Fund(G)	276.14	9.92							
Sundaram Fin Serv Opp Fund(G)	40.39	9.73							
Sundaram World Brand Fund-Sr II-Reg(G)	14.18	9.58							
Sundaram World Brand Fund-Sr III-Reg(G)	14.34	9.53							
Mirae Asset Great Consumer Fund-Reg(G)	34.37	9.49							
Reliance Multi Cap Fund(G)	97.33	9.49							
Edelweiss Large Cap Fund(G)	34.79	9.44							
Baroda Large Cap Fund(G)	14.27	9.35							
Parag Parikh Long Term Equity Fund-Reg(G)	24.86	9.32							
ICICI Pru Growth Fund-1(DP)	11.15	9.31							
UTI Banking and Financial Services Fund-Reg(G)	99.38	9.25							
UTI Mastershare-Reg(G)	121.06	9.14							
DSP US Flexible Equity Fund-Reg(G)	24.00	9.04							
IDFC Large Cap Fund-Reg(G)	32.10	8.73							
Kotak Tax Saver Scheme(G)	43.11	8.70							
DHFL Pramerica Large Cap Fund-2-Reg(G)	12.44	8.61							



Fund-Reg(G)		Reliance Vision Fund(G)	510.34	-3.82	
Invesco India Feeder - Fund(G)	12.50	0.44	L&T Large and Midcap Fund-Reg(G)	46.19	-3.96
Invesco Global Equity Income Fund(G)			UTI LT Adv Fund-IV(G)	10.47	-4.27
Aditya Birla SL CEF-Global Agri-Reg(G)	22.68	0.39	L&T Midcap Fund-Reg(G)	132.09	-4.43
UTI Core Equity Fund-Reg(G)	61.90	0.31	BNP Paribas Mid Cap Fund(G)	30.83	-4.69
Reliance Japan Equity Fund(G)	12.40	0.23	Tata Infrastructure Tax Saving Fund(G)	24.09	-4.75
SBI Magnum Global Fund-Reg(G)	166.95	0.08	DSP Natural Res & New Energy Fund-Reg(G)	32.17	-5.47
Edelweiss Long Term Equity Fund (Tax Savings)-Reg(G)	45.82	0.07	IDFC Sterling Value Fund-Reg(G)	50.91	-5.60
Motilal Oswal Multicap 35 Fund-Reg(G)	25.61	0.01	Aditya Birla SL Midcap Fund(G)	285.40	-5.62
ICICI Pru Exports & Services Fund(G)	56.88	-0.14	IDBI Midcap Fund(G)	10.71	-5.64
Templeton India Value Fund(G)	254.51	-0.31	IDFC Focused Equity Fund-Reg(G)	35.76	-5.64
UTI Focussed Equity Fund-I(G)	13.23	-0.36	Edelweiss Eur Dynamic Equity Off-shr Fund-Reg(G)	10.51	-5.65
SBI Healthcare Opp Fund-Reg(G)	117.87	-0.37	Franklin Asian Equity Fund(G)	21.84	-5.67
Aditya Birla SL Global Commodities Fund(G)	12.48	-0.45	DHFL Pramerica Midcap Opp Fund-Reg(G)	17.96	-5.72
SBI LT Advantage Fund-III-Reg(G)	13.12	-0.47	Reliance Tax Saver (ELSS) Fund(G)	54.61	-5.87
IDFC Tax Advt(ELSS) Fund-Reg(G)	55.59	-0.60	Aditya Birla SL Dividend Yield Fund(G)	158.67	-6.04
ICICI Pru Infrastructure Fund(G)	50.92	-0.88	Invesco India Feeder - Invesco Pan European Equity Fund-Reg(G)	10.41	-6.29
DSP Midcap Fund-Reg(G)	53.69	-0.94	Edelweiss Gr China Equity Off-Shore Fund-Reg(G)	26.83	-6.36
Principal Emerging Bluechip Fund(G)	102.18	-0.95	Sundaram Infra Advantage Fund(G)	32.09	-6.67
Reliance Consumption Fund(G)	63.35	-1.31	Sundaram Mid Cap Fund(G)	459.45	-6.78
UTI LT Adv Fund-V(G)	9.70	-1.36	Canara Rob Infrastructure Fund-Reg(G)	44.41	-6.86
ICICI Pru Growth Fund-3(DP)	10.44	-1.42	Edelweiss Mid Cap Fund-Reg(G)	26.13	-6.90
HDFC Small Cap Fund-Reg(G)	43.48	-1.45	SBI Magnum Comma Fund-Reg(G)	35.43	-7.02
UTI LT Adv Fund-III(G)	13.82	-1.54	SBI Magnum MidCap Fund-Reg(G)	73.03	-7.04
ICICI Pru Value Fund-11(G)	11.85	-1.58	Aditya Birla SL Mfg. Equity Fund-Reg(G)	12.77	-7.06
Kotak Emerging Equity Scheme(G)	37.93	-1.59	UTI Mid Cap Fund-Reg(G)	99.14	-7.15
Sundaram Select Small Cap Series-IV-Reg(G)	13.85	-1.72	Kotak Infra & Eco Reform Fund(G)	19.60	-7.18
L&T India Value Fund-Reg(G)	35.36	-1.74	Franklin India Smaller Cos Fund(G)	54.02	-7.49
Aditya Birla SL Equity Advantage Fund(G)	395.56	-1.80	SBI Small Cap Fund-Reg(G)	51.03	-7.58
UTI Infrastructure Fund-Reg(G)	52.60	-1.81	L&T Business Cycle Fund-Reg(G)	14.94	-7.63
HDFC Mid-Cap Opportunities Fund(G)	54.34	-1.84	Baroda Mid-cap Fund(G)	8.83	-7.64
Tata Infrastructure Fund(G)	54.86	-1.97	Reliance Small Cap Fund(G)	39.63	-8.19
Sundaram Select Small Cap Series-III-Reg(G)	13.82	-2.00	Kotak Small Cap Fund(G)	70.46	-8.25
ICICI Pru Value Fund-10(G)	11.23	-2.01	HDFC Infrastructure Fund(G)	16.89	-8.25
SBI Infrastructure Fund-Reg(G)	14.88	-2.07	SBI PSU Fund-Reg(G)	10.11	-8.26
ICICI Pru Nifty Next 50 Index Fund(G)	24.58	-2.09	IDBI Small Cap Fund(G)	9.39	-8.39
SBI LT Advantage Fund-II-Reg(G)	13.49	-2.14	Aditya Birla SL Infrastructure Fund(G)	31.86	-9.02
L&T Tax Advt Fund-Reg(G)	52.74	-2.24	L&T Emerging Businesses Fund-Reg(G)	24.45	-9.11
SBI LT Advantage Fund-IV-Reg(G)	12.38	-2.37	L&T Infrastructure Fund-Reg(G)	15.71	-9.19
Invesco India Multicap Fund(G)	46.40	-2.42	Principal Global Opportunities Fund(G)	27.69	-9.86
Motilal Oswal Long Term Equity Fund-Reg(G)	16.98	-2.51	ICICI Pru Smallcap Fund(G)	24.63	-10.79
Kotak World Gold Fund(G)	8.07	-2.53	Reliance Power & Infra Fund(G)	97.95	-11.27
IDBI Nifty Junior Index Fund(G)	20.94	-2.53	Sundaram Select Micro Cap-Series X-Reg(G)	13.65	-11.46
Invesco India PSU Equity Fund(G)	17.10	-2.62	DSP Small Cap Fund-Reg(G)	54.84	-12.51
SBI Contra Fund-Reg(G)	108.54	-2.76	Aditya Birla SL Emerging Leaders Fund-4-Reg(G)	14.75	-14.24
Invesco India Infrastructure Fund(G)	16.90	-2.87	Aditya Birla SL Emerging Leaders Fund-7-Reg(G)	12.85	-14.39
Baroda ELSS 96(G)	43.51	-2.97	Aditya Birla SL Emerging Leaders Fund-3-Reg(G)	14.15	-14.66
ICICI Pru Dividend Yield Equity Fund(G)	16.63	-2.98	IDFC Infrastructure Fund-Reg(G)	15.03	-15.08
Edelweiss Emerging Markets Opp Eq. Offshore Fund-Reg(G)	12.36	-3.12	Sundaram Global Advt(G)	16.73	-3.14
Sundaram Global Advt(G)	16.73	-3.14	Tata Resources & Energy Fund-Reg(G)	14.07	-3.18
Tata Resources & Energy Fund-Reg(G)	14.07	-3.18	DSP India T.I.G.E.R. Fund-Reg(G)	90.51	-3.21
DSP India T.I.G.E.R. Fund-Reg(G)	90.51	-3.21	ICICI Pru Midcap Fund(G)	94.49	-3.31
ICICI Pru Midcap Fund(G)	94.49	-3.31	SBI LT Advantage Fund-I-Reg(G)	13.06	-3.41
SBI LT Advantage Fund-I-Reg(G)	13.06	-3.41	DHFL Pramerica Euro Equity Fund(G)	13.22	-3.50
DHFL Pramerica Euro Equity Fund(G)	13.22	-3.50	ICICI Pru Value Fund-4(G)	21.09	-3.52
ICICI Pru Value Fund-4(G)	21.09	-3.52			



May faces pressure to step down

AFP ■ LONDON

Prime Minister Theresa May faces growing pressure from within her own party either to resign or to set a date for stepping down as a way to build support for her Brexit agreement with the European Union, British media reported Sunday.

Senior Conservative Party figures were urging May to recognize her weakened political position and leave the prime minister's post. However, there was no indication from Downing Street a resignation was near.

Some of the party's key supporters of a "hard" Brexit that would see Britain leave the EU even without a withdrawal deal in place planned to meet with May Sunday afternoon at Chequers, the prime minister's country residence.

