

**OPINION 6**  
LESSONS FROM  
MEMORY

**WORLD 5**  
UK MOTHER URGES THIEF TO RETURN  
DEAD DAUGHTER'S LOCK OF HAIR

**NATION 9**  
CONGRESS REPLACES  
CHANDRAPUR CANDIDATE

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## 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 pros 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 launched an exercise to involve

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.

Former Chief Ministers

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.

Continued on Page 4

## 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 Abasa 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.

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### 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 Neduntheevu 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.

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## 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.

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## 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 Sailna Khamor 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 Khamor 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 Khamor Wildlife



Sanctuary, in the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) / Environment Management Programme (EMP) report, details of sanctuary, flora and fauna and conservation plan were not includ-

ed. 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 Florian, 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.

Continued on Page 4

## BJP announces low-profile names to fight Congress

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

BJP on Sunday announced names of low-profile candidates for six seats for Chhattisgarh which goes to polls in three phases for 11 Lok Sabha seats. The party had announced five names earlier.

BJP has picked up a surprise face, former mayor Sunil Soni, for Raipur seat while Santosh Pandey, a die-hard supporter of former chief minister Raman Singh, for Rajnandgaon seat. Soni has replaced former union minister Ramesh Bais while Pandey in place of Abhishek Singh, son of Raman Singh.

Arun Saw, a largely unknown face, will contest from Bilaspur seat while the party has decided to bet on a small cadre Jyoti Nand Dubey for prestigious Korba seat.

BJP has done caste arithmetic better for Mahasamund seat and announced Chunnial



Sahu as party candidate to take on Congress heavyweight and former minister Dhanendra Sahu. Vijay Baghel, a close relative of Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel, will be the BJP candidate for

Durg seat. BJP had won 10 out of the 11 seats in 2014 elections and it lost polls only in Durg seat. Analysts say that BJP is expected to suffer heavy defeat in Chhattisgarh in 2019.

## 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 CRPF'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



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

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.

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## Raman slams Bhupesh for loan borrowing spree

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Former Chief Minister and BJP national vice-president Raman Singh on Sunday strongly criticised the Congress Government for going for a loan borrowing spree since it came to power in December last year.

"The repeated act of loan borrowing will adversely impact the fiscal health of the state government as well as its normal working of government in state in near future," Singh cautioned while talking



to media persons at Swami Vivekanand Airport Raipur on his return from New Delhi.

Singh further alleged that the new Congress Government has breached trust of public as it failed to keep up its promises made in run up to Assembly

polls. "There is a lot of resentment among public against the Congress Government and it will reflect in three-phased parliamentary polls," Singh claimed. The State goes to polls for 11 Lok Sabha seats on April 11, 18 and 23.

# 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 Rehashmi 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 communiqué 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 communiqué 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 Rehashmi 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, Chandrashekhar 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 limelight 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).

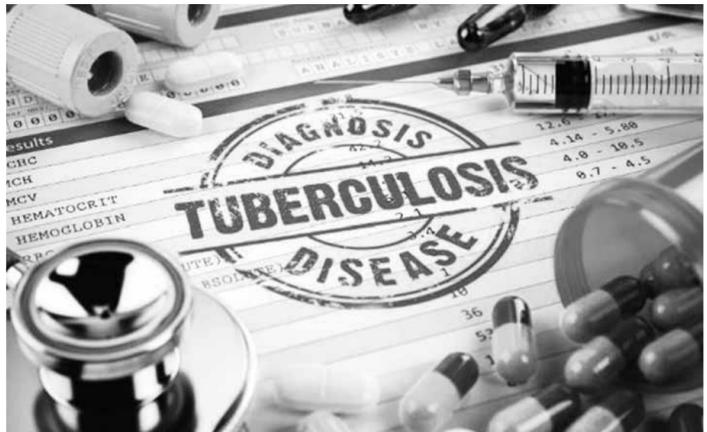
A report released last week showed that India is among the five low or middle-income countries — Eritrea (83 per cent), Djibouti (78 per cent), Malawi (78 per cent) and Togo (75 per cent) — that achieved or exceeded the target of a 75 per cent reduction in TB deaths among people living with human immunodeficiency 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 cores disbursed as DBT since April 2018," said the Ministry in a statement.

