**OPINION 6** 

**DEMOCRATISING THE** 

COMMONWEALTH

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THREAT TO TAIWAN FROM

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# Saving nature part of our culture: PM Raj revolt: Modi launches International Big Cat Alliance Project, hails Project Tiger's success Pilot flies

ARCHANA JYOTI/PNS ■

India is a country where protecting nature is part of culture... We do not believe in conflict between ecology and economy, but give importance to coexistence between the two," Prime Minister Narendra Modi noted while releasing the much-awaited tiger census data, Status of Tigers in India, 2022, in Mysuru on Sunday.

The census report, released on the silver jubilee of Project Tiger, shows the numbers of the big cats has increased from around 2,967 tigers in 2018 to 3,167 in 2022, up by 6.74 per cent, even as it flags concerns that the local tiger population has become extinct in several including Venkateswara National Park, Tiger Reserves like Kawal, Satkosia and Sahyadri, while stressing the need to avoid negative human-tiger interactions. According to the data, the tiger population was 1,411 in 2006, 1,706 in 2010, 2,226 in 2014.

Population increase is substantial in Shivalik and Gangetic floodplain, followed by central India, north-eastern hills, Brahmaputra flood plains and Sundarbans, while Western Ghats population showed

decline. Attributing the increase in the number of tigers to the country's culture of "protecting the nature", the Prime Minister reiterated that the success of Project Tiger has many dimensions and it has led to an increase in tourist activity, awareness programmes and a reduction in man-animal conflicts in tiger reserves. "The

Avodhya: Maharashtra Chief

Minister and Shiv Sena leader

Eknath Shinde on Sunday said

that of the BJP is the same and

they will unfurl the saffron flag

WILL SUE RAHUL FOR

**DEFAMATION: BISWA** 

Himanta Biswa Sarma on

Sunday said he will file a

defamation case against

Kolkata: A 62-year-old

who is a TMC member.

the Adani group.

all over the State next year. P5

Guwahati: Assam Chief Minister

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi

over a tweet that linked him to

CONG MAN BOMBS HOUSE OF SON FOR BACKING TMC

Congress activist was arrested

in West Bengal's Murshidabad

district on Sunday for allegedly

bombing the house of his son

the ideology of his party and

presence of big cats has made a positive impact on the lives and ecology of the local people everywhere," Modi added.

Modi also launched the "International Big Cat Alliance" (IBCA) and released a booklet "Amrit Kaal Ka Tiger Vision", presenting the vision for tiger conservation in the next 25 years. He said the protection of wildlife is a universal issue, adding that IBCA was India's endeavour for the protection and conservation of seven big cats: Tigers, leopards, cheetahs, lions, snow leopards,

puma and jaguars.
"Cheetahs had become extinct in India decades ago. We brought this magnificent big cat to India from Namibia and South Africa. This is the first successful transcontinental translocation of the big cat," Modi said.

At the inaugural session of the commemoration of 50 years of Project Tiger, the PM also released a ₹50 coin. Around 97 countries can be member states of the IBCA and it will focus on preventing the extinction of big cats due to various threats, including climate change. It will drive benchmarking of big cat conservation practices and create a corpus of funds for conservation of big cats.

Modi, earlier in the day, went on a safari at the Bandipur Tiger Reserve in Karnataka amidst the picturesque surroundings of the towering Western Ghats, as part of programmes to mark 50 years of Project Tiger'.

Dressed in a speckled safari clothing and hat, he reportedly covered about 20 kilometres ly covered about 20 kilometres in an open jeep inside the in an open jeep inside the and diversity," Modi tweeted



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Bomman and Bellie at the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve on Sunday. The tribal couple has devoted their life to caring for orphaned baby elephants, and was the inspiration behind the Oscar 2023 winning documentary short film 'The Elephant Whisperer

tiger reserve, located partly in Gundlupet taluk Chamarajanagar district, and partly in H D Kote and Nanjangud taluks of Mysuru district. "Spent the morning at the scenic Bandipur Tiger Reserve and got a glimpse of

with some pictures of the safari. During his speech at the event, the PM said, "India with just 2.4 per cent of the world's land area, contributes about 8 percent of the known global diversity. It is the largest tiger range country in the world. With nearly 30,000 elephants, we are the largest Asiatic elephant range country in the world. Our rhino population of nearly 3,000 makes us the largest single-horned rhino country in the world."

India is the only country to have Asiatic lions, and their population has increased from around 525 in 2015 to 675 in 2020, he said, adding that the leopard population is up by 60 per cent in a span of four years. "Also, endangered aquatic species have shown improvement by measures like cleaning of rivers and water bedies." of rivers and water bodies.

Modi also visited the Theppakkadu elephant camp at Mudumalai in the hilly Nilgiris district and interacted with Bellie and Bomman, the ele-phant caretakers who featured in an Oscar-winning docu-

The number of tiger reserves has gone up from 28 in 2006 to 51 today. India had 2,967 tigers in 2018, or 7 out of every 10 big cats in the wild in the world, according to the All-India Tiger Estimation Results released in 2019. Madhya Pradesh had the highest number with 526 tigers (308 in 2014), followed by 524 (406) in Karnataka and 442 (340) in Uttarakhand. What initially started with nine tiger reserves now spans 53 such protected

However, experts noted that the growing number of tigers in the country will inevitably lead to more mananimal conflicts as the predators venture out for prey as well due to fighting for territory among them. So far this year, the country has already lost 52 big cats. Last year the mortality figure was 121.

The report itself rings alarm bells as it says that no doubt big cats have occupied new areas in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, "the local tiger population has become extinct in several areas, Sri Venkateswara National Park, including Tiger Reserves like Kawal, Satkosia and Sahyadri."

Continued on Page 2

# at Gehlot

It appears that all is not well in the Rajasthan Congress. With Assembly election months away, factionalism is rearing its head with Congress leader Sachin Pilot opening a new front against Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot.

In a sign of escalating tussle in the party's State unit ahead of Assembly polls, Pilot on Sunday alleged that the Gehlot-led Government failed to investigate cases of alleged corruption during the BJP rule in Rajasthan and announced a day-long fast to press for action.

Without referring to Pilot's demand, the Congress issued a statement in Delhi that Gehlot as Chief Minister has implemented schemes that have benefited people and the party will seek a renewed mandate later

these landmark achievements and the collective efforts of our organisation". The move by former Deputy Chief Minister to open the new front against Gehlot

amid the factional fighting is seen as an attempt to pressure the high command to resolve the leadership issue ahead of the year-end Assembly polls. "No action was taken (by the Gehlot Government) on the

corruption by the previous Vasundhara Raje Government. While in the Opposition,

we promised an inquiry into the mines scam of ₹45,000 crore," Pilot said at a Press meet at his residence here, announcing a hunger strike on Tuesday. He said he wrote to Gehlot

last year on the issue but did not get any answer to his letters. Continued on Page 2



Congress senior leader Sachin Pilot addresses a Press conference at his residence

### **CAPSULE UP** urban polls in 2 New Delhi: An MBA student of Jamia Millia Islamia died by suicide at his rented house in phases on S-F Delhi's Gafoor Nagar SAFFRON FLAGS TO FILL MAHA NEXT YR: SHINDE May 4, 11

PNS LUCKNOW

The elections of 760 urban local bodies in Uttar Pradesh will be held in two phases on May 4 and May 11. The counting of votes will

be taken up on May 13. The State Election Commission (SEC) announced the poll schedule here on Sunday. The State Government and the SEC also issued the poll notification on Sunday.

The model code of conduct

has come into force with immediate effect.

Electronic voting machines will be used for the polling in 17 nagar nigam towns and for the rest of the urban local bodies ballot boxes will be

# SAD leader Inder Atwal joins BJP

PNS NEW DELHI

Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) leader and former MLA Inder Iqbal Singh Atwal joined the BJP here at the party headquarters on Sunday in presence of senior BJP leader and Union Minister Hardeep

former Speaker Charanjit

Singh Atwal. Along with Atwal, his younger brother Jasjeet Singh Atwal and other leaders from

Puniab too joined the BIP. "If at all anyone is implementing the ideas of Babasaheb Ambedkar in a real sense, it is the Government of India under Continued on Page 2 | Prime Minister Narendra



Atwal is the son of Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) leader Inder Iqbal Singh Punjab Atwal being welcomed by Union Minister Hardeep Assembly Speaker and Singh Puri after he joined the BJP, in New Delhi on Lok Sabha Deputy Sunday Ranjan Dimri I Pionee

Modi. I am joining the BJP after being impressed by the work done by its Government at the Centre through various

schemes," said Atwal. Earlier on Saturday, CR Kesavan, great-grandson of India's first Indian Governor-General C Rajagopalachari, joined the BJP.

### Missing girl's body found in neighbour's bag in GreNo

**STAFF REPORTER** ■ NOIDA

The body of a two-year-old girl missing for the last two days in Greater Noida was found in a suitcase in a neighbour's house, according to police on Sunday. Panic gripped the area after the news spread like wild fire with Surajpur Kotwali police, Dial 112 team, ACP and Additional DCP reaching the spot. The forensic team took samples from the spot.

Tension prevails in the village. The Gautam Budh Nagar Police Commissionerate said the girl had gone missing while playing on April 7 in Devla town. The girl's father lodged a complaint at Surajpur Kotwali on April 8, said police. Based on the complaint,

the police registered a missing report and started the investigation

# **3 States impose curbs** as Covid cases surge

 $E^{\mathrm{ven}}$  as India gears up for a 2-day mock drill to take stock of hospital preparedness in which both public and private facilities are expected to participate from Monday amid rising Covid cases, three States-Haryana and Kerala, Puducherry have made wearing the face masks mandatory in public places while others are

advised to observe caution. The Covid cases have been on the rise in the past few days though on Sunday the infections marginally declined to 5,357 on Šunday from 6,155 cases reported on Saturday.

However, the death toll has increased to 5,30,965 with 11 deaths. While three deaths were reported from Gujarat, two were from Himachal Pradesh and one each from Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh besides one reconciled by Kerala, the data updat-



ed at 8 am stated.

The Covid case tally was recorded at 4.47 crore (4,47,56,616). The active cases now comprise 0.07 per cent of the total infections, while the national Covid-19 recovery rate was recorded at 98.74 per cent, the Ministry said.

Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya will visit AIIMS, Jhajjar on Monday to oversee the mock drill. In a statement, he said the Government is prepared to deal with the recent spike in infections.

Continues on Page 2

### IIT Bombay student held for abetting batchmate Darshan Solanki's suicide

PNS MUMBAI

student of IIT Bombay has A student of its zone. tion with the alleged abetment of his batchmate Darshan

Solanki's suicide. The accused, identified as Arman Khatri, and Solanki stayed on the same floor of a stayed on the same noor or a hostel of the IIT Bombay, an official of the Mumbai Police's SIT has said. In a purported suicide note recovered by the SIT on March 3, Solanki had mentioned that "Arman has

killed me", the official said. Solanki, who hailed from Ahmedabad in Gujarat and was a first-year student of the BTech (Chemical), allegedly committed suicide by jumping off the seventh floor of a hostel building located on the IIT campus in suburban Powai on

February 12 this year. Continued on Page 2

# Identify minorities at State-level plea: SC hearing today

PNS NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court is sched-■ uled to hear on Monday a batch of pleas seeking guide-lines for the identification of

minorities at the State level. The pleas include the one filed by advocate Ashwini Upadhyay who has sought directions for framing guidelines for the identification of minorities at the State level, contending that Hindus are in minority in 10 States.

A top court will hear the petitions raising various issues related to the identification of minorities, including challenging the constitutional validity of the National Minority Minority Educational Institutes

On January 17, the top court had expressed displeasure over six States and Union Territories, including Jammu & Kashmir, not submitting their comments to the Centre on the issue of identification of minorities at the State level.

"We fail to appreciate why these States should not respond. We give the last opportunity to the Central Government to obtain their responses failing which we will presume that they have nothing to say," the SC had said.

Commission Act, 1992 and the National Commission for

Continued on Page 2



Prime Minister Narendra Modi lights a candle at Sacred Heart Cathedral Church in Delhi on Sunday on the occasion of Easter. An official video showed the Prime Minister being welcomed at the church and him greeting priests and worshippers on the holy day. Modi later joined them as they offered prayers. He also planted a tree on the premises. After the visit, Modi tweeted, "Today, on the very special occasion of Easter, I had the opportunity to visit the Sacred Heart Cathedral in Delhi. I also met

# Saree Walkathon espouses fitness

round 15,000 women from Around 15,000 women from 15 States across the country participated in the city's first-ever "Saree Walkathon" on Sunday to promoting fitness.

The event, also aimed to promote Surat's textile industry, which is a major contributor to the city's economy, began from Athwa Party Plot and contin-ued via Parle Point, covering a distance of three kilometres before concluding at the starting point. Only women and girls dressed in sarees were allowed to participate.

Municipal Surat Commissioner Shalini Agarwal expressed her gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, stating, "It is a matter of pride that under the leadership of PM Modi, India got the presidency of G20. Saree Walkathon has been organised here today. Around 15,000



women have registered for the event and women from 15 States have come here.

The walkathon was organised by Surat Municipal Corporation and Surat Smart City Development Limited in collaboration with the 'Fit India

Movement', a nationwide campaign to promote fitness and health among citizens. After the 'Saree Walkathon'.

a four-day exhibition with saree artisans from across the country will reportedly be held in

# **Edu that values nationality,** culture is meaningful: Yogi

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has said quality education that values culture, tradition and nationality is alone 'meaningful' emphasising it is crucial for the development of a student's personality", he added.

He was addressing the foundation ceremony 'Abhyudaya' of Maniram-based Delhi Public School (DPS) in Gorakhpur, as the Chief Guest on Sunday "It is the responsibility of the educational institutions to inform students about those schemes of the government that can help them achieve their goals.

He said when the whole world was battered by corona pandemic, India came up with the new National Education Policy (NEP), which opens doors of immense possibilities for institutions like DPS".

The Chief Minister said



Indian scholars have always stressed that knowledge should be acquired from anywhere, adding the centres of education must be like pave the way for all-round development of students and do not only create long queues of unemployed degree and certificate holders.

Chief Minister Adityanath Yogi has also emphasised the importance of sensible use of technology in education, pointing out that though knowledge

in today's world and one must not be its slave.

He said technology should be used as a medium for welfare of the public and nation's growth. The Chief Minister said that DPS pro vice-chair-man Vishal Singh has expressed his desire to open DPS branches in Kushinagar, Maharajganj Siddharthnagar.

'These three are border districts and the government will extend all possible cooperation if good institutions come forward to set up their

branches here," he remarked. He further added Gorakhpur is a big centre of education, medical treatment, employment and business for the people of eastern Uttar Pradesh as well as bordering Bihar and Nepal.

He said that many institutions had been set up near DPS. "Lumbini, the birthplace

"With six seven months left

for the elections, the opponents

can spread an illusion that

there is some collusion.

Therefore, action will have to

be taken soon so that the

Congress workers feel that

there is no difference between

our words and actions," he

statements of Gehlot in the

Assembly and outside in which

he had levelled corruption alle-

gations against the previous

BJP Government. He said he

will observe a day-long fast at

Shaheed Smarak on April 11,

the birth anniversary of

Mahatma Jyotiba Phule who

was from the Saini communi-

at loggerheads over the post of

the Chief Minister ever since

the Congress formed the

Government in Rajasthan in

December 2018. The Opposition BJP said Pilot

should also demand an inves-

tigation into the alleged cor-

ruption during the Congress

Leader of Opposition

Gehlot and Pilot have been

ty to which Gehlot belongs.

He also showed videos of

hour's drive from here. Along with this, a bypass is also being constructed till Kushinagar, so that the distance of Buddha's Mahaparinirvana place will be completed in just half an hour. We are also bringing the project of 'New Gorakhpur' in this area.

The Chief Minister said India is changing under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, adding a new India emerged in the last nine years under his Governance.

Rajendra Rathore said in a

statement that the infighting

between the Chief Minister

and his former Deputy has

increased to such an extent that

now Pilot will sit on hunger

strike against his own

Congress leaders supported

Pilot's demand, others claimed

it would inflict great harm to

the party in the upcoming

election, particularly when it is

working on a strategy to repeat

general secretary Jairam

Ramesh said the Congress

Government in Rajasthan with

Gehlot as CM has implement-

ed a large number of schemes

and taken many new initiatives

that have impacted the people

leadership position in gover-

nance in our country. The

Bharat Jodo Yatra in Rajasthan

was an outstanding success

made possible by the dedica-

tion and determination of the

party organisation in the State," he said. "Later in the year, the

Congress will seek a renewed

"This has given the State a

In a statement, Congress

its Government in the State.

While a section of

Government.

profoundly.

"The ability of a leader is tested amid challenging times. During Covid epidemic, when whole world was in a state of inertia and confusion, India took up the challenge and presented a model before the world. The sensitive government made arrangements for providing free tests, free treatment, free vaccines and free ration for over 80 crore people,"

Raj revolt: Pilot flies at Gehlot

# Amul not 'entering' K'taka, tweets Malviya

### Cong running misinformation campaign against BJP

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Sunday accused the Congress of unleashing a "misinformation campaign over dairy cooperative Amul's presence in Karnataka and asserted that it has done far more than the opposition party to strengthen the Karnataka Milk Federation and its products are sold under the brand name Nandini.

"Amul is NOT entering Karnataka. Both Amul and KMF sell their products across quick-commerce platforms. KMF's turnover went up by (Rs) 10,000 crore after BJP came to power in 2019. In 2022, turnover stood at (Rs) 25,000 crore, of which (Rs) 20,000 crore went back to farmers of Karnataka," BJP IT department headed Amit Malviya tweeted. His tweets came after Congress leader

mandate from the people on

the strength of these landmark

achievements and the collective

efforts of our organisation,"

section of party MLAs rebelled

openly, demanding a leadership

change in the State. It led to a

one-month-long political crisis

that ended after assurance by

the party high command to

look into the issues raised by

Minister said Congress leader

Sonia Gandhi had given him

the responsibility of the party

in the state and he, along with

other leaders, had opposed the

wrong policies of the then BJP

government led by Vasundhara

responsible Opposition had raised the issue of corruption

because of which the BJP was

voted out of power. He said the

State Government has a "zero

tolerance" policy for corruption

and to further strengthen it,

transparent and effective action

should have been taken. "Now six-seven months are left for

the election, the opponents

He said the Congress as a

The former Deputy Chief

In July 2020, Pilot and a

Ramesh said.

Amul Milk

Siddaramaiah took a swipe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi following Amul's announcement of its plans to sell milk and curd in the Bengaluru market. With Modi visiting the state on Sunday, the former Karnataka chief minister asked if the purpose of his trip was "to loot the state".

Malviya said, "There is a reason why India doesn't TRUST Congress. They LIE! Latest being the misinformation campaign that Karnataka Milk Federation, which owns Nandini, is going to merge with Amul." The BJP has done far more to strengthen KMF and make Nandini a global brand. KMF is the nation's second

largest milk cooperative and has depots in Maharashtra, Goa, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Tamil Nadu. The BJP leader said, "15 per cent of KMF's total sales is outside Karnataka. Nandini is exported to Singapore, UAE and many other countries. Amul and KMF are NOT merging." He also claimed that Amul, owned by Gujarat Milk Marketing Federation, is not entering Karnataka and that both Amul and KMF sell their products across quick-com-

merce platforms. He added, "Under the BJP, Karnataka is a milk surplus state. Dairy farmers are doing very well. Congress, which is shedding crocodile tears for brand Nandini, opposed the anti-cow slaughter bill, approved of our nandinis being slaughtered. BJP plans to make Nandini a bigger brand.'

IIT Bombay student held for abetting batchmate Darshan Solanki's suicide

From Page 1

The Mumbai Police's SIT recently received a report from a handwriting expert, which said the handwriting in the purported suicide note recovered from the institute's hostel matched the writing samples of the deceased, confirming that it was written by him, an official earlier said.

Maharashtra The Government had formed the SIT to conduct a probe into Solanki's death.

His family had claimed that he faced discrimination at the premier institute for belonging to a Scheduled Caste (SC) community and suspected foul play in his death.

However, the inquiry committee set up by the IITB had ruled out caste-based discrimination and hinted at deteriorating academic performance as a possible cause of

# **3 States impose curbs** as Covid cases surge

ICU beds, oxygen supply, and other critical care arrangements are in place. On a possible fourth wave of the Covid pandemic, the Health Minister in an interview with a news channel said "There's a need to be alert. The last Covid mutation was the BF.7 sub-variant of Omicron, and now XBB 1.16 sub-variant is causing the surge in infections, he said, adding that in the Ministry's experience, sub-variants are not too dangerous.'

With an uptick in the trend of Covid cases, scientists said XBB.1.16 is the Covid-19 variant responsible for the present surge. However, scientists say people in India have developed hybrid immunity (due to vaccination and natural infection). Therefore, the present Covid-19 variants will not cause a lot of hospitalisation. According to the latest INSACOG bulletin, the newly emerged recombinant coronavirus variant XBB.1.16 has been observed in different parts of the country, accounting for 38.2 per cent of the infection till date.

However, not taking the chance, the Haryana Government has made wearing face masks mandatory in public places where there is a gathering of more than 100 people, Government offices, malls, etc as a precautionary measure. Masks have been made mandatory in Ĥaryana's schools too.

The State's health department has asked the public to adopt Covid appropriate behaviour. The district administrations and panchayats have been instructed to ensure that it is implemented in all parts of the State.

Similarly, Kerala has also made masks mandatory for pregnant women, the elderly and those with lifestyle diseases. Kerala Health Minister Veena George, after holding a high-level meeting to evaluate the Covid-19 situation in the State, said Covidrelated deaths are mostly reported in people above 60 years and those with lifestyle diseases such as diabetes. George also directed the health department to ensure oxygen availability and said a special meeting of private hospitals will be held soon.

The Puducherry administration too has made wearing masks compulsory in public places with immediate effect. Staff working in hospitals, hotels, restaurants, liquor shops, hospitality and entertainment sectors, government offices and commercial establishments should compulsorily wear masks, a statement said.

tory, it issued a 'high-priority' directive, instructing officials to ensure the screening of international passengers at all airports. All samples which test positive for Covid should be sent for genome sequencing, said the government order.

In Delhi, hospitals, polyclinics and dispensaries in Delhi have been instructed by health department to scale up test-

PUBLIC NOTICE

My client Mr. Madhav Kumar Mishra

Government's tenure.

tiger habitats is a positive development, there is a need to pay attention and act quickly in these areas to reverse the trend of extinction of small populations and avoid negative human-tiger interactions," says the report. It has called for seri-

Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh. The small and genetically unique population of tigers in Simlipal is a priority for conservation. "Wildlife habitats in the region face various threats, including habitat

ous conservation efforts to help encroachment, illegal hunting, reached their carrying capacity, ulated cattle grazing, excessive harvesting of non-timber forest products, forest fires, mining, and expanding infrastructure," as per the report. SP Yadav, head of Project Tigers admitted that "there are several tiger reserves where the tiger population has

### ibility that the Congress had built as the Opposition party has to be maintained. "Gehlot and I had made allegations together. How will we know it is true until there is

can spread confusion that there

is some collusion," Pilot said.