May thus far has been unable to generate enough support in Parliament for the deal her government and the EU reached late last year.

Lawmakers voted down the Brexit plan twice, and May has raised the possibility of bringing it back a third time if enough legislators appear willing to switch their votes.

Treasury chief Philip Hammond said Sunday that senior party members plotting to remove May were being "self-indulgent." He said a change of leadership would not provide a solution to the U.K.'s political deadlock on Brexit.

"We've got to address the question of what type of Brexit is acceptable to Parliament, what type of way forward Parliament can agree on so that we can avoid what would be an economic catastrophe of a no-deal exit and also what would be a very big challenge to confidence in our political system if we didn't exit at all," Hammond said.

Cabinet Office Minister David Lidington, mentioned as a possible caretaker prime minister should May be ousted, said Sunday that talk of a Cabinet

BREXIT



revolt was far-fetched speculation.

The Cabinet is focused on the best way to get May's withdrawal plan passed in the House of Commons, Lidington said.

The U.K.'s departure from the EU was set to take place on March 29, but the absence of an approved divorce agreement prompted May last week to ask the leaders of the 27 remaining member nations for a postponement.

The leaders rejected May's

request to extend the deadline until June 30. Instead, they agreed to delay Brexit until May 22, on the eve of EU Parliament elections, if the prime minister can persuade Parliament to endorse the twice-rejected agreement.

If she is unable to rally support for the withdrawal agreement, the European leaders said Britain only has until April 12 to choose between leaving the EU without a divorce deal and a radically new path, such as revoking the decision to leave the bloc or calling another voter referendum on Brexit.

Parliament may take a series of votes this week to determine what proposals, if any, could command majority support.

Conservative Party legislator George Freeman tweeted Saturday night that the U.K. needs a new leader if the Brexit process is to move forward.

"I'm afraid it's all over for the PM. She's done her best. But across the country you can see

the anger. Everyone feels betrayed," Freeman tweeted. "This can't go on. We need a new PM who can reach out & build some sort of coalition for a Plan B."

Under Conservative Party rules, May cannot face a formal leadership challenge from within her own party until December because she survived one three months ago. But she may be persuaded that her position is untenable if Cabinet ministers and other senior party members desert her.

Her bid for fresh support for her withdrawal plan has so far failed to win backing from Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party, which usually provides crucial votes for May's minority government.

She also faces pressure from groups demanding a second Brexit referendum. Huge crowds turned out Saturday for an anti-Brexit protest march in London. Organizers claimed more than 1 million people attended.

NZ to hold national remembrance for Christchurch next Friday

AFP ■ CHRISTCHURCH

New Zealand will hold a national remembrance service on March 29 for the victims of the Christchurch mosque massacre and their families, the prime minister's office announced on Sunday.

The interfaith service will take place in Christchurch two weeks after an Australian white supremacist shot and killed 50 Muslims who had arrived for Friday prayers at two mosques in the city on March 15.

"The national remembrance service provides an opportunity for Cantabrians (Christchurch-area residents), New Zealanders and people all around the world to come together as one to honour the victims of the terrorist attack," Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said in a statement.

"In the week since the

unprecedented terror attack there has been an outpouring of grief and love in our country.

"The service will be a chance to once again show that New Zealanders are compassionate, inclusive and diverse, and that we will protect those values."

The slaughter has rocked the normally laid-back country and prompted horror worldwide, heightened by the gunman's cold-blooded livestreaming of the massacre.

Since then, New Zealanders have responded with an outpouring of support for the country's small Muslim community.

The attack also left dozens of people injured, some critically. Brenton Tarrant, a 28-year-old Australian, was arrested within minutes of the massacre and has been charged with murder.

GLOBE TROTTER

NEPAL POLICE RESCUES 84 CHILD LABOURERS

Kathmandu: As many as 84 child labourers were rescued by Nepal Police from various parts of Rolpa district, an NGO said here on Sunday. The children aged below 16 were working at brick kilns, hotels and restaurants and transport firms, according to the Rolpa unit of the NGO, Save the Children.

4 BURIED IN SWISS ALPINE AVALANCHE

Berlin: Swiss police say four people are missing after being buried in an avalanche high in the Alps in the southwest of the country. Valais canton (State) police said Sunday on Twitter that the four were hit by the morning avalanche at 2,800 meters (9,200 foot) altitude in the Bouverier area near the borders with France and Italy.

BLAST KILLS 8 CHILDREN IN SUDAN

Cairo: Sudanese officials say eight children are killed in an explosion near a military facility where they were searching for scrap metal to resell.

Polls close in Thailand's first general election since 2014 coup

AFP ■ BANGKOK

Thais began the nail-biting wait late on Sunday to see whether the ruling junta will return to power as a civilian government, or if pro-democracy parties can triumph against the odds, as polls closed in the country's first general election since a 2014 coup.

The Election Commission estimated 80 per cent of voters had turned out at schoolyards, temples and government offices across the nation, their enthusiasm fired by years of denied democracy.

Sunday's crunch vote was foreshadowed by a cryptic last-minute warning from King Maha Vajiralongkorn to support "good" leaders to prevent "chaos."

Thailand is a constitutional monarchy and the palace is nominally above politics. But the institution retains unsalable powers and is insulated from criticism by a harsh

royal defamation law. The election pits a royalist junta and allies against the election-winning machine of billionaire ex-premier Thaksin Shinawatra and an unpredictable wave of millions of first-time voters.

The kingdom remains bitterly divided despite the junta's pledge to rescue it from a decade-long treadmill of protests and coups.

Politicians across the spectrum fear a stalemate under election rules, written by the junta, which limit the chances of any single party emerging with a comfortable parliamentary majority.

There are 51 million eligible voters and more than seven million first-timers aged 18-25.

Preliminary results were expected within a few hours of the polls closing at 5.00 pm local time (1000 GMT).

"I want to see Thailand become more democratic and inequality eased from society," said insurance company

employee Pattrapong Waschiyapong at a Bangkok polling station.

Fears of the potential for foul play ricocheted across social media in a reflection of the lingering mistrust between rival political camps, in a country which last held a general election in 2011.

"Thai people come to vote because they want change," said Somkid, 64, giving only one name, as she waited outside the headquarters of the Pheu Thai party. "If there is any vote rigging there will be protests."

The day was framed by the palace statement, which added further intrigue to an election that has repeatedly threatened to tip into chaos before a single ballot was cast. It reiterated comments by late king Bhumibol Adulyadej from 1969 calling for people to "support good people to govern the society and control the bad people" to prevent them "creating chaos."

Pak PM orders probe into forced conversion, marriages of 2 teenage Hindu girls

Islamabad:

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on Sunday ordered a probe into reports of abduction, forced conversion and underage marriages of two teenage Hindu girls in Sindh province and to take immediate steps for their recovery, Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry said.

The two girls, Raveena (13) and Reena (15), were allegedly kidnapped by a group of "influential" men from their home in Ghotki district in Sindh on the eve of Holi. Soon after the kidnapping, a video went viral in which a cleric was purportedly shown solemnising the Nikah (marriage) of the two girls, triggering a nationwide outrage.

In a separate video, the minor girls can be seen saying that they accepted Islam of their own free will.

In a Twitter post in Urdu on Sunday, Information Minister Chaudhry said that the prime

minister has asked the Sindh chief minister to look into reports that the girls in question have been taken to Rahim Yar Khan in Punjab.

Chaudhry said the prime minister has also ordered the Sindh and Punjab governments to devise a joint action plan in light of the incident, and to take concrete steps to prevent such incidents from happening again.

"The minorities in Pakistan make up the white of our flag and all of our flag's colours are precious to us. Protection of our flag is our duty," he said.

On Saturday, Chaudhry said that the government had taken notice of reports of the forced conversion and underage marriages of the two girls.

Meanwhile, Minister of State for Interior Shehryar Khan Afridi has directed IG Police Sindh to probe and submit report on abduction of two Hindu girls at the earliest. *PTI*

Macron looks to galvanise EU on China as Xi visits France

AFP ■ PARIS

Chinese President Xi Jinping heads to the French Riviera on Sunday for the final leg of his European tour, as France's Emmanuel Macron looks to forge a united European front to contend with China's global ambitions.

Xi's trip will begin in the Mediterranean city of Nice and a stop in the nearby principality of Monaco before face-to-face talks with Macron.

On Monday, the two leaders head to Paris for the official state visit, marking 55 years since Charles de Gaulle broke ranks with the West to establish diplomatic relations with the Communist nation.

A series of cooperation deals on nuclear power, aerospace and clean energy initiatives, some involving lucrative contracts, are expected to be signed.

But Xi's visit poses a particular challenge for Macron,

who wants to deepen EU ties with China while also pushing back against Beijing's growing clout.

Europe's distrust of Huawei, which is poised to become the dominant player in next-generation telecom networks worldwide, is emblematic of the increasingly rocky relationship.

"We have a lot to do together in terms of climate action, in terms of multilateralism, but we also have to defend our own interests," Macron said in Brussels on Thursday.

He has lauded the EU's "awakening" to the challenges posed by China, which the bloc now labels a "rival" despite becoming Europe's biggest trading partner.

"The reality is that the world has changed significantly — China is not the country it once was, and we are dealing with a very major partner," a Macron aide said ahead

of Xi's visit.

On Tuesday, Macron and Xi will be joined by German Chancellor Angela Merkel and EU Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker to explore "points of convergence" ahead of an EU-China summit in Brussels next month. Xi arrives in France from Italy, which has angered its EU partners by formally joining China's "new Silk Road" initiative for a string of maritime, rail and road connections aiming at expanding Chinese trade.

Macron is expected to press his call for increased "reciprocity" regarding market access to China, in particular Beijing's demands that foreign companies hand over vital technological know-how in order to invest in the country.

"If we're going to talk about a new Silk Road, then it must be one that goes in both directions," Finance Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian told BFM television on Friday.

