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*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

Phir Ek Baar Modi Sarkar, predict polls

Most exit polls give BJP-led NDA clear majority in Lok Sabha but discordant survey results in Uttar Pradesh to decide final outcome

ALL INDIA

AGENCY	NDA	UPA	OTHERS
India Today-Axis Poll	339-365	77-108	69-95
New18-IPSOS	336	82	124
News 24 - Today's Chanakya	340	70	132
Times Now-VMR	306	132	104
Republic-C Voter	287	128	127
ABP Nielsen	267	127	148
News X My Neta	242	162	136

Exit polls do not mean exact polls. We have to understand that. Since 1999, most of the exit polls have gone wrong — Vice-President Venkaiah Naidu

Every single exit poll can't be wrong! Time to switch off the TV, log out of social media & wait to see if the world is still spinning on its axis on the 23rd — Omar Abdullah

Battleground LOK SABHA



UTTAR PRADESH (80)

AGENCY	BJP	CONG	GATHBANDHAN
India Today-Axis Poll	65	2	13
Times Now-VMR	58	2	20
Republic-C Voter	38	2	40
ABP Nielsen	22	2	56
Poll of polls	65	2	13

The BJP under the leadership of Modi will accomplish its target of securing 300-plus seats on its own, and 400-plus seats on the strength of its allies

UP CM YOGI ADITYANATH

I don't trust exit poll gossip. The game plan is to manipulate or replace thousands of EVMs through this gossip. I appeal to all Opposition parties to be united, strong and bold. We will fight this battle together — Mamata Banerjee

BENGAL (42)

AGENCY	BJP	TMC
Republic-C Voter	11	29
ABP Nielsen	16	24
India Today-Axis Poll	19-23	19-22
Times Now-VMR	11	28
India News	14	26



DELHI (7)

AGENCY	BJP	CONGRESS	AAP
India Today-Axis Poll	6	1	0
Times Now-VMR	7	0	0
Republic-C Voter	7	0	0

Exit polls predict close fight in Chhattisgarh

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Exit polls results on various news channels on Sunday after the final phase voting ended for parliamentary polls, showed a neck-to-neck fight between the BJP and Congress in Chhattisgarh.

Exit polls results predicted a slight edge in favour of the BJP in Chhattisgarh which has total 11 Lok Sabha seats.

The BJP had won 10 seats in 2014 parliamentary polls in the state but Congress swept to power in December last year in the assembly polls by winning

68 out of the 90 seats. Political analysts were predicting a clean sweep for the resurgent Congress in the mineral-rich State.

Exit polls results have surprised many in Chhattisgarh and state's ruling Congress has outrightly rejected the exits polls results saying the party would sweep once results are declared officially on May 23.

The BJP too rejected exit polls findings for Chhattisgarh and claimed it would repeat the 2014 performance despite it performed poorly in assembly polls barely six months back.

mostly to BJP doing exceedingly well in States like Maharashtra, Haryana, Bihar, Karnataka besides Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh — the three Congress-ruled States. While the BJP was in close contest with the Congress in Rajasthan and MP, it was wiped out in Chhattisgarh.

But the pollsters have given BJP the edge in the Naxal-affected State now.

Even in Karnataka, where Congress is again ruling (in an alliance with JD-S), the pollsters suggest the NDA could even bag all the 28 seats.

In Maharashtra, where the BJP-Shiv Sena is predicted to be sweeping the polls, Prakash Ambedkar's 'Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi', a Dalit-Muslim formation, which contested about 37 seats, may have severely dented Congress-NCP chances in most of the 48 seats. The BJP-SS combine could win 38-42 seats, leaving just 6 to 10 for Congress-NCP.

In Haryana, some of the exit polls have forecast defeat of former Chief Minister Bhupendra Singh Hooda with his son and sitting MP Depender Singh Hooda fighting hard to save his Rohtak seat. The BJP seems to have gained by consolidating its non-Jat votes in the State.

As per exit polls it is the Hindi-heartland which has backed Prime Minister Narendra Modi who seemed riding a "pro-incumbency wave" even after much debated rising figures of unemployment and agrarian crisis in many States.

Assam in the North-East is giving the BJP 7 out of 10 seats while Gujarat is said to have voted for Modi to the hilt as exit polls leave only one or two of the 26 seats for the Congress.

Elections to 542 seats of the Lok Sabha ended on Sunday. The Election Commission has deferred election for Vellore in Tamil Nadu over allegations of misuse of money power.

DEEPAK K UPRETI/
M MADHUSUDAN ■ NEW DELHI

Abki baar 300 paar", was Prime Minister Narendra Modi's war cry during his whirlwind campaigning across the country. On Sunday, as many as six exit polls forecast the same. Suggesting a "Modi wave" bigger than that of 2014, the pollsters gave a maximum of up to 365 seats to the BJP-led NDA and predicted it would bulldoze the Congress even in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh — where the Opposition party recently won the Assembly polls — to storm back to power at the Centre.

As for the UPA, the pollsters forecast a bleak prospect giving the entire alliance as less as just 60 seats and pegging its highest tally at 162. The

Congress-led alliance seemingly has gained in Punjab, Kerala and Tamil Nadu but if the exit polls hold true, the Congress, which was at its lowest tally of 44 seats in 2014, may not touch the three-figure mark this time too.

Only two pollsters said the BJP-led NDA would fall short of the majority mark of 272 seats in the Lok Sabha.

In the politically crucial Uttar Pradesh with 80 Lok Sabha seats, the pollsters have come up with a mixed bag of results indicating the complexities involved at the ground level. If India Today-Axis gave the BJP-led NDA a maximum of 68 seats and News 24-Today's Chanakya said its tally could even cross the 70-seats mark, then ABP-Nielsen gave the NDA as less as 22 Lok Sabha seats and the SP-BSP-

RLD alliance a high of 56 seats, something which should cheer up the Opposition camp.

In battleground West Bengal, the BJP is said to be headed towards making major gains at the expense of the Trinamool Congress with India Today-Axis forecasting as high as 23 seats for the saffron party. However, News18-IPSOS gave the BJP only a marginal gain pegging just 3-5 seats to it and forecasted a sweep by the TMC. The BJP has given it all in Bengal, which is one of the States besides the North-East where it intends to offset probable losses in UP or elsewhere.

The results in Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal would be most keenly awaited. It was riding on its stupendous performance of bagging 71 of the 80 Lok Sabha seats in UP that the BJP under Modi came



Voters display their identity cards after during the last phase of Lok Sabha polls at Theon village near Shimla on Sunday PTI

to power in 2014. But with arch-rivals BSP and SP joining hands to pose a formidable challenge to the BJP, any major dent in its tally in the Hindi

heartland would severely impact its chances of returning to power. NDA winning more than half of the 80 seats in UP would go on to confirm that

mutual transfer of Yadav and Jatav votes of SP and BSP didn't materialise in entirety.

The surge of NDA in 2019 general elections is linked

Maya lends hand to Opp unity, to meet Rahul today

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Even as exit poll surveys have predicted a return of the Modi-led NDA Government, BSP chief Mayawati is likely to meet Congress president Rahul Gandhi and UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi on Monday following efforts by Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister and TDP leader N Chandrababu Naidu to ensure an Opposition alliance dispensation at the Centre. Naidu on Sunday held a second round of talks with top Opposition leaders, including Rahul, Sonia and NCP chief Sharad Pawar.



Mayawati's meeting with the Congress leadership is seen as a significant outreach and breaking of ice after the BSP chief carried out an acrimonious campaign that was

unsparring of the Congress and even kept it out of the Mahagathbandhan in UP.

Sources said Mayawati, who nurtures prime ministerial ambitions and has made no

bones about the fact, is said to have agreed to meet the Congress leadership to ensure that an Opposition alliance must come to power anyhow. At the same time, she knows her PM ambitions can't be fulfilled without the Congress' help, sources added. Naidu is the 'chief facilitator' of the Mayawati-Sonia meeting.

Mayawati recently said all the votes of the alliance would go to the Congress in Amethi and Raebareilly, the constituencies of Rahul and Sonia.

Mayawati's meeting with the Congress is part of the series of meetings among Opposition parties lined up

ahead of the Lok Sabha results on Thursday. The last time Mayawati had exchanged greetings with the Congress leadership was during the oath ceremony of JD(S)-Congress coalition Government led by HD Kumaraswamy in Karnataka.

But thereafter the Congress and the BSP failed to agree on seat-sharing for the Madhya Pradesh Assembly elections leading Mayawati to vent her anger on the grand old party which formed the Government. Mayawati then joined hands with her rival Samajwadi Party but kept out the Congress.

Violent 7th phase brings curtain down on LS polls



Muslim women wait their turn at a polling station in Kolkata on Sunday PTI

63.5% turnout reported; bombs hurled in Bengal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/KOLKATA

The long-drawn 2019 Lok Sabha polls concluded on Sunday with the seventh and last phase witnessing a 63.52 per cent voter turnout amid incidents of violence reported from West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Punjab, where a Congress activist was killed.

Bengal, despite bombs being hurled and clashes between TMC and BJP workers, recorded the highest voter turnout (73.51 per cent). Bihar recorded the lowest (53.36 per cent) turnout.

The last phase, which will decide the fate of 918 candidates, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saw EVM glitches and poll boycott at some booths.

According to the Election Commission (EC), Himachal Pradesh recorded 70.23 per cent turnout, Madhya Pradesh 73.86 per cent, Punjab 63.67 per cent, Uttar Pradesh 58 per cent, Jharkhand 71.16 cent and

Chandigarh 63.57 per cent. In Bengal, rival groups threw crude bombs in Bhatpara. The tense situation was brought under control when police used batons. Violence was reported in all the seven phases in Bengal.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee accused BJP workers and Central forces of "intimidating voters" during the seventh phase poll saying she has never seen "such a thing before." Meanwhile, in Basirhat the BJP alleged that 100 voters were barred from casting their votes and a BJP camp was set to fire in Barasat.

BJP's North Kolkata candidate Rahul Sinha said a crude bomb was hurled near Girish Park in the constituency around noon. Police, however, said crackers were burst in the area, and polling went peacefully. In Kolkata South, TMC candidate Mala Roy alleged she was stopped from entering polling booths.

Sporadic clashes were reported in Kolkata and its surrounding areas. BJP candidate Nilanjan Roy in Diamond Harbour constituency alleged his car was vandalised in Budge Budge area. Similar

reports came in from Jadavpur constituency, where BJP candidate Anupam Hazra's car came under attack by unidentified men.

EVM malfunctioning was reported from across Punjab and Bihar. Violent clashes between workers of various parties in Punjab, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh were reported. In the Nalanda seat, a mob ransacked a polling booth and held an official hostage for an hour as they boycotted the polls. Clashes were also reported from Sasaram, Karakat, Arrah and Jehanabad.

Congress and Akali-BJP workers clashed in Talwandi Sabo in Bathinda and Gurdaspur. At Talwandi Sabo, Akalis alleged that shots were fired by ruling party workers. According to reports, one Congress worker was killed in a poll-related violence in Khadoor Sahib seat in Punjab.

In UP, the turnout in Modi's constituency Varanasi was 57 per cent, while in Gorakhpur, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's turf, it was 56.47 per cent. Violence erupted in Chandauli Lok Sabha constituency, where State BJP chief Mahendra Nath Pandey is seeking re-election.

1 killed in gang war, another shot by cops

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a gang war between the notorious Manjeet Mahal gang and his rival splinter group in South-western part of the national Capital, two gangsters were killed near Dwarka Mor Metro station on Sunday between 3.45 pm and 4 pm.

While one gangster was killed in the shootout between the rival gangs, the second one was gunned down by police personnel of a Police Control Room (PCR) van which had reached the spot after being informed about the shootout that rattled passersby at the busiest section connecting Dwarka Mor with Uttam Nagar. More than 20 rounds were fired in the gang war.

The bodies of the two slain

gangsters were taken for autopsy in West Delhi and sluths from Crime Branch and Special Cell are in hunt of gangsters who manage to flee the spot.

The deceased have been identified as Praveen Gahlot, a member of Manjeet gang, and his rival Vikas Dalal, who had run away from Haryana Police custody in October.

"A few days ago Vikas had shot one of his former accomplices in Vasant Kunj. He is being treated in a Gurugram hospital," said sources.

A senior police official said, "Praveen Gahlot was sitting in his car near Dwarka Mor metro station when a Swift car arrived and three men started firing at Praveen. Praveen died on the spot."

Opp cries foul over telecast of Modi's visit to Kedarnath

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A political row erupted on Sunday over Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Kedarnath and Badrinath shrine. Trinamool Congress, TDP and a Congress MP from West Bengal wrote to the Election Commission (EC) claiming that "continuous" telecast of Modi's "private activities" at the shrines is violation of the Model Code of Conduct.

While Modi "thanked" the EC for giving him the permission for the visit, Congress president Rahul Gandhi hit out at the poll body, saying its "capitulation" before "PM Modi and his gang" is obvious.



"From electoral bonds and EVMs to manipulating the election schedule, NaMo TV, 'Modi's Army' and now the drama in Kedarnath; the EC capitulation before Modi and his gang is obvious to all Indians," Rahul tweeted.

CAPSULE

PRE-MONSOON RAINFALL DEFICIT DROPS TO 22%
New Delhi: Pre-monsoon rainfall from March to May, phenomenon vital to agriculture in several parts of the country, has recorded a deficiency of 22 per cent, according to IMD data.

MCDONALD'S REOPENS 13 RESTAURANTS IN DELHI
New Delhi: Connaught Plaza Restaurants Private Ltd (CRPL), now wholly-owned by food service retailer McDonald's, has re-opened 13 of its restaurants in Delhi starting 11 am on Sunday, a statement by McDonald's said.

SIDHU HARMING CONG, SAYS AMARINDER SINGH
Chandigarh: The simmering tension between Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh and his Cabinet colleague Navjot Singh Sidhu was out in the open again on Sunday with the former accusing the cricketer-turned-politician of damaging the Congress.

Poll raids: ₹34 cr cash, liquor, drugs seized

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Cash, drugs, liquor and precious metals worth ₹3449.12 crore were seized by enforcement agencies since the Lok Sabha polls were announced on March 10. The quantity of drugs and narcotics seized by the poll body is equal to the weight of 19 adult male Asiatic elephants (an adult male Asiatic elephant weighs nearly 4000-4500 kg). The seized quantity of drugs/narcotics is 76521.09 kg worth over ₹1270.37 crore.

According to flying squad of the EC, the contrabands being circulated/seized in Gujarat, Delhi and Punjab are of a much superior quality than the ones being supplied elsewhere.

In 2014, the overall seizure was ₹1,206 crore, Director General (Election Expenditure) in the EC Dilip Sharma said on Sunday after the seventh and the final phase of polls. For the current elections, two more heads-precious metal like gold and

freebies/other items have also been added under which the seizures are being made.

As per data, 184.3 lakh litre liquor worth of over ₹294.91 crore was seized across the country which will fill roughly five and-a-half Olympic-sized swimming pools. Between March 10 and May 19, ₹839.03 crore in cash, precious metals, including gold, worth ₹986.76 crore and 'freebies', including sarees, wrist watches, aimed at inducing voters worth ₹58.56 crore were seized, he said. The total comes to ₹3449.12 crore.

Tamil Nadu has topped the list of states from where the maximum amount of cash, liquor and narcotics have been recovered by the EC during the ongoing Lok Sabha elections, followed by Gujarat and Delhi.

As per data, EC seized maximum value seizures (₹950.03 crore) have been made in Tamil Nadu, followed by Gujarat (₹552.72 crore) and Delhi (₹426.10 crore). In Tamil Nadu,

the total cash seizure was ₹227.13 crore while precious metals, gold and jewellery of 3113 kg worth of ₹709.67 crore was seized during the polls. Mizoram and Lakshadweep are the two states from where no cash has been recovered.

Political parties as well as independent candidates use ambulances and other vehicles fitted with flashing lights to carry cash and other items to lure voters. EC observers, surveillance teams and enforcement agencies raid airports, highways, railways stations, hotels and farm houses if there is any suspicion of illegal money. Accepting money to vote or not to vote for a candidate is a punishable offence with prison terms, fines or both. The use of money in elections has increased in the last few years. A Delhi-based NGO, Centre for Media Studies (CMS), has estimated that all political parties in 2019 would together spend over ₹60,000 crore.

Keep Central forces in Bengal till May 27, BJP urges poll body

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Expressing concern that the EC's ruling TMC may target a section of voters after polling is over, the BJP on Sunday requested the Election Commission to order the presence of central armed police forces in the State till the Model Code of Conduct period ends.

BJP leader and Union Minister Nirmala Sitharaman told reporters that elections in six of the nine seats, which have undergone elections on Sunday, were marred by violence.

revenge, TMC workers have been beating up people and we are afraid that they will start targeting voters after the polls are over. The central armed police forces should be there till the end of the Model Code of Conduct," she said.

The MCC will remain in force till May 27, according to the EC. The counting of votes is due on May 23.

Sitharaman was joined by nominated Rajya Sabha MP Swapan Dasgupta who said, "In West Bengal, the violence unleashed by the TMC as part of its 'badla' strategy won't end."

"Central forces must remain in the state as long as the Model Code is in operation till end-May," he said.

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Govt deports 600 foreigners, including 200 clerics after Sri Lanka Easter bombing

Colombo Authorities have identified about 1,200 such individuals

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Out of the 600 foreigners including 200 hardcore maulvis (Muslim religious preachers) deported by Colombo post the suicide bombings there, over a 100 were Indians who, along with those from Pakistan and Maldives, were suspected to be engaged in radicalization in the Sri Lankan mosques.

Besides the Indians, clerics from Pakistan and Maldives have also been deported in large numbers owing to their terror links that emerged after serial suicide bombings in Colombo on Sunday Easter last month that took a toll of over 250 persons including 11 Indians. Besides the 200 maulvis, the 400 other individuals are also suspected to have travelled on tourist visas but have been essentially been engaged in radical preachings, sources said.

Sri Lankan authorities have identified about 1,200 such individuals who are being screened for terror links and depending upon antecedent verification more such clerics are likely to be deported to the respective countries.

The revelation of the Indian maulvis in radicalization activities in the island nation has set alarm bells ringing in the security establishment here as they apprehend the international terror groups might have developed a hub of such transnational radical preachers in the country.

The deportations began on Tuesday after the Sri Lankan authorities informed the respective foreign missions on the issue. By Thursday, the 600 such radicals were deported to the respective countries.

Pakistani clerics have infiltrated the mosques in the

region including in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Maldives and even in some of the ASEAN countries. These clerics are being exploited by the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence for the larger design of implementing state agenda of sponsoring terror in the neighbourhood, sources said.

The sources said such radical clerics are also part of the transnational radicalization networks of the international terror groups like the Al Qaeda and ISIS who have a long term agenda of radicalization and subsequently recruit them into their fold for their terror designs, including logistics management chain and funding through illegal narcotics supply chain.

During the last over two years, Indian clerics in large number, as revealed by the Sri Lankan deportations, are also taking up jobs of Islamic preaching in foreign shores.

In the wake of the development, the challenge for the security agencies is two-fold, one to keep tabs on their activities after their deportation and secondly to establish their role and extent of involvement in radicalization during their stay in Sri Lanka, insiders said, adding the Indian security agencies will have an onerous task ahead to contain the impact of the deported radical clerics.

They said counter-terrorism and security-related issues come under the domain of the security agencies in so far as Sri Lanka is concerned as any adverse activity there has a direct bearing on the security calculus in South India, especially Tamil Nadu.

Ahead of carrying out the suicide bombing in Colombo, chief National Thowheed Jamat Zaharan Hashim had stayed in South India for three months but remained undetected by the Intelligence Bureau.

Extreme hot condition not appropriate for elections, says Paswan

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

LJP chief and Union Minister L Ram Vilas Paswan on Sunday spoke against polling in April-May, saying extreme hot condition in the period is not appropriate for elections as he asked political parties to evolve consensus for polls to be held in either February or November.

Earlier in the day, Bihar Chief Minister and JD(U) president Nitish Kumar also questioned the long drawn polling in intense heat conditions and suggested general election should be held in two or three phases either in February-March or October-November. In his tweets, Paswan said people are nowadays more aware about voting but April-May is not an appropriate period for Lok Sabha or assembly polls as the period is extremely hot and results in a lower turnout.

"After a new government is formed after the elections, leaders of all political parties should seriously consider holding the polls either in February or November. It will facilitate campaigning. People will cast votes in comfort, boosting the turnout. It will strengthen democracy," the Lok Janshakti Party leader said.

In his comments, Kumar also disfavoured gap between voting days.

He stressed on a constitutional provision for conduct of election at a more suitable time and said he will write a letter to his counterparts in other parties after completion of current election to reach a consensus over the issue.

The seven-phase Lok Sabha election, which started on April 11, is ending Sunday.