He said he never called for any

malicious action but the cred-

out in the investigation that no one was guilty, we will accept that Gehlot and I were liars. "But until a case is registered, how will people believe

that the allegations made by us are true or false," Pilot said. He said it was one of the

suggestions he had given to the party high command. Pilot has been often,

though in a subtle manner, demanding the party leadership to take action on issues raised by him. Following the revolt by Pilot and 18 other MLAs in 2020, Gehlot used terms like "gaddar", "nakara", "nikamma" for his former deputy and accused him of being involved with the BIP leaders in a conspiracy to topple the Congress Government. A few days before Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Iodo Yatra entered Rajasthan from Madhya Pradesh, Gehlot had again targeted Pilot, calling him "gaddar" in an interview with a news channel in November last year.

a fair investigation. If it comes

Pilot responded to it, say-

ing it was not his upbringing to use such language. Pilot's demand to order a probe and take action in the alleged mining scam during the previous BJP government and other corruption allegations was supported by State Cabinet Minister Pratap Singh Khachariyawas.

Khachariyawas was the Jaipur Congress president when Pilot was the PCC chief and used to be at the forefront with him in raising the corruption issue. He was in the Pilot camp but during Pilot's revolt against Gehlot in 2020, Khachariyawas switched to the Gehlot camp.

to the chief minister and say

He said whatever Pilot has pointed out is right, and action against corruption should be taken. "Pilot is an asset for the party and Rahul Gandhi has said this... I would also speak

that we should take action," Khachariyawas said. Another Congress leader said Pilot's announcement was also a "kind of revolt" against Gehlot and this would certainly harm

"At a time when the

Congress Government is leaving no stone unturned to retain power in the upcoming elections, Pilot's announcement to sit on 'Anshan' will definitely send a wrong message among the masses. This should be avoided," the Congress leader Pilot supporters said issues

raised by the leader before the party high command have not been addressed so far, which has left him disappointed. They said the party workers wanted Pilot to be the Chief Minister.

"Pilot had a major contribution in bringing Congress to power in 2018.

As the PCC chief, he worked hard to revive the party and because of him, the party got a majority of seats in eastern Rajasthan but he was not given the rightful share in the government," a Pilot support-

# Saving nature part of our culture: PM

Bandhavgarh, Tadoba Andheri, Ranathambhore and Panna. At the same time there are other tiger reserves which are low density and have potential to accommodate more tigers. We need to actively manage our

on April 21 and for the second phase on April 26. State Election Commissioner Manoj Kumar said here in a Press conference that in the first phase polling will be held in 37 districts on May 4 and in 38 dis-

The poll notifications for the first phase of urban local bodies elections will be issued by the district magistrates on Monday (April 10) and on April 16 for the second phase of the polls. The last date for filing nomination papers for the first phase polls is April 17 and

The elections will be held for 14,684 posts which includes mayors, chairpersons of nagar palika parishads and chairpersons of nagar panchayats and ward members. UP has 17 mayors of nagar nigams or municipal corporations with 1,420 corporators, 199 chairpersons of nagar palika parishads and 5,327 ward members, 5,444 chairpersons of nagar panchayats and 7,176

the last elections held in 2017,

96.33 lakh and the number of increased by 2,361. He said district magistrates and district police chiefs had been directed to identify the sensitive and hyper sensitive polling booths and make arrangements for the web casting and videography of

polling. He said UP Police and Provincial Armed Constabulary would be deployed for maintaining law and order and if the need arose, the State Election Commission would seek central paramilitary forces from

the state government. Kumar said the district officials had been asked to identify the anti-social elements and people with criminal background and send them to jail by cancelling their bail. The urban local bodies elections were delayed by over a month as the reservation of seats for the Other Backward Classes was challenged in the

Allahabad High Court. The High Court in its verdict had directed the state government to hold the elections without reservation of seats for the OBCs. The state government had challenged the order in the Supreme Court and also appointed a dedicated commission for conducting a rapid survey to work out the number of seats to be reserved for the OBCs. The apex court had stayed the High Court order and later approved the report of the dedicated commission for the OBC reservations and gave green signal for holding the elections.

This issue has again been challenged in the High Court. The High Court had directed

son of Mr. BimalKishor Mishra intends to purchase Freehold Residential Appartment No. OC-CD-A10-09-904, Notice is hereby given to the public measuring 1727 Sq.Ft, in Group Housing Colony known as IREO The Corridors, Sector-67A, Gurgaon, that the sale deed dated 01/04/1998 Haryana from Mrs.Priya Berry wife of Mr.Rohit Berry (registered owner of the said property) who had lost/misplaced the Original Allotment Offer Letter dated 07.08.2013, Origina Buyer's Agreement dated 25.03.2021 and Payment Receipts issued in the name of Mrs.Priya Berry and my client is mortgaging the same to HDFC Ltd, If anybody including Bank, Financial Institutions, persons, relative has any claim, right, interest whatsoever in the said property shall inform within 15 days to the undersigned with documentary evidence. In the event of no response to this notice, than our client shall presume that title of the said property is unencumbered and

Karnail Singh, Advocate, K-8, Basement, Jungpura Extension New Delhi Contact No. 9811163363 & 9953683363

executed Mrs. Kamla Devi acting through attorney Mrs. Manorma Devi in favour of Mr. O.P. Sharma son of Sh. Nanak Sharan R/o 197, Sant Nagar, New Delhi-110065 in respect of property No. 176 plot no. 143-A Venkataramani, appearing for measuring 133 sq. yds. out of khasra the Centre, had referred to the no. 189/150 Sant Nagar East of Kailash, New Delhi - 110065 has been lost/misplaced. All person are hereby informed not to deal or carry out any transaction with anyone on the basis of the said missing document. If anyone has already carried out or being carried out kindly inform the undersigned in writing on the below mentioned address within 7 days from

197, Sant Nagar, New Delhi-110065

# Devender Kumar Sharma

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भोपाल, दिनांक 05.04.2023

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**Municipal Corporation Bhopal** 

# Identify minorities at...

On November 22 last year,

In its status report, the

Ministry has said that the "last reminder" was sent on

December 21 to these six States

and UTs which have so far not

From Page 1

Telangana — are still awaited. Attorney General R Venkataramani, appearing for the Centre told the top court that it has held consultative meetings with all state govstatus report filed by the Ministry of Minority Affairs ernments, UTs and other which said that 24 States and stakeholders on the issue of six UTs have so far furnished identification of minorities at their comments on the issue. the state level and 14 states have furnished their views so

The status report, filed in the apex court on January 11, 2023, said that comments from six States and UTs -Arunachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Jharkhand, Lakshadweep, Rajasthan and

given their comments. It said in one of the petitions, "the petitioner has prayed to put restrain on the Government of India from placing reliance/acting upon and implementing the Sachar Committee report, submitted on November 17, 2006, for running/initiating any scheme/s in favour of Muslim community or for any other purpose".

The status report said that a petition with the same subject matter is pending adjudication before the apex court. The Ministry has said that

apart from state governments

and UTs, it held consultative

meetings with other stake-

holders including the Ministry

of Home Affairs, the Ministry

of Law and Justice, the

National Commission for Minorities (NCM) and the Educational Minority Institutions (NCMEI). "All the ministries/depart-

ments have sent their views/comments," said the status report which also annexed the copy of replies received from these ministries or departments. The ministry said 24 State

Governments, including Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Punjab, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Odisha, Sikkim, Uttarakhand, Nagaland and Himachal Pradesh, have furnished their views. Others are Haryana,

Gujarat, Goa, West Bengal, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and six Union Territories namely Ladakh, Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu, Chandigarh, NCT of Delhi, Andaman & Nicobar islands and

Puducherry. During the earlier hearing. Upadhyay had told the bench

that he has challenged the

validity of section 2(f) of the

National Commission for

Minority Education Institution

2(f) of the Act, which empowers the Centre to identify and National Commission for notify minority communities in India, as "manifestly arbitrary, irrational, and offending", his plea has alleged that it gives unbridled power to the Centre. Upadhyay had earlier referred to a 2007 judgment of

Ministry of Education, the Act, 2004. Terming section

the Allahabad High Court on a plea seeking the quashing of the May 2004 order passed by Uttar Pradesh recognising 67 madrassas for grant-in-aid. He had said the high court verdict of 2007 has not been challenged. "Can minority status be decided district-wise?

How can that be done," the

bench had earlier observed

during the hearing. On May 10 last year, the apex court expressed displeasure over the Centre's shifting stand on the issue of identification of minorities, including Hindus, at the state level and directed it to hold consultations with the States within three months.

In supersession of its earlier stand, the Centre had told the apex court that the power to notify minorities is vested with the Union Government and any decision about the issue will be taken after discussion with states and other stakeholders.

# **UP urban polls in 2...**

from 7 am to 6 pm. Symbols for the first phase will be allotted tricts on May 11 in the second phase.

The divisions covered in the first phase are Saharanpur, Moradabad, Agra, Jhansi, Lucknow, Prayagraj, Devipatan, Gorakhpur and Varanasi. The divisions covered in the second phase are Meerut, Bareilly, Aligarh, Kanpur, Chitrakoot, Ayodhya, Basti, Azamgarh and Mirzapur.

April 24 for the second phase.

ward members. Kumar said compared to

the number of urban local bodies had increased by 107 and number of chairpersons and ward members had also increased by 2,024. In 2017, there were 653 urban local bodies. He said the number of new voters had increased by

the state government to put the report of the dedicated commission on its website. The matter is listed for hearing on Monday. Although every possible care and caution has been taken to avoid errors or omissions, this publication is being sold on the condition and understanding that information given in this publication is merely for reference and must not be taken as having authority of or binding in any way on the writers, editors, publishers, and printers and sellers who do not owe any responsibility for any

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### Jamia's MBA student, 25, kills himself

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Ahailing from Bihar died allegedly by suicide at his rented accommodation in southeast Delhi's Gafoor Nagar area police said on Sunday.

Ebaduddin, a native of Sultangani in Patna, allegedly hanged himself from the ceiling of his flat, the police said, adding his family has been informed. The incident came to light on Saturday when neighbours called the police.

No suicide note has been found and the reason behind his death is being ascertained, they said. "No foul play has been found or suspected. The body has been kept at AIIMS mourtary. He was studying at Jamia and lived alone at Gafoor Nagar," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Southeast) Rajesh

# LG taking credit for city Govt's work to clean Yamuna: Saurabh

Delhi Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj on Sunday accused Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena of taking credit for the work being done by the city government to reduce the pollution load in the Yamuna

Earlier in the day, Saxena visited the supplementary drain in Wazirabad and said, "We are not working for credit but to give clean Yamuna to the peo-

Addressing a press conference here, Bharadwaj said Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal launched a six-point action plan to clean the river in November 2021 and it "had all the points that the LG is now talking about".

"We prepared plans for



cleaning the drains and allocated money for it. The LG goes to the field with the media and tells them that he has got it done. He has been blowing his own trumpet," the minister alleged.
"Such acts do not suit the

LG's post. He should focus on his work and improve the law

Bharadwaj said the LG conducted a field visit and showed the media the technology being used to treat the wastewater in the supplementary drain but "the work was started by the Delhi government". "His job is not to visit drains but various police stations that come under him.

Delhi. He should visit them. But he visits drains where work is going on and claims credit for the work being done by the government," Bharadwaj said.
"Chief Minister Arvind

Kejriwal has never raised the issue but this has been happening," he added.

The minister further

alleged that Saxena did not have the constitutional power to allocate money for projects and only the Delhi government could do that.

He also shared a list of various initiatives taken by the Delhi government to clean the

Citing tweets by former water minister Satyendar Jain, Bharadwaj claimed these works had started even before Saxena

# 'Some remain illiterate despite being educated in IIT': LG's dig at Kejriwal

In a dig at Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, Delhi Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena on Sunday said that one should not be boastful about one's degree and some people remain illiterate despite being educated in IIT.

Saxena was asked about Kejriwal's comments targeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi over his educational qualifications and questioning the genuineness of his degrees. "I have heard the com-

ments made by the honourable chief minister in the Assembly. One should never be boastful about their degree. "A degree is only a receipt

of education but real education lies in your knowledge and behaviour. "I have seen the kind



last few days. It has been proved how some people remain illiterate despite being educated in IIT," the LG said.

The Delhi chief minister, who has studied at IIT, and his Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) have launched a fresh attack on the issue since the Gujarat High Court recently quashed a seven-year-old order of the Commission (CIC) that had asked the Gujarat University to provide information on Modi's

The HC also imposed a fine of Rs 25,000 on the AAP chief, who was the RTI appli-

cant in the matter. Reacting to Saxena's remarks, AAP leader and Delhi Education Minister Atishi accused him of raising questions on prestigious institutions like IITs and said the LG and BIP leaders should also show

their degrees. "LG sahab is raising questions on those IITs, in whose name Indian students become CEOs of big companies and make the nation proud.

"Those who have to hide their degrees will raise questions over the degrees of others. I would request LG sir to show his degree too and also ask the other BJP leaders to show their degrees," she said at

# Making good citizens more important than making children score good marks: Atishi

Making good citizens is more important than making children just score good marks, Delhi Education Minister Atishi said on Sunday.

She was interacting with teachers of Delhi government schools at the closing ceremony of a five-day training programme by State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) to understand objectives of the 'Happiness Curriculum'.

Atishi said schools have started focussing on making children a better professional through learning the content of

subjects.
"Today's school education focuses on making children a better professional through learning the content of the subjects. But rarely any attention is paid to skills that are required in everyday life.



Students are not prepared properly for everyday challenges despite spending 14-15 years in studying," Atishi said.

"Making good citizens is more important than making children just score good marks," she said, highlighting Arvind Kejriwal government's vision for Delhi's education

Speaking about the 'Happiness Curriculum', the minister said the programme has been successful and students have been trained to become a good human beings.

The curriculum was introduced in Delhi government schools about five years ago, and I am pleased to see

### Delhi mayoral poll on April 26: Minister

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The mayoral poll in Delhi will be held on April 26, city minister Saurabh Bharadwaj said on Sunday.

Incumbent Shelly Oberoi,

an AAP councillor who was elected on February 22, will continue to hold charge till her successor is elected. She had defeated the BJP's Rekha Gupta by a margin of 34 votes.

Oberoi polled 150 votes, while Gupta received 116 votes out of the total 266 votes

"The fresh mayoral polls will be held on April 26," Bharadwaj told PTI on Sunday. Sources said the Aam Aadmi Party is likely to repeat Oberoi and deputy mayor Aaley Mohammad Iqbal as its

The city gets a new mayor after the end of financial year.

candidates for the respective

# HC to hear Sharjeel Imam's plea for bail in sedition case

The Delhi High Court will on Monday hear a plea by JNU student Sharjeel Imam seeking bail in connection with a 2020 riots case involving allegations of sedition.

The case, which assails a January 24, 2022 order by the trial court dismissing Imam's bail application in the matter, is listed for hearing before a bench of Justices Siddharth Mridul and Talwant Singh. On January 30, the court

had sought to know the stand of the city police as to whether Imam's plea for bail could be remanded back to the trial court for adjudication as there was no ground mentioned in the lower court's order rejecting the relief. The bench had said since section 124A (sedition) of the Indian Penal Code has been kept in abeyance following the directions of the Supreme Court, it will have to



mind the other sections framed against Imam. Last year, the trial court had framed charges against Imam under sections 124A (sedition), 153A (promoting

enmity), 153B (imputations prejudicial to national integration), 505 (statements conducing to public mischief) of the IPC and section 13 (punishment for unlawful activities) of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act.

As per the prosecution,

speeches at Jamia Millia Islamia on December 13, 2019 and at the Aligarh Muslim University on December 16, 2019, where he threatened to cut off Assam and the rest of the northeast

In his petition before the high court, Imam has said the trial court "failed to recognise" that pursuant to the directions of the top court, the basis for dismissal of his earlier bail plea, i.E. The charge of sedition no longer existed and therefore relief must be granted to him.

# Capital logs 699 fresh Covid cases, positivity 21.15%

Delhi on Sunday logged 699 fresh Covid-19 cases with a positivity rate of 21.15 per cent, according to data shared by the city government's health

Four people suffering from COVID-19 died in the city. However, the health bulletin stated that COVID-19 was the primary cause of death in just With the fresh cases,

Delhi's COVID-19 tally has risen to 20,14,637. The death toll stands at 26,540, the bulletin stated. Delhi saw 535 COVID-19

cases on Saturday with a positivity rate of 23.05 per cent.
The capital logged 733 cases -- the highest in more than seven months -- on Friday

ty rate had touched the 30-per According to the bulletin, 3,305 COVID-19 tests were conducted in Delhi on with a positivity rate of 19.93

On Thursday, 606 cases

were recorded with a positivi-

ty rate of 16.98 per cent, and

On Wednesday, Delhi added 509 cases with a posi-

tivity rate of 26.54 per cent, the

highest in nearly 15 months. In

January last year, the positivi-

### 9 years after FIR, court convicts ex-accountant for insulting woman's modesty

lmost nine years after an AFIR was lodged in the matter, a court here has convicted a man for the offence of using abusive words to insult the modesty of a woman, saying it was evident from the record that "outrageous and demeaning words" were uttered by the accused in the office, intending to be heard by everyone and also to insult the victim's mod-

Metropolitan Magistrate Vijayshree Rathore was hearing the case against Mahesh Kumar Panwar, a former accountant of a private firm who was accused of insulting the modesty of the complainant, an interior designer, by "uttering outra-geous words" on April 3, 2014. "The fact is that the

accused had uttered the words ... Which any prudent person would generally not utter to any female. The above words are ... Outrageous and demeaning to the dignity of the lady and it is also evident from the record that such words were uttered by the accused in the office, intending to be heard by everyone present there and also to insult the modesty of the vic-



tim," the magistrate said. "I hold that the prosecution has successfully proved its case

against the accused, Mahesh Kumar Panwar, beyond all reasonable doubts under section 509 (word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman) of the Indian Penal Code. The accused is accordingly convicted," she added in her order passed

The arguments on sentencing will be heard on April

Regarding what constituted an insult to a woman's modesty, the magistrate said, "It is common knowledge that any words, spoken or sung, picture or figure exhibited, which suggests lewd thoughts, is immoral and insulting to female modesty unless the woman is a con-

### Foundation stone of Kirari Bus depot laid to park 140 buses



**STAFF REPORTER** NEW DELHI

elhi Transport minister Kailash Gahlot on Sunday laid the foundation stone of the Kirari Bus depot, which is being constructed to house 140 buses.

The depot will be spread across 5.4 acres and will be equipped with all modern facilities, including Electric Vehicle (EV) charging facilities, according to an official statement.

This is part of the Delhi government's plan to construct nine new bus depots across the city to house the continuously increased number of buses, it said. The Delhi government will spend Rs 160 crore to build the new bus depot at Kirari. This amount includes nearly Rs 40 crore paid to the Delhi Development Authority (DDA)

for the acquisition of the land, Rs 40 crore to be paid to the Public Works Department (PWD) for the construction of the depot and nearly Rs 80 crore for the electrification of the depot.

Speaking at an event, Gahlot said, "In 2015, Delhi had 5,842 buses which have now increased to 7,379 in 2023. Under the visionary leadership of Chief Minister Arvind Keiriwal, Delhi was ranked among the top 35 cities with the best public transport in the

world." With most of the land in Delhi being under DDA, it is the commitment of the Kejriwal government to find land parcels for depots to house more than 10,000 buses in the city in the coming times, he

# 2 arrested for killing electrician in Alipur

Two men were arrested for old electrician in outer Delhi's Alipur over a monetary dispute, police said on Sunday. The accused have been

identified as Shiva Bhardwaj and Sofiyan, they said. Police on Saturday received

information that a man named Bunty, who had slept at the Suryadev Rajwara Farms on the GT Karnal Road during the night, was not responding, they said. The body of Bunty, a resi-

dent of Bulandshahar in Uttar Pradesh, was found on a sofa, Deputy Commissioner of Police (outer north) Ravi Kumar Singh had said.

No injuries were seen on the body but the victim's mobile phone was found missing from the spot, he said.

During the enquiry, it was revealed that Bunty had come to the venue after taking his dinner at about 9:30 pm, a senior police officer said.

Using technical surveillance, manual information and scanning footage from more than 20 CCTV cameras, the suspects were identified, the

The police team managed



victim's village, he said.

During interrogation, Bhardwaj disclosed that he, along with his friend Sofiyan, from Meerut, had murdered Bunty, he said.

Subsequently, another raid was conducted at midnight at Meerut and Sofiyan was nabbed, the DCP said.

Bhardwaj further told police that he had stolen Bunty's ATM card a month ago and withdrew money from it. When the victim came to know about it, he asked for his money back and threatened of telling people from their native village about the incident, he added

Following this, Bhardwaj conspired to eliminate Bunty with the help of Sofiyan, whom he met a few months back, he

On Friday, the duo travelled to Alipur, entered the farmhouse from the backside by scaling the wall and smothered Bunty to death in his sleep, DCP Singh said.

### **30-yr-old pregnant** woman shot at by neighbour days ago succumbs

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Ahad suffered a miscarriage after allegedly being shot at by her neighbour in outer Delhi's Siraspur died at a city hospital, police here said on Sunday.

Ranju was allegedly shot at by her neighbour, identified as Harish, on April 3 after she objected to loud music being played during a function at his home, they said.

'The woman's condition was stated to be critical. She was undergoing treatment at a city hospital. We received information from the hospital on Saturday that she had succumbed to her injuries," a senior police officer said.

Following her death, the police have added Section 302 (murder) to the FIR, he said.

Harish and his friend Amit whose gun was used to commit the crime, have been arrested the police said. The police received a PCR call regarding a firing incident in Siraspur on April 3. After reaching the spot, it was found that Ranju had been admitted to Max Hospital in Shalimar Bagh. Doctors at the hospital told the police that she had suffered a gunshot injury in her neck and was unfit to give a statement.

### Delhi Tourism dept to organise bougainvillea flower show

**STAFF REPORTER** ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Tourism depart-■ ment will organise its first three-day bougainvillea flower show at Garden of Five Senses in Saket from April 14, officials said on Sunday.

Bougainvillaea flowers of different varieties will be on display during the show, the tourism department said, adding they organises various fairs and festivals to promote tourism in the national capital.

The Delhi tourism department will organise the bougainvillea flower show from April 14 to 16 at Garden of Five Senses in south Delhi's Saket, according to an official state-ment. Delhi Development Authority (DDA), Central Public Works Department (CPWD), NDMC, MCD, University of Delhi, Netaji Subhash University, and Delhi PWD are the major participants in this bougainvillea

flower show. Bougainvillea is a tropical tufted flowering vine, which is often used in gardens, walls, hedges etc. But its flowers bloom profusely in summer, although under ideal conditions, it can bloom throughout the year, the department said.

# SC to hear today city Govt's plea challenging nomination of members to MCD by LG

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

he Supreme Court is sched-Luled to hear on Monday a plea of the Delhi government to quash the nomination of 10 members to the Municipal Corporation of Delhi by the Lieutenant Governor.

S Narasimha and J B Pardiwala will hear the plea. On March 29, the top court had sought a response from the office of lieutenant governor on

Y Chandrachud and Justices P

A bench of Chief Justice D

In the petition filed through lawyer Shadan Farasat, the Arvind Kejriwal government has challenged the decision of the LG to nominate the members allegedly without the "aid and advice" of the elected dispensation and its council of

In February, the top court had ensured the holding of poll for mayor and deputy mayor by making it clear that the 10 nominated members of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi cannot vote in the mayoral election.

Besides seeking quashing the nominations, the plea has sought a direction to the LG office to "nominate members to the MCD under Section 3(3)(b)(i) of the Delhi



Municipal Corporation Act.. In accordance with the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers".