Strong 6.1 magnitude quake jolts eastern Indonesia

AFP ■ JAKARTA

A 6.1-magnitude earthquake hit off the coast of North Maluku province in eastern Indonesia Sunday, US seismologists said, but no tsunami warning was issued.

The quake was 150 kilometres (92 miles) northwest of the coastal town of Ternate at a depth of 37 kilometres, according to the US Geological Survey. The quake was felt in Ternate but residents were unconcerned, a local said.

"I was watching TV when the earthquake suddenly happened, the jolt was quite strong but thankfully it was quick so there was no panic," Ternate resident Budi Nurgianto told AFP.

Officials are still assessing the quake's impact but there

were no immediate reports of casualties.

"We are still checking to see if there's any damage," said Rahmat Triyono, head of Indonesian weather agency BKM's earthquake and tsunami division.

Indonesia experiences frequent seismic and volcanic activity due to its position on the Pacific "Ring of Fire," where tectonic plates collide.

Last September, a 7.5-magnitude quake and a subsequent tsunami in Palu on Sulawesi island killed more than 2,200, with a thousand more declared missing.

On boxing day December 26, 2004, a 9.1-magnitude earthquake struck Aceh province, causing a tsunami and killing more than 170,000 in Indonesia.

Norway airlifts passengers off cruise ship caught in storm

AFP ■ OSLO

Rescuers were working Sunday to airlift more than 1,300 passengers and crew off a cruise ship after it ran into trouble in rough seas off the Norwegian coast.

The Viking Sky lost power and started drifting mid-afternoon Saturday in perilous waters two kilometres (1.2 miles) off More og Romsdal, prompting the captain to send out a distress call.

The authorities decided to launch a helicopter airlift in very difficult conditions rather than run the risk of leaving people on board.

"We would rather have the passengers on land rather than on board the ship," police chief Tor Andre Franck said.

By early Sunday, the crew

had managed to restart three of its four engines.

Authorities said 397 of the 1,373 people on board had so far been taken off by helicopter, with each chopper able to take 15-20 people per trip.

Police said 17 people had been taken to hospital.

The vessel was making slow headway at two to three knots off the dangerous, rocky coast and a tug would help it towards the port of Molde, about 500 kilometres northwest of Oslo, officials said.

Five helicopters were scrambled along with coastguard and other rescue vessels. Two tugs were reportedly closing in on Viking Sky.

"Towing cables are being set up by the tugs," southern Norway's rescue centre said on Twitter.

Dramatic footage of the ordeal showed furniture and plants sliding round the lurching vessel as parts of the ceiling came down. Dozens of passengers wearing life jackets were seated around waiting to get off the vessel.

"We're still waiting for the helicopter to get out," says Ryan Flynn who was shooting one of the videos. "This is taking very long." The airlift was continuing, emergency services spokesman Per Fjeld said.

"I have never seen anything so frightening," said one of the passengers who was rescued, Janet Jacob. "I started to pray. I prayed for the safety of everyone on board," she told the NRK television channel.

"The helicopter trip was terrifying. The winds were like a tornado," she added.

Iraq parliament sacks Guv over deadly ferry capsizes

AFP ■ BAGHDAD

Iraq's parliament on Sunday sacked the governor of a northern province where 100 people died in a ferry disaster that sparked a wave of grief and anger.

Most of those killed when the boat sank Thursday in the Tigris River in Mosul were women and children headed for a Mother's Day picnic on the Kurds' Nowruz New Year holiday.

Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mehdi wrote to parliament on Saturday calling on legislators to fire Nineveh provincial governor Nawfel Akoub, citing "negligence and concrete failings" meriting his dismissal.

His two deputies were also fired during a vote in the

Sixteen people have been arrested as part of an investigation into the ferry capsizes

national Assembly. Parliament declared those killed in the tragedy "martyrs", allowing their families to receive financial compensation and paving the way for court proceedings.

Sixteen people have been arrested as part of an investigation into the ferry capsizes, a security official said.

Authorities say 63 people are still listed as missing. Dozens of students held a silent protest Sunday on the campus of the university of

Mosul, dressed in black to mourn the victims.

One of them, Abdullah al-Jubburi, told AFP they were demonstrating to demand that "corrupt" politicians and civil servants be replaced.

"The governor and all corrupt officials must be put on trial... We are fed up of being mistreated and marginalised," said fellow protester Isra Mohammed.

Akoub has already been subjected to the anger of victims' relatives and their supporters over alleged corruption and cronyism.

When he visited the scene of the tragedy on Friday stones were thrown at his convoy by protesters demonstrating against perceived corruption and neglect.

Death toll from central Mali massacre up to 134, says UN

AP ■ BAMAKO

The death toll from a massacre in a central Malian village rose to 134 dead, the UN said, as new video emerged Sunday showing victims strewn on the ground amid the burning remains of their homes.

An ethnic Dogon militia already blamed for scores of attacks in central Mali over the past year attacked an ethnic Peuhl village just before dawn on Saturday.

Among the victims in Ogossogou were pregnant women, small children and the elderly, according to a Peuhl group known as Tabital Pulaaku.

covered with a piece of fabric, and at one point an ID card is shown covered with blood.

In the capital of Bamako, visiting UN Security Council President Francois Delattre, condemned the killings as an "unspeakable attack" late Saturday.

At least 55 people were wounded and the UN mission in Mali said it was "working to ensure the wounded were evacuated." New York, the UN secretary-general condemned the attack and called on the Malian authorities to swiftly investigate it and bring the perpetrators to justice.

Islamic extremists were ousted from urban centers in northern Mali during a 2013 French-led military operation.

The jihadists scattered throughout the rural areas, regrouped and began launching numerous attacks against

the Malian military and the UN mission. Since 2015, extremism has edged all the way to central Mali where it has exacerbated tensions between the Dogon and Peuhl groups.

Members of the Dogon group accuse the Peulhs of supporting these jihadists linked to violent groups in the country's north and beyond.

Peulhs have in turn accused the Dogon of supporting the Malian army in its effort to stamp out extremism.

In December, Human Rights Watch had warned that "militia killings of civilians in central and northern Mali are spiralling out of control."

The group said the ethnic Dogon militia known as Dan Na Ambassagou and its leader had been linked to many of the atrocities and called for Malian authorities to prosecute the perpetrators.

UK mother urges thief to return dead daughter's lock of hair

PTI ■ LONDON

A mother in the UK has urged a thief to return a stolen lock of hair which she said was all she had left of her dead two-year-old daughter.

Kirsty Baldwin's daughter Ellie Louise died six years ago of bronchial pneumonia and she had kept the hair in her handbag, which was stolen at a motorway service station in Greater Manchester, the BBC reported.

The bag was taken from her car by the thief in front of her and the robbery had "devastated" the family.

Baldwin, 35, from the Newcastle area, was robbed Wednesday by what she described as an "unkempt" man.

She said he opened the passenger door before she could lock it and grabbed the handbag.

The bag contained a tablet computer, a large amount of Euros in cash, a purse containing the lock of her daughter's blonde hair laminated on a card, the BBC reported.

Baldwin said the lock of hair was "all we had left of her". She added: "Please, if anyone finds the lock shown in the picture, please do the right thing and hand it in to your nearest police station. Thank you."

A police official of Greater Manchester Police said, "Robbery in any circumstance is particularly distressing but Kirsty and her family have been left devastated."

Over 500 mn years old fossil trove unearthed in China

PTI ■ BEIJING

Scientists in China have discovered a "stunning" trove of well-preserved thousands of fossils estimated to be about 518 million years old on a river bank in the country's central Hubei province.

The fossils are particularly unusual because the soft body tissue of many creatures, including their skin, eyes, and internal organs, have been "exquisitely" well preserved.

Palaeontologists have called the findings "mind-blowing" - especially because more than half the fossils are previously undiscovered species, the BBC reported.

The fossils, known as the Qingjiang biota, were collected near Danshui river in Hubei province.

More than 20,000 specimens were collected, and a total

of 4,351 have been analysed so far, including worms, jellyfish, sea anemones and algae.

They will become a "very important source in the study of the early origins of creatures", one of the fieldwork leaders, Prof Xingliang Zhang from China's Northwest University, told the BBC.

The discovery is particularly remarkable because "the majority of creatures are soft-bodied organisms like jellyfish and worms that normally stand no chance of becoming fossilised", Prof Robert Gaines, a geologist who also took part in the study, said.

The majority of fossils tend to be of hard-bodied animals, as harder substances, like bones, are less likely to rot and decompose.

The Qingjiang biota must have been "rapidly buried in sediment" due to a storm, in order

for soft tissues to be so well preserved, Prof Zhang said.

Scientists are especially excited by the jellyfish and sea anemone fossils, which Prof Gaines described as "unlike anything I have ever seen. Their sheer abundance and their diversity of forms is stunning."

Meanwhile, palaeontologist Allison Daley, who was not part of the study but wrote an accompanying analysis in Science, told BBC's Science in Action programme the find was one of the most significant in the last 100 years.

"It blew my mind - as a palaeontologist I never thought I'd get to witness the discovery of such an incredible site. For the first time we're seeing preservation of jellyfish - [when] you think of jellyfish today, they're so soft-bodied, so delicate, but they're preserved unbelievably well at this site."

Trend Blazer

Kangana to play Jayalalithaa

Actress **KANGANA RANAUT**, last seen on screen in *Manikarnika*, will be playing late Tamil Nadu Chief Minister **J. Jayalalithaa** in the forthcoming multilingual biopic *Thalaivi*, its makers have announced. On Kangana's birthday on Saturday, it was officially announced that she has been roped in to play Jayalalithaa.

Thalaivi will start rolling from April. "When producer Vishnu Induri approached me with the offer, I felt a sense of responsibility more than excitement. This was a story of an achiever, a story of one woman who fought for her place in a male-dominated world. It was meant to be told with honesty. The stature of this leader and her courage inspired me to say yes," said Vijay.