Campaigning has been especially exacting in states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal as they have undergone polls in every phase.

Parties spend ₹53 cr poll ads on FB, Google, YouTube

BJP spent over ₹17.10 cr on 12,002 ads on Google platform and ₹4.23 cr on over 2,500 ads on Facebook

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Political parties have spent over ₹53 crore on digital platforms like Google and Facebook since February 19 during the ongoing Lok Sabha campaign till May 17. BJP is the top spender on Google and Facebook advertisement, followed by DMK. According to Facebook's Ad Library Report, there were 1.21 lakh political ads with a total spending of more than ₹26.5 crore between February and May 17 this year. Similarly, ad spend on Google, YouTube, and partner proper-

ties since February 19 stood at ₹27.36 crore with 14,837 ads. The voting for the last and final phase was completed on Sunday. In terms of geographies, according to the report, the maximum money on election ads has been spent in Andhra Pradesh (₹5.23 crore), followed by Tamil Nadu (₹4.43 crore) Telangana (₹2.03 crore) and Delhi (₹2.81 crore) for the period.

BJP spent over ₹17.10 crore on 12,002 advertisements on Google platform and ₹4.23 crore on over 2,500 ads on Facebook. The BJP spent on campaigning a combination of video, print and digital ads on supporting pages like 'My First Vote for Modi', 'Bharat Ke Mann Ki Baat' and 'Nation with NaMo' too, 'Main Bhi Chowkidar', 'Bhrastachar Mitane ke liye, Naya Bharat

Banane ke liye, Vishwa mein Samarth dikhane ke liye Desh ka maan badane ke liye and Atankwad ko harane ke liye surakshit rashtra banane ke liye and, infused over Rs 4 crore on ads on the social networking platform that has well over 200 million users in India. On Google's platforms, it has spent more than ₹17 crore. The DMK, which is second in spending on digital platform with the expenditure of Rs 4.10 crore on 266 advertisements.

The Congress spent ₹1.46 crore on Facebook for 3,686 ads. It shelled out another ₹2.71 crore on Google's platforms with 425 ads, while YSR Congress Party of Rs 2.31 crore. Meanwhile, Congress has been highlighting the promises made by its PM candidate Rahul Gandhi through multiple digital advertisements.

The pro-Congress page "Bande Mein Hai Dum" spent Rs 2.59 lakh for drumming up support for the grand old party on Facebook and the Indian Youth Congress spent ₹6.52 lakh on the social media platform.

As per Facebook's data, Trinamool Congress has spent ₹29.28 lakhs. Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) shelled out ₹13.62 lakh for 176 ads on the Facebook page. Interestingly, Google's political ad dashboard showed that Auburn Digital Solutions was running AAP campaigns and had spent ₹2.18 crore from February 19 onwards.

Google enforced its election ads policy for India in February, which requires advertisers to provide a certificate issued by the Election Commission (EC), or anyone authorised by it, for each ad they wish to run. An advertiser must first be verified

by Google before submitting this pre-certificate for advertisement.

Amid increased political advertising on social media platforms, the Election Commission (EC) has given directions for close tracking of expenditure by political parties and candidates on these platforms during elections. In a communication to chief electoral officers of all states and Union Territories on April 18, EC said "ad transparency reports" from Google, Facebook, and Twitter, among others, should be closely studied. The poll panel has conveyed to all states that parties' payments for social media campaigns should be tracked and assessed. It must also be ensured that these reflect correctly in the accounts of parties and candidates.



Centre for Cultural Resources and Training (CCRT) under the aegis of Ministry of Culture organised a 10-day training programmes for the in-service school teachers and students from all parts of the country with an aim to disseminate Integrated Art Education among students. The All India Annual Cultural Festival- Indradhanush 2019 from May 18-28, 2019 will see children between the age group 6-16. On the first day CCRT director in-charge Rishi Vashist motivates young minds

Names of RS members who moved impeachment motion against HC judge can't be disclosed: CIC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Names of Rajya Sabha members, who moved an impeachment motion against a high court judge, and those who withdrew it can't be disclosed as it would be a breach of parliamentary privilege, the Central Information Commission has held.

Chief Information Commissioner Sudhir Bhargava gave this order on a petition filed by S Malleswara Rao, who had sought to know from the Rajya Sabha Secretariat the number of MPs who had signed and moved the impeachment against Justice C V Nagarjuna Reddy, and those who withdrew it. Reddy retired from the Hyderabad High Court last year.

The Rajya Sabha Secretariat had cited Section 8(1) (c) of the RTI Act to deny the information.

The section exempts from disclosure information which can cause a breach of privilege of Parliament or a state legislature.

Bhargava said in order to enable the Parliament or a state legislature or their

Quoting British constitutional theorist Thomas Erskine May, Bhargava said, "Parliamentary privilege is the sum of the peculiar rights enjoyed by each House collectively is a constituent part of the High Court of Parliament... And by members of each House of Parliament individually, without which they cannot discharge their functions."

individual members to perform their functions effectively and without any impediments or interference from any quarter, certain privileges are conferred upon them in the Constitution under articles 105 and 194.

Quoting noted British constitutional theorist Thomas Erskine May, Bhargava

said, "Parliamentary privilege is the sum of the peculiar rights enjoyed by each House collectively is a constituent part of the High Court of Parliament... And by members of each House of Parliament individually, without which they cannot discharge their functions."

"The commission notes that giving a notice of motion by any member in the course of discharge of his parliamentary duties is covered within the meaning and scope of the term 'Proceedings in Parliament'," the commissioner said.

He said the disclosure of details of members who gave the motion and some who subsequently withdrew their names under the RTI may open the parliamentary conduct of such members to public scrutiny.

"Such disclosure may not only indirectly influence the members in discharge of their parliamentary duties, but has a tendency to influence their independence in the future performance of their duties, thereby would cause breach of privilege," Bhargava said.

Pre-monsoon rainfall records 22% deficiency

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Pre-monsoon rainfall from March to May, a phenomenon vital to agriculture in several parts of the country, has recorded a deficiency of 22 per cent. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) recorded 75.9 millimetres of rainfall from March 1 to May 15 as against the normal rainfall of 96.8 millimetres, which comes to around minus 22 per cent. From March 1 to April 24, the IMD recorded a deficiency of 27 per cent. According to IMD data, the deficiency has fallen over the last fortnight due to rains over east and northeast India.

Meanwhile, the southwest monsoon has advanced into South Andaman Sea and conditions are favourable for it to reach the North Andaman Sea and the Andaman Islands in the next 2-3 days, the IMD said.

Of the four meteorological divisions of the IMD, the south peninsula, which comprises all the southern states, has recorded pre-monsoon deficiency of 46 per cent - the highest in the country.

This was followed by 36 per cent in the northwest sub-



division that covers all the north Indian states - it was 38 per cent from March 1 to April 24, but has dropped by 2 per cent due to rainfall across several parts.

The deficiency in the east and northeast region that covers eastern states of Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal, Odisha and northeastern states was seven per cent. There was no deficiency in the central region

which comprises states of Maharashtra, Goa, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh.

However, from March 1 to April 24 the pre-monsoon rainfall recorded in the central division was five per cent than normal. The region has also been witnessing intense heat waves and several dams in the Marathwada region of Maharashtra have reached zero

storage level.

Pre-monsoon rainfall is important for horticulture crops in some parts of the country. In states like Odisha, ploughing is done in the pre-monsoon season, while in parts of northeast India and the Western Ghats it is critical for plantation of crops.

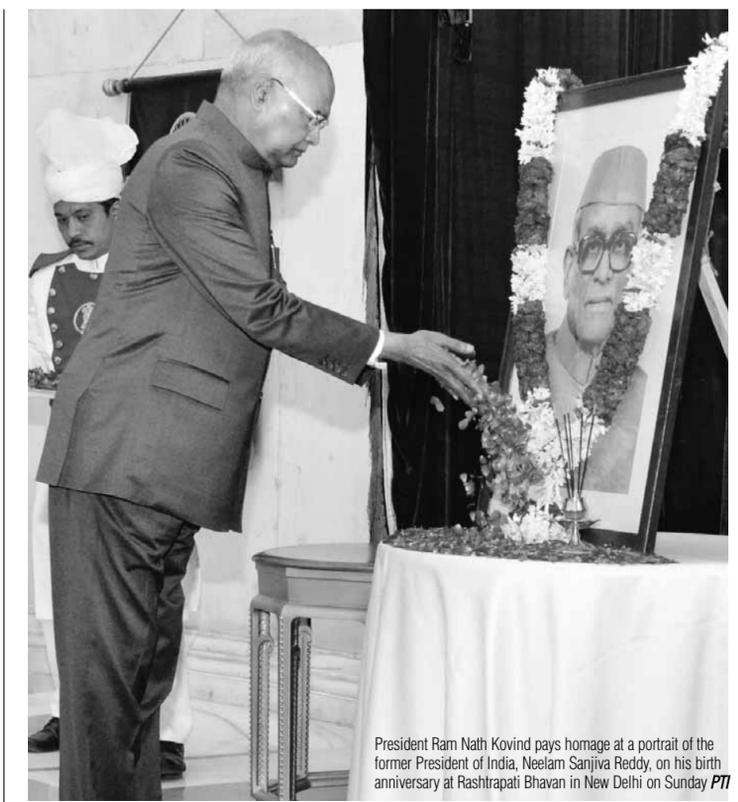
Laxman Singh Rathore, former director general of the IMD, said in parts of northeast

Meanwhile, the southwest monsoon has advanced into South Andaman Sea and conditions are favourable for it to reach the North Andaman Sea and the Andaman Islands in the next 2-3 days, the IMD said

India and the Western Ghats, pre-monsoon rainfall is critical for plantation crops. There will be 'moisture stress' in case of a deficit, he said.

Crops like sugarcane and cotton, planted in central India, survive on irrigation and also require supplement of pre-monsoon rains, Rathore added.

"In the forested regions of Himalayas, pre-monsoon rainfall is necessary for plantations like apple. Due to moisture, pre-monsoon rainfall also helps in minimising the occurrence of forest fires," he said.



President Ram Nath Kovind pays homage at a portrait of the former President of India, Neelam Sanjiva Reddy, on his birth anniversary at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi on Sunday PTI

Bastar residents have high hope from Baghel to save Indravati river

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Chairman, Bastar Development Authority, Lakheshwar Baghel has expressed serious concern over depleting water level of Indravati river and he blamed the Odisha government and urged Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel to personally intervene into the matter as the river is the lifeline for poverty-hit Bastar.

Lakheshwar while talking to The Pioneer said that Baghel had been taking the matter seriously and had instructed the Engineer-in-Chief of state to take immediate step whatever best could be done on the part of Chhattisgarh state to save Indravati.

The immediate step could be the de-silting of Jora Nullah because of which the river water is taking a



reverse turn into the Odisha state, Lakheshwar informed. He further informed that "a complete solution to the revival of Indravati was actually not in the hands of Chhattisgarh government alone as it is interstate issue and Odisha is not executing on the agreement it had agreed upon and thus Chhattisgarh government had also written a letter to the central tribunal in this regard seeking an amicable solution", he added.

In charge minister of the Bastar region, Kawasi Lakhma and MLA Vikram Mandavi were also among the delegation which met the CM to draw attention on revival of Indravati river, Lakheshwar informed.

Commenting on ongoing foot march of the social activists and citizens of Bastar to save Indravati river, Lakheshwar said it was appreciable that citizens are aware enough and have launched a movement for a

good cause but we are helpless because the matter comes under interstate dispute.

Meanwhile, the foot-march launched by social activists and residents of Bastar with a motive to revive Indravati, the lifeline river of Bastar region entered twelfth day on Sunday.

In a bid to provide a new lease of life to the Indravati river, a group of local residents and social activists of the region, had launched a

foot-march (Padyatra) from Bhejapadar village situated along Chhattisgarh-Odisha border from where the river makes its way into Chhattisgarh.

The marchers are also demanding from the state government to talk to Odisha government for releasing water as per the water agreement between the two states. This release of water to the Indravati river would then be able to cater the day-to-day need of water for Bastar residents who are also urging Chhattisgarh government to construct a permanent structure on the Jora Nullah which is pending for years.

The water level in the Indravati river is depleting with the onset of summers and the citizens of Bastar are facing scarcity of water not only for their Rabi crop but also for their daily use as well.

Chhattisgarh exhibits Kosa fabrics at Delhi expo

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

On special invitation from Government of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh is participating in Lord Tirupati Balaji 'Brahmotsav' organized at Tirupati Balaji Temple, New Delhi.

State is exhibiting its Kosa fabrics and Bastar Art through handicraft and handloom exhibition. The expo began on May 15 will continue till May 25.

The Kosa fabrics and Bastar art is drawing customers. The colours used on the Kosa fabrics are of natural colours. The yellow colour is prepared from marigold flower; the black colour is mixture of



mushroom and onion while the plain kosa cloth has been dyed with vegetable colour.

At exhibition, a customer Anandita said, she is purchasing the Kosa silk saree for her daughter as a gift as she is getting married in month of June. Another customer Arti appreciated the use of natural dye in Kosa silk laying stress that it is rare in other states.

Hotel owner from Tirupati, Ashok said he has procured the Dhokra art of Chhattisgarh to decorate his hotel. Brahmotsav is an annual festival.

Six killed in two road accidents

STAFF REPORTER ■ Janjgir-Champa/Jashpur

Six people including two children, were killed and five others injured in two separate road accidents in Chhattisgarh, police said on Sunday.

Two women and a 10-month-old boy died and five others sustained injuries when their car collided with a truck at Bhadri square in Janjgir-Champa district on Saturday night, Dabhra's sub-divisional officer of police Sadhna Singh informed.

The victims, all members of the same family, were returning from a marriage function when the mishap took place. Three of them, identified as Neha Mahant (30), her son

The victims, all members of the same family

Tanmay and Kumari Mahant (60), died on the spot.

A police team rushed to the spot and took the injured persons to a hospital in the nearby Kharsia town of Raigarh district, Singh said.

They were later referred to another hospital in Raigarh because of their serious health conditions, she said. The truck driver was arrested and his vehicle seized from the spot, the official said.

In another incident, a man, his four-year-old

daughter and younger brother were killed when a truck collided with their motorcycle on Katni-Gumla highway in Jashpur district on Saturday night, a local police official said.

The three persons, all natives Chetwa village, were returning from a wedding in Dutarbahar village when the speeding truck coming from the opposite direction hit their two-wheeler, he said.

While Santan Sai Paikra (30) and his daughter Chahak died on the spot, his brother Kujbihari succumbed during treatment at a local hospital, he said.

Efforts were on to trace the truck driver, who fled while leaving the vehicle at the spot.

7 assembly constituency counting at Raipur

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The counting of seven assembly constituencies for Raipur Parliamentary seat will take place at Raipur while two assembly constituencies of the seat, to be held at Baloda Bazar.

Raipur Lok Sabha seat has total nine assembly constituencies. Counting is scheduled to begin at 8 am on May 23.

The counting of assembly constituencies under Raipur district will take place at Government Engineering College, E-Block, Sejbahar. Raipur District Electoral Officer and Returning Officer Dr Basavaraju S reviewed the counting arrangements with

all Assistant Returning Officers and other departmental officials.

DEO Dr Basavaraju S stated that votes count would begin at 8.00 in the morning on May 23 and postal ballot papers will be counted first. The Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) will be taken up for counting after 8.30 am.

He added that the counting of assembly constituencies of Dharsiwa, Raipur Rural, Raipur city West, Raipur City North, Raipur City South, Arang and Abhanpur at GEC, Sejbahar. The counting of two remaining, Baloda Bazar and Bhatapara assembly constituency will be held at Baloda Bazar district headquarters.

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Subrat Sahoo, Chief Electoral Officer, Chhattisgarh has issued directives to all the Returning Officers cum district collectors of all the 11 Parliamentary constituencies regarding the counting centre, counting process, strong room, videography, and announcement of result along with preparing the reports.

The counting is scheduled to start on May 23 at 8.00 am.

As per directive on security arrangement, the 100 metres periphery of counting centres should be declared as 'walking area' where entry of vehicle is prohibited.

A three-tier security cover should be made where entry is allowed only to those having identity cards issued by Election Commission or District Electoral Officer. The third-tier should be manned by CRPF personnel.

As per ECI directive, 5 VVPAT machine slips of each assembly constituency will be counted in random. Written intimation should be given to candidates on opening of strong room.

Directives further states of holding videography of all arrangements, processes of counting from opening of strong room to last process but by maintaining confidentiality of the counting and number of votes obtained by candidates.

All prior permissions from Election Commission should be obtained while no objection certificate has to be obtained from ECI observer. Decision should be taken, in case application is received for re-counting.

Elected candidates should be issued election certificate in form-22. The candidate or person known to DEO should be handed over the certificate and a receipt certificate be obtained. RO should certify before sending it to Lok Sabha secretariat.



Health Minister T. S. Singhdeo based on a complaint received that a postmortem was conducted in open, inspected the Lakhanpur Community Health Centre on Sunday. He was accompanied by Chief Health and Medical Officer P. S. Sisodia.

Prakash Bajaj sent to jail for allegedly harassing woman

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

BJP's controversial leader Prakash Bajaj was on Sunday booked on the charges of allegedly sexually harassing and criminally intimidating a woman of Raipur city, police said.

"He was arrested and sent to jail on judicial remand," Station House Officer (SHO) Civil Line Mohsin Khan informed.

According to the SHO, a woman had recently registered a complaint against Bajaj that in 2016 she had provided the accused Rs 10 lakh as he had promised to get a house for the complainant in Raipur, the SHO said.

However, Bajaj did not arrange house for the complainant. When the victim demanded her money

back, Bajaj used to call her at his office but never returned back the money, SHO added.

Later on, Bajaj started to make wrong moves and tried to touch inappropriately. When the complainant warned him of lodging FIR against him, Bajaj boasted of having strong political connection and said nothing would happen to him, the SHO mentioned.

Bajaj was booked under Sections 354 (Assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty) and 506 (criminal intimidation) of Indian Penal Code (IPC).

Notably, Bajaj was the complainant of a sleaze CD episode last year which was linked to the former minister and BJP leader Rajesh Munat.

NGGB taking shape in Surguja

STAFF REPORTER ■ AMBIKAPUR

The ambitious scheme of Chhattisgarh government Narwa Garwa Ghurwa Bari (NGGB) is taking shape in Surguja district.

As per the official information, the day care centre for cattle under this project is quickly taking shape in about 57 villages of the district. Already Rs 4.5 crore has been sanctioned for the construction of day-care centres under the MNREGA.

"To build the cattle day-care centre, such spots have been selected which already have green cover so that the bovine could easily get natural shades of trees," a district administration official said, while adding construction of shed, fodder store room, installation of tube-well, solar pump, making pasture and other required facilities available are in the process. Vermi compost pits and planta-

These centres will be managed by women self-help-groups which will be named as 'Gauthan Management Committee'

tion drive are also under progress, officials stated.

These centres will be managed by women self-help-groups which will be named as 'Gauthan Management Committee'.

They are being roped-in so that their financial condition could be improved via the sale of bio-fertilizers produced from vermi-compost.

The urine and cow-dung will be collected for processing and sale.

HOW TO REMAIN FRESH IN SUMMER

Temperature's rising and we are looking forward to longer and lazier days of summer. While summer may be of some relief from cold and chilly days, it may also bring along various health problems like dehydration, upset stomach, bacterial infections, heat stroke. It is imperative to make sure you are eating the right foods and exercising the right way to fitness and health. Restore and replenish your skin and physical health as we suggest some amazing healthy diet tips to survive the sweltering summer this year.



Grab seasonal fruits and vegetables

These days most vegetables and fruits are available all-year round. Always pick freshly harvested foods to extract best benefits they have to offer. Load up on mangoes, plums, tomatoes, berries, watermelon, oranges, etc.

Keep yourself hydrated

Drinking water is extremely important as it helps to rehydrate your body and function better. Make sure you gulp down 8-10 glasses of water and ensure a well hydrated body. Do not drink extremely chilled water as it will only wreak havoc on your health.



Downsize your meal

It takes longer for the stomach to digest food plus the hot weather does not allow you to load up on too many foods. It is good to have lighter meals rather than having heavy ones, especially at night.



Eat more cooling foods

Load up on more body cooling foods and more hydrating foods that will help you keep going in this heat. Eat more watermelon, sesame, coconut water, cucumber, mint, etc.

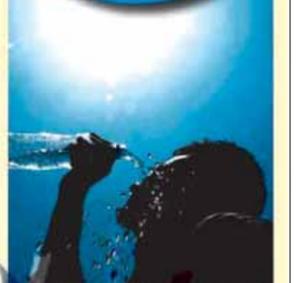


Choose fresh juices over cold drinks

Summers make you thirsty more often, which makes us resort to cold drinks and energy drinks that prove to be hazardous in the long run. Whenever you feel like quenching your thirst drink orange juice or melon juice.