"This petition has been filed by the elected government of the NCT of Delhi seeking inter alia quashing of orders dated..., and consequent gazette

Lieutenant Governor has illegally appointed 10 (ten) nominated members to the Municipal Corporation of Delhi on his own initiative, and not on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers," the plea It said neither the DMC

notifications ..., whereby the

(Delhi Municipal Commission) Act nor any other provision of law says anywhere that such nomination is to be made by the administrator in his dis-"This is the first time, such a nomination has been made

by the LG completely bypass-

ing the elected government,

thereby arrogating to an unelected office a power that belongs to the duly elected government," it said.

Referring to the constitutional scheme pertaining to Delhi, it said that the word 'administrator' must necessarily be read as the administrator, who is LG here, acting on the aid and advice of the council of ministers.

The petition underlined that according to the provision of the Delhi Municipal Corporation Act, apart from the elected councillors, the MCD also had to include 10 people, above 25 years of age, having special knowledge or

experience in municipal administration, which were to be nominated by the adminis-

"It is pertinent to note that neither the section (of the MCD Act) nor any other provision of law says anywhere that such nomination is to be made by the Administrator in his discretion," the petition claimed.

It said it was a settled position of constitutional law for the last 50 years that the powers conferred on a nominal and un-elected head of state were to be exercised only under the "aid and advice" of the council of ministers, but for some "exceptional spheres" where

they were expressly required by law to act in their discretion.

"Accordingly, under the constitutional scheme, the LG is bound to act on the aid and advice of the council of ministers and, if there is a difference of opinion, he may refer the matter to the President and under no circumstances does he have any independent decision-making power," the petition claimed

It said the only two courses of action open to the LG were to either accept the proposed names duly recommended by the elected government, or to differ with the proposal, and refer the same to

the President. "It was not open to him at all to make nominations on his

own initiative, completely circumventing the elected gov-ernment. As such, the nominations made by the LG are ultra vires and illegal, and are consequently liable to be quashed," it alleged. The petition claimed no

proposal was allowed to originate from the elected government and the file pertaining to the nomination of members was circulated to the departmental minister only on January 5, after nominations had already been made and

# **BJP** holds meet to finalise first list of picks for Karnataka polls

The BJP on Sunday held its Central Election Committee (CEC) meeting here at the BJP headquarters to finalise the first list of candidates for the Karnataka Assembly elections slated for

According to sources, the list may not be announced immediately and may "take longer time" and "could be out on Monday."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended the important meet to approve the first lot of nominees for total 224 Assembly seats in the Southern state, currently run by the BJP.

Minister B S Yediyurappa (BSY) who is a member of the parliamentary Board and the CEC was present in the meet.

Other top Karnataka leaders who were present and vetted the candidates list for the crucial assembly polls included state CM Basavaraj Bommai, Union Minister Pralhad Joshi and state chief Nalin Kumar Kateel.



BJP chief JP Nadda, Union Home Minister BJP Amit Shah and defence minister Rajnath Singh were seated with the Prime Minister in the meet which commenced post 6 PM and closely scrutinised the candidates which were discussed a day before by the top leaders at the residence of Nadda with

Shah in attendence. There could be "major changes" in the Karnataka list of candidates with a number of

sitting MLA could be dropped and the younger nominees given preference, sources said.

Yediyurappa, though, had earlier said that most of the sitting MLAs would be alloted tickets by the party.

The former CM wants his younger son BY Vijayendra to contest from Shikaripura, the seat held by the BSY. The party, however, seeks BSY's son to take on the Congress leader

and ex-CM Siddaramaiah from

key to winning in the elections in which JDS is also in the fray, making the contest a triangu-

The Karnataka Assembly

poll is "evenly poised" and

hence ticket selection would be

Varuna assembly seat.

BJP has set an ambitious target of 150 seats in the Assembly poll For the May 10 elections,

the counting of votes will take place on May 13.

# Congress points to Adani Group's alleged 'China links'

 $F_{
m government,\ the\ Congress}^{
m iring\ a\ fresh\ salvo\ at\ the}$ on Sunday pointed to Adani Group's alleged China links and asked why the conglomerate is still being permitted to operate ports in India.

Attacking the Centre, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh cited a media report which claimed that the government denied security clearance in 2022 to a consortium of APM Terminals Management and Taiwan's Wan Hai Lines after agencies discovered a connection between a Wan Hai director and a Chinese firm.

This blocked the consortium's bid to operate a container handling terminal at the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority, Ramesh said in a statement, pointing out that it is a government policy to prevent Chinese firms and entities with Chinese connections from operating ports and terminals



'This raises fresh questions about the Adani Group's China links. As we have repeat edly pointed out in our Hum Adani ke Hain Kaun (HAHK) series of questions to PM Narendra Modi, Chinese citizen Chang Chung-Ling is closely associated with the Adani Group," Ramesh alleged.

"His son owns PMC Projects, a firm that has constructed ports, terminals, rail lines, power lines and other infrastructure assets for the Adani Group. The Adani Group and PMC were alleged to be involved in a Rs 5,500 crore power equipment overinvoicing scam by the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence," he claimed.

### President Murmu taking sortie on Sukhoi-30 fighter jet has inspired every Indian: Modi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi hailed President Droupadi Murmu on Sunday after she undertook a sortie on a Sukhoi-30 MKI fighter aircraft, saying she has displayed exceptional leadership time and again.

Murmu took a sortie on the Sukhoi-30 MKI fighter jet at Assam's Tezpur Air Force Station on Saturday.

Tagging a tweet by Murmu on undertaking the sortie, Modi said, "This has inspired every Indian! Rashtrapati Ji has time and again shown exceptional leadership."

Also tagging a tweet on the conclusion of the "Yoga Mahotsav", Modi said with less than 75 days to go for the International Yoga Day, 2023, he would urge people to mark it with great enthusiasm and also practise yoga on a regular

Responding to a tweet on his visit to Tamil Nadu on Saturday, the prime minister said, "As I said in my speech yesterday -- I love the Tamil



language, Tamil culture and the vibe of Chennai.'

In another tweet, he said the projects launched on Saturday will have a very positive impact on Tamil Nadu's growth.

Tagging a tweet by former Indian cricketer Laxman Sivaramakrishnan hailing the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government at the Centre for the inauguration of a new integrated terminal building (phase-1) at the Chennai International Airport, Modi said the new terminal building will significantly contribute to the growth story of Chennai and Tamil Nadu.

Responding to a Twitter user who lauded the Make in India logo, Modi said people across the country's length and breadth, including him, share that sentiment.

# Jaishankar to begin 6-day visit to Uganda, Mozambique today

 $E_{\text{Jaishankar will embark on}}^{\text{xternal Affairs Minister S}}$ a six-day visit to Uganda and Mozambique beginning Monday to explore ways to expand India's ties with the two

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), announcing the visit, said on Sunday that Jaishankar's first destination would be Uganda.

"The external affairs minister will visit Uganda from April 10-12. During the visit, he is expected to hold delegation level talks with his counterpart Foreign Minister of Uganda General Jeje Odongo, call on leadership of the country and meet other ministers," the MEA

It said Jaishankar will also inaugurate a transit campus of the National Forensic Science University (NFSU) in Jinja.

An MoU between India and Uganda on setting up of the first ever campus of NFSU outside India, is likely to be signed during the visit.



The MEA said Jaishankar will also participate in the ground-breaking ceremony of a solar powered water supply project in Uganda. He will also address the

trade and business community of Uganda and have an interaction with the Indian

The MEA said Jaishankar will visit Mozambique from April 13 to 15, adding it will be the first-ever visit by an external affairs minister of India to

During the visit he will call on top leadership and also cochair the fifth session of the Joint Commission Meeting with Mozambican Foreign Minister Veronica Macamo.

Jaishankar is also expected to meet several other ministers and representatives of the Assembly of Mozambique.

He will also interact with the Indian diaspora based in Mozam bique.

"The external affairs minister's visit to Uganda and Mozambique is expected to further strengthen India's strong bilateral relations with these two countries," the MEA

# CBI books joint general manager of IRCON for bribery

PNS NEW DELHI

The CBI has booked a joint I general manager of Írcon International Ltd, a public sector undertaking (PSU) under the Railway Ministry, in a

The Joint General Manager of IRCON posted at Vangaon in Palghar district of Maharashtra, Nitin Bokade has been booked under the relevant section of the Prevention of Corruption Act for allegedly demanding undue advantage from the complainant Ganesh Kajale, Authorised Representative of Mumbai

based private firm Arkoma. In his complaint dated April 5, Kajale said that Arkoma was awarded the tender for construction work of Sub Depot building and Railway Quarters in Vangaon village in Palghar. The said construction work started in August 2022.

The accused Boakde post-



ed at Vangaon was monitoring the construction work of

As per the completion of the work, the complainant's company was supposed to get the payments for the running bills from Bokade's office.

In March, 2023, Bokade called the complainant and said if he wants the bills to be cleared smoothly in time, he needs to pay Rs 70,000 as bribe. However, the complainant did not pay much attention to his demand and neglected it, reads the FIR.

However, on March 20, the complainant received a notice from IRCON regarding the defects in construction work and instructed to resolve the issue within seven days.

# Over 2K rules, laws scrapped by Centre in last 9 yrs for ease of governance: Jitendra Singh

Union Minister Jitendra Singh has said more than 2,000 rules and laws were scrapped by the Narendra Modi government in the past nine years for ease of governance and ease of doing business, according to an official statement issued on Sunday.

He said previous governments found "comfort in a status quoist approach", but Prime Minister Modi has demonstrated the courage and conviction to do away with such rules, many of which persisted since the time of British Raj and caused inconvenience to the citizens.

The ultimate aim of good governance is to bring ease of living to the citizens, said the Minister of State for Personnel.

He was speaking as the chief guest after presenting the Yashraj Bharati Samman (YBS) awards at a 'gratitude ceremony' organised by the Yashraj Research Foundation (YRF) here on Saturday night.

He said the three cate-



have been presented, namely innovation in healthcare, transforming people's lives and ethical governance, have always been the priority of the Modi government. The minister recalled that

soon after the government came to power in May 2014, within two to three months, the practice of getting cer-tificates attested by gazetted officers was done away with.

"Thereafter within a year, Prime Minister spoke from the ramparts of Red Fort about the abolition of interview in job recruitment so that a level playing field could be provided. In pension, face recognition technology was introduced so that the elder citizens did not have to go

through the tedious process of getting a life certificate," Singh Most of the functioning

was converted online and in order to bring in transparency, accountability and citizen participation, the human interface was reduced to the bare minimum, he said.

Talking about public grievance redressal, Singh said that the grievance redressal mechanism was shifted to Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS) -- an online platform-- as a result of which about 20 lakh grievances are received every year in comparison to just 2 lakhs every year before this government came in because this government followed a policy of time bound redressal and gained the confidence of the people.
In the field of healthcare,

the minister said that use of technology and telemedicine during Covid pandemic has shown how innovation can deliver healthcare in the remote and rural areas.

### Chandrappa named working president of Karnataka Cong

Days ahead of the Karnataka Assembly polls, the Congress on Sunday appointed B N Chandrappa as working president of its State unit.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge has appointed Chandrappa as working president in the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee, a party statement

The Karnataka unit is headed by D K Shivakumar. The appointment of Chandrappa comes after Karnataka Congress working president R Dhruvanarayana passed away last month.

Congress has so far declared 166 candidates for the polls, including one for the Karnataka Sarvodaya Party.

While the party had declared 124 candidates in



its first list, it declared another 42 candidates in the second list. The party's Central Election Committee has met at least four times and held detailed deliberations on all the candidates for the total 224 assembly seats, but is yet to declare 58 more candi-

The Congress is seeking to wrest power from the BJP in Karnataka, the only southern state where the saffron party is in power. The elections to the assembly will be held on May 10 and results will be declared on May 13.

# 'Politics of convenience': Sibal hits back at dynasty remarks

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal on Sunday accused the BJP of indulging in "politics of convenience", as he hit back at Prime Minister Narendra Modi over his remarks on dynasty in Telangana and cited past instances of the party aligning with dynastic political families in var-

Prime Minister Modi took a swipe at Bharat Rashtra Samithi chief and Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao and urged the state government to not allow any hindrance in the works related to the development. In a tweet, Sibal said, "PM Takes swipe at

KCR: Says corruption and dynasty go hand in hand. Why did BJP join: 1) Punjab (Akalis) 2) Andhra (Jagan) 3) Haryana (Chautalas) 4) J&K (Muftis) 5) Maharashtra (Thackerays)...Not dynasties when BJP joined them!"

"It's called politics of convenience!" the former Union minister said.

In another tweet, Sibal said, "PM: Takes a swipe at KCR, says dynasty and corruption go hand in hand. BJP makes allegations of cor-



ruption against AAP. No dynasty there. Need not be dynasty to allege corruption.

You say BJP not dynasty. Is BJP corrupt?' he said.

In his remarks in Telangana, Modi said his government has attacked the real root of corruption of dynastic forces who want to keep their control over every system.

"Should we fight against corruption or not? Should we fight against the corrupt or not? Should the country be liberated from corruption or not? Should legal steps be taken against the corrupt however big or not. Should the law be allowed to work against the corrupt or not," he asked the gathering.

### Broccoli decreases risk of obesity, diabetes, heart disease: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

If you or your kids are not big fans of broccoli, then you must read this study that has found why this edible green plant in the cabbage family is called a superfood and that its consumption decreases the risk of obesity, diabetes, heart disease and overall mortality. As if this is not enough. A team of researchers has now found that it contains certain molecules that bind to a receptor within mice and help to protect the lining of the small intestine, thereby inhibiting the development of disease.

"We all know that broccoli is good for us, but why? What happens in the body when we eat broccoli?" said Gary Perdew, H. Thomas and Dorothy Willits Hallowell Chair in Agricultural Sciences, Penn State. "Our research is helping to uncover the mechanisms for how broccoli and other foods benefit health in mice and likely humans, as well. It provides strong evidence that cruciferous vegetables, such as broccoli, cabbage, and Brussels sprouts should be part of a normal healthy diet."

According to Perdew, the wall of the small intestine allows beneficial water and nutrients to pass into the body but prevents food particles and bacteria that could cause harm. Certain cells that line the intestine — including ente-



rocytes, which absorb water and nutrients; goblet cells, which secrete a protective layer of mucus on the intestinal wall; and Paneth cells, which secrete lysosomes that contain digestive enzymes - help to modulate this activity and keep a healthy balance.

In their study, which was published in the journal Laboratory Investigation, Perdew and his colleagues found that molecules in broccoli, called aryl hydrocarbon receptor ligands, bind to aryl hydrocarbon receptor (AHR), which is a type of protein called a transcription factor. This binding, they found, initiates a variety of activities that affect the functions of intestinal

# Dive feet first, not head, in shallow water, doctors warn swimmers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

As swimming becomes more prevalent in these warmer months in a swimming pool or natural water ponds, doctors suggest just diving feet first. The water should be 12 to 14 feet in depth. For the head-first jump into shallow water can break the neck instantly and lead to a spinal cord injury that can leave the diver quadriplegic, warn the doctors.

Take the case of a 22-yearold software engineer in Pune who succumbed to head and spine injuries last Sunday, nearly 10 days after he dived head-

first into a shallow swimming pool. According to police, he had suffered severe head and spinal injuries in the fatal dive into the 3.5-foot-deep swimming pool.

However, Pearl, a 26-yearold girl who also took headfirst jump into a swimming pool and suffered spinal injuries has been lucky enough to not only survive but has also partially recovered from her paralytic state and is making good progress with an advanced rehabilitation program.

Her doctor, Dr Gururaj Sangondimath, Senior Consultant & Unit Chief, Senior Minimally Invasive and Spinal



Deformity Robotic Surgeon, spine surgery says: "Due to a Indian Spinal Injuries Centre lack of awareness, people dive (ISIC), Delhi who performed into shallow waters headfirst

and hit the floor or bed, and break their necks, many of them become completely paralyzed under the neck. 'We perform spinal fusion

and fixation surgery that usually takes around one-and-ahalf to three hours. The recuperation period can be anywhere between one-and-a-half to six months."

Over the years, ISIC has been witnessing several such cases of spine injuries, especially in the age group of 15-35 years. A lot of people dive in water canals in India, particularly young boys, and become quadriplegic for life for not ranges from 1.2 to 21%." adhering to the diving norms. Also, if someone dives in a

Spine & Rehabilitation Centre at Sri Balaji Action Medical Institute, notes that younger people are risk-takers. Unfortunately, they are also the main victims of spinal injuries leading to paralysis due to head-first diving into shallow waters in a pool or river.

Dr HS Chhabra, Chief of

Shallow water is defined as water with a maximum depth of 1.5 meters. A study by Blanksby finds that 89% of injuries occur in water less than five feet deep. The incidence of spinal cord injury after diving or falling into shallow water

among younger age groups who are very fond of recre-

they may not be aware of the depth. People should dive only in water that is deep enough to support their size, weight, and skill level. Finally, one should never dive into the shallow end of the pool and always dive feet first, first time every day so that the exact depth gets known.. The doctors say that the

water body for the first time

rehabilitation process in such cases is very crucial to regain physical and mental strength so that the patients get back into society.

Dr Gururaj emphasizes creating awareness, especially

"jump leg first' in unknown waters of the pools, ponds, canals, and wells. Otherwise, there will always be a risk of getting injured in the neck. Shallow water diving has to be done very carefully after assessing the depth of the water, he According to the Mayo Clinic, 10% of all spinal cord

ational swimming, and said,

injuries are caused by sporting and recreational activities. A large proportion of these recreation injuries come from routine swimming activities such as diving in shallow water or slipping and falling outside of

# TMC's 1 cr letters to PM drive Pak intruder shot dead, over 'no' MNREGA funds to WB 2 arrested in Poonch

SAUGAR SENGUPTA KOLKATA

 $D_{ ext{unique method of protest}}^{ ext{ays after announcing a}}$  against what the ruling Trinamool Congress called BJP Government's vindictive attitude towards Bengal by stopping the release of MNREGA funds by writing one crore letters to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the TMC workers on Sunday embarked on getting such letters written and signed by the members of the rural community.

Such a scheme was earlier announced by TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee from a meeting at Alipurduar in North Bengal. The Diamond Harbour MP had told the rally on Saturday that "one crore letters from the people of Bengal will be sent to the Prime Minister demanding our share of funds. I will take all these letters to the Central government in Delhi. We will then see how the Centre ignores us and the letters sent by the peo-

Roundly conceding that



there had indeed been embezzlement of funds in various central schemes he said,"we don't mind government taking action against the corrupt ... let the ED and CBI throw the corrupt who embezzled funds put behind the bar but you must give the people their dues."

While experts called it a good move to take the campaign to the real sufferers of the blockage of fund the rural poor ahead of the coming panchayat elections, Opposition BJP backed the central decision to block the funds alleging the State had repeatedly failed to furnish the accounts for earlier remittances. According to the aunt of Abhishek Banerjee

sources the State government had to cancel about 15 lakh job cards using which crores had been withdrawn and gone to fake accounts. Ditto in the case of Prime Minister Awaas Yojana schemes, BJP leaders alleged.

"First let the government furnish the action taken report which they did not ... let them account for the money earlier sent to them then the central government will send the money," said BJP leader Dilip Ghosh adding the money thus meant for the poor people were actually going into the pockets of the TMC bigwigs.

Bengal Chief Minister and

Centre for blocking State's funds. Saying that she had done a mistake by supporting the GST initiative she earlier said,"They take crores of rupees in tax as GST but do not return our lawful dues ... how will we be able to pay our starving

The central government had blocked more than Rs 1 lakh crore that was due to the State and about Rs 8,000 crore particularly meant for the MNREGA and other poor-oriented schemes she said. The Left did the balancing act attacking TMC for gobbling away funds but demanding at same time from central government funds to save the people from starv-

The people must be saved first and so their dues must be given to them ... let the government identify some other way to pay the poor their dues .. they have worked for all these months and their money should be paid to them," CPI(M) leader

Chakrabarty said.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

Pakistani intruder was shot A Pakistani miruder made Adead along the line of control (LOC) in Poonch district of Jammu & Kashmir while two others were captured alive by Indian Army in the wee hours on Sunday.

The trio, according to the Indian army authorities, belonged to the narco terror group. During the search operations the army also recovered three bags with fourteen packets of Narcotics weighing approximately 17 kgs, Pakistan currency, some documents, According to a Jammu

based Defence spokesperson,"during the preliminary questioning of the two intruders who have been apprehended alive, all three intruders are residents of Maidan Mohalla, village of Pakistan Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (POJK) Chanjal". Sharing details of the operation, the Defence spokesman said, "at around 10.15 p.m late Saturday night



alert troops deployed on the Line of Control in the Poonch Sector observed a suspicious movement of a group (three individuals) close to the Line of Control. At around midnight the group crossed the Line of Control and started infiltrating on their own side".

The Indian army troops deployed on the fence challenged the infiltrators. As the intruders started to run away, they were engaged by fire, in which one intruder was shot dead, while the other two managed to run into the jungle tak-ing advantage of the thick

foliage and rocky outcrop. Defence spokesman said, in order to prevent their escape across the line of control the entire area was immediately cordoned off. "At first light fresh search

operations were launched wherein the dead body of one intruder was recovered at the encounter site.

As the search progressed in the jungle, one intruder was apprehended alive in wounded condition. In the subsequent search the third intruder was also apprehended alive", Defence spokesman added.

### Cong activist bombs son's house for backing TMC

62-year-old Congress Aactivist was arrested in West Bengal's Murshidabad district on Sunday for alleged-ly bombing the house of his son who is a TMC member, police said. Zahiruddin Sheikh hurled crude bombs at the house of his son Anisur Sheikh (30), who is the TMC youth wing president of Raninagar 2 panchayat area, on Saturday night, they said.

The relationship between Zahiruddin and Anisur soured after he and his wife Sefali Seikh joined the TMC during the 2018 panchayat elections. Shefali was made the panchayat pradhan by the TMC, following which she and her husband started living separately from her in-laws, locals

No one was injured in the attack as Anisur and Sefali manage to escape but panic gripped the area, police said. Anisur alleged that his father attacked his house to prevent him from fighting the next panchayat polls.

# Saffron flag will be unfurled all over Maha in 2024: Shinde

Maharashtra Chief Minister and Shiv Sena leader Eknath Shinde on Sunday said the ideology of his party and that of the BJP is the same and they will unfurl the saffron flag all over the state next year. "Our party's role is clear.

The Shiv Sena has an alliance with the BJP. Our ideology, which is Hindutva, is the same We will go to our state with new energy from Ayodhya and serve the people. In 2024, the Shiv Sena and the BJP's 'bhagva' (saffron flag) will be unfurled in the entire state," he said while addressing a press conference here. The Lok



Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde along with his Cabinet Ministers performs rituals at Sharayu river, in Ayodhya, on Sunday

Sabha election as well as the are due next year. Shinde is on Maharashtra Assembly polls his maiden visit to Ayodhya

ister in June last year. He has been accompanied to the temple town in Uttar Pradesh by thousands of Shiv Sainiks.

Without naming anyone, the Maharashtra chief minister said there are a few people who are "allergic" to Hindutva, because if it (Hindutva) reaches every household in the country, their"shop" will be closed.

"In the evening, there will be 'aarti' on the banks of the Sarayu river and there is a programme of taking the blessings of seers. Many people are a little allergic to this. I will say only one thing - the Ram mandir and Ayodhya are not political BJP. It is a matter of our faith and belief," he said. Shinde said now that the construction work of the Ram temple has started, Ayodhya will witness rapid progress and lakhs of people will benefit from it.