# BJP did nothing for Bastar for 20 yrs: Baij

STAFF REPORTER ■ BIJAPUR

Congress candidate for Bastar Lok Sabha seat Deepak Baij said on Sunday that BJP failed to usher in development in vast poverty-hit Bastar despite it kept winning the seat for past 20 years.

"People have given enough chance to BJP in Bastar, now it's the turn of Congress" Baij remarked in a formal chat with reporters at Bijapur which comes under Bastar parliamentary constituency.

On Naxal issue, Baij said that he had already demanded release of innocent tribal booked in various jails under false cases.

"Dialogue with the villagers, local leaders will be initiated soon and a solution to the Naxal issue in Bastar to be found," he said.



## No hard feelings, says Kedar after denied ticket

STAFF REPORTER ■ JAGDALPUR

Former minister and BJP leader Kedar Kashyap said on Sunday that his supporters were slightly angry after he was denied ticket for Bastar Lok Sabha seat but he has no hard feelings for the party or against any individual.

"They (supporters) have been pacified and urged to work for party with utmost dedication," Kashyap said while talking to reporters at BJP office,



Jagdalpur.

Kashyap further stated, "Congress lacks quality leadership who can match the stature

of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Congress on regular basis is issuing irrelevant statements for political gains and people understand everything."

BJP has fielded Baiduram Kashyap for Bastar seat to save its bastion. "Congress attack on Baiduram is a political conspiracy to confuse the people through a web of lies. Congress is running out of issues after BJP has put a strong candidate for Bastar. Party workers will ensure his victory," he opined.

## Cop attempts suicide in Balodabazar

STAFF REPORTER ■ BALODABAZAR

A police constable allegedly attempted to commit suicide by setting himself on fire in Balodabazar district, but was rescued by his colleague, police said on Sunday.

The incident took place Saturday night when the constable, Yagya Sahu doused himself in petrol which he took out from his motorcycle, and set himself ablaze, said JR Thakur, Balodabazar Additional Superintendent of Police.

Sahu's colleague constable Ramkripal Sahu who tried to put out the flames, was also injured, police said. Both the constables were shifted to hospital in Raipur.

The incident took place Saturday night when the constable, Yagya Sahu doused himself in petrol which he took out from his motorcycle, and set himself ablaze,

"Yagya has sustained 90 per cent burns and his condition is said to be very critical. Ramkripal is reported to be out of danger", Thakur informed.

The trigger behind the extreme step taken by Yagya is being investigated. A case has been registered and further probe is underway.



The barricades are being installed in the Raipur collectorate premises on Sunday as part of preparation for filing of nomination papers for Lok Sabha polls.

# Five held for illegally adopting infant

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Five persons were arrested on Sunday on charges of a case of illegal adoption of a newborn babe, police said.

The infant baby's mother along with four others was arrested while the baby has been placed in a government-run creche, Additional Superintendent of Police (City) Prafull Thakur informed.

To the question of any kind of monetary benefits involved in the case, the ASP said, "prima-facie it looks like no money was transferred but the individuals involved in case had adopted the baby while violating norms and rules. We are looking into the money party."

The accused have been identified as the mother of infant Ishwari Chelak from Baloda Bazar, Mamta Goswami of Tatibandh, Roopa Rathore of Purani Basti, Sanjay Gandatra of Khamtarai and Bhupesh Makhija from Saraipali town of Mahasamund district.

According to the ASP, Ishwari who belongs to labour class had reached Dr BR Ambedkar Memorial Hospital in Raipur while she was seven-month pregnant. She had decided to abort the child, as she was fed up of abuse hurled by her hus-



The accused in police custody

Pioneer Photo

band and they already had two children.

At the hospital she met Mamta Goswami who advised Ishwari not to abort the baby. She took Ishwari to house of a woman named Rupa Rathore, living in Purani Basti locality of state capital.

