



OPINION 6

POLITICAL SEESAW
IN NEPAL

WORLD 8

IRAN VOWS RETALIATION FOR ISRAELI
STRIKE ON SYRIAN CONSULATE

MONEY 10

INDIA MANUFACTURING SECTOR
GROWTH HITS 16 YEARS HIGH IN MARCH

Published From

DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA

Late City Vol.21 Issue 91
*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

BHOPAL, WEDNESDAY APRIL 3, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹1.50

Established 1864

the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com

DELHI CAPITALS
READY FOR KKR
CHALLENGE
12 SPORTS

BAIL FOR SANJAY SINGH Bane or Boon for AAP?

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

In a relief to AAP leader and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh, the Supreme Court on Tuesday granted bail to him in the money laundering case related to the Delhi liquor policy case after the Enforcement Directorate conceded that it has no objections. The AAP leader is not supposed to make any public statement regarding the case, the court added, while dismissing as infructuous the second petition filed by Singh challenging his arrest and remand. The top court decision has brought a big relief to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in midst of Lok Sabha poll campaigning as two of its top leaders — national convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and former Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia — are in jail in connection with the case. The bench comprising Justices Sanjiv Khanna, Dipankar Datta and PB Varale passed the order to grant him bail, who has been in jail for six months, observing that no money has been recovered from his possession and there is no trace of it, while orally commenting that Singh would be entitled to indulge in



In this file photo, AAP MP Sanjay Singh being taken to the Rouse Avenue Court by the Enforcement Directorate officials in connection with the Delhi excise policy case in New Delhi. Singh was on Tuesday granted bail in the case by the SC PTI

political activities during the period of bail. The bench ordered that the AAP leader can continue with his political activities but cannot make any statements with regard to the case. It said Singh will remain out on bail during the course of the entire trial and that the terms and conditions for the bail will be fixed by the special court. During the post-lunch session, Additional Solicitor General

SV Raju, appearing for the ED, said he has taken instructions from the probe agency and it has no objections if Singh is out on bail. "I am making the statement without going into the merits of the case and keeping all the rights and contentions open," he said. Taking note of the statement, the bench ordered, "In the morning session ASG SV Raju was asked to obtain instructions. He states they have no objections if Sanjay is released on bail in proceedings arising out of the FIR...In view

of the statement made, we allow the present appeal and direct that Sanjay be released on bail during pendency of trial on terms and conditions set by the trial court." The bench said the concession of bail granted to Singh will not be treated as "precedent". Consequently this bail order may not be of much help to other jailed AAP leaders, including Arvind Kejriwal. The bench clarified that the bail was granted to Singh on the concession granted by the ED and not on merits. As AAP MP Sanjay was given bail by the Supreme Court in the liquor "scam" case on Tuesday, the atmosphere was jubilant at Singh's residence as supporters with "dhool and nagada" gathered outside his house to celebrate the bail. They raised slogans like "Jail ke taale toot gaye, Sanjay bhaiya choot gaye" and "Sanjay tum sangharsh karo, hum tumhare sath hain". Reacting on the bail, Singh's wife Anita Singh said the happiness is incomplete with three of her "brothers", Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia and Satyendar Jain, still behind bars. Describing Singh's bail as the "victory of truth", his wife said the AAP will celebrate when all its leaders are cleared in the case.

Sleep timing of Ram Lalla keeps Ayodhya awake

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

Controversy has erupted over the district administration's proposal to keep Ram Lalla awake for 24 hours during the upcoming Ram Navami festival, drawing objections from saints and members of the Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust. Anticipating a significant surge in devotees during Ram Navami, the district administration has suggested keeping the temple doors open round-the-clock, discarding the traditional 'shayan' (sleeping) timing, to accommodate the expected influx of worshippers. District Magistrate Nitish Kumar had announced that the Ram Temple management will graciously open its doors round the clock from April 16 to April 18, with the pinnacle of celebrations slated for April 17. However, the proposal has been met with skepticism from saints, who question the prudence of such a decision. Senior Priest Satendra Das remarked, "Never ever any temple remained open for 24 hours, that too for three days. This is against Hindu tradition. Bhagwan also needs rest." While the Trust asserts that it is consulting with the saints



to gather their opinions on the matter, concerns remain regarding the departure from established worship traditions. The Ram Navami fair, slated to begin on April 9, anticipates a massive turnout of over 50 lakh devotees in Ayodhya from across the country. With such a crowd expected, there is consideration to extend the temple's opening hours to 24 hours a day during the festival period to ensure uninterrupted darshan of

Ram Lalla. Presently, the temple operates for 14 hours daily, attracting a footfall of approximately one and a half to two lakh devotees to Ram Lalla's shrine. Acknowledging the necessity for extended hours during the festival, the district administration has urged the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust to contemplate opening the temple 24 hours on Ashtami, Navami, and Dashami tithis.



Ministry seeks report on Vistara flight cancellations, delays

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

A day after Vistara decided to temporarily curtail its daily flight schedule, the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) has sought a detailed report from the Tata group airline amid non-availability of pilots causing flight cancellations and major delays. The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has also asked Vistara to submit a daily report on the flights that are being cancelled and delayed. Vistara has been facing backlash from passengers on social media due to significant operational challenges. Over the past week, flights have either been cancelled or delayed. Vistara has cancelled around 60 flights on Tuesday after the airline cancelled approximately 50 flights and 160 delayed on Monday. The number could even go up to 70. In the ongoing summer schedule, Vistara will be operating 25.22 per cent more weekly flights at 2,324. Many passengers have taken to social media to complain about flight delays and cancellations. Reflecting the impact of flight cancellations and delays, Vistara's On Time Performance (OTP) touched 51.4 per cent on April 1 and it was the lowest among the scheduled airlines, as per the latest data from the civil aviation ministry. The airline's passenger load factor stood at 85.4 per cent on April 1, the data showed.

Modi attacks Rahul over fire remark

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ RUDRAPUR (UTTARAKHAND) / NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday launched a blistering attack on Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for his remark suggesting that there will be a "conflagration" in the country if he gets a third term and asked the people to wipe out the Congress from everywhere. Addressing his first election rally in Uttarakhand, Modi said he is being threatened and abused by the corrupt but there will be even bigger action against corruption after his re-election. "The Congress and INDIA Alliance have made their intentions clear. Congress's royal

family shehzada (prince) has threatened there will be fire if Modi gets another term in office. Staying out of power has made them so desperate that they are now talking about setting the country afire. Would you let them do it? Is this the kind of language used in a democracy? Wouldn't you punish them?" Modi said. At an INDIA Bloc rally in Delhi's Ramlila Maidan on Sunday, Rahul Gandhi had said if the BJP wins the election through "match-fixing" and changes the Constitution, then the country would be on "fire" and would not survive. "The Congress, with its Emergency-mindset, no longer has faith in democracy. Therefore, it is busy instigating



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses a public rally ahead of upcoming Lok Sabha elections in Udham Singh Nagar district in Uttarakhand on Tuesday PTI

people against the electoral mandate," the Prime Minister alleged. He accused the Congress of pushing the country towards instability and anarchy and asked the people to wipe it out from everywhere. He said a big Congress leader in Karnataka recently spoke of separating south India from the country and dividing it. But instead of punishing him, the party has given him a ticket to contest the polls, he said, apparently referring to Congress leader DK Suresh. The Prime Minister also accused the Congress of insulting the country's first Chief of Defence

Staff Bipin Rawat, who hailed from the hill State. He alleged that the Congress, which encouraged infiltrators, was troubled the most when the BJP brought CAA to give citizenship to persecuted religious minorities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan. "The Congress is sunk so deep in the morass of appeasement that it cannot think of national interest," he alleged. He also talked about how the "weakness" of Congress Governments had led to the "country's division" and the "ceding" of Kartarpur Sahib Gurudwara from Indian Sikhs.

India sees red as China runs riot renaming Arunachal towns

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Tuesday rejected attempts by China to rename places in Arunachal Pradesh and asserted that assigning "invented names" will not alter the reality that the State "is, has been, and will always be" an integral and inalienable part of India. Responding to questions at a Press conference, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Monday had said, "If today I change the name of your house, will it become mine? Arunachal Pradesh was, is and will always be a State of India. Changing names does not have an effect."



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar

The MEA statement on Tuesday was issued in response to media queries in the wake of China releasing a fourth list of 30 new names of various places in Arunachal Pradesh amid Beijing's stepped-up assertions in recent

weeks to re-emphasise its claim over the Indian State. "China has persisted with its senseless attempts to rename places in the Indian State of Arunachal Pradesh. We firmly reject such attempts. Assigning invented names will not alter the reality that Arunachal Pradesh is, has been, and will always be an integral and inalienable part of India," MEA Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal was quoted as saying in the statement. The 30 places renamed by Beijing include 12 mountains, four rivers, one lake, one mountain pass, 11 residential areas and a piece of land, state-run Global Times reported. A high-resolution map of the areas has also been shared by China.

Three former foreign secretaries ask parties not to rake up Katchatheevu

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

The DMK's game plan to bring in Katchatheevu, a 285 acre uninhabited islet 20 km off Rameswaram coast, an issue in the upcoming Lok Sabha poll has backfired as three former Foreign Secretaries of the country have issued a stern warning to the major political parties which are behind the move. It all started with the DMK's manifesto for the 2024 election blaming the BJP Government at the Centre for failing to retrieve the islet that was ceded to Sri Lanka in 1975 by the then Prime



Minister Indira Gandhi as part of the move to settle the international maritime boundary line between the two countries. It has also been revealed that a technology innovation by Union Government's INCOIS laboratory to keep the fishermen away from

international maritime border line did not take off because of the lack of interest in it by a political party in Tamil Nadu. Shiv Shankar Menon, who was the Foreign Secretary and later national security adviser under the UPA Government led by Manmohan Singh has alerted the parties not to rake up the Katchatheevu issue. "It is like scoring a self-goal and will be counter productive," Menon told media persons who asked him about the possibility of retrieving the islet, a bone of contention between fishermen of Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka.

Crackdown on vehicles with tinted glass intensifies

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Considering the involvement of tinted glass-equipped vehicles in criminal activities and the increasing prevalence of such vehicles, the Delhi Police has initiated a crackdown on these vehicles across the national Capital. The Najafgarh area of south west Delhi leads the list as of now with as many as 851 violations, followed by 617 in Nangloi, 417 in Punjabi Bagh, 365 in Tilak Nagar and 350 in Dwarka among others. The IGI airport area in Delhi, known for its bustling activity among tourists and

foreigners, has also experienced a 100 per cent surge in violations within just one year. Last year, the Delhi Traffic Police recorded 123 violations, whereas from January 1 to March 15 this year, the number has escalated to 265 violations. The police said such vehicles have a history of being used for committing crime against women by criminals. According to the law, the front windscreen should have a visual light transmission (VLT) of at least 70 per cent, which means it shouldn't block more than 30 per cent of the light. The side windows should maintain a VLT of at least 50



per cent, ensuring adequate visibility. The opaqueness of heavily tinted windows obstructs clear visibility, posing a threat both for the other commuters and pedestrians and the driver of the four wheelers. The Delhi Traffic Police launched campaigns this year to target such vehicles with as many as 7,567 violators booked in 2023 compared to 1,083 in 2022 and 3,029 in 2023. Taking vigilance of a concerning trend of non-compliance, measures including heightened surveillance, regular checkpoints, and stringent penalties for offenders were put in

place in India's Capital. These violations were frequently happening mainly in West and South west Delhi including areas of Najafgarh, Nangloi, Punjabi Bagh, Tilak Nagar, Dwarka, Karol Bagh, IGI Airport, Kapashera, Rajouri Garden, and Badarpur. Comparatively, the violations in these areas have also increased manifold over the years. While 50 violations were seen in Punjabi Bagh in 2022, the number went up to 417 in 2024. Similarly, in a period of a year the number of tinted glass violations in Tilak Nagar area went to 365 from

just 129 in 2023. By addressing this issue, the Delhi Traffic Police aims to mitigate potential hazards associated with impaired visibility, thereby reducing the incidence of accidents and promoting responsible driving practices. It also aims to crackdown on criminals who target women. Vehicle owners have been told to adhere strictly to regulations of tinted glass, stating that the "compliance with these regulations not only fosters safer road conditions but also contributes to the overall well-being of the community."

INDIA bloc a group of corrupt and dynasts: JP Nadda

PNS ■ JABALPUR

BJP chief JP Nadda on Tuesday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi brought a change in the political culture which was dominated by the politics of caste, dynasty and appeasement in the past and replaced it by setting the trend of development. Addressing a meeting of intellectuals in Jabalpur in the run-up to Lok Sabha elections, Nadda alleged the opposition INDI alliance is a group of corrupt and dynast leaders. "Prime Minister Narendra Modi has brought a political change in the political culture of the country. I want people to recall old political style which focused on caste, whether a person is forward

(caste) or backward, which castes are supporting him and vote bank politics," Nadda said. He alleged that caste-based politics used to be the main agenda of politics in the past. "Another way of doing politics in those days was through dynastic rule. Only members of one family continued to remain in the front while the rest were supposed to just clap," he said. Nadda further said politics of appeasement was the trend in the country in the past. "But today we can say that after Modi ji arrived, the dynastic politics, caste politics and the politics of appeasement is ended and a new politics of development has started in the country,"

the BJP president said. He said earlier people were made to believe that nothing would change in the country and everything would go on as it is. "It was instilled in our minds that we won't be able to see any change in the country, and we have to compromise. It was ingrained in the minds of the common people that change was impossible and they had no option but to adjust to the situation," Nadda claimed. However, this mindset has changed after Modi came to power ten years ago. "The common man's mindset is changed and he starts believing that things can change. Things have changed and will continue to change. This is a political change in the country,"

Nadda added. Referring to the opposition INDIA bloc, Nadda said it consists of those (leaders) who want to save their corruption. "On the one hand, Modi has resolved to eliminate and uproot graft, whereas on the other hand, there is the INDI alliance," he added. Nadda said people should decide which type of politics they prefer. "Development is happening and the country is moving ahead under the leadership of the prime minister. The corrupt have suffered a blow. (Leaders of) the INDI alliance are fighting to save their families as well as themselves from the blow being dealt to corruption," Nadda said. Taking a swipe at the

Opposition, the BJP chief claimed half of the members in the INDI alliance are either out on bail or in jail. Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi are out on bail while Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal and his ministers are in jail, he said. He also mentioned the National Conference led by Farooq Abdullah, PDP of Mehbooba Mufti, Shiromani Akali Dal, Samajwadi Party, RJD, DMK, BRS, Congress and others in his speech, saying the members of the India bloc are dynastic parties. "The Congress has now become the party of Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi as all other leaders have left them," he added.



BJP National President JP Nadda with Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav and BJP State President VD Sharma during a public meeting in Shahdol, Madhya Pradesh on Tuesday. Pioneer photo

PepsiCo India to invest Rs 1,266 cr in MP

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

PepsiCo India on Tuesday said it will invest Rs 1,266 crore to set up a flavour manufacturing facility at Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh as part of its expansion plans in the country. The plant spread over 22 acres, will play a significant role in scaling up PepsiCo's beverage production in India, generating employment and positively impacting the local economy, the company said in a statement. The construction of the upcoming plant is slated to start in 2024 and is expected to be operational in the first quarter of 2026. "With support from the government of Madhya Pradesh, we aim to strengthen our footprint while driving impactful progress in enhancing the socio-economic

The construction of the upcoming plant is slated to start in 2024 and is expected to be operational in the first quarter of 2026

landscape of the region," PepsiCo India & South Asia CEO Jagrut Kotecha said. PepsiCo India Senior Vice President, Beverages George Kovoor said the new unit will be the company's second flavour manufacturing facility in India. "We aim to ramp up the production of our beverages to meet the rising demand in the country. This strategic investment not only strengthens our dedication to pro-

viding the highest quality beverages to our consumers but also reinforces our responsibility to drive sustainable practices across our operations," Kovoor added. PepsiCo's first flavour manufacturing facility in India is in Channo, Punjab. PepsiCo India said in line with its global sustainability goals, the new manufacturing facility will operate entirely on renewable energy sources leading to a reduction in carbon footprint by an impressive 1.9 metric tonne per day. With zero liquid discharge technology, the plant aims to achieve approximately 90 per cent overall water efficiency, ensuring responsible management of water resources, and replenishing 100 per cent of the water used at the facility, the company said.

CEO not aware of complaint regarding BJP office at CM House

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Chief Electoral Officer Anupam Rajan has said that he is not yet aware of the complaint regarding making CM House a party office. Rajan has said that he has not seen any complaint regarding whether any political meeting has taken place in the CM House. He has said that he will take information in this matter. Rajan said these things in response to the questions of journalists during the media workshop organized on the topic of media and elections at the Academy of Administration. Regarding the situation of holding elections when there are 400 candidates, Rajan said that voting can be conducted through EVMs when there are 384 candidates. There is currently no provision for the



Commission to use EVMs if there are more candidates than this and if such a situation arises, the Commission will take a decision on it. During this, information was given that if any candidate has given wrong information related to crime in his affidavit, then the Returning Officer will take action in this matter only when someone complains about the

concerned candidate. After the complaint, the affidavit of the concerned candidate is pasted on the board by the Returning Officer and then action is taken on the basis of the complaint. In this, the Returning Officer is instructed that he will not take any action against the candidate, nor will he investigate his affidavit. If any mistake is found, the Returning Officer

can take action against which the candidate has the right to appeal. He can appeal to the Chief Electoral Officer and if he is not satisfied there, he can go to the ECI and then to the court. Joint Chief Electoral Officer Manoj Khatri posted in CEO MP Election Office was also present in this workshop. In this workshop, information was also given about precautions to be taken on paid news and social media. Experts of the Election Commission said that if a candidate posts something on social media from his own blog or through Facebook or If such work is done, certification will be required. In the workshop, information was also given to the media people about making photographs and videos inside the polling stations and the arrangements made during the counting of votes.

Animal bite awareness programme organised

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

The Department of Trauma and Emergency Medicine at AIIMS Bhopal on Tuesday organized a significant animal bite awareness program under the theme "Aware Today for a Safe Tomorrow." The event, aimed at addressing the critical issue of animal bites and rabies prevention, was inaugurated by the Executive Director, Professor (Dr.) Ajai Singh. Addressing the gathering, Prof. Ajai Singh emphasized that animal bites are not just a medical problem but also a social concern that demands urgent attention. He stressed AIIMS Bhopal's commitment to taking up the challenge of creating awareness and educating the public on the prevention and management of animal bites, particularly rabies. "Public awareness is crucial in tackling the menace of animal bites, and it is imperative that we extend our efforts beyond the confines of our institution," remarked Prof. Ajai Singh. "By collaborating with local health authorities and engaging communities, AIIMS Bhopal aims to create widespread awareness and ensure a safer environment for all." Dr. Prabhakar Tiwari, Chief Medical and Health Officer (CMHO) reaffirmed the importance of collaborative efforts in addressing public health challenges. Earlier in the program, Professor (Dr.) Yunus, Head of the Department of Trauma and Emergency Medicine, provided insights into the alarming statistics concerning animal bites in India. He highlighted that every hour, two individuals lose their lives due to rabies, underscoring the urgent need for preventive measures and awareness campaigns. The event witnessed active participation from AIIMS Community, reflecting the collective resolve to combat the menace of animal bites and ensure a safer future for all.



Workers prepare vermicelli ahead of the Eid-ul-Fitr festival in Bhopal on Tuesday. Pioneer photo

Govindpura police seize 3 kgs of Cannabis from two miscreants

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Govindpura police have nabbed two drug peddlers and seized about 3 kilograms of Cannabis Rs 55000, investigation of source and seller network is under investigation. Police said on March 31 during the night patrolling when they reached near the DPI building, two youths suddenly started running after seeing the police vehicle. Both of them ran towards the Gautam Nagar police post, whom we surrounded with the help of the staff and caught him. When asked about the reason for running away, they failed to provide a correct reply. The two were identified as Arju Purviya(25) of Kargil Basti, Govindpura and Bablu Uike(26) Kargil Basti, Govindpura. During the investigation the drugs which was Cannabis was found to be weighing 2.995 kg worth Rs 55,000. Police registered a case under section 8 and 20 of the NDPS Act. The crime record of the accused is under investigation. The police are continuously conducting operations to

The two were identified as Arju Purviya(25) of Kargil Basti, Govindpura and Bablu Uike(26) Kargil Basti, Govindpura

catch illegal drug traffickers in the city and based on information regarding the drug peddlers police immediately took action on the information received. The accused failed to provide documents related to Cannabis and was arrested and the source from where the accused brings the drug and where does he dispose is under investigation. The accused used to find the retail customers by bringing drugs at cheap prices and selling it in small quantities in Bhopal and nearby areas. The drug peddlers are involved in the crime for how long it is yet to be investigated and their local network has to be revealed.

13 candidates file nomination papers

Bhopal: Chief Electoral Officer Anupam Rajan has said that as per the election schedule of Lok Sabha Elections-2024, the process of filing nomination papers for the second phase has started from March 28. On the third day of the second phase of nomination, 13 candidates submitted 19 nomination papers. From March 28 till now, 27 nomination papers have been filed by 21 candidates. CEO Rajan has informed that on April 2, one nomination paper was filed by one candidate in Lok Sabha Parliamentary Constituency No. 6 Tikamgarh (SC), 2 nomination papers were filed by 2 candidates in Lok Sabha Parliamentary Constituency No. 7 Damoh, 2 nomination papers by 2 candidates in Lok Sabha Parliamentary Constituency No. 8, 6 nomination papers by 4 candidates in Lok Sabha Parliamentary Constituency No. 9 Satna, 5 nomination papers by 3 candidates in Lok Sabha Parliamentary Constituency No. 10 Rewa and 3 nomination papers have been filed by 1 candidate in Lok Sabha Parliamentary Constituency No. 29 In Betul (ST). No nomination papers were filed by any candidate in Lok Sabha parliamentary constituency no. 17 Narmadapuram.