"Lakhs of people are happy with our Ayodhya visit. But there are some who are troubled because they are intentionally allergic to Hindutva. They intentionally insulted Hindutva and spread confusion

Hinduism is a way of life. There is tolerance in it, it takes everyone along and does not insult anyone. Many are scared that if Hindutva reaches every household, every mind, then

their political shop will be closed. Due to this fear, after independence, many people made such attempts," the Shiv Sena leader said.
He said that in 2014, when

government based on the idea of Hindutva was installed in the country under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the awakening towards Hindutva, its honour and pride increased.

"Earlier, Balasaheb Thackeray had thought about Ayodhya. He used to say, 'garv se kaho hum Hindu hai' (say it with pride that we are Hindus). This slogan was coined by Balasaheb Thackeray and the world knows about it

### Tribal women made crawl for joining BJP

# Adhikari seeks NCST action in Balurghat case

**SAUGAR SENGUPTA** KOLKATA

Bengal Opposition Leader Suvendu Adhikari has urged the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes to probe the alleged persecution of some tribal women in Balurghat district of North Bengal by subjecting them to making Dandawat Parikrama (circumambulate in a prostrate position) or simply crawling as a penance for joining the BJP.

Apparently comparing the two incidents of three tribal women being subjected to do the crawling penance and President Droupadi Murmu —herself a member of the Scheduled Tribe — taking sorties in one of the world's fiercest fighter aircraft almost in identical times, Adhikari demanded NCST action into the mat-

The Bengal BJP leader on Sunday tweeted, "President Droupadi Murmu took a sortie in Sukhoi 30 MKI Fighter Jet at the Tezpur Air Force Station in Assam ... Martina Kisku, Shiuli Mardi, Thakran Soren & Malati Murmu performed ... Atonement Ritual of Dandavat" for 1 km at Balurghat ... as punishment by TMC goons for joining BJP. I would

Chairperson of (NCST) Harsh Chouhan to take note of this unfortunate incident and take the most stringent action possible against the perpetrators under The Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act,

Three tribal women,

Thakran Soren and Malati Murmu, of Tapan Gofanagar, Tapan, in Balurghat district had allegedly quit the Trinamool Congress to join the BJP on Friday but soon the local toughies of the Bengal ruling party forced them to return to the TMC by handing them

out an exemplary punishment. "They were forced to do a Dandavat Parikrama for about a km till the TMC district party office while people around watched," on Sunday said Majumdar who along with national BJP vice president Dilip Ghosh would on Monday lead a protest rally demanding police action against the guilty at Balurghat.

Majumdar said that prior to the incident 200 TMC members led by Kisku, Mardi and Soren had switched over to the BJP appealing"all tribal communities across the nation to protest against the TMC as they

are anti-tribal. According to the BJP leaders fear of TMC was so palpable in the area that not only did the people watched silently to whatever took place but also the victims rubbed their noses on the road and later told the

media persons that they had done so after realizing

### Election-related seizure close to ₹100 crore in 10 days of Karnataka poll announcement

**PTI** ■ BENGALURU

The election related seizure in Karnataka on Sunday touched close to Rs 100 crore, the office of the Chief Electoral

According to the daily bulletin, the CEO said Rs 99.18 crore worth seizure were made ever since the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) came into effect in the State from March 29. In just 10 days of MCC coming into effect, Rs 36.8 crore cash, Rs 15.46 crore worth freebies, 5.2 lakh litres of liquor valued at Rs 30 crore, Rs 15 crore worth gold and Rs 2.5 crore worth silver ornaments have been seized, the bulletin

On Sunday, the Static Surveillance Team seized Rs 34 lakh cash in Yadgir district and 56 televisions worth Rs 21 lakh in Nelamangala constituency in Bengaluru Rural district. The Excise department has seized 54,282 litres of liquor worth Rs 1.62 crore.

A sailor dies during

operation on board

# Are you now trying to steal Nandini from us? Siddaramaiah to Centre

offensive against the ruling BJP, Amul. after Amul announced its plans Bengaluru market, senior Congress leader Siddaramaiah on Sunday tweeted asking Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was visiting Karnataka on Sunday, whether the purpose of his visit was"to loot the State".

Alleging that the State's milk production had been affected since the day Union Cooperative Minister Amit Shah spoke about the possibility of merging the Karnataka Milk Federation (KMF) with Amul, the former Chief Minister in a series of tweets asked the Prime Minister what his role had been in this.

Amul's move is being seen by many, especially Opposition parties, as a threat to KMF's famed dairy brand 'Nandini'. They also see it as an attempt to trample upon KMF, amid a nar-

Bengaluru: Continuing his rative around its merger with

"Is your purpose of coming Karnataka or to loot from Karnataka? You have already stolen banks, ports and airports from Kannadigas. Are you now trying to steal Nandini (KMF)

from us?" Siddaramaiah asked "It was Gujarat's Baroda Bank that subsumed our Vijaya Bank. Ports and Airports were handed over to Gujarat's Adani. Now, Amul from Gujarat is planning to eat our KMF (Nandini)

Narendra Modi, Are we the enemies for Gujaratis?"

Instead of giving 2 crore jobs a year to youths, Narendra Modi took away jobs of Kannadigas from our banks, ports and airports, he further said, adding that"Now Karnataka BJP wants to hurt the prospects of our farmers by giving KMF to Amul." PTI ing KMF to Amul."

# **BJP** tries to woo **Vokkaliga in K'taka**

**PTI** ■ BENGALURU

As Vokkaligas (15 per cent of the population) are considered to be the second major community of Karnataka after Lingayats (17 per cent), the would be a shift in their voting stance in the May ten Assembly election as the ruling BJP has aggressively tried to woo them.

One can gauge the role Vokkaligas play in Karnataka politics from the fact that it has given seven Chief Ministers to Karnataka since independence and a PM. As a retired IAS officer puts it, this is a community which has rich political awareness

"Of the 17 Chief Ministers Karnataka had, seven were from the Vokkaliga community. K Chengalaraya Reddy, Kengal Hanumanthaiah and Kadidal Manjappa, the first three chief ministers of the state, were from the Vokkaliga Community," the officer said. He added that H D Deve

Gowda, a Vokkaliga, became the first person from Karnataka to occupy the post of Prime Minister. The Old Mysuru region, the community's stronghold, comprises Ramanagara, Mandya, Kodagu, Kolar, Tumakuru and Hassan districts.

The region has 58 assembly constituencies, which is more than one-fourth of the total number of seats in the 224-member House. JD(S) represented 24 seats, Congress 18 and BJP 15 in this region in the current assembly.

This apart, the community is present in sizeable numbers in Bengaluru Urban district comprising 28 con-stituencies, Bengaluru Rural district (four constituencies), and Chikkaballapura (eight constituencies)

A political activist Raje claimed that Gowda Vokkaligas dominate in all the 27 out of 28 assembly constituencies of Bengaluru urban district barring Anekal.

### Fire in Nagaland's Dimapur, 1 dead, 900 left homeless

**Dimapur:** A massive fire broke out at the Burma Camp in Nagaland's Dimapur district on Sunday, killing a woman and leaving around 900 people homeless, an official said. The fire broke out at

around 12 pm, he said. Around 260 kutcha houses, made of thatch, were gutted in the blaze, he said. A woman, who was in her 70s, was charred to death in the fire, and many others were injured. Several fire services personnel were also injured in the blaze as a large number of gas cylinders exploded, the official said.

Around 900 people, mostly labourers, were left homeless by the fire, he said, adding that the cause of the blaze is yet to be ascertained.Some people were also missing, locals said. Fire tenders from

Chumukedima, Dimapur and Central fire stations were deployed to fight the blaze, which could be brought under control after three hours, the official said.

# Martina Kisku, Shiuli Mardi,

# **100 trucks flagged off**



Mumbai: A 23-year-old sailor succumbed to injuries on board Indian Naval Brahmaputra during operations at sea on Saturday. Identifying the deceased sailor as Mohit, a defence spokesperson said here on Sunday that he used to work as a hull mechanic on INS Brahmaputra.

"In an unfortunate accident at sea on April 8 23, Mohit, Hull Artificer 4, aged 23 years, succumbed to injuries onboard INS Brahmaputra during operations at sea," the defence spokesperson said.. Meanwhile, the Indian Navy has ordered a Board of Inquiry into the cause of death of its sailor.

### 5 more arrested in **Bihar Sharif communal** violence incident that they were spreading hatred

PTI PATNA

 $B^{\rm ihar\ Police\ on\ Sunday}_{\rm arrested\ five\ more\ people\ in}$ connection with its probe into the communal violence that erupted in Bihar Sharif town in Nalanda district during the Ram Navami festivities. Fresh arrests have been made by the Economic Offences Unit (EOU) of the Bihar Police. Two more accused,

involved in some other cases and also wanted by the EOU in Nalanda communal clashes cases, surrendered before the police on Sunday. The EOU will now seek their custody. EOU sleuths are also probing association, if any, of the surrendered accused with some particular outfit. "Investigations by the EOU have revealed that the accused had created a WhatsApp group and through

among people against different communities. Accused were also instigating people to indulge in spreading fake video messages against different communities. The EOU has also recovered five mobile phones from their possession that are being further scrutinized", JS Gangwar, Additional Director General (ADG) of Bihar Police (Headquarters), told reporters here on Sunday. The EOU is also conduct-

ing it's separate investigation to nab those who were indulging in spreading fake videos and messages by using different social media platforms during communal tensions in Nalanda and Sasaram, he said, adding the EOU registered it's first FIR against 15 people on April 8. All five arrested persons are named accused.

# BJP slams Rajasthan Govt over crimes against women **PTI** ■ JAIPUR

 $B^{\mathrm{JP}}$  leader Satish Poonia on Sunday mounted an offensive on the Congress government in Rajasthan on the issue of law and order and alleged that the State was top in crimes against women. Poonia, the deputy leader

of opposition in the Rajasthan Assembly, on Sunday reached Pachpadra in Barmer district with a BJP delegation to meet family members of the Dalit woman who was allegedly set afire after being raped. She died while undergoing treatment in Jodhpur.
"The rape and murder of a

Dalit woman in Pachpadra is shocking. As a result of the state's failed law-and-order situation, women today are insecure and the spirits of criminals are high," Poonia told reporters. The 30-year-old woman was allegedly raped on Thursday by



Barmer district's Balotra and set her on fire. The woman was cremated

on Sunday after a post-mortem. Poonia said Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, in order to save his chair, has forgotten the people of the state.

He said in a statement that the morale of criminals in Rajasthan has been high since the arrival of the Gehlot government and crimes against women have hit a peak. Cases of rape and violence are con-

Congress rule, he alleged. The BJP leader claimed that entire state is troubled by increase in crimes due to the"broken" lawand-order situation. Poonia also claimed that the Congress government has weakened the morale of the police.

Only three per cent of Rajasthan's budget is spent on policing and there is a shortage of manpower and other resources, he alleged and added that Gehlot did not take any step to strengthen the police.

# to facilitate migratory tribal population in J&K

Sunday flagged off a fleet of 100 trucks for transportation of livestock and migratory tribal families from various districts to the highland pastures in Jammu and Kashmir, an official said here.

The trucks have been deployed both on the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway and the Mughal Road, an alternative link connecting the twin border districts of Poonch and Rajouri in Jammu with south Kashmir's Shopian, the official said.

He said the transportation system was put in place by the tribal affairs department to reduce the travel time from 20-30 days on foot to 1-2 days, besides ensuring smooth traffic management on the strategic roads. Secretary, Tribal Affairs Department, Shahid Iqbal Choudhary said

Sinha has committed to provide transportation support and transit facilities to the migratory tribal population. "Directions were also issued by Chief Secretary

Arun Kumar Mehta to ensure

saturation in transport facilities and to cover 100 per cent of the migratory population on the national highway and Mughal road," he said. Choudhary said required funds are also being released in favour of the J&K Road

Transport Corporation for procurement of trucks to provide transportation facilities to the migratory tribal families. The finance department has advised tribal affairs department to avail services of JKRTC for movement of transhumant tribal population till a formal policy in this regard is framed by government. PTI www.dailypioneer.com

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PAPER WITH PASSION-

# China getting exposed

Beijing's role in spreading Covid is so great that even Tedros, whom it made WHO chief, is unable to defend it

Inhen the going gets tough, moles feel the heat. With the suspicion about China's role in spreading the novel coronavirus that caused the Covid pandemic becoming clearer, even World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has to say things he would never have said. Last week, he was forced to announce: "Without full access to the information that China has, ... all hypotheses are on the table." Including that of its lab origin. It needs to be mentioned here that for more than a year since Covid-19 was accepted as a pandemic, the Tedros' WHO and a vicious coterie of 'experts' had made the natural origin of the coronavirus almost a dogma; questioning that was considered as a cardinal sin, and those who dared to challenge the natural origin thesis were treated as outcastes—maligned by the 'experts,' silenced

by the liberal establishment, and de-platformed by Big Tech. Needless to say, the dogma suited Beijing. An article by the prominent science journalist Nicholar Wade in the May 5, 2021, edition of the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists demolished the natural origin orthodoxy. When some conservative politicians and commentators in the United States expressed their suspicion about the virus being lab-made, they were derided and denounced by Left-liberals for being-well, you can guess that—'xenophobic', 'racist', 'bigoted', etc. Conservatives all over the world are described in such terms, but that's another story.

Tedros, who owes his position to the machinations of Beijing, did his best (or worst) to serve the

interests of the Chinese Communist Party. Friendlier analysis of his words and actions in the early weeks of Covid-19 is that he was unpardonably careless; a more critical examination would make him an accomplice of the CCP's. As late as January 14, 2020, his WHO tweeted, "Preliminary investigations conducted by the Chinese authorities have found no clear evidence of human-to-human transmission of the novel #coronavirus (2019-nCoV) identified in #Wuhan, #China." This was despite the fact—a detailed report by the Associated Press later proved that—that scientists at the WHO and elsewhere suspected not just human-to-human transmission of the coronavirus but also its high lethality. But, in spite of the CCP's malicious intentions and Tedros' spinelessness, the truth about the deadly virus is coming out. Maria Van Kerkhove, WHO's technical lead, talked to journalists about the new data on Thursday. The data, she said, "collected in January and February 2020, more than three years ago" should have been shared long ago. Tedros had to say this. Unsurprisingly, this has attracted China's ire; its health officials slammed the WHO for its "offensive and disrespectful" comments. China Center for Disease Control and Prevention Director Shen Hongbing accused the WHO of "attempting to smear China." What Shen and his political masters fail to realise is that their lies are getting exposed. Even their moles are unable to stem the tide.



A tiger at Van Vihar National Park in Bhopal. The Project Tiger has completed 50 years

# Democratising the Commonwealth



SANJAY DALMIA

The Commonwealth represents one-third of humanity that needs urgent reform in its leadership to make it democratic



**DEVELOPING A** 

COMMONWEALTH

AND UPDATING

ITS MISSION TO

**ALLOW ITS** 

MEMBERS TO

FLOURISH AS

IN TODAY'S

THAT WILL

**EQUAL PARTNERS** 

**ENVIRONMENT IS** 

A TALL ORDER

**REQUIRE NEW** 

**LEADERSHIP** 

**POSITIVE** 

he world order has changed since the inception of the Commonwealth. It is the right time to take a fresh look into the working of the commonwealth and there is an urgent need to make a paradigm shift in its total approach towards the member countries. Recently in succeeding his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, King Charles III not only takes over the leadership of the United Kingdom but also that of the Commonwealth. A British dynasty as head of the Commonwealth, a free association of 56 independent self-governing nations, has always been an embarrassment to democratic values and leaders. In today's democratic world, hereditary leadership has no place in any organization. A monarch from the United Kingdom can't be the head of the Commonwealth. As a confederation of states based on shared history and values, the Commonwealth represents one-third of humanity. All members share one common history which is the illegal occupation by Britain. Trying to delineate history from the Commonwealth is impossible. There is no organization like it when it comes to historical baggage. Due to its colonial heritage, it has always suffered from an imperial hangover which impedes its reformation.

The Commonwealth represents one-third of humanity that needs urgent reform in its leadership like Group 20 (G-20) which runs under the leadership

of a rotating Presidency. The leadership Commonwealth should also be chosen under the leadership of a rotating Presidency of all member countries by a principle of rotation among its members in the appointment of its leader during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). Rotation-based leadership is characterised by equality. This means that every member of the Commonwealth has the same rights with the same hierarchical level; there is no place for a King. It is also recommended that the office of the Commonwealth also operates from the Commonwealth's leader country till the period the country is in a leadership position.

There is a growing desire among the members of the Commonwealth to be free of any imperial aura associated with the British royal family that indicates the organisation's colonial origins as the British crown is the symbol of monarchy that has a very bloody history. Hereditary leadership cannot be tolerated by republic members who hold democratic values. And if the commonwealth doesn't agree with the reform of Democratic leadership then members have the right to leave this autocratic organiza-

The subject of whether the leader of the organisation

should be a natural leader in the contemporary democratic world has been raised again with Prince Charles' succession as head of the Commonwealth. In addition, the Chagos Archipelago territorial issue has favoured Mauritius and disadvantaged Britain. Britain's actions are not in the best interests of its leadership in a post-Brexit context because the Commonwealth is made up of numerous small island states, and the handling of Windrush immigrants has raised concerns between Britain and the 12 Caribbean countries. The Commonwealth must set boundaries between its colonial past and its present and adopt a new perspective. It would be nothing less than a colonial artefact if the smaller states are unable to relate to the ideology and values of the

organisation.
The Commonwealth needs to be redesigned, and more significantly, its power base needs to be decentred from London. The organisation can capitalise on a variety of shared risks and opportunities in the absence of a direct common threat without having to resort to its dismal

Fostering an effective alliance based on equality and sovereignty that can deliver an ambitious agenda for its members requires fresh and proactive leadership. Therefore, we advocate rotating leadership

instead of automatic succession as in the past, but what's more important than the nominal figurehead of the Commonwealth is its actual leadership, and the UK is no less aligned on this issue. Today, the UK's political leaders lack both the willingness and the capacity to lead the Commonwealth, as they are far removed from their historic power positions.

Developing a positive Commonwealth and updating its mission to allow its members to flourish as equal partners in today's environment is a tall order that will require new leadership. In the world of today,

India is a growing force that will have a profound impact on how the world looks in the future. For more than a century, India was the jewel in the Crown of Britain's global colonial empire. The idea of the iewel becoming the bearer of the crown may be called for if the nobler of the many diverse values of old are to continue. As a strong and able nation, India is capable of leading if properly supported and guided. Reshaping the Commonwealth as a force for global progress is an opportunity it should not miss given its ambition to play a broader role in

of the Dalmia Group of Companies. Views expressed are personal)

(The writer is the Chairman

woria amairs.

### THE EDITOR **OPPOSITION UNITY Work-Life Balance**

# Shrinking media freedom is a cause of concern

The freedom of the press is critically important to protect the foundation of democracy, writes Bishal Kumar Saha

ndia, one of the world's largest democracies, has been witnessing a disturbing trend in recent years - a steady decline in its ranking in the World Freedom Index. The country's rank has deteriorated from 112 in 2016 to 150 in 2022. It is not surprising that India's ranking is deteriorating sharply when the government is making blatant efforts to oppress the media's free voices at any cost. The Indian government's heavy-handed approach towards the media has been a cause of concern for the last few decades. The country has witnessed a series of attacks on journalists.The government has also been accused of using various tactics to suppress dissenting voices, including imposing restrictions on the media, detaining journalists, and shutting down social media platforms. One of the most significant challenges faced by the Indian media today is the threat of defamation lawsuits. The government has used these lawsuits as a means to silence journalists and media outlets critical of its

policies.



frivolous, and the damages demanded are exorbitant, which leads to self-censorship among journalists and media outlets. In addition, The use of surveillance and counterterrorism laws, such as NSA (National Security Agency) UAPA (Unlawful Activities Prevention Act) and Sedition law as conventional weapons to silence dissent and intimidate those who speak out against the government. Such laws are meant to be used for legitimate national security purposes, and should not be abused to stifle dissent or intimidate the press. The Indian government has also been using its regulatory powers to stifle media freedom.

It has been accused of selectively targeting news out-The lawsuits are often lets critical of the government, One or Madhyamam. The

imposing fines, and suspending broadcast licenses. The government has also used its control over state-run media to shape public opinion and suppress dissent. The government's attempts to control the narrative have also extended to social media platforms. In recent years, the government has asked social media platforms to take down content it deems objectionable. The government has also proposed new regulations that give it more power to regulate social media platforms, which has raised concerns about censorship and free speech. The pathetic situation of media freedom in India is a

matter of great concern. Free and independent media is essential for the functioning of a healthy democracy. It serves as a watchdog, holding those in power accountable and informing citizens about the issues that affect their lives. Recently, The Supreme Court issued a landmark judgment in support of press freedom and ordered the government to refrain from taking any action that would impede the functioning of Media

Supreme Court's decision is a decisive step in the right direction towards upholding this fundamental right and ensuring that journalists can work independently and

without fear of retribution. The court noted that free and independent media is essential for the functioning of a democratic society and that any attempt to curb press freedom is a threat to the foundations of democracy. A vibrant and free media landscape is also necessary for the free flow of information, which is critical for an infor-

med citizenry. The Indian government must recognize the importance of media freedom and take steps to protect it. It must stop using its regulatory powers to stifle dissent and impose restrictions on the media. Instead, it should work towards creating an environment that fosters free and independent media. The use of laws like the UAPA and NSA to stifle free speech and dissent should be scrutinized and challenged, and efforts should be made to ensure that they are not misused for political purposes.

(The writer is a researcher)

Sir — A joint platform of Opposition parties to fight the dominant BJP in the 2024 elections was always a chimaera. In the past few years, many Opposition leaders have talked about unity and challenging the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) with a formidable force, but the repeated calls for this unity were not visible on the ground with one party or another distancing itself over self-protection and attacking Modi personally and range of issues. Oppositions may have forgotten that Indians are definitely looking for an alternative to BJP after its failure on many fronts.

At last, the golden opportunities availed, when Rahul Gandhi was convicted and disqualified, even those parties who openly dismiss Congress, such as the Trinamool Congress (TMC), Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) rallied behind Congress and participated in the protests. For the first time in years, India's splintered Opposition is sinking its differences (but NCP chief Sharad Pawar started his divergent views on Adani) to take on Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi, which could extend to a substantial challenge in national elections due in 2024. The opposition should remember that people already tested what PM Modi is after hearing his unbridled promises and incongruent deliveries for almost nine years in power. And still, he continues to enjoy popular public support. They need to tell what different offers they have if voted to power. Their stand on the Old Pension Scheme is a definite plus. Hope for the country's sake the Opposition must unite to give a befitting fight against the Modi government.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

### **DEFINE TREASON**

Sir — Has watching a movie, reading a book, liking a sportsperson and actors & actresses of a foreign country and eating and wearing clothes of one's choice, been brought under the category of crime? The answer is that from the activities of the last few years, it seems that doing anything



t refers to "Work-Life balance is the need of the hour ". Work-Life balance is indeed very important for multiple reasons and it has become all the more critical since the pandemic hit us. It is a given fact that any company wants its employees to be productive, irrespective of the number

of hours they spend at work, and an imbalance between work and life only results in productivity going down. During the pandemic work from home became a norm in many sectors, but that also adversely impacted employees as employees were expected to be on the call and present PPTs even at late hours of the day. So it will not be an exaggeration to say that the human resources department has a tough task to ensure that it keeps employees in better shape so that they help produce desired results for Indian Inc. As rightly mentioned in the article that one size does not fit all, hence HR will have to find what each individual seeks in terms of flexibility, and what are their trigger points ultimately they will have to think beyond the 9 to 5 routine.