'Being half Kashmiri, it's always special to shoot there and be with the locals. They are very warm people, hospitable and genteel, and always welcoming. When Ashvin first sent me the script, I was immediately drawn to it. It's so refreshing to see a filmmaker writing a story about Kashmir's reality.'

—Soni Razdan



Actress **VAANI KAPOOR** is currently shooting her next *Shamsher* opposite **Ranbir Kapoor**. In the film, directed by Karan Malhotra, Vaani will play



the character of the most sought-after travelling performer from India. The actress has been learning *kathak* for a few months now to prepare for the role. "For the film, the dance sequences required me to have a very Indian, classical body language, which is why I started taking *kathak* classes to learn the nuances and the grace. Karan specifically wanted me break from the Western style to do justice to the choreography being set for me," said Vaani.

Cardi B to sue bloggers

Rapper **CARDI B** is suing bloggers for claiming she is a "prostitute with herpes." Cardi filed the lawsuit against **Latasha K**, who has a blog called 'unWinewithTashaK.' She's angry about 23 videos that Tasha posted over the last 14 months. According to the suit, Tasha posted a video saying

Cardi's baby might be born with intellectual disabilities. The inference seems to be Cardi was doing drugs that would harm then-unborn Kulture. She's also suing **Starmarie Ebony Jones**, who posted a video in September accusing Cardi of doing cocaine and prostitution.



Actress **NEHA SARGAM**, who plays Anarkali in director Feroze Khan's *Mughal-E-Azam*, tells **CHAHAK MITTAL** that women have always retaliated, no matter the end result or the era that they come from

SIXTY YEARS ON... WHAT'S CHANGED?

When one talks of grandeur of epic proportions in the Hindi film industry, the name *Mughal-E-Azam* cannot fail to make an appearance. The 1960 film chronicling the love story of Prince Salim and a court dancer, Anarkali, is remembered for the seemingly-real *sheesh mahal* (palace of mirrors), the offscreen romance which had turned sour between the lead pair of Dilip Kumar and Madhubala, iconic dialogues and more. The film's commentary on the reality of a society ridden with taboos and hierarchical differences continues to cast a spell and fascinate the current audience even today.

Director Feroze Khan adapted it to stage and the Broadway-style musical has got such a rousing response that it has made a comeback. Actress **Neha Sargam**, who essays the role of Anarkali, says, "The script was modified according to the current context, especially in terms of women and personal relationships."

She believes that every era has had its own share of challenges and revelations. "There have been different set of challenges for both men and women in each era. However, there are certain things which continue to be common and have only evolved. For instance, even though the restrictions on women have been abundant, yet they have always tried to get up and create their own space, irrespective of the era. In the play, driven by social norms of gender and hierarchy, even though Anarkali looks like the victim, she does try in every possible way to take a stand. She stands up for herself in difficult times. It doesn't matter whether she wins or not. In



a way, she is a powerful woman," she says. This Anarkali wouldn't let her self-esteem be destroyed or taken for granted.

This is the way, **Neha** believes, Anarkali's character can connect with today's and every generation's woman who has always tried to retaliate, no matter the consequences or end result. "Our director has brought it out with a feminist approach, keeping in mind the woman of today's era, who is ever-evolving," says she.

The actress describes one of the scenes to highlight this aspect — where Salim tightly slaps Anarkali — "The scene was very regressive and according to the norms of the time, nobody questioned it. However, today, it means a lot. In the film, Dilip Kumar had actually slapped Madhubala hard. In the play, the script has been modified and now Salim doesn't slap

her, rather just pushes her away." She says that such small gestures often influence the audience in a huge way which sometimes go unnoticed.

Talking about present relationships and parental acceptance, she says there is still a large population who might not happily accept the person their daughter or son brings home. She says, "The story highly resonates with the current youth, who still, to some extent, struggle to get their parents' consents before marrying someone of their choice. Be it any criteria — caste, class or religious differences, homosexuality — parents do take these elements into account before giving their approval. They may have progressed but are not completely over it."

She laughs and says that to show the audience what should have been done, one can't change the plot. After all, "of course,

Akbar won't suddenly accept Anarkali instead of bricking her up in a wall. The story will always be the same."

The actress, who has been a part of daily soaps since a long time now, says she feels fortunate to have bagged the role of Anarkali, since this is the first time she is doing theatre. Narrating the story, she says, "I had received a mail from **Mukesh Chhabra Casting Company** in June, last year. However, it somehow landed in the spam. Later, I received calls from the company for the same. They told me that they were trying to contact me since a long time as they were looking for a singer as well as an actor. So, in the play, I am singing, dancing and acting live. Initially, I was confused since I had never been a part of theatre before and always had stage

fright." However, it turned out to be a great learning experience for her as she also had to practise and learn Urdu to rehearse the play's dialogues.

She tells us that even though a play's script has to be followed in a certain way, which is challenging, "the director wanted us to express ourselves and our characters in our own way. I should react the way I would react but with a touch of Anarkali's style."

Around 700 costumes were factored by designer **Manish Malhotra** for the play's crew of 200-300 people. The play, she tells us, was not going to come back to the city after it was first staged in November-December 2018 but is back on popular demand. Starting from April 6, the play would mark its 175th show.

TECH TALK

Somebody left the window open

Facebook left millions of passwords readable by employees, stored on internal servers, for years

Facebook left hundreds of millions of user passwords readable by its employees for years, the company acknowledged after a security researcher exposed the lapse.

By storing passwords in readable plain text, Facebook violated fundamental computer-security practices. Those call for organisations and websites to save passwords in a scrambled form that makes it almost impossible to recover the original text.

"There is no valid reason why anyone in an organisation, especially the size of Facebook, needs to have access to users' passwords in plain text," said cybersecurity expert **Andrei Barysevich**.

Facebook said there is no evidence its employees abused access to this data. But thousands of employees could have searched them. The company said the passwords were stored on internal company servers, where no outsiders could access them. Even so, some privacy experts suggested that users change their Facebook passwords.

The incident reveals yet another huge and basic oversight at a company that insists it is a responsible guardian for the personal data of its 2.3 billion users worldwide.

A security blog said Facebook may have left the passwords of some 600 million Facebook users vulnerable. In a blog post, Facebook said it will likely notify "hundreds of millions" of Facebook Lite users, millions of Facebook users and tens of thousands of Instagram users that their passwords were stored in plain text.

Facebook Lite is a version designed for people with older phones or low-speed internet connections. It is used primarily in developing countries.

Last week, Facebook CEO **Mark Zuckerberg** touted a new "privacy-focused vision" for the social network that would emphasise private communication over public sharing. The company wants to encourage small groups of people to carry on encrypted conversations that neither Facebook nor any other outsider can read.

The fact that the company couldn't manage to do something as simple as encrypting passwords, however, raises questions about its ability to manage more complex encryption issues — such in messaging — flawlessly.

Facebook said it discovered the problem in January. But security researcher **Brian Krebs** wrote that in some cases the passwords had been



stored in plain text since 2012. Facebook Lite launched in 2015 and Facebook bought Instagram in 2012.

The problem, according to Facebook, wasn't due to a single bug. During a routine review in January, it said, it found that the plain text passwords were unintentionally captured and stored in its internal storage systems. This happened in a variety of circumstances — for example, when an app crashed and the resulting crash log included a captured password.

But **Alex Holden**, the founder of **Hold Security**, said Facebook's explanation is not an excuse for sloppy security practices that allowed so many passwords to be exposed internally.

Barysevich said he could not recall any major company caught leaving so many passwords exposed. He said he's seen a number of instances where much smaller organisations made such information readily available — not just to programmers but also to customer support teams.

Security analyst **Troy Hunt**, who runs a data breach website, said the situation may be embarrassing for Facebook but not dangerous unless an adversary gained access to the passwords. Facebook has had major breaches, most recently in September

when attackers accessed some 29 million accounts.

Jake Williams, president of **Rendition Infosec**, said storing passwords in plain text is "unfortunately more common than most of the industry talks about" and tends to happen when developers are trying to rid a system of bugs.

He said the Facebook blog post suggests storing passwords in plain text may have been "a sanctioned practice," although he said it's also possible a "rogue development team" was to blame.

Hunt and **Krebs** both likened Facebook's failure to similar stumbles last year on a far smaller scale at **Twitter** and **GitHub**; the latter is a site where developers store code and track projects. In those cases, software bugs were blamed for accidentally storing plain text passwords in internal logs.

Facebook's normal procedure for passwords is to store them encoded, the company noted in its blog post.

That's good to know, although Facebook engineers apparently added code that defeated the safeguard, said security researcher **Rob Graham**. "They have all the proper locks on the doors, but somebody left the window open," he said.

WEBBED

YEH CRAZY DIL



Just like most other young couples, after being together for over two years, **Aadar** (25) and **Koyal** (26) amicably end their relationship over wanting different things from life. But, if only break ups were that simple. **Koyal** gets involved in a complicated rebound relationship with her co-worker **Jiten**, while **Aadar** explores something new about himself with every new tinder date he goes on. Just as they begin to move on, life happens. A series of unexpected adventures, confusing situations and messy circumstances involving their past arise in front of them.

Starring **Zoa Morani**, **Adeeb Rais**, the series is now streaming on **MX Player**.

THE HIGHWAYMEN



Two steely former **Texas Rangers** **Frank Hamer** and **Maney Gault** join forces to try and capture notorious outlaws and infamous criminals, **Bonnie Parker** and **Clyde Barrow** in this crime drama based on real events.

Starring **Kevin Costner**, **Woody Harelson**, **Kathy Bates**, the thriller film releases on **Netflix** on **March 29**.