Golf cart facility commences at IGRMS for all the visitors

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

In collaboration with Daulat Ram Engineering bhopal and Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya From today, the facility of golf cart has been started for all the visitors visiting the museum at reasonable prices. With this service visitors will be able to visit their desired exhibition in less time. Prof Amitabh Pandey, Director of Manav Sangrahalaya, said that now the service of one golf cart each for entrance number 01 to 06 seats and for entrance number 02 to 11 seats has been started. In this golf cart the fare for the 06 seater will be Rs 300 for 02 hours and for the 11 seater the fare will be 500 (five hundred rupees only) for 02 hours. On this occasion Devashish Sharma, representative of Daulat Ram Engineering the institute which is running the first phase of golf cart service said that golf cart services can be available in a group or on an individual basis. one can also enjoy the golf cart by taking a ticket of Rs 50 (fifty rupees only) per person, but this facility will be available only when all 06 seats are booked. The tourists who visited the museum said that it is convenient for all of us tourists.

The service of one golf cart each for entrance number 01 to 06 seats and for entrance number 02 to 11 seats has been started

This will save us from the worry of reaching directly to different exhibition venues and not having to walk in sunlight in summer or winter. Earlier, when tourists used to go to the exhibition site on foot we had to face various problems. Now visiting the museum will be even more comfortable. Golf cart service will start from entrance no. 01 at 11 am and will go to the first parking lot, Tribal habitat open air Exhibition Himalaya Village, Veethi Sankul, Mandapam, Avriti Bhavan, Coastal Village, Maru Gaon, open air Exhibition and entrance no 02. Golf cart service will start from these points and reach entrance number 01.



Visitors enjoy the Go-Kart facility launched for the visitors at Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya in Bhopal on Tuesday. Pioneer photo

Saplings plantation programme organised at AIIMS

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

As part of the ongoing Swachhata Pakhwada, AIIMS Bhopal organized a significant tree plantation event. The Executive Director, Professor (Dr.) Ajai Singh, spearheaded the initiative by planting trees alongside a large contingent of participants from various walks of life. With a profound emphasis on environmental conservation and community welfare, Prof Ajai Singh reiterated the importance of maintaining cleanliness and greenery within not only the premises of AIIMS Bhopal but also its surrounding areas. Recognizing the invaluable benefits of a greener environment, Prof Singh highlighted how it significantly contributes to the enhancement of public health.

"Today's tree plantation drive symbolizes our commitment to fostering a healthier and more sustainable environment," stated Prof. Ajai Singh. "Trees play a crucial role in providing us with oxygen, absorbing water, and mitigating pollution. By planting trees, we not only contribute to our immediate surroundings but also to the well-being of future generations."

Provide factual and accurate information to readers: CEO

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Media should provide factual and correct information related to elections to the readers. The Commission's effort is to provide all the latest election related information to the media. Chief Electoral Officer Anupam Rajan said this in the state level media workshop organized at the Academy of Administration. He said that media plays an important role in conducting free and fair elections. Rajan emphasized the ongoing efforts to promote widespread voter participation, stressing the crucial role of media co-operation in this endeavor. He urged media outlets to actively engage in voter awareness



initiatives. Additionally, Rajan highlighted his consistent communication with the media to address queries and ensure accurate information dissemination to the public. **Facility of postal ballot for journalists holding authorization letter** The Chief Electoral Officer,

Rajan, said that journalists possessing authorization letters from the Election Commission will have the option to vote via postal ballot. This provision enables journalists to cast their votes conveniently while engaged in polling day coverage. Furthermore, individuals aged above 85 years or

those with over 40 percent disability will have the opportunity to vote from their homes upon request. Rajan also addressed journalists' inquiries during the briefing. **Journalists are the eyes and ears of the Commission** Joint Election Officer Manoj Khatri said that journalists are the eyes and ears of the Commission. He said that through you the Commission gets information, which is sometimes not apparent to the administration. Khatri said that political advertisements should be issued only after the approval of the MCMC Committee. Advertisement should not be given as news. He also urged journalists to file nominations for the National Media

Award. National Level Master Trainer Professor P.N. Sanesar and Dr. Y.P. Singh gave detailed information about various electoral processes including cVIGIL app, KYC, MCMC, paid news, media ethics and media coverage on the day of polling and counting. Rajan expressed deep condolence on the untimely demise of the son of senior Bhopal journalist Manoj Saini. He prayed to God to give peace to the departed soul and strength to the family to bear this loss. Additional Chief Electoral Officer Rajesh Kumar Kaul, Joint Chief Electoral Officer Basant Kurre and Deputy Chief Electoral Officer Pramod Shukla officers and journalists were present in the media workshop.



Speaker of the Madhya Pradesh State Assembly Narendra Singh Tomar and Principal Secretary AP Singh release the new year calendar of the state assembly in Bhopal on Tuesday. Pioneer photo



Polling officials during a training programme ahead of the Lok Sabha elections at Samanvay Bhawan in Bhopal on Tuesday. Pioneer photo

Police team with villagers rescue accident victims

PNS ■ INDORE

On the information of vehicle accident from the control room Mhow on March 10, between 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm under outpost Kampel police station Khurail area, outpost in-charge Sub Inspector. Satyendra Singh Sisodia left with his team and reached the incident site at Padmi Khandel Road, where a Wagon R car was buried under an Ashok Leyland truck MP 19 HA 4764 which was filled with a sack of porridge, which was found by the police team. With the help of the crane team and the villagers, the injured Sumit Jaiswal, his wife Purnima Jaiswal and children Vyonmesh Mithali and Anju trapped in the Wagner car were rescued and immediately sent to the hospital with the help of an ambulance. On Tuesday at Chowki Compel Indore, Superintendent of

Police, (Rural) District Indore Sunil Mehta, ASP Rupesh Dwivedi, DSP (Rural) Indore Umakant Chaudhary and Police Station Incharge Inspector Deepak Khatri, safely rescued the injured people trapped inside the car in the car-truck accident that took place on Pedmi-Khandel road. The villagers who saved the lives of five people were honored by garlanding them and giving them citations and in praise of the great work done by the entire rescue team by the senior officers, SP Sunil said, "Many things have happened in life. There are very few occasions when we can save a person's life. If we want to narrate a story to the next generation, then there can be no story greater than the one in which we have had the good fortune to save someone's life. Heartfelt thanks to you all for your efforts." ASP Rupesh Dwivedi applauded the rescue team mem-

bers as "angels" for the injured. DSP Umakant Chaudhary expressed thanks to the villagers who rescued the victims Team of rescue team villagers appreciated are- Anand Singh son of Nirbhay Singh Thakur, Sonu son of Inder Singh , Ajay son of Balveer Singh, Kamal son of Hukam Singh, Yogesh son of Gopal Singh Thakur , Ajay son of Amrit Singh, Mahesh Narayan Singh resident Jethura, Ayush son of Roop Singh, Rajat son of Kallusingh, Atul Puran Singh, Sonu Dalsingh ,Rajveer Devdendrasingh resident Pedmi, Shobharam, Munshilal Deva, resident Banjari, Raju Guman Deva resident Banjari Dheeraj Govindsingh Thakur resident Shivni Baje Chamansingh resident Khandel 17. Ritesh Uday Singh resident Khundel 18. Sonu Nagendra Tiwari, Lallan Kanya Yadav , Naveen Kailash Chand and Mukesh Singh Chauhan.

Atishi claims, now she, Bharadwaj, Durgesh, Chadha would be arrested

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi minister and AAP leader Atishi on Tuesday claimed that after arresting Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, now the Enforcement Directorate will arrest her, Saurabh Bharadwaj, Durgesh Pathak and Raghav Chadha. At a press conference here, Atishi revealed that the offer, conveyed by a close associate of hers, came with a stark ultimatum: join BJP to safeguard her political career or face imminent arrest by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) within a month. "I have been approached to join the BJP through a personal contact. I have been told that either I can join the BJP and save my political career or get arrested in the next one month. An individual very close to me told me that Prime Minister Narendra Modi made up his mind to put every AAP leader in jail. Starting with Satyendar Jain, Manish Sisodia, Sanjay Singh, now they have arrested Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal. But now they want to arrest another four top leaders -- me, Raghav Chadha, Durgesh Pathak and Saurabh Bharadwaj," Atishi said. Despite these threats, Atishi affirmed AAP's resilience and commitment to upholding the nation's constitution under the Kejriwal. Atishi mentioned that after the rally at Ramliha Maidan on Sunday, where lakhs of people came from Delhi and across the country, and after the AAP's on the streets for the past 10 days, now the BJP feels that arresting four leaders of AAP wasn't enough. In the

Despite these threats, Atishi affirmed AAP's resilience and commitment to upholding the nation's constitution under the Kejriwal

upcoming time, the next four leaders will be arrested and put in jail. "I want to tell the BJP that we are not afraid of their threats. We are soldiers of rvind Kejriwal, disciples of Bhagat Singh. We will fight till our last breath to protect the constitution of the country and to provide a better life to the people of this country. Whether BJP puts one MLA or worker of the Aam Aadmi Party in jail, 10 more people will come forward to fight Shri Arvind Kejriwal's battle and defeat BJP," Atishi concluded. Making this claim in a news conference, Delhi Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj said before March 31 there was a question in the minds of the people as well as the media since the top leadership of the AAP _ chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia, Satyendar Jain and Sanjay Singh _ are behind bars, whether people will turn up for the mega rally at Ramliha Maidan. Moreover, whether people have faith in the AAP, whether the organisation is still standing firm, or has it collapsed as the BJP has been repeatedly claiming, Bharadwaj said.

There is no reason for Kejriwal to resign as CM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A day after the special court sent Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to judicial custody till April 15, Delhi Minister Atishi weighed in on his arrest, saying that "there is no reason" for him to resign from the post of Delhi Chief Minister because "he has not been convicted". Her statement came after the BJP on Tuesday demanded Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's resignation, saying the national capital deserves a "better Chief Minister". A day after Arvind Kejriwal was sent to judicial custody in the excise policy case, AAP MLAs and councillors on Tuesday met his wife Sunita Kejriwal and asserted that the Delhi chief minister should run his government from jail and not resign. The AAP MLAs and Municipal Corporation of Delhi councillors told Sunita Kejriwal that two crore people of the national capital stand with the chief minister and he should not resign at any cost, party leaders said. Of the AAP's 62 MLAs in Delhi, 55 including all the ministers were present during the meeting. Four MLAs are out of station while three -- Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia and Satyendar Jain -- are in jail, the AAP leaders said. Delhi Minister and AAP leader Atishi, has made it clear that Kejriwal has no plans to resign because "he has not been convicted". "There are two constitutional and legal provisions related to this in our country. Representation of the People Act says that if you have a conviction for

more than two years, then you cannot remain a public representative. Arvind Kejriwal has not been convicted...Arvind Kejriwal enjoys the overwhelming majority of the Delhi Assembly, so there is no reason for Arvind Kejriwal to resign. If Arvind Kejriwal resigns today then it will be a very simple and straightforward solution for the Bharatiya Janata Party to topple the opposition governments," she said at a press conference when asked whether Kejriwal will resign from the post of the chief minister. Earlier in the day, BJP spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia has accused Kejriwal of "double standards", noting that he took resignations from deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia and another ministerial colleague Satyendar Kumar Jain but has refused to resign following his arrest in the excise case. Atishi said there was no rule in the Constitution or law that requires Arvind Kejriwal to resign as the chief minister of Delhi. Citing the Representation of the People Act, she said Kejriwal has not been convicted in any case yet and that he enjoys an overwhelming majority. Asserting if Arvind Kejriwal resigns from the post of Delhi CM, Atishi stated that the BJP will topple the AAP government. "Arvind Kejriwal enjoys the overwhelming majority of the Delhi Assembly, so there is no reason for Arvind Kejriwal to resign. If Arvind Kejriwal resigns today then it will be a very simple and straightforward solution for BJP to topple the opposition governments," she stated. Addressing a press conference on the AAP MLAs and councillors meeting with

Sunita Kejriwal, Senior leader Saurabh Bharadwaj said the elected representatives wanted to meet Sunita Kejriwal after Kejriwal's arrest. However, the meeting was delayed due to the party's protests against the arrest and the opposition INDIA bloc's rally at Ramliha Maidan. The AAP MLAs met Sunita Kejriwal and nearly two dozen of them expressed their views, the Delhi Minister said in a press conference. Since Kejriwal can interact with her through videoconferencing from Tihar jail, the MLAs and councillor urged Sunita Kejriwal to communicate to him their message that he should keep running the government from behind bars without tendering his resignation, Bharadwaj added. They told Sunita Kejriwal that the BJP will exert "immense" pressure on the Delhi chief minister to resign. If he steps down, they will say that he abandoned his responsibilities, Bharadwaj said. "It is the policy of the BJP to set a trap and force the chief minister to resign," he said. Kejriwal has communicated to party leaders and volunteers through his wife that he is fine, strong and more resolute than before, and asked them not worry about him, the Delhi minister said. Sunita Kejriwal also communicated the chief minister's message that he was extremely proud that the AAP MLAs, councillors and the entire INDIA bloc successfully organised Sunday's massive rally at Ramliha Maidan even though he was not with them. "The chief minister has said that the rally gave a clear message that as long as he is in the jail, the problems for the BJP will keep increasing," Bharadwaj said.

Unveiling entrepreneurial wisdom



PNS ■ INDORE

In a bid to foster entrepreneurial spirit and inspire budding innovators, Medi-Caps University recently hosted a captivating Fire Side Chat Event. The highlight of the event was the presence of five distinguished entrepreneurs, each sharing their unique insights and experiences in the world of business, among the esteemed panelists were Mr. Himanshu Chaturvedi, Founder of MotionGility; Mr. Vivek Singh Parihar, Founder of RTB Analytica; Mr. Himanshu Goyal, Founder of Eship Simplified; Mr. Akasht Bharani, Founder of 10XDigital; and Mr. Ravindra Sharma, Founder of Autosys. The session was marked by engaging discussions on various aspects of entrepreneurship, including the journey from ideation to execution, overcoming challenges, the importance of mentorship, and strategies for securing funding for star-

tups. Students actively participated, seizing the opportunity to seek guidance and advice from the seasoned experts. This event was dignified by the esteemed presence of Honorable Vice Chancellor Prof. (Dr.) D.K Patnaik and Pro-Vice Chancellor Prof. (Dr.) D.K. Panda, underscored by the steadfast support and direction of university leadership, exemplified by Mr. Palash Garg, OSD, and Mrs. Saloni Garg, Director Branding, while faculty members, Deans, and Heads of Departments were lauded for their pivotal contributions to its success. As the curtains drew to a close on the Fire Side Chat event, attendees departed with new found inspiration, motivation and a deeper understanding of the entrepreneurial journey. The event served as a testament to Medi-Caps University's commitment to nurturing entrepreneurial talent and fostering innovation in its student community.



A master trainer during a training programme for polling officials ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, at Ravindra Bhawan in Bhopal on Monday. Pioneer photo

Sukesh Chandrashekhar hits out at Delhi Transport Minister Kailash Gehlot

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Launching an attack on the Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, jailed 'conman' Sukesh Chandrashekhar has hit out on the Transport Minister and Najafgarh MLA Kailash Gehlot, accusing harassing him. Gehlot was recently called for questioning by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in the alleged excise policy linked money laundering case. In a letter, he said, "My Dear Kailash Gehlot ji, your next Don't worry, I understand how you and Jain are putting pressure on me; Harassing me

through Jail Superintendent and his staff. But not for long." He alleged that he gave Rs 50 crores to Gehlot at his farm house and said, "Even though you changed all your phones before going to ED for investigation, you won't get away my friend. I will give all the screenshots , voice recordings of yours and mine, starting with the delivery of 50 Crores that I gave at your farm house, for Rajya Sabha seat as promised by my bro Arvind Kejriwal, so Kailash ji you can't get away, all the DBS account details and Cyprus Bank details I shall give the agency, I am sure you

He also hit out at AAP spokesperson Priyanka Kakkar again for 'for making disparaging libelous statements defaming Sukesh' following the Home Ministry's nod for CBI probe into the alleged extortion case involving AAP leader Satyendra Jain, who is in Tihar jail

exactly know what I am talking about." He also hit out at AAP spokesperson Priyanka Kakkar again for 'for making disparaging libelous statements defaming Sukesh' following the Home Ministry's nod for Central Bureau of Investigation's (CBI) probe

into the alleged extortion case involving AAP leader Satyendra Jain, who is currently in Tihar jail. He said, "Be it as it may Priyanka ji for starters the Jail Protection money of Rs. 10 Crore and Rs. 50 Crore that was extorted and paid by me was to Satyender Jain in the

capacity of then Jail Minister and on his instructions to Sandeep Goel then DG Prison." Sukesh, who is accused in a Rs 200 crore cheating case involving the wife of a former Fortis Healthcare promote, alleged, "There is enough and more evidence including whatsapp chats proving the same, so unwantedly to act and do your drama everyone has seen the video of Tihar Club "COO" Satyender Jain getting his messages in Jail proving his power in Jail and how Jail Officials Right from top to Bottom are the puppets. Don't worry, I will make sure to expose everything in detail with supporting

evidence, then the world will know who was and is in charge of the famous Delhi jails, actions speak louder than words, so kindly hang on." Calling AAP chief the original 'conman', Sukesh remarked, "So Priyanka ji, today time and again all of you keep shouting I am the notorious conman, but please ask your Kejriwal ji and Jain saab why they were happily using my services and mainly my money since 2015. Have some shame, you can't fool the People of India and mainly Delhi anymore. All know who the real OG conman is, Arvind Kejriwal."

EC appoints special observers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission (EC) on Tuesday appointed special observers for administrative, security and expenditure monitoring purposes in several States to ensure a level playing field during the upcoming elections. The special observers — former civil servants with brilliant track record — have been tasked with overseeing the electoral process with strict vigilance, particularly against the back-drop of challenges posed by the influence of money, muscle and misinformation, the poll panel said.



also been deployed in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Odisha, it said. Besides general, expenditure and police observers, the EC had been deploying special observers in poll-going states. Special observers will station themselves at the state headquarters and if needed, tour the areas where sensitivity is high

and necessary coordination is required, the poll panel said. They can seek requisite inputs from time to time from the observers deployed in the parliamentary constituencies, assembly seats or districts, wherever necessary, without interfering in their work. They are also mandated to seek inputs and coordinate with regional heads and nodal offi-

cers of various agencies involved in monitoring activities. The special observers will have a special focus on border areas and work towards plugging the inflow of inducements and also work on seeking inputs on the redressal of grievances of the public. Also on their agenda is quick response to counter false narrative and monitoring of the last 72 hours before the poll, to ensure free and fair elections. While retired IAS Manjit Singh has been deployed as a general special observer in Bihar, former IPS Vivek Dubey has been posted as a police special observer in the state. In Maharashtra, Dharmendra S Gangwar, a retired IAS, has been made general special observer while N K Mishra, a former IPS, is the police special observer. In Uttar Pradesh, retired IAS officer Ajay V Nayak is the general special observer and Manmohan Singh, a former IPS officer, is the police special observer. Similarly, in Andhra

Pradesh, the general special observer is retired IAS officer Ram Mohan Mishra and the police special observer is former IPS Deepak Mishra who was once with the Delhi Police. Former IAS officer Yogendra Tripathi and retired IPS Rajnikant Mishra have been appointed as a general special observer and police special observer, respectively for Odisha. In West Bengal, the general special observer is former IAS Alok Sinha and the police special observer is retired IPS Anil Kumar Sharma. The special expenditure observers for the five states are Rajesh Tuteja in Uttar Pradesh, Himalini Kashyap in Odisha, B Murali Kumar in Karnataka, Neena Nigam in Andhra Pradesh and B R Balakrishnan in Tamil Nadu. All are former Indian Revenue Service officers. Lok Sabha elections are being held in seven phases between April 19 and June 1. The counting of votes will be held on June 4.

EC issues transfer order of two IGs, eight DMs, 12 SPs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



The Election Commission (EC) on Tuesday issued transfer orders for two inspectors general of police, eight district magistrates and 12 superintendents of police in five States as part of its “regular review” for the Lok Sabha elections. The decision was taken by the commission during a meeting chaired by Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar along with Election Commissioners Gyanesh Kumar and Sukhbir Singh Sandhu, the poll panel said. The elections were announced by the commission on March 16 and will be held in seven phases between April 18 and June 1. Counting of votes is scheduled for June 4. The Election Commission (EC) said that all the transferred officials have been asked to hand over their

charge to their immediate junior officers. Those shunted out will not be assigned any election duty till the completion of the Lok Sabha polls, it said. The respective state governments have been directed to send a panel of names of Indian Administrative Service and Indian Police Service officers to the commission and those short-listed will be appointed in the place of those transferred. Among those transferred are the inspectors general of police Guntur Range, Andhra

Pradesh, and Central Range, Odisha. The other officers are the district magistrate (DM) of Udalgiri in Assam; the DM and the superintendent of police (SP) of Bhojpur district, and the DM and the SP of Nawada district in Bihar. The SP of Deoghar in Jharkhand, the DMs of Cuttack and Jagatsinghpur, the SPs of Angul, Bhubaneswar, Khurda, Rourkela and the DCP (Cuttack) in Odisha have also been transferred. In Andhra Pradesh, the DMs of Krishna, Ananthapuram and Tirupati districts and the SPs of Prakasam, Palnadu, Chittoor, Ananthapuram and Nellore districts have been shunted out. Separately, the EC has asked the Jharkhand chief secretary to fill up vacant posts of SP (Rural) Ranchi, deputy inspector general of police (Palamu) and IGP (Dumka) by sending a panel of names of officials to it.