Bal Govind | Noida

against the will of the government is becoming treason. A case was filed against several students for watching the BBC documentary on the campus of Delhi University. Now over 50 academicians have urged Delhi University to roll back punishment given to students for an on-campus screening of a BBC documentary on Narendra Modi and the Gujarat riots, reminding the century-old institution that the government has to defend It is not his job. We, the teachers and administrators, are not here to control their views or censor their sources of information. While exercising this right all of us should follow only one condition: it should not promote hatred and violence. Will this appeal have any effect on the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Delhi Police?

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

### **POLITICAL MUSICAL CHAIRS**

Sir — Intriguingly, the emergence of fault lines between political leaders and their respective party leaderships, leading to the severance of their ties, is commonplace in today's sort of politics. Yet, bizarre are the pleas these disgruntled leaders rely upon while leaving a party-for instance, an atmosphere of suffocation, indifference of the leadership and myriad other excuses, contributing to these refrains. Presently, it is Congress to have for long been beset with this phenomenon. Congress' former stalwart Ghulam Nabi Azad, who parted ways with the party and announced his own Democratic Progressive Azad Party last year, has recently criticised former . Congress chief, Rahul Gandhi.

Joytiraditya Scindia, once a right hand man of Rahul Gandhi and now a Union Minister in the BJP-ruled Centre, has also picked holes in Mr Gandhi recently and to rub it in, Andhra Pradesh ex-CM Kiran Kumar Reddy also switched his loyalty to the BJP accusing Congress high command of arrogance. A Congress stalwart and Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gahlot has, however, taken strong exception to Mr Gandhi's bashing by his former enemies. However, the public perception has it that this happens when the deserters see the greener pastures on the other side of the

Azhar A Khan | Rampur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneér@gmail.com

# **FIRST COLUMN**

### **DIGITAL HEALTH FOR THE WORLD**

India's G20 Presidency can take digital health solutions across the globe





AMIT KAPOOR

SAMEER KANWAR

orldwide, countries are accelerating efforts toward universal health coverage. Yet, according to the World Health Organization, 30% of the world's population is still unable to access essential health services. Additionally, 930 million people are at risk of falling into poverty due to out-of-pocket health expenditures of 10% or more of their house-

Further, unregulated and fragmented healthcare delivery systems, poor administrative coordination, insufficient human resources, and lack of financial support continue to hinder progress toward universal health coverage. Digital health solutions can address most of these challenges if they are integrated into the overall health system strengthening approach for sustainability and impact. Technology can be a great enabler in facilitating an equitable and affordable healthcare system that reaches the last

In 2022, the global digital health market size was valued at US\$211.0 billion. It is projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 18.6% from 2023 to 2030. India is a part of this growth story — at an event late last year, the Union Minister of State, Prime Minister's Office, stated that India should see an 80% increase in investments in digital health in the next five years. But a robust need-gap analysis and a comprehensive understanding of its applicability are critical to making digital health sustainable



To that end, a global/multi-country Digital Health Collaborative could galvanize efforts and accelerate the adoption and mainstreaming of digital health. There are four potential areas that the collaborative can pursue. First, it can support member countries to identify gaps and existing technology platforms that can be leveraged for healthcare. By providing technical support and guidance, it can be developed to facilitate inter-and intracountry expansion.

Second, a one-size-fits-all approach will not work, as countries have varying resources and challenges. Building lean, mean, and agile technology solutions that allow flexibility, localisation, and customisation is important. Digital Public Goods can play a pivotal role here, with the caveat that issues such as data localisation and country sovereignty should be duly acknowledged and addressed.

Third, the Collaborative needs to focus on developing successful public-private partnerships, given their proven success in addressing healthcare challenges at scale. And finally, data exchange on health is currently, minimal, largely because of the lack of a global regulatory framework. Developing a robust, efficient, and acceptable regulatory framework can have positive long-term implications in solving healthcare challenges. The Collaborative can become an advocate for the safe and regulated sharing

India's G20 Presidency offers an opportunity to initiate thought leadership on the Collaborative. India can leverage its past experiences—it has chaired the Global Digital Health Partnership in 2019, moved the Digital Health Resolution in the 71st World Health Assembly which was globally endorsed in 2018, and supported the development of the WHO Digital Health Strategy 2020-2025. India has also successfully demonstrated its ability to develop and scale digital public infrastructure like Aadhaar and UPI, among others, which are the backbone of digital health. Digital health initiatives such as eSanjeevani, Co-WIN, Aarogya Setu, and the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission could only be scaled up due to the digital public infrastructure in place. The G20 is well positioned to create the platform for a Digital Health Collaborative as a concrete step towards making healthcare affordable and accessible for all.

(Amit Kapoor is Chair of the Institute for Competitiveness and Faculty at Stanford University. Sameer Kanwar is Director of Digital Health, India & South Asia, PATH)

# Karnataka elections: A precursor to 2024



The BJP must do well in the Karnataka polls to ensure its return to power in the 2024 general elections

Thile riding high on the victory crest in three northeast states, the Bharatiya Janata Party is all set to make its southward journey. It will rely on the charisma of Narendra Modi. But it has to work hard to make the BJP coalition government look good for its lackluster performance. Besides, it will have to tackle several burning issues like anti-incumbency factors, high inflation, and unemployment.

In this backdrop, the BJP has put the prestige of prime minister Narender Modi and B.S. Yeddyurappa, the octogenarian leader at stake. An outcome of Karnataka polls will have a direct bearing on the ensuing three assembly elections in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh besides impacting the 2024 parliamentary elections.

BJP is banking on Modi's vote-catch-

ing capability and the influence of former CM, Yeddyurappa who has been reined in by nominating him as a member of the parliamentary board and central election committee though he has been humiliated in the past. He was twice divested of his CM's chair. PM Modi tried to placate Yeddyurappa when he described him as one of the most experienced leaders who has devoted his life to the welfare of farmers and poor people.

Yeddyurappa's community, the Lingayat constitutes 17% of Karnataka's population, mostly in northern areas. Therefore, a belated attempt to woo the community has been made by BJP by appeasing this stalwart who will be a star campaigner but not a CM candidate. BJP will have to focus on Southern Karnataka (Mysore region) as it has done well in other regions and improved significantly in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. But the saffron party is organizationally very strong and has no dearth of resources which is strengthened by RSS machinery. BJP's support of the majority of Lingayat 'MUTTS' and 'Love Jehad' agenda, mobilization of Hindu vote bank through polarization etc. Would be part of its winning strategy.

It is an undeniable fact that BJP has

been a rising force in central, western and northern states of India during the post-Mandir era. BJP formed a government in Karnataka in 2008 and 2018 but with the help of partners hence it is vying to emerge independently in Karnataka which may be piicated in Manarashtra also in the future. RSS has been working in coastal Karnataka and BJP got a fillip to expand its footprints in other regions except for southern Karnataka (Mysore region) which needs to be improved as it is the stronghold of JD(S) and Congress.

BJP improved its performance in Karnataka in the Lok Sabha polls in 2019. It got 40 per cent of the votes which was much more than in the assembly polls held in 2018. Karnataka has a 224-member assembly spanning six regions Bengaluru, Central, Coastal, Hyderabad-Karnataka, Mumbai-Karnataka and Southern Karnataka. BJP has been comfortable in coastal Karnataka and polled 51 % votes in 2018 while the statewide vote was 36%. In central Karnataka, the BJP won 24 out of 35 seats and got 43 per cent votes with a strike rate of 70%. However, it needs to deliver better in Southern Karnataka to win more seats.

In the hope of creating pro-Hindu sentiments, the BJP-Bomai government scrapped the 4% quota of Muslims who



BJP IMPROVED PERFORMANCE IN KARNATAKA IN THE LOK SABHA POLLS IN 2019. IT GOT 40 PER CENT OF THE VOTES WHICH WAS MORE THAN ITS **VOTE SHARE IN** THE ASSEMBLY POLLS HELD IN

will be moved to the 10 % weaker section (EWS) category hence now they will have to compete with Brahmins, Mudaliyars, Jains, Vysyas and others. It may impact existing EWS castes and adversely affect Muslims' interests. Experts say that it may also hurt those castes in the Banjara Community who have been hit due to this new caste rejig hence they have been lying dormant so far. Analysts say that the Bomai government raised the quota for SCs from 15 % to 17 % and STs from 5 per cent to 7 per cent in October 2022 to improve its chances based on the social engineering formula. Then, another attempt was made recently when it withdrew the 4 % Muslim quota. This would be shared between the powerful Lingayat and Vokkaliga communities which enjoyed five per cents and four per cent sub quotas respectively within the OBC segment.

How did Lingayat move away

It is the Yeddyurappa phenomenon that brought a sea change to the entire caste structure in Karnataka. This benefited the BJP in a big way. Rajeev Gandhi's ruthless action of sacking the Veerendra Patil government proved disastrous for Congress which was reduced to 36 seats from 179 seats in 1994 as the Lingayat community moved away from the party. BJP increased its vote percentage from 4% to 17 % which was primarily due to the Lingayat community and party made Yeddyurappa face but an identical blunder was committed by BJP's high command which removed him from chief minister's post over corruption. He formed his party Karnataka Janata Party (KJP) and damaged BJP in several constituencies in 2013 as the vote split enabled BJP to win 40 seats compared to 110 in 2008.

BJP's share dipped from 33.86 % to 19.95 % and Yeddyurappa's party cornered 9.8%. Now the BJP trio composed of Modi-Shah-Nadda has reigned in Lingayat supremo Yeddyurappa and expects to change the dynamics of Karnataka assembly elections. Bomai -BJP government's 'con-

troversial image' has given hope to Congress to register its victory after losing three eastern states -Tripura, Meghalaya and Nagaland which may prove a 'Game Changer' for the party at the central level also. But if BJP wins against all odds in the first southern state, it will be encouraged as it will be able to add to its aggressive posture which will help it in state elections and 2024. BJP won 104 seats in the house of 224 in the 2018 assembly elections in Karnataka and toppled the Congress-Janata Dal (secular) coalition in June 2020 barely after 15 months as 16 MLAs of the ruling alliance resigned which brought Bomai to the helm of affairs in the state.

Congress is seriously eyeing

Karnataka The Congress Think Tank is optimistic that it will be able to turn the tables on BJP. This is primarily due to several factors which include skyrocketing prices of essential commodities, unemployment, weakening of the democratic setup, misuse of investigating agencies, atrocities against women, etc. Second, unlike in the past, the Congress general secretary in charge of Karnataka polls, Randeep Surjewala and his team had been deployed by high command well on time. They have been working hard and succeeded in browbeating BJP by releasing the first list of 124 candidates on March 24 which was an unbelievable development. Third, Congress has described its two guarantees – Grih Jyoti – 200 units of electricity free for every household and Grih Laxmi — Rs 2,000 cash transfer every month to every household as a genuine promise to give relief to these two deserving sections of society.

Fourth, Congress is confident about the sympathy generated by Rahul Gandhi's disqualification from Lok Sabha and other 'excesses' committed by the NDA government. To derive political mileage, Rahul kickstarted the campaign from Kolar in Karnataka on April 5. This is the same place where he delivered a speech that led to his two-year conviction by the Surat court. Fifth, Congress expects the impact of Rahul's Bharat Jodo Yatra as he raised all issues relating to every section of society including common people, youths, women etc.

Finally, the Congress, however, will have to sort out the issues of infighting in the organization. i nis will include a tussie for the CM's post between Siddaramaiah, the opposition leader and Shiv Kumar. It will have to counter the BJP's communal agenda, caste equations and distribution of tick-

The Aam Aadmi Party contested 29 seats in 2018 and lost all of its deposits. Now AAP may act as a 'vote cutter' in Karnataka if the Delhi CM fields candidates in Bangalore and around. On the other hand, JD(S) and Congress combined took the lead over BJP when the first list was announced which has given a head start to those who got tickets.

Experts believe that it is do or die for BJP and Congress both as final results will impact the ensuing three state assembly polls and parliamentary polls in 2024. As the first semifinal, Karnataka assumes a lot of importance and relevance

# Advantages of genome sequencing in healthcare

Genome sequencing customises diagnostic procedures for diseases at a very nascent stage and provides personalised treatment

n 1990, The Human Genome Project was start-**⊥**ed which took 13 years for sequencing 20,000 genes and to understand the relationship between the genes and their work together. The idea behind genome sequencing is customizing diagnostic procedures for diseases at a very nascent stage and providing a personalized treatment and management option for individuals which goes against the "one size fits all" theory.

DNA Sequencing done at an affordable cost and in measured time can help in early diagnosis and targeted treatment of diseases. Genetic risks of developing diseases well before the actual symptoms appear can be detected especially for the young population to manage inherited diseases at



the right time. It can also guide us for specific lifestyle changes that can prevent or prolong the appearance of certain diseases.

During the recent Pandemic that the world was struggling to cope with, genome sequencing enhanced our insight into the mutation of the SARS-CoV2 virus affecting its transmissibility and virulence. This has helped in rapid healthcare decisions and the development of diagnostic tests. This has further been the backbone to fight the COVID-

Taking this reactive to proactive step forward, Genomic sequencing can now help to live up to the idea of "Prevention is better than Cure". With the advent of Preventive Genomics, a growing popula-



monitor their health through Biohacking. This helps in personalized efforts of blood tests, diet, exercise and choosing a healthy lifestyle much before the appearance of the disease which in turn reduces the odds of diseases and enhances

(Writer is a political

analyst and senior

journalist based in

longevity. According to the American Heart Association, 80 per cent of cardiovascular diseases are preventable. Diabetes can be prevented in 60 per cent of cases. The World Health Organization has projected that the total annual number of deaths from NCDs will increase to 55 million by 2023. In India 6.3 million deaths have been attributed to NCDs in 2017. There were more than 73 million cases of Diabetes in India in 2017, the highest in any country across the World. The prevalence of Diabetes is 8.8% in the age group of 20-70 years. NCDs also occupy 5-10 per cent of the GDP and are posing an

economic burden to growth and development. Several large studies such group of 36-45 years.

as PESA (Progression of Subclinical Atherosclerosis) using multimodalities have indicated almost 50 per cent of individuals with normal LDL levels have Subclinical Atherosclerosis. As this is undetected at an early stage, individuals present either with Angina caused by reduced blood flow to the heart or with a Heart Attack or Sudden cardiac death. Indians are known to have the highest coronary artery disease rates.

The Risk of having Metabolic Diseases like Diabetes, Hypertension, Dyslipidemia, and Morbid Obesity almost increases by 4 times as we move from the age group 18-25 years to 26-35 years and further by 3 times as we move from 26-35 years to the age

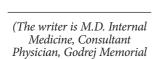
This gives us an insight towards the fact that the economic growth of the country is dependent on the above age groups which can be severely impacted by non-communicable diseases if not detected early and managed before

complications begin to set in. The IIT-Bombay and Godrej Memorial Hospital have launched the first-of-itskind Comprehensive Genome sequence-based Personalized Health Plan. The plan is based on whole Exome analysis which includes 7000+ genes aided with 58 pathological parameters to unravel the underlying predisposition of an individual to various diseases in their lifetime. Curated datasets obtained from various sources such as GWAS. OMIM, ClinVar, ACMG,

and ClinGen have been used for the analyses. This takes the detection

DisGeNET, UniProt, KEGG,

and treatment to the next level. Personalized Health Reports take into consideration the genetic makeup of the individual to highlight the risks of NCDs and Inherited diseases. Besides, it helps in the early detection of predisposed diseases for better management and prognosis. Another positive impact is motivating Holistic lifestyle changes in alignment with the genetic profile of the person for a better quality of life. This could be categorized as the best use of Genome sequencing towards curating a disease-free tomorrow for the generations to come, breaking the shackles of Conventional Healthcare.



Hospital)

# **Israel retaliates after rockets fired from Syria**

¬he Israeli military said its forces The Israeli military sales at a tracked targets in Syria early on Sunday after six rockets were launched from Syrian territory in two batches toward Ísrael in a rare attack from Israel's northeastern neighbour. After the second barrage of three rockets, Israel initially said it responded with artillery fire into the area in Syria from where the rockets were fired. Later, the military said Israeli fighter jets attacked Syrian army sites, including a compound of Syria's 4th Division and radar and artillery

The rocket firings came after days of escalating violence on multiple fronts over tension in Jerusalem and an Israeli police raid on the city's most sensitive holy site. In the second barrage, which was launched early Sunday, two of the rockets crossed the border into Israel, with one being intercepted and the second landing in an open area, the Israeli military said. In the first attack, on Saturday, one rocket landed in a field in the Israeliannexed Golan Heights. Fragments of



Israeli police escort Jewish visitors marking the holiday pf Passover to the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, known to Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary and to Jews as the Temple Mount, in the Old City of Jerusalem during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan on Sunday

another destroyed missile fell into Jordanian territory near the Syrian border, Jordan's military reported. There were no reports of casualties. A Damascus-based Palestinian group loyal to the Syrian regime claimed responsibility for launching the three missiles Saturday, reported Beirutbased Al-Mayadeen TV. The report quoted Al-Quds Brigade, a militia different than the larger Palestinian Islamic Jihad's armed wing with a similar name, as saying it fired the rockets to retaliate for the police raid on Al-Aqsa Mosque.

In Syria, an adviser to President

Bashar Assad described the rocket strikes as "part of the previous, present and continuing response to the brutal enemy.

Israel, which has vowed to stop Iranian entrenchment in Syria, has carried out hundreds of strikes in government-controlled parts of that country in recent years, though it rarely acknowledges them.

Before the latest strikes, Syrian officials had attributed 10 attacks to

officials had attributed 10 attacks to Israel this year, some of which put the Damascus and Aleppo airports temporarily out of service and killed civilians as well as Syrian soldiers and Iranian military advisers.

In the occupied West Bank, Israeli security forces fatally shot a 20year-old Palestinian in the town of . Azzun, Palestinian health officials said, stirring protests in the area.

The Israeli military said troops fired at Palestinians hurling stones

Health Ministry identified the Palestinian killed as Ayed Salim.

His death came at a time of unusually heightened violence in the West Bank. Over 90 Palestinians and have been killed by Israeli fire so far this year, at least half of them affiliated with militant groups, according to a tally by The Associated Press.

Palestinian attacks on Israelis have killed 19 people in that time — including on Friday two British-Israelis shot to death near a settlement in the Jordan Valley and an Italian tourist killed by a suspected car-ramming in Tel Aviv. All but one were civilians. The rocket fire from Syria comes against the backdrop of soaring Israeli-Palestinian tensions touched off by an Israeli police raid on Jerusalem's most sensitive site, the sacred compound home to the Al-Aqsa mosque. That outraged Palestinians marking the holy fasting month of Ramadan and prompted militants in Lebanon — as well as Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip — to fire a heavy barrage of rockets into Israel.

# Tensions around Jerusalem shrine

▼sraeli warplanes and artillery struck targets in Syria following rare rocket fire from the northeastern neighbour, as Jewish-Muslim tensions reached a peak on Sunday at a volatile Ierusalem shrine with simultaneous religious rituals. Thousands of Jewish worshippers gathered at the city's Western Wall, the holiest place where Jews can pray, for a mass priestly benediction prayer service for the Passover holiday. At the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, a walled esplanade above the Western Wall, hundreds of Palestinians performed prayers as part of observances during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Hundreds of Jews also visited the Al-Aqsa compound under heavy police guard Sunday, to whistles and religious chants from Palestinians protesting their presence. Such tours by religious and nationalist Jews

have increased in size and frequency over the years, and are viewed with suspicion by many Palestinians who fear that Israel plans one day to take over the site or partition it. Israeli officials say they have no intention of changing long-standing arrangements that allow Jews to visit, but not pray in the Muslim-administered site. However, the country is now governed by the most rightwing government in its history, with ultra-nationalists in senior positions. Tensions have soared in the past week at the flashpoint shrine after an Israeli police raid on the mosque.

On several occasions, Palestinians have barricaded themselves inside the Al-Aqsa Mosque with stones and firecrackers, demanding the right to pray there overnight, something Israel has in the past only allowed during the last 10 days

# Israelis protest judicial overhaul

Thousands of Israelis gathered Saturday for a weekly demonstration against the government's contentious judicial overhaul plans, despite security concerns stemming from a surge in Israeli-Palestinian violence. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu put his overhaul on hold after mass protests against the plan, which has brought together large swaths of Israeli society in opposition to a series of bills that aim to weaken the country's Supreme Court. The main protest in Tel Aviv, Israel's commercial hub, was held less than two kilometers (a mile) from Friday's attack, in which an Italian tourist was killed and five other Italian and British citizens were wounded when a car rammed into a group of tourists. In a separate incident, two British-Israeli women were shot to death near a settlement in the occupied West Bank. The spasm of violence in Israel and the West Bank has heightened fears of an even more intense surge, with the rare convergence of the holy Muslim month of Ramadan, the Jewish Passover holiday and Easter currently underway.



Leaders of the grassroots rotest movement against the judicial overhaul called for the weekly mass protest to continue as planned Saturday, with tens of thousands of people attending for a 14th consecutive week.

They portrayed the antivernment demonstration as a rally of solidarity with those killed and wounded in Friday's attacks, as well as with Israelis living near the Lebanese border and the Gaza border affected by recent Palestinian rocket fire. In Tel Aviv, protesters held a moment of silence for the victims. The protest organisers argue that the overhaul plans

have diminished Israel's national security by roiling the military and weakening the country in the eyes of its enemies.

Upon announcing the delaying of the proposed changes in Israel's legal system, Netanyahu appeared to calm some of the tensions that have fuelled three tumultuous months

But his announcement failed to address the underlying issues that have polarised the nation, and he has vowed to revive the plan in the coming weeks if negotiations on a com-promise with the political oppo-

### AMA's first gay president to take over at tumultuous time

Chicago (AP): The first openly gay person to lead the American Medical Association takes the reins at a fractious time for US health care. Transgender patients and those seeking abortion care face restrictions in many places.

The medical judgment of physicians is being overridden by state laws. Disinformation is rampant. And the nation isn't finished with COVID-19. In the two decades since Dr Jesse Ehrenfeld first got involved with the AMA as young medical resident, the nation's largest physicians' group has tried to shed its image as a conservative self-interested trade associa-

While physician pocketbook issues remain a big focus the AMA is also a powerful lobbying force for a range of public health issues. Two years ago, the AMA won widespread praise for announcing a plan to dismantle structural racism within its ranks and the US medical establishment

# Ukraine attacks continue amid Easter pleas for peace

least seven civilians, Ukrainian northeast and Zaporizhzhia in sion of Ukraine. the southeast — came under fire, the Ukrainian military reported

Kharkiv governor Oleh Syniehubov said two men died Sunday in shelling in Kupiansk, a city that Russia held before Ukrainian forces regained control of almost all of the province. The city remained under attack later Sunday as Russian forces targeted residential areas with multiple rocket launchers, Syniehubov said.