HERE ARE SOME HEALTHY TIPS FOR SUMMER YOU MUST NOTE DOWN!



Binge on lighter snacks

Move over fried snacks that you enjoyed during winters, it is time to load up on lighter snack options like nuts, seeds, fruits, salads, etc.

Hygiene is the key to a healthy body

Make sure whatever you eat or drink is clean and hygienic. You are prone to get bacterial infections from the utensils in restaurants and even at home. Always ensure they are clean and always wash your hands before eating.



70% polling in Himachal Pradesh

PNS ■ SHIMLA

At least 70 per cent of Himachal's eligible electors cast their votes on Sunday to seal the fate of 45 candidates in the fray for state's four Lok Sabha constituencies.

The turnout this time crossed the 2014 Lok Sabha mark of 64.42 per cent polling.

Five MLAs, including a state minister, are among the 45 candidates in the fray.

"According to the reports received till 8:30 PM, the polling percentage in the state was 70 percent. Shimla Lok Sabha constituency (reserved) recorded polling percentage of 71.10, Mandi saw voter turnout of 72, Hamirpur 71.04 and Kangra 66," said a state election officer.

There were minor hiccups as electronic voting machines developed snags at some places in the state, he said.

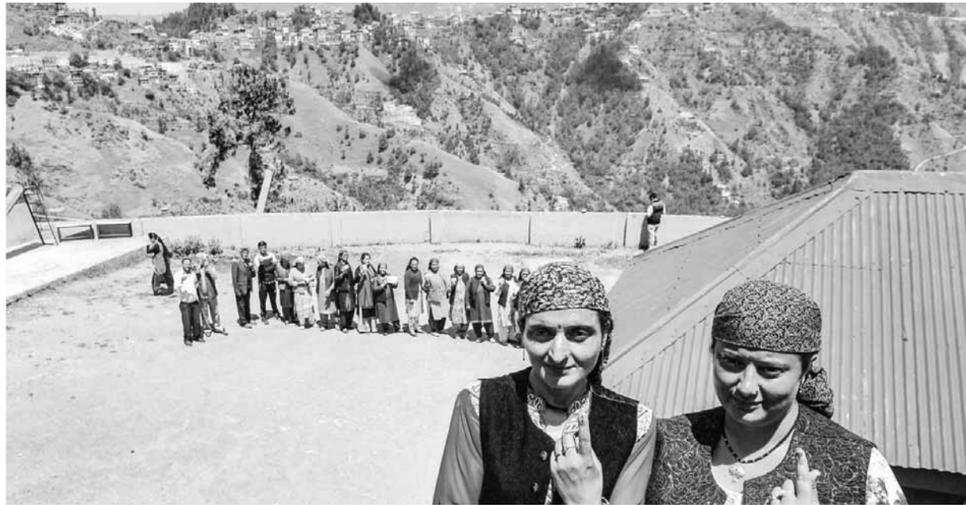
In Hatli Jamwal area of Nurpur Assembly segment in Kangra district, the polling was stopped in the morning for about an hour due to faulty VVPAT machine. It was immediately reported and the VVPAT was changed, he said.

In Khannai area, two differently-abled voters, both visually-impaired -- Saraj Deen, 70, and Shaver Deen, 41, were escorted by officials from their house in a government vehicle to the polling station to cast their votes, he added.

Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur, six-time Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh and

two-time former Chief Ministers Prem Kumar Dhumal and Shanta Kumar and former Union Minister and Congress leader Anand Sharma were among the early voters in the state.

Jai Ram Thakur along with his family members cast his vote at Bharari (Murhag) in Seraj Vidhan Sabha constituency of Mandi district. Thakur claimed that the BJP would win all four Lok Sabha seats in the state.



He said the voters in the state are supportive of the policies and works of the BJP governments at the Centre and

Lok Sabha constituencies	Voting % (Till 8:30 PM)
Shimla (reserved)	71.10
Mandi	72
Hamirpur	71.04
Kangra	66

Mandi, Hamirpur and Kangra — in the state where 53,30,154 registered voters are registered. The main contest is

The main contest is between the Congress and the BJP in the State. With the electorate in the LS polls traditionally favouring the party at the helm in the state, these elections are being seen as a referendum on the State's 17-month-old BJP Government

polling in "record" numbers. A total of 7,730 polling stations were set up in 4 constituencies — Shimla (SC),

between the Congress and the BJP in the state. With the electorate in the Lok Sabha polls traditionally favouring the

party at the helm in the state, these elections are being seen as a referendum on the state's 17-month-old BJP government.



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SIDELIGHTS

Three government employees have died due to different ailments while performing their poll duties in Himachal Pradesh. The deceased include presiding officer Vaneet Kumar who was a PGT at government senior school at Sapri in tribal Kinnaur district, homeward jawan Devi Singh who was resident of Chandera village in Arki Tehsil of Solan district and polling officer Lol Ram who was a junior technician and was resident of Sajla village in Manali tehsil of Kullu district. The Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur said that the government is with the family members of the deceased in this hour of grief. An ex-gratia of Rs 15 lakh each has been announced to the next of the kin of the deceased persons.

Shyam Saran Negi, a 102-year-old voter who also participated in the 1951-52 general elections which were the country's first, cast his ballot at a picturesque hamlet in Kinnaur district. "I have never missed an opportunity to vote," Negi told reporters in Kalpa. In 1951, Negi, a retired schoolteacher, was on an election duty and exercised his franchise in Chini constituency - later renamed Kinnaur. This time he cast his 31st vote. He has voted in 17 parliamentary and 14 Assembly polls.

The world's highest polling station at 15,256 feet in Tashiganag village of Himachal recorded an unbelievable, 132 per cent voter turnout -- all valid votes. Against merely 49 registered voters figuring in the village electoral roll, a total of 65 voters had cast their votes till 3 pm at the Tashiganag polling booth. The unbelievable spike in the poll percentage was attributed to the desire of many poll officials, deployed at polling booths in the Tashiganag village and other nearby areas to cast their votes at the world's highest polling station.

Located at an altitude of 10,000 feet and around 350 km from state capital Shimla, voters at Geu village in Lahaul and Spiti district boycotted the Lok Sabha poll. "We have to take the decision as none of the governments have found a permanent solution to frequent floods due to a nearby nullah here," a villager said. An election officer said, there are 167 voters registered at the village and none of them have voted till afternoon. Only five votes have been cast at the Geu polling station, that too were cast by the poll staff, he said.

Before proceeding to his bride's village for his marriage, bridegroom Anil, 28, of Kothi village near Manali, led his entire 'barat' to the polling booth number eight in the city and cast his vote, besides making his wedding companions too do the same. Decked in his wedding attire, complete with ornamental headgear, Anil reached the polling booth to a pleasant surprise of election officials, security personnel and fellow voters in the queue and cast his vote. Anil cast his vote before proceeding for his marriage, said a district election official, adding the groom reached the polling with many of his 'baratis'.

The BJP had wrested the state from the Congress in December, 2017, winning 44 seats in the 68-member Assembly. The Congress won 21 seats, independents two and the Communist Party of India-Marxist won one.

Sitting BJP MP and the Chief Minister's confidante Ram Swaroop Sharma is seeking a second term from Mandi Lok Sabha seat and contesting

against Congress greenhorn Ashray Sharma, who is the grandson of former Telecom Minister Sukh Ram.

In the Shimla (reserved) seat, Retired Colonel Dhani Ram Shandil, 78, is the Congress candidate against BJP's nominee and former Indian Air Force (IAF) officer Suresh Kashyap, 48.

In Hamirpur, former Chief Minister Prem Kumar Dhumal

is trying to ensure a fourth term for his son Anurag Thakur, who is pitted against ex-wrestler and five-time Congress legislator Ram Lal Thakur.

From Kangra, the BJP's nominee is Cabinet Minister Kishan Kapoor, 68, against Congress two-time legislator Pawan Kajal, 44. In the 2014 Lok Sabha polls, the BJP had won all four seats in the state.

Cong files complaint against Kirron Kher

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

On the day of polling in Chandigarh, Congress on Sunday submitted a complaint to the Election Commission against the BJP and its candidate Kirron Kher for violating the democratic rights of the citizens by releasing its manifesto just hours before the end of campaigning, which is 48 hours before the polling time.

The printing of only 100 manifesto copies thereof is also against the democratic principles of the Constitution of India and against the oath given by Kirron Kher at the time of filing her nomination, said Congress advocate Pankaj Chandgotia in the complaint.

He stated that the manifesto must be released at least

The Congress' complaint added, it is requested that the candidature of BJP candidate Kirron Kher be cancelled as she has committed grave sacrilege of the Constitution of India and Indian Democratic Principles and violation of the solemn oath given by her at the time of filing nomination

7 days before the polling date to honour the principles of a healthy democracy. The BJP has not obeyed the concept of democracy and deliberately delayed the release of its election manifesto to almost the last minute, to avoid any dialogue or discussion on it, which is the right of every voter. The voter has been denied his fundamental right of knowing the promises and real commitment of the concerned candidate Kirron Kher and her party, the Chandigarh

submitted to the Election Commission over telecast of exit polls while the voting was in the progress, Congress said that the telecast on a news channel started at 4 pm while voting was still going on in Chandigarh and other areas of Phase 7.

Although the complaint was registered, still the exit poll program started. Upon this, the Congress raised the matter on the C-VIGIL APP Chandigarh EC officials visited Congress advocate Pankaj Chandgotia's office in Sector 28 here and took shots of the program where the Chandigarh trends were also being discussed.

The matter was escalated by the nodal officer to the national level. The matter is under investigation by the NGRS, Pankaj said.

Polls show BJP gaining, BJD sure of Odisha House majority

Bhubaneswar: The Biju Janata Dal (BJD) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Sunday exuded confidence to form the next government in Odisha, while the Congress hoped to better its 2014 performance.

While most exit polls indicated gain for the BJP in both the Lok Sabha and the Assembly, some hinted at a neck-and-neck fight between the BJP and the BJD in the state.

Odisha witnessed simultaneous elections to 21 Lok Sabha and 146 Assembly seats in four phases.

"The exit polls show a gain for the BJP in parliamentary seats. People have voted the BJP knowing that it can protect the interest of the country. Besides, we are quite confident of forming the government in the state," said state BJP Vice-President Pratap Sarangi.

The ruling BJD expressed the hope to form the government for the fifth straight term in the state and perform well in the Lok Sabha elections. "I don't want to speculate on the number as shown in the exit polls. But I can certainly say we will secure two-third majority in the Assembly and repeat the same in the Lok Sabha," said Rajya Sabha MP Pratap Deb

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The Congress, which failed to bag a single Lok Sabha seat last time, is expected to open its account this time.

Even though the Congress did not claim to form the government in the state, it said the party would improve its tally in this election.

"The election results on May 23 will show a different story. We will play a decisive role in the state in forming the government as no political party would get majority in the state. The Congress would get around 30 seats in the Assembly," said state Congress Vice-President Arya Kumar Gyanendra.

In 2014 general elections, the BJD had secured 20 seats, the BJP one and the Congress had drawn a blank.

In Assembly polls, the BJD had got 117 seats, the Congress 16 and the BJP 10 seats. IANS

Over 64L voters seal fate of 278 candidates in Punjab

MONIKA MALIK ■ CHANDIGARH

Over 64.33 percent voters, out of 2.07 crores, exercised their franchise in 11 hours polling process on Sunday to seal the fate of as many as 278 candidates in the electronic voting machines (EVMs).

The polling in the border state remained "by and large" peaceful amid reports of EVM glitches and minor clashes between the Congress and SAD-BJP workers.

The maximum polling percentage was witnessed at 73.90 percent in Bathinda, while the lowest at 56.35 percent was recorded in Amritsar. "We are expecting it to touch 70-mark," said Punjab Chief Electoral officer Dr S Karuna Raju, as the percentage would be revised when the final tally becomes available.

During the previous Lok Sabha election-2014, the overall voter turnout was 70.89 percent with Sangrur witnessing highest turnout at 77.48 percent, while the lowest was recorded in Hoshiarpur with 65.29 percent.

The result of many stalwarts, including the SAD president Sukhbir Badal, his Union Minister wife Harsimrat Kaur Badal, former Union Minister and Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh's wife Preneet Kaur, actor-turned-politician Sunny Deol, Punjab Congress president Sunil Jakhar, Aam Aadmi Party president Bhagwant Mann, and many others, would now be kept safe in the EVMs, and would be declared along with others on May 23 — the day counting of votes.

However, the exit polls, revealed on late Sunday evening, predicted that the Congress may continue to

maintain its grip in the state by increasing its tally of four up to nine seats.

The state CEO Dr Raju maintained that barring stray incidents of clashes, the polling has remained "100 percent peaceful" in Punjab.

The reports of minor clashes between the Congress and SAD workers were received from Talwandi Sabo, Moga and Sangrur leaving one injured. A murder was also reported in Tarn Taran, but that was because of personal animosity and not a poll violence. Dr Raju informed that three cases have been registered under various sections in this regard of uploading video of the voting process on Facebook, in Rupnagar, Ludhiana and Gurdaspur.

"We came to know of some media reports where some persons had posted photos of casting vote on EVMs. We took a serious note of the matter, and asked the Ludhiana District Election Officer-cum-Deputy Commissioner Pradeep Kumar Agrawal to inquire into the matter," said Dr Raju.

The spokesperson said that the District Administration swung into action and checked voter lists as well as the social media account of the person to know his whereabouts or address, and the information was then passed on to the Police Commissioner, and the person was detained.

In another incident, two persons have been booked under sections 126-B Representation of People's Act-1951, besides 188, 201 of the Indian Penal Code during the polls at Kharar, after they were carrying mobile phone inside the polling booth and posting live video on the social media. Giving details on law and

order front, Dr Raju said that a Congress worker Bunty in Sarali Kalan village in Khadoor Sahib was murdered in the wake of an "for personal enmity and has got no relation with Lok Sabha Election". He said that FIR has been registered under section 302/34 of the IPC against Sukha, Gora and Soni.

He said that in Adampur (District Jalandhar), a minor verbal dispute arose between supporters of SAD and Congress Party, and the administration diffused the situation.

Dr Raju added that in another incident at Talwandi Sabo under Bathinda constituency, two persons were injured after the Congress leader Khushbaaz Singh Jattana fired from a "desi" (country-made) weapon. "Injury was not due to bullets or cartridges. The Police has registered an FIR against 12 persons and 15 unknown persons in this regard under section 307, Arms Act and SC/ST Act," he added.

Another incident of dispute was reported in Hakkawala village of Ferozepur district wherein one person was injured while two vehicles were also damaged.

As the polling began at 7 am, the voters including elders, women and youth queued up at several polling stations to exercise their franchise. The roads and streets in the towns and villages of Punjab were virtually converted into gullies with the voters gushing through it towards the polling booths. But even political observers are finding it tough to say whether the high tide of voters during the parliamentary polls in the state was a result of second 'Modi wave' or the popularity of the ruling Congress in the state.

QUOTE-UNQUOTE

Congress will win in all the 13 seats. I am getting very positive reports from all the constituencies with Congressmen having already started celebrating with distribution of ladoos indicating their level of confidence. The entire Akali leadership, right up to Harsimrat, is down in the dumps...I am confident of Preneet sweeping the poll by a margin of over one lakh votes, and the UPA-3 will form the next government at the Centre"

— Capt Amarinder Singh, Punjab Chief Minister

"The people have rejected a government that did not care for them and tried to hide behind false allegations of sacrilege since it had nothing at all to offer to people on the basis of its performance...I thank the valiant and tireless workers of SAD who fought government repression and Congress high handedness bravely and persistently"

— Sukhbir Badal, SAD president

"I thank the people of Punjab for coming out in large numbers to exercise their democratic right despite hot weather. By conducting themselves responsibly, the people of Punjab have set an excellent example"

— Dr S Karuna Raju, Punjab Chief Electoral Officer

Where the Congress party, on one hand, has all along been claiming to achieve its Mission 13 in the state, the SAD-BJP combine, on the other, is expecting to sail through by cashing in on the Modi wave bagging a fair share of votes in its favour to form the NDA-led government at the Centre once again.

But, it is to be seen whether the anti-incumbency at the national level against the BJP-led NDA was stronger than the anti-incumbency the ruling Congress in Punjab is facing. It is to be seen whether the high voter turnout, similar to previous polls, would defy the anti-incumbency factor or it would go with the generally-accepted notion of 'voting for the change', and going with the other available alternatives — Aam Aadmi Party or the fourth front under the banner of

Punjab Democratic Alliance (PDA).

TECHNICAL SNAGS

As many as 169 ballot units, 88 control units, and 695 VVPATs were replaced after they developed technical snags during the polling process in Punjab on Sunday. As many as 42,689 ballot units, and 28,703 VVPATs were being used for the polling in the seventh and last phase if election in the state.

The Election Commission, after success in previous assembly polls making the polling process more transparent, has used the Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) enabled EVMs.

In the morning, there were reports of technical glitches in EVMs at several places including Ludhiana, Samana and Moga. There were reports that eight ballot units, 13 control

units, and eight VVPATs were replaced before 2 pm.

It has been learnt that polling was halted for half an hour at Eelwal village in Punjab's Sangrur constituency when two factions of Congress workers clashed with each other outside a polling station.

Three persons were reportedly injured.

CEO Dr Raju said that in the morning during mock poll, as many 290 ballot units, 219 control units and 508 VVPAT machines were replaced and 169 ballot units, 88 control units and 695 VVPAT were replaced during the conduct of poll.

"There is not a single case of disruption of poll and inducement of voters that was brought to the notice of the Commission during the day," he said.

OFFICIALS DEPUTED	
Micro-observers	: 9390
General Observers	: 17
Police observers	: 7
Expenditure Observers	: 19
Polling personnel	: 1.25 lakh
CAPF Security personnel	: 25,000
Punjab Police personnel	: 75,000

Besides, there were PWD coordinators, volunteers of NCC/NSS, Aanganwadi workers, Mid-Day-Meal workers and watchmen

FIRST-TIME VOTERS

Across Punjab, the first time voters ventured out of their homes to vote for their future; and came back satisfied with a mark on their fingers certifying their contribution in ensuring a democratic setup. Among many others, the daughter of SAD's power couple — party president Sukhbir Badal and Union Minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal — Gurlen Kaur too exercised her franchise for the first time and admiring her inked finger.

In Punjab, there are around four lakh first-time voters. And those who pressed the EVM button got the "certificate of appreciation".

To woo the first timers, not only the Election Commission taken a set of initiatives. But as the Gen-Y came out to cast their "valuable" votes, they came with lot of expectations from the one they voted for.

On the Election Commission's directions, the District Administrations have given appreciation certificates to the first-time voters.

Just as the final polling figures are yet to be compiled, it would be interesting to see how many youth come out to exercise their franchise.

MAN MURDERED IN TARN TARAN

A man was brutally murdered in full public view allegedly by his neighbours following a heated exchange over some issue, even as the polling for the last phase of Lok Sabha elections was underway in Punjab's Tarn Taran district on Sunday.

The incident occurred at Sarli Kalan village under the Khadoor Sahib parliamentary constituency when the victim, Bunty Singh, 30, was returning home after exercising his franchise, Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Kuldip Singh Chahal said.

He, however, clarified that the incident was not related to the polling. "This murder is not related to the ongoing polls and is not an incident of poll violence," he said.

SUNNY DEOL VISITS POLLING STATIONS

Donning a turban, Bollywood actor turned politician Sunny Deol on Sunday visited polling stations to observe the polling process. He was seen greeting voters with folded hands outside a booth in the Fatehgarh Churian area.

Jumping a barricade, the star obliged when a young voter asked for a photograph.