ICG Samudra Paheredar makes port call at Vietnam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Coast Guard (ICG) pollution control vessel Samudra Paheredar, with an integral helicopter, made a port call at Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam on Tuesday as part of its ongoing overseas deployment to Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries, Coast Guard officials said here. Giving details, they said during the three-day visit, the crew will engage in professional interactions focusing on marine pollution response, maritime search and rescue, and maritime law enforcement. The activities will also include cross-deck training, subject

matter expert exchanges, sports events and passage exercise with the Vietnam Coast Guard (VCG). The visit not only aims to strengthen ties between the ICG and VCG, but also showcases India's indigenous ship-building capabilities. In addition, 25 National Cadet Corps (NCC) cadets aboard the vessel will participate in a Walkathon and Beach Clean-up activities. Since 2015, the ICG and VCG have an existing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which institutionalised the cooperative engagements between the two maritime agencies. This overseas deployment is a testimony to ICG's commitment to bolster bilateral rela-

tionships and enhance international cooperation with friendly countries. The visit of the ICG specialised vessel to these countries is in pursuance with India ASEAN Initiative for marine pollution announced during ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus in Cambodia in 2022. The deployment of Samudra Paheredar to the ASEAN region reflects India's shared concern and resolve towards marine pollution, promoting safety and security through maritime cooperation. Prior to Ho Chi Minh, the vessel had visited Manila, Philippines to demonstrate a seamless continuation of diplomatic maritime engagements in the ASEAN region.

Must focus on changing nature of warfare: Rajnath to forces

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday here urged the armed forces to be prepared to meet the challenge of fast changing nature of warfare and stressed upon the present complex world situation which effects everyone globally. Making this assertion while addressing the Army Commanders' Conference, he said “Unconventional and asymmetric warfare, including hybrid war will be part of the future conventional wars. Cyber, information, communication, trade and finance have all become an inseparable part of future conflicts. This necessitates that Armed Forces will have to keep all these facets in consideration while planning and formu-

lating strategies.” Referring to the situation on the Line of Actual Control(LAC)facing China, Rajnath expressed full confidence that while troops are standing firm, the ongoing talks for peaceful resolution will continue and disengagement and de-escalation, is the way forward. The defence minister complimented the efforts of Border Roads

Organisation(BRO), which has led to the quantum improvement of road communication in the borders both Western and Northern, while working under difficult conditions. Referring to the situation along the Western borders, he complimented the Indian Army's response to cross border terrorism, however the proxy war by the adversary continues. Western borders face Pakistan while Northern borders face China. Rajnath stressed upon the technological advancement taking place in every sphere of our life and applauded the Armed Forces for aptly incorporating them. He appreciated the Army's efforts to develop niche technologies in collaboration with civil industries, including premier

educational institutions and thereby progressing towards the aim of “Modernisation through Indigenisation” or ‘Atamnirbharta’. He emphasised that a regular interface of Armed Forces with the emerging technologies is a must. The Army Commanders' Conference, an apex level biannual event, was conducted in virtual mode on March 28 and thereafter in physical mode on April one and two. During the event, Indian Army's apex leadership comprehensively deliberated upon all aspects of existing security scenarios, situation along the borders, in the hinterland and challenges for the present security apparatus. In addition, the conference also focused on issues pertaining to organisational restructuring, logistics,

administration, human resource management, modernisation through indigenisation, induction of Niche technologies and assessment of impact of the various existing global situations. Rajnath said issues related to “Defence diplomacy, indigenisation, information warfare, defence infrastructure and force modernisation should always be deliberated upon in such a forum. Doctrinal changes whenever required should be made to make the Armed Forces future ready. The recommendation and suggestions made by the senior leadership in such like forum as Commanders Conference should be deliberated upon and be taken to a logical conclusion with mid-course review and modification if required.”

Kharge attacks BJP over state of railways

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Tuesday attacked the BJP Government on the state of the Railways, alleging that it has “ravaged” the Railways by destroying its finance, safety, efficiency and affordability. Kharge claimed that his party will revitalise the national carrier as a growth engine for India. In a social media post, Kharge said, “the Railways (is) ravaged under the Modi Government! Trains, getting ‘trained’ only for Self Promotion.” “Behind the 3D Selfie Points of Modi ji and the event-driven green flags for Vande Bharat, lies the story of absolute apathy, complete neglect and deliberate emaciation of the Railways by the BJP,” he said. Kharge claimed the Railways is still the lifeline for crores of Indians, but the Modi govern-



ment “has destroyed its finances, safety, efficiency and affordability”. “No wonder, the number of mail and express trains that were punctual declined from 79 percent in 2012-13 to 69.23 percent in 2018-19 ! (CAG 2023). The Congress party will revitalise the Railways as a growth engine for India,” the Congress chief said.

Posing seven questions, he asked why has the BJP government not filled more than three lakh vacancies in the Railways. “Is the BJP against SC, ST, OBC, EWS people who may avail reservation in India's largest public sector employer,” he asked. “Why has the average price per passenger per kilometre dou-

bled from 0.32 paise per passenger-km in 2013-14 (UPA) to 0.66 paise per passenger-km in 2023? Is it not true that more than 100,000 train-related deaths were reported between 2017 and 2021? (NCRB). This does not include the deadly Balasore accident (2023) which took the precious lives of almost 300 people,” Kharge said. “Is it not true that the Kavach Railway Safety anti-collision technology only covers 2.13% of the network? Why did the Modi Government withdraw the concessions for senior citizens, women and children, in an apathetic manner during the COVID pandemic? Due to this revocation, the Modi Government looted Rs 2242 crores in a single year,” the Congress president asked. According to the CAG, he claimed that only 0.7 percent funds out of Rs 58,459 crore were spent on track renewal and asked why it was so.

This is the reason, Kharge claimed, why the much-hyped Vande Bharat high speed trains have an average speed of just 83 kmph instead of 180 kmph claimed by the Modi government. “Is it not true that the move to merge the Railway Budget was a way to cut its funds through the back door? Is it not true that Modi Government has unveiled a grand plan of Privatisation of the Indian Railways and incremental privatisation has already begun,” he also asked. According to the National Railway Plan (2021) of the Modi government, the Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha claimed “all freight trains will be privatised by 2031, along with 30 percent of the 750 railway stations”. “All profit-making AC coaches will also be privatised. Only loss-making second class passenger trains will be left with the railways,” he said.

EC ropes in Ayushmann to urge youngsters to vote

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



Actor Ayushmann Khurrana has been roped in by the Election Commission of India (ECI) to urge the youngsters to vote in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. The 39-year-old actor features in the ECI's campaign video that encourages the youth to exercise their franchise in the upcoming elections. Khurrana, known for critically-acclaimed films such as “Andhadhun”, “Dream Girl”, “Bareilly Ki Barfi” and “Dum Lagha Ke Haisha”, said it is imperative that the youth participate in deciding the future of the country. “Everyone must vote and be conscious citizens by participating in the process of nation-building. The power to choose

the leaders who will represent the country, represent our needs in the Parliament rests with us,” “Every vote counts and every vote is important. Voting is a symbol of empowerment in a democratic nation like ours,” Khurrana said in a statement. Santosh Ajmera, director of Voter Education at ECI, New Delhi, praised the actor for supporting the ECI's campaign,

aimed at addressing urban and youth apathy in the electoral participation. “The film, while a commentary on individual behaviour whereby voting day is often considered as a holiday with hundreds of excuses offered for not to vote, gives out a beautiful message and a single reason for why one should vote. “Ayushmann Khurana's act is highly convincing and impactful and resonates well with his followers, mostly the younger generation. ECI has tried to utilise Ayushmann's potential and reach to inspire and mobilize youngsters towards voting, as an important democratic exercise & duty towards the future,” he said. The Lok Sabha polls are scheduled to be held in seven phases from April 19. The counting of votes will be taken up on June 4.

Congress complains to EC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Tuesday complained to the Election Commission against BJP's advertisement campaign, alleging it was maligning the Opposition party through the use of cropped and distorted videos, and urged the poll body to take immediate action against the authors and issue instructions for recall. The Congress also filed a complaint against what it called the BJP's “malicious attempts” to link the Congress campaign to billionaire financier George Soros. AICC General Secretary (Communications) Jairam Ramesh said, “The party lodged a complaint against the BJP's repeated and malicious use of cropped and distorted videos to malign the INC. The ECI was requested to take immediate action against the authors of this low-level campaign, as well as issue instructions for its recall.”

A delegation of party leaders comprising Salman Khurshid, Pawan Khera and Gurdeep Sappal on Tuesday met the Election Commission and handed over a memorandum of their complaints to them. “The Congress Party lodged a complaint against the BJP's malicious attempts to link the Congress campaign to George Soros,” Ramesh said. “This complaint covers other examples of false propaganda that target the INC as well. Not only are these materials patently false, they are also mala fide and knowingly defamatory. The ECI was requested to take immediate action against the authors of this low-level campaign, as well as issue instructions for its recall,” he said in a post on X. The opposition party has also complained against the alleged violation of the model code of conduct for elections in Andhra Pradesh, where assembly and Lok Sabha polls are held together. It claimed posters and advertisements of

state schemes were still bearing the photos of the state chief minister. The Congress submitted its position that no welfare beneficiaries should be denied their benefits during the course of the election in the state of Andhra Pradesh, a position which the Election Commission appreciated, he said. “In violation of the Model Code of Conduct, state scheme advertisements in Andhra Pradesh still bore the photograph of the Chief Minister until recently. The Congress had demanded an immediate stop to this practice, and the Election Commission acted on it, ordering the withdrawal of all posters. It requested the Congress Party to notify it of any remaining posters in the state,” Ramesh said. He said the Congress Party sought a clarification on the expenditure allocation and division between the candidate and the party for expenses on campaign materials.

Only five per cent lithium ion batteries get recycled

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Only a mere 5 per cent of lithium-ion batteries are currently undergoing recycling and reuse, while a staggering 95 per cent are disposed in landfills and incineration, posing grave environmental and safety concerns in the country. As India stands as the 3rd largest generator of e-waste globally, urgent and substantial efforts are imperative to combat this mounting crisis. The dominance of the informal sector in the Lithium ion batteries e-waste scenario has just exacerbated adverse environmental and economic implications. Flaggng the issue, Rajesh Kumar Pathak, Secretary of the Technology Development Board (TDB) under the Union Science and Technology Ministry said, “India is 3rd in the world in terms of e-waste generation and significant efforts are required to curb the issue. TDB supporting this initiative would help to engage informal recyclers to connect with



formal recyclers thereby contributing towards a circular economy.” He was sharing his concerns at an event held to ink a pact with Remine India Private Limited, for setting up a commercial plant for recycling of Li Battery and E-Waste using indigenous technology at Eldeco, SIIDCUL Industrial Area in Sitarganj in district Udhham Singh Nagar, Uttarakhand with TDB pledging substantial financial assistance.

Amidst escalating imports of e-waste, propelled by the proliferation of lithium-ion batteries in portable electronics, electric vehicles, and renewable energy systems, the imperative for recycling initiatives looms large. The potential for value creation through metal retrieval from spent batteries underscores the urgency for sustainable solutions. With India's lithium-ion battery recycling market poised to surge to USD 14.89 billion

by 2030, the need for robust, environmentally friendly recycling methods is paramount. In this pursuit, the concerted efforts of stakeholders to address the burgeoning battery waste crisis and mitigate its adverse impacts on both the environment and economy cannot be overstated. India is one of the world's largest importers of lithium-ion batteries, importing them from China, Japan, and South Korea. In 2022, it imported 617 million units of lithium-ion batteries for USD 1.8 billion. Through the agreement, TDB has pledged a financial assistance of Rs 7.5 crores out of the total project cost of Rs 15 crores, marking a significant stride towards sustainable development and environmental stewardship. The funded project entails the establishment of a commercial plant for the recycling of Li-ion batteries and e-waste, leveraging indigenous technology developed by the Centre for Materials for Electronics Technology

(CMET), Hyderabad. Recognized as a matter of national significance, the efficient recycling of Li-ion batteries serves as a vital source of secondary raw materials for cell manufacturing within the country. The escalating imports of e-waste stemming from the disposal of spent Lithium-ion Batteries (LIBs) are driven by their growing utilization in portable electronics, electric vehicles, and global renewable energy storage systems. Efficient and environmentally friendly recycling methods are imperative to address the escalating issue of battery waste, mitigate migrant supply side risks related to critical elements, and reduce carbon footprints. With informal recyclers often employing rudimentary and environmentally damaging methods to extract valuable materials from e-waste, the result is heightened pollution, soil and water contamination, and health hazards for workers and surrounding communities, pointed out environmentalists.

Congress LS candidates feel disowned by party

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■
DEHRADUN

Congress candidates for the Lok Sabha elections in Uttarakhand are “disenchanted” as the party workers feel that they have been ‘disowned’ by the central leadership when the compared to BJP’s aggressive approach which is set to improve its voting percentage by taking the lead in announcing the candidates much advance and a massive rally to kick-start by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday in the Himalayan state.

One of the Congress candidate of the five Parliamentary seat rued the fact that not a single popular leader of the grand old party has been able to reach out to them yet for any form of campaigning given the fact that any poll candidate can maximum reach out to maximum four villages in a

day in this tough terrains. “This is a well known fact that the connectivity is a major issue in hilly areas and on a given day campaign can be focused only in limited villages or towns as travel time is more from reaching one place to another. We have a good chance in atleast two Lok Sabha seats including that of Haridwar due to a triangular contest. Time is running short as we go to polls in the first phase only on April 19,” shared the party candidate on the sidelines of his campaign. He told The Pioneer that rather than doing team work for improving on consolidated vote percentage couple of the party’s political stalwart are concerned in establishing their kins or in a way working as Team B for the BJP.

However Uttarakhand Congress chief spokesperson Garima Dasauni expressed her delight that there has been immense support to the

candidates and workers are sweating it out their best to take advantage of the strong anti-incumbent factor against the BJP’s Central and State’s ‘misrule’. “We are talking issues concerning people while they (BJP) talking polarizing. People have now understood that current regime will bring more trouble to them as there is a palpable restlessness within,” Dauani told The Pioneer in Dehradun.

Modi initiated the the BJP’s Lok Sabha poll campaign in Uttarakhand on Tuesday by addressing a rally in Rudrapur, which is part of the Nainital-Udham Singh Nagar constituency. “Uttarakhand lives in the heart of the prime minister. The people of Uttarakhand also look forward to his visits eagerly and the party will retain all the seats. Not just election time bu party workers remain with the people round the clock,” state



BJP candidate from Pauri Garhwal, Anil Baluni, visits the ancestral village of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Yamkeshwar, to seek blessings from Yogi's mother during his Lok Sabha campaigning

PNS

BJP spokesman Satish Lakhera said. While BJP chief JP Nadra will begin his tour of the state on

Wednesday during which he will address public meetings in Pithoragarh under the reserved Almora Lok Sabha

seat and Vikasnagar under the Tehri Garhwal constituency. On April 4, Nadra will hold a roadshow in Haridwar.

In 2019, BJP got a massive 61.01 per cent vote share, while the grand old Party 31.40 per cent followed by BSP which stood third, with 4.48 per cent vote share. Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) has also been an entity in the State with a sizeable vote share and has announced its candidates for all the five Lok Sabha seats which goes to polls in the first phase of April 19.

The Haridwar and Tehri Garhwal Lok Sabha is witnessing a triangular contest between sitting three time MP Maharani Mala Rājya Rani Shah of BJP, Jot Singh Gunsola of Congress and Bobby Panwar as an Independent. Shah is the Royal descendant of Kingdom Tehri.

The other four Lok Sabha seats in Uttarakhand are Pauri Garhwal with sitting BJP MP Tirath Singh Rawat but the current contest is between BJP’s chief media incharge Anil Baluni and Ganesh

Gondiyal of Congress. While Union Minister BJP’s Ajay Bhatt and Prakash Joshi of Congress are in Nainital Udham Singh Nagar, Ajay Tamta of BJP and Pradeep Tamta of Congress are in a fight in Almora.

Interesting seat to watch is Trivendra Singh Rawat of BJP and Virendra Rawat of Congress in Haridwar, a constituency represented by former CM and former Union Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal. Sitting independent MLA Umesh Kumar is now giving restless nights to both the Rawats as Umesh is contesting as an independent and has gathered a large base.

Sources said Umesh demanded the ticket for Haridwar seat from Congress but denied since the stand taken by former State CM Harish Rawat who insisted his son Virendra’s candidature and if denied then threatened to quit the party.

Mayawati ekla cholo reshapes UP electoral landscape

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh, often regarded as the heartland of Indian politics, is witnessing a seismic shift in its electoral dynamics as Mayawati, the formidable leader of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), makes a bold declaration of contesting the upcoming elections independently.

This move, which defies traditional alliance strategies, has sent shockwaves through the state’s political arena, significantly altering the calculus for all major players.

In a departure from the prevalent trend of strategic alliances, Mayawati’s resolute stance to go solo in the elections has upended the political equations in Uttar Pradesh. With the BSP firmly asserting its autonomy, the landscape that was once characterized by coalition politics is now undergoing a profound transformation.

Despite overtures from the Congress for an alliance, Mayawati’s unequivocal decision to field candidates independently has disrupted the



opposition’s plans to consolidate against the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The proposed I.N.D.I alliance, which aimed to bring together the Samajwadi Party, Congress, and potentially the BSP, now faces uncertainty in light of Mayawati’s firm stand.

Even within the opposition camp, doubts lingered over the efficacy of aligning with the BSP, with concerns raised about the smooth transfer of votes and seat-sharing arrangements.

The reluctance of key players like the Samajwadi Party to accommodate BSP’s demands further complicated the alliance discussions.

The BSP’s strategic move is underscored by its announcement of candidates for crucial constituencies, particularly in regions like Rohilkhand, where the party seeks to consolidate support among marginalized communities. By nominating candidates like Muhahid Hussain and Irfan Saifi for key seats, the BSP aims to carve out a distinct political identity and strengthen its grassroots presence.

Mayawati’s decision reflects the party’s confidence in its organizational strength and ability to navigate the electoral landscape independently.

Despite the allure of alliances, the BSP remains steadfast in its conviction that it can effectively mobilize its cadre and loyal supporters to secure electoral success.

As the BSP gears up for the electoral battle, attention now turns to the party’s forthcoming moves, including the announcement of candidates for

strategic constituencies across Uttar Pradesh and other regions. Mayawati’s upcoming meeting with party leaders, led by Akash Anand, is expected to chart the party’s electoral roadmap, reaffirming its commitment to political autonomy and strategic clarity.

While internal dissent and deliberations have marked the decision-making process within the BSP, Mayawati’s firm rejection of alliances underscores the party’s determination to chart its own course.

The proactive approach in candidate selection and electoral preparations reflects BSP’s strategic acumen aimed at maximizing gains while staying true to its ideological principles.

Mayawati’s declaration of an independent political trajectory heralds a paradigm shift in Uttar Pradesh’s electoral landscape. As the state braces for a fiercely contested election, the BSP’s unwavering commitment to autonomy sets the stage for a gripping political showdown, with far-reaching implications for the state’s future and beyond.

Enough, will not contest elections anymore, says Siddaramaiah

PTI ■ MYSURU

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday said he has decided not to contest in elections anymore, as he won’t have the health and enthusiasm needed to work after four years with advancing age.

During the 2023 assembly polls itself, he had declared that it will be his last election, but he will continue to remain in politics.

“People in Varuna want me to contest once again for Assembly polls from there, but I have decided not to contest in elections anymore. Now I’m 77 year old , still I have four years time (assembly tenure), I will be 81-82 year-old by then. I won’t have health, and I will not be able to work happily. Can I work with enthusiasm? Enough,” Siddaramaiah said.

Speaking to reporters here, he said, “By 2028 (when Assembly elections are due in Karnataka), I will be 82-year-old, and I will complete 50 years in politics. In 1978, I became the taluk board member.”

When told he doesn’t look old, he said, “I may not look old, but who can experience aging, you or me?”

Siddaramaiah during May assembly polls last year had emerged victorious in Varuna constituency, entering the Assembly for the ninth time.

Siddaramaiah, the then sitting chief minister, had lost in Chamundeshwari in 2018. He, however, won in Badami,



the other constituency from where he had contested, and went on to serve as Leader of Opposition.

Making his debut in the Assembly in 1983, Siddaramaiah had got elected from Chamundeshwari on a Lok Dal Party ticket. He has won five times from this constituency and tasted defeat thrice.

After neighbouring Varuna became a constituency in 2008 following delimitation, Siddaramaiah represented it till he vacated the seat for his son Dr Yatindra in the 2018 assembly polls and went back to his old constituency of Chamundeshwari. In 2023 Yathindra returned the favour to his father by vacating the seat.

Ahead of the May 2018 Assembly polls, Siddaramaiah had said it would “most likely” be his last election. Earlier, during the 2013 Assembly polls too, he had

said that it was his last election and went on to become Chief Minister after the polls.

Amid speculations about leadership change, Siddaramaiah on Monday asked the people of his Varuna assembly segment to give the Congress candidate a lead of at least 60,000 votes in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, to ensure that he remains in the post.

Downplaying his statement, Siddaramaiah on Tuesday said: “I was not emotional, I just said that for all the development work to continue, I should be there, that’s all. Because if BJP comes, they will stop all this. With that intention I said. I have got a lead of 48,000 votes, I asked for an even bigger lead for Sunil Bose (Congress candidate from Chamarajanagar Lok Sabha segment under which Varuna comes).”



Assam CPI(M) lends support to Gaurav Gogoi of Congress

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

The CPI(M) on Tuesday said it has extended unconditional support to Congress nominee Gaurav Gogoi and Assam Jatiya Parishad candidate Lurinjyoti Gogoi in the Lok Sabha elections despite absence of a seat-sharing pact among the parties.

Though the Congress, CPI(M) and the AJP are part of the 16-party United Opposition Forum Assam (UOFA) in the state, they have put up candidates individually barring one seat.

In a series of posts on X, CPI(M)’s Assam unit said they are extending unconditional support to the opposition candidates, who are contesting in the first phase, in order to defeat the BJP-led alliance.

“CPI(M) Assam has decided to extend its unconditional support to @lurinjyotigogoi and @GauravGogoiAsm in Dibrugarh and Jorhat LSC respectively,” it added.

In Lakhimpur Lok Sabha constituency, CPI(M) shall jointly campaign with CPI for their candidate.

“While there is no seat sharing with @INCIndia till date, we shall nevertheless campaign for @GauravGogoiAsm in Jorhat. We however urge @INCIndia to rethink their decision regarding Barpeta LSC,” CPI(M) Assam said.

The Congress nominated its

state Seva Dal chief Deep Bayan from Barpeta, while the CPI(M) has named its lone MLA in the state Assembly Manoranjan Talukdar for the seat.