# Weekend shelling by 31 children back home from Russia Russian forces killed at 31 children back home from Russia

officials reported Sunday as Kyiv: The head of a Ukrainian rescue organi-Pope Francis and Archbishop zation said Saturday that the organization has of Canterbury Justin Welby brought back 31 children from Russia, where used their traditional Easter they had been taken during the war. Mykola messages to highlight the war Kuleba said at a news conference in Kyiv that in Ukraine and other conflicts the children were expected to arrive in the caparound the world. While ital later in the day. Kuleba is the executive direc-Russia continued to concentor of the Save Ukraine organization and is the trate on seizing all of Ukraine's presidential commissioner for children's rights. industrial east, two other Deportations of Ukrainian children have been provinces — Kharkiv in the a concern since Russia's February 24, 2022, inva-

The International Criminal Court increased missile, rocket and artillery pressure on Russia when it issued arrest warrants

> Elsewhere in the province, a 30year-old man was hospitalised in serious condition after Russian shelling of the city of Chuhuiv, he said on Telegram. Shelling also killed two people overnight, one of them a child born in 2012, in the city of Zaporizhzhia, the capital of that province, according to City Council Secretary Anatoliy Kurtev.

separated families and facilitate reunification The Zaporizhzhia region's governor, Yurii Malashko, said 18 communities in all were shelled. Three people were killed and five were wounded on Saturday, Malashko said. Zaporizhzhia is home to Europe's largest nuclear power plant and one of four Ukrainian

provinces that Russian President Vladimir Putin ille-

gally annexed in September.

dren from Ukraine.

Since then, Russia's military has sought to oust Ukraine's troops from those areas, especially Luhansk and Donetsk provinces, which make up the industrial region known as the Donbas. Bakhmut, a city in Donestsk, has seen the 13month war's longest battle. Western analysts have said Russian forces recently made it into the center of the city.

Russian children's rights commissioner Maria Lvova-Belova, accusing them of abducting chil-

Cross said this week it had been in contact with

Lvova-Belova, the first confirmation of high-level

international intervention to reunite families

with children who were forcibly deported.

ICRC spokesman Jason Straziuso said the orga-

nization was in contact with Lvova-Belova "in

line with its mandate to restore contact between

The International Committee of the Red

# Building collapses in Marseille, fire stymies rescue operations

ple may be buried under the debris of a building that collapsed following an explosion in France's port city of Marseille, but a fire deep within the rubble hindered rescue efforts Sunday, the French interior minister said. Officials determined that at least four people lived in the building, Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said. It was not known if anyone

was killed in the collapse or explosion, or what triggered the blast, he said. Darmanin, who visited the site, provided the update nearly 11 hours after the five-story building collapsed before 1 am. More than 100 firefighters, aided by specialists, worked through the night to access and extinguish the fire, which the minister said was burning a few meters (feet) under the debris. The delicate operation pro-

ceeded with the aim of keeping



firefighters safe, preventing further harm to people potentially trapped in the rubble and not compromising vulnerable buildings nearby. Some 30 buildings in the area were evacuated, Darmanin said.

The building that collapsed is located on a narrow street in the center of Marseille, adding

to an array of difficulties for firefighters and rescue workers. The intense heat made it impossible to send in dog teams to search. Robots were reportedly being deployed.

Marseille Mayor Benoit Payan said that two buildings that share walls with the one that collapsed were partially

caved in. It was among the evacuated structures. Six people were hospitalised. "We're trying to drown the fire while preserving the lives of eventual victims under the rubble," Lionel Mathieu, commander of the Marseille fire brigade, said during a televised briefing.

'Firefighters are gauging minute by minute the best way to put out the fire," Payan, the mayor, said. "We must prepare to have victims," he said grimly. An explosion was the "probable" cause of the building collapse, Payan said, but later stressed that "no conclusions can be drawn" without an investigation.

The collapsed building is located in an old quarter in the center of France's secondlargest city.

The noise from the explosion resounded in other neighborhoods. Nearby streets were

# Sunak to receive Joe Biden for Good Friday pact anniversary

 $B^{\text{ritish Prime Minister Rishi}}_{\text{Sunak will welcome US}}$ President Joe Biden to Belfast in Northern Ireland next week as the UK commemorates the 25th anniversary of the Belfast (Good Friday) Ágreement, the peace treaty struck for the region in April 1998, Downing Street said on Sunday. Biden will arrive in the UK on Tuesday evening, when Sunak will meet him off Air Force One and the US President will then undertake a programme of engagements including a bilateral with Sunak.

It comes as Monday marks a quarter of a century since the Good Friday Agreement was signed, transforming the political and economic landscape of the devolved region of Northern Ireland. "The Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement was an incredible moment in our nation's history. It was a pow-



erfully rare example of people doing the previously unthinkable to create a better future for Northern Ireland," said Sunak.

"It is that promise of a better future that we offered to everyone in Northern Ireland that I will be thinking of first and foremost over the coming days. It is my responsibility as the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to ensure we are making good on that promise," he said. The British Indian leader said that

Northern Ireland is "teeming' with opportunities, talent and ingenuity. "The biggest thing we can do to improve peoples standard of living and secure a prosperous and thriving Northern Ireland is economic growth. That's something I'm relentlessly focused on delivering," he added. The US strongly supported the Agreement process and played a pivotal role in boosting peace away from secessionist violence in Northern Ireland.

### Indian-origin candidates line up for Leicester Mayor role

London (PTI): Two Indianorigin candidates are lined up to go head-to-head for the post of Leicester Mayor in the local elections coming up in the UK early next month. Conservative Party councillor Sanjay Modhwadia will competé with Rita Patel, a former Labour councillor who announced her bid recently in order to scrap the role.

Patel, a Rushey Mead councillor from Leicester who will run as an independent, launched her campaign saying the city needed "a fresh start" and promised one of her first jobs will be to remove the mayoral

Sitting Labour Mayor, Sir Peter Soulsby, expressed disappointment at Patel's exit from the party after she was one of four city councillors suspended for six months for their attempt to scrap the mayor's office through a vote at a coun-

cil meeting last month.

Now the Tories have confirmed Modhwadia, a city councillor for North Evington, as their candidate to challenge Soulsby – who has held the job since it was created 12 years

He was in the eye of the storm when Leicester witnessed sectarian clashes last September following an India-Pakistan match.Modhwadia, a local businessman, has been campaigning to push for a "Made in Leicester" brand to improve the city's perception around the globe.

While the Tories and Rita Patel have both said they want to get rid of the mayoral role, Leicester's Green Party has promised a public referendum on the matter. The Green Party have chosen Mags Lewis who also stood in 2019, finishing third - will be their candi-

The election is scheduled for May 4 and anyone elected may just go on to have a short stay in office.

### Avalanche in French Alps kills at least 4 people

Paris (AP): An avalanche in the French Alps killed four people on Sunday, France's interior minister said, calling the death toll a provisional count. The avalanche rolled down the Armancette glacier in Contamines-Montjoie, in the Haute-Savoie region, some 30 kilometers (almost 20 miles) southwest of Chamonix Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin provided no details in his tweet about the deaths. The Alps are a prime vacation spot over France's long Easter weekend. The local France-Bleu radio station put the size of the avalanche at 1,000 meters (3,280 feet) long and 100 meters (328 feet) wide. Two helicopters were sent in to help in the search, the station said, quoting the local prefecture in Thonon.

# Memphis Zoo bids farewell to panda

Memphis (AP): Visitors at the ence some of Chinese culture. Memphis Zoo said goodbye Saturday to giant panda Ya Ya during a farewell party ahead of her departure back to China. Highlighted by Chinese cultural performances, the sendoff marked the end of a 20-year loan agreement with the Chinese Association of Zoological Gardens that landed Ya Ya in Memphis. About 500 people attended the event, which featured a demonstration by the Tennessee Happy Kung Fu School. Ya Ya was born August 3, 2000 in Beijing. She was joined in Memphis under the loan agreement by Le Le, a male panda who was born July 18, 1998 and died in February ahead of the pair's planned return to China. Ya Ya will likely head back to China at the end of month, according to zoo spokesperson Rebecca Winchester. The zoo panda in the wild is about 15 says the pandas were key to years, but in captivity they have

research and conservation pro-

jects and helped people experi-

The life expectancy of a giant the giant panda species from

lived to be as old as 38. Decades

of conservation efforts in the

wild and study in captivity saved

extinction, increasing its population 1,000 at one time to more than 1,800 in the wild and captiv-Advocacy groups In Defence of Animals and Panda Voices previously applauded the return to China, saying the pandas had been suffering

in the zoo setting. Zoo officials said the groups were spreading false nformation. Zoo President and CEO Matt

Thompson called Le Le and Ya Ya "two of the most spoiled animals on the planet. A memorial for Le Le was on display at the zoo on Saturday.



Britain's Prince William and Kate with their children Prince George, left, Princess Charlotte and Prince Louis attend the Easter Mattins Service at St George's Chapel at Windsor Castle in Windsor, England on Sunday

# Threat to Taiwan from | Pak Cabinet to decide on Punjab polls today China grave: US panel

¬he chairman of the House The chairman of the ISS China said Saturday the US must take seriously the threat posed to Taiwan, as Beijing launched military drills around the island in the aftermath of the Taiwanese president's meetings with American lawmakers.Rep. Mike Gallagher, R-Wis., who attended the meeting with President Tsai Ing-wen in California last week, told The Associated Press that he plans to lead his committee in working to shore up the island government's defences, encouraging Congress to expedite military aid to

"I think it all just points to what is obvious," Gallagher told the AP, arguing that Chinese President Xi Jinping is intent on reunifying Taiwan with the mainland. "We need to be moving heaven and earth to enhance our deterrence and denial posture, so that Xi Jinping concludes that he just can't do it," Gallagher said. China conducted drills with warships and dozens of fighter jets around Taiwan on Saturday, the Taiwanese gov-

ernment said, in what was

meeting between the US lawmakers and the president of the self-ruled island democracy claimed by Beijing as part of its territory. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy hosted Tsai in a bipartisan session at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley, California, with more than a dozen members of the US House for what was the most sensitive stop during her transit through the US. China's response to Tsai's transit through the US has not, so far, been as intense as its reaction last year after then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan. While both McCarthy and Tsai spoke in measured remarks after the meeting about maintaining the status quo between their countries, which have no formal diplomatic ties, the daylong meeting enraged China.

The Chinese military announced the start of three-"combat readiness patrols" as a warning to Taiwanese who want to make the island's de facto independence permanent. Taiwan split with China in 1949 after a civil war, and the United States broke off official ties

formally establishing diplomatic relations with the Beijing government. The US acknowledges a "one China" policy in which Beijing lays claim to Taiwan, but it does not endorse China's claim to island remains Taiwan's key provider

of military and defense assis-

tance. The ruling Communist

Party says the island is oblig-

ed to rejoin the mainland, by

force if necessary. Beijing says contact with foreign officials encourages Taiwanese who want formal independence, a step the ruling party says would lead to war. Chinese officials condemned Tsai's meetings with lawmakers and announced sanctions on two organizations that hosted her in the US, but its immediate response so far has been less forceful than its reaction to Pelosi's August trip to Taiwan. China had warned US lawmakers not to join the meeting with Tsai, Gallagher said. And after the meeting, China urged the US off what it called a "wrong and danger-ous road" Gallagher, who served as a US Marine with

tours in Iraq, said US law-makers will not be intimidat-

ed by the Chinese.

### the Supreme Court Bill, and An "emergency" meeting of the federal Cabinet has Justice Athar Minallah's judicial note in the case of the election

been called on Sunday to decide whether funds should be released to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) for holding the polls in Punjab on May 14, or show open defiance to the orders of the Supreme Court, according to a media report.

Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb said that the meeting would be held in Lahore with Prime Minister Sheh-baz Sharif in the chair, Dawn newspaper reported. "This is an important meeting on the current issues. However, its agenda has not been circulated yet," she said, adding that "significant decisions" might be taken in the huddle.

Most Cabinet members would participate in the deliberations through video links.Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) has separated itself from the Sharifs' demand that Chief Justice Umar Ata Ban-dial should step down. But, according to sources, the party may review its stance at the last minute on whether to support its senior coalition partner's decision to reject the apex court's order on Punjab polls.

A Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) insider told Dawn that the release of funds for Punjab elections, President

- which PML-N sees grossly in favour of its stance — would come under discussion during the meeting. He said the Sharifs were in a complete mood to defy the CJP-led three-member bench's decision to hold elections in the province on May 14 and there was no secret in it.

"Be it Nawaz Sharif, Shehbaz Sharif and Maryam Nawaz...all in one voice have rejected the three-bench verdict and the parliament is also standing behind the PML-N's stance," he said and added that the party was also unanimous on this point. He said that in Sunday's meeting, the Premier and Cabinet would declare that there were no funds for the May 14 elections.

"And let's see what action the SC takes on Monday...we don't care," he said and added that PML-N was desperately looking for a narrative and this defiance would help it build one with which it can go into polls. "Further legislation by parliament to clip the apex court's powers may also be discussed in the meeting," he said. Federal Finance Minister

Ishaq Dar earlier in the day also did not give any hint that the government would be releasing funds to the ECP for the Puniab

# Inflation skyrockets as govt fails to stabilise economy

- UTILITYSTORES

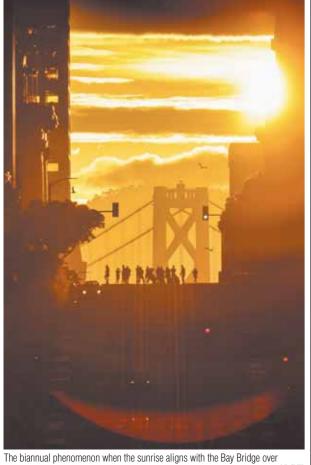
Nazim Malik pulled out his children from a private English-medium school and enrolled them in a government-run Urdu school because he can no longer afford their fees amid the spiralling inflation that has made life miserable for most Pakistanis who are now worried about two meals a day for their families.

The Pakistani rupee in recent months has seen a dramatic erosion in its value to the US dollar, currently trading at around PKR 288 in the open market. In the month of Ramzan, buying fruits to break the fast has become a luxury for millions across the country.

The economic situation has never been so grim in a country which since independence has thrice seen military coups and the ouster of elected governments.

Cash-strapped Pakistan's economy has been in a free fall mode for the last many years, bringing untold pressure on the poor masses in the form of unchecked inflation, making it Pakistanis standing in queue outside a utility store in Lahore on Sunday almost impossible for a vast 65,000 Pakistani rupees (PKR) number of people to make seems to be only meant to ends meet. Their woes buy food for his wife and three increased manyfold after last

"I pulled out my children from an English-medium school to get them enrolled in a government-run Urdu pubic school because I can no longer afford their fees. I am lucky that I don't have to give house rent as I am living in my parents' house. I am desperately looking for some extra work to supplement my income," he said.



# Anti-Terrorism Act will be guided by highest court: Lankan Minister

Justice Minister Wijeyadasa Rajapakshe said on Sunday that the government would follow the Supreme Court's observations on the proposed new Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA), amid objection from the Opposition and the civil society groups. He said the decision to delay the tabling of the bill in parliament was based on requests made by various organizations for more consultation. "So that they would have more time to go to the Supreme Court if they wished to do so," Rajapakshe said. The new Anti-Terrorism

Act (ATA) will replace the much-maligned Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) of 1979, which was enforced to counter the then Tamil separatist militancy. On April 1, Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena told reporters that the new counter-terrorism law will be introduced later this month. However, the justice minister AP/PTI delayed to either late April or lished in the government national security.

early May. Rajapakshe said that under the new bill the defence minister's powers of PTA, which allowed indefinite and arbitrary detention, had been diluted. "It will be the police who will be ordering detention and anyone arrested must be produced before court in 24 hours," he told reporters. Rajapakshe said if the new counter terrorism act was going against the fundamental and human rights of individuals, the Supreme Court would rule as such. Under the Sri Lankan par-

liamentary practice, any new bill could be challenged in the highest court to judge on its constitutionality within 14 days of its presentation in parliament. The Supreme Court would rule if it required a simple or absolute majority in the 225-member assembly and if it would need a national referendum for its adoption to become law. On March 17. the new Anti-Terrorism Act

gazette. The opposition and civil society groups objected to the new ATA, saying it targets the civil society protests which took place mid-last year over the then government's failure in handling the ongoing economic crisis. Since 2016, the European Union has been urging the government to repeal the PTA and bring in new counter-terrorism legislation in line with international standards. The EU has linked its GSP+ export tariff concessions to Sri Lanka modifying its counter-terrorism

The main opposition leader Sajith Premadasa had slammed the bill as "undemocratic and authoritarian". The opposition and rights groups fear that anyone expressing democratic opposition to the government could be targeted using the ATA. Sri Lanka, which currently is reeling under its worst economic crisis, has witnessed several activ-

### **'Harsh reforms** vital for Lanka's economy'

Colombo (PTI): Sri Lanka's Central Bank Governor Nandalal Weerasinghe has said that tough policy measures adopted by the government to overcome the ongoing economic crisis were vital to stabilise the island nation's econ-

omy.
"The difficult and painful policy measures implemented by the Government and the Central Bank thus far have helped to stabilise the economic conditions, compared to the unprecedented socio-economic tensions witnessed in 2022," Weerasinghe said. Sri Lanka introduced painful economic measures such as tax hikes and utility rate hikes to unlock the USD 2.9 billion IMF bailout programme to help it overcome its economic crisis and catalyse financial support from other development part-

The IMF further added that Sri Lankan authorities had committed to an ambitious

# Roadside bomb kills two soldiers in NW Pakistan

**AP** ISLAMABAD

 $A^{\text{roadside bomb exploded in}} \\ \text{Anorthwest Pakistan, killing}$ two soldiers who were travelling in their vehicle, the military said. The Pakistani Taliban claimed responsibility for the

year's catastrophic floods that

killed more than 1,700 people

and caused massive econom-

ic losses. "Mehngai (inflation)

has crushed my buying power.

Literally, the two-time meal is

not possible with what I earn,"

Malik, who works as an

accountant in Lahore,

said.During the last six

months, inflation climbed to

a level where his salary

The banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan gave a higher death toll in Saturday's attack in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, saying eight soldiers died. There was no immediate explanation for the discrepancy. The TTP also claimed responsibility for a hand grenade attack on a police van in the Swabi area of the province that killed a police officer and injured two others on Saturday. Pakistan is witnessing increased attacks on security forces after the militant TTP ended a cease-fire with the government last November.

sive anti-terrorist operation across the country within the coming weeks. The National Security

Friday it will carry out a mas-

Committee, comprising the prime minister and the military's top brass, agreed to relaunch the operation this month under a national action plan. The plan involves military and intelligence operations, death sentences for militants, setting up special military courts for trials, and the deployment of anti-extremist forces in vulnerable areas. A previous counter-

extremist plan was launched in 2014 after a school massacre in Peshawar, where the TTP gunned down over 140 people, including 132 children. The Pakistani Taliban are a separate group from the Afghan Taliban, although Pakistan's militant

### 'Father dropped toddler who died in brook'

Clarksburg (US): A 2-year-old boy from Vermont found dead in a brook early Saturday may have been dropped there by his father as he fled the scene of a car crash in northwestern Massachusetts, police said.

Massachusetts State Police troopers were called to the site of the crash in Clarksburg just before 2 am local time. Authorities learned that the child was missing and searched the Hudson Brook. Police and Clarksburg firefighters pulled the child from the brook and took him to a hospital where he was pronounced dead. A police probe concluded that the boy's father, later identified as Darel A Galorenzo, dropped him into the waterway as he fled the crash scene on foot.

# Khalsa is 'uniting', not 'dividing' force, says Ambassador Sandhu

Washington (PTI): India's the country. Ambassador to the US Taranjit Singh Sandhu has said that Khalsa is a "uniting and not a dividing force," days after instances of violence at the Indian missions by a small group of pro-Khalistan supporters. Sandhu, who comes from an illustrious Sikh family, made the remarks on Saturday at an event where he was presented with the presti-gious "Sikh Hero Award" from Sikhs of America along with several other eminent Sikh Americans. "Khalsa, which was created on the Baisakhi day, by Guru Gobind Singh is a uniting and not a dividing force," Sandhu said in his keynote address at the event, which was attended by eminent Sikh Americans from across

The Khalsa tradition was initiated in 1699 by the tenth Guru of Sikhism, Guru Gobind Singh. The important concepts and fundamentals in the Sikh religion and history include universality, unity, equality, honest living, seva, meditation, peace of mind, and harmony between people, he said. The Khalsa flag — which flies at the Akal Takht and Nishan Sahibs — is a flag of unity, peace and universal love, the Indian diplomat said, asserting that Sikhism is a religion of inclusion, brotherhood, love, equality and dive "We must keep these car-

dinal virtues in mind and not what a couple of mischievous characters spin using virtual media," Singh said in an appar-

ent reference to the instances of violence by a small group of separatists in the US, Canada, UK and Australia. In his speech, Sandhu shared with the Sikh diaspora the rise of India and some of the key accomplishments of the country in key sectors of economy, digitisation, health and entrepreneurship. "In such a scenario, Punjab and the youth in Punjab need to be connected with the economic, financial, tech and digital revolution happening in India," Sandhu said.

"The government, people and in particular the youth must take advantage of the expanding partnership with the US in various fields that Prime Minister Modi and President Biden are trying to put in place," he said.

### 3 taken to hosp after Delaware mall shooting

Christiana (US): A Delaware mall shooting left three people injured and forced shoppers to evacuate as police investigate. Delaware State Police said authorities do not have a suspect in custody in the shooting at the Christiana Mall, in a northern community near Pennsylvania.

"We can confirm that there are 3 victims who were injured by gunfire and transported to an area hospital for medical treatment," police said in a tweet. "There are currently no public safety concerns at Christiana Mall and the surrounding area." The mall would remain closed Saturday evening, police said in a statement. The three people were shot in the food court area, WPVI-TV reported.

### Saudi officials visit Yemen capital Cairo (AP): Saudi officials were peace in the region." He said

in Yemen's capital on Sunday for talks with the Iran-backed Houthi rebels, as part of international efforts to find a settlement to Yemen's nine-year conflict, officials said. Saudi Arabia's delegation, chaired by the kingdom's ambassador to Yemen, Mohammed bin Saeed Al-Jaber, will hold talks with with Mahdi al-Mashat, head of the Houthi's supreme political council, which runs rebel-held areas in Yemen, according to the Houthi-run SABA news agency.An Omani delegation, which arrived in Sanaa on Saturday, will also join the talks, the agency reported, citing an unidentified source. Mohammed al-Bukaiti, a Houthi leader, said on Twitter that Saudi and Omani officials would discuss "ways to achieve a comprehensive and lasting

achieving an honorable peace between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia would be "a triumph for both parties," and urged all sides to take steps to "preserve a peaceful atmosphere and prepare to turn the page of the past." There was no immediate comment from Saudi Arabia. The office of the UN envoy for Yemen didn't immediately respond to a request for comment. The talks in Sanaa are part of international efforts led by Oman to settle Yemen's conflict, which began in 2014. That's when the Houthis seized Sanaa and much of the country's north, ousting the internationally recognized government that fled to the south and then into exile in Saudi Arabia.

The Houthi move prompted a Saudi-led coalition to intervene months later in a bid recognised government to power. The conflict has in recent years turned into a regional proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Saudi Arabia and the Houthis reached a draft deal last month to revive a cease-fire that expired in October.

The deal is meant to usher in a return to Yemeni political talks, according to Saudi and Yemeni officials. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss closeddoor negotiations. They said the Saudi-Houthi understandings include a six-month truce with a cessation of all military activities across Yemen. The Houthis have committed to coming to the table with other Yemeni parties to negotiate a political settlement to the conflict, they

# Saddam's image scrubbed from Baghdad

**AP** ■ BAGHDAD

 $O^{f \ his \ countless \ stories \ of \ his}_{life \ as \ a \ hairdresser \ in}$ Iraq, the one Qaiss al-Sharaa most enjoys retelling is about the day April 9, 2003, when he watched Iraqis and American Marines pull down the statue of Saddam Hussein in front of his salon in Baghdad's Firdos Square. The 12-metre (39-foot) statue of the Iraqi dictator extending his right hand had been erected just a year earlier to celebrate his 65th birthday.