THE LEGEND OF COCAINE ISLAND



The documentary film follows **Rodney Hyden** on his journey to follow up an urban legend and find \$2 million in cash supposedly buried in the Caribbean. **Hyden** is a businessman from **South Florida** who set out to discover the money after losing all his wealth in the recession. It is an urban legend about a duffel bag of cocaine buried in the Caribbean leads a misfit band to hatch a nutball plan to find it in this comic documentary.

Directed by **Theo Love**, the film will release on **Netflix** on **March 29**.



The ongoing erosion along Beki river in Barpeta district of Assam. The hungry lides of the river continue to erode the banks almost throughout the year.



Rahima Khatun of Majidbhita Char (sandbar) and some other women in western Assam's Barpeta district cleaning the dried Mati Mah (Urad Bean) in an open field.

DOES MONSOON REALLY USHER IN HAPPINESS?

ANUP SHARMA studies the challenges faced by women living in the Char areas of Assam, which remain under flood water for at least five months every year

Monsoon is setting in and Rahima Khatun is worried. The rainy months normally usher in happiness for many in agrarian Assam. For tens of thousands like Rahima, who live on Chars or riverine sandbars, they signal a tough time.

A resident of Majidbhita Char in western Assam's Barpeta district, Rahima is one of the victims of climate change that has impacted the sandbars and people living on them. At the mercy of nature, Char-dwellers like her are living a nomadic life, shifting from one eroded sandbar to another that could be eaten up by the river in the near future.

There is no denying the fact that the lives of Rahima and others like her largely depend on monsoon rains. However, it also becomes a nightmare for the women living on the Char, most of which lacks proper sanitation and where open defecation is not a choice but a compulsion.

"The monsoon and floods are always worrying for people like us, particularly the women. I have been living in the Char

areas since my birth and I have seen the girls and women suffering during the flood season. They have to go outside their houses before dawn to isolated places to defecate and clean up," said the 70-year-old Rahima.

The Char areas of Assam remain under flood water at least five months in a calendar year, with three months of high water level. Floods make it difficult to commute from one place to another on foot and small country boats remain the only option.

Going to secluded places to defecate before the sunrise can often be risky for the women.

"I lost my seven-month-old son during a flood two years ago. Our house was under knee-deep water when I left in a boat to relieve myself the morning he died. My baby and my husband were sleeping on the bed when I had gone out. But the baby was missing when I returned. His inert body was found in the water," Eliza Begum, Rahima's neighbour at Majidbhita, said as she broke into tears.

The baby had rolled down from the bed while her husband was sleeping.



Eliza Begum in the backyard of her house. Eliza had lost her seven-month-old son during floods in 2016.

"I cannot blame my husband or anyone else for my baby's death. It was perhaps Allah's wish. I had to go out rowing a boat in the darkness because we, women, have to finish our ablutions before it is daylight," Eliza added.

Floods claim babies and women, Rahima said. "Drowning is one reason. Some die of hygiene-related diseases. A few women lost their lives after having been bitten by snakes," she said.

Three to four waves of floods affect millions of people in most of Assam's 33 districts. The data with the state government says floods from June-August 2018 killed more than 80 people, including minors, and affected more than 30 lakh people. The floods also damaged crops on large swathes of land.

The Char dwellers invariably bear the brunt of floods. Though sandbars have been prone to flooding and erosion, the pace has increased in recent years. Hydrologists attribute this to climate change.

Most of some 2.5 million

people living on Chars (according to the 2003 Socio-Economic Survey by the Char Area

Development Department) in the state have learnt to live with floods. But lack of adequate attention by the government has made their life tougher.

Although the government of India launched the Nirmal Bharat and Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, and toilets are being made in remote areas of the state under this flagship scheme, the Char areas are yet to get the benefit.

"Majidbhita has three villages — Majidbhita, Tepajuli and Bhergaon. We surveyed the government schemes in these villages and found that none were allotted even a single toilet each. Government schemes hardly reach those places. The Char dwellers seem to exist only during elections when leaders come seeking votes," said Jehidul Hussain, a member of a local NGO named Jhai Foundation.

(This article is written as part of Climate Fellowship of the ASTEC, Assam.)

Peace in time of war

Man doesn't realise that political power, without the capability to rule one's physical senses and the intent to use it for human good, leads to turmoil, says RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI



In present world many people consider survival and security as prime values. They argue that if a person does not survive, then what is the value that other things hold for him. In a similar vein, they further argue that if a person lives in a state of constant insecurity and fear, then where is the charm, joy, fun or zest in living? The quality of life of a man in fear is like that of a man in a state of suspended animation and it's not at all cherishable, relishable, enjoyable or valuable. On the other hand there are other people who question the contention of the former kind of people. The questions they raise are that 'What, after all, is the purpose of survival?' and 'What is the goal of life?' Further, they'd ask, 'What do we want to achieve by or while living?' They argue that the difference between a human being and an animal is narrowed down to zero if man also, like other animals, is concerned primarily and only about his physical survival. They feel that there should be some higher and nobler aim of human existence and that there should be something more worthy for humans to achieve. Arguing thus, they ask: If personal survival is the main value, then why do military men endanger their own lives or sacrifice their lives at the battle-front in order to keep intact the sovereignty of the nation? Again, why did the heroes of the Indian freedom strug-



gle happily embraced death for the sake of independence of their motherland? Why did kings in the olden times, give up their palaces and bodyguards and went to the forest-retreats in pursuit of truth, endangering their life, knowing well that there were carnivores there? With these questions in mind, they further argue that why should man fear if he has moral and spiritual strength and good relations with all the other beings? Because fear, they assert, arises from guilt-consciousness, suspicion or enmity. So, man should be free of the negative tendency or emotion, namely fear because one's survival should normally be an assured thing if one's actions are in harmony with other beings, with the environment and with the moral and physical laws. Each one of us must understand a fact that our life and death, or survival and happiness are governed by the law of karma and if it is good, why should we fear? Because death is inevitable; why should then we not sleep well night after night?

Today, what makes the world situation peaceless is that mankind has not yet been able to realise the truth that the factors, that lead nations to race for military superiority, build-up of weapons and subjugation of other people and their territories, are religious bigotry, scramble for power and revenge. Because of his lust for power, man cheats himself of happiness.

It is a pity that he easily forgets that the power of arms or money without the power to rule one's own mind is worse than evil. Also, man does not realise that the political power without the power to rule one's physical senses and the intent to use it for human good, leads to turmoil. Remember, lasting happiness of the human race depends not on power to dominate others but on his mastery over his demonic traits. So, the rub of the matter is that man needs to be reminded in an effective and workable manner that if he does not kill the demons of hate, anger and war through the weapons of love and universal brotherhood, the demons would continue to destroy mankind.

I have a question for you: When was the last time you paid attention to your body? In a world fraught with judgment about how we should look, it might have been long when you last caught your reflection. Or maybe you noticed a particular pain somewhere like your knee, back, or shoulder.

Too often, we only pay attention to our bodies when they're not behaving how we want them to. There's more information available to us by way of a natural, symbiotic connection to our bodies, where two-way communication is the key.

Our bodies communicate in energy — and that's your first language. The issue is, many of us aren't aware.

Why don't we listen to our bodies?

In essence, we're out of practice. Think about your childhood — who decided what and when you ate? Was it ever okay to skip vegetables and head straight for the desserts? And what about now? How often do you eat just because it's dinner time? How often do you not eat because you're anxious about your weight?

The truth is, your body knows exactly what nourishment it requires and would enjoy at all times. It also knows what clothes it would like to wear and the activities it would like to do. In fact, it has awarenesses and a gentle insistence around everything that con-

Are you listening to your body?

We often only pay attention to our bodies when they are not behaving the way we want them to. However, a regular two-way communication with it is the key, says DAIN HEER

cerns it. In short, it has a point of view. Would you like to tune in to it?

Step 1: Recognise you're an infinite being. Your body is your vehicle for the lifetime while you, the being, are infinite. You each have your own awarenesses and points of view and you can exist together, in harmony.

Try this: Here's a quick exercise to help you get the distinction between your body (the vehicle) and you (the infinite being). Close your eyes, and expand your energy out into the room you're in. Reach the walls of the room, then go beyond them. Notice that if you choose to, you can go further. Expand 100 miles out in all directions. Notice how easy it is. Understand that you can circle the planet if you choose to. It's not your physical body that's expanding, it's your being.

How infinite are you?

Another question — If a being can travel so far in an instant and be that big, could it ever fit inside of a physi-



cal body?

Step 2: Recognise your body is conscious. Every plant, person, structure on the planet has consciousness — and your body is no exception. Your relationship with your body is deepened by asking questions from an open and present place. And then, listening.

Try this: Start with food. At breakfast, instead of auto-piloting your way to granola ask, "Body, what would you like to eat?" Then, be open, be present, and listen.

What do you sense? What are you picking up? Start to ask your body about everything that concerns it — food, clothes, movement, even the people it gets intimate with. Be patient. Like an old friend you haven't spoken to in a while, sometimes it takes time to rebuild your connection; sometimes it happens in a beat. An idea to play with — your body is a psychic receiver. If you'll forgive the comparison, your body is like a sponge. Why? Because it has the capacity to absorb the energies,

thoughts and judgments of everyone around it.

Furthermore, it has the capacity to try to heal the pain and suffering of everyone around it. This means when you experience pain, it might not be your pain. When you feel sad or angry or afraid, these may not be your feelings.

Now, this is a huge concept that goes beyond its scope, but I just want to invite you to play with it. Recognising that what you feel in your body may not be yours, paves the way for letting go of any solid energy that might be limiting you. For some people, this piece of information is world-shifting and comes as a huge relief, while also deepening their understanding of what a gift their body is.

Try this: For any pain you experience in the next three days, question, "Body, who does this belong to?" You're not looking for conclusive answers. Just being open to the notion that what you're experiencing may not be yours and being willing to let anything go that doesn't belong to you, is a wonderful start. Your body is such a gift. Be with your body with total presence and with zero judgment. Take care of it. Get to know it better and enjoy breathing life back into your natural connection.