Another UOFA ally, Trinamool Congress also decided to contest from Barpeta and gave ticket to Abul Kalam Azad.

From the ruling front, BJP’s alliance partner Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) has nominated senior leader, and sitting Bongaigaon MLA Phani Bhusan Choudhury to contest from Barpeta for the general elections.

“It is clear from the ground that the fight is going to be between AGP-BJP Candidate and @ManoTalukdar. Hence, @INCIndia should withdraw their candidate so that it is easier for the @INDIAAlliance to win Barpeta LSC,” CPI(M) said.

In other constituencies in the first phase, the Left party will campaign against the ruling alliance and try to make the strongest antiBJP candidate win, it added.

Out of the 14 Lok Sabha seats, the Congress announced candidates for 13 seats. It has offered Dibrugarh seat to alliance partner Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP).

From the ruling NDA, the BJP has named 11 candidates, AGP nominated two and United People’s Party Liberal (UPPL) declared one candidate.

Prohibitory orders imposed in Assam Cachar ahead of LS polls

PTI ■ SILCHAR (ASSAM)

Prohibitory orders were clamped in Assam’s Cachar district by the administration on Tuesday citing concerns over possible communal violence and breach of peace ahead of the general elections.

The order by district magistrate Rohan Kumar Jha will remain in effect until further orders, an official statement said.

Prohibitory orders under CrPC section 144 has been imposed throughout the district in appre-

hension of breach of peace, public tranquillity and safety of the public during the election period, the statement added.

Polling in Cachar district, which comes under Silchar Lok Sabha constituency, is scheduled in the second phase on April 26.

According to the order, no person or group will be allowed to carry weapons like lathi, lance, spears, ‘dao’ or any other articles which can be used as a weapon of offence.

Additionally, the prohibition extends to carrying guns, toy

pistols, revolvers, as well as using or carrying any explosives, fireworks, or materials capable of producing sound or chemical effects.

Earlier on March 27, the Cachar district administration had imposed prohibitory orders ahead of nomination filing of candidates. These orders included restrictions on the number of people and vehicles permitted within a 100-metre radius of the offices of the returning officer or assistant returning officer.

Modi ended politics of caste and appeasement: Nadra

PTI ■ JABALPUR/SHAHNOL

BJP chief JP Nadra on Tuesday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi brought a change in the political culture which was dominated by the politics of caste, dynasty and appeasement in the past and replaced it by setting the trend of development.

Addressing a meeting of intellectuals in Jabalpur in the run-up to Lok Sabha elections, Nadra alleged the opposition INDI alliance is a group of corrupt and dynast leaders.

“Prime Minister Narendra Modi has brought a political change in the political culture of the country. I want people to recall old political style which focused on caste, whether a person is forward (caste) or backward, which castes are supporting him and vote bank politics,” Nadra said.

He alleged that caste-based politics used to be the main agenda of politics in the past.

“Another way of doing politics in those days was through dynastic rule. Only members of one family continued to remain in the front while the rest were supposed to just clap,” he said.

Nadra further said politics of appeasement was the trend in the country in the past.

“But today we can say that after Modi ji arrived, the dynastic politics, caste politics and the politics of appeasement is ended and a new politics of development has started in the country,” the BJP president said.

He said earlier people were made to believe that nothing would change in the country and everything would go on as it is.

“However, this mindset has changed after Modi came to power ten years ago. The common man started believing that



things could change. Things have changed and will continue to change. This is a political change in the country,” Nadra added.

Referring to the opposition INDIA bloc, Nadra said it consists of those (leaders) who want to save their corruption.

“On the one hand, Modi has resolved to eliminate and uproot graft, whereas on the other hand, there is the INDI alliance. People should decide which type of politics they prefer,” he said.

“Development is happening and the country is moving ahead under the leadership of the prime minister. The corrupt have suffered a blow. (Leaders of) the INDI alliance are fighting to save their families as well as themselves from the blow being dealt to corruption,” Nadra said.

Taking a swipe at the Opposition, the BJP chief claimed half of the members in the INDI alliance are either out on bail or in jail.

Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi are out on bail while Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal and his

ministers are in jail, he said.

He also mentioned the National Conference led by Farooq Abdullah, PDP of Mehbooba Mufti, Shiromani Akali Dal, Samajwadi Party, RJD, DMK, BRS, Congress and others in his speech, saying the members of the India bloc are dynastic parties.

“The Congress has now become the party of Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi as all other leaders have left them,” he added.

Later, addressing a public meeting in Shahdol, Nadra said the country was facing terror attacks every now and then before 2014, but such incidents don’t occur now.

“Earlier scams took place every day, but now action against corrupt persons is taking place with full honesty,” he added.

Nadra said while the prime minister is determined to take the country forward, the Opposition keeps harping on the “remove Modi” tune.

Canvassing for sitting BJP MP from Shahdol (ST) seat Himadri Singh, Nadra said the BJP’s double engine government has ensured the empowerment of women and poor, benefits for farmers, and opportunities for youths to fulfil their aspirations.

Nadra hailed Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav for presenting his government’s three-month report card which highlighted the steps taken for the welfare of the people.

Later in the evening, the BJP president addressed the party workers in Jabalpur.

“It can happen only in BJP where even a meeting of workers is so huge that it looks like a public meeting. This was possible because of BJP’s 18 crore members in the country, which is the largest political party in the world,” he added.

Nine nominations filed for second phase of Assam LS polls

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Nine candidates in Assam filed their nomination papers on Tuesday, taking the total number of nominees to 14 for the second phase of polls, which will cover five parliamentary constituencies in the state on April 26, an election official said.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma was present during the filing of nomination by BJP candidate Amarsingh Tisso for Diphu (ST) constituency.

Speaking on the occasion, Sarma said the elections this time was a formality to re-elect Prime Minister Narendra Modi and to ensure that the development work initiated by him continues.

He said the tribal areas of the state suffered from insurgency for decades but it was due to the PM’s initiative that violence has ended and development has taken place.

In Diphu (ST), two candidates filed their nominations so far with an independent submitting his papers earlier.

In Karimganj, AIUDF candidate Sahabul Alam Choudhury and independent aspirant Binoy Krishna Roy filed their nominations, bringing the total number of candidates in the constituency to four. Previously, SUCI(C)’s Prajwal Sudip Dev and

independent candidate Dilip Kumar had also submitted their papers.

In Silchar (SC), three more candidates filed their nominations. They are SUCI(C)’s Provas Chandra Sarkar, Bangali Nabonirma Sena’s Barindra Kumar Das and independent Raju Das.

Former Lok Sabha MP Radhey Shyam Biswas of All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) submitted his nomination for the Silchar constituency on Monday, taking the total number of candidates to four.

In Nagaon, two independent candidates, Abu Shama and Sikha Sarma, filed their nominations, while Saiful Islam Chowdhury of Asom Jana Morcha submitted his papers on Monday, taking the total to three aspirants so far.

In Darrang-Udalguri, Lalit Pegu of Voters Party International (VPI) submitted his nomination during the day.

Overall, the total number of nominations filed for the second phase polls, covering Nagaon, Darrang-Udalguri, Diphu (ST), Silchar (SC), and Karimganj, stands at 14.

The prominent candidates to contest in the second phase are Congress sitting MP Pradyut Bordoloi from Nagaon against BJP’s Suresh Bora and AIUDF MLA Aminul Islam.

Tumultuous times

Imran Khan gets relief in Toshakhana corruption case; no reprieve for Pakistani politics

In what can be termed as a minor victory for cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan, he has got some relief from the court in the ongoing corruption case against him. In a dramatic turn of events, the former Pakistani Prime Minister, Imran Khan, and his wife, Bushra Bibi, have had their 14-year jail sentence suspended by the court. Imran Khan received a reprieve as the High Court of Islamabad suspended the sentence imposed on him and his wife, Bushra Bibi, in the Toshakhana corruption case. Initially sentenced on January 31 by an accountability court, the couple challenged the verdict in the Islamabad High Court. The Islamabad High Court has granted temporary relief to the couple by suspending their sentences and providing them bail. The decision, made by the Islamabad High Court, has stirred considerable controversy and reignited discussions about the state of governance and accountability in Pakistan. The case revolved around allegations that Imran Khan and his wife had received luxury gifts from foreign dignitaries during his tenure as Pakistan's Prime Minister and did not deposit them in the state treasury. The decision to suspend the jail term has sparked intense debate across Pakistan. Supporters of Imran Khan view it as a victory for justice, citing a lack of substantial evidence and alleging political vendetta by the ruling party. On the other hand, critics argue that the move undermines the credibility of Pakistan's anti-corruption efforts and raises questions about the role of the judiciary. This development comes at a crucial juncture for Pakistan, with the country grappling with a myriad of economic, social, and political challenges. The new regime that came to power is still gasping for legitimacy. The popular perception is that the election was a farce and Imran remains popular though behind bars. He was ousted from office two years back when he fell out of favour with the Pakistan army, which holds significant influence as the kingmaker in the country. Imran campaigned for his party in the general elections but was put behind bars just before the elections and remained there throughout the election while Pakistan Muslim League (N) won the elections and Shehbaz Sharif was elected as the prime minister of the country. The popular perception is that it is the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf of Imran Khan has a large support base and Imran remains a popular leader. With the court verdict now going in his favour Imran may take on the ruling party more aggressively. While Imran Khan's supporters see it as a vindication of his leadership and a blow to his political adversaries, PML(N) is likely to intensify its efforts to dig deeper into Imran's follies. Moreover, the role of the military in Pakistani politics continues to be a subject of speculation and concern. Amidst these challenges, Pakistan faces an uncertain future. A lot needs to be done to ensure good governance and accountability in the country. As Pakistan navigates through these turbulent times, the need for strong and principled leadership has never been more pressing.



A herd of wild Asiatic elephants seen on the outskirts of Guwahati

Role of parents in a child's formative years

The first five years of a child's life are termed 'golden period,' a pivotal phase where parents play a monumental role in shaping its future

The first five years of a child's life are a unique opportunity for parents to nurture and guide their child's development so that they can realise their full potential and become the best version of themselves. This period is often referred to as the "golden period," a critical and transformative phase that lays the foundation for all their future development, learning, and well-being. Let's understand why. Unraveling Synaptic Pruning Every baby is born with about 100 billion brain cells which are largely not connected with each other. As the baby comes into the world and experiences the world through sights, sounds, smells, tastes and feel, these brain cells start firing and connecting with each other at an astounding rate to form "synapses". But, starting around the age of 2, the brain wants to be efficient and it starts pruning off brain connections (synapses) that it thinks are not strong or important enough by a process called synaptic pruning. It's almost as if the child starts losing their talents even before they have a chance to



fully develop them. **Pivotal Role Of Parents in Early Childhood** For parents, it's crucial to understand the significance of synaptic pruning in the early years of a child's brain development, and it highlights the importance of providing rich, engaging learning experiences for their baby right from birth. By offering diverse and holistic learning experiences - that includes physical play, creative stimulation - parents can help ensure that the most beneficial synapses are strengthened in their child's brain, setting the foundation for a lifetime of talents and skill development. **Sooner, the Better** During the first five years the brain is exceptionally malleable, and experiences leave a lasting impact on cognitive, emotional, and social development. Maximising positive experiences and interactions during this critical phase

sets the foundation for a child's future success in various aspects of life. The younger the baby, the faster they learn, and wider the window for them to explore their fullest potential. **Practical Tips for Parents:** **1.Quality Interactions:** Your young baby or toddler is capable of amazing feats, much beyond your imaginations! Treat them not as a helpless being, but as a fearless and curious learner! **2.Deliberate Stimulations:** Create deliberate opportunities to provide your baby or child with the right stimulations to grow and develop their physical, intellectual, social, cognitive, creative, logical, and problem solving skills through play. **3.Consistent Activity:** Get into an easy-to-follow routine, where you are not stressing out daily about researching and reading on what to do with your child, but can follow a done-for-you program that tells you what activities to do with your child on a daily basis for their all-round development. **4.Meaningful Playtime:** Try and give many opportunities to your child to play with kids

of their own age to help develop compassion, confidence, social skills and even a higher IQ. It is as important for them to interact with other kids as it is for them to interact with adults, and we can't neglect one over the other! **5.No Screen time:** Yes, it's easy to feed your child while watching a video on mobile! But, screen time may lead to long term impact on your child's brain development, and may also lead to speech delays, so avoid screen time as much as you can! Bill Gates has said that the first five years of a child essentially shape how the next 80 years turn out to be. Parents thus have a huge responsibility towards their children to understand the significance of synaptic pruning and recognise this golden window of opportunity. Through love, engagement, and thoughtful nurturing, parents can contribute to the flourishing of strong neural connections, laying the groundwork for a bright and promising future. *(The writer is Co-founder, Raising Superstars; views are personal)*



RAGHAV HIMATSINGKA

Political seesaw in Nepal

As Nepal navigates through these uncertain times, the future of its leadership and the direction of its governance hang in a delicate balance

Many Nepalese see second time Home Minister Rabi Lamichhane Rashtra Swatantra Party as a future Prime Minister . With Bell as its election symbol it became the fourth largest party on debut in politics. Bereft of ideological orientation and any macro vision, it has focused on development and eradication of corruption. Ironically, Lamichhane is himself being investigated for fraud a second time—the first time he had to step down due to dual passport and citizenship issues. Nepali Congress had blocked Parliamentary proceedings setting a deadline of 31 March for an impartial parliamentary probe and demanding his resignation for alleged fraud in a cooperative fund. He was questioned by an inhouse panel of lawmakers where he denied the charge. Both Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda and former PM KP Oli have ruled out the probe and his resignation. Lamichhane captured the people's imagination as a Galaxy 4K TV anchor who championed the crusade over corruption in his signature show, Seedha Kura Janata Ko Sang (Straight Talk with People). He is youthful, charismatic and a popular leader who is going places. A Janata Samajwadi Party politburo member, whose party is in the five-party coalition Government told me yesterday in Pokhara, : "Lamichhane ko dui ta haath ma laddu chha (Lamichhane has sweets in both hands), implying he's the new kingmaker sought by the opposition NC to break the coalition and return to power. The NC is believed to have offered him the premiership before Prachanda and Oli had secured him. Will Lamichhane take a break till investigations - if ordered - are completed? Or will the case lead to another political crisis? But the assault on corruption is absolute. The former Maoist leader and Prachanda confidante KB Mahara was rearrested and released on bail in the 61 kg gold scam in which his son Rahul is already in jail. Many distinguished leaders are in and out of jail. There is a



money and name trail with Chinese deeply embedded. The Bhutan refugee scam had powerful politicians including former NC defence minister, Balkrishna Khand, recently released on bail and Maoist Top Bahadur Raymajhi still in custody. Many others including a "prominent lady" are linked to it. Min Bahadur Gurung, the owner of the biggest departmental store chain, Bhat Bhateni, was in jail recently. And last month, Nepal's only billionaire and NC lawmaker, Binod Chaudhary, was investigated over Bansbari land scam while his brother Arun was briefly jailed. The names of two former PMs have been linked to Lalita Niwas land scam. Another former PM's name is whispered about a tea estate in Jhapa. Both Prachanda and Lamichhane are attacking corruption with utmost vigour China was last month delighted with the Left alliance returning to power which Communist leader Oli insisted was not Beijing's handiwork but "ours" - "we brought about the change". Despite the perceived pro-China Government, its leaders are moving very slowly on BRI and the utilisation of Rs 60 bn pledged by President Xi Jinping during his maiden visit in 2019. Last week Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Narayan Kaji Shreshtha was on a nine-day visit to Beijing (UML's Bishnu Poudyel was also in China)



THE FORMER MAOIST LEADER AND PRACHANDA CONFIDANT KB MAHARA WAS REARRESTED AND RELEASED ON BAIL IN THE 61 KG GOLD SCAM IN WHICH HIS SON RAHUL IS ALREADY IN JAIL

and met his counter part Wang Yi. They reaffirmed to "very soon sign the BRI implementation plan" which is according to Chinese procedure, is needed for executing projects. When NC's former Foreign Minister Prakash Mahat signed the BRI Framework Agreement in 2017, Nepal had worked on 35 projects which were toned down to nine. The hesitation on part of both China and Nepal and the consequential delay is due to defining the funding modality. Kathmandu wants aid and grants or , concessional, not commercial, loans from China. Nepal has joined only China's Global Development Initiative, not Global Security or Global Civilisation Initiatives. After an agonising four years, Kathmandu subscribed to US's Millennium Challenge Corporation - Nepal Compact in 2022. BRI is intended to balance MCC. Nepali strategists have modified Prithvi Narayan Shah's dictum — Nepal is a yam between two stones (India and China) to three stones (India, China and US). Till about 2010, US Embassy in Delhi would say: "It will take the lead on Nepal from India." Over time, that has changed. I've been living in Lame Ahal, a predominantly Gurung village below the Kathmandu-Pokhara Highway which China, its original builder, is four-laning for the last two years throwing up dust, slush and anger.

Chinese engineers from Wayuan Highway and Bridge Construction Company with Nepalese labour are working at snail's pace. Pokhara-ites were telling me it hadn't rained for two years. Many village taps had dried up. Then suddenly last week Pokhara valley was deluged in rain, causing havoc for road and air traffic from Pokhara. It is an unseasonable phenomenon and climate-change related. India is still the favourite whipping boy. When I visited Bhat Bhateni and observed in audible voice: everything is Chinese" the lady at the counter responded: "India does not give us anything". On my daily trek across Seti river, I sometimes hear the word 'thug' about India. All of this is compulsive and imagined anti-India sentiment which will not go away anytime soon. Prachanda is already talking about switching coalitions again. This tactic keeps coalition partners with him. NC is trying to wean away JSP and Unified Socialists led by Upendra Yadav and Madhav Nepal who was once called Madhav India to revive Democratic alliance keeping the current coalition on a short fuse and Nepal unstable. *(The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and a founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. Views are personal)*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WATER SCARCITY

Madam — Acute water shortage is a fact of life in most Indian cities. The water crisis in Bengaluru adds to the plethora of apocalyptic tales of water scarcity. In Bengaluru, the cost of tanker services surged, impacting upscale and residential areas alike. The issue of water scarcity and the lack of access to clean water in many parts of the world. water is frequently regarded as a commodity rather than an essential human right. The absence of water could be perilous in alternative scenarios like urban fires due to which firefighters are struggling to encounter increased challenges in reaching a blaze in our densely populated country. Declaring water as a human right can be seen as problematic because it doesn't address the underlying issue of access and distribution. While it's crucial for those who lack it, simply declaring it a right without addressing systematic issues could be seen as a superficial solution. In 2023, the sale of bottled water in India was worth about 403 billion rupees. The growth slowed down mainly because fewer people in rural areas were buying bottled water. It takes about five times more water to make a plastic bottle than the amount of water it can hold inside. **Palak Rohra | Ujjain**

GET RID OF WASTE

Madam — The common practice for household refuse disposal in rural areas is to dump solid waste openly in backyard gardens or open spaces. Such indiscriminate disposal is an environmental hazard and can threaten human health and safety. Solid waste that is improperly disposed of can result in several problems. It can create a breeding ground for pathogenic microorganisms and vectors of disease and cause a public nuisance due to its unsightliness and bad smell. It can cause contamination of surrounding soil, groundwater and surface water, and it can also create fire hazards, and physical hazards and have poisoning effects (from pesticides and insecticides).

Empowering women in science



Apropos news article "Need more women representation in science" published on April 02, this is my response. The underrepresentation of women in STEM fields is a multifaceted challenge, stemming from societal biases and a lack of support within professional circles. Recognising this disparity, the Department of Science and Technology (DST) in India has launched the 'Women in Science and Engineering-KIRAN (WISE-KIRAN)' scheme, a commendable effort to empower women across diverse backgrounds in scientific pursuits. WISE-KIRAN's comprehensive approach addresses various hurdles faced by women in STEM, from societal stereotypes to limited resources and mentorship opportunities. By offering scholarships, mentorship programmes, and capacity-building workshops, this initiative aims to foster a supportive environment for women in scientific careers. Moreover, schemes like WIDUSHI and CURIE further bolster women's participation by supporting retired and non-permanent women researchers and enhancing research infrastructure in women's institutions. Additionally, initiatives like Vigyan Jyoti play a crucial role in sparking young girls' interest in STEM disciplines, paving the way for a more inclusive and diverse scientific community. These efforts signify a step forward in breaking down barriers and fostering a culture of inclusivity, ultimately driving innovation and progress in STEM fields.

Vishal Kumar | Delhi

However, these problems can be avoided by using appropriate management techniques. For all waste management issues, your role should be to engage community members and families in awareness of the solid waste problems in their area and try to change their behaviour. In doing so, it should be possible to have a clean, attractive and sustainable environment. Proper management of e-waste will help your community prevent communicable diseases and sustainably safeguard the environment.

Shanthi Ramanathan | Mumbai

STRUGGLE OF INDIAN CRICKETERS

Madam — Apropos news article "New pace sensation Mayank who found inspiration in jet planes" published on April 01, this is my response. There is no dearth of Mayank Yadav's like stories in Indian cricket. Many past and young cricketers who have made it to the IPL or Indian team have seen their share of struggles in their lives and come from humble beginnings. MS Dhoni, Bumrah, T. Natarajan, Mukesh Kumar, Praveen Kumar—the list is endless.

Since we have a fascination for fast bowling hence any bowler who bowls at faster than 150 kmph delivery gets into the limelight. Mayank, who did not have proper cricketing shoes 7 years ago and could not even get proper meals and his father's small commodity business collapsed during Covid. But the Sonnet club in Delhi took great care of him and nurtured him. There is no doubt that by clocking 156 kmph delivery he has become the talk of the town but he should not forget that before him there was Umran Malik who bowled at 157 kmph delivery and even played for India too, but then his inconsistency did him in. So Mayank Yadav would do well to sharpen his other aspects of the game and try to be consistent if he wants to play for India. Because only bowling fast will not fetch him the desired results. He has to develop in swing, outswing, slower, cutter all kinds of variations.