"There were lots of younger Iraqis from around the country with the American troops topping the statue who naturally wanted their freedom," al-Sharaa told The

Associated Press. "The statue also evaporated, burned away showed the face of a man everyone feared." For the world, it became an iconic moment of the US-led invasion; live TV coverage as Marines tied the statue to a vehicle to pull the statue down inflated it into a symbol of the end of Saddam's quarter century rule.

In reality, the Firdos Square statue was a minor part of the huge number of monuments and palaces that Saddam erect-ed to show off his power. All his statues and images are long gone now, 20 years after that day. Many of his palaces and buildings have been repur-

posed for a new Iraq. But much of the hope that came in wiping away Saddam's oppressive visual presence has

first by years of brutal violence and now by a wrecked economy and rampant corruption by the new political elite of sectarian-based factions. Firdos Square has been refurbished as a small park, funded by private banks. On a building towering over the square is a large mural of Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani — assassinated in a 2020 US drone strike — and Imam Hussein, grandson of the

Prophet Muhammad. It is the sort of Shiite imagery that proliferates around Baghdad because of the domination of Iran-backed Shiite parties in the govern-"This new garden that replaced Saddam's represents

the widespread corruption in

Iraq today, underneath the nice greenery and fountains," said al-Sharaa. He said that while he doesn't miss Saddam's rule he does miss "the rule of the law."

"Families are too scared to take their kids there, because drug dealers hang out there at night," he said of the square. It's not known what happened to most of the Saddam statue, but pieces of it were taken away by souvenir hunters. A group of young US Marines from Ūtah in 2003 said they sawed off the statue's right hand and intend-

ed to sell it on eBay. But it disappeared from their cargo as they tried to smuggle it home on their military flight back. All they have is the photo they took of themselves holding it like a prized fish. In 2016, a German antiques dealer said he bought Hussein's left leg and then resold it on eBay for over USD 100,000. British journalist Nigel Ely wrote a 2017 book about a chunk of Saddam's left buttock that he pried off the statue. He tried to auction it off for charity but didn't get a high enough

Saddam's policy of filling Baghdad and other cities with palaces and statues and por-traits of himself "created this image of this divine leader," Senior Research Fellow at Chatham House Renad Mansour told the AP. Saddam "needed to project power in different ways to remind the people who was in charge."



Pope Francis blesses the faithful from his popemobile in St. Peter's Square at The Vatican at the end of the Easter Sunday

# Goyal all set to visit Italy, **France to boost trade ties**

ommerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal will hold a series of meetings with leaders and top CEOs of France and Italy next week during his three-day visit to these two countries to further boost trade and investment ties

The Minister will be on an official visit to France (Paris) and Italy (Rome) on April 11-13. He will be accompanied by a delegation of top Indian

In France, Goyal along with Olivier Becht, Minister delegate of Foreign Trade, Attractiveness and French Nationals Abroad, Government of France, will co-chair the India-France Business Summit on April 11, the commerce ministry said in a statement on

The summit will focus on various themes, including building a green future, emerging technologies, defence cooperation and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific regions, it added.

Goyal is also scheduled to meet with French business leaders across various sectors



and will attend a CEOs round-

Both Indian and French ministers will participate in an event that will showcase India's cultural heritage and soft power and are expected to witness the participation of over 600 dignitaries from the French government, the Indian business diaspora in France and members of the French business community.

Goyal will also be interacting with members of the Indian community in Paris.

In Rome, the statement

**OSBI** 

Under SBI YFI programme

started in 2011, he said, around

100 professionals or fresh grad-

uates are selected as fellows,

who join hands and foster

change with rural communities

and NGOs at grassroots across

by US 'PeaceCorps', works on

12 thematic areas such as

health, rural livelihood, food

security, environmental pro-

tection, education, water, tech-

nology, women's empower-

ment, self-governance, social

entrepreneurship, traditional

craft and alternate energy, he

The programme, inspired

India (YFI) Alumni.

17 Indian states.

said, Goyal would meet Antonio Tajani, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation.

He is scheduled to meet top Italian CEOs for bilateral meetings followed by CEOs Interactive Business Session, where 35 CEOs are likely to participate," the ministry said, adding this would be followed by a meeting with Adolfo Urso, Minister of Enterprises and Made in Italy, who would also interact with Indian CEOs.

# valued firms climbs ₹82,169 cr last week

Eight of the top 10 valued firms added ₹82,169.3 crore in market valuation last week, with HDFC twins emerging as the biggest winners amid an overall positive trend in equi-

Last week, equity markets were closed on Tuesday (April 4) for 'Mahavir Jayanti' and on Friday (April 7) on account of 'Good Friday

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 841.45 points or 1.42 per cent in the holiday-shortened week.

Of the top 10 valued firms, eight including Reliance Industries, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), HDFC Bank Hindustan Unilever Ltd, HDFC and ITC witnessed gains in their market valuation.

From the top-10 pack, the valuation of HDFC Bank jumped ₹31,553.45 crore to ₹9,29,752.54 crore. HDFC's market valuation surged ₹18,877.55 crore ₹5,00,878.67 crore.

Bharti Airtel added



₹9,533.48 crore taking its valuation to ₹4,27,111.07 crore.

The market capitalisation (mcap) of Reliance Industries rallied ₹6,731.76 crore to ₹15,83,824.42 crore and that of TCS climbed ₹5,817.89 crore to ₹11,78,836.58 crore.

ITC's mcap went up by ₹4,722.65 crore to ₹4,81,274.99 crore and that of State Bank of India gained ₹3,792.96 crore to ₹4,71,174.89 crore.

Hindustan Unilever added ₹1,139.56 crore to take its market valuation to ₹6,02,341.22

However, the mcap of Infosys declined by ₹2,323.2 crore to ₹5,89,966.72 crore and that of ICICI Bank fell by ₹1,780.62 crore to ₹6,10,751.98

# Mcap of 8 of top-10 | Govt specifies retail sale price based GST cess rate for pan masala, tobacco

The Government has specified the retail sale pricebased GST cess rate that would be levied on pan masala and tobacco manufacturers with effect from April 1.

This is a departure from the earlier regime that imposed cess, over and above the 28 per cent Goods and Services Tax (GST) rate on ad-valorem

As per a finance ministry notification dated March 31, the GST cess rate that would be applicable on pan masala is 0.32 times the retail sale price (RSP) of the pan masala pouch.

Pan masala, containing tobacco gutkha, now has a cess rate of 0.61 times the RSP, while the rate for smoking mixtures for pipes and cigarettes is 0.69 times.

Chewing tobacco, filter khaini, and jarda scented tobacco attract a cess of 0.56 times the RSP, and the rate for branded unmanufactured tobacco and hookah or gudaku is 0.36 times the RSP.

The new rates are applicable from April 1, 2023. Moving to RSP-based levy would mean that manufacturers would now have to pay the cess on the final

retail price of masala and chewing tobacco at the time it crosses the factory gate.

This would help curb tax

evasion as the cess would be

collected at the first point itself. AMRG & Associates Senior Partner Rajat Mohan said moving to an RSP-based system can provide a more stable source of revenue for the government in case of broken supply chains.

'Ín the new taxation scheme, the entire cess is collected at the first point of sale, i.E., the manufacturer itself, limiting the impact of tax eva-

The estimated revenue from RSP-based cess rate on pan masala and tobacco is almost at the same level as was in the earlier ad- valorem

However, in the earlier regime since there were instances of tax evasion, the revenue collection was lower. The government last month amended the GST law and capped the maximum rate of GST compensation cess that would be levied on pan masala, cigarettes and other forms of tobacco, linking it to the RSP of the product.

# SBI Foundation gives ₹30 lakh grant to eight 65% to 23 mn tonnes select social ventures

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

SBI Foundation, the CSR arm of State Bank of India (SBI) on Sunday committed ₹30 lakh as a grant to 8 ventures who work at the grassroot level to bring change in the lives of rural population. The selection for the grant

is done on the basis of projects submitted by fellows of SBI Youth for India programme, and depending on the assess-ment, grant is pledged during 'SBI YFI Sahyog - The Pitch Fest', SBI Foundation CEO and Managing Director Sanjay Prakash told PTI.

Four top winning ideas are given support of ₹6 lakh each while four runners-up are given ₹1.5 lakh each, he said after the selection process on

Last year, he said, the Foundation had given a grant of ₹20 lakh to selected few social enterprises both under non-profit and for-profit ven-

# NTPC coal output rises

Ctate-owned power giant **O**NTPC on Sunday said its captive coal mines have registered 65 per cent year-on-year production growth to over 23 million tonnes in FY23. NTPC Ltd has recorded a

coal production of 23.2 million tonnes in FY23, witnessing a 65 per cent growth against 14.02 million tonnes a year ago from its four operational coal mines

— TPC Pakri-Barwadih (Jharkhand), NTPC Chatti Bariatu (Jharkhand), NTPC

Dulanga (Odisha) and NTPC

Talaipalli (Chhattisgarh), a company statement said. NTPC has also achieved the highest-ever annual overburden removal of 73.0 million cubic metres, representing 129 per cent growth compared to 31.9 million cubic metres of overburden removal in the

The achievement demonstrates NTPC's commitment to increasing its domestic coal production to meet the growing demand for power in the

previous fiscal.



NTPC management lauded the role of the power ministry, coal ministry and state governments, among others, for their support to its coal mining in enhancing production and dispatching 21.9 million tonnes of good quality coal to NTPC power plants with a phenomenal year-on-year growth of 48 per cent over coal dispatch of 14.8 million tonnes in the previous fiscal.

The coal mining team has implemented digital various initiatives at its mines to enhance safety, including e-SMP, a digitalised safety management plan and a mobile app

### FPIs dump Indian equities worth ₹37,631 cr in FY23; trend likely to reverse in FY24

After withdrawing record funds in 2021-22, foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) continued their sell-off in the last fiscal too and pulled out Rs 37,631 crore from Indian equities amid aggressive rate hikes by central banks globally. The outflow trend is like-

ly to reverse in the current financial year since India has the best growth potential in the financiaľ year 2023-24 (FY24), VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services, said. Market analysts believe

that FPI flows in the current financial year would be decided by a host of factors, such as the US Federal Reserve's policy stance, oil prices movement and development in the geopolitical situation. Since FPIs started investing

in 1993, this is the first time they sold consecutively for two financial years. They sold equities worth ₹1.4 lakh crore in FY22. However, the pace of selling slowed down to ₹37,632 crore in FY23, data with the



Before these outflows, FPIs invested a record ₹2.7 lakh crore in equities in 2020-21 and ₹6,152 crore in 2019-20. In the financial year 2022-

23, most of the major central banks started hiking the interest rate, which resulted in the departure of hot money from emerging markets, including India. This resulted in an unprecedented rise in prices (inflation) in most economies.

Apart from global monetary tightening, volatile crude and rising commodity prices, along with Russia and Ukraine eign money in 2022-23. On the domestic front too,

the scenario was not encouraging. Rising inflation continued to be a cause for concern and to tame that, the RBI also hiked rates, which cast a shadow on the growth prospects of the domestic economy, said Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director - Manager Research, Morningstar India. Another important aspect

that led to the outflows from domestic stock markets was its high valuation compared to other relatable markets, he

### **Gold imports dip** 30% to \$ 31.8 bn in Apr 22-Feb 23

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's gold imports, which have a bearing on the current account deficit, fell about 30 per cent to \$ 31.8 billion during April 2022-February 2023 due to high customs duty and global economic uncertainties, according to data from the commerce ministry.

Imports of the yellow metal stood at \$ 45.2 billion in the corresponding period of 2021-22. The imports are in the negative zone since August 2022.

Silver imports, however, rose by 66 per cent to \$ 5.3 billion during April-February 2023. The significant fall in gold imports though has not helped in narrowing the country's trade deficit — the difference between imports and exports. The merchandise trade deficit for April-February 2022-23 was estimated at \$ 247.52 billion against \$172.53 Billion in the year-ago period.

According to industry experts, high import duty on gold and global economic uncertainties are the reason for the dip in the imports of the

# COAl says telcos being mindful of service quality in 5G rollout

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Industry body COAI has asserted that operators are mindful of adhering to service quality as they roll out 5G, but added that full benefits of seamless urban-rural connectivity of fifth-generation services will be gained once pan-India availability of these networks is achieved. The speed of 5G rollout in

India "is the fastest in the world", SP Kochhar, Director General of Cellular Operators' Association of India (COAI) "When the rollout is taking

place in a phased manner, that is, in urban areas first, followed by rural, and not in a hetero-



benefits of 5G will take some time to arrive," Kochhar told

5G services, in locations rolled out already, are meeting the scientific parameters of ultra high-speed network.

rolled out, telecom operators are being very careful that they adhere to quality, as it is in their interest to do so, and the competition is so stiff that they don't want to lose out the business. So they will come out with the best quality, and that they are doing," Kocchar said.

5G services which promise turbocharged speeds far greater than 4G, and ultra low latency connectivity, have been rolled out in hundreds of cities in India by telecom operators Bharti Airtel and Reliance Jio. According to Kochhar, while players are fully conscious of service quality, some ground realities have to be kept in

### Lenders likely to post robust Q4 numbers; PSU banks profit may touch ₹1 lakh crore in FY-23

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The banking sector is likely to post good numbers in the fourth quarter ended March 2023, and the total profit of public sector banks (PSBs) is expected to touch a record high of ₹1 lakh crore in FY23, aided by the decline in bad loans and healthy loan growth.

According to a senior bank official, the country's biggest lender State Bank of India (SBI) expected to earn a profit above ₹40,000 crore in the financial year ended March 2023. In the first nine months of the previous financial year, the bank's bottomline stood at ₹33,538 crore, higher than ₹31,675.98 crore recorded in Similarly, other public sec-



tor lenders are also likely to report encouraging numbers, helped by a decline in non-performing assets (NPAs), moderation in slippages, doubledigit credit growth and rising interest rate.

For the first nine months of 2022-23, all 12 PSBs have earned a cumulative profit of ₹70,166 crore compared to ₹48,983 crore in the year-ago period, an increase of 43 per

"The trend would contin-

ue in the fourth quarter. It is fairly possible that PSBs would be earning around ₹30,000 crore in the fourth quarter and thus close the financial year 2022-23 with a profit of ₹1 lakh crore," Punjab & Sind Bank managing director Swarup Kumar Saha told PTI.

The PSBs had earned a cumulative profit of about ₹15,306 crore in the first quarter, which increased to ₹25,685 crore in the September quarter and ₹29,175 crore in the three months to December. All public sector banks, barring Punjab National Bank (PNB), registered an increase in net profit

in the December quarter. PNB's net profit for the third quarter was down 44 per cent to ₹628 crore due to higher provisioning.

Ltd (APJL) to procure 1,496

MW net capacity power from

2X800 MW ultra-supercritical

sion its second 800 MW unit

largest liquid fuel-based power

generation plants in the Indian

sub-continent region. The installed capacity of heavy fuel

oil (HFO)-based plants is about 6,329 MW and high-speed

It is expected to commis-

Bangladesh has one of the

power project at Godda.

soon, it stated.

### 'Unsold housing stock falls 12% in last five years to 6.27 L units'



PTI NEW DELHI

With a significant rise in housing sales post-Covid, real estate consultant Anarock has said unsold homes with developers across seven major cities fell 12 pc in the last five years, and time needed to clear these inventories have come down by half to just 20 months.

In its latest report, Anarock said unsold housing stocks have declined 12 per cent to 6,26,750 units at the end of January-March this year from 7,13,400 units as of March 31,

More importantly, Anarock said, inventory overhang (estimated time developers need to clear unsold inventories at current sales velocity) fell to 20 months from 42 months at the end of March 2018.

An inventory overhang of 18-24 months is normally con-

sidered healthy. Anarock Chairman Anuj Puri attributed the drop in unsold stocks and inventory

In Q1 of 2023, the top 7 cities recorded all-time high sales of more than 1.14 lakh "Strong home-ownership sentiment, relatively lower

home loan rates, strong

momentum in luxury housing, and the anticipation of further price hikes were major factors in boosting housing sales," Puri observed. As per the data, Delhi-NCR remained the frontrunner in reducing overall inventory

overhang in the last five years from 66 months in Q1 2018 to 23 months in Q1 2023". During the last five years, in Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR), the inventory

overhang has shrunk to 21 months from 55 months. Bengaluru currently has the lowest inventory overhang

of 13 months. Hyderabad's inventory overhang was reduced to 21 months from 23 months. Pune builders will require 20 months to sell unsold stocks against 40 months five years ago.

### Maruti eyes doubling SUV sales this fiscal; looks to take leadership position with 25% market share

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

¬he country's largest car ■ maker Maruti Suzuki India aims to more than double its SUV sales this year and take the leadership position in the fastgrowing segment with a market share of over 25 per cent, according to a senior company

official. The auto major sold 2.02 lakh sports utility vehicles (SUVs) last financial year with a market share of around 13 per cent. In the current fiscal year, the company aims to sell around 5 lakh units.

The SUV segment is currently the fastest-growing ver-



tical in the domestic passenger vehicle industry. The SUV contribution to the overall passenger vehicle market has grown from 24 per cent in 2018 to 43 per cent in 2022.



dani Power on Sunday said Athat it has begun supplying electricity from its plant in Godda in Jharkhand to Bangladesh. Adani Power Ltd (APL), a

part of the diversified Adani Group, has commissioned the first 800 MW ultra-super-critical thermal power generation unit at Godda in Jharkhand. The plant has started with supplying 748 MW of power to Bangladesh, a company statement said.

The electricity supplied from Godda will significantly improve the situation in the neighbouring country as it will statement. It is the first power replace expensive power genplant in the country, which has started its operations from Day erated from liquid fuel, bringing down the average cost of One with 100 per cent Flue Gas



Adani Power begins supply from J'khand plant to B'desh

stated. Bangladesh's long-standing relationship," said Š B Khyalia, Bangladesh CEO of Adani Power, in the

Development Board (BPDB) executed a long-term Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) with APL's wholly-owned subsidiary Adani Power Jharkhand

diesel (HSD)-based plants is about 1,290 MW, totaling to and Zero Water Discharge, it over 7,600 MW. November 2017,

Though at present, Bangladesh has long-term PPA ties with three other imported coal-based generators, the total tariff of Godda plant is competitive compared to peers, it

overhang to a surge in housing

# VILLARREAL STUN MADRID

Real Madrid suffered a 3-2 defeat by Villarreal in La Liga on Saturday in a thrilling clash ahead of their Champions League showdown against Chelsea next week. Real Sociedad beat Getafe 2-

0 to tighten their grip on fourth place, while Villarreal rose to fifth after their impressive triumph at the Santiago Bernabeu.

The champions remain 12 points behind leaders Barcelona, who face Girona on Monday, with Villarreal winger Samuel Chukwueze scoring twice in a sensational individual display.

Pau Torres's own goal sent Madrid in front but Chukwueze levelled before the break.

Vinicius Junior netted a superb solo goal before Jose Luis Morales equalised again and Chukwueze curled home a superb winner, which reduced Madrid's hopes of retaining the title to virtually nothing.

"The truth is, it was hard for us to be 100 percent motivated, that's quite normal," Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti told Movistar.

"If you aren't 100 percent, you have to be better on the pitch, we weren't organised, they manage the ball well and it was hard for us to get it back."

However the coach said the defeat did not allow any doubts to creep in ahead of Chelsea's visit in the Champions League quarter-final first leg.
"No, no doubts," added

Ancelotti.

"We knew it could be com-plicated, and Wednesday is another story. Our level dipped a bit today, but on Wednesday it will be at the maximum."

The coach made six changes from the 4-0 Clasico thrashing of Barcelona in the Copa del Rey semi-final midweek, with Europe in mind.

Ĥowever he maintained his



attacking trio of Karim Benzema, Rodrygo and Vinicius, looking to put the game to bed

early.

Marco Asensio and Vinicius

Asensio and Vinicius combined for Madrid's opener, with Torres deflecting the latter's

cross into his own net.

The visitors levelled late in the first half when Chukwueze's magical footwork left defender Nacho Fernandez for dead, and the Nigerian finished clinically past Thibaut Courtois.

Madrid came out flying in the second half and Vinicius scored a brilliant goal of his own, nutmegging defender Aissa

Mandi to leave a crowd of perusers behind him, before

slipping the ball home.

The Brazilian winger, on 21 goals across all competitions, should have matched his tally of 22 last season but fired into the side netting after being teed up by Benzema.

The French forward, who scored hat-tricks in both his previous two games, was withdrawn before the hour mark to rest him for the Chelsea clash.

Villarreal pulled themselves level in the 70th minute when Chukwueze's cross caused danger and substitute Morales finished well.

With 10 minutes remaining, Chukwueze scored a brilliant second, curling into the top corner from outside the area. It was his fifth goal in his last

seven La Liga matches, with Chukwueze in the best form of his career to date. Madrid were awarded a late

penalty when the ball appeared to strike Mandi's arm as he slid along the floor, but VAR showed there was no offence committed.

"The league is complicated, that's obvious, but we're alive in two other competitions that we will try to win," said Madrid

defender Lucas Vazquez.

Villarreal rose to fifth, two points clear of Real Betis, who host Cadiz on Sunday.

Coach Quique Setien lavished praise on Chukwueze.

"For a few weeks he's been giving us a lot, he's a permanent

threat," said the former Barcelona boss. "Not just in goals, but in passes, chances, he's an extraordinary player who is giving us a

Mikel Oyarzabal and Takefusa Kubo struck for Real Sociedad in their comfortable

### Real's Valverde 'punches' Villarreal's Baena: Reports

 $R^{\text{eal Madrid midfielder Fede}}_{\text{Valverde punched Villar-real's Alex Baena in the face}$ after the champions' 3-2 defeat in La Liga on Saturday night, according to media reports in Spain. Baena complained on Twitter on Sunday about being "attacked" and denied he had insulted Valverde's family, which some reports cite as the reason for the Uruguayan's

anger.
"I'm very sad for the attack that I suffered after the game and surprised about what they are saying about me, it's totally false that I said that," wrote Baena on Twitter.

Spanish reports state that on loan at Osasuna, shone and struck twice for the cup finalists Valverde waited by the visitors' in a 2-1 win over bottom of the team bus to confront Baena.

"Fede Valverde, thuggish and cowardly," Villarreal team delegate Xisco Nadal wrote on Twitter on Sunday, before later deleting his post. Referee Javier Alberola Rojas did not include any reference to the incident in his report from the game.

Spanish newspaper Marca spanish newspaper Marca report that sources close to Valverde say Baena upset the Madrid player during the teams' Copa del Rey clash in January by speaking about his unborn child.

Valverde's partner Mina Bonino revealed in February the couple thought they had lost their baby, but the pregnancy was later found to be healthy.

Marca say Baena again referred to Valverde's child during the match on Saturday, provoking the confrontation.

# If Madrid have switched off, it's because of us: Xavi

**AP** ■ BARCELONA

form after a strong start to the season, La Real suffered Europa

League elimination and in recent

weeks allowed teams to close in

behind them in the hunt for

took Real Sociedad in March after they dropped points in a draw with lowly Cadiz.

With this solid victory, Real

Sociedad are four points clear of

Villarreal and six ahead of Betis.

bounced back from their Copa del Rey semi-final defeat by Osasuna this week with a 2-1

win over Espanyol.

Earlier Athletic Bilbao

Barcelona winger Ez Abde,

Atletico Madrid, third, over-

Champions League football.

 ${\bf B}$ arcelona coach Xavi Hernandez believes if Real Madrid have given up on La Liga, it is because of his side's superb season, he told a news conference on Sunday.