Trump favours abortions in rape, incest cases

AFP ■ WASHINGTON
President Donald Trump has declared himself "strongly Pro-Life," days after two US states passed tough new restrictions on abortions, but said exceptions should be made for pregnancies resulting from rape or incest.
The US president spelled out his position on abortion — set to feature prominently at next year's election — in his first comments on the hot-button issue since Alabama's Governor signed a near-total ban on the termination of pregnancy.
"As most people know, and for those who would like to

know, I am strongly Pro-Life, with the three exceptions — Rape, Incest and protecting the Life of the mother — the same position taken by Ronald Reagan," Trump tweeted late on Saturday.
Trump, who is seeking to expand on his conservative support ahead of his re-election bid, added: "The Radical Left, with late term abortion (and worse), is imploding on this issue. We must stick together and Win for Life in 2020."
Alabama's governor on Wednesday signed a near-total prohibition on abortions widely seen as the country's most restrictive ban, and the Missouri legislature on Friday



"As most people know, and for those who would like to know, I am strongly Pro-Life, with the three exceptions — Rape, Incest and protecting the Life of the mother — the same position taken by Ronald Reagan," Trump tweeted late on Saturday
made the procedure illegal from eight weeks of pregnancy.
Neither make exceptions for rape or incest — only for cases where the mother's life is in danger.
Republican-led legislatures in Georgia, Ohio, Mississippi,

Kentucky, Iowa and North Dakota have also enacted laws banning abortion from the moment a fetal heartbeat is detected.
Supporters hope that legal battles over the laws will reach the Supreme Court, as they pursue the long-sought conservative goal of overturning its landmark 1973 abortion ruling, known as Roe v Wade.
Roe v Wade guarantees women's rights to abortion as long as the fetus is not viable — around 24 weeks of pregnancy.
Trump, a bombastic, twice-divorced billionaire, won over the evangelical vote during his 2016 campaign by promising to

appoint anti-abortion justices at the Supreme Court.
He has since brought two conservative appointees to the highest court in the land — Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh — shifting the balance of the nine-person bench.
In a series of tweets on the deeply polarizing issue, Trump said the US had "come very far in the last two years" on abortion, and praised "two great new Supreme Court Justices".
On Sunday, defenders of women's reproductive rights are set to march in protest against Alabama's new abortion law in four of the Southern state's cities, including the capital Montgomery.

Saudis say they don't want war But will defend themselves

AP ■ DUBAI
Saudi Arabia does not want war but will not hesitate to defend itself against Iran, a top Saudi diplomat said on Sunday amid heightened tensions in the Persian Gulf after attacks on the kingdom's energy sector.
Adel al-Jubeir, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, spoke a week after four oil tankers — two of them Saudi — were targeted in an alleged act of sabotage off the coast of the United Arab Emirates and days after Iran-allied Yemeni rebels claimed a drone attack on a Saudi oil pipeline.
"The kingdom of Saudi Arabia does not want war in the region and does not strive for that... But at the same time, if the other side chooses war, the kingdom will fight this with all force and determination and it will defend itself, its citizens and its interests," al-Jubeir told reporters.
A senior Iranian military commander was similarly quoted as saying his country is not looking for war, in comments published in Iranian



media on Sunday.
Fears of armed conflict were already running high after the White House ordered warships and bombers to the region earlier this month to counter an alleged, unexplained threat from Iran.
The US also has ordered nonessential staff out of its diplomatic posts in Iraq.
But President Donald Trump appears to have softened his tone in recent days, saying he expects Iran to seek negotiations with his administration. Asked on Thursday if the US might be on a path to war with Iran, the president answered, "I hope not."
The current tensions are

Saudi Arabia on Sunday to discuss energy prices and production cuts.
Iran's oil exports are expected to shrink further in the coming months after the US stopped renewing waivers that allowed it to continue selling to some countries.
OPEC and non-OPEC oil producers have production cuts in place, but the group of exporters is not expected to make its decision on output until late June, when they meet again in Vienna.
Saudi Arabia's King Salman, meanwhile, has called for a meeting of Arab heads of state on May 30 in Mecca to discuss the latest developments, including the oil pipeline attack.
The kingdom has blamed the pipeline attack on Iran, accusing Tehran of arming the rebel Houthis, which a Saudi-led coalition has been at war with in Yemen since 2015. Iran denies arming or training the rebels, who control much of northern Yemen, including the capital, Sanaa.
"We want peace and stability in the region, but we won't stand with our hands bound as the Iranians continuously attack. Iran has to understand that," al-Jubeir said.
"The ball is in Iran's court."
Al-Jubeir also noted that an investigation, led by the UAE, into the tanker incident is underway.
The state-run Saudi news agency reported Sunday that US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo called Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to discuss regional developments.
There was no immediate statement by the State Department about the call.
An English-language Saudi newspaper close to the palace recently published an editorial calling for surgical US airstrikes in retaliation for Iran's alleged involvement in targeting Saudi Arabia's oil infrastructure.
The head of Iran's Revolutionary Guard, Gen. Hossein Salami, was quoted Sunday as saying Iran is not looking for war, but he said the US is going to fail in the near future "because they are frustrated and hopeless" and are looking for a way out of the current escalation.
His comments, given to other Guard commanders, were carried by Iran's semi-official Fars news agency.

For Iranians, economic crisis looms larger than US tensions

AP ■ TEHRAN
Across Iran's capital, the talk always seems to come back to how things may get worse.
Battered by U.S. Sanctions and its depreciating rial currency, Iran's 80 million people struggle to buy meat, medicine and other staples of daily life.
Now they wonder aloud about America's intentions as it rushes an aircraft carrier and other forces to the region over a still-unexplained threat it perceives from Iran.
The Associated Press spoke to a variety of people on Tehran's streets recently, ranging from young and old, women wearing the all-encompassing black chador to those loosely covering their hair.
Most say they believe a war will not come to the region, though they remain willing to defend their country. They think Iran should try to talk to the US to help its anemic economy, even as they see President Donald Trump as an erratic and untrustworthy adversary.
"Trump is not predictable at all and one doesn't know how

to react to him and what is the right thing to do against him," said Afra Hamedzadeh, a 20-year-old civil servant and university student. "Since he controls the global economy we are somehow left with few options."
But opinions vary across Tehran, depending on whether you speak to someone coming out of Friday prayers, in the back of a shared taxi cab, or exiting the coffee shops popular with young people.
"If America could do anything, it would have done many things by now," said the chador-wearing Zohreh Sadeghi, a 51-year-old housewife coming out of prayers.
"It can't do anything. It can't do a damn thing." That's an opinion shared by 35-year-old office worker Massumeh Izadpanah.
"When someone keeps trying to scare you it means that they think they are not yet ready for war. When someone really wants war it starts the war right away. Like when Iraq attacked us, all of a sudden bombs were dropped," she said.
"But right now America just says, 'I'm coming,' to scare

Iran."
A young nation, many across Iran were alive for its bloody 1980s war with Iraq, a conflict that began when dictator Saddam Hussein invaded and dragged on for eight years. That war, in which Saddam used chemical weapons and Iran launched human wave attacks, killed 1 million people.
Since Trump withdrew the U.S. from Iran's nuclear deal with world powers last year, state television increasingly has focused attention on that war's wounded.
In Tehran's southern Javadiyeh neighborhood, veteran Mohammad Ali Moghaddam said he was ready to fight again.
"I would encourage my three sons and grandsons to go to defend Iran too," said Moghaddam, a 58-year-old welder. Arezou Mirzaei, a 37-year-old mother of two in central Tehran, is more worried.
"I think the Government should do something to avoid war," Mirzaei said. "If war was good, then Afghanistan and Iraq would not be the mess that we see on TV."

May pledges 'new, improved deal' to save her Brexit plan

PTI ■ LONDON
British Prime Minister Theresa May on Sunday promised a "new and improved deal" that she hopes will see her controversial Brexit agreement through Parliament when it comes up for a fourth vote in the first week of June.
Writing in "The Sunday Times," May said it was "truly" decision time for MPs when the Withdrawal Agreement Bill returns to the House of Commons and claimed that she would not simply be asking them to "think again" but will be asking them to consider an improved package of measures that honours the June 2016 referendum result in favour of Brexit.
"When the Withdrawal Agreement Bill comes before MPs, it will represent a new, bold offer to MPs across the House of Commons, with an improved package of measures that I believe can win new support," she writes.
"I will not be simply asking MPs to think again. Instead I will ask them to look at a new and improved deal with fresh pairs of eyes — and to give their support," she said.
May, who is weighed down by mounting pressure from her backbench MPs to lay out a clear timetable for her exit from Downing Street after the fourth vote on her withdrawal agreement with the European Union (EU) next month, revealed that she was open to holding a series of indicative votes in Parliament in a last-ditch effort to try and see her deal through.
"The Cabinet will consider the details of those changes next week. It will also consider whether holding votes in Parliament to test support for possible solutions would be a useful prelude to MPs considering the legislation," she said.
The beleaguered British PM has been struggling to surmount the opposition to the controversial Irish backstop clause in the agreement, which the EU sees an insurance policy against a hard border between its member-country Ireland and the UK after Brexit. However, the Brexiters with-



Britain's Prime Minister Theresa May with her husband Philip leave after a church service near her Maidenhead constituency England on Sunday

in her own Tory party have consistently voted against it over fears that it could be used as an excuse to keep Britain tied to EU norms even after its exit from the 28-member European economic bloc.
May warned that even though her new package will be a stronger proposition, it was important for the parliamentary arithmetic to fall into place to avert a chaotic no-deal Brexit and leave the EU with a deal in place by the latest deadline of October 31.
"While the deal MPs are to vote on will be different, the dynamics of their decision will remain the same. A majority of MPs are against leaving without a deal; whatever you think of that as an outcome, Parliament will do all it can to block it," she said.
The Conservative Party leader also used the intervention to make a plea for the European Parliament elections scheduled for next Thursday, when opinion polls indicate that her party will be punished at the ballot box in favour of the newly-formed anti-EU Brexit Party.
She said: "I hope that everyone who wants to see Brexit delivered in a responsible way as soon as possible will vote for the only party that can actually deliver that: the Conservative Party."
"The other parties standing in this election either cannot deliver Brexit or have so far

Oz PM Scott Morrison stages 'miraculous' poll win

Bill Shorten resigns as Labor leader
PTI ■ MELBOURNE
Backed by "quiet Australians" and defying exit polls, the ruling Conservative Coalition led by Prime Minister Scott Morrison staged a "miraculous" victory in the general election on Sunday, devastating the opposition Labor Party, forcing its leader Bill Shorten to resign.
Around 16 million Australians swarmed to the polling booths across the country on Saturday to elect the nation's 31st prime minister, in what was widely referred to as the climate-change election.
The latest results showed that the Conservative Coalition has won 74 seats while labour secured 66. A party needs 76



seats for a simple majority in the 151-member House of Representatives. It was not clear if 51-year-old Morrison will require the support of independent MPs to govern.
But an independent, Helen Haines, who won from the seat of Indi, said that she would be working with the Coalition in the scenario of a hung parliament. Haines said she was very determined to work with the government on addressing climate change.
Morrison along with his wife Jenny visited a church in Sydney's Sutherland Shire on Sunday in his electorate of Cook where he thanked his local voters.
"I have always believed in miracles... For me and for my government, for all of my team it's all about you... Tonight is about every single Australian," a beaming Morrison told his supporters.
At his victory party in Sydney, the Conservative Coalition leader said, "Tonight

"Our government will get back to work just as Gladys Berejiklian got back to work in New South Wales, just a few months ago," he told his supporters.
Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump congratulated Morrison on his election victory.
President Trump congratulated Prime Minister Morrison on his Coalition's victory in Australia's federal election, White House deputy press secretary Judd Deere said.
"The two leaders reaffirmed the critical importance of the long-standing alliance and friendship between the United States and Australia, and they pledged to continue their close cooperation on shared priorities," Deere said.
Centre-left Labor Party leader Bill Shorten, who campaigned heavily on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, conceded his defeat and said he would resign as the party

Bad news for Imran, no oil, gas reserves found off Pak shore

PTI ■ KARACHI
Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan's dream of the cash-strapped country becoming self-sufficient in oil has been dashed after no reserves were discovered in the Arabian Sea off the Karachi coast, media reports said on Sunday.
The drilling work at Kekra-1 well in deep sea near Karachi has been stopped after no oil or gas reservoir could be found, according to Special Assistant to Prime Minister Khan on Petroleum Nadeem Babar.
Pakistan was hopeful of finding large oil and gas reserves in its territorial waters in the Arabian Sea. US oil giant Exxon Mobil, Italy's ENI and a couple other companies were involved in drilling an ultra-deep oil well.
Babar told Geo News that the process of drilling up to more than 5,500 meters was completed on Kekra-1 (Indus G-Block) off Karachi coast. Babar said the office of DG

Petroleum Concessions has been apprised of the results of drilling.
He said that the cost of drilling project, which has now been abandoned, remained over USD 100 million.
In March, Prime Minister Khan had said Pakistan would not need to import oil after reserves were found near Karachi coast.
"We are hopeful of finding large reserves of gas and oil in the sea near Karachi. The nation should pray for this and I will soon share good news regarding this," Khan had said.
"God willing the reserves will be so large that we will not need to import any oil," he said.
Khan said he believes that if big oil reserves are discovered, most of Pakistan's economic problems will be addressed and then there will be no stopping in the country's progress.
Around four months ago, Italian firm ENI, the operator of the Kekra-1 offshore block,

Austrian Prez calls for Sept poll in wake of scandal

AFP ■ VIENNA
Austria's President Alexander Van der Bellen on Sunday called for fresh elections in September after a corruption scandal embroiling the far-right brought down the coalition Government in spectacular fashion.
Just days before key EU elections, Vice-Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache was forced to resign in disgrace Saturday following explosive revelations from a hidden camera sting. Conservative Chancellor Sebastian Kurz — whose 18-month coalition with the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ) had been held up as a European model — reacted by pulling the plug on their union.
"My preference is for early elections in September, if possible the beginning of September," Van der Bellen told journalists on Sunday after holding talks with Kurz.

UN PEACEKEEPER KILLED IN MALI

UNITED NATIONS: A Nigerian peacekeeper was killed on Saturday in an attack on the United Nations' stabilization mission in Mali, the UN said.
The victim "succumbed to his wounds following the armed attack by unidentified assailants" in Timbuktu, a statement said. A Nigerian peacekeeper was also injured. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres was "deeply saddened" by the assault, which he said could amount to a war crime. In a separate incident Saturday, three Chadian peacekeepers were wounded.

GLOBE TROTTER

GUNMEN KILL 19 AT FISH MARKET IN CONGO

Bunia: At least 19 people were killed when gunmen attacked a fish market in northeast Democratic Republic of Congo near Lake Albert, local officials said on Sunday. No group has claimed responsibility, but the region around Ituri province has been hit in the past by intercommunal violence between militias from the Hema and Lendu communities.

Get down to business

The economic challenges are far tougher this time and real euphoria will be when the new leadership surmounts them



Every election has its own takeaway and this, too, has one, certainly beyond the noise of violence, rhetoric, bigotry and raging passion. It is that of the silent voter, who has zipped up his choices close to his chest and has become extremely individualist than classist about what works best for him, what he has got, not got, likely to get. He values a leadership which can deliver without the encumbrances of the usual tropes of caste, colour or wave and be practicalist about forging a new character of India going into the next decade. Leaving aside parties, for the voter this has been a normal and emotionless general election in a long, long time with no discernible wave, pro or anti-establishment, and where choices will be weighed purely on issues. Hence, there's a return of good old uncertainty that makes the wait for May 23 that much longer and exciting. If Prime Minister Narendra Modi does return, with a reduced tally or otherwise, it will certainly not be with the saviour halo of 2014. For a campaign, which was marred by more questions than answers, where every official machinery seemed to be orchestrated to the ruling dispensation's comfort, and which plunged to the desperation of polarising the voter not only on religion but on a nation's flawed past versus the undone present, he will be carrying a notional albatross around his neck. It would be a grace period for him to actually do something progressive and inclusive once he knows the verdict is on his side and the insecurity of endearing himself to the masses is gone. If it is the Congress-backed federal front which manages to stave him off, it will need to get off the anti-Modi referendum mode, search for a cohesive leader and get down to transacting the business of governance. Even as a grand Opposition bloc that fails to make a mark, it has to be a responsible alternative that can match issues with solutions. No matter who occupies which side of the Treasury benches, both will have to give up catcalls and be extremely performance-oriented.

For the challenges are many, the primary one being economic with an oil crisis looming ahead following the US-Iran standoff, India losing immunity from sanctions and the world economy going into a sluggish slump. Ideal conditions for a test of leadership indeed. If the new government passes it and restores market stability, that will merit greater euphoria. Unlike 2014, when international crude oil prices had dipped, this time procuring alternative oil supplies to hold prices is a real challenge considering a reduction of imports from Iran would also mean losing the benefits that came with them. Then it has to deal with the US-induced arm-twisting called protectionism. Trade tariffs can undo any kind of diplomatic headway made so far and imbalanced trade deficits, particularly with China, are a matter of concern. More than promises that Modi could afford in 2014 to demonstrate a policy shift, this time either he or the alternative leader has to implement what each promised in the manifestoes and hit the ground running, particularly with regard to creating jobs, ameliorating farm distress and reshaping the contours of the agricultural economy. In fact, agrarian reforms could very well present a stand-out opportunity for the new regime. It would be better for anybody to not be too ambitious about announcing mega or populist projects for they bring in unexpected pressures of time-bound deliveries that are dependent on too many variables. Besides, there is a slowdown on consumption and demand. Scalable and realistic growth targets should be the focus than what is predicted or expected. The saving grace for India is that even amid a global recessionary wave, its growth rate by most agencies has been predicted to be around seven per cent against the global figure of 3.5 per cent. Transparency in bank operations, especially after the series of scams, is a priority. Just as there has to be a semblance of institutional autonomy, which over the last five years, has been compromised by power play. Internationally, India has to play smart between humouring the US and negotiating new talk points with China. At home, whichever front comes to power has to attempt a social cohesion of disparate allies rather than imposing a monolithic egoism. That in itself will be a corrective check and balance. Finally, there's a bipartisan systemic momentum in policies but true leadership knows how to make a virtue or vice of it. Let's hope for the former.

Trump's rulebook

Under the US President's proposed 'skill-based' migration programme, Indians are in a quandary



For a country that has been built by immigrants for the past four centuries, the United States (US) has become oddly hostile to immigrants over the past couple of decades. Now, President Donald Trump, who was elected in part due to his anti-immigrant rhetoric, wants to change the America 'Permanent Resident' visa system — known to many as the 'Green Card' for the colour of the document — to a new system that will dramatically change the way immigrant visas are issued, by moving to a skill-based system like many other nations such as Australia and Canada. While this might sound like a godsend to Indians, because many of our migrants are skilled Information Technology (IT) workers, the Trump administration was considerably light on details in its proposals. But one detail that is known is that the new rules would make it tougher for families to move as quotas for them will drop heavily unless they are equally skilled or perhaps members apply separately.

One reason that the Trump administration might have been light on details is because it is very unlikely that these proposals will pass through the Democratic-controlled lower house of the United States, the Congress of Representatives. Trump and his Republican party have been at loggerheads with the opposition Democratic Party ever since he won a surprise victory for the Presidency amid accusations of collusion by foreign powers in influencing the election. Regardless of politics, what is worrying is how the US is thinking. These visas might make it easier for new IT workers to migrate no doubt but by being a disincentive to accommodating their families, will no doubt make the US less attractive for some. As it is, the Trump administration overturned an Obama-era rule that allowed spouses of H1B visa holders, overwhelmingly Indian technology-industry workers' wives, to hold H4 visas. This, coupled with the way Trump has decided to treat the children of illegal immigrants, who are crossing the US border with Mexico, makes it quite clear that going after the family is a sure-shot way of reducing immigration. While this Bill may not pass, it might have the kernel of an idea for future legislation. If you are single and skilled, things should not be a problem to get to move; it will obviously help Indian H-1B visa holders do away with the green card backlog. There are only a fixed number of Green Cards and they are taken by family-based petitioners. Still the single worker influx will have its attendant problems, too.

Thwart the juggernaut

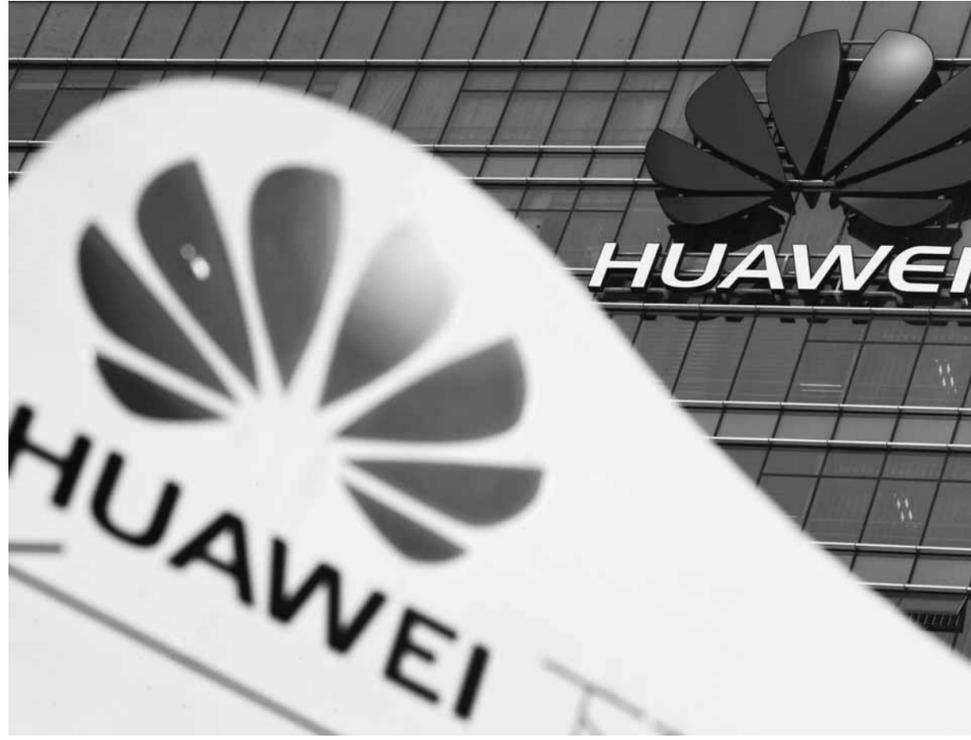
By signing an executive order to protect its networks from foreign espionage, the US has drawn the first blood on what was hitherto whispered as a need to counter Chinese ambitions



BHOPINDER SINGH

US President Donald Trump recently signed an executive order on 'Securing the Information and Communications Technology and Services Supply Chain' that effectively walked the talk on clamping down on the growing Chinese presence and influence. While the order itself was ostensibly country-agnostic and company-agnostic, the unmistakable target was a leading Chinese company, Huawei. Predicated under security concerns, the statement from the White House said that the order, "declares a national emergency with respect to the threats against information and communications technology and services in the United States (US) and delegates authority to the Secretary of Commerce to prohibit transactions posing an unacceptable risk to the national security of the US or the security and safety of its people." Soon, the US Commerce Department added Huawei to the 'entity list' of banned organisations. Against the backdrop of the ensuing US-China trade wars, this latest American salvo has huge implications for Chinese products and services going forward, as it questions the construct of "Made in China," given the inextricable and complex Government-industry interlinkages that beset the ownership, interests and operations of major Chinese organisations.