Bal Govind | Noida

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

TIME TO ROOT OUT CORRUPTION

Create an environment that ensures fairness, justice and integrity in governance



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR **NIKUNJ JI**

In recent months there has been one topic that has consistently grabbed headlines in Indian media and that is 'Corruption'. Huge scams, central agencies probes, public protests and anti-corruption agitations have kept the topic alive in all sections of media, Government quarters and in public and private discussions. There has been enormous pressure on the Government by civil rights activists to make a strong anti-corruption Law and implement it aggressively across the country. However, in this whole struggle, we tend to forget the fact that the issue of corruption cannot be dealt with by activism and political awareness alone. Because laws and regulations cannot deter humans from indulging in follies of character and moral values. It is like pruning or cutting the stems and branches that will sprout again and proliferate in more directions. Such laws can surely deter people in high public offices from indulging in blatant acts of bribery, fraud and corruption but it cannot root out the evil itself.

So what is it that makes man corrupt? Is it power, status, wealth or lack of these that makes him so? The genesis of corruption is not to be found in any external circumstance, it actually lies in the psyche or the character of the human soul. It begins with a desire that tempts one to have more, acquire more and grab more money, assets, power and fame in order to gain happiness.



Once it starts, it creates a chain of vicious circles that keeps feeding itself with more desire and indulgence. This blind chase is then supported by the temporary feeling of being high and powerful which is followed by emptiness, insecurity and despair that further drives a person to commit such acts of corruption. All this begins from the fundamental ignorance about the true identity of self. Because we believe our self-worth depends on money, role, status, fame or authority we strive to create more identities based on that. With time these fabricated means of self-worth crumble and fall apart and in that fear, we put in all effort to strengthen and protect these false support systems because we feel we are nobody if all these identities are taken away.

From a spiritual perspective, it is said that vices like greed, ego, lust, anger and attachment are all born out of body consciousness i.e. the false identification of the self with one's physical image, role and assets. It is this ignorance and vices that begin to corrupt the soul and everything that comes from a corrupt soul will be tainted i.e. its thoughts, feelings, actions and habits. In that sense, one can say that today almost all human souls have become corrupt to some degree. Hence we must understand that corruption is a soul-deep malady and it can be remedied only by spiritual awareness and empowerment. We must awaken to our true selves and live by our original values of peace, purity, love and joy.

When we look inward and become aware of our true identity and innate qualities, we begin to express and experience them in our lives naturally. A person who empowers himself this way experiences contentment in life. Such a person will never fall into the trap of sensory attractions and desires as it's only when we are disconnected from our innate self we feel empty inside and get attracted to external things to feel happy or worthy. In the soul consciousness stage, we are naturally aware of our virtues and we also understand the law of cause and effect — the law of karma. Remember! A soul that is aware of its spiritual identity will never indulge in corrupt actions as it knows that they will lead to suffering and degradation. This realisation and experience will free us from corruption.

(The writer is a spiritual educator and popular columnist; views are personal)

Political chameleons: A threat to democracy



SUKHDEV **SINGH**

The new political entrants like AAP, promising a departure from traditional politics, have faltered, mirroring the same patterns of opportunism and non-performance



The presence of political parties in democracies makes the peoples' representation in governance social but organised and helps the democracies work. Since the representation is through individuals, the politics of party switching by one or more leaders and/or followers is a common phenomenon causing the defeat and victory of the respective individual leaders and political parties. If party switching is guided by political ideologies, development policies and other policy programmes or by the change in leadership affecting the core ideology of the party or the constitutional spirit of the governance, it can be a healthy corrective exercise.

But if influenced by the strategic local individual factors concerning the prospects of the political growth of an individual involving the chances of winning elections, gaining ministerial and other positions and gaining influence, then it is a matter of serious concern for a democracy, people and a nation.

Another matter of a similar concern is the growing trust deficit of the people in the political class and cynicism about human integrity and political class due to the gap between what the political leaders say and do.

Indian democracy is under threat from both these political phenomena more than ever in its history: the major political parties in power promise during the elections without delivering on the ground after winning the elections. If this were not enough, the party-switching game driven by individual strategic interests is more frequent and unhesitant than ever in its history. What is more worrisome is that the political parties are themselves active players in the game of poaching turncoats who willingly show them white today, yellow tomorrow and saffron the next day. Neither the individual leaders nor the political parties have any qualms about the mismatch in the ideologies and policies; the only



ANOTHER MATTER OF CONCERN IS THE GROWING TRUST DEFICIT AMONG THE PEOPLE IN THE POLITICAL CLASS AND CYNICISM ABOUT HUMAN INTEGRITY, STEMMING FROM THE DISPARITY BETWEEN WHAT POLITICAL LEADERS SAY AND WHAT THEY ACTUALLY DO

motivation is winning elections to remain in power; Neither the individual leaders nor the political parties have any worry that the party switching would impact governance, confidence of people, representation and policy-making. It underscores the fluidity of political allegiances, party politics and validity of manifestoes.

The recent happenings during the last a few years in Punjab are a case in study. Disillusioned about the working of the traditional political groupings, people in Punjab elected the first time leaders of a new political party AAP challenging the traditional party system, but finding AAP too in the footsteps of the traditional political parties has led them to a new level of disillusionment.

Rather than planning a serious engagement to fulfil the poll promises and work for people, a continued engagement in blame game and with winning elections following the modus operandi of the conventional political parties has created despondency rather than enthusiasm. Instead of fielding their own members, however raw they may be, or searching from the academia and NGOs their probable candidates in elections at different levels, they have been relying on induction of the traditional leaders from other traditional parties to contest in their name without bothering to check their ideology, previous political training and working behaviour.

Anurag Sheetal of Jalandhar left BJP to contest assembly elections in 2022 on AAP ticket but has now left AAP to join BJP again. His rival as a congress candidate in the 2022 assembly elections,

Sushil Kumar Rinku was inducted in AAP in the presence of Arvind Kejriwal to contest parliamentary by-election from Jalandhar in 2023 in spite of staunch opposition by the AAP MLA Anurag Sheetal. To the desperation of AAP, Susheel Rinku has now resigned from AAP to join BJP, charging AAP senior leadership with non-performance.

With strong support from the AAP, Sushil Kumar Rinku had won the parliamentary by-election. Interestingly in August, 2023, he was suspended from the parliament session for his unruly behaviour while opposing the BJP Government on Delhi services bill. As a follow up, he wore chains symbolising "democracy in slavery" and stood in front of the Parliament building protesting against the leaders of opposition parties. Criticising the central Government i.e. the BJP, he had appealed to the people to defeat the central Government (BJP) in 2024 elections to keep the spirit of constitution and ideology of Bhim Rao Ambedkar alive. Now, ironically, he himself has joined the BJP to bring it back to power again and the BJP has welcomed him in its fold without any qualms about his 'unruly behaviour' worthy of suspension from parliament.

Wouldn't his appeal to the people to elect the BJP into power that he earlier wanted the people to defeat confuse the people and generate disbelief and cynicism? Wouldn't the praise of Sushil Rinku as a worthy and sober leader by the BJP high command persuading to vote for Sushil Rinku, whom they had suspended as an unruly leader add to the

confusion and trust deficit? Wouldn't the people experience absurdity to see Anurag Sheetal campaigning for Rinku whose entry in AAP he had opposed? Several senior congress leaders have already defected from the congress to the BJP impersonating a 'take-over' instead of switch over. Sunil Jakhar, once the state president of the congress, is now the state BJP president causing unhappiness to both the congress high command and the old guard of the state BJP. Shouldn't people receive his policy statements with an amount of mistrust? A three term MP on congress ticket has quit congress to join the BJP. As a young boy and sophomore in politics, he was rewarded for his grandfather's political assassination as a congressman and the then chief minister of Punjab. Suddenly after joining the BJP, he has realised that the PM and HM have a great affection for Punjab whom he has criticised more than once for their ideology, politics and governance. To the people, his statement definitely does not stand as an authentic communication.

The political discourse by nature is characterised by a gap between projected and practised values; if the gap is widened enough to be poles apart on different occasions, it sounds unauthentic and absurd. Yet the political parties in Punjab are busy setting the stage for a theatre of absurd for the people to witness the circus of parliamentary elections 2024.

(The author is a retired professor from Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar and member of governing council, INTACH & Cultural Heritage, New Delhi; views are personal)

Kangana Ranaut: From stardom to political aspirations

Kangana's evolution from a silver screen sensation to a grassroots politician unfolds against a backdrop of controversy and high expectations

In line with the 19th-century Victorian realist philosophy of 'Chance and destiny' championed by Thomas Hardy, Kangana Ranaut's journey from an obscure village in Himachal Pradesh to the glamorous world of Bollywood and now to the realm of politics seems like an unimaginable dream turned into reality. Her indomitable spirit and unwavering determination have propelled her from testing her luck in the film industry in Mumbai to considering a political career in her hilly home state.

Kangana's ascent from the nondescript village of Bhambala in Mandi district is a testament to her sheer willpower and commitment. Despite facing resistance from her family, who initially



K S **TOMAR**

opposed her choice to pursue a career in Bollywood, Kangana forged ahead, overcoming financial struggles and the harsh realities of life in Mumbai. Her journey was fraught with challenges, with her even lacking a proper place to live at times. However, her training under renowned theatre director Arvind Gaur proved to be a turning point, honing her skills and shaping her into the formidable talent she is today.

Transitioning from the glitz and glamour of Bollywood to the rough and tumble world of politics is no small feat. Kangana's decision to enter active politics, particularly by contesting the Mandi Lok Sabha seat, signifies a significant shift in her career trajectory. Despite her lack of experience

in politics, her unwavering support for Hindutva ideology and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, coupled with her association with the RSS, has garnered her the BJP ticket, setting the stage for a potentially dramatic political showdown.

However, Kangana's foray into politics is not without its challenges. Unlike the scripted narratives of films, political reality demands a different set of skills and commitments. Voters in Mandi will expect her to prioritise their needs and concerns, necessitating her to establish a permanent presence in the constituency. Her inexperience in political manoeuvring will require her to work doubly hard to earn the trust and support of the electorate, notwithstanding



the backing of the BJP machinery and the charisma of Prime Minister Modi. The bypoll for the Mandi Lok Sabha seat held on October 30, 2021, saw the Congress candidate securing victory, largely due to the sympathy factor following the demise of Virbhadra Singh. However, with the political landscape shifting and the Congress party grappling with internal strife, Kangana's entry into the fray could potentially tilt the scales in her favour.

Kangana's nomination for the Mandi seat on her 37th birthday was seen as a fitting tribute to her unwavering commitment to her ideological beliefs and her determination to serve her birthplace. However, her propensity for controversy, evident in her social media posts and public statements, has garnered both acclaim and criticism. From her remarks on the farmer's agitation to her views on India's independence, Kangana has courted controversy, often finding herself embroiled in heated debates and facing backlash from various quarters.

As she embarks on this new chapter in her life, Kangana will need to shed her filmy persona and connect with the grassroots workers and voters on a more personal level. Building rapport with the electorate and demonstrating a genuine understanding of their needs will be crucial for her success as a politician.

In conclusion, Kangana Ranaut's journey from Bollywood to politics is a testament to her resilience and determination. While her transition may be fraught with challenges, her unwavering commitment to her beliefs and her desire to serve her people could pave the way for a successful political career. As she navigates this new terrain, Kangana will need to draw upon her strengths and adapt to the demands of the political arena, all while staying true to her roots and convictions.

(The writer is a political analyst; views are personal)

Kitchen charity halts Gaza ops

AP ■ DEIR AL-BALAH

An apparent Israeli airstrike killed six international aid workers with the World Central Kitchen and their Palestinian driver, the charity said Tuesday, in a potentially major setback to efforts to deliver aid by sea to Gaza, where Israel's offensive against Hamas has pushed hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to the brink of starvation. The food charity, founded by celebrity chef Jose Andres, said it was immediately suspending operations in the region. The source of fire late Monday could not be independently confirmed. The Israeli military expressed "sincere sorrow" over the deaths while stopping short of accepting responsibility. Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, the top military spokesman, said that officials are reviewing the incident at the highest levels. He says an independent investigation will be launched that "will help us reduce the risk of such an event from occurring again."

Footage showed the bodies, several wearing protective gear with the charity's logo, at a hospital in the central Gaza town of Deir al-Balah. Those killed include three British nationals, an Australian, a Polish national and an American-Canadian dual citizen, according to hospital records. The charity said the team was travelling in a three-car convoy that included two armoured vehicles. "Despite coordinating movements with the (Israeli army), the convoy was hit as it was

'Aid workers in Gaza were killed by an unintended strike'

Deir Al-Balah (Gaza Strip) (AP): Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has acknowledged that Israeli forces carried out the strike that killed seven aid workers in Gaza. In a statement on Tuesday, he said: "Unfortunately over the last day there was a tragic incident of an unintended strike of our forces on innocent people in the Gaza Strip." He says officials are "checking this thoroughly" and "will do everything for this not to happen again". The strike late Monday killed seven aid workers for the World Central Kitchen, leading the charity to suspend its operations in Gaza.

leaving the Deir al-Balah warehouse, where the team had unloaded more than 100 tons of humanitarian food aid brought to Gaza on the maritime route." Erin Gore, the CEO of the charity, said "this is not only an attack against WCK, this is an attack on humanitarian organizations showing up in the most dire of situations where food is being used as a weapon of war. This is unforgivable." Three aid ships from the Mediterranean

island nation of Cyprus arrived earlier Monday carrying some 400 tons of food and supplies organized by the charity and the United Arab Emirates, the group's second shipment after a pilot run last month. The Israeli military was involved in coordinating both deliveries. The US, which has provided key military and diplomatic support for Israel's offensive, has touted the sea route as a new way to deliver desperately needed aid to northern Gaza and plans to build its own floating dock, with construction expected to take several weeks. The UN has said much of the population is on the brink of starvation, largely cut off from the rest of the territory by Israeli forces. Israel has barred UNRWA, the main U.N. agency in Gaza, from making deliveries to the north, and other aid groups say sending truck convoys north has been too dangerous because of the military's failure to ensure safe passage. The UNRWA said in its latest report that 173 of its workers have been killed in Gaza. The figure does not include workers for other aid organizations. The bodies of the aid workers have been taken to a hospital in the southern city of Rafah on the Egyptian border, according to an Associated Press reporter at the hospital. The foreigners' bodies will be evacuated out of Gaza and the Palestinian driver's body will be handed to his family in Rafah for burial.

12-year-old opens fire at school in Finland, killing 1, wounding 2

AP ■ HELSINKI

A 12-year-old student opened fire at a secondary school in southern Finland on Tuesday morning, killing one and seriously wounded two other students, police said. The suspect was later apprehended. Heavily armed police cordoned off the Viertola school — a large educational institution including lower and upper secondary schools with a total of about 800 students — in the city of Vantaa, just outside the capital, Helsinki, after receiving a call about a shooting incident at 09:08 am. Police said both the suspect and the victims were 12 years old. One of the students had died instantly after being shot, Chief of Police Ilkka Koskimäki from the Eastern Uusimaa Police Department told a news conference. The other two were seriously wounded, he said. The weapon used in the shooting was a registered handgun that was licensed to the suspect's relative, Koskimäki said. The suspect was detained in the



Helsinki area later Tuesday with a handgun in his possession, police said. He admitted to the shooting in an initial police hearing but there is no immediate word of the motive, police said, adding that the case is being investigated as a murder and two attempted murders. Finnish President Alexander Stubb and Prime Minister Petteri Orpo offered con-

lences to the families of the victims in postings on X with both saying they were shocked over the shooting. "What makes it particularly shocking is the age of the victim and the suspect," Orpo said during a news conference later Tuesday. "I can assure you that this (shooting) will be carefully reviewed and conclusions will be drawn that this will not happen again," he said.

The minimum age of criminal liability in Finland is 15 years, which means the suspect cannot be formally arrested. A suspect younger than 15 can only be heard by the police after which they will be handed over to Finland's child welfare authorities. In the past decades, Finland has witnessed two major deadly school shootings. In November 2007, a 18-year-old student armed with a semi-automatic pistol opened fire at the premises of the Jokela high school in Tuusula, southern Finland, killing nine people. He was found dead with self-inflicted wounds. Less than a year later, in September 2008, a 22-year-old student shot and killed 10 people with a semi-automatic pistol at a vocational college in Kauhajoki, southwestern Finland, before fatally shooting himself. In the Nordic nation of 5.6 million, there are more than 1.5 million licensed firearms and about 430,000 license holders, according to the Finnish Interior Ministry.

Egypt's pres sworn in for third 6-year-term

AP ■ CAIRO

President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi of Egypt was sworn in for a third six-year term on Tuesday after being re-elected in a December vote in which he faced no serious challengers. El-Sissi took the oath of office before parliament, which convened in the new administrative capital in the desert outside Cairo. El-Sissi won 89.6 per cent of the vote in the December election, with turnout of 66.8 per cent more than 67 million registered voters. He ran against three virtually unknown opponents. The vote was overshadowed by the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza on Egypt's eastern border, which has threatened to expand into wider regional turmoil. El-Sissi was first elected as president in mid-2014, then reelected in 2018. A year later, constitutional amendments, passed in a general referendum,



added two years to el-Sissi's second term, and allowed him to run for a third, six-year term. His victory in this latest election was widely seen as inevitable. His three opponents were marginal political figures who were rarely seen during the election campaign.

Senegal swears in ex-opp figure, recently freed from prison, as new president

AP ■ DAKAR (SENEGAL)

Senegal inaugurated Bassirou Diomaye Faye as its new president on Tuesday, completing the previously little-known opposition figure's dramatic ascent from prison to the palace in recent weeks. Faye was released from prison less than two weeks before the March 24 election, along with popular opposition figure and mentor Ousmane Sonko, following a political amnesty announced by outgoing President Macky Sall. It is the former tax inspector's first time in elected office. "It's the culmination of a long struggle for democracy and the rule of law," said Aissata Sagna, a 39-year-old factory worker who worked on Faye's campaign. "This is a day of celebration for us, even if we have lost young people killed during



the demonstrations." The election tested Senegal's reputation as a stable democracy in West Africa, a region that has experienced coups and attempted coups. It followed months of unrest ignited by the arrests last year of Sonko and Faye and concerns that the president would seek a third term in office despite constitutional term limits. Rights groups said dozens were killed in the

protests and about 1,000 were jailed. Faye, 44, campaigned on promises to clean up corruption and better manage the country's natural resources. His victory was seen as reflecting the will of young people frustrated with widespread unemployment and former colonial ruler France, seen by critics to be using its relationship with Senegal to enrich itself. Such frustrations are common across many countries in Africa, home to the world's youngest population, where a number of leaders have clung to power for decades. In his first speech as president-elect, Faye promised to fight corruption and reform the economy. A practising Muslim from a small town, Faye has two wives, both of whom were present on Tuesday. Ahead of the election, he released a declaration of his

assets to show transparency and called on other candidates to do the same. It listed a home in Dakar and land outside the capital and in his hometown. His bank accounts totalled roughly USD 6,600. "I think the first challenge is the formation of his (Faye's) government," said Alioune Tine, founder of the Senegalese think tank Afrikajom Centre. "This will be the first concrete message he sends to the Senegalese people. The size, diversity and profiles will be analyzed with a fine-tooth comb, to see if they meet the demand for a break with the past." The new president was little known until Sonko, a popular opposition figure who came third in the previous election in 2019, named him to run in his place after being barred from the election for a prior conviction.

Israel clears way to expel Al Jazeera

Netanyahu's incitement claim is a lie

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday vowed to shut down Al Jazeera's operations in Israel, calling it a "terror channel" that spreads incitement, after parliament passed a law clearing the way for the closure. Netanyahu's pledge escalated Israel's long-running feud against Al Jazeera. It also threatened to heighten tensions with Qatar, which owns the channel, at a time when the Doha government is playing a key role in mediation efforts to halt the war in Gaza. The broadcaster condemned Netanyahu's incitement claim as a "dangerous ludicrous lie." Al Jazeera said late Monday that it holds Netanyahu responsible for the safety of its staff and offices, that it would continue what it described as its bold and professional coverage, and that it "reserves the right to pursue every legal step." Israel has long had a rocky relationship with Al Jazeera, accusing it of bias against Israel. Relations took a major downturn nearly two years ago when Al Jazeera correspondent Shireen Abu Akleh was killed during an Israeli military raid in the occupied West Bank. The Palestinian-American journalist was well-known across the Arab world for her critical coverage of Israel, and the channel accused Israel of intentionally killing her. Israel denied the charge, saying she was likely killed by Israeli fire in what appeared to be an accidental shooting. Those relations further deteriorated following the outbreak of Israel's war against Hamas on October 7, when the militant group carried out a cross-border attack in southern Israel that killed 1,200 people and took 250 others hostage. In December, an Israeli strike killed an Al Jazeera cameraman as he reported on the war in southern Gaza. The channel's bureau chief in Gaza, Wael Dahdouh, was

injured in the same attack. The network also blamed Israel for killing Dahdouh's son in a strike in January. Hamza Dahdouh was working for Al Jazeera when the strike hit a car he was traveling, it reported. The army later said that Hamza Dahdouh was a member of Islamic Jihad, a militant group that joined the October 7 attack with Hamas. Wael Dahdouh's wife, daughter and another son were killed along with his grandson in another Israeli strike last October. The channel broadcast images of Dahdouh entering the hospital and giving way to grief as he peered over the body of his dead son. Israel has not said who the target of that strike was. Al Jazeera is one of the few international media outlets to remain in Gaza throughout the war, broadcasting bloody scenes of airstrikes and overcrowded hospitals and accusing Israel of massacres. Israel accuses Al Jazeera of collaborating with Hamas. "Al Jazeera harmed Israel's security, actively participated in the October 7 massacre, and incited against Israeli soldiers. It is time to remove the bullhorn of Hamas from our country," Netanyahu said on X, formerly Twitter. He said he planned on acting immediately under the authorities of the newly passed law. "The terror channel Al Jazeera will no longer broadcast from Israel," he said. Al Jazeera has been closed or blocked by other Mideast governments, including Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. Egypt has banned Al Jazeera since 2013. It launched the crackdown after the 2013 military overthrow of an elected but divisive government dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood group. Egypt considers the Brotherhood a terrorist group and accused both Qatar and Al Jazeera of supporting it.