Champions Madrid lost 3-2 at home against

Villarreal on Saturday and league leaders Barca can move 15 points clear of Los Blancos with a win at home against Girona on Monday.

"I don't know if they've switched off or not, but if they have, it's thanks to us," said Xavi. "Tomorrow it's important to increase the gap to 15 points. It won't mean anything is sealed,

but it would be a spectacular distance. "It doesn't interest me if Madrid do something or don't, what interests me is what we do.' Madrid are in the Copa del Rey final and face Chelsea on Wednesday in a Champions

League quarter-final first leg clash. Xavi said he thinks Barcelona winning the top flight for the first time since 2019 would be a magnificent achievement which some are trying to "minimise".



"Winning La Liga is incredible, winning the league gives you stability," added the coach.

'I remember (former Real Madrid coach Zinedine) Zidane, after winning the Champions League, saying that the objective was to win La

Liga.

"It's being minimised that winning a league, for us, would be extraordinary."



# Jabeur books return to final at rainy Charleston

**AP** ■ CHARLESTON

Second-seeded Ons Jabeur booked a return to the WTA final in Charleston on Saturday, but she'll have to wait to learn her opponent after rain halted the second semi-final. Jabeur, who finished run-

ner-up to Belinda Bencic on the green clay courts of South Carolina last year, said a rain delay of more than three hours proved advantageous in her 7-5, 7-5 victory over third-seeded Daria Kasatkina. But the second semi-final,

between top-seeded American Jessica Pegula and fourth-seeded Bencic was also interrupted, and with heavy weather expected to linger, play was halted for the night with their match in a second-set tiebreaker.

Bencic had won the first set 7-5, but the second was knotted at 6-6 with Pegula up 4-2 in the

tiebreaker when the match was stopped as the light rain that had fallen through several games intensified. Jabeur, runner-up last year at Wimbledon and the US Öpen, reached her first final of 2023 with her victory over Kasatkina.

But the world number five, who was sidelined in February after knee surgery in the wake of the Australian Open, had to rally from two breaks down in the first set and a break down in the second. On Sunday she'll be chasing her first title since a grass court triumph in Berlin last year.

"I have to thank the rain," Jabeur said, adding it gave her time to talk to her coach and "reflect on what happened in the first set. "My game was there, I just needed to find something small," added Jabeur, who was broken to open the second set but gained a decisive break in the final game to finish it out.

Lionel Messi scored one goal and set up another for Sergio Ramos as Paris Saint-Germain won 2-0 at Nice on Saturday to restore their six-point lead at the top of the Ligue 1 table and ease the pressure on coach Christophe Messi converted a Nuno Mendes

cross in the 26th minute before Gianluigi Donnarumma produced several key saves and Dante was denied by the woodwork as PSG's goal lived a charmed life on the Cote d'Azur.

Ramos then ended any doubt about the outcome when he headed in a Messi corner with 14 minutes remaining, as PSG bounced back from suffering consecutive home defeats.

on Galtier amid reports he may not

The result clearly meant a lot to Galtier, who was in charge at Nice last season and expressed his displeasure at a banner unfurled by the home supporters aimed at his mother.

"My mum is 83 and has just had cancer. That's all. And if these people in the stands have been watching games in Europe this season it is because of the work I did last season," said Galtier, who led Nice to fifth in his single campaign at the club.

A win for PSG's nearest challengers Lens on Friday had cut their lead at the top of the table to just three points before this game, and before the

"We knew we had a lot of pressure on our shoulders both because of our



Messi and Ramos seal PSG's win

poor performances and because of Lens winning, and especially because Nice are a really good team who have been on a great run," Galtier told broadcaster Canal Plus.

"It was definitely not our best performance of the season but the players fought for each other and it is obviously three important points."
He added: "It is better to have a six-

point lead than be chasing after a sixpoint deficit but we know we have a very important match next weekend."

It was a first defeat in 15 matches in all competitions for Nice since former PSG midfielder Didier Digard

January. The Ineos-owned club remain eighth in the table.

# azio beat Juve to consolidate second place

azio strengthened their grip Lon second place in Serie A with Saturday's impressive 2-1 win over Juventus, while Paulo Dybala moved Roma just behind their capital city rivals with the only goal at Torino.

Sergej Milinkovic-Savic

and Mattia Zaccagni struck the goals which sank Juve and gave Maurizio Sarri's team a great chance of reaching the Champions League next sea-

With nine matches remaining Lazio are five points ahead of Roma in third and most importantly seven in front of Inter Milan, who have been knocked out of the top four after drawing 1-1 at Salernitana on Friday, the only point they have collected from their last four matches.

The Roman side were deserving winners of pulsating



match at the Stadio Olimpico which was won by Zaccagni's brilliantly taken goal seven minutes after half-time.

Italian winger Zaccagni was a menace all night and ended a superb team move by sweeping home his 10th goal of the season from Luis Alberto's wonderfully disguised flick.

'We're all really happy because tonight's match was really important," Zaccagni told DAZN.

"Even in those final minutes when it was a bit on top we really didn't concede very much at all. It's a big step forward. Being second is much more important than my 10

Zaccagni had set up Milinkovic-Savic's 38th-minute opener, which Juve thought was scored after a foul and was cancelled out almost immediately by Adrien Rabiot, and also had a goal ruled out for offside just after putting Lazio ahead. The hosts' win is also great

news for Napoli, whose huge league has been cut back to 16 points but now no longer have to worry about seventh-placed

The Turin giants, who pushed in vain for a second equaliser late on, are hoping to have a 15-point penalty for illicit transfer activity revoked later this month but even if they succeed they would only be a point ahead of Lazio.

Elsewhere, Dybala has been Roma's talisman since arriving as a free agent last summer, and he was once again key when he confidently netted his 11th league goal of the season in the eighth minute in Turin from the penalty spot.

The Argentina internation-

al's strike was enough for Jose Mourinho's solid side to leapfrog both Milan and Inter

### Woods withdraws from Masters with injury

AP 📕 AUGUSTA

 ${
m F}^{
m ive ext{-}time}$  winner Tiger Woods, who limped through an awful, bogey-strewn start to his rain-halted third round of the Masters, pulled out of the tournament with a foot injury organizers said on Sunday.

"I am disappointed to have to WD (withdraw) this morning due to reaggravating my plantar fasciitis," he posted on Twitter shortly after organisers had announced his decision. "Thank you to the fans and to @TheMasters who have shown me so much love and support. Good luck to the players today!"

It is the second time in the past year that Woods has been forced to withdraw from a major championship citing injury.

The 15-times major winner, who now plays a very limited schedule on the PGA Tour focusing instead on being able to compete in majors, had speculated before the tournament that this may be one of his last

"I don't know how many

Masters.

more I have in me," Woods had said on Tuesday, "Śo just (have)

### Rajawat lifts maiden world tour title at Orleans fortune of watching the cream of

**PTI** ORLEANS

India's Priyanshu Rajawat capped off an impressive week with a thrilling win in the final against Denmark's Magnus Johannesen to claim the men's singles title at the

Orleans Masters here on Sunday. The Madhya Pradesh shuttler, who was part of the Indian team that registered an epic win at the 2022 Thomas Cup, saw off world number 49 Johannesen 21-15, 19-21, 21-16 in a 68-minute summit clash to grab the biggest title of his

"I am very happy with my performance this week. It is my first big title and I'm extremely happy to win this," world No. 58 Rajawat, who is likely to get into top 40 after this win, said from Orleans.

The two shuttlers, making it to the final after coming through the qualifiers, dished out some superb badminton, but the Indian rode on his ability to produce winners to secure the world tour super 300

It was the first meeting between the two 21-year-olds, both looking for a breakthrough win but Rajawat, who didn't drop a game in the \$240,000 tournament, showed his maturity as he dished out a controlled aggressive game to come up

The image of an airborne Rajawat unleashing a forehand crosscourt jump smash to trouble his opponent will be etched in the mind of the spectators, as he accu-



mulated multiple points with this

returned early from Orleans when it was a super 100 event, but the tournament was upgraded to super 300 from this year, and the Indian

Raiawat started playing the game following his brother Krunal. He was interested in football for a brief time but then badminton took over and soon he found himself in the Pullela Gopichand Academy in Gwalior.

"I was there for two years but then Gopi sir called me to Hyderabad and I have been training there since 8 year old," said

trademark shot. A year ago, Rajawat had

made the most of the opportunity.

In Hyderabad, Rajawat had the

Kidambi Srikanth or HS Prannoy, training with them shaped his "I grew up watching videos of Lin Dan and Gopi sir and then

Indian badminton in action. Be it

when I started training, there was Srikanth bhaiyya, Sameer bhaiyya, Prannoy bhaiyya, all of them had an influence on my game. The sessions had with them helped me immensely and their success also motivated me a lot.

Rajawat, who had a runner-up finish at Odisha Open in 2022, won the BAI trials to make it to the Thomas Cup team. He then won the Raipur International Challenge and finished second at Bangladesh Open in December.

to be able to appreciate the time I have here and cherish the memories." The Masters is aiming to finish the rain-impacted third round on early on Sunday before proceeding to the decisive final round at Augusta National. Woods is still dealing with the impact of severe leg injuries suf-fered in a 2021 car crash. He made his return at last year's Masters, where he shared 47th and spoke of walking 72 holes on the hilly layout as a victory

# RINKU SEALS IMPOSSIBLE WIN FOR KKI

→he gargantuan Narendra Modi Stadium proved to be too small and an asking rate of 29 too less for Kolkata Knight Riders' Rinku Singh, who hammered five consecutive sixes to seal a miraculous threewicket win over Gujarat Titans in the IPL here on Sunday.

Just when it seemed every-thing was lost for KKR after wily Afghanistan spinner and stand-in captain Rashid Khan had taken a hat-trick in the 17th over to reduce KKR to 155/7, Rinku (48 not out off 21 balls) did the Houdini Act to eke out one of the most memorable wins in the history of the Indian Premier League.

KKR needed 29 runs in the final over to attain the winning target of 205. Umesh Yadav took a single to give the strike to Rinku, who looked like a genius with the bat.

It seemed like he was waving a magic wand, which could fetch him a maximum at his beck and call. With 28 needed off the last five balls, Rinku took the aerial route on all five deliveries to conjure up magic hardly ever seen before in an IPL

Even as a wave of jubilation spread in the KKR camp, the Titans dugout went silent.

Venkatesh Iyer was the other hero for KKR on the day. Before Rinku unleashed his full fury to silence the crowd and leave the Titans fielders looking skyward, the 28-year-old Madhya Pradesh batter made a real 'impact' and brought KKR to the doorstep of victory with a smashing 84 off 40 deliveries, as the two-time IPL champions looked set to chase down the

200-plus target.

The left-handed batter's
100-run partnership with captain Nitish Rana (45 off 29 balls) was the cornerstone of KKR's massive fight-back and came days after both the batters had failed in their match against Royal Challengers Bangalore at the Eden Gardens on April 6.

Putting the disappointment scoring just three runs in the previous game on the backburner, Iyer — who came in as an 'Impact Player' for Suyash Sharma — took the stadium by storm, unleashing eight fours and five sixes, leaving the Titans

Iyer came to the crease at fall of Afghanistan opener Rahman-ullah Gurbaz, who was picked ahead of England opener Jason Roy, and he regaled the packed stadium with his lusty hitting.

Iyer's dismissal in the 16th over, following an Alzarri Joseph yorker that cramped him for



space and he ended up hitting it straight to Gill at long on, sent a wave of jubilation in the Titans

Rashid, who was leading the team in the absence of an unwell Hardik Pandya, then weaved magic in the 17th over, dismissing the dangerous West Indian middle-order batter Andre Russell, Sunil Narine and Shar-dul Thakur off the first three deliveries of his last over to virtually seal the win. But he had no inkling about Rinku's plans. And when it unfolded, it spelt doom for the Titans.

Earlier, a captivating batting display from Gujarat Titans' Vijay Shankar, a fine half-century from young top-order batter Sai Sudharsan saw the defending champions put on a formidable total on the board.

Sudharsan, who had scored an unbeaten 62 against Delhi Capitals in the previous match, struck 53 off 38 balls, studded with three boundaries and two maximums, while Shankar took just 24 balls to score an unbeaten 63, embellished with four boundaries and five sixes, as the Titans made hay.

Young Shubman Gill too came to the party, scoring a feisty 39 and sharing a 67-run partnership with Sudharsan before he was dismissed by West Indian spinner Sunil Narine.

The maturity Gill and Sudharsan displayed after opener Wriddhiman Saha had departed early, dismissed by Narine for just 17 runs (17 balls), helped the team overcome the early setback and take the total to 100 runs without losing any further

The pair's half-century stand laid the foundation and by the time Gill departed, holing out a length delivery from Narine at long-on in the 12th over, he had put the Titans well

on course for a big total. The left-handed Sudharsan flourished from the moment he arrived at the crease at the fall of Saha. He kept picking up handy runs, including a six, as the pair kept the scoreboard ticking.

The best part about the partnership was that the pair kept rotating the strike, taking singles at the first opportunity to keep the opposition on tenter-

Gill's dismissal, which came as a big blow, brought in Abhinav Manohar, who plundered three consecutive boundaries off Umesh Yadav in the 13th over. But his cameo 14-run innings off just eight deliveries was brought to an end by Delhi teenager Suyash Sharma, whose googly ripped through the gap between the bat and pad to dis-

# Tripathi, Markande help SRH earn 1st win of IPL 2023

 $S^{unrisers\ Hyderabad\ produced\ a\ clinical\ performance}$ to register a convincing eightwicket victory over Punjab Kings and open their account in the ongoing Indian Premier League here on Sunday. With SRH chasing 144 after

spinner Mayank Markande's (4/15) exploits with ball, Rahul Tripathi sizzled with an unbeaten 48-ball 74 to help his side complete the task in 17.1 overs.

Skipper Aiden Markram remained not out on 37 off 21 balls, and their efforts ensured that Shikhar Dhawan's 66-ball 99 not out, which lifted Punjab Kings to 143 for nine, went in

Markande did the star turn with figures of 4 for 15 to leave Punjab Kings reeling at 88 for nine in the 15th over. Dhawan hit 12 fours and five sixes. SRH were slow to start with and reached 34 for one at the end of the six powerplay overs.

Having being hit for six by Tripathi, leg-spinner Rahul Chahar came back to grab the big wicket of Mayank Agarwal for a 20-ball 21, in the ninth over. Tripathi then struck two successive fours off Chahar to help SRH cross 50, before hitting left-arm spinner Harpreet Brar for three boundaries on the trot to keep his team in the con-

On a pitch where almost all the batters struggled, with the exception of Shikhar Dhawan, Tripathi managed to shine and brought up his half-century in 35 balls with a six off Mohit Rathee.

That was followed by the duo of Tripathi and skipper Aiden Markram bringing up the fifty partnership at the start of the 14th over, with SRH requiring 49 runs in 42 balls.

Tripathi and Markram then almost sealed the issue in their team's favour by striking Rathee for 21 runs, bringing the equation down to 26 runs in the last



Earlier, even as Punjab Kings lost wickets at regular intervals, Dhawan showed his teammates how to do it with his incredible knock.

Asked to bat first, Punjab Kings endured a disastrous start as they lost Prabhsimran Singh in the very first ball of the match, trapped in front of the wicket by veteran India seamer Bhuvneshwar Kumar The ball hit him above the

knee roll but Prabhsimran decided to walk back without asking for a review, leaving Punjab at none for one. Skipper Shikhar Dhawan

played Bhuvneshwar towards the third man region for the innings first boundary.

However, Dhawan again watched from the non-striker's end as Matthew Short (1) was dismissed lbw by South African left-arm pacer Marco Jansen on the second delivery of the match's second over at the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium. The ball landed on a good

length and swung in before hitting Short's pads. Unlike Prabhsimran, Short consulted his skipper before deciding to come back into the dugout, leaving Punjab Kings in a spot of bother at 10 for two in the second over. Next ball, and another swinging delivery struck wicketkeeper-batter Jitesh Sharma (4) on the pads, and a Jansen's loud shout for an lbw was upheld by the umpire. DRS was promptly taken and the ball-tracking technology showed it was going well down the leg-side, leading to the decision being overturned and giving some relief to PBKS.

Dhawan found two fours off his Indian team colleague Bhuvneshwar, before Jansen returned to send back Jitesh Sharma, who failed to clear SRH skipper Aiden Markram at mid-off.

# Lord Rinku saved the day: Venkatesh

Rinku Singh's stunning final over Ronslaught which handed Kolkata Knight Riders an unlikely win against Gujarat Titans on Sunday earned him a new moniker "lord" from his teammate Venkatesh Iyer, who himself slammed a 40-ball 83.

"It was a nail-biting finish, extremely happy that we won the game. Our coach has always said that we can score 200 on any given day. Honestly, the wicket was quite good to bat. When the target is 200, you can't have silent overs. I was just trying to execute my plans," Iyer said after the match.

"Me and Nitish had a good partnership. Unfortunately, somewhere we lost our way but Lord Rinku saved the day. To be honest, we still believed that we could win. This teaches us that we should never give up until the last ball."

Iyer said the victory will be a "great morale-booster" for the team.

"We want to make winning a habit. I haven't been in great form. Tonight, I went out and played as late as possible. The bowlers were quick and I tried to use their pace, and that worked to my advantage," said



Iyer, talking about his 55-ball 100-run stand with KKR skipper Nitish Rana (45) for the

Gujarat Titans' stand-in skipper Rashid also praised Rinku for playing an outstanding innings when all odds were stacked

Rinku came in when KKR needed 56 off 30 balls, but Rashid's hat-trick almost sealed the game in the favour of Gujarat Titans.

However, the left-handed batter did not give up, hitting five sixes off as many balls from Yash Dayal in the final over after hitting Josh Little for a six and a four in the final two deliveries of the penultimate over.

"It's a tough game for us, especially for me as a captain. You need 30 plus in the last over, the same thing happened for us last year when we won. We will learn from it, more importantly a good game of cricket and the fans would have loved it. It was more about what he is most comfortable with, to trust his (Yash Dayal) plans," Rashid said.

"Rinku played unbelievable shots and credit goes to him for the way he played and for the way he finished. Keep it simple, hit the right area consistently and that's what T20

# RCB aim to bounce back against LSG | Senior guys need

**PTI** ■ BENGALURU

 $R^{\rm oyal\,Challengers\,Bangalore\,will\,be}_{\rm expecting\,more\,runs\,from\,its\,bat}$ ters and discipline in death overs bowling when they take on the highflying Lucknow Super Giants in the IPL here on Monday.

RCB come into the match after a demoralising 81-run defeat against Kolkata Knight Riders and would be eager to return to winning ways at the M.Chinnaswamy Stadium.

It's early days in the tournament but RCB's death bowling has been a major concern for the team.

RCB looked on course to register their second win of the season but the script went awry after the 12th over. They had the game in the palm of their hands, reducing the opposition to 89 for 5 before KKR went on to post

Against Mumbai also they went for over 13 runs in the last five overs. Death overs specialist Harshal Patel and Mohammed Sirai, who had done well with the new ball, have struggled at the

The absence of Wanindu Hasaranga, who is on national duty, and Josh Hazlewood, who is recovering from an Achilles heel injury, has only amplified RCB's death bowling woes.



Both bowlers are expected to link up with team this week. But until then, South African medium pacer Wayne Parnell who has come in a replacement for Reece Topley can help with the ball at the back end of the innings.

RCB bat deep. Openers Virat Kohli and du Plessis did the job in the win against Mumbai but against KKR, the entire line up was done in by spin.

They would be wary against the Lucknow spinners, who come into the game on the back of their stellar display in the five-wicket win over Sunrisers Hyderabad on Friday.

Young leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi has continued to impress, taking six wickets, while veteran leggie Amit Mishra and Krunal Pandya have also played impactful roles.

In the pace department, England quick and the tournament joint leading wicket taker Mark Wood was down with flu and missed the previous game alongside medium pacer Avesh Khan, who injured himself. It is to be seen if the two are available against

Lucknow, who have won two and lost one game, would hope their batters are more consistent. While Kyle Mayers has been outstanding, skipper KL Rahul and all-rounder Marcus Stoinis' form is a concern.

### with me: Rohit IANS MUMBAI fter a crushing seven wick-🔁et loss against Chennai

to step up starting

Super Kings in an IPL 2023 match, Mumbai Indians skipper Rohit Sharma said that the senior guys in the team starting with himself need to step up as they are looking to get some momentum in the league. It was the second consecu-

tive loss for Mumbai Indians as they had earlier lost to RCB in their campaign opener.

"The senior guys need to step up starting with me. We know the nature of IPL, when the tournament starts we need to get some momentum and when you don't it is tough. Just two games and all is not lost still. If you win, you can win a few on the trot and when you lose it is hard to come out of that momentum. Hopefully things start to change. Things we speak in the changeroom have not worked in the middle," said

# Chahar to undergo scans, Stokes suffers toe injury

Chennai Super Kings and India seamer Deepak Chahar will undergo scans after suffering a hamstring injury he sustained during their Indian Premier League match here on Saturday night against Mumbai

Indians. Chahar could bowl only one over at the start of the contest here at the Wankhede Stadium and hobbled off the field after receiving initial treatment, and did not return to take the field for CSK who sauntered to a seven-wicket victory.

The 30-year-old right-arm seamer will now undergo scans on his left hamstring to determine the extent of the injury that he suffered and is expect

Chahar has had a long injury layoff and returned to top-flight action only in this IPL, struggling in the first two games before suffering a fresh hamstring injury on his

"Chahar will undergo scans to identify the extent of the injury once the team returns to Chennai," said CSK in a statement on Sunday

Ben Stokes, who featured in the first two games for CSK but missed the clash against Mumbai Indians on Saturday, is said to have injured his toe, at a time when he is also dealing with a troubled left knee which has prevented him from bowling

full tilt in this IPL. The English all-rounder,



on whom CSK spent Rs 16.5 crore in the auction in December, has so far bowled only one over - against Lucknow Super Giants — and looked far from his best.

"Chennai Super Kings cricketer Ben Stokes is nursing a minor toe injury which forced him out of the match against Mumbai Indians. Stokes played Chennai Super Kings' first two matches of IPL 2023 before injuring his toe during training ahead of the third game, which the Super Kings won by seven wickets," the release said.

The franchise added, "The Chennai Super Kings medical

Chennai Super Kings medical staff are closely monitoring both the players and will provide all support necessary for

### I'll never give up, want to play a Test at Wankhede: Rahane

**PTI** ■ MUMBAI

A jinkya Rahane never gives up and after surprising the cricketing world with the fastest fifty of IPL 2023 at the Wankhede Stadium, the out of favour India batter yearns to play a Test match at his home ground.
On CSK debut, Rahane smashed

seven fours and three sixes in his 61 from just 27 balls and the fastest fifty of the season came off just 19 balls.

"I always enjoy playing at Wankhede. I have never played a Test here. I would want to play a Test here, said Rahane, who led India to a famous Test series win in Australia in 2021.

Rahane was not supposed to start the game but an injury to Moeen Ali gave him an opportunity.



"There is still a long way to go. Today, I was not sure about my place in the eleven. I got to know just before the toss, for me it is about playing one game at a time and staying in the moment," Rahane told the media on Saturday night. "Anything can happen. Today, I was

not sure about my game. For me, I will never give up. It is about playing with enjoyment and passion.
"Whatever format I play, it is about

giving my best every time, rather than thinking about the future, (things) which is not in my hand, not in my control, for me it's all about giving my best every time and be as positive as possible and whenever I get an opportunity I should be ready for that," Rahane