Two months later on March 9, 2019, she gave birth to a baby girl at Ambedkar Hospital Raipur.

The matter came to light after an unknown person registered complaint with Women and Child Development Department in this regard. The department then lodged an FIR after which police initially

detained Ishwari and then arrested Mamta and Rupa, ASP Thakur said. Police tracked down Sanjay Gandatra and his brother-in-law Bhupesh in this connection.

Police have registered a case under section 75 (punishment for cruelty to child), 80 (punitive measures for adoption without following prescribed procedures) and 81 (sale and procurement of children for any purpose) of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 against the accused.

The accused were presented at the local court from where they were sent to jail.

## Dhanendra Sahu to file nomination today

STAFF REPORTER ■ MAHASAMUND

Congress candidate for Mahasamund Lok Sabha seat Dhanendra Sahu will file his nomination papers on March 25 at Mahasamund collectorate.

Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel will attend the nomination rally to boost the



winning prospects of former minister Sahu who is a powerful OBC community leader.

The BJP has dumped its sitting MP from Mahasamund Chandulal Sahu and announced candidature of a largely unknown face of Sahu community, Chunnilal Sahu.

## Three persons killed in road accident

STAFF REPORTER ■ DURG

Three people were killed on Sunday after a bike on which they were travelling in collided head-on with an MUV coming from opposite direction under Pulgaon police station limits. The collision was so intense that two persons died on the spot while another one succumbed to injuries at the hospital, Station House Officer (SHO) Pulgaon

Uttam Verma informed. The deceased were identified as Subhas Yadav Manikpuri (40), Pyarelal Dewangan (67) and Dhayram Sahu (50) all residents of Durg district. They were on way to Durg city from Chingri village in the district and had reached Kolihapuri around 10 am when the accident happened, the SHO said while adding that the MUV driver was arrested the vehicle was seized.

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# Shivraj vs Digvijay likely in Bhopal

FIANS ■ BHOPAL

The BJP in Madhya Pradesh has withheld its nominee for the Bhopal Lok Sabha seat after the Congress formally fielded former Chief Minister Digvijay Singh. The party has deferred a decision on Gwalior and Indore too.

While the Bharatiya Janata Party has cleared a list of 15 out of 29 seats, the Congress is treading cautiously. Apart from Digvijay Singh, its list of nine also includes three women - Meenakshi Natarajan from Mandasaur, Kavita Singh from Khajuraho and Pramila Singh, a former BJP MLA, from tribal-dominated Shahdol.

The BJP was considering senior RSS worker Vishnu Dutt Sharma for Bhopal, but there were protests from senior members like former Chief Minister Babulal Gaur, former Minister Umashankar Gupta and others who sought a local candidate to be fielded instead. The RSS is said to have



been vetting the list at every stage. The current member, Alok Sanjar, is unlikely to be re-nominated considering the resistance from the ranks and possible challenge from Digvijay Singh.

Former Chief Minister, Shivraj Singh Chouhan, who was initially considered for Vidisha may be asked to take on Digvijay Singh. The RSS has also assessing the claim of Pragna Thakur, the saffron Sadhvi who was recently acquitted of charges in the

Malegaon blasts.

The BJP's first list of 15 reflects a big reshuffle. The party has dropped five MPs and shifted Union Minister Narendra Singh Tomar from Gwalior to Morena in anticipation of Congress nominating Jyotiraditya Scindia from Gwalior, instead of Guna which he currently holds.

The dropped MPs include former bureaucrat Bhagirath Prasad who had ditched the Congress to accept the BJP ticket, Anoop Mishra, the

nephew of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Chintamani Malviya from Ujjain, Gyan Singh from Shahdol and Jyot Dhurve from Betul, whose certificate as a tribal candidate was found to be forged.

The new faces are Durgadas Uikey from Betul (a choice of RSS) and Amit Firozia, a first-time contestant from Ujjain. Former Union minister Dalbir Singh's daughter Himadri Singh, who quit the Congress last week, is to contest the Shahdol seat.