(The writer is the bestselling author of many self-help books.)

Don't let yesterday take up too much of today. —Will Rogers

HANDFUL OF NUTS DAILY CAN BOOST MEMORY

Eating a handful of nuts every day can improve mental health and memory skills by up to 60 per cent, finds a study.

The findings showed that consuming nuts for a long period of time could be the key to better cognitive health, improved thinking, reasoning and memory in older people.

"By eating more than 10 grams (or two teaspoons) of nuts per day older people could improve their cognitive function by up to 60 per cent — compared to those not eating nuts — effectively warding off what would normally be experienced as a natural two-year cognition decline," said lead researcher Ming Li from the University of South Australia.

The reason could be because peanuts have specific anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects that help reduce cognitive decline including dementia. They are also known to be high in healthy fats, protein and fibre with nutritional properties that can lower cholesterol.

INDIA CUTS 84% TB DEATHS IN AIDS PATIENTS

India achieved 84 per cent reduction in tuberculosis deaths among people living with HIV by 2017 — three years ahead of the target, said a report by The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS).

The report showed that India is among the five low or middle-income countries — Eritrea (83 per cent), Djibouti (78 per cent), Malawi (78 per cent) and Togo (75 per cent) — that achieved or exceeded the target of a 75 per cent reduction in TB deaths among people living with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), by 2017, three years ahead of the 2020 target.

According to the WHO, globally, TB deaths among people living with HIV have fallen by 42 per cent since 2010, from 520,000 down to 300,000 in 2017. "TB should be a disease of the past. It has been treatable and preventable for decades. Years of neglecting the rights of the world's poor to basic health care, food and shelter have let TB take hold," said Michel Sidibe, Executive Director of UNAIDS.

CHILDHOOD ABUSE WORSENS DEPRESSION LATER

Facing trauma in childhood can significantly change the structure of the brain, which may result in severe depression that could even be recurrent in adulthood, say researchers.

The results from MRI scan images suggest that both childhood maltreatment and recurring depression are associated with similar reductions in the surface area of the insular cortex, part of the brain that regulates emotion and self-awareness, said the study, published in The Lancet Psychiatry journal, which found childhood maltreatment one of the strongest risk factors for major depression in adulthood.

"Given the impact of the insular cortex on brain functions such as emotional awareness, it's possible that the changes we saw make patients less responsive to conventional treatments," said lead researcher Nils Opel, University of Munster, Germany.

The study included 110 patients aged 18 to 60 years. Of the 75 patients who experienced a relapse, 48 had experienced one additional episode, seven reported two episodes, and six experienced three episodes.

MALE HORMONES IN WOMEN CAUSE BLINDNESS

Increased levels of hormone testosterone — male sex hormone — in women could cause a brain disorder that can lead to blindness, as per a study.

The study, led by the University of Birmingham, Britain, showed that excess testosterone leads to Idiopathic Intracranial Hypertension (IIH) — high pressure in the brain — resulting in blindness and daily long-term headaches in women. The findings showed that women with IIH had raised levels of testosterone compared to those with obesity and polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS).

The hormones were also found to be increased in the brain fluid of women with IIH. "These findings mark a key step forward. For the first time, we have found a pattern of androgen dysregulation that is unique to IIH and potentially a driver of abnormal brain pressure in people with the condition," said Alex Sinclair, researcher from the varsity.

DRINKING ORANGE JUICE DAILY IS HEALTHY

Drinking orange juice daily may cut your risk of deadly strokes by almost a quarter, suggests a study.

The study, published in the British Journal of Nutrition, showed that people who consumed the juice each day saw a reduction in the risk of a brain clot by 24 per cent. Further, the rates of heart disease were also reduced in regular drinkers, who were 12 to 13 per cent less likely to suffer with damaged arteries.

Fresh fruit juices have long been thought of as healthy. But consumers in recent years have been put off by warnings over their high sugar content.

The researchers noted that the health benefits in terms of stroke prevention could outweigh the risks from sugar content. "We found a favourable association with pure fruit juice consumption," said researchers from the Netherlands National Institute for Public Health.

RAMOS PANEKA SEALS LA ROJA WIN

Real centre back scores winner from spot as Spain open Euro 2020 qualifying campaign with 2-1 win

AFP ■ MADRID

Sergio Ramos scored a second-half penalty to help Spain beat a spirited Norway 2-1 on Saturday in their opening Euro 2020 qualifier, while teenage striker Moise Kean netted in Italy's win over Finland.

Spain were not at their clinical best in Valencia, but got their Group F campaign off to a solid start despite Norway threatening an upset.

The 2010 World Cup winners have been unpredictable of late, having been dumped out by Russia in the last 16 of the World Cup and then missing out on the Nations League finals after a home loss to England.

"The team responded well to their equaliser. You always have the dream and aim of achieving something important," Ramos told Spanish television channel TVE.

"We're in a new stage with a coach who has a fantastic style of play. We'll take things game by game. We'll pick up more confidence from winning."

Coach Luis Enrique named an attacking line-up, with Marco Asensio, Alvaro Morata and Rodrigo all starting, and it was the latter who volleyed home the opener from Jordi Alba's cross in the 16th minute.

Winger Jesus Navas created several other early chances for his teammates on his first Spain appearance since March 2014, but Rodrigo headed over and Morata was denied by away goalkeeper Rune Jarstein.

Norway started to grow into the game and were handed a chance to draw level in the 65th minute when Inigo Martinez grabbed Bjorn Johnsen, and Bournemouth striker Joshua King stepped up to slot past David de Gea.

Spain wasted little time in getting their noses back in front, though, as Jarstein felled Morata to concede a 71st-minute penalty.

Centre-back Ramos stepped up and confidently dispatched a 'PANEKA' spot-kick down the middle to score his 16th goal of the season for club and country.

KEAN MAKES HIS MARK

Juventus youngster Kean, 19, became the youngest striker to start for Italy in more than a century as Roberto



"I learn from Cristiano Ronaldo, in training, I steal his secrets. And always try to be ready and train regularly so that I'm prepared when the time comes. This is a beautiful evening, but I know that I still have so many records to beat and I intend to beat them."
—MOISE KEAN

Mancini's men saw off Finland 2-0. Italy got off to a flying start in Udine, as Nicolo Barella gave them a seventh-minute lead with his maiden international goal.

The 22-year-old Cagliari midfielder hammered home a low volley after a free-kick was only half-cleared by the Finnish defence.

The day belonged to Kean, though, as he slotted in the second with 16 minutes to play to mark his full debut in style.

"To become part of Azzurri history is an added incentive to keep working," said Kean.

"There are many goals ahead of me and my aim is to achieve them. I wanted to show that I deserved this chance from Mancini."

Italy are top of the early Group J standings ahead of Bosnia and Herzegovina, who edged out Armenia 2-1 as captain Edin Dzeko became the first player in their history to be capped 100 times.

The other game in the group saw Greece win 2-0 against Liechtenstein in Vaduz.

IRELAND STRUGGLE

Earlier on Saturday, Mick McCarthy made an inauspicious start to his second stint in charge of the Republic of Ireland as his team laboured to a 1-0 victory over Gibraltar.

The 60-year-old McCarthy, who led Ireland to the 2002 World Cup last 16 before resigning later that year, was reappointed manager last November, replacing Martin O'Neill.

The result leaves Ireland second in the early Group D table behind Switzerland, who beat Georgia 2-0, but McCarthy will know he has plenty of work to do after seeing his men struggle to claim just their second win in 12 matches.

Elsewhere, World Cup quarter-finalists Sweden made a winning start in Group F as midfielders Robin Quaison and Viktor Claesson both scored in the space of seven first-half minutes in a 2-1 success over Romania.

PANAMA SPOIL PAQUETA'S PARTY

AFP ■ LISBON

Brazil were held to a 1-1 draw against Panama in an international friendly played at Porto's Dragao Stadium on Saturday.

AC Milan's Lucas Paqueta claimed his first international goal for the five-time World Cup winners before captain Adolfo Machado responded for the side in 76th place in the world rankings.

Injured Paris Saint-Germain forward Neymar watched the game from the stands as he recovers from a fractured right foot.

"The performance wasn't brilliant but it wasn't below par either," coach Tite said.

"When we go to the Copa America we will make more accurate choices to be more efficient."

The Selecao opened the scoring just after the half-hour mark.

Midfielder Paqueta was on the end of a deep Casemiro cross to volley home at the back post.

Skipper Machado brought the teams level four minutes later.

Erick Davis' central free-kick found the centre-back near the penalty spot who lobbed his long-distance header over a stunned Ederson who appealed for offside.

Everton attacker Richarlison came close to bagging his side's second as his effort smashed the crossbar five minutes after the break.

Real Madrid's Casemiro had two chances to win the game for Tite's outfit with a header and a powerful shot with quarter of an hour remaining.

Both teams made a wave of substitutions in the closing moments and Eder Militao went close with an injury-time header.

Next for Brazil is Tuesday's friendly against the Czech Republic as they prepare to host this year's Copa America which starts on June 14.

'Neuer is class above ter Stegen'

AFP ■ MUNICH

Bayern Munich reserve goalkeeper Sven Ulreich has backed Manuel Neuer to defend his status as Germany's number one, saying that his team mate is better than Barcelona's Marc-Andre ter Stegen.

"In Marc and Manuel, Germany have two very good goalkeepers, but I think Manuel is a class above," Ulreich told Sky.

Neuer will be in goal when Germany take on the Netherlands in their opening Euro 2020 qualifier, and Ulreich said that he should remain as first choice goalkeeper until the tournament next summer.

"He is just a brilliant keeper, and I think it does the team good to have such an experienced player between the posts," he said.