Unlike most unilateral decisions initiated by Trump, this executive order had bipartisan support across the political divide, symbolising the overwhelming threat perceptions within the US that are emanating from China. The Huawei action was looming for some time and the US had been sabre-rattling on the same with other Western powers. While Australia had acceded to the warning and banned the organisation earlier, the European nations were sceptical about the US' seriousness. Given that the Chinese multi-national had outmanoeuvred the European companies like Ericsson and Nokia in grabbing market shares across emerging markets of Africa, Latin America and Asia — the expectation of reciprocal protectionism would rise within Western capitals to support their own organisations as the Chinese state does. The US went as far as threatening its allies to withdraw "intelligence" inputs unless they stopped using the Chinese manufacturers like Huawei for building their 5G infrastructure. At the heart of the fears is the new internet architecture that could possibly "link" industrial equipment, personalised data, security cameras and civic facility details among others and transport the data dump to a repository in China, from where a apocalypse-like situation of a virtual "shutdown" of American military-economic-civic infrastructure could be effected if China so wanted in a crisis! Given the Chinese ambition, investments and strategic outlook, such fears of data protection are not entirely unfounded. Expectedly, the Chinese have likened the US move to a "cold war mentality" and alluded to the US



fears as unsubstantiated paranoia. Given the construct of the organisation itself and the rules governing its principal place of origin and headquarters ie, China, it is certainly obliged and vulnerable to the *diktats* of its Ministry of State Security. Like most Chinese offerings, the winning appeal of Huawei was in its cost-effective technology and terms of trade. However, the recent move has added a 'non-commercial' angularity of dealing with Chinese companies. Last year, the global list of top 500 companies, as measured by *Fortune* magazine, had an unprecedented 120 Chinese companies making the cut (just shy of 126 by the leading nation, US). This sudden emergence of Chinese companies owes its success in huge measure to the complex commercial-political wiring of Chinese organisations that baffles most corporate-watchers as to their real ownership and control structures. Founded in 1987 by a former People's Liberation Army (PLA) officer, Ren Zhengfei, who now owns only one per cent of share, it has grown into a \$106 billion global conglomerate with a mammoth \$14 billion dedicated towards R&D. Despite its immense size, scale and the competitive intensity of its domain, it still grew at a staggering 21 per cent over the previous year. Today, it serves 45 of the top 50 telecom operators

“ THE ONUS IS NOW ON THE CHINESE TO DEMONSTRATE TRANSPARENCY AND UNVEIL THEIR CONTROL AND COMMAND STRUCTURES BEHIND CORPORATES AS ALSO CONVINCING THE WARY WORLD OF THEIR INTENTIONS AND AMBITIONS. UNFORTUNATELY, IT WILL BE AN UPHILL BATTLE FOR CHINA ”

worldwide and its network already reaches one-third of humankind. Somewhere, questions abound about such rapid rise, access and the 'invisible-hand' that drives such surreal growth. Given its formidable presence and invaluable necessity in the infrastructure of some third-world countries, it will not be easy to 'ban' its products across such countries — though it certainly marks the beginning of larger implications for 'Made in China' that go beyond a corporate entity. Partly on account of genuine fears and partly on account of the escalating trade war, the recent US move has drawn the first blood on what was hitherto whispered as a need to counter the Chinese juggernaut. In a barely veiled threat, the Chinese have reminded the US about its own vulnerabilities with American organisations like Qualcomm, who generate over half of their revenues from China, as indeed the likes of Intel and Apple, who rely on Chinese parts and market! Many of China's strategic sovereign imperatives like the 'One Belt, One Road' or in this case, the 'Digital Silk Road', which promises hyper speeds and capacities of 5G (promoting 'Internet of Things') communication, envisages a pivotal role for organisations like Huawei. The sovereign intent on becoming a Cyber and Artificial

Intelligence (AI) superpower has fuelled the Chinese State to support and fund many aggressive and audacious investments that make the world nervous, given the known Chinese ambitions and penchant for means. The temerity and commitment behind developing cutting-edge technology that could have multiple "spin-off" usage and data-sharing has the Western world worried. The Chinese are past masters in reverse engineering and sourcing technology licitly and illicitly, especially in matters of defence equipment and overall security preparedness. However, due diligence and care has to be ensured with evidentiary proof of potential misuse or "leakage" before censuring or ascribing any questions on the Chinese organisations as it should not violate the principle of fairplay in the global economy. The onus is now on China to demonstrate transparency and unveil its control and command structures behind its corporates as also convince the wary world of its intentions and ambitions. Unfortunately, it will be an uphill battle for China given its history and its prevailing instincts to convince the world, otherwise. (The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry)

SOUNDBITE

The BJP will get me murdered by my own personal security officer one day like Indira Gandhi. My own security officers report to BJP.



Delhi Chief Minister —Arvind Kejriwal

Kamal Haasan needs to define a Muslim to be identified as an intelligent person. For that he will have to read and study for at least a hundred years.



Union Minister —Giriraj Singh

The Pacific has the moral authority to offer a lesson for the rest of the world. We absolutely need to save the Pacific to save the world.



UN Secretary-General —Antonio Guterres

Development is asking: Did you see the Prime Minister's first press conference? It looks like the last episode of *Mann Ki Baat* has been telecast on TV instead of radio.



Samajwadi Party leader —Akhilesh Yadav

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Falling standards

Sir — This refers to the editorial, "Ocean of darkness" (May 16). The Election Commission's (EC) decision to curtail electioneering by 19 hours in the nine constituencies in West Bengal that went to polls recently was wholly unjustified. Evidently, it was taken to benefit the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). It was yet another proof that the electoral body was doing the BJP's bidding. It is clear that the EC fixed the deadline for electioneering as 10 pm last Thursday for Prime Minister Narendra Modi to finish his rallies. What was needed was not invocation of Article 324 to cut short the campaign period and 'remove' ADG Rajeev Kumar and Principal Secretary Atri Bhattacharya but exemplary punishment to those who unleashed violence in Kolkata and created the 'fear psychosis.'

Nobody has any illusion that the poll panel has been reduced to the establishment's lapdog. The perception that the commission condones blatant breach of the Model Code of Conduct by the BJP and denies a level-playing field to all parties not only costs the

Partisan panel needs to be rescued

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Constitutional body its credibility but also subverts the sanctity of the election process. The Commission shirked its responsibility when it came to taking action on the complaints lodged against Narendra Modi and BJP chief Amit Shah, too. Constitutional bodies should adhere to the Constitution without wavering if democracy is to be alive and kicking robustly.

G David Milton Maruthancode

Laxity in action

Sir — This refers to the editorial, "Best left alone" (May 18). Pragna Singh Thakur, the terror accused in Malegaon blast case, has emphatically announced that Nathuram Godse is a patriot and would remain a patriot forever. The BJP, which nominated her to contest the Bhopal seat as if

Criminals in fray

Sir — It is rather disturbing that there are reportedly 7,928 candidates with criminal cases in the electoral fray. Self-declarations have been given by 1,500. There are serious criminal cases against 1,070. If 1,500 candidates have given declarations, the remaining 6,428 are mum.

While it may not be fair to bar those facing criminal cases in courts from contesting the elections, candidates, who have concealed that they are facing criminal cases, should have been barred from contesting.

The number of candidates facing such cases may be high if politically motivated complaints are lodged and charges are cooked up to prevent a candidate from contesting. Some hiding their records bear testimony to how loosely the law has been enacted. Such gaps must be sealed. Necessary amendments, if need be, must be moved.

KV Seetharamaiah Hassan

Spiralling suicides

Sir — The rising number of suicides and mental health issues among young ones need to be taken seriously. It is unfortunate that a young life full of potential is lost. Social media platforms must have adequate safeguards.

Kunal Singh Via email

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

Great powers, endless wars

The great power mania infects almost everybody. The US is no exception. But if a nation remains so for long, eventually it becomes insane



GWYNNE DYER

Great nations do not fight endless wars," said US President Donald Trump in his State of the Union speech last February, but he was wrong. That's exactly what they do. Great powers fight more wars than anybody else, even if, like the US today, they have no hostile neighbours. The original observations were made half a century ago by Quincy Wright, an American political scientist at the University of Chicago. During the entire history of 'modern' Europe from 1480 to 1940, he calculated, there have been about 2,600 important battles.

France, a leading military power for the whole period and the greatest power for most of it, participated in 47 per cent of those battles — more than a 1,000 major battles. Russia, Britain and Germany (in the form of Prussia), which were all great European powers by 1700, fought in between 22 and 25 per cent of them. And then the rate of participation falls off very steeply.

Spain was a great military power until the mid-1700s but then dropped out of contention and can offer only a 12 per cent attendance record for battles over the whole four-and-a-half centuries. The Netherlands and Sweden, which were great military powers only for brief periods, were present at only eight and four per cent of Europe's battles respectively. Indeed, Sweden has not used its Army in war for 190 years now. By any other yardstick — the amount of time a given European country has spent at war, the number of wars it has taken part in, the proportion of its population that has been killed in wars — the result is the same.

There is a steep and consistent gradient of suffering, in which the most powerful nations fight most often and lose most heavily in lives and wealth. How can this be? Why doesn't great power deter other countries from fighting you? Well, it actually does, to some extent. However, great power also enables the country possessing it to acquire "interests" everywhere and tempts it to use its military power to protect or advance those interests. Only great powers fight "wars of choice."

North Vietnam did not choose to fight the US. Neither did Cuba or Grenada or Libya or Panama or Serbia or Iraq. Nor, for that matter, did Canada (then British North America) in 1812 or Mexico in 1846 or Spain in 1898. Those were all "wars of choice" for the US but not for the other side. This is not to say that they were all wars of aggression. The first Gulf War was not, for example, nor was the Kosovo War. But they were all wars that the US could have chosen not to fight without suffering grave harm to its own legitimate interests. It chose to fight them, often for relatively minor stakes, because it could.

The great power mania infects everybody. Trump, despite his well-founded conviction that America should bring its troops home from the Middle East, has now vetoed a bipartisan Congressional resolution that tried to force an end to American participation in the war in Yemen. Never mind the lies that are told about the Houthi rebels who control most of Yemen being simply pawns of Iran and about Iran being the reason the Middle East is so "unstable."

Why would Trump, like several generations of American "statesmen" before him, fall for the bizarre notion that deciding who rules in Lebanon or Egypt or Yemen is a "vital national interest" of the US? The webs of spurious logic that support such nonsense are familiar. "Oil is our vital national interest, so Saudi Arabia is our indispensable ally." Why? Wouldn't Arabia want to sell its oil to the US under any imaginable regime? And hasn't fracking made the US virtually self-sufficient in oil anyway?

"Since Saudi Arabia is our ally, we must support its war in Yemen, and support it against Iran too." Why? You managed to be closely allied with both Israel and Saudi Arabia back in the days when the Saudis still saw Israel as a mortal enemy. You don't have to back either of them in everything they do. "Our credibility is at stake." This is the last resort falsehood that can justify almost any otherwise indefensible military commitment. Don't let them see you back down, no matter how stupid your position is. They won't respect you if you bail out.

Or as Trump put it when he was still just a candidate for the Republican nomination: "Our military dominance must be unquestioned and I mean unquestioned, by anybody and everybody." Power purely for the sake of power. Any country that remains a great power for long enough eventually becomes insane.

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

AT THE LAST MOMENT, THE COMPLETE MUSLIM VOTE GOT SHIFTED TO CONGRESS. WE ARE TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHAT HAPPENED.

—AAM AADMI PARTY CHIEF
ARVIND KEJRIWAL

POINT COUNTERPOINT



EVERYONE HAS A RIGHT TO VOTE WHICHEVER PARTY HE/SHE WANTS TO. PEOPLE OF DELHI DID NOT UNDERSTAND NOR LIKED HIS GOVERNANCE MODEL.

—CONGRESS LEADER
SHEILA DIKSHIT

Women-friendly AI

If tech intelligence is shaped by a homogenous group of men, its 'thinking' will adapt inherent biases present in the system. AI, after all, learns and replicates from training data, says NANDITA KOSHAL

Leadership in internet-driven technology firms has long been viewed as a bastion of male domination. Latest figures by Statista, a German online portal for statistics, confirm that tech is still not a "woman's world" as the female lot still form a minority in its workforce. Figures are even more schismatic when we consider the percentage of women occupying leadership positions in the top tech companies of the world. While in Netflix, women hold an encouraging 43 per cent of the leadership positions, the picture becomes bleaker as we consider the percentages for Facebook (30), Apple (29), Google (26) and Microsoft (20). All these data are well below the desired level of 50 per cent that depicts gender parity.

This trend is, however, not specific to big tech companies only. Even the start-up and entrepreneurship ecosystem has witnessed biased trends against women. According to Silicon Valley Bank's 'Women in Technology Leadership 2019' report on tech executives in the US, the UK, China and Canada, while 56 per cent of start-ups have at least one woman in an executive position, only 40 per cent have minimum one woman on the board of directors.

These trends highlight the need to bring more and more women in technology space, especially in leadership roles. The imperative goes beyond the narrative of just maintaining gender parity. Technological advancement constantly needs new and diverse knowledge, perspectives and intellectual and technological innovations. With technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT) and Robotics seeing tremendous growth, wherein we are trying to make machines think like humans, it is essential to bring elements of diversity, inclusivity and heterogeneity in the world of intelligence.

If "intelligence" in the world of technology is largely shaped by a homogenous group of men, it is more likely that "thinking" of technology will adapt the inherent conscious or unconscious biases and prejudices of the section. This is largely because AI learns and replicates from the training data. The algorithms developed will, thereby, imbibe the prejudices present in the data. It is, hence, essential that more women become part of the core teams developing technology to make the future of intelligence unbiased.

It is also found that diversity in tech and business leadership positions positively affect profits of the firms. A 2016 study at Pearson Institute for International Economics demonstrated a positive correlation between women at the C-suite level and firm profitability. According to their research, a firm with 30 per cent women at C-suite level leadership can expect a 15 per cent boost to their profitability.

Apart from bringing in more diversity, inclusivity and profitability to the firms, women bring fresh perspectives, narratives, creativity, flexibility, visibility, responsibility and dynamism to the firm. Further, a report from First Round Capital found that companies with a woman on their founding leadership teams outperformed all-male companies by 63 per cent. Women may be a minority in tech but their power and presence is definitely rising in the world. According to the *Forbes*' 2018 list of world's 100 most powerful women, 20 are from the tech industry. The cohort of women in leadership positions in tech is substantially increasing in this list of power women. The list saw the likes of Susan Wojcicki, CEO YouTube, who figured as the seventh most powerful women in the world, closely followed by IBM CEO Ginni Rometty and Facebook's COO Sheryl

“ AS WE EMPHASISE ON THE NEED FOR WOMEN LEADERS IN THE INTERNET-DRIVEN TECH INDUSTRY, IT IS IMPERATIVE TO ADDRESS WHY THERE IS LACK OF THEM THEREOF UNDENIABLY, FACTORS LIKE DIFFICULTY IN BALANCING LEADERSHIP JOBS AND FAMILY LIFE, LACK OF FLEXIBLE WORK HOURS, BIASED PERCEPTIONS AND THINKING OF IMMEDIATE CAREER OPTIONS THAN PLANNING LONG-TERM CAREER GOALS PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE



Sandberg, figuring in the 10th and 11th position in the list.

China's Jean Liu, president, Didi Chuxing and India's Roshni Nadar Malhotra, CEO, HCL Enterprises, also featured as 10 most powerful women in tech according to the same list. All these prominent executives have been celebrated not only for their leadership skills but also for changing the face of the industry and for demonstrating utmost responsibility and sensitivity in dealing with the adverse situations.

The rise of women in leadership positions has partly been attributed to the strategic move by companies. According to this manoeuvre, women are promoted to a C-suite position when likelihood of failure is more, especially when a company is going through exceptionally challenging times, a concept now widely known as glass cliff. While cases like that of Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer might give credence to this theory, glass cliff should be viewed by women as an efficacious opportunity to break the glass ceiling. A shining example of this is Anne Mulcahy, CEO of Xerox from 2001 to 2009, who successfully managed to turn the company around after being promoted at a time when Xerox was tottering on the verge of bankruptcy. In fact, Harvard Business Review study had found that while men were preferred to head a successful company by respondents (67 per cent), majority (63 per cent) opined

that woman should take over the company in crisis. Glass cliff rather than being viewed as a trap for ambitious women should be seen as chance for women to break the stereotype and demonstrate their mettle.

As we strenuously emphasise the need for women leaders in internet-driven tech industry, it is also imperative to address why there is lack of them thereof. Undeniably, factors like difficulty in balancing demanding leadership jobs and family life, lack of flexible work hours, biased perceptions and thinking of immediate career options than planning long term career goals play an important role.

Similarly, women also face problems in getting good mentors as men get wary to mentor women due to fear of allegations of sexual harassment and exploitation. The main reason, however, why technology leadership still remains a male bastion, lies in the concept of comparative advantage that both the genders respectively have. While women are considered to be adept at managing people, men are considered to be more skilled at managing technology. As an economic principle, it is most profitable and efficient to allocate resources according to comparative advantage that resource has, especially if the opportunity cost of allocating resources to opposing trades is high.

Industries work on the principle of profitability, which explains their

natural learning towards male leadership. Hence, most of the tasks like fund raising, hard negotiating and production processes, which form the core of leadership decisions, are usually male dominated. Whereas, processes like managing human resource, communications, managing risk in which women thrive, although very important, may not necessarily be considered core attributes.

However, this should not be construed to imply that women and men should only function within these social constructs. Wherever, it's a choice between a more skilled woman and less skilled man or vice-versa, preference should be given to skill and merit. Therefore, it is essential for women to come out of their comfort zones and imbibe those attributes which are core characteristics of becoming leaders.

The need for bringing more women in technology no longer remains a question of equality alone, it has now become a necessity, too. Both men as well as women will need to change their attitudes and attributes to bring in more women in the industry. Diversity and inclusion are going to be the keywords in driving the world of technology and women can definitely be prognosticated to play a significant role in this new era of intelligence.

(The writer is a Research Associate at OP Jindal Global University and a Chapter Leader at ISOC)

Cure the illness from within

Access to low-cost generics at the cost of sidelining the protocols mandated by the WHO and compromising on drug quality will lead us nowhere. There's a need to enforce stringent quality regulations. Will the pharma sector amend itself, asks TANU PRIYA

In recent times, India has earned the distinction of being the "pharmacy of the world" for championing the cause of supplying affordable drugs to many countries. The pace at which the "pharmacy of the world" is growing, there's no denying that India is utilising its full potential. That the domestic market grew by ₹1.1 trillion in 2016-2017 and that India accounts for 20 per cent of the global export volume speaks volumes about our place in the global market. The Indian pharmaceutical market (IPM) is expected to grow at 9-12 per cent CAGR between 2016 and 2021. Owing to an increase in Government spending in the healthcare sector and with the launch of schemes like Ayushman Bharat, the domestic market is expected to witness further expansion in the near future.

However, this is just one side of the story. On the other side, standard procedures, as mandated by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and also required by Western drug-regulating authorities like the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), to approve a batch of drug upon its import, are often sidelined.