Like Bhopal, nominations for Indore and Gwalior have become contentious for both parties. The BJP has also been reconsidering the nomination of outgoing Lok Sabha Speaker Sumitra Mahajan following murmurs of protest from the rival faction led by Kailash Vijayvargiya.

Her nomination will also have a bearing on Bhopal where veteran leader Babulal Gaur has staked a claim.

If the 75-plus age barrier is held against one, the other could be kept out too, a party supporter from Indore said.

Digvijay Singh's nomination from Bhopal has caused flutter among his supporters and detractors alike. His son Jaivardhan tweeted a poem to suggest the party could subject him to severe tests but Digvijay Singh would happily face the challenges. Former Leader of Opposition Ajay Singh has suggested that leaders from Gwalior and Chambal (read Jyotiraditya Scindia) should be asked to contest from Indore. Vijayvargiya has offered to contest against Digvijay Singh. He says with his own party members keen to defeat him, it would be interesting to take on Digvijay Singh.

# TDP not to contest LS polls in Telangana

FIANS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telugu Desam Party (TDP) will not contest Lok Sabha elections in Telangana, party sources said on Sunday.

With several top leaders defecting to the ruling Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) and remaining leaders not keen to contest the polls, the TDP's Telangana unit is understood to have decided not to field candidates for next month's elections.

Monday is the last day for filing of nominations for the elections scheduled on April 11.

The TDP, which contested the recent Assembly elections in alliance with Congress, may announce support to Congress in all 17 Lok Sabha constituencies in Telangana

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The TDP, the ruling party of Andhra Pradesh, had contested Telangana Assembly polls as part of the four-party 'People's Alliance' led by the Congress. The alliance secured 21 seats in 119-member Telangana Assembly. They included two of TDP and one of them has crossed over to the TRS.

The decision came two days after former MP Nama Nageswara Rao quit the TDP to join the TRS, which gave him ticket from Khammam Lok Sabha constituency. He was one of the last key leaders to leave the TDP.

# Priyadarshini Scindia's name for Gwalior crops up

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

FIANS

# Sitharaman slams Opp for questioning air strikes

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday slammed the Opposition and the Congress in particular for questioning the air strikes in Pakistan after the Pulwama terror attack and accused them of politicising it.

The BJP Government gave freedom to the armed forces to act and they delivered, she said. Sitharaman also accused the previous Congress-led UPA government of not taking a similar deterrent action following the November 26, 2008 terror attacks in Mumbai and claimed that the Army was willing to respond if the then government wanted them to do something.

"If only a similar deterrent action had been taken after the Mumbai attack and I have enough reasons to believe the armed forces did tell the Government at that time, if you want us to do something we are

ready, but we want you to take the call..." she said. Her statement comes two days after Sam Pitroda, chief of Indian Overseas Congress, asked the government to come out with "more facts" on the Balakot air strikes.

Prime Minister Modi, using the hashtag 'Janta Maaf Nah Karegi' (people will not forgive) in a tweet, had attacked Pitroda for reportedly saying he wanted to "know more" about the Balakot air strikes, including number of terrorists killed.

Several BJP leaders, including BJP chief Amit Shah, slammed Pitroda for his remarks. Referring to the Balakot air strikes, she said the Prime Minister had clearly said it was now up to the armed forces to take the call on how to proceed and that freedom was given to them.

"When action was taken by us...What is being asked how many people did you actually kill...What is the proof. It is absolute shocking conduct.



Telangana BJP leaders felicitate Union Minister Nirmala Sitharaman at Secunderabad parliament Workers Meeting in Nampally on Sunday

The morale of the armed forces is being hit at. So, when the Opposition is questioning you are questioning them (armed forces) and then you keep telling us that don't politicise Balakot. You are the one who is politicising it by asking us

for proof by asking the government did you really kill terrorists or did you really cross the border. Pakistan can ask it..." Sitharaman said addressing an event 'Telangana For Modi' organised by 'Modi Army' (supporters of Modi) here.