Ulreich kept goal for Bayern for much of last season while Neuer recovered from a series of foot injuries.

Since returning to full fitness last summer, Neuer, 32, has regained the number one shirt for both Bayern and Germany.

Yet in the national team, Neuer is under threat from 26-year-old Barcelona keeper ter Stegen.

"I want to apply pressure, and I want to push through a change in the number one spot," ter Stegen told DAZN earlier this month.

Having sent Neuer's Bayern team mates Mats



Hummels, Jerome Boateng and Thomas Mueller into international retirement as part of a transition to the younger generation, coach Joachim Loew is under increasing pressure to promote ter Stegen.

"I hope the manager puts his trust in me for important games," ter Stegen told RTL after Germany's 1-1 draw with Serbia last Wednesday.

Last week, Loew confirmed that Neuer will remain his number one, but said that ter Stegen is "world class" and would get chances to play in the year ahead.

"I think we are lucky to have two such great goalkeepers," said Germany and Real Madrid midfielder Toni Kroos on Saturday. "You can't really make the wrong decision when picking one or the other."

Last-minute goal hurts India

PTI ■ IPOH

India's perennial problem of conceding goals at the fag end of a match hurt them again as Korea equalised in the final minute for a 1-1 draw in the Sultan Azlan Shah Cup hockey tournament on Sunday.

India took the lead in the 28th minute through Mandeep Singh and looked set to earn their second consecutive win of the six-team tournament, but a defensive error led to Jonghyun Jang scoring from a penalty corner just 22 seconds from the final hooter.

The match was stopped in the fourth quarter due to heavy rains with around eight minutes left in the match. India had defeated Japan 2-0 in their opening match on Saturday.

India made an attacking start with midfielder Vivek Sagar Prasad creating space inside the striking circle within the first minute but the Korean defenders held strong to avert an early goal.

The Koreans immediately launched a counter attack, entering India's circle, but defender Surender Kumar tackled well to clear the ball.

India got two more scoring opportunities but failed to convert them. A quick-thinking Mandeep Singh gave India their first penalty corner in the 10th minute with a good tackle in the baseline. The opportunity was, however, wasted due to poor execution as both sides could not score in the first quarter.

India won their second penalty corner in the initial minutes of the second quarter but the drag-flick was saved by

the Korean goalkeeper. The following minutes saw Korea execute the full-press to limit India's circle entries.

Though the tactic was good, they lost three players (Kim Hyeonjin, Jihun Yang and Lee Namyoung) to green cards that reduced their strength to eight players. The situation was capitalised by India as they found easy gaps to make circle entry and the experienced Mandeep Singh struck the first goal for India in the 28th minute.

India kept a good structure, relied on strong defence with precise marking and constantly pushed the Korean defence to make forays into the striking circle.

Playing in rain after the third quarter began, a defensive error on India's part saw Korea being awarded their first penalty corner of the match. But India's rusher Amit Rohidas did well to ward off the danger and keep India's lead intact.

With a little over eight minutes remaining for the final hooter, the game was stopped due to rain. When play resumed, Korea put up an attacking front to win back-to-back penalty corners, but did not get any success.

With 53 seconds remaining, Korea won another penalty corner, but Jonghyun Jang's powerful drag-flick was brilliantly saved by India goalkeeper P R Sreejesh. A referral by Korea saw them being awarded another penalty corner and this time, Jang was on target to level the scores and snatch a draw for his side.

India will take on Malaysia on March 26, after a rest day on Monday.



'Indian shuttlers are dangerous opponents'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Aiming to secure his second title at the India Open, former world champion Viktor Axelsen on Sunday praised the current crop of Indian shuttlers, describing them as highly competitive and dangerous.

The former world No 1 from Denmark, who won Silver at the All England Championship this month, starts firm favourite to win the India Open crown, a feat he achieved in 2017, after reaching three back-to-back summit clashes from 2015 to 2017.

"It is always really competitive; you have to always take care against them. I played Sameer at the All England, it was a tough match and it is always tough, they are always dangerous to face," Axelsen told reporters after a practice session at the IG stadium.

The Yonex-Sunrise India Open will have Kidambi Srikanth, Sameer Verma and B Sai Praneeth in the top half, while HS Prannoy starts in the bottom part of the draw, which also



features second seed Axelsen, who will receive the top billing following the withdrawal of top seed Shi Yuqi of China.

YUFEI, SHI YUQI PULL OUT

Chinese top seeds Chen Yufei and Shi Yuqi on Sunday pulled out of the India Open on medical grounds, taking some sheen off the \$ 350,000 World Tour Super 500 tournament

beginning on Tuesday.

Chen recently broke a five-year title drought for China at the All England Championship and Shi Yuqi is the defending champion.

With the top seeds withdrawing, India's P V Sindhu will receive the top billing and is firm favourite to lift the trophy for the second time after claiming the crown in 2017 and reaching the finals in the last edition.

Osaka, Zverev stunned in Mimai; Serena withdraws

AFP ■ MIAMI

Naomi Osaka crashed out of the third round of the WTA and ATP Miami Open on Saturday as Hsieh Su-Wei exacted revenge for a painful Australian Open defeat with a 4-6, 7-6 (7/4), 6-3 victory.

World number one Osaka had looked in little danger after winning the first set and moving a break ahead in the second.

But Taiwan's Hsieh, who was a set and 4-1 up in Melbourne earlier this year before losing to the Japanese star in the third round, battled superbly.

"This was a very emotional win for me," said Hsieh, whose 39 winners were one less than her opponent. "Any time you beat one of the top players it is amazing."

It wasn't the only shocker of the day, as Spanish veteran David Ferrer rallied to beat world number three Alexander Zverev 2-6, 7-5, 6-3 to reach the third round.

Ferrer, 36 and ranked 155th in the world, received a wild card into the tournament as he continues a limited schedule in a 2019 billed as his farewell tour.

Zverev, runner-up to John Isner here last year, coughed up 12 double faults as he suffered his second



Naomi Osaka reacts after losing point against Hsieh Su-Wei during the Miami Open clash AP

straight early exit in succession after a third-round departure at Indian Wells.

Osaka was coming off a fourth-round exit at Indian Wells, but Hsieh's coach said her victory was

n't all that surprising.

"She has enough experience to stay strong and you saw that," French coach Frederic Aniere, who has worked with Hsieh for the last two years and is also her boyfriend,



Serena Williams reacts after losing point against Caroline Wozniacki during the Miami Open clash AP

said. "Yes it's huge, but for her it's not a big surprise."

SERENA WITHDRAWS

The 33-year-old Hsieh will play Caroline Wozniacki in the fourth round of the women's draw, which now looks wide open following Osaka's defeat and former world number one Serena Williams' surprise exit with a left knee injury.

The American has completed just seven matches this year, withdrawing in Indian Wells with illness midway through a round of 32 match with Garbine Muguruza.

There are surely doubts now that the 37-year-old can add to her tally of 23 Grand Slams, something which has so far proved beyond her

since returning last year after taking time out following the birth of her first child.

With Williams out, Wang Qiang, the 18th seed from China, advances to the fourth round on a walkover.

In the late game, unseeded Canadian Bianca Andreescu beat Angelique Kerber for the second time in a week 6-4, 4-6, 6-1, outlasting the German eighth seed in a two-hour, nine minute three setter.

The duo also met in the WTA Indian Wells final, with Andreescu winning 6-4, 3-6, 6-4.

Elsewhere, Roger Federer survived a scare but battled back from a set down to beat Radu Albot 4-6 7-5 6-3.

Albot posed plenty of problems for the 20-time Grand Slam winning legend, who took a while to get adjusted to the tournament's new Hard Rock Stadium venue.

But the Swiss star's class and experience eventually shone through, even though he was severely tested in his first ever meeting with the in-form Moldovan.

Federer next faces 103rd-ranked Serbian Filip Krajinovic, who beat three-time Grand Slam winner Stan Wawrinka 7-5, 2-6, 7-6 (7/5).

LEADERBOARD

RUNS	85	David Warner (SRH)
WICKETS	3	Imran Tahir (CSK)
6S	30	
4S	61	

Russell played a great knock. The bowlers did not bowl bad balls but he just smashed them
— RASHID KHAN



RUSSELL steals thunder from Warner

West Indian all-rounder smashes 19-ball 49 to help KKR pull out sensational 6 wicket win against Sunrisers

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Andre Russell smashed an explosive 49 to spoil David Warner's scintillating IPL comeback as Kolkata Knight Riders pulled off a dramatic six-wicket win over Sunrisers Hyderabad, here Sunday.

Needing 53 runs from last three overs, the powerful Jamaican changed the course of the match with his big-hitting against Siddharth Kaul, creaming off 19 runs from the 18th over.

He retained the strike by taking a smart single and continued his assault on Bhuvneshwar Kumar, who too bled 21 runs in the penultimate over as KKR sealed the 182-run chase with two balls to spare. Russell hammered four sixes and an equal number of boundaries in run sequence that read 6-6-1-4-1-4-6-4-0-6-1. Youngster Shubman Gill (18 not out) completed the formalities with two sixes off Shakib-Al-Hasan.

Promoted to open with Chris Lynn, Nitish Rana made full use of the opportunity and kept them in the hunt with a 47-ball 68.

But he departed shortly after a 12-minute interruption caused by tower lights failure.

The momentum slowly shifted in favour of SRH but Russell in a matter of minutes changed the complexion of the match.

Earlier, Warner made a stupendous comeback with a scintillating 85, helping his side reach a challenging 181/3.

Putting behind the embarrassing ball tampering scandal, that kept him out last year, the Aussie smashed three sixes and nine boundaries in his 53-ball knock.