However, while exporting the same batch of drugs, India fulfils the mandatory requirements — Good Laboratory Practices (GLP), Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) and Good Clinical Practices (GCP).

India's stand on quality drug manufacturing: Many manufacturing units are reportedly not compliant with the WHO's version of GMP for pharmaceutical products, neither do they follow good laboratory practices. While there are 12,000 manufacturing units in India, only 25 per cent of them comply with GMP standards. And there are only a few nationally-accredited laboratories in India.

The demand for 62,000 pharmaceutical products requires adequate and industry-specific drug testing laboratories to be put in place. However, at present, only around 47 test facilities are listed and which have been certified under the National GLP programme, of which six central laboratories sample around 8,000 drugs per annum. This has resulted in insufficient output. The industry has been unable to satiate mass demand.

One significant yet unintended



spill-over of low output, low-quality pharmaceuticals is the rise to another beast-drug-resistant disease. When a strain of tuberculosis, for instance, is exposed to substandard levels of medicine that isn't strong enough to contain it, the strain evolves into resisting further antibiotic action. Therefore, with the existing multiplying problems that the pharmaceutical industry faces, it is certain that drug resistance would further plague India's health profile.

The case of Jan Aushadhi: Another push by the Government, the Jan Aushadhi multi-purpose stalls were launched in 2015 under the Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Jan Aushadhi

Pariyojana Kendra scheme, which catapulted the growth of "generics-only." The programme aims at making quality medicines available at affordable prices for all, particularly the poor and disadvantaged, through exclusive outlets so as to reduce out-of-pocket expenses in healthcare.

But a move such as this, promising to bring healthcare within the reach of the common man, has been marred by its own set of complications. Five medicines have been recalled from Jan Aushadhi stores in the last 20 days alone due to quality lapses. There were six other recalls between January and March, taking the total to 11 in just the

first four months of 2018 while there were 11 recalls in all of 2017.

Such frequent drug recalls are unusual in India where a single recall can land a company in serious trouble, including legal action, an export ban and financial losses. Drugs are typically recalled if the product is defective, contaminated, contains a foreign object, fails to meet specifications or is misbranded. There are also other issues of quality, partiality in procurement modalities and irrational combinations that affect the timely availability/supply of the right kind of drugs.

By opening Jan Aushadhi centres without supply and quality assurances and without substantially increasing the health budget, any mass movement to achieve universal health coverage is bound to fail. Can we afford to be careless on the quality aspect of drugs just to introduce cheaper variants of a drug? It is this question that is looming large in the Indian pharmaceutical market today.

Leaving a patient confused is not a sign of a healthy pharmaceutical ecosystem: Adding to the woes is the lack of awareness among patients as

they struggle between the efficacy of branded and non-branded generics. The latest blow by the Government was to make it mandatory for doctors to prescribe generic salt, giving leeway to the chemist nexus to grow to further incompetence and lowering quality standards. All efforts meant to achieve universal health coverage somehow missed the basic but crucial factor ie, quality. The gamut of "generics only" is finding an anchor in the subcontinent but is disturbing to the state of millions, who expect quality over just price.

The systemic sidelining of brands entering the domestic space by pushing hard for cheaper alternatives cannot be seen in a socio-welfare spirit. Irrespective of export or domestic distribution, a drug must be manufactured under the safety protocols enlisted by the WHO. It's not fair to suddenly stop a patient from consuming a drug that has fostered trust based on results. We are nowhere near to relying solely on "generics" since they do not meet safety standards of their exported versions.

(The writer is Project Officer, Capacity Building and M&E, UNDP)



A CHANCE TO RESHAPE POLITICS

EU elections are a chance to reshape British politics. They should be a rejection of Brexit, the parties that campaigned for it and the parties that now want to impose the harshest version. In the right-wing narrative, these elections are all about the Brexit party and the battle for the Tory leadership. In a more balanced perspective, though, they are about something much bigger. (The Guardian Editorial)

INDIA VOTES



CELEB CORNER



Violence, low turnout mark Bengal last phase polling

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ DIAMOND HARBOUR/KOLKATA

Bengal lived up to its violent reputations even as reports of stray, yet continued and 'systematic' violence emanated from most of the nine parliamentary constituencies — and four Assembly seats where, bypolls took place — that went to the seventh and final phase of polling on Sunday.

Reports of bombing, booth-capture, proxy voting and came in from Jadavpur, Diamond Harbour, Joynagar, Dum Dum, Basirhat and North Kolkata even as Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee accused the Central forces of 'doing excess'.

The final phase of polling witnessed a 'remarkably low' 72.91 per cent of polling till 5 pm in the evening. Though the rate may go up by a few notch-



A fire set ablaze during clashes, allegedly between the BJP and TMC activists, from Kankinara under the Bhatpara Assembly constituency where by-election was underway, in North 24 Parganas, on Sunday PTI



BJP candidate from Jadavpur seat Anupam Hazra (R) with a party worker, injured in a clash with TMC Workers near a polling booth, during the last phase of Lok Sabha polls in South 24 Parganas district, on Sunday PTI

stituencies. BJP and CPI(M) workers clashed at Jadavpur where a Left polling agent was beaten up by alleged TMC men apparently causing a cerebral stroke to the victim, sources said.

The BJP and TMC supporters fought with crude bombs at Islampur and Bhatpara Assembly by-elections segments. Bombs were lobbed from all sides giving the security forces a hard time even as repeated lathicharges were resorted to control the violent mob belonging to the two outfits.

Meanwhile, the Chief Minister accused the Central forces of 'unprecedented torture on common people.' She said, 'I have not seen such a level of torture by the central forces before,' Banerjee said in a short statement.

83-year-old cancer survivor among elderly voters in Patna

PTI ■ PATNA

Cancer-related ailment has left octogenarian Surendra Garai debilitated but not his spirit as he arrived at a booth here to cast his vote. Despite scorching heat, Garai, who retired as an executive engineer in 1995, came along with his 78-year-old wife and family to exercise the franchise.

'He is an oral cancer survivor, and has had three surgeries since he was diagnosed with the disease on 2009. His tongue had to be removed in an operation done about six months ago,' his daughter, Arunima Kumari said. But, he is always enthusiastic to vote and urged all the family members to join in, she said.

Garai, wife Bindeshwari Devi, Arunima and her husband Sanjeev Kumar and another family member came together to vote at a booth in Kankarbagh area. 'He still goes for morning walk every day supported with his walking stick and tries to keep fit even at 83. He is not able to speak but his spirit is very high, and for voting too, as he has practically participated in all elections,' Arunima told PTI.

She, however, complained that none of her family members, and herself were handed out voter slips, and 'we faced some hassle at the booth'. 'We came in the afternoon, because we did not want to stand in a queue for searching our names. But, glad we were able to eventually vote,' she said.

Tej Pratap's bodyguards bash up journalists at polling booth in Patna

PTI ■ PATNA

Private security guards of RJD leader Tej Pratap Yadav on Sunday beat up a couple of photo journalists in the city after one of them allegedly smashed the windscreen of the former Bihar Minister's vehicle, enraged over the car crushing the toes of a fellow lensman.

The incident took place at the Veterinary College here, where a polling station has been set up and the maverick leader had arrived to cast his vote for the Patna Sahib Lok Sabha constituency.

After casting his vote, a fuming Yadav told reporters, 'Am I not supposed to exercise my constitutional right? People had surrounded the vehicle in a way that it was getting difficult to move. And as soon as we realised somebody has been hurt, the car stopped.'

'Still, some of you journalists clambered on the bonnet and started banging on the windscreen, leaving it damaged badly. In such a situation, what choice do security personnel have except to intervene,' he said.

The incident drew strong condemnation from a number of journalists' bodies, which demanded an apology from the RJD supremo Lalu Prasad's elder son.

Union Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad, who is the BJP candidate from the seat, said, 'This is unfortunate. Should not have happened.'

Police said a probe has been ordered into the incident. 'Investigation is on into the incident and upon completion, action will be taken in accordance with law,' said Senior Superintendent of Police, Patna, Garima Malik.

'Soopda saaf' for BJP in UP, Bihar: Shatrughan Sinha

PTI ■ PATNA

Actor-turned-politician and Congress leader Shatrughan Sinha on Sunday expressed confidence that he would retain the Patna Sahib Lok Sabha seat for the third consecutive term despite a formidable challenge posed by the BJP, which has fielded Union Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad from the seat.

Sinha, whose wife Poonam has also made her electoral debut in Lucknow against Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh, said for the BJP it would be 'soopda saaf' (whitewash) at the hands of the 'Mahagathbandhan' in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, which together account for 120 Lok Sabha seats.

Of the 120 seats, more than 100 were bagged by the NDA five years ago. The sitting MP also scoffed at claims made by the BJP, which he quit last month ending three decades of association, that it was poised to win 300 on its own. 'They did not win 300 in 2014 despite the Modi lahar (wave). Now when the lahar has become a kahar (curse), making such a claim is just bluster,' he said.

Who am I? Modi getting blessing from people of Varanasi: Joshi on PM's poll prospects

PTI ■ VARANASI

As people of this holy city voted on Sunday in the last phase of the Lok Sabha 2019 elections, former MP and veteran BJP leader Murali Manohar Joshi said he is nobody to bless Narendra Modi, the party's candidate from this seat, as the Prime Minister has got blessings of the people here.

Joshi, who won on BJP's ticket from Varanasi in 2009, was shifted to Kanpur in 2014 to make way for Modi to fight his Lok Sabha elections from this constituency in politically-significant Uttar Pradesh, but did not get a chance to fight the 2019 elections from any seat.

After casting his vote here, Joshi was asked by reporters whether his blessing are with Modi, who is again in the electoral fray from Varanasi, to which he said, 'Who am I?... People are blessing him.' Joshi also visited the famous Kashi Vishwanath and Sankat Mochan temples here. He was BJP's president and a Union Minister in the NDA Government from 1999 to 2004.

He won the 2014 Lok Sabha elections from Kanpur and was also head of Parliament's Estimates Committee. Several reports presented by his panel were critical of the Modi Government. Earlier this year, Joshi had said in a statement that he was conveyed by the BJP General Secretary (Organisation), Ram Lal, about the party leadership's decision that he should not be contesting the elections. Lal is known as a Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) appointee in the party.

Voted for development, say conjoined twins

PTI ■ PATNA

Twenty-three-year-old conjoined twins Sabah and Farah, who have been acknowledged as separate voters, on Sunday urged people to exercise their franchise in large numbers after casting their ballots.

The twins, joined at the head, had first voted in the 2015 Assembly polls when their names were printed on a single voter ID card and their vote was counted as a single one.

'This time they have been issued separate voter IDs and permitted to cast their votes separately.'

'We have voted for development and urge people to come out and do likewise in large numbers,' the sisters told newsmen outside their booth in Samanpura locality of the city, falling under the Patna Sahib Lok Sabha seat.

A poll official, who accompanied the young women, told reporters 'as per Election Commission's directions transport arrangements were made for Sarah and Farah and we helped them to cast their votes at the booth.'

District Magistrate Kumar Ravi said the girls have been acknowledged as separate voters since 'despite nature having made them the way they are, they have their individual opinions and choices'.



POLITICIAN'S CORNER



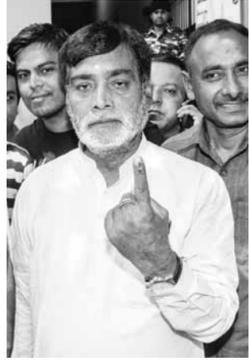
Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar



Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Sushil Modi



Ravi Shankar Prasad and his wife Maya Shankar



Ram Kripal Yadav



Nitish Kumar's son Nishant Kumar



Bihar Education Minister Krishnanand Verma



RJD leader Rabri Devi



Misa Bharti



Tej Pratap



Shatrughan Sinha with wife Poonam Sinha



UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath



Moon Moon Sen with her daughters Raima Sen and Riya Sen



Ajay Rai



Murli Manohar Joshi



Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee



Birman Bose



Lokpal Chairperson Justice Pinaki Chandra Ghose and his wife Debjani Ghose



DIG, Patna Central Range, Rajesh Kumar, with his wife

MAMATA REJECTS EXIT POLL AS CONSPIRACY

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Close on the heels of the exit polls giving BJP a remarkable breakthrough in Bengal, State Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee rejected its findings saying "gossip" of exit polls was being done to match a likely EVM tampering by the BJP. Even as most Bengali news channels put BJP's tally between 12 and 23 pulling down Trinamool Congress' seat to "anywhere between 20 and 25 seats" the Chief Minister said "I don't trust Exit Poll gossip. The game plan is to manipulate or replace thousands of EVMs through this gossip. I appeal to all Opposition parties to be united, strong and bold. We will fight this battle together." She said, "When I say something I say with some thought behind it," adding "no

one is God's angel to presage things. In 2016 they had nearly got us defeated. There is a plan in it. This is a conspiracy. They are trying to feed this to the market to establish the truth." Secondly she said, "the conspiracy is to dishearten the opposition move so that they cannot activate their alliance." This "gossip will shoot up the share market" from tomorrow because some business houses have huge stake in it." She reminded how Prime Minister Narendra Modi had in a meeting said that TMC MLAs were in contact with him and after May 23 the State Government would fall adding "there is a conspiracy going on against democracy and against Opposition parties and against Bengal." She said that she had spo-

ken to many national leaders and everyone was supporting her view. "I appeal and advice all the opposition leaders to keep a watch on the strong rooms and the EVM to thwart a foul play." One of the popular Bengali channels gave 24 seats to TMC, 16 to the BJP and 2 to the Congress. The Left for the first time after Independence drawing a blank according to the post-poll survey seeing its voter percentage going down to about 5 per cent from 30 per cent in 2014. Another channel put the toll for TMC to 28, Congress to 3 and BJP to 11. A third channel said the BJP would get 19 seats, the TMC would get 22 seats and the Congress would manage only 1 seat of Behramopore.

Over 900 posts taken down from social media platforms during LS polls

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp, removed a total of 909 posts during the Lok Sabha election, following directions from the Election Commission (EC). Facebook alone took down

650 posts, followed by Twitter (220), ShareChat (31), YouTube (five) and WhatsApp (three), Director General (Communications) in the EC Dharendra Ojha said on Sunday, after the seventh and final phase of polling was concluded. Of the 650 posts taken down by Facebook, 482 were

political messages posted during the "silence period". The "silence period" starts 48 hours before the hour set for conclusion of polling in a particular phase. The seventh phase of polling came to a close at 6 pm on Sunday, so the "silence period" had begun at 6 pm on Friday for this phase.

As many as 73 social media posts were political advertisements in the "silence period", two were violative of the Model Code of Conduct, 43 were related to voter "misinformation", 28 were dubbed as those crossing the limits of decency, 11 were related to exit polls and 11 were hate speeches,

Ojha said. There were also 647 confirmed cases of paid news, of which the maximum of 342 were reported in the first phase itself, he added. During the 2014 Lok Sabha polls, 1,297 confirmed cases of paid news were reported, Ojha said.

Nitish targets Lalu, rubbishes claims about Prashant Kishor on rapprochement

PTI ■ PATNA

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Sunday repudiated arch rival Lalu Prasad's claim that he had sent poll-strategist-turned politician Prashant Kishor for rapprochement owing to unease with the BJP. Kumar also said he was looking forward to the formation of a new Government by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Centre and his JD(U) joining it. The Chief Minister, however, made it clear that his party will stick to its stand on issues like Article 370, Uniform Civil Code and the Ayodhya dispute, which was at variance with that of the BJP. The JD(U) chief, who had a low-key presence during the general elections, talked in detail on varied issues, including condemning BJP Bhopal candidate Pragya Singh Thakur describing Mahatma Gandhi's assassin Nathuram Godse as "patriot", and also questioned the long-drawn polling in intense heat condition. Terming Thakur's remarks on Godse as "nindaneeyee" (condemnable), he hoped that

the saffron party would consider taking action against her. Replying to queries from journalists outside a polling station near the Raj Bhavan, where he cast his vote, Kumar dismissed the recent statement by senior Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad, who had hinted at the possibility of a post-poll tie-up with the JD(U) in the event of the elections throwing up a hung Parliament. The CM said though he shared "excellent personal relations" with the veteran leader, the latter's words did not carry much weight within his own party. "Hum kyon bhejenge (why would I send)," replied Kumar curtly, when asked about the jailed RJD supremo's controversial claim in his recently-published autobiography that he had sent Prashant Kishor as his emissary to discuss the prospects of a realignment, a few months after he returned to the BJP-led NDA in July, 2017. "It is a fact that Prashant Kishor does keep meeting people from various political parties. He has to as a talented political strategist. But, he formally joined our party only in September last year," Kumar said.

Modi to get massive mandate; BJP 300 plus, NDA over 400: Yogi

PTI ■ GORAKHPUR

Amid the ongoing voting for the last phase of Lok Sabha polls on Sunday, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath claimed that the BJP will form the next Government at the Centre under Prime Minister Narendra Modi with a "massive mandate" of "300 plus seats" of the BJP and "400 plus" of the NDA allies. "Polling on 67 Lok Sabha seats in UP has already been held, and voting was held on 13 seats today. I can say with confidence that on May 23, when the election results will be declared, the BJP under the leadership of Modiji will accomplish its target of securing 300-plus seats on its own, and 400-plus seats on the strength of its allies," said Adityanath after casting his vote. "In UP, the BJP will be successful in achieving the target of 74-plus seats," said the chief minister, adding "the festival of the democracy should be treated enthusiastically". Asked whether the Chief Minister's remarks amounted to influencing voters or flouting the model code of conduct after the end of

campaign, UP Chief Electoral Officer L Venkateshwarlu told PTI in Lucknow that the Election Commission will look into it if it gets any complaint on the matter. "No complaint has yet been received in this connection. If we get any complaint, we will seek a report from the local administration in this regard and look into it," he said. Adityanath was among the first voters to exercise his franchise here on Sunday. He cast his vote at the Prathamik Vidyalaya near Jhoolelal Temple in Gorakhpur at 7 am. Speaking to reporters after casting his vote, the chief minister said, "People are fighting this election for the nation's interest and if someone cannot understand it, his IQ (intelligence quotient) is questionable. The entire election revolved around Modiji. With big achievements of his government during the last five years, the BJP will win the election." "This is the first election which hinged on Modiji. All through the seven phases of the polls, I found it centred around Prime Minister Modi," the CM said.

Exit polls do not mean exact polls: Vice-Pres

PTI ■ AMARAVATI

Vice-President M Venkaiah Naidu on Sunday mocked at the exit polls, saying they were not exact polls. "Exit polls do not mean exact polls. We have to understand that. Since 1999, most of the exit polls have gone wrong," the Vice-President pointed out. Naidu addressed an informal meeting of well-wishers, who felicitated him in Guntur. Referring to the ongoing general elections, he said every party exuded confidence (over victory). "Everyone exhibits his own confidence till the 23rd (day of counting). There will be no base for it. So we have to wait for 23rd," he remarked. "Country and the state need an able leader and stable Government, whoever it be. That's what is required. That's all," Naidu observed. The Vice-President also said change in society should start with political parties. "If democracy has to strengthen and something good has to happen to people elections, selections, candidates, parties all should dis-

charge their duties responsibly and properly," he noted. The Vice President lamented that civility has become a casualty in the present political discourse. "There is a lot of degeneration in the speeches of political leaders. They are resorting to personal abuses. One is not an enemy to the other in politics, they are only rivals... They are forgetting this basic fact," he said. Expressing anguish over the behaviour of elected representatives in Parliament and state legislatures, he said, "See how MPs are behaving in Parliament and MLAs in Assembly, irrespective of the parties. Panchayat and civic bodies' members follow them." The Vice-President also found fault with political parties announcing freebies to win over the electorate. "The way parties are behaving... You have been given a mandate for five years. You have to work. Without doing that, you announce freebies at the last minute. I am always opposed to it. Free power means, no power," Naidu observed.



77.62% POLLING IN BYPOLLS TO 4 TN ASSEMBLY
Crucial by-elections to four Assembly constituencies in Tamil Nadu Sunday recorded an overall 77.62 per cent turnout with Aravakurichi topping with a little over 84 per cent. The bypolls, besides re-polling in 13 polling stations, were held smoothly. There were some reports of EVM glitches which were resolved immediately, according to Election Commission officials. Byelections were held in Aravakurichi (84.28 per cent), Sular (79.41), Thiruparankundram (74.17) and Ottapidaram (72.61). An average 84.13 per cent polling was recorded in the 13 polling stations where report had been ordered for reasons, including alleged irregularities and technical issues, reported during the elections held on April 18.

ASSEMBLY BYPOLLS IN K'TAKA: 75.81% POLLING
An average of 75.81 per cent polling was recorded in the by-elections to two Karnataka Assembly constituencies, Chincholi and Kundgol, on Sunday. While Chincholi registered a voter turnout of 70.3 per cent, Kundgol 81.33 per cent. The outcome of the bypolls is likely to have a bearing on the stability of the JDS-Congress coalition Government in the State.