# Jharkhand grand alliance announces seats for parties

PTI ■ RANCHI

The Opposition grand alliance in Jharkhand on Sunday announced their seat-sharing formula among the Congress, the JMM, the JVM (Prajanatrik) and the RJD for the 14 Lok Sabha seats

"The Congress will contest in seven seats, while the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) will contest four and Jharkhand Vikas Morcha (Prajanatrik-JVM) two. The maha gathbandhan has left Palamau seat to the RJD," State Congress president Ajoy Kumar said at a Press conference here.

Along with the state Congress president, JMM chief Shibu Soren, JMM's working president Hemant Soren and JVM president Babulal Marandi were present in the press conference, while there was no representation from the RJD.

# Karti Chidambaram in new Congress candidates list

FIANS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday released its ninth list of 10 candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, including Karti Chidambaram, son of former Finance Minister P Chidambaram, from Sivaganga constituency in Tamil Nadu.

Karti Chidambaram had also fought the 2014 parliamentary polls from Sivaganga, the stronghold of his father, but lost to AIADMK's PR Senthilnathan. P Chidambaram had represented the constituency in 2004 and 2009.



# TIGER UNDERGOES LIP OPERATION

Mumbai: An 11-year-old Royal Bengal tiger at the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) here has been operated upon for removal of a growth on its lip, an official said on Sunday. This is the sec-

ond such operation on the same tiger carried out by the authorities, said the SGNP official. "Tiger Yash underwent surgery in August 2018," said SGNP veterinary officer Dr Shailesh Petha.

# BJP kick-starts UP poll campaign...

From Page 1  
"For the sake of vote back the Opposition is questioning Indian Army. India needs a Prime Minister who can give a befitting reply to Pakistan and terrorism. After India used air force to destroy terror camps inside the Pak territory, the country now realises that the Modi Government will not be a mute spectator to Pak-sponsored terrorism," BJP national president Shah said.

He said till date there were only two countries in the world who had taken revenge of death of their soldiers in terrorist attacks. "These were United States and Israel, and India's name has been added to this list. Shah also attacked the Congress, the SP and the BSP saying these parties ran Governments that were corrupt and squandered money for personal gain," he said. The rally held at the Agra College ground was attended by MP from Agra Ramshankar Katheria, whose place was denied ticket. In his place SP's Baghel is the party candidate.

# Peeved over delay in flats, Noida buyers begin NOTA campaign

Noida: Peeved over delay in possession of flats, a section of buyers in Noida and Greater Noida on Sunday started a unique initiative pledging to go for NOTA instead of any candidate in the Lok Sabha election.

The flat buyers under a registered umbrella body Noida Extension Flat Owners and Members Association (NEFOMA) have launched the 'No Home, No Vote' drive to express their angst with their elected representatives and state as well as central governments, the body said.

Noida and Greater Noida are part of the Gautam Buddha Nagar parliamentary constituency which has over 22.5 lakh voters. Notably, over five lakh new voters have been enrolled since 2014 and a major chunk of them is flat buyers, according to the district administration.

"The flat buyers in Greater Noida west have not got the flats even after the assurance from the prime minister. (Uttar Pradesh) Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath constituted three ministerial committees but



those also did not help. Hence our association has started today the 'No Home, No Vote' drive from Rudra Projects in Greater Noida," NEFOMA president Annu Khan.

"Buyers say there is no difference between the previous governments and the present government. No leader comes to the support of the flat buyers hence the flat buyers have decided they will vote for NOTA," Khan said in a statement.

In 2014, a total 3,836 votes were polled for None of the Above in Gautam Buddha Nagar constituency, less than one per cent of the total votes cast that year. NOTA was introduced to empower the citizens to indicate their disapproval for all contestants.

# 3 Jaish terrorists arrested in J&K

Srinagar: Three Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) terrorists were arrested by security forces on Sunday from the outskirts of the city, police said.

"Three car-borne terrorists affiliated with proscribed terror outfit JeM (were) arrested by police and security forces at Lawaypora (on Srinagar-Baramulla road) (based) on a credible input today," a police spokesperson said. The spokesperson said ammunition, including live rounds, was seized from the three terrorists.