Sunak expands free childcare as 'improving' sign before election

London (PTI): British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Tuesday marked the expansion of free government-funded childcare to cover two-year-olds as a sign of things "improving" for the economy ahead of a general election expected later this year. During a round of local radio interviews in north-east England, the 43-year-old British Indian leader was again asked when he plans to call an election and reiterated his previous indication of a timeline in the second half of the year. While he came under some criticism for laughing off the question during one such exchange, Sunak insisted that the government was heading to a place where the electorate would be able to see a "brighter future" ahead. "Last year we promised the biggest-ever expansion in childcare provision this country has ever seen, and today we are delivering on our plan with 15 hours of free childcare for parents with two-year-olds," said Sunak. "We want to give working families the peace of mind that they will be supported and our full expansion will save parents 6,900 pounds a year – helping to build a brighter future for families and help to grow our economy," he said. Asked about a general election, he told BBC Radio Newcastle: "I've said repeatedly and clearly that my working assumption would be that we have a general election in the second half of the year. There's been no change to that." "I think people hopefully will increasingly feel that things are improving and that we're heading to a place where, as I said, I want to give people peace of mind that there's a brighter future for them and their families, they can have a renewed sense of pride in our country. That's the direction of travel and so we're now heading in the right way," he told BBC Radio Tees.

Iran vows retaliation for Israeli strike on Syrian consulate

AP ■ TEHRAN

Iran and one of its key proxies vowed Tuesday to respond to a strike widely attributed to Israel that demolished Iran's consulate in the Syrian capital of Damascus and killed eight people, including two Iranian generals. Iran's state TV reported Tuesday that the country's Supreme National Security Council, a key decision-making body, met late Monday and decided on a "required" response to the strike. The report said the meeting was chaired by President Ebrahim Raisi, but provided no further details. "We will make them regretful about the crime and similar acts," said Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has final say on all matters of state in Iran. Israel has repeatedly targeted military officials from Iran, which supports militant

groups fighting Israel in Gaza, and along its border with Lebanon. Monday's strike in Damascus signaled an escalation because it struck an Iranian diplomatic mission. It was not clear if Iran would respond itself, risking a dangerous confrontation with Israel and its ally the United States, or if it would continue to rely on proxies, including Lebanon's Hezbollah militia and Yemen's Houthi rebels. The airstrike in Syria killed Gen Mohammad Reza Zahedi, who led the elite Quds Force in Lebanon and Syria until 2016, according to Iran's Revolutionary Guard. It also killed Zahedi's deputy, Gen Mohammad Hadi Hajirahim, and five other officers. Hezbollah said Tuesday that Zahedi played a crucial role in helping "develop and advance the work" of the group in Lebanon. A Hezbollah member was also killed in Monday's strike, bringing the overall death toll

to eight. Hezbollah announced the death of Hussein Youssef on Tuesday, but did not provide further details. "This crime will certainly not pass without the enemy receiving punishment and revenge," Hezbollah said in a statement. Since the outbreak of the war in Gaza nearly six months ago, those proxies have stepped up attacks, leading to near daily cross-border exchanges between Hezbollah and Israel, and frequent Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping. Hamas, which rules Gaza and attacked Israel on October 7, is also backed by Iran. Israel, which rarely acknowledges strikes against Iranian targets, said it had no comment on the latest attack in Syria, although a military spokesman blamed Iran for a drone attack early Monday against a naval base in southern Israel. Israel has grown increasingly impatient with

the daily exchanges of fire with Hezbollah, which have escalated in recent days, and warned of the possibility of a full-fledged war. Houthi rebels have also been launching long-range missiles toward Israel, including on Monday. Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said the country is in a war on multiple fronts "both offensively and defensively." "We see evidence of this every day, including over the last few days," said Gallant, speaking to the Israeli parliament's Defense and Foreign Affairs Committee. "We operate everywhere, every day, in order to prevent our enemies from gaining strength and in order to make it clear to anyone who acts against us — all over the Middle East — that the price for action against Israel will be a heavy one." Gulf monarchies Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar condemned the strike on the Iranian consulate amid fears

of a widening regional conflict. The 22-state Arab League alleged that Israel aims to "expand the war and push the region to chaos." Iran's official news agency IRNA said Tuesday that Iran relayed an important message to the United States late Monday and that it called for a meeting of the U.N. Security Council. The message to Washington was delivered through a Swiss envoy in Tehran; Switzerland looks after US interests in Iran. IRNA said Iran holds the United States, Israel's closest ally, responsible for the strike. Meanwhile amid ongoing tensions in the Red Sea, the U.S. Central Command said early Tuesday that its forces had destroyed a Houthi unmanned surface vessel the previous day. CENTCOM said the vessel posed "a threat to US and coalition forces and merchant vessels in the region."

Congo appoints its first female PM

AP ■ KINSHASA (CONGO)

Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi on Monday appointed the country's first female prime minister, fulfilling a campaign promise and taking an important step toward the formation of a new government after his reelection late last year. Former planning minister Judith Suminwa Tuluka will step into the role at a time of worsening violence in the country's mineral-rich east, which borders Rwanda. The long-running conflict has displaced more than 7 million people according to the United Nations, making it one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. Tuluka promised to work toward peace and development in her first speech on state television following her appointment. Still, it could be months before a new government is formed as the process requires intensive negotia-



who are sometimes hidden," she said, referring to the conflict that involves many armed groups, including some believed to be backed by Rwanda's military. "I'm thinking of all these people, and my heart goes out to them." Far from the nation's capital, Kinshasa, eastern Congo has long been overrun by more than 120 armed groups seeking a share of the region's gold and other resources as they carry out mass killings. Both regional and UN peacekeepers have been asked to leave Congo after the government accused them of failing to resolve the conflict. Violence has only continued to worsen as the withdrawal of personnel begins and Congolese authorities move into their positions. Bintou Keita, the top UN envoy to Congo, told the UN Security Council last week that the prominent rebel group known as M23 had made significant territorial

gains in the east, which was contributing to the spike in violence and surging numbers of displaced people. Re-elected to a second five-year term in December, Tshisekedi has blamed neighbouring Rwanda for providing military support to the rebels. Rwanda denies the claim but UN experts have said there is substantial evidence of their forces in Congo. The United States last month urged Congo and Rwanda to walk back from the brink of war. The US State Department also said Rwanda should withdraw troops and surface-to-air missile systems from eastern Congo and criticized M23, calling it a "Rwanda-backed" armed group. The Rwandan Foreign Ministry said last month that the country's troops are defending Rwandan territory as Congo carries out a "drumatic military build-up" near the border.

Channel opened for vessels clearing wreckage at bridge collapse site

AP ■ BALTIMORE (US)

The US Coast Guard has opened a temporary, alternate channel for vessels involved in clearing debris from the collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, part of a phased approach to opening the main shipping channel leading to the vital port, officials said Monday. Crews are undertaking the complicated work of removing steel and concrete at the site of the bridge's deadly collapse after a container ship lost power and crashed into a supporting column. On Sunday, dive teams surveyed parts of the bridge and checked the ship, and workers in lifts used torches to cut above-water parts of the twisted steel superstructure. Officials said the temporary channel is open primarily to vessels that are helping with the cleanup effort. Some barges and tugs that have been stuck in the Port of Baltimore since the

collapse are also scheduled to pass through the channel. Authorities believe six workers plunged to their deaths in the collapse, including two whose bodies were recovered last week. Maryland Gov. Wes Moore said at a Monday afternoon news conference that his top priority is recovering the four remaining bodies, followed by reopening shipping channels to the port. He said he understands the urgency but that the risks are significant. He said crews have described the mangled steel girders of the fallen bridge as "chaotic wreckage." "What we're finding is it is more complicated than we hoped for initially," said US Coast Guard Rear Admiral Shannon Gilreath. Moore said crews used a large crane to lift a 200-ton (180-metric ton) span of the bridge, a task that took 10 hours. He said the piece was considered a "relatively small lift" in the grand scheme

of the recovery effort, which he called enormous. Moore said crews would lift another 350-ton (317-metric ton) piece from the bridge later Monday as weather allows. Officials earlier said the temporary channel would have a controlling depth of 11 feet (over 3 meters), a horizontal clearance of 264 feet (80 meters) and a vertical clearance of 96 feet (29 meters). "This marks an important first step along the road to reopening the port of Baltimore," Capt. David O'Connell, the federal on-scene coordinator of the response, said in a statement Monday. "By opening this alternate route, we will support the flow of marine traffic into Baltimore." Two additional larger channels are planned as more debris is removed from the waterway. Officials declined to provide a projected timeline for those channels being opened.

PML-N led ruling coalition sweeps Senate elections in Pak

AP ■ ISLAMABAD/ LAHORE

Pakistan's ruling coalition swept the Senate elections as the results of 19 seats were announced after the election process to fill 48 vacant seats of the upper house of the bi-cameral Parliament. The alliance led by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and including Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and other parties bagged 18 seats out of 19 while an independent candidate also was elected with their support. Polling was held on 12 seats from Sindh, five seats from Punjab and two seats from the Islamabad capital territory. In Punjab, PML-N grabbed all seats while in Sindh, PPP got 10 seats and one seat went to Muttahida Qaumi Movement and an independent candidate. The PML-N and the PPP won one seat each from Islamabad. Eighteen candidates had already been elected

unopposed, including eleven from Balochistan and seven from Punjab. Elections in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province were postponed due to controversy over oaths of members elected on reserved seats. Foreign minister Ishaq Dar was elected senator after getting 224 votes in the National Assembly. His opponent Raja Ansar Mehmood from the opposition Sunni Ittehad Council got 81 votes. Rana Mehmood ul Hassan of the Pakistan Peoples Party also won his seat by defeating Farzand Hussain Shah of the Sunni Ittehad Council. Thus the ruling alliance won both senate seats from the Islamabad capital territory. Prominent among the winners were PML-N-supported Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb and Petroleum Minister Musadiq Malik who won in Punjab by garnering 128 and 121 votes, respectively. PML-N's Khalil Tahir

Sindhu was successful on a minority seat in Punjab while PPP's Poonjo Bheel was successful on a minority seat in Sindh. Earlier, polling was postponed in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) "on account of delay of oaths of reserved seats" as the house was incomplete because 25 members elected on the reserved seats were not given oath by the speaker of the provincial assembly Babar Saleem Swati. "The commission is of the considered view that the standards of honesty, justness and fairness of election as provided in Article 218(3) of the Constitution cannot be fulfilled due to non-administration of oath to elected members and which amounts to disenfranchisement of lawful voters and denial of level playing field to the voters," the ECP said in a statement. Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Chief

Minister Ali Amin Gandapur vowed that he would not let the members elected on reserved seats take oath as they were elected illegally as the seats were snatched from his party led by Imran Khan. He further said that the PTI would summon its parliamentary meeting and pass a resolution on the matter. The Senate comprises 96 members, including 23 each from four provinces and four from the federal capital region of Islamabad. Those from provinces are elected by the respective provincial assemblies while the National Assembly elects one Senator from the Islamabad region. The Senate is a continuous body as half of its members retire after three years and new ones are elected. The ECP had announced plans to hold polls on 48 seats as four seats of senators who were elected from tribal regions were abolished after the region

was merged with the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province of the country. Before the merger, eight senators were elected from the federally administered tribal areas called Fata. The PML-N's numbers in the Senate have now risen to 19 while the PPP's have risen to 24. Khan's PTI has 20 members in the Senate. The ruling alliance's strength in the upper house will play a crucial role in case of any amendment in the constitution as a two-thirds majority is needed in both houses for the same.

NAWAZ SHARIF CHAIRS YET ANOTHER MEETING

Unfazed by criticism, Pakistan's former prime minister Nawaz Sharif has chaired yet another administrative meeting with his daughter and Punjab province Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz. Sharif, who is also the supreme of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party, on Monday, co-chaired a meet-

ing to review issues faced by the province's agriculture sector, a report in Dawn newspaper said on Tuesday. The veteran leader chairing the administrative meetings raised many questions as he does not hold any official posts in the provincial or federal government and is only a National Assembly member. Since the February 8 general elections marred by allegations of vote rigging, the 74-year-old PML-N supreme leader has generally kept a low profile. However, in the few public appearances since, he has been seen chairing or co-chairing with his 50-year-old daughter administrative meetings of the Punjab provincial government. "This has led to questions, as Sharif holds no official position in either the provincial or federal government and is officially only a member of the National Assembly," it said. Earlier in March, Sharif

assumed a 'de-facto' role of Punjab chief minister, and presided over three administrative meetings of the provincial government, raising many eyebrows. Sharif issued directions to the authorities concerned and ministers regarding different projects in the province, which used to be the bastion of his Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party, regarding different infrastructure projects, including the underground train and metro bus, farmers' plight, electric bikes for students and Ramzan relief package. Sharif was elected from Lahore in the February 8 polls. Jailed former premier Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party has alleged that its mandate was stolen by Sharif-led PML-N. Sharif served as Punjab chief minister twice in the 1980s before moving to Islamabad. He was Pakistan's prime minister for three non-consecutive terms.

Bushra Bibi poisoned in sub-jail: Imran

Islamabad (PTI): Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan on Tuesday said his wife and former first lady Bushra Bibi was poisoned while incarcerated at his private residence here which was turned into a sub-jail, emphasizing that the army chief should be held responsible if she is harmed. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader during the hearing of the 190 million pound Toshakhana corruption case in Adiala jail informed Judge Nasir Javed Rana that there had been an attempt to poison the former first lady and added that she had marks on her skin and tongue as a side effect of the "poisoning." "I know who is behind it," The Express Tribune newspaper quoted the 71-year-old PTI founder as saying. Khan said that if any harm came to Bushra, the Pakistan Army chief (General Asim Munir) should be held responsible as members of an intelligence agency were controlling everything at his Bani Gala residence in Islamabad and Adiala jail in Rawalpindi. Khan further urged the court to order 49-year-old Bushra's medical examination by Dr. Asim of Shaukat Khanum Hospital, adding that he and the party did not trust the doctor who examined her earlier. He also urged to have an inquiry into the matter of Bushra's alleged poisoning. Following the former premier's request, the court directed Khan to submit a detailed application about the former first lady's medical examination. Talking to the media after the hearing, Bushra said rumours regarding her being an "American agent" were circulating in the party and that she was poisoned through a popular toilet cleaner. She said "three drops" of a popular toilet cleaner were added to her food, claiming that a person's health deteriorates after a month of consumption. "My eyes swell up, I feel pain and discomfort in my chest and stomach and food and water also taste bitter. Some suspicious substance was mixed in honey earlier and now the toilet cleaner was mixed in my food," claimed the former first lady.

'Delivering justice strengthens security in my country'

AP ■ THE HAGUE (NETHERLANDS)

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Tuesday urged delegates at a conference on justice and compensation in Ukraine to continue efforts to tackle impunity for war crimes in order to "provide real strength to our common security — security from aggressions and terror?" Ministers and officials from dozens of countries met in the Netherlands to discuss how to bring justice to victims of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as the war sparked by Russia's invasion drags on in its third devastating year. The International Criminal Court has issued arrest warrants for Russian President Vladimir Putin and the country's commissioner for children's rights charging them with personal responsibility for the abductions of children from Ukraine. The court also has issued warrants for two senior Russian military officers for alleged responsibility for attacks on critical infrastructure in Ukraine. "Let the real peace be restored faster. And let everyone who destroys peace be truly afraid



U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, left, and French Defence Minister Sebastien Lecornu shake hands as they attend the French Support for Ukraine Public Diplomacy Event at the Nexter Systems headquarters in Versailles, near Paris, France, on Tuesday.

of facing trial in The Hague," Zelenskyy said in a video message. Ukraine's prosecutor general, Andriy Kostin, told the meeting that his country has identified 551 war crimes suspects, indicted 374 and has already

prosecuted 104 people. During the conference, a register of damage caused by Russia's invasion was formally opened, allowing people to submit claims for compensation for damages, loss or injury suffered as a result of the inva-

sion. The Hague-based Register of Damage Caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, or RD4U, was established by the Council of Europe last year. It will not pay out any claims, but

is a stepping stone toward an international compensation mechanism that has not yet been established.

The launch focused on claims for damage or destruction of residential property. It said that between 300,000 and 600,000 claims are expected. RD4U aims to allow further claims soon, including those related to damage or destruction of Ukrainian critical infrastructure.

Opening the conference, Dutch Foreign Minister Hanke Bruins Slot said the devastating toll of Russian attacks underscored the need to support Ukraine. "Because if we don't, the country's justice system will eventually collapse under the weight of these atrocities," she said.

The Hague, known as the international city of peace and justice, is central to efforts to bring accountability and end impunity for crimes in Ukraine. It is home to the International Criminal Court and the International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine, and the Dutch government has offered to host a special tribunal on the crime of aggression.

National Assembly Speaker appoints Tehreek-e-Insaf nominee as Leader of Opp

AP ■ ISLAMABA

Pakistan's National Assembly Speaker Ayaz Sadiq Tuesday endorsed a major demand of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party by appointing its nominated leader Omar Ayub Khan as the Leader of the Opposition in the lower house. According to a press release issued by the Assembly Secretariat, the development came after Omar along with PTI chief Gohar Khan and senior leader Amir Dogar met Sadiq. The Speaker declared Khan the Leader of the Opposition after the scrutiny process was completed under Rule 39 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business of the National Assembly. The statement added that the deadline to submit nomination papers for the slot was till 6pm on Monday. No other candidates' nomination papers had been received by the stipulated

time, it said. With the appointment, the phase of appointing the Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly was completed. The PTI supported Sunni Ittehad Council on March 9 had formally nominated Umar for the leader of the opposition by submitting his documents to the office of the speaker. Leader of the opposition sits in front of the speaker on his left side and on the right side of the leader of the house. He enjoys the status of a federal minister and gets a separate office where usually opposition parties hold meetings. He also gets the right to speak in response to the speech by the leader of the house or any leading member from the government. It may be noted that after the February 8 elections, all independent members elected with the support of PTI had joined the Sunni Ittehad Council, excluding Gohar Khan and Omar Ayub Khan.

Putin vows to find masterminds of concert hall attack

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russian President Vladimir Putin vowed on Tuesday to track down the masterminds of the Moscow concert hall attack that left 144 people dead in the worst assault on Russian soil in two decades, and urged the country's law enforcement agencies to tighten security at mass gatherings. Putin has repeatedly sought to link the March 22 attack to Ukraine and the West despite the Islamic State group's claim of responsibility and Kyiv's vehement denial. Speaking at a meeting with top officials of the Interior Ministry that oversees the nation's police force, Putin said it is important to determine "not only the perpetrators of this outrage, but all links in the chain and its beneficiaries." He added, in an apparent threat of retaliation: "Those who use this weapon against Russia should realize it's a double-edged weapon." Putin said that the masterminds of the concert hall raid sought to "sow discord and panic, strife and hatred in our multiethnic country in order to break up Russia from within," adding that "we mustn't allow them to do that." "It's inadmissible to use the tragic event to provoke ethnic tensions, xenophobia and Islamophobia," he said. Russian security agencies have detained four suspected gunmen, all of them citizens of Tajikistan, and seven other suspects. The attack has fuelled anti-migrant sentiments and drawn calls from Russian hawks to limit migration despite the fact that the Russian economy strongly depends on migrant workers, most of them citizens of ex-Soviet nations in Central Asia, including Tajikistan. Russian media reported that authorities have strengthened con-

trols over migrants in the wake of the attack. Putin urged the Interior Ministry to tighten controls to stop illegal migration and close loopholes in existing procedures that allow people with a criminal past get work permits and even Russian citizenship. The lapse in security has led many to wonder how gunmen could easily kill so many people at a public event. Kremlin critics have argued that the security blunder was rooted in the Russian vast security apparatus focusing heavily on stifling the political opposition, independent media and civil society groups in the harshest crackdown since Soviet times instead of on terror threats. Putin said that the authorities are investigating the performance of law enforcement structures and other agencies in the concert hall attack. He urged law enforcement agencies to strengthen security at public gatherings. "We have paid a very high price, and the analysis of the situation must be objective and professional," he said. "We need to take ensuring security and order at mass gatherings, sports facilities, transport, trade and recreational centers, schools, hospitals, universities, theaters and so on. All those facilities must be under constant control." Putin, who has repeatedly accused the US and its allies of trying to destroy Russia, again charged that Moscow's geopolitical adversaries were aiming to "ruin what is left of historic Russia, to break up its historic core" in order to win control over the country's vast resources. "Some of them are trying to preserve their hegemony in today's rapidly changing world at the expense of Russia," he said. "Some apparently saw our country as a weak link. They are mistaken."

Ukraine uses drones in what appears to be its deepest strike yet inside Russia

PTI ■ MOSCOW

Ukrainian drones attacked industrial facilities in the province of Tatarstan, Russian authorities said Tuesday, in what would be Kyiv's deepest strike inside Russian territory since the war began more than two years ago. Seven people were injured in the attack on facilities near the cities of Yelabuga and Nizhnekamsk, located some 1,200 kilometers (745 miles) east of Ukraine, Russian regional authorities said. The strike damaged a hostel for students and workers in a free economic zone where a factory manufacturing Iranian-designed drones is reportedly located, other media reports said. Tatarstan is known for its high level of industrialization. Tatarstan officials said the attack didn't disrupt industrial production, while Nizhnekamsk's mayor said the attempt to strike a refinery was thwarted by air defenses. Kyiv officials normally neither



A Ukrainian Emergency Situation sapper carries an unexploded shell after using a mine-clearing machine to clear the site of explosives after battles with Russian troops, near Balaklia, Kharkiv region, Ukraine on Monday.

claim nor deny responsibility for attacks on Russian soil, though they sometimes refer obliquely to them. The Associated Press could not independently verify

the reports. Ukrainian drone developers have for months been extending the weapons' range, part of Kyiv's effort to compensate for

its battlefield disadvantage in weapons and troops. The unmanned aerial vehicles are also an affordable option while Ukraine awaits more U.S. military aid. Neither side is currently able to make much of a dent on the around 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line. Ukraine previously has launched drone attacks in and around St. Petersburg, which lies about 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) north of the border. But the facilities in Tatarstan, a province on the Volga River, appears to be the most distant target Ukraine has tried to hit. In recent weeks, Russian refineries and oil terminals have been targets of Ukrainian drone attacks, part of stepped-up assaults on Russian territory, including long-range drone attacks. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said last year his country had developed a weapon that hit a target 700 kilometers (400 miles) away, in an apparent reference to a drone attack on Russian soil.