PANAJI ASSEMBLY BYPOLL: 75.25% TURNOUT
A voter turnout of 75.25 per cent was recorded at 6pm for the Panaji Assembly bypoll held on Sunday, Goa's Chief Electoral Office informed. The constituency has over 22,000 voters, and polling was held at 30 booths, it said, adding that the exercise, which began at 7am, was peaceful. The bypoll was necessitated due to the death of former Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar on March 17 this year.

AP REPOLL: 89 PC TURNOUT RECORDED
Over 89 per cent polling was recorded in the repolling in seven polling stations in Chandragiri Assembly segment under the Chittoor Lok Sabha constituency in Andhra Pradesh Sunday, officials said. Interestingly, it was 1.13 per cent less than the total votes polled during the elections held on April 11, according to the office of the State Chief Electoral Officer.

Sebi ups surveillance before poll results



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Regulator Sebi and stock exchanges have beefed up their surveillance mechanism to check any manipulative activities in the market this week in view of the high-octane election related events lined up.

The heightened surveillance and monitoring systems are already in place for Monday, the first trading session after the announcement of exit poll results, while they would be further ramped up on Thursday, when the final

results will be declared, a senior official said.

The poll results are likely to have a bearing on trading and increased monitoring helps to keep in check possible manipulations and excessive volatility in the markets.

Manipulators tend to exploit such volatile situations in the stock markets.

The enhanced vigil on the markets will continue till May 23, when the results of the Lok Sabha polls will be declared.

According to the official, movements in Nifty futures

and options on the Singapore exchange will also be closely monitored. Trading in Singapore stock exchange starts much before Indian markets open and their trends generally have an impact on domestic markets.

The BSE Sensex soared 537 points and the NSE Nifty reclaimed the 11,400 level Friday in a broad-based rally ahead of the poll results.

During the week, the Sensex gained 467.78 points, or 1.24 per cent, and the Nifty advanced 128.25 points, or 1.13 per cent.

Merger impact: BoB looks to rationalise 800-900 branches

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned Bank of Baroda (BoB) is considering the option of rationalising 800-900 branches across the country to improve operational efficiency, following its merger with Dena Bank and Vijaya Bank.



The merger of Dena Bank and Vijaya Bank with BoB became effective from April 1. It does not make sense to have branches of Dena and Vijaya at the same location when both have been merged into BoB, a senior bank official said.

"There are cases where branches of three banks are at one location or one building. So these branches have to be either closed or rationalised as duplication is a drain on efficiency," the official said.

After comprehensive review, BoB has identified 800-900 branches which needs to be rationalised, the official said, adding that the lender could opt for re-location and in some cases closure.

Besides, there is also need to close regional and zonal offices of merged entities as they would not be required.

The official further said, the bank needs to expand in eastern part of country as it has

strong presence in South, West and northern part of the country.

With the first ever three-way merger, BoB has now become the second-largest public sector lender after State Bank of India with over 9,500 branches, 13,400 ATMs, and 85,000 employees to serve 12 crore customers.

The consolidated entity started the operation with a business mix of over ₹15 lakh crore on the balance sheet, with deposits and advances of ₹8.75 lakh crore and ₹6.25 lakh crore, respectively.

The maiden three-way amalgamation is considered as the major step in the consolidation of the public sector banking industry recommended in 1991 by the Narasimham Committee report.

It is to be noted that when State Bank of India (SBI) amalgamated its five associate banks and Bharatiya Mahila Bank in April 2017, it rationalised about 1,500 branches across the country.

Don't go too far in damaging moves, China tells US

PTI ■ BEIJING

China's top diplomat Wang Yi has asked US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo not to go "too far" in its "damaging moves" against the Chinese interests, saying that both countries will benefit from cooperation and lose from conflicts.



State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang held a telephonic conversation with Pompeo on Saturday, days after US President Donald Trump signed an executive order barring American companies from installing the foreign-made telecom equipment posing a national security threat, a move apparently aimed at banning Huawei from US networks.

Beijing has warned of retaliation against the order that effectively barred Chinese telecom giant Huawei from the US market.

The world's top two economies are locked in a trade battle that has seen mounting tariffs, sparking fears that the conflict could damage the global economy.

Wang, noting that the US has recently made remarks and taken actions that are harmful to the Chinese interests in various fields including cracking down on Chinese enterprises' normal operations through political measures, said China strongly opposes such actions.

"We urge the US side not to go too far," he told Pompeo. History and reality have

shown that as two big countries, China and the US will both benefit from cooperation and lose from conflicts, Wang said, adding that cooperation is the only right choice for the two countries.

The two sides should follow the direction set by the two countries' heads of state, manage their differences on the basis of mutual respect, expand cooperation on the basis of mutual benefit, and work together in pushing forward a China-US relationship based on coordination, cooperation and stability, state-run Xinhua news agency quoted Wang as saying.

China has always been willing to resolve economic and trade differences through negotiations and consultations, which, however, should be conducted on the basis of equality, he said, adding that China, in any negotiations, must safeguard its legitimate interests, answer the calls of its people, and defend the basic norms of international relations.

Wang stressed that China has stated its firm opposition to the US' recent negative words and acts related to Taiwan, and urged Washington to abide by the 'one-China principle' and the three China-US joint communiques, and handle Taiwan-related issues carefully and properly.

The two sides also exchanged views on relevant international and regional issues, the report said.

Wang emphasized that China, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, is committed to the de-nuclearisation, peace and stability of the Middle East.

The trade war between China and the US escalated after Trump this month increased the import duty on Chinese products worth \$200 billion from 10 per cent to 25 per cent. China retaliated by slapping tariffs on \$60 billion worth of US imports.

Trump has been demanding that China reduce the massive trade deficit which last year climbed to over \$539 billion. He is also pressing for protection of intellectual property rights (IPR), technology transfer and more access to American goods to Chinese markets.

RBI's vision document on payment systems to spur digital economy: Fintech firms

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The RBI's 'Payment Systems Vision 2021' document would act as a catalyst for promoting digital economy and instill confidence among the general public, fintech companies say.

Aiming at a 'cash-lite' society, the Reserve Bank of India last week released the vision document for ensuring a safe, secure, convenient, quick and affordable e-payment system as it expects the number of digital transactions to increase more than four times to 8,707 crore in December 2021.

The RBI has said it will implement the approach outlined in the document during the period 2019 - 2021.

COO of Payworld Praveen Dhabhai said the vision document has a focus on empowering payment system providers and at the same time providing ease to consumers.

"We are confident with our vision as a payment system provider aligned with the regulators, we will be able to contribute in increasing the digital transactions penetrations

especially in the assisted segment in smaller cities and rural India," he said.

Navin Surya, Chairman Emeritus, Payments Council of India said: "Clarity in defining outcomes in terms of scale of digital and overall payments vis a vis GDP is a very good measurement to look forward to and also assess the impact of work done by all stakeholders."

However, KYC simplicity, digital KYC and KYC bureau, as well as simplification of existing policies to enable NBFCs to issue credit cards is missing from the document, said Surya, who is also the chairman of Fintech Convergence Council.

Mandar Agashe, founder and vice chairman, Sarvatra Technologies, was of the opinion that the 24x7 helpline that the RBI plans to set will help in instilling confidence in customers regarding the digital payments system.

Other than this, geo-tagging of payment system touchpoints will help companies understand where and what type of transactions are taking place, which will also lead to curtailing frauds, he added.

India registers trade deficit with 11 RCEP members in 2018-19

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India has registered trade deficit in 2018-19 with as many as 11 RCEP member countries — including China, South Korea and Australia - out of the grouping of 16 nations that are negotiating a mega trade pact since November 2012.

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) bloc comprises 10 Asean group members (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, Laos and Vietnam) and their six FTA partners - India, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand.

According to the provisional trade data, India's trade deficit — the difference between imports and exports — with three countries (Brunei, Japan, and Malaysia) has in fact increased marginally in 2018-19 as compared to the previous fiscal.

The trade gap with Brunei, Japan, and Malaysia has increased to \$0.5 billion, \$7.1 billion and \$3.8 billion, respectively in the last fiscal. It was \$0.4 billion, \$6.2 billion and \$3.3 billion in 2017-18.

However, deficit with Australia, China, Indonesia, Korea, New Zealand and



Thailand has narrowed in 2018-19 as compared to the preceding fiscal.

With Australia, China, Indonesia, Korea, New Zealand and Thailand, it narrowed to \$8.9 billion, \$50.2 billion, \$10.1 billion, \$1.1 billion, \$0.2 billion, and \$2.7 billion, respectively, in 2018-19, compared to \$10 billion, \$63 billion, \$12.5 billion, \$11.9 billion, \$0.3 billion, and \$3.5 billion in 2017-18.

Interestingly, the trade surplus with Singapore (\$2.7 billion) in 2017-18 has turned into deficit of \$5.3 billion in 2018-19.

India has trade surplus with Cambodia (\$0.1 billion), Myanmar (\$ 0.7 billion), and the Philippines (\$1 billion) in 2018-19.

India did not carry out any trade with Laos in the previous

fiscal. Experts have mixed views over the impact of increasing trade gap on India's position in negotiating mega free trade agreement.

An industry expert on these negotiations said as this is a comprehensive trade deal, India will get greater market access in other countries not only in goods, but in services also.

On the other hand, some experts said that India needs to be cautious while negotiating the pact, as trade deficit is increasing with several of the RCEP member nations, which would impact domestic manufacturers.

"Free trade pacts are not about only giving market access, but also getting that access in other countries. Our exports to countries like

Singapore, with which India has trade surplus, is not increasing. In 2018-19, we have a trade deficit with Singapore," said Biswajit Dhar, the professor of economics at Jawaharlal Nehru University.

He said that as the strength of the domestic manufacturing is weak, India would not be able to take advantage of such free trade agreements.

An official said that India does not have free trade agreement with two of its biggest trading partners — the US and China — but the country has highest positive balance of trade with America, while it has highest deficit with China.

RCEP negotiations, which started in Cambodian capital Phnom Penh in November 2012, aims to cover goods, services, investments, economic and technical cooperation, competition and intellectual property rights.

Pressure is also mounting on India for early conclusion of the proposed trade pact.

Member countries are looking to conclude the talks by end of this year but many issues, including the number of products over which duties will be eliminated, are yet to be finalised. Domestic steel and other metal industries wants these sectors to be kept out of the deal.

GST Council may consider national bench of AAAR next month; move to give certainty to taxpayers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The GST Council is likely to consider next month a proposal for setting up a national bench of the Appellate Authority for Advance Ruling (AAAR) to reconcile the contradictory orders on similar issues passed by AAARs in different states, a move aimed at providing certainty to taxpayers.

Sources said the revenue department is mulling on the idea of a national bench of AAAR since it feels that the Authority for Advance Ruling (AAR) mechanism in its current form is not serving its objective of providing certainty to taxpayers under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime.

"There has been a view that a second Appellate Authority for Advance Ruling needs to be set up. It would be a national bench only to reconcile divergent verdicts passed by state AARs. We will present the proposal before the GST Council, which is expected to meet in June," an official told PTI.

The AARs in different states have passed about 470

orders, while AAARs have disposed of around 69 cases till March 2019.

Out of the orders passed by AARs, contradictory orders were passed in about 10 cases, a couple of which were later clarified by the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC).

The official further said the GST law would have to be amended for setting up a second appellate authority since the Act in its present form does not provide for a centralised authority.

Setting up of a national bench of AAAR would help bring certainty in the GST era as divergent rulings by AARs leave the industry flummoxed about the tax implication of a particular business decision.

"The composition of the national bench of AAAR would be decided after the states agree to the proposal," the official added.

In view of the confusion created by contradictory rulings, the revenue department had last year too mooted a proposal to set up a centralised appellate authority for advance ruling to bring uniformity in such cases.

Oil producers meet to discuss output amid Iran tension

AFP ■ JEDDAH

Major crude producers are set to meet on Sunday to discuss how to stabilise a volatile oil market amid rising US-Iran tensions in the Gulf, which threaten to disrupt supply.

Key OPEC members and other major suppliers including Russia will assess the oil market and examine compliance to production cuts agreed late last year.

But the subject of Iran, which is not present, will dominate the one-day meeting of the OPEC+ group.

It comes days after sabotage attacks against tankers in highly sensitive Gulf waters and the bombing of a Saudi pipeline by Iran-aligned Yemen rebels.

The meeting also comes as the full impact of re-instated US sanctions against Tehran kicks in, slashing the Islamic republic's crude exports.

Hours before the meeting in Jeddah, host Saudi Arabia said it does not seek war with Iran, but is ready to defend its interests.

The meeting is set to make recommendations ahead of a

key OPEC summit in late June, to be attended by Iran.

President Donald Trump said last month Saudi Arabia and other OPEC members had agreed to his request to boost oil production in order to tamp down rising prices.

Massive drops in exports by Iran and Venezuela plus output cuts of 1.2 million barrels per day, implemented by the OPEC+ group since January, have cut supply.

But UAE Energy Minister Suheil al-Mazrouei said inventories were still building up.

He told reporters Saturday that the job of balancing the market was not yet complete, a hint that any ramp-up in production could send prices crashing as they did in late 2018.

OPEC and the International Energy Agency said earlier this month that global oil supply fell in April due to US sanctions on Iran tightened and OPEC+ production cuts.

The IEA said Iranian crude production fell in April to 2.6 million bpd, down from 3.9 million before Washington announced in May 2018 it

would withdraw from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal and reimpose sanctions.

Iran's output is already at its lowest level in over five years, but could tumble in May to levels not seen since the devastating 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war.

Energy intelligence firm Kpler sees Iranian exports plunging from 1.4 million bpd in April to around half a million barrels in May — down from 2.5 million in normal circumstances.

Venezuela's output is also tumbling, down by over half since the third quarter of last year.

Kpler data shows OPEC+ members have kept to agreed production cuts.

But exporters fear a rush to raise production to plug the gap left by Iranian exports could backfire, triggering a new supply glut.

Sunday's meeting comes amid soaring Gulf tensions after the mysterious sabotage of several tankers off the Emirati coast and drone attacks, claimed by Iran-aligned Yemen rebels, which shut a key Saudi crude pipeline.

Both attacks targeted

routes built as alternatives to the Strait of Hormuz, the conduit for almost all Gulf exports.

Iran has repeatedly threatened to close the Strait in case of war with the US, which said this month it was sending an aircraft carrier and strike group to the region.

Saudi Arabia accused Iran of ordering the pipeline attacks, targeting "the security of oil supplies... And the global economy".

Saudi foreign affairs minister Adel al-Jubeir said Sunday his country does not want war with Iran, but was ready to defend its interests.

Riyadh "does not want a war, is not looking for it and will do everything to prevent it," he told journalists in Riyadh.

Saudi Arabia called Saturday for urgent meetings of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Arab League to discuss escalating tensions, government news agency SPA said.

It also said Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman had spoken with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo about enhancing security in the region.

Govt plans introducing artificial intelligence system in MCA 21 portal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Corporate affairs ministry plans to introduce artificial intelligence system in the MCA 21 portal as it seeks to make compliance process easier as well as ensure routine enforcement activities are done round-the-clock on autopilot basis.

MCA 21 is the electronic backbone for dissemination of information to all stakeholders, including the regulator, corporates and investors. All filings under the companies law are submitted to the ministry through this portal.

Corporate Affairs Secretary Injeti Srinivas has said the ministry would look to "introduce Artificial Intelligence in MCA 21 when version 3 of the portal is rolled out in about a year's time".

"It will look to rationalise all the forms, follow the principle of single source of truth

so that one is not required to fill in known details again (as it will get filled automatically) and also interlink databases, so that routine enforcement is done 24x7 on autopilot basis," he said.

In the ministry's monthly newsletter, Srinivas also said that MCA 21 allows electronic filings of various documents under Companies Act, 2013 and has fully automated all processes related to enforcement and compliance monitoring under the Act.

Earlier this year, the ministry sought applications from service providers to develop as well as operate the upgraded version of MCA 21 system.

MCA 21 system was started in 2006.

The first phase of the e-governance initiative of the ministry was implemented by Tata Consultancy Services and the second phase is being implemented by Infosys for the period from January 2013-July 2021.

IOC TO EXAMINE US SANCTIONS' IMPACT ON CPCL EXPANSION

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's top refiner Indian Oil Corp (IOC) will evaluate the implications of US sanctions if Iran was to invest in its subsidiary Chennai refinery's Rs 35,700 crore expansion, its Chairman Sanjiv Singh said.

IOC plans to pull down the 1 million tonnes per year Nagapattinam refinery of its subsidiary Chennai Petroleum

Corp Ltd (CPCL) and build a brand new 9 million tonnes unit in the next five to six years.

National Iranian Oil Co (NIOC), which holds 15.4 per cent stake in CPCL, is keen to participate in the expansion project, Singh said.

Following US decision to reimpose economic sanctions on Iran, IOC will examine the impact of NIOC investing further in CPCL.



Regional Manager Sunil Kumar Sobti, in the meeting of Branch Heads, welcomes General Manager S Vijay Kumar. S Vijay Kumar advised Branch Heads to adopt positive and dynamic approach and to improve upon all business parameters. Sunil Kumar Sobti urged the Branch Heads to focus on Recoveries, Retail Credit, MSME and Cross Selling to support citizens of Delhi. During the meeting representative of SBI Life Insurance also gave their presentation

'IT'S A SKY BLUE WORLD'

Pep's men hailed as English football's greatest ever team after completing first ever domestic treble

AFP ■ MANCHESTER

Manchester City's treble winners have been hailed as English football's greatest ever team after their FA Cup final demolition of Watford completed an historic campaign.

Pep Guardiola's side became the first English club to win the Premier League, FA Cup and League Cup in the same season thanks to their swaggering 6-0 success at Wembley on Saturday.

Equalling the record margin of victory for an FA Cup final was the perfect way to cap a remarkable year for City, who followed their record-breaking Premier League triumph in 2017-18 with an even more astonishing run this term.

They are the first English top-flight side to register 50 wins in all competitions in a single season.

Guardiola's men also scored a record 169 goals in 61 games this season, beating their own previous best of 156.

City now rank high on the list of the greatest English teams of all-time.

Only a select few can claim to be on a par with City, an elite group that includes Arsenal's 2004 'Invincibles', Manchester United's 1999 vintage, who won the Premier League, Champions League and FA Cup, and the Liverpool team of 1984, who lifted the old First Division, the European Cup and the League Cup.

The world's media were united in their praise for Guardiola's men, who have won five of the last six domestic trophies.

Eurosport labelled City as



the country's greatest ever, writing: "They may not have won the Champions League but the cold hard facts don't lie: Manchester City are the best team to ever grace English football."

The Guardian's Barney Ronay summed up City's majestic form over the last year.

"Manchester City's historic FA Cup final win was almost swamped by the glowing list of statistics piling up around them — but nothing can dis-

guise the scale of this achievement and the brilliance of Pep Guardiola's team," he wrote.

"Welcome to the new order. Domestic games: played 51, won 43. Domestic trophies: three out of three. Five-goal hauls: 11. Defeats since Christmas: one.

"Scan the history books, fan back to the big city clubs of Victorian times, linger on the red-shirted eras of the last 50 years.

"English domestic football has never seen anything quite

like this single-season hit from Manchester City. It turns out we really do all live in a sky blue world now."

'ENJOY THE MOMENT'

City midfielder Kevin De Bruyne came off the bench to score in the FA Cup final, ending an injury-plagued season on a high for the Belgian.

De Bruyne insisted it is hard to compare different eras when it comes to rating the all-time greats.

But he was happy to reflect

on a truly breathtaking campaign for the treble winners.

"It has been an unbelievable season to win three titles. It says enough," De Bruyne said.

"To compare generations is very difficult. We are happy to be in the conversation but we should just enjoy the moment because it doesn't happen very often."

De Bruyne says it is "already an honour" to be considered one of the best teams in English football history, but

he won't indulge talk of going one better by winning next season's Champions League.

"It is not about topping it, it is about being consistent and trying to achieve the best," he said.

"We are not starting the season saying we want to win three titles or four titles, we want to play the way we play and do our best.

"It is not all about the end product, it is about the journey and you appreciate it even more."

City's 'beating heart' Kompany to leave club

AFP ■ MANCHESTER

Vincent Kompany announced on Sunday that he will leave Manchester City after 11 trophy-laden years to become player-manager of Anderlecht.

Belgian defender Kompany joined City in 2008 and made 360 appearances, winning four Premier League titles, two FA Cups, four League Cups and two Community Shields.

The 33-year-old signed off with victory in the FA Cup final on Saturday, where the club captain lifted the trophy after City thrashed Watford 6-0 to complete a domestic treble.