# Govt's new policy is to choke democratic space in Kashmir, says Mehbooba

Srinagar: Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) president Mehbooba Mufti said choking the democratic space and punishing people collectively was a new policy adopted by the Centre to deal with Kashmir.

The purpose behind the "repressive measures being taken in Jammu & Kashmir by the BJP-led Government is to show the electorate how tough the saffron party is against Kashmiris", Mufti claimed.

"Choking democratic space and punishing people collectively is unfortunately a new policy adopted by the government of India to deal with Kashmir," the former CM said at PDP youth convention here. Referring to a ban imposed on the JKLF and the Jamaat-e-

Islami Jammu & Kashmir, she said it was ironical that while on one hand, the Central Government claims to have launched a rehabilitation scheme for terrorists who lay down arms, on the other, organisations like Jammata and JKLF, which have rejected violence as a method of achieving any goal, are slapped with bans.

"The JKLF is committed to resolution through political means, while the Jamaat-e-Islami is a religious and social organisation running schools and orphanages across the state. Such repressive measures will shrink the already limited space and will only increase the level of alienation and frustration among the people," Mufti said.

# 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.

# 9% CRPF men suffer from obesity, diabetes

From Page 1  
Karwal also said that if the retirement age is enhanced, it will directly impact the recruitment process for next three years and subsequently increase the age profile of the force with reduced component of youth in the force.

As many as 180 battalions (1,80,000 personnel) out of 243 battalions are deployed in various roles without any peace time deployment. A Subedar Major rank official in the media branch of the Force's headquarters said a mechanism should be put in place where in the health check up of top rung officials should be conducted by a panel of doctors independent of the CRPF medical wing.

A study conducted by the IIM, Ahmedabad on "Emotional Intelligence and Occupational Stress in BSF and CRPF" in 2012 had

# Akhilesh to fight from Azamgarh, MSY among...

From Page 1  
In the 2014 polls, Mulayam contested from two constituencies, Azamgarh and Mainpuri, and won both. The SP has so far announced the names of 20 candidates, 19 in Uttar Pradesh and one Madhya Pradesh. Other prominent candidates are Akhilesh's cousins,

Dharmendra Yadav and Akshay Yadav. While Dharmendra Yadav will fight from Badaun, Akshay Yadav will contest from Firozabad. Dharmendra Yadav, the son of Ram Gopal Yadav, will contest again from the seat that he has won thrice, while Akshay Yadav will contest from Firozabad, from where he had won the last parliamentary elections.

The party has declared Dimple Yadav its candidate from Kannauj. The Samajwadi Party, the BSP and the Rashtriya Lok Dal have entered into an alliance in Uttar

Pradesh for the April-May Lok Sabha polls. The Samajwadi Party has entered a pre-poll alliance with the Mayawati-led BSP and will contest 37 of 80 Lok Sabha seats in UP. While the BSP will contest on 38 seats, the RLD, which is also a part of the alliance, will fight from three seats. The SP-BSP-RLD alliance had left two seats for the Congress in Amethi and Rae Bareilly.

The general election is going to start on April 11 and will continue till May 19. Polling on the 80 seats in the State will be held in seven phases.

The Samajwadi Party and the BSP will hold a series of joint rallies for the Lok Sabha polls, with the first being on April 7 in Uttar Pradesh's Deoband town. There will be several joint rallies in the State and besides the BSP and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) will be also part of these public meetings, Samajwadi Party chief spokesman Rajendra Chowdhury said. The first of these joint rallies will be held in Saharanpur district's Deoband town on April 7 and will be addressed by Akhilesh Yadav, BSP chief Mayawati and RLD president Ajit Singh.

# 2 Hindu girls kidnapped, converted, married...

From Page 1  
The two girls 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.

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

According to media reports, the Hindu community in the area staged protests, demanding action against perpetrators of the alleged crime.

In a Twitter post in Urdu, Chaudhary said 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.

India has been raising the issue of plight of minorities, particularly the Hindu community in Pakistan.