Fire at Istanbul nightclub kills at least 29 people



AP ■ ISTANBUL

A fire at an Istanbul nightclub during renovations on Tuesday killed at least 29 people, officials and reports said. Several people, including managers of the club, were detained for questioning. At least one person was being treated at a hospital, the Istanbul governor's office said in a statement. The Masquerade nightclub, which was closed for renovations, was on the ground and basement floors of a 16-story

residential building in the Besiktas district on the European side of the city bisected by the Bosphorus. The fire was extinguished. Gov. Davut Gul told reporters at the scene that the cause of the fire was under investigation and the victims were believed to be involved in the renovation work. Authorities detained five people for questioning, including managers of the club and one person in charge of the renovations, Justice Minister Yilmaz Tunc said.

Pope exposes confidential details of past conclaves

AP ■ VATICAN CITY



Pope Francis has exposed the political "maneuvers" used to sway votes during the two most recent elections of popes, while denying he is planning to reform the process for future conclaves, in a book-length interview published on Tuesday. The revelations are contained in "Pope Francis, Successor: My Memories of Pope Benedict XVI", in which the Argentine pope reflects on his relationship with the late German pope and settles some scores with Benedict's longtime aide. The book, written as a conversation with the correspondent for Spain's ABC daily, Javier Martinez-Brocal, comes at a delicate time for the 87-year-old Francis. His frail health has raised questions about how much longer he will remain pope, whether he might follow

in Benedict's footsteps and resign, and who might eventually replace him. In the book, Francis revealed previously confidential details about the 2005 conclave that elected Benedict pope and the 2013 ballot in which he himself was elected, saying he was allowed to deviate from the cardinals' oath of secrecy because he is pope.

In 2005, Francis said, he was "used" by cardinals who wanted to block the election of Benedict — then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger — and that they managed to sway 40 out of 115 votes. The idea wasn't to elect the Argentine but rather to force a compromise candidate after knocking Ratzinger out of the running, he said. "They told me afterward that they didn't want a foreign pope" — in other words, a non-Italian one — Francis said, making clear that the process wasn't so much about the Holy Spirit inspiring cardinals as it was a cold, hard political calculus. Francis said he put an end to the maneuvering by announcing that he wouldn't accept being pope, after which Ratzinger was elected. "He was the only one who could be pope in that moment," Francis said, adding that he,

too, voted for Ratzinger. In 2013, after Benedict's resignation, there was also political maneuvering involved. Francis — then Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio — said he only realized after the fact that cardinals were coalescing behind him, pestering him with questions about the church in Latin America and dropping hints that he was gaining support. He said it finally dawned on him that he might be pope when Spanish Cardinal Santos Abril y Castelló came running after him after lunch on March 13, just before what would become the final ballot. The Spanish cardinal had what was clearly a health-related question about Bergoglio's ability to take on the physical rigors of the papacy, after opponents apparently had raised his health as a possible impediment to his election. "Eminence, is it true you're

missing a lung?" Francis recounted Abril as saying, to which he replied that he had part of one lung removed after a respiratory infection. After he assured the cardinal that the operation had taken place more than 50 years earlier, he remembered Abril muttering: "Oh these last-minute maneuvers..." Francis in the interview denied rumours he is planning any reform of the conclave rules for a future papal election. Conservative media have speculated, without any attribution, that Francis was tinkering with the protocols to limit pre-conclave discussions about the needs of the church to cardinals aged under 80. Only those cardinals — most of whom were appointed by Francis — are able to vote for the next pope, but older colleagues are currently allowed to take part in the earlier discussions.

While Francis denied any such reform, he revealed he was revising the protocol for papal funerals. Francis said Benedict's would be "the last wake in which the body of a pope is exposed in an open coffin, on a bier." He said he wanted to ensure popes "are buried like any son of the church", in a dignified, but not excessive manner. In the book, Francis also settles some scores with Benedict's longtime secretary, Archbishop Georg Gaenswein, whom he initially fired and then exiled from the Vatican after what he described as a series of imprudent decisions that "made life difficult for me." Gaenswein is widely believed to have helped fuel the anti-Francis opposition during Benedict's decade-long retirement, allowing Benedict to be used by conservatives nostalgic for his doctrinaire papacy.

India manufacturing sector growth hits 16 years high in March

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's manufacturing sector growth climbed to a 16-year high in March on the back of the strongest increase in output and new orders since October 2020, amid reports of buoyant demand conditions, a monthly survey said on Tuesday.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) surged to a 16-year high of 59.1 in March, from 56.9 in February, reflecting stronger growth of new orders, output and input stocks as well as renewed job creation.

In Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) parlance, a print above 50 means expansion while a score below 50 denotes contraction.

"India's March manufacturing



PMI rose to its highest level since 2008. Manufacturing companies expanded hiring in response to strong production and new orders. On the back of strong demand and a slight tightening in capacity, input

cost inflation picked up in March," Ines Lam, Economist at HSBC, said.

Manufacturing output rose for the 33rd month running in March, and to the greatest extent since October 2020.

Growth quickened across the consumer, intermediate and investment goods sectors.

Inflows of new work strengthened from both domestic and export markets. New export orders increased at

the fastest pace since May 2022, the survey said.

Quantities of purchase increased at the quickest rate since mid-2023, and one that was among the strongest in nearly 13 years, as companies sought to build up stocks in advance of expected improvements in sales.

On the job front, after leaving payroll numbers broadly unchanged in the previous two months, manufacturers in India took on additional workers in March. The pace of job creation was mild, but the best since September 2023, the survey said.

On the price front, despite remaining modest by historical standards, cost pressures were at their highest in five months. Companies reported having paid more for cotton, iron,

machinery tools, plastics and steel.

However, customer retention remained a priority for goods producers who raised their charges to the least extent in over a year.

On the outlook for the Indian manufacturing sector, companies remained confident on an average, with 28 per cent forecasting output growth in the year ahead and 1 per cent expecting a contraction.

The overall level of sentiment remained elevated, but slipped to a four-month low as inflation concerns weighed on confidence.

The HSBC India Manufacturing PMI is compiled by S&P Global from responses to questionnaires sent to purchasing managers in a panel of around 400 manufacturers.



India, EEU bloc start negotiation for FTA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Senior officials of India and the five-nation Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) bloc held detailed discussions last month to formally start negotiations for a free trade agreement to boost economic ties, an official said.

The five members of the EEU are Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia. The official said two feasibility studies have already been conducted on the proposed agreement.

In such agreements, two or more trading partners either eliminate or significantly reduce customs duties on the maximum number of goods traded between them. These agreements provide greater market access to Indian goods and services.

"Senior officers of both sides have met on March 28 here and have

discussed formally starting talks for the FTA," the official said.

An industry expert said domestic exporters from sectors like engineering goods, electronics and agriculture can get an edge from the agreement.

Russia is the top trading partner of India in the bloc, with bilateral trade worth USD 49.4 billion in FY23. India's exports to Russia stood at USD 1.14 billion in 2022-23, while imports were USD 46.2 billion due to an increase in crude oil imports.

The bilateral trade with Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan was USD 134.26 million, USD 111.81 million, USD 641.62 million, and USD 56.56 million, respectively, in 2022-23. A similar agreement was signed by India and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). The members of this bloc are Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.

India commanding higher valuations on investors trust: Buch

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Sebi chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch on Tuesday said the Indian capital markets are commanding higher valuations because of foreign investors' optimism and trust in the country.

She said at 22.2, the ratio of price to earning multiple in the Indian market is higher than the average of many indices around the world.

"Yes, some people say that we are an expensive market but still why is the investment coming? Because this is a reflection of the optimism and the trust and faith that the world has in India today that we are commanding the kind of multiples in our markets," she said at a CII event on corporate governance here.

A few weeks ago, Buch had flagged concerns on high valuations in segments of small and midcap stocks, stating that it could be becoming into a bubble.

Buch said she meets foreign investors regularly as part of her mandate and has seen an increased interest in India among them because of the velocity which the country's economy has got after years of high speed growth.

They are encouraged by data suggesting the strength of



the economy as visible in the growth in GST collections month on month, advance tax payouts, power and energy consumption, she said.

The interest has led to the overall market capitalisation in equities reaching over Rs 378 lakh crore at the end of FY24 from Rs 74 lakh crore a decade ago, Buch said, adding that the market capitalisation is at the level of the overall GDP now.

She said Indian entities raised a total of Rs 10.5 lakh crore from markets by way of equity and bond issuances in FY24, which includes over Rs 8 lakh crore through the bond route.

Speaking about the bond issuances, she said it has reached over 62 per cent of the overall bank lending done in a year now.

Bajaj Auto shares climb nearly three per cent

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of Bajaj Auto Ltd on Tuesday climbed nearly 3 per cent after the company reported a 25 per cent year-on-year growth in its total vehicle wholesales in March. The stock advanced 2.61 per cent to settle at Rs 9,276.65 on the BSE. During the day, it jumped 3.48 per cent to reach the 52-week high of Rs 9,356.

At the NSE, it climbed 2.53 per cent to Rs 9,271.05.

Bajaj Auto Ltd on Tuesday reported 25 per cent year-on-year growth in its total vehicle wholesales, including exports at 3,65,904 units in March.

The Pune-based automaker had sold 2,91,567 two-wheelers and commercial vehicles in March 2023, according to a company statement.

Total domestic sales (including commercial vehicles) rose 18 per cent to 2,20,393 units in the last



month compared to 1,86,522 units sold in the same month last year.

Total exports during the month under review rose 39 per cent at 1,45,511 units from 1,05,045 vehicles shipped out to overseas markets in March last year, according to the statement.

For the fiscal year ended March 31, 2024, the company reported wholesales of 4,350,933 units, an 11 per cent rise over 3,927,857 units in 2022-23.

Stock markets end three days winning run

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Stock markets snapped the three-day winning run on Tuesday with benchmark Sensex falling by 110 points due to profit-taking in select IT, private bank and auto shares amid weak trends from the US markets and foreign fund outflows.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined by 110.64 points or 0.15 per cent to settle at 73,903.91 with 16 of its components ending lower and 14 settling higher. During the day, the index dropped by 270.78 points or 0.36 per cent to a low of 73,743.77 points. The broader NSE Nifty closed lower by 8.70 points or 0.04 per cent at 22,453.30 despite recovery at the fag-end..



Both Sensex and Nifty scaled lifetime high levels in intra-day trade on Monday before settling around 0.5% higher.

"The domestic market took a breather today after achieving a fresh record high yesterday.

Factors such as a rising dollar, increasing US bond yields, and a notable uptick in crude oil prices collectively dampened investor sentiment," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial

Services said. Better-than-expected US data raised worries about a potential delay in interest rate cuts by the US Fed, Nair added.

"Nifty snapped its three-day rally despite a sharp recovery in the last half an hour. Global stocks were mixed on Tuesday after Wall Street fell as surprisingly strong US manufacturing data created doubts over how soon the US Federal Reserve might cut interest rates," said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities.

From the Sensex basket, Kotak Mahindra Bank fell the most by 1.84 per cent. ICICI Bank dropped 1.63 per cent, HCL Technologies by 1.82 per cent, and Infosys by 0.84 per cent. Tata Consultancy

Services, Wipro, Tech Mahindra and Larsen & Toubro were the major laggards.

Mahindra & Mahindra, Nestle, Tata Motors and IndusInd Bank were among the gainers.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge jumped 1.28 per cent and the midcap index climbed 1.14 per cent. Analysts said mid and small-cap stocks continued their recovery rally, although concerns about high valuations lingered.

Moreover, investors are eagerly anticipating guidance from the upcoming RBI monetary policy announcement for insight into near-term market direction.



Gold falls ₹50; silver climbs ₹430

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

After hitting an all-time high Alevel, gold prices on Tuesday fell Rs 50 to Rs 68,370 per 10 grams in the local market, following weak trends in the international markets, according to HDFC Securities.

In the previous session, the precious metal closed at Rs 68,420 per 10 grams. However, silver prices climbed Rs 430 to Rs 79,000 per kg. In the previous session, it had settled at Rs 78,570 per kg.

In the overseas markets, spot gold at COMEX was trading at USD 2,255 per ounce, down by USD 2 from the previous close.

"After reaching an all-time high in the previous session, gold prices slightly retreated on Tuesday, as traders began to doubt the US Federal Reserve's decision to lower interest rates following solid US manufacturing data.

"Meanwhile, the US dollar index rallied to a five-month high, which also weighed down on the precious metal prices," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities.

However, silver prices were higher at USD 25.55 per ounce. Its previous close was USD 25.13 per ounce.

Audit profession at crossroads in fight for talent: ACCA

PNS ■ DELHI

Accountancy bodies ACCA & ACAANZ have released a survey report which highlights major challenges audit profession is facing in attracting and retaining talent. A survey conducted by ACCA (the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants) and Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand (CA ANZ), supported by a series of global roundtables, revealed persistent challenges in the auditing profession in its battle to attract and retain talent. Antonis Diolas, head of Audit and Assurance, ACCA and author of the report "Attract, Engage, Retain: Insights and Recommendations for Audit Talent Success", said, "A compelling insight from our study highlights the absence of a commonly understood and unified purpose within the audit profession. This not only inhibits prospective candidates from entering the profession in the first place, but also hinders current professionals from recognising how their work generates value."

Amir Ghandar, Reporting and Assurance leader, CA ANZ said, "The research clearly shows the need for empathy and respect in the workplace recognising employees' multifaceted lives."

He also said that the people also need to be able to see themselves in their leaders, to visualise the opportunities and career possibilities in a way that feels real.

Hiring down four per cent in March year on year: Report

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Hiring by Indian companies saw a 4 per cent decline in March as compared to the same month last year, a report released on Tuesday stated.

However, sequentially, there was a slight uptick of 3 per cent, reflecting an optimistic business sentiment, the report by foundit Insights Tracker (fit) said.

The report is based on an analysis of fit data from March 2023 to March 2024. The report revealed that white-collar gig jobs, or freelance work, saw an 184 per cent increase compared to the previous year. This suggests professionals'

growing preference for flexible, project-based work arrangements, it noted.

Additionally, it stated that gig workers, representing a vital workforce segment, have expanded 21 per cent over the same period, highlighting companies' increasing reliance on freelancers and independent contractors to meet business needs.

The IT sector is at the forefront of this gig boom, as per the report.

The share of IT software in the gig economy has nearly doubled, jumping to 46 per cent in March 2024, from 22 per cent in March 2023, it added.

MakeMyTrip, STB ink pact to promote Singapore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Online travel service provider, MakeMyTrip Ltd on Tuesday said it has entered into a partnership with Singapore Tourism Board for promoting Singapore as a key destination to Indian travellers. The two partners have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for a year-long strategic partnership to boost travel to Singapore, MakeMyTrip said in a statement.

Under the MoU, Singapore Tourism Board (STB) and MakeMyTrip will embark on joint activations and campaigns to boost inbound travel to Singapore in 2024, it added. "Through this partnership, we want to



deepen Indian consumers' brand affinity for Singapore and reinforce the city's appeal and enhanced offerings for various segments of Indian visitors," STB Chief Executive Melissa Ow said.

STB will also tap into MakeMyTrip's market understanding and insights to curate unique travel holiday packages targeting consumers in India, the statement said.

MakeMyTrip Co-Founder and Group CEO, Rajesh Magow said Singapore was one of the top three searched international destinations on the company's platform last year, advancing from fifth place in 2022.

"The widespread interest for this destination from across India underscores its appeal. With ongoing initiatives that refresh its offerings, seamless travel access, and amenities tailored to Indian preferences, Singapore holds significant potential to capture the continued interest of more Indian travellers," he added.

India is one of the top five markets for STB and over 10 lakh Indians visited Singapore in 2023, the statement said.

Main board IPOs collect ₹62,000 crore in FY24

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Buoyant secondary markets, strong participation of retail investors, and robust flows from institutional investors helped 76 companies in raising nearly Rs 62,000 crore through mainboard IPOs in 2023-24, marking a 19 per cent surge from the previous fiscal year. With FY2025 on the horizon, expectations are high for yet another stellar year for IPOs (Initial Public Offerings). This optimism is fuelled by a confluence of factors, including the surge in domestic capital, enhanced governance practices, the vibrant spirit of Indian



entrepreneurship, and favourable government policies bolstered by FDI support, Pantomath Financial Services Group, said in its report.

"With a diverse array of offerings and a fervent appetite for growth capital, the IPO landscape in FY2025 promises to be dynamic and vibrant, offering exciting opportunities for investors and companies alike. We anticipate that equity-raise through IPOs in FY25 could exceed Rs 1 lakh crore. This figure could potentially increase even further if there are no global shocks affecting the Indian market," Mahavir Lunawat, Managing Director, at Pantomath Capital Advisors, said.

According to the report, a total of 76 companies garnered close to Rs 62,000 crore through main-board IPOs in 2023-24, which was way higher than Rs 52,115

crore mopped up by 37 companies in the preceding fiscal.

Interestingly, companies from multiple sectors tapped the IPO market in FY24. However, the traditionally dominant financial sector, demonstrated restrained activity, raising Rs 9,655 crore, which accounted for less than a fifth of the total capital raised in FY24, in comparison to 51 per cent in 2022-23.

Further, new-age technology companies were also few, with just three IPOs of Yatra, Mamaearth, and Zaggie hitting the market in the last fiscal.

Rupee falls four paise to close at 83.43 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee on Tuesday consolidated in a narrow range and settled 4 paise lower at 83.43 against the US dollar, weighed down by a strong dollar and elevated crude oil prices. Forex traders said a weak trend in domestic equities also dented investor sentiments.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 83.37, then touched an intraday high of 83.34 and a low of 83.44 against the greenback. The rupee finally

settled at 83.43, a fall of 4 paise over its previous close. On Thursday last week, the rupee depreciated 6 paise to settle at 83.39 against the US dollar. Forex market was closed on Friday and Monday on account of 'Good Friday' and the annual account closing of banks, respectively. "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on strong US dollar and weak tone in domestic markets. Rising crude oil prices may also weigh on the domestic currency," said Anuj Choudhary Research Analyst,

Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. Traders may take cues from Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS) and speeches by various US Federal Reserve officials. USD/INR spot price is expected to trade in the range of Rs 83.20 to Rs 83.60, Choudhary added. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.05 per cent lower at 104.96. Brent crude futures advanced 1.78 per cent to USD 88.98 per barrel.



INDIAN MEN HOCKEY TEAM HEADS TO AUSTRALIA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian men's hockey team has left for Australia to compete in a five-match Test series beginning April 6, a crucial assignment ahead of the Paris Olympics in July-August. The Harmanpreet Singh-led side left on Monday night. The team has been in good form and recently won three out of its four matches during the FIH Pro League in Bhubaneswar. After the opening game on April 6, the series features matches on

April 7, 10, 12 and 13.

It is essential for the Indian team to enhance their performance, build and check-through the improvement areas for the coming Paris Olympics, Hockey India stated in a press release. "As we embark on this crucial tour to Australia, we are filled with determination and excitement. The series presents an excellent opportunity for us to assess our strengths and areas for improvement ahead of the Paris Olympics," Harmanpreet said before the side's departure.

"We are fully committed to giving our best on the field and making every moment count," Vice-captain Hardik Singh stated that this tour holds immense significance for the team. "We have been working hard as a team to refine our skills and strategies, and we are confident in our abilities. We are focused on putting up a strong performance and making our country proud," he said.

THE INDIAN TEAM:
GOALKEEPERS: Krishan Bahadur Pathak, PR Sreejesh,

Suraj Karkera
DEFENDERS: Harmanpreet Singh (C), Jarmanpreet Singh, Amit Rohidas, Jugraj Singh, Sanjay, Sumit, Amir Ali
MIDFIELDERS: Manpreet Singh, Hardik Singh (VC), Vivek Sagar Prasad, Shamsher Singh, Nilakanta Sharma, Rajkumar Pal, Vishnukant Singh.
FORWARDS: Akashdeep Singh, Mandeep Singh, Lalit Kumar Upadhyay, Abhishek, Dilpreet Singh, Sukhjeet Singh, Gurjant Singh, Mohammed Raheel Mousen, Bobby Singh Dhami, Arajjeet Singh Hundal.

Praggnanandhaa enters as India best bet

PTI ■ TORONTO

Teen sensation R Praggnanandhaa will enter as the favourite among the three Indian participants in the Candidates chess tournament that will get underway here from Wednesday to decide the challenger for the next world championship match. After nearly 35 years as many as three Indians — Praggnanandhaa, D Gukesh and Vidit Gujrathi — have qualified for the most prestigious event of the year that has just eight participants. According to an expert, India is the new Russia of the chess world, as in the past such dominance was only shown by Russian players.