"As overwhelming as it is, the time has come for me to go. And what a season to bow out," Kompany said.

"I feel nothing but gratefulness. I am grateful to all those who supported me on a special journey, at a very special club."

Anderlecht is the Belgian club where Kompany began his professional career before joining Hamburg and he admitted he is relishing the chance to move into management.

"I choose to be grateful for the past but remain ambitious and driven for the future. For the next three years, I will take up the role of player-manager of Anderlecht. Belgium's finest," he wrote on Facebook.

"This may come as a surprise to you. It's the most passionate yet rational decision I've ever made."

Kompany has been ravaged by injuries in recent years and he featured in only



Vincent Kompany appreciates crowd gesture after playing his final Man City game at Etihad Stadium

17 of City's 38 league games this season because of muscle problems.

He also paid tribute to his team-mates and manager Pep Guardiola.

"It's cliché to say it but it's also so true: without my team-mates, I would have never been here today," he said.

"We fought many battles together. Side by side. In good times and in bad. So to all of you, from the 2008-2009 squad to today's domestic treble winners: I owe you guys!"

"A special word also to Pep and the backroom staff: you've been superb. You've followed me through so much hardship. You made me come back stronger every time. Thank you so much."

In September, City will hold Kompany's testimonial match, from which he will donate all profits to Manchester's homeless.



Real humbled in final-day defeat

AFP ■ MADRID

Real Madrid delivered a suitably dreadful end to their miserable season, and Gareth Bale was not even given the chance to say a likely goodbye, as Zinedine Zidane's side were beaten 2-0 at home to Real Betis on Sunday.

Zidane had indicated this could be Bale's final game ahead of an expected summer departure but the Welshman was left on the bench, made to watch on as three substitutes came on ahead of him at the Santiago Bernabeu.

None were able to revive another dreary and disjointed Madrid performance, which concluded both the season and first phase of Zidane's much-hailed return as coach.

"The best thing for us is that it's over and we can think about next year," he said afterwards. "Because things will change, for sure."

As the players saluted the fans at the end, they were greeted by a chorus of whistles.

By then, Bale was already off down the tunnel, perhaps aware that any attempt at a farewell could be given an even colder reception.

"I'm sorry, I didn't give Bale minutes today," Zidane said. "But I don't know what's going to happen, I have to make decisions based on today and the match."

"There are no excuses," Zidane said. "It has been difficult from the start of the season and now at the end with me. That is the reality."

He has promised change over the summer and many in his squad here could leave — goalkeeper Keylor Navas, who was the subject of several affectionate chants during the game, as well as Nacho, Sergio

Reguilon, Isco, Marcos Llorente and Bale.

If this was to be Bale's last appearance after six seasons, in which there have been numerous injuries but several trophies too, including four in the Champions League, it seemed a sorry way not to say goodbye.

Betis confirmed coach Quique Setien would not return next season, after a turbulent campaign saw the club drop out of contention for Europe and finish 10th.

Lionel Messi finished the season as La Liga's leading scorer with 36 goals, netting twice in a 2-2 draw at Eibar as he earned the Pichichi award for a record-equalling sixth time.

Marc Cucurella gave Eibar a surprise lead on 20 minutes at Ipurua, driving under the body of reserve Barca goalkeeper Jasper Cillessen after a cushioned lay-off by Sergi Enrich.

Messi responded with two goals in as many minutes on the half-hour, applying a pair of clinical finishes to assists from Arturo Vidal and Ivan Rakitic.

Cillessen was again at fault though as Eibar levelled moments before the break, the Dutchman racing out his area and head clear only for Pablo De Blasis to volley superbly back over his head.

The draw means Barcelona finish with 87 points, six fewer than last year. They have not hit a lower total since coming third in 2008 but it was still enough to end the season 11 clear of Atletico Madrid and 19 ahead of Real.

Ernesto Valverde's side will bid for a fifth consecutive Copa del Rey next weekend, but nothing can eradicate the sense of disappointment, still lingering from their nightmare in Europe.

Need to score consistently under tight marking: Reid

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India need to consistently score goals under tight marking to narrow the gap with top teams like Australia, said coach Graham Reid after his first major assignment with the national team.

On their tour of Australia that concluded on Friday, India lost both the games against the hosts after beating the A team.

Speaking about the tour comprising five matches, Reid, who was appointed as India coach last month, said that the assignment in his home country was an opportunity for him to understand his team better.

"It was good to get a view of where the team (India are ranked five) is at, compared to the World Number 2 side (Australia). They have been playing against world class oppositions on a regular basis in the FIH Pro-League since the World Cup last year, and this showed up in our two matches against them," he said.

"For me, those matches provided a good bench-mark as to the level we have to be at as we move towards the Olympic qualification. So, in terms of preparation for our upcoming FIH Men's Series Finals (here next month), the tour was ideal.

"It provided me a great opportunity to view players at much closer quarters and under the pressure of a world-class team. Our first quarter in the first Match on Wednesday night showed me the level this team can play, we just need to do that on a more consistent basis. Not only across quarters



but across games," said Reid.

The 55-year-old Australian said that his team was focused on improving its attack.

"Our ability to score goals under tight marking pressure will be critical if we are to close the gap with teams like Australia. Over the next few weeks in Bhubaneswar during our National Camp (starting on Monday), we need to create as many opportunities as possible for our attackers to experience this tight pressure," he said. It will also be critical for our defenders to keep improving this area from a defensive point of view. With speed and power becoming the dominant forces in World Hockey, we also need to keep improving in these areas."

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

All eyes will be on six-time world champion Mary Kom as 72 Indian boxers vie for honours against 200 pugilists from 16 nations in the second edition of India Open beginning here on Monday.

Asian Games champion Amit Panghal and World Championship Bronze medalist Shiva Thapa will be among the other top Indian boxers in the tournament which will serve as a preparatory meet for the World Championships (an Olympic qualification event) from September 7-21 in Yekaterinburg (men's) and from October 3-13 in Ulan Ude (women's), both in Russia.

Having opted out of the Asian Championships last month in order to prepare for the World Championships, 2012 London Olympics Bronze medalist Mary Kom will make her competitive debut at home in 51kg in the

Mary & Co aim to pack a punch



\$ 70,000 five-day meet at the Karmabir Nabin Chandra Bordoloi Indoor Stadium.

"Yes, of course, there are expectations from me. I feel more confident in 51kg after

the last few months of rigorous training," said the star pugilist who had won Gold in 48kg category at the first edition in 2018.

While Mary Kom will be

India's biggest medal hope yet again, Amit Panghal (52kg) will be looking to continue his dominance after winning the Asian Championships Gold.

Monaco virtually ensures safety



PTI ■ PARIS

Monaco virtually made sure of their French Ligue 1 survival with a 2-0 win over Amiens on Saturday while champions PSG signed off their home campaign with Kylian Mbappe scoring his 32nd league goal of the season in a 4-0 win over Dijon.

Radamel Falcao and Aleksander Golovin scored in either half at the Stade Louis II to take Monaco to 36 points and three above the drop zone with one match left to play.

Monaco, the 2017 champions, are not mathematically safe but they have a three-point lead over Caen who occupy the relegation play-off spot with a goal difference of seven.

Guingamp were already relegated while Dijon were pushed to the edge of the trap door when they lost

4-0 at PSG.

French World Cup winner Mbappe, back from a three-match ban for a red card in the French Cup final, scored two of the goals to take his league tally to 32 with one game left.

He is the first French player to reach that figure since Herve Revelli scored 31 for Saint-Etienne in the 1966/67 season.

PSG were presented with the Ligue 1 trophy for the eighth time against a background of fireworks after a win which preserved their 16-point lead.

Saturday's result was never in doubt after Angel Di Maria and Edinson Cavani had given PSG a 2-0 lead inside the first four minutes.

Suspended Neymar, the world's most expensive footballer, watched the game from the stands before join-

ing his teammates in a lap of honour in front of their fans at the Parc des Princes.

"We wanted to leave behind a good image before the end of the season with the quality we have shown throughout the campaign," said PSG defender Thilo Kehrer.

"We did that by winning 4-0, it was important for our supporters. It's a great feeling to be league champions."

Elsewhere, Lille made sure of second place and a spot in the Champions League group stages with a 5-0 rout of Angers.

Nicolas Pepe, who will leave the club in the summer, scored twice to take his season tally to 22.

Lyon will finish third — enough for a Champions League preliminary round place — after a 3-0 win over Nice.

Moun will be fighting it out in 57kg for the very first time.

Simranjit Kaur, a Silver medalist at the continental tournament in 64kg, has switched to 60kg as well and will be competing with former world champion Sarita Devi, who added her eighth Asian medal this year.

After her stunning performance at the Asian Championships, where she became the first Indian to win a Gold in 81kg, Pooja Rani has gone back to her original weight category of 75kg.

The top international boxers lineup includes Asian Games Gold medalist Baturov Bobo, Asian Games champion Mirzakhaliyev Mirazizbek, two-time

World Championships medalist Jasurbek Latipov of Uzbekistan, Youth Olympic champion Brian Agustin Arregui of Argentina, world champion and reigning Asian Championships Josie Gabuco of Philippines.

WARNER, SMITH READY TO FACE FIRE IN ENG

Australian coach Langer urges fans to treat returning duo as human beings, prone to committing mistakes

PTI ■ LONDON

The English crowd may throw some taunts on Steve Smith and Warner during the World Cup but they are ready to "face the fire", says Australia coach Justin Langer.

Warner and Smith return to high intensity action at the showpiece event after serving out their one-year bans, imposed for their role in last year's ball-tampering scandal.

Langer admitted that controlling the crowd is not their hands but urged the fans to treat Warner and Smith as human beings, prone to committing mistakes.

"We can't control the crowd. What I do know? It may ramp up, it may heat up, but it won't be any hotter than it was twelve months ago. I've never seen anything like it so the boys are very well prepared. They've paid a heavy price and we're always expecting to come here and to face the fire and we're ready for that," said Langer after team's first training session after their arrival.

But what has been their preparation in dealing with the angry crowd response? to this Langer said the Australian camp has to support them emotionally and ensure that Warner and Smith remain comfortable.

"What we've got to understand is that they're human beings as well. There's not too many I've met in my life who like being booed or heckled or disliked so ... they're human beings."

"We're going to have to care for them. We are going to have to put an arm around them and make sure they're going ok. But what people say, whether it's in the crowd or social media or wherever there's nothing they can do about that they can't control it but what we can do is keep an eye on them and make sure they're going ok as people as much as cricketers."

Langer said Smith is hitting the ball as clean as hard as he was doing it before the ban. A proof of it was when Smith hit pacer Pat Cummins so hard that the ball sailed over and hit a car passing by on the Nottingham Road.

"As batsman it's brilliant. I watched Steve Smith batting against New Zealand in those three practice games, he's literally a master of the game, so it's nice to have him back."

"Dave's got that look on his eye, he's really hungry, he's a great player as we all know, he's so dynamic, he brings so much energy, and that's what we ask from our players. You watch Glenn Maxwell field or bowl or bat — he brings the energy. Dave Warner always brings energy to the contest. It's really nice to have him back."



Fitting in duo is a happy headache: Katich

IANS ■ KOLKATA

Pencilling in David Warner and Steve Smith into the top-order could be a headache, but there is no doubt the pair would only make the playing XI richer as they strive to defend their World Cup crown, feels former batsman Simon Katich.

While Warner has been in the form of his life, finishing the IPL as the highest scorer for Sunrisers Hyderabad, Smith stamped his class in the warm-up games against New Zealand.

"They are both quality players and their records speak for themselves. The hard part is the Australian team has a problem of plenty particularly in the top four."

"Both of them are top four players. There is (Usman) Khawaja, (Aaron) Finch, Shaun Marsh, and the two and these guys will try to fit into four slots. Then there is Maxwell, Stoinis. It's going to be a tough selection call," Katich said.

For the defending champions, the primary selection question centres on how to fit in Aaron Finch, Usman Khawaja and Warner into the top three.

After the World Cup, Australia will take on England in the Ashes. "They will welcome back the experience of Smith and Warner," said Katich when asked about the off-field baggage that comes along with the pair.

"The balance with the batting line-up is what they need to get



right," the 43-year old reiterated.

Katich, who worked closely with India's World Cup bound wicketkeeper batsman Dinesh Karthik during his time as assistant coach of the Kolkata Knight Riders, also threw his weight behind the 33-year old whose selection raised a few eyebrows.

"There is a lot of talk around that No 4 spot, and he is a guy who likes to spend time in the middle. Once he is set, he is very hard to bowl to at the back end. He has got all the tricks and he does have the timing and power to clear the rope," said Katich who has played 56 Tests and 45 ODIs for Australia.

"It's hard to judge a player based on T20 cricket with ODI cricket," he concluded.



'India has best bowling attack'

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Former India opener Lalchand Rajput believes the Virat Kohli-led side has the best bowling attack among the 10 teams to take part in the upcoming World Cup, making it one of the favourites for the 50-over showpiece event.

"I think India has got best bowling attack and we have got a very well balanced team. We have got very good all-rounders and if we look at any other team, India is best equipped for that," Rajput, who is also the mentor of Triumph Knights Mumbai North East, said on Sunday.

"...And if it is a good day our team, it is very difficult to beat them. And Hardik (Pandya) is a great X-factor in the team and (Ravindra) Jadeja who can get going at the lower order, so overall I think we have got a very good chance and I think we should be in the top four," added Rajput, who is now Zimbabwe's coach.

India begin their campaign against South Africa at Southampton on June 5.

Rajput, who was the team's cricket-manager when India lifted the inaugural T20 held in South Africa in 2007, feels that this team has the a heavy top three in Shikhar Dhawan, Rohit Sharma and skipper Kohli.

Asked about the similarities between the World Cup winning 2007 side and the current team, Rajput said, "As I said, there are lot of all-rounders, all-rounders makes lot of difference and I think we have got good all-rounders, the strikers as well, we got a very heavy top three (batsmen) and that's very important."

"Earlier also there was (Virender) Sehwag, Sachin (Tendulkar), now we have got Shikhar Dhawan, Rohit (Sharma) and Virat (Kohli) and then we have got the X-factor, somebody can really bang like a Hardik Pandya, (Mahendra Singh) Dhoni as usual a great finisher, so we have got a very well balanced team," said the former Afghanistan coach.

'I think India has got best bowling attack and we have got a very well balanced team. We have got very good all-rounders and if we look at any other team, India is best equipped for that'
— LALCHAND RAJPUT



AGAINST INDIA IT'S OUR TURN THIS TIME: NGIDI

PTI ■ DUBAI

South African fast bowler Lungi Ngidi wants to set the record straight against India in the upcoming World Cup, saying his team "owes one" to the Virat Kohli-led side following its ODI series loss at home.

Visitors India had sealed a comprehensive 5-1 win over South Africa last year.

The Proteas were missing some key players skipper Faf du Plessis, AB de Villiers and Quinton de Kock during that series and Ngidi believes a full-strength team will be able to return the favour when they clash with India on June 5 at Southampton.

"I believe we owe them one," the 23-year-old said.

"I'm looking forward to India. When they came here, they had a good series against us. So in my mind, I believe we owe them one. It would be a very exciting game for me. I'm sure it will be for all the guys as well."

"They're a great team, don't take that away from them. But when they had a good series here, we were missing a few players. With those guys back, we'll see how it evens out a bit," added the 23-year-old.

South Africa have never won the World Cup and Ngidi said it would be a dream come true if he can help the side to victory.

South Africa will open their World Cup campaign against hosts England and Ngidi said they would want to send a statement to the hot favourites.

"We are well-aware that they are probably under a lot more pressure than we are," said Ngidi, who has picked up 34 ODI wickets at an average of 21.64.

"They are hosts, they're considered to be favourites and that's an advantage for us. We obviously want to win, and if we do, it would send a massive statement."

Retired Bravo named in Windies reserves

PTI ■ ST JOHN'S

Retired Dwayne Bravo has been included in the list of 10 reserve players by Cricket West Indies (CWI) for the ODI World Cup starting in England on May 30.

Bravo, who had announced his retirement last October, and Kieron Pollard, who hasn't played an ODI since October 2016, found a place in the reserve list put up on the website of Cricket West Indies (CWI) on Sunday.

Bravo, who plays for Chennai Super Kings in the Indian Premier League, featured in an ODI way back in October 2014 and his last match for West Indies was a T20I against Pakistan in September 2016.

It was under his captaincy that the West Indies team had returned home midway through a series in India in 2014 after a fallout with the board.

Pollard, on the other hand, last played an ODI in 2016 against Pakistan at Abu Dhabi. He last represented the regional side in a T20I against India in November 2018.



Other players in the list include Sunil Ambris, John Campbell, Jonathan Carter, Roston Chase, Shane Dowrich, Keemo Paul, Khary Pierre and Raymon Reifer.

"The choice of players in the reserve list is to really cover our bases and ensure we have a good balance in the pool of players that can be selected if replacements are required," said Interim Chairman of Selectors Robert Haynes.

"We think the skill set in this pool is strong with a good blend of experience and upcoming young players who can be ready to contribute when required."

The West Indies will have a training camp in Southampton, England from May 19 to 23 to prepare for the World Cup.

The four-day camp, involving the entire 15-man squad, will include an additional warm-up fixture against Australia, which will be played on May 22 at the Ageas Bowl.

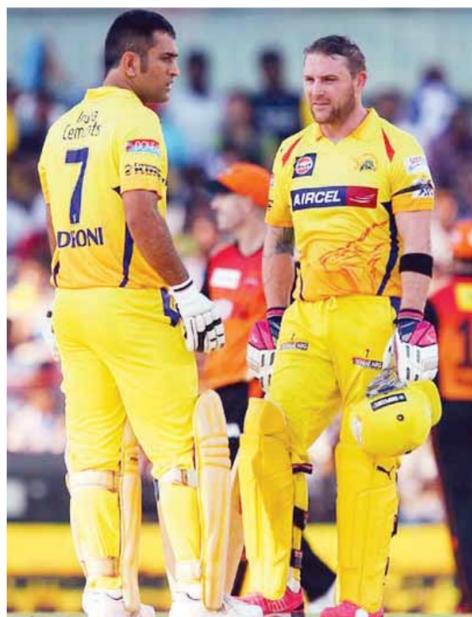
Dhoni puts opposition under pressure: McCullum

IANS ■ MUMBAI

With the ICC Cricket World Cup 2019 just around the corner, all eyes will be on Team India which is seen as the most strong contender and on former captain MS Dhoni who is probably featuring in his last World Cup. Experts of the game believe the stumper will be a major weapon in Captain Virat Kohli's armoury.

Speaking on *Star Sports*, the tournament's official global broadcaster which introduced a new show 'FAB 15' that analyses each player who is part of the Indian World Cup squad going to England, former New Zealand cricketer Brendon McCullum said: "He is invaluable to the Indian team, he has a blueprint in his mind along with an approach to the game. He always puts the opposition under pressure when he arrives at the crease and reads the game perfectly. His fitness has been great, and he has been striking the ball beautifully in the recent past."

On MSD's recent form as a wicketkeeper and batsman, former England batsman Kevin Pietersen said: "His calmness gives him the ability to judge



what's in front of him, it doesn't matter what situation it is, he is just one of those guys who you know would hold onto the ball when thrown at him."

"The best thing about IPL this year was the rebirth of MSD's batting, he took out all the bowling attacks in front of him," he added.

Ashwin set to play for Notts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Senior India off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin will be tuning up for the inaugural World Test Championship against West Indies by playing in English County for Nottinghamshire.

"Yes, Ashwin will be playing for the Notts this season. The CoA had already made it clear that any centrally contracted cricketer will have automatic rights to play County cricket if that player gets an offer. Ashwin's deal is almost final and only the CEO needs to sign his NoC," a senior BCCI functionary privy said.

After Test vice-captain Ajinkya Rahane inked a deal with Hampshire, it is the turn of Ashwin to play six division 1 County games for the Nottinghamshire side that also has England's premier fast bowler Stuart Broad in their ranks.

This will be Ashwin's second stint in English County, having played four games for Worcestershire during the 2017 season.

It was a fruitful season back then for the 32 year old, who got 20 scalps in four games and also scored 214 runs.

The BCCI has been in touch with the various county sides as they want their top long form specialists to play county cricket



every season during June and July.

As of now, Rahane, Ashwin and Cheteshwar Pujara (with Yorkshire on three year contract) are certain to play the county games.

Umesh Yadav and Ishant Sharma may also feature in a few games if things fall in place.

As far as the youngsters are concerned, Prithvi Shaw, Hanuma

Vihari and Mayank Agarwal will be with the India A side in the West Indies as a part of the shadow tour before the senior squad embarks on its journey.

World Test Championship will begin soon after the ICC World Cup with the Ashes in England starting the event, while the Windies tour India, and New Zealand hosts Sri Lanka — both in July.