# 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.

# 264 bustards block Ratlam-Vadodara NH

From Page 1  
It also took exception that as the project was largely elevated tracks and measures were needed to ensure injury and accidents to a lesser extent. The EAC has also sought measures that need to be considered for habitat conservation and conservation of Lesser Florican and mitigation measures to be addressed in detail after consultation with the State Chief Wildlife warden.

Lesser Florican is the smallest bird of the bustard family. It is one of the four bustard species of India, all of which are threatened as per International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Though Lesser Florican has been given the highest degree of protection under Schedule-I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972, its numbers have declined, necessitating its declaration as an endangered species in the IUCN Red list. However, pushing the project for clearance, the Enviro Infra Solutions said that the proposed expressway will provide better, fast, safe and smooth connectivity for the commuters of Madhya Pradesh,

especially in Ratlam region. "Smooth and fast-moving traffic will cause only lower emissions thereby reducing pollution levels. Accident rates are also expected to come down substantially. Development of the proposed project road will improve the local agriculture and enable farmers to realise better value for their products as well as attract more investment to that region, thus boost economy of the area, State and nation as a whole. The vehicle operating and maintenance cost is expected to go down substantially.

The proposed road alignment will also include general amenities like bus bays, truck lay bays, rest areas, service road at builtup locations, pedestrian and cattle underpasses, landscaping and tree plantation, traffic aid post, emergency telecom system, emergency medical aid post, streetlight at built ups etc and thus overall facilities to the road users shall improve. People will have increased access to better social and health infrastructure and other services located outside the project area. This will in turn lead to overall improvement of the quality of life of the people residing in the project zone in terms of their economic, social and health status. Growth of local tourism and resultant boost to local economy is also expected due to proposed project," it added.

# May faces pressure to step down

AP ■ 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



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.

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 TROTTERING

**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 Gornier 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 Wachaiyapong 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 shores 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 Ogossou were pregnant women, small children and the elderly, according to a Peuhl group known as Tabital Pulaaku.

Graphic video obtained by The Associated Press shows the aftermath of Saturday's attack, with many victims burned inside their homes.

A small child's body is 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 Ambassador 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."

## 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-Balakot 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 Balakot 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 stenorian 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 raakhte parbaanaa* (You oppressive rulers, you will never be able to suppress we 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 Lutyan's 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. *Modiji* is also doing the same.



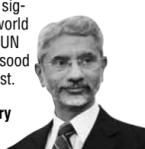
**Delhi Chief Minister**  
—Arvind Kejriwal

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



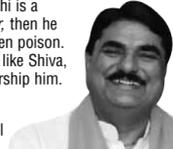
**Lyricist**  
—Javed Akhtar

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 avatar, 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' kith 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

### 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

**Sameer Bhoi**  
Bargarh

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.

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](mailto:letterstopioneer@gmail.com)

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 warmed 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 be 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 giggling 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). Orban 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 lime-light 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 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 Vihar 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 Maheish 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 proliferate 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)



FOREIGN EYE



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)

# 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 Vidharbha 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

Tinamool 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.

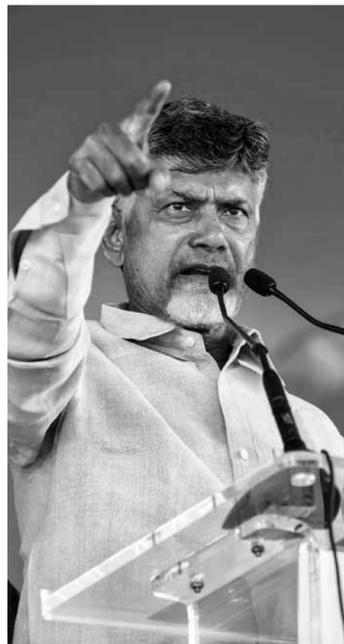
Attacking the Centre for making issues personal he said "those who are calling themselves as chowkidars are themselves harassing the common people," adding it was beneath his and his family's dignity to make personal attacks on fellow politicians.

"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 alleged 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 "Mahamiliawati (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 wasnikn 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 to 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,

Bihar Congress spokesman Harkhu Jha told PTI.