India World Cup probable Vijay Shankar also made a fine return to the Orange Army with a quick-fire unbeaten 24-ball 40 (2x4, 2x6) fol-



RUSSELL HAMMERED FOUR SIXES AND AN EQUAL NUMBER OF BOUNDARIES IN RUN SEQUENCE THAT READ 6-6-1-4-1-4-6-4-0-6-1. YOUNGSTER SHUBMAN GILL (18 NOT OUT) COMPLETED THE FORMALITIES WITH TWO SIXES OFF SHAKIB-AL-HASAN

lowing Warner's exit in the 16th over. Warner's 37th IPL fifty also made him the first cricketer in IPL to have most 50-plus scores (40) ahead of

Virat Kohli (38) as the Aussie also has three centuries.

Jonny Bairstow complemented Warner well by giving him the max-



imum strike as the duo raced to 100-mark in 10.5 overs in their massive 118-run opening partnership.

Having opted to bowl, the otherwise disciplined KKR attack looked clueless against the rampaging Warner who was let off twice while on scores of 21 and 68 by Robin Uthappa and skipper Dinesh Karthik respectively.

Karthik's captaincy was over-defensive and lost the review to Warner early in the second over, while SRH made full use of the DRS by overturning a decision against Bairstow.

There was no looking back for Warner who batted as if he was never out of action and pierced the gaps at ease with successive boundaries against Piyush Chawla and Sunil Narine to unsettle the otherwise disciplined KKR spinners.

Warner brought his fifty with a six against Andre Russell and then went on to smack India frontline spinner Kuldeep Yadav for his second six.

Such was the Warner assault that four of the regular KKR bowlers including the frontline spin duo of Sunil Narine (0/29 in three overs) and Kuldeep (0/18 in 2 overs) did not even bowl their full quota of four overs.

Pantastic show

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Rishabh Pant blazed away to an unbeaten 27-ball 78 and powered Delhi Capitals to a mammoth 213 for six against Mumbai Indians in their Indian Premier League opener here Sunday.

Pant raced to his half century in 18 balls, hitting seven towering sixes and as many fours at the Wankhede Stadium, which looked too small for the Delhi dazzler.

Just 21, Pant smashed the world's best fast bowler, Jasprit Bumrah, for a few sixes as well.

Pant, playing his natural game, mercilessly punished the Mumbai bowlers after South African Colin Ingram (47 off 32 balls 7x4, 1x6) and Shikhar Dhawan (43 off 36 balls; 4x4; 1x6) pulled the visitors out of the rubble and laid the foundation of a big total with their 83-run stand for the third wicket.

The young wicketkeeper was brutal on Hardik Pandya, whom he hammered for two sixes and a four off debutant Rasikh Salam in the 19th over.

Pant was also brutal on death overs specialist Bumrah. Rahul Tewatia complimented the stumper with 9 not out.

Earlier, the duo of Dhawan and Ingram rallied the Delhi innings after they lost two quick wickets — Prithvi Shaw (7) and skipper Shreyas Iyer (16) — inside the first four overs — and also took the Mumbai attack to cleaners.

Ingram upped the ante in the eighth over slashing Hardik for a four and then a six.

But Ben Cutting gave Mumbai the much-needed breakthrough as he removed Ingram, who was caught by Hardik in the 13 over. Dhawan also threw his wicket away as Delhi slumped from 112 for two to 131 for four.

But then it was the Pant show and he left no chance to impress selectors ahead of the crucial World Cup selection.



JK's Rasikh Salam makes IPL debut

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Young right-arm medium pacer Rasikh Salam became only the second player from Jammu and Kashmir to play in the Indian Premier League.

Salam, 17, turned up for Mumbai Indians in their lung-opener against Delhi Capitals at the Wankhede Stadium here Sunday and also opened the bowling for the hosts.

Rasikh, who got his cap from former India pacer Zaheer Khan, is the youngest player to make the debut for Mumbai

Indians.

Salam, who hails from Kulgaam district, was picked up by Mumbai Indians for his base price of Rs 20 lakh.

Parvez Rasool, an off-break bowler, was the first one from the northern state, to play in the cash-rich tournament. Rasool represented two IPL teams - Pune Warriors India and Sunrisers Hyderabad.

Another player from Jammu and Kashmir, Manzoor Dar was picked up by IPL franchise Kings XI Punjab last year, but did not feature in any game.



Comeback won't be easy for Smith: Ashwin

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Steve Smith would still be a bit rusty and Kings XI Punjab would try to exploit it to their advantage, says skipper Ravichandran Ashwin, who also reckons that it won't be easy comeback journey for the Australian.

The spotlight will be on Smith when Rajasthan Royals' clash with Punjab on Monday. "We all know he is a quality player and must have worked and prepared hard during the break but comebacks are not easy. He must have put a lot of efforts for a comeback mentally. I am sure he would look to perform and on the other hand we would look to take advantage of his rustiness," said Ashwin.

Ashwin himself is struggling to make a comeback to the Indian side and is likely to miss the World Cup bus with Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal and Ravindra Jadeja doing a nice job with the white ball.

Asked if he feels, he is still in reckoning for a spot in India's World Cup squad, he was a tad irritated.

"I can't answer the question. Selectors have to answer that. But as far as I am concerned I have played two World Cups. If I deserve and I am selected I would love to play," he said.

Punjab coach Mike Hesson said big-hitting West Indian that Gayle is huge player for his team.

Up Next Royals start campaign against Punjab

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Australian batsman Steve Smith will embark on a redemption journey when Rajasthan Royals open their campaign against Kings XI Punjab in the 12th edition of the Indian Premier League (IPL), here Monday.

Smith was handed a one-year ban along with his then deputy David Warner exactly a year ago for their roles in the ball-tampering scandal in South Africa.

Smith was last seen in action in a couple of Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) matches late last year before an elbow injury ruled him out of the tournament. The ban was limited to state and international fixtures only and not domestic or club cricket.

The IPL will be the actual start of his long road to redemption and Smith would be looking to make the most of it ahead of the World Cup, starting May 30 in England.

Smith, though, is yet to recover fully from his elbow injury and may take a little time to get into the groove.

With Smith in their ranks, the Royals have one of the best teams this season led by Ajinkya Rahane and they would be eager to capitalise on the home advantage tomorrow.

British all-rounder Ben Stokes and Jos Buttler are assets to the team but they will not be available after April 25 as per England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) diktat because of the World Cup, and Rajasthan would be keen to win enough matches by then.

Stokes will once again be the key in both batting and



LAST YEAR'S MATCHES

● Rajasthan Royals defeated Kings XI Punjab by 15 runs at Jaipur

● Kings XI Punjab beat Rajasthan Royals by six wickets at Indore

FOR THE RECORD

● Ajinkya Rahane is the highest run-getter for Rajasthan Royals. The right hand batsman has scored 2417 runs at 34.52 in 80 innings of 86 matches since 2011.

● Ravichandran Ashwin claimed 10 wickets at 41.00 in 14 matches for Kings XI Punjab in the first season last year.

Live on Star Sports 1 & 2

RR VS KXIP

JAIPUR

MONDAY 8:00 PM

HEAD TO HEAD

M 17

RR 6

KXIP 10

bowling departments, while the Kings would be expecting their all-rounder Sam Curran to be on the top of his game on Monday.

Their bowling too have reasonable depth with speedster Jaidev Unadkat eyeing a slot in Indian team for the World Cup. Varun Aaron, Dhawal

Kulkarni, Jofra Archer, Ish Sodhi and few others give variety and options to Royals for different conditions

Ravichandran Ashwin-led Punjab side would rely heavily on their openers Chris Gayle and KL Rahul to provide them a fiery start and if swashbuckling West Indian opener hap-

No one complains when so many runs are scored: Harbhajan

PTI ■ CHENNAI

The slowness of the Chepauk track might be attracting a lot of criticism but veteran off-spinner Harbhajan Singh said while the wicket was difficult to bat, it was not unplayable.

Rival captains Mahendra Singh Dhoni and Virat Kohli expressed their disappointment over the wicket after the opening match of the Indian Premier League turned out to be damp squib on Saturday night.

After Royal Challengers Bangalore got bundled out for 70 in 17.1 overs, Chennai Super Kings achieved the target in 17.4 overs, winning by seven wickets.

"See, it was a difficult pitch to bat on but it wasn't like it was unplayable. We're so used to watching matches on good wickets where no one complains when people score 170-180. But if it spins or seams a little, everyone has a problem, saying why is this happening?," Harbhajan said at the post match press conference.

"No one has a problem with why so many runs are being made. So people actually forget that the bowler also has a job in cricket. Batsmen should struggle once in a while so that they understand that it should be a battle of bat and ball.

"In some places, yes, they played some rash shots as well. It was not that this was a 70 runs wicket. You'll get at least 120 if you apply yourself," Harbhajan, who won the man-of-the-match award for his spell of three for 20, said.

The 38-year-old admitted that he and his team were surprised at the amount of turn they got from the pitch.

"It was a wicket where it was holding a bit. We honestly didn't expect it to turn so much as it did today. We played a practice match



here and the wicket was a good one. We would have preferred to play on a wicket that wouldn't spin as much as this did. Hopefully it would be better hereafter."

Harbhajan, who did not have a great season in the 2018 edition of the IPL, said it was nice to be on the winning side and contributing to the team's cause.

"It is nice to be on the winning side and contributing, especially taking the wickets of Virat (Kohli), AB (de Villiers) and Moeen (Ali)...Top-order batters. This is the kind of performance that is expected from me, being the senior bowler in the side.

"Though people might think that I am old but the experience is something I have gained over the years, which no one can take away from me. I am glad to contribute to the win," said the CSK tweaker.

Meanwhile, RCB assistant coach Vikram Solanki said the pitch was far from ideal for batting.

"I don't think we played well enough and CSK were by far the better side. We were surprised by spin and lack of pace and it spun far more than we thought. It was probably not an ideal pitch as it was not an even contest. You need an opportunity to score as well," he said.