Jay Prakash Narayan Yadav and Shailesh Kumar alias Bulu Mandal, both sitting MPs of the RJD, have been fielded by the RJD from Banka and Bhagalpur respectively, Bihar unit RJD president Ram Chandra Purvey told reporters here.

The last date for filing nominations for the second phase of polling is March 26.

Tariq Anwar, who won the Katihar seat as NCP candidate in 2014, had joined the Congress in September last year, while former BJP MP from Purnea, Uday Singh, alias Pappu Singh, had joined the party on March 20 in Patna, PTI



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

### CONG FIELDS HARIPRASAD FROM B'LURU 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 Ajit 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-RJD 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 Bhadrawati-Warora Assembly constituency, resigned from the Sena and joined the Congress recently in the hope that he would be given a ticket to contest the Lok Sabha polls. He had been lobbying for the Congress ticket.

Bhadrawati-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

□ Bhadrawati-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 Gajbiye (Ramtek-SC), Suresh Dhanorkar (in place of Vinayak Bangade from Chandrapur), Subhash Wankhede (Hingoli).

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.

Chavan had suggested to the caller that he should speak to Mukul Wasik, who was "calling the shots" in the selection of candidates for the state. "But Mukul Wasnik is no one in front of you," the caller had said.

At one stage, Chavan was heard saying, "I have also informed the party. Nobody is listening to me. I am planning

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 Udayanraje 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 Vadra'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 sunburns. 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.



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

## 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.

# 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 Priyank 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 millennial, Thomas Cook India Chairman and MD Madhavan Menon told PTI.

"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 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-

# 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 MTNL and BSNL 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.

In the hyper-competitive telecom environment, both the public sector firms have approached the Government for financial support and to resolve legacy issues, but the Centre is yet to take any final call.

# 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 fighter



jets — 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.

# 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 for 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 Nicolò 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 his 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 Suresh 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-pressure to limit India's circle entries.

Though the tactic was good, they lost three players (Kim Hyeonjin, Jihun Yang and Lee Namyong) 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 Miami; 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

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,



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	
<b>RUNS</b>	<b>85</b> David Warner (SRH)
<b>WICKETS</b>	<b>3</b> Imran Tahir (CSK)
<b>6S</b>	<b>30</b> Russell played a great knock. The bowlers did not bowl bad balls but he just smashed them
<b>4S</b>	<b>61</b> — 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 meter 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-

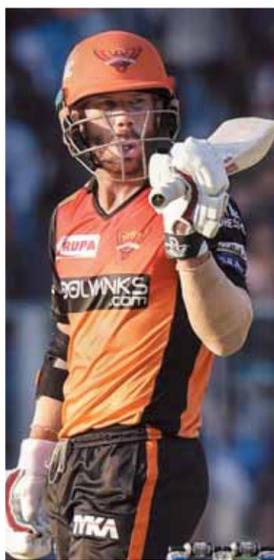


RUSSELL HAMMERED FOUR SIXES AND AN EQUAL NUMBER OF BOUNDARIES IN RUN SEQUENCE THAT READ 6-6-1-4-1-4-6-4-0-6-1. YOUNGSTER SHUBMAN GILL (18 NOT OUT) COMPLETED THE FORMALITIES WITH TWO SIXES OFF SHAKIB-AL-HASAN

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 in the 16th over to start the destruction and then spared none. He struck 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 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. "The way he batted in the last series against quality bowlers and took on the spinners shows that he still is a formidable force. He is an asset on the field and in the dressing room where he helps youngsters groom," said Hesson.

## 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.

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### HEAD TO HEAD

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Ashwin-led Punjab side would rely heavily on their openers Gayle and KL Rahul to provide fiery start

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 happens to be in his elements, the Kings XI may be able to draw the first blood.

Skipper Ashwin would be desperate to prove that he can still make a difference in this format. With Mohammed Shami, Andrew Tye and Muejeb Ur Rahman, Punjab's bowling looks pretty strong.

Their bowling too have reasonable depth with speedster Jaidev Unadkat eyeing a slot in Indian team for the World Cup. Varun Aaron, Dhawal

## 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.