Praggnanandhaa, 18, starts as the rating favourite among Indians and also as the favourite of the chess buffs even though the top bracket of the world feels that all the three Indian youngsters still need time to settle among the world elite. Fearless and psychologically sound, Praggnandhaa will likely have the assistance of eight-time Russian champion Peter Svidler for the event. One cannot help but recall that during one of the world championships Indian grandmaster P Harikrishna had assisted Svidler in his quest to be the world champion. While Svidler could be a game-changer, it will largely depend on Praggnandhaa's form and how he adapts in this tough event, where the eight players will play each other twice. At just 17 years, Gukesh is



hailed as one of the finest talents around. The Indian is also the youngest participant in the fray and second youngest ever after Robert James Fischer — aka Bobby Fischer — to qualify for the elite event. Fischer was 16-year-old when he qualified in 1959. That Fischer's record lasted a whopping 65 years, goes to prove what it takes to be one of the candidates and if Gukesh wins it, he will be the youngest ever to compete for the World Championship title. Vidit Gujrathi will have his task cut out and much will depend on his form. In his last outing, probably training his sights for the candidates, the Nasik-based player did not do well at the Prague masters and slipped considerably on the rating list also. Praggnanandhaa was the first to qualify for the tournament

by virtue of his silver medal performance in the last World Cup at Baku, Azerbaijan. The Indian star went down to Magnus Carlsen in the final but since then has picked up a lot and has come around as a fierce. Gujrathi made it thanks to a remarkable performance in the Grand Swiss tournament at Isle of Man, UK, last year. The Indian had displayed top form in the final stages of the tournament. For Gukesh it was touch and go but the teenager displayed steely nerves to win a spot through the rating process by winning a GM tournament in Chennai last December. The field however is diverse with a great mix of youth and experience. American Fabiano Caruana starts as the top seed ahead of his compatriot Hikaru

Nakamura. The 20-year-old Alireza Firouzja of France is ranked third while twice challenger Ian Nepomniachtchi of Russia is the fourth seed. Praggnanandhaa, Gukesh and Gujrathi follow these four in terms of FIDE ratings while Nijat Abasov of Azerbaijan is the last seed in the event. The first round will commence on Thursday, at midnight IST. There will be four rest days in all. The winner not only gets to play the world championship match but will also become richer by 48000 Euros (roughly Rs. 45 lakh).

ROAD TO THE CANDIDATES:

Ian Nepomniachtchi (2758) — qualified as the previous World Championship match runner-up.
R Praggnanandhaa (2747) — qualified as the 2023 World Cup runner-up.
Fabiano Caruana (USA, 2804) — qualified as the third-place finisher at the 2023 World Cup.
Nijat Abasov (AZE, 2632) — qualified as the fourth-place finisher at the 2023 World Cup after the winner, Magnus Carlsen, declined his right to participate.
Hikaru Nakamura (USA, 2789) — qualified as the 2023 Grand Swiss runner-up.
Vidit Gujrathi (2747) — qualified as the 2023 Grand Swiss winner.
Alireza Firouzja (FRA, 2760) — qualified as the best by rating on January 1, 2024.
D Gukesh (2747) — qualified as the 2023 FIDE Circuit winner.

PTI ■ ROHTAK

Month-long exposure camps with international pugilists will greatly benefit the development of boxing in India, especially at the age-group level, feels national junior girls' boxing coach Geeta Chanu. Chanu noted that the reason countries like Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are among the top boxing nations is the close cooperation between the respective boards of these Central Asian nations. "Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have good endurance they are also high on strength but where they really score over others is their confidence," Chanu told PTI. "Central Asian countries like Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan conduct combined training and competitions across various age groups, at least three such combined train-

Indian junior girls coach advocates for extended training camps with international boxers

ing or competitions in a year. Hence from a very young age they get a lot of international exposure. "Our players face international boxers only in multi-national tournaments," she added. The Boxing Federation of India (BFI) conducted a 15-day REC Combined Multinational Training Camp for junior boys and girls at the Sports Authority of India's National Boxing Academy here. At the camp that ended on Tuesday, Indian boxers got to rub shoulders with pugilists from boxing powerhouses Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan besides Sri Lanka.



Chanu welcomed BFI's move to host a multinational camp for the age-group level Indian teams

but insisted that the duration of such camps should be longer. "We need even longer camps. A

30-day camp would yield more results. In 15 days not everything can be covered so we want that a longer camp should be there," she said. Junior World Championship gold and silver medallists Payal and Amisha Kerketta echoed the same sentiment. "This camp was very useful as our shortcomings were identified and a lot of work on rectifying them was done. It would have been great had it been a longer camp," Payal said. "At the continental as well as World Championships we face a lot of Uzbek and Kazakh boxers so it was good to observe them close up and spar with

them at this camp," Amisha added. "We wish more such camps are conducted for longer durations like 45 days or a month so that we can learn much more." The camp, which is a part of SAI's new Khelo India Rising Talent Identification (KRITI) initiative, saw participation of over 150 boxers including 75 from India, 37 from Kazakhstan, 18 from Uzbekistan and 35 from Sri Lanka. "The vision behind this is to identify athletes at a grassroots level and to build the bench strength of the he country," said Deputy Director SAI Sachin. K.



Atletico Madrid beat Villarreal

AP ■ MADRID

Atletico Madrid scored early and late to beat Villarreal 2-1 in an entertaining Spanish league game and snap a two-game losing streak. Villarreal won its last four matches and was nine games unbeaten, but a last-gasp goal from substitute Saul Niguez gave Atletico all three points and took it into fourth place in La Liga, two points above Athletic Bilbao. Niguez got the winner with three minutes remaining when he coolly side-footed a low shot past the goalkeeper from 17 yards out. It was the first league goal of the season for the central midfielder, who went on to replace Pablo Barrios just three minutes earlier.

Axel Witsel put the capital club 1-0 up when he headed home a corner from Rodrigo Riquelme after eight minutes. Villarreal's Norwegian striker Alexander Sorloth equalized four minutes into the second half with his 14th goal of the season. The late defeat was a crushing blow for Villarreal, which started poorly but came into the match in the second half. It remained in 10th place, ahead of Getafe on goal difference and a point behind Osasuna in ninth. Of the late goal, Villarreal defender Raul Albiol said, "Atletico have a punch and that can happen. They are one of the teams who most score goals in the final minutes of a game.

We need to start believing we are as good as anyone: Jena

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Olympic-bound javelin thrower Kishore Jena says facilities and funding have never been as good as they are right now for India's athletes, who need to improve their mindset and start considering themselves as good as anyone else in the world. Jena undertook a 35-day training stint in Gold Coast in Australia from February 5 to March 10, funded by Target Olympics Podium Scheme (TOPS). Speaking to PTI, Jena said he hardly found anything different save for the warmer weather Down Under, which was more conducive for his training. "We have everything here, I trained at NIS Patiala where the facilities are world class and as good as in Australia. I have been looked after very well by Sports Ministry, SAI (Sports Authority of India), getting funding from TOPS," Jena, youngest of the seven children of a paddy farmer in Kothashahi village near Puri in Odisha, said in the interview facilitated by SAI. "What is lacking is in ourselves (athletes), our mindset, the mindset that we are as good as any other in the

world though we are improving on this front as well." His goal is to deliver his personal best at the upcoming Paris Olympics but the Asian Games silver-medallist feels he can enter the exclusive Indian club of Diamond League top-three finishers. Jena, who improved his personal best from 78.05m to 87.54m last year, is beginning his season at the Doha leg of the prestigious Diamond League on May 10. He will also take part in Golden Spike at Ostrava, Czech Republic, on May 28 — a World Athletics Continental Tour gold level event — and the Paris leg of the Diamond League on July 7. "This year, everything is about doing my personal best in Paris Olympics. That is the most important thing. But everybody wants to finish on podium (top three) in prestigious competitions like Diamond League and I also hope to do that," Jena said. "If I do my best on the day, it (top three finish in DL) can happen," said the 28-year-old who made the Paris Olympics cut by breaching the 85.50m qualifying standard at the Asian Games last year. Till now, reigning Olympic and world champion Neeraj Chopra, long



jumper M Shreshankar and former discus throw star Vikas Gowda are the only three Indians who have finished inside top three in a Diamond League meet. Jena threw his personal best of 87.44m to win the silver medal in the Hangzhou Asian Games last year, while Chopra took the gold with a throw of 88.88m. His meteoric rise last year — from finishing fifth in the Budapest World Championships to winning silver medal in Asian Games -- was

achieved while training in India and he said the country has world class infrastructure and support system to shine at the global stage. "It's cold in Patiala in winter and difficult to manage training because of fog also. So, we requested SAI for training stint in Australia. We went to Australia solely because of the cold winter in Patiala, nothing else. "It was a productive stint of strength training and improvement on technique (in Australia). We worked on the bending of the blocking leg. It

will gradually improve and I am hoping for 85 per cent improvement on that. "We are yet to do full throwing sessions (in Patiala), will do gradually as the Diamond League (Doha leg on May 10) approaches. I am hoping to improve my personal best and achieve peak form during Paris Olympics." Chopra had said after last year's Asian Games that Jena has a smooth run-up but his blocking leg bends a bit and he will do even better if he corrects that. Jena said that he has started much better than last year and will be training at NIS Patiala before leaving for Doha. Asked if he will return to India after competitions abroad, Jena said, "I may be taking part in back-to-back events (beginning in Doha on May 10) and may need to be abroad most of the time till the Paris Olympics, but we are yet to finalise. "But from the Paris Diamond League (July 7) onwards, I would prefer to have my base there till the end of the Olympics." The men's javelin throw event at the Paris Olympics will start with the qualifying round on August 6 and final will be held on August 8.

Inter extends Serie A lead with win over Empoli

AP ■ ROME

Inter Milan became the second team in Serie A history to score in the season's first 30 games when it beat Empoli 2-0 and edged closer to the title. Only Juventus in the 2013-14 campaign scored in its first 30 games. In the big five European leagues this season, no other team has matched Inter's feat. Inter extended its lead to 14 points on second-placed AC Milan. There are eight rounds left. Empoli lost its last three games by 1-0 and it was a goal behind after just five minutes when Federico Dimarco turned in

an Alessandro Bastoni cross. Inter was on top throughout but it couldn't double its lead until the 82nd minute. Alexis Sanchez, who replaced Bastoni, had the easiest of finishes after good work on the right by Denzel Dumfries. Empoli remained third to last and in serious relegation trouble. **BOLOGNA CLOSER TO CHAMPIONS LEAGUE:** Bologna beat lowly Salernitana 3-0 to take another step towards Champions League football. The eighth win in nine games for Thiago Motta's side pushed it to within two points of third-placed Juventus. A fourth place finish would ensure

Bologna of Champions League football for the first time. Riccardo Orsolini opened the scoring after 14 minutes with a tremendous left-foot shot from outside the box and Alexis Saelemaekers made it 2-0 a minute from halftime. Left back Charalampos Lykogiannis completed the scoring in stoppage time after working a neat one-two with Saelemaekers. The result marked an unhappy debut for Salernitana coach Stefano Colantuono, the club's fourth coach this season. Salernitana looks doomed to spend next season in the second tier. It is 11 points from safety. Salernitana plays Sassuolo



next Friday in a relegation six-point game made all the more urgent after Sassuolo surrendered a lead at home to Udinese. Grégoire Defrel opened the scoring for the home four minutes before halftime following a defense-splitting pass from Matheus Henrique. However, Florian Thauvin equalized from close range three minutes later. The result will satisfy neither side as the search for points becomes more desperate. Sassuolo remained second from bottom on the table, and although Udinese was five places above it, only four points separate them in a congested battle to avoid the

drop. **CAGLIARI DRAWS WITH VERONA:** Two other teams in the fight, Cagliari and Verona, started the day tied on points and they ended the day still tied after drawing 1-1. Verona led after half an hour through Federico Bonazzoli. Goalkeeper Simone Scuffet got a hand to Bonazzoli's flick with the outside of his boot but could not stop the ball going in. Ghanaian midfielder Ibrahim Sulemana scored with 16 minutes remaining to give Cagliari a share of the spoils. Verona was in 15th place, above Cagliari on goal difference. **ROMA STALEMATE AT**

LECCE: Fifth-placed Roma was held to 0-0 at Lecce. Good goalkeeping and profligate finishing ensured a stalemate. Roma failed to score in the league for the first time since Daniele De Rossi took over as coach in mid-January but the point still means he has taken 23 points in his first 10 matches in charge, a feat bettered previously by only two other Roma coaches in the last 30 years. The point was a welcome one for Lecce and coach Luca Gotti. Gotti took over on March 13 and is unbeaten in his first two games. Lecce remained in 13th place but not out of relegation danger.



DELHI CAPITALS READY FOR KKR CHALLENGE

PTI ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Delhi Capitals would be keen to prove that their comfortable win against Chennai Super Kings was not a flash in the pan while Kolkata Knight Riders would be eyeing a hat-trick of victories when the two sides face off in the IPL here on Wednesday.

The Capitals would be buoyed by the 20-run victory here on Sunday, their first of the season, against defending champions CSK who were outsmarted by Rishabh Pant and Co. In all departments of the game. And come Wednesday, the Capitals will have to put another such performance against KKR, whose batters pummelled Royal Challengers Bengaluru bowlers to notch their second win of the season on March 29. For DC, the onus will be on Prithvi Shaw and veteran Australian David Warner to provide a solid start. Meanwhile, Pant continues his

inspirational journey. After two scratchy innings, the skipper gave a glimpse of his devastating best as he scored his maiden fifty (51 off 32 balls) of the season and seems to be slowly finding his groove. The likes of South African Tristan Stubbs and Australian Mitchell Marsh, both capable of launching an assault on the opposition, need to be better towards the end as DC lack domestic power hitters.

While Stubbs showcased his prowess with the bat against Rajasthan Royals, a consistent show from him will do a world of good for DC. On the other hand, Marsh is yet to produce a glimpse of his brute power with the willow which could prove to be DC's lethal weapon.

South African Anrich Nortje is yet to find his rhythm as he returned to action after a long injury layoff. The Capitals' Indian pace unit will thus have to punch above its weight against a formidable KKR side.



Khaleel Ahmed's performance against CSK was commendable, yet his long-standing fielding troubles remain a concern. He struggles particularly with aerial catches, dropping more than he successfully takes. He dropped a catch of MS Dhoni against CSK. Mukesh Kumar lacks pace while veteran Ishant Sharma is more than capable of asking pertinent questions.

KKR, on the other hand, have looked good this season, registering two wins from as many games. Opener Phil Salt, all-rounder Andre Russell and Venkatesh Iyer have been in good nick in the first two games and would look to pose a challenge for the Delhi pacers.

Skipper Shreyas Iyer also got some runs under his belt in the win against Royal Challengers Bengaluru. Rookie pacer Harshit Rana has impressed so far, picking five wickets in two outings, but Mitchell Starc, their record

buy, and Varun Chakravarthy have gone for runs aplenty.

THE TEAMS (FROM):

Delhi Capitals: Rishabh Pant (c), David Warner, Prithvi Shaw, Yash Dhull, Abishek Porel, Axar Patel, Lalit Yadav, Mitchell Marsh, Pravin Dubey, Vicky Ostwal, Anrich Nortje, Kuldeep Yadav, Jake Fraser-McGurk, Khaleel Ahmed, Ishant Sharma, Mukesh Kumar, Tristan Stubbs, Ricky Bhui, Kumar Kushagra, Rasikh Dar, Jhye Richardson, Sumit Kumar, Swastik Chikara and Shai Hope.

Kolkata Knight Riders: Shreyas Iyer (c), KS Bharat, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Rinku Singh, Angkrish Raghuvanshi, Sherfane Rutherford, Manish Pandey, Andre Russell, Nitish Rana, Venkatesh Iyer, Anukul Roy, Ramandeep Singh, Varun Chakravarthy, Sunil Narine, Vaibhav Arora, Chetan Sakariya, Harshit Rana, Suyash Sharma, Mitchell Starc, Dushmantha Chameera, Sakib Hussain, Mujeeb Ur Rahman.



Parag reminds me of young SKY: Bond

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Rajasthan Royals assistant Coach Shane Bond has described in-form Rryan Parag as a player of "extreme talent" and likened him to a young Suryakumar Yadav who joined Mumbai Indians more than a decade ago and went on to become one of the most explosive T20 batters in the world.

The 22-year-old Parag has brought his rich form from domestic cricket into the IPL, striking two high quality fifties to help Rajasthan notch up wins in all three games so far. Parag's latest effort came against Mumbai Indians in his side's six-wicket win on Monday. He dropped anchor to spearhead Royals' chase of 126, scoring 54 not out off 39 balls with the help of five fours and three sixes.

"He (Parag) sort of reminds me a little bit of Surya (Suryakumar Yadav), who came to Mumbai a few years ago. He looks like that - he has got extreme talent. He has just matured as a cricketer, even though he is only 22," Bond, who is also the RR bowling coach, said at the post-match press conference.

Bond played a crucial role in developing bowling talents at MI in his nine-year stint with the Mumbai-based franchise from 2015 onwards, before shifting base to Jaipur this year. "He (Parag) has had an outstanding domestic season, obviously, batting up the order. The trade we made with Devdutt (Padikkal), bringing Avesh (Khan) in, that was to put Rryan up into a position which was probably better suited," the former New Zealand fast bowler added.

Suryakumar, the world's number one T20 batter, joined MI in 2011 and spent four years at Kolkata Knight Riders from 2014-17 before he was brought back to the Mumbai side in 2018. He is recovering from a recent surgery.

Bond said Parag has had to play the role of a finisher in the IPL at a young age whereas other teams have experienced international players in that role.

"Rryan started so young, you forget that he was 17 or something, playing in one of the toughest spots in a batting line-up of No 6. You look at the characters who finish games around the IPL, they are

generally pretty experienced guys," he said.

(The) Tim Davids, (the) Dave Millers... these are high quality players who play international cricket. Rryan has been tasked with that for a number of years. He is still a very young man, but he has got this wealth of experience behind him now.

"We are getting the best of him. The investment that RR have made of him, it's starting to reap the rewards. It is pretty exciting what he could offer for the rest of the season for us."

Bond also felt "selfless" Yuzvendra Chahal, who produced a measly spell of 4-0-11-3 to set up Rajasthan's win on Monday, could be back in India reckoning if he continues to deliver.

"The competition is pretty tough, so one of the real challenges for any bowler coming into this tournament is to forget that there is a World Cup, and you start bowling to get into a World Cup team," he said.

"If your team is successful, you are in a winning team, selections and rewards come from that. That has more of been our focus, to forget about all that other noise from the outside and just work really hard for each other.

"If we do that, I have got no doubt people are going to start talking like you are now about Chahal and whether he will feature in a World Cup or not. He is bowling beautifully, and if he keeps doing that, then we have got a massive chance in this tournament," he added.

Bond said having knowledge about opposition players also helps in making strategies for his current team.

"When you have obviously spent so much time with certain players, watched them every day and talked to them about their game and the way that they see the game, that definitely helps," he said.

"It was quite fun being on the other side of the team. A couple of dismissals, you get a lot of satisfaction from that."

MI pacer Akash Madhwal said a fresh pitch at the Wankhede Stadium assisted bowlers in the first game but maintaining tight lines was equally crucial.

"We had to get our basics right and had to bowl in the line of the stumps. The pitch had some help for the fast bowlers," said Madhwal, who returned 3/20.

Rohit would not have lost MI captaincy if he had been named India T20 WC skipper earlier: Sidhu



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former India cricketer Navjot Singh Sidhu believes that Rohit Sharma would not have been replaced by Hardik Pandya as Mumbai Indians captain had the BCCI named him skipper for the T20 World Cup last year itself.

Rohit was declared captain of India's yet-to-be-named T20 World Cup squad in February this year by BCCI secretary Jay Shah at an event in Ahmedabad, a good two months after he was replaced by Pandya as MI skipper.

"If the BCCI had named Rohit as captain for the T20 World Cup in October, the franchise wouldn't have chosen Hardik as captain. It's a matter of the franchise's respect. So, the actual issue here is timing," Sidhu said in 'Star Sports Press Room'.

Pandya has been facing hostility from fans in the ongoing IPL, booed in all three matches so far, including the one at MI's home turf of Wankhede, besides ending up

on the losing side.

Sidhu said the fans' reaction is quite understandable as Rohit is a much-loved cricketer. "Nobody can digest the fact that India's hero, India's captain, is not the captain of our franchise. 'What wrong has he done?' is what fans of the franchise would be thinking. But what does he have to do?"

"There is nothing that succeeds like success. If he had won these two matches, there wouldn't have been any noise," he pointed out.

Talking about other teams in the IPL, Sidhu felt Royal Challengers Bengaluru have become predictable, especially in their spin bowling.

"The biggest thing needed in the winning of a team is that they are not dependent on just one individual to achieve victory. We do talk about Virat Kohli and Faf du Plessis, but you got to add the right horse."

"The chain is as strong as the weakest link, and their weakness lies in the spin

department. Their spinners are just not there, so therefore they will have to replenish that area. Like, RCB had (Wanindu) Hasaranga, who was pretty good and even before him, there was Yuzvendra Chahal," he observed.

"But they let them go and that has created a void in their bowling line-up. RCB haven't been able to fill that void, which makes them predictable. Now look at (MS) Dhoni - when he comes, no one knows his plan," he said.

Sidhu reiterated that IPL performances will shape the T20 World Cup squads of all the teams.

"The entire world revolves around the IPL. Playing in the IPL just before the World Cup is like participating in a mini World Cup. Stellar performance here can make you an overnight sensation. Therefore, anyone who excels in the IPL becomes a strong contender," he said.

The T20 World Cup will begin on June 1 in the USA and the West Indies.



KKR-RR, GT-DC matches rescheduled: BCCI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Kolkata Knight Riders' home IPL game against Rajasthan Royals was on Tuesday advanced by a day to April 16, while Gujarat Titans-Delhi Capitals fixture in Ahmedabad was also rescheduled by the BCCI which did not give any reason for the move.

The PTI had on Monday reported that the KKR-RR tie was set to be rescheduled due to Ram Navami, but the Board did not specify any reason for the rescheduling of matches on these two dates.

"The fixture between Kolkata Knight Riders & Rajasthan Royals, which was earlier scheduled to take place on April 17, 2024 at Eden Gardens, Kolkata will now be played a day prior on April 16, 2024.

"The Narendra Modi Stadium, Ahmedabad was earlier scheduled to host the match between Gujarat Titans & Delhi Capitals on April 16, 2024. The fixture will now be played on April 17, 2024," the BCCI said in a statement.

It was learnt that Kolkata Police expressed its inability to provide adequate security cover for what will be KKR's third home game of the 17th IPL season, just three days after they host the Lucknow Super Giants.

"Since the match is coinciding with Ram Navami and a portion of security is already deployed for elections. Therefore it won't

be possible for us to provide adequate security for the match on April 17," Kolkata Police had stated in a letter to Cricket Association of Bengal (CAB) president Snehasish Ganguly.

Bengal is also set to vote on April 19 in the first phase of the seven-phase general elections. The voting in Kolkata will take place on June 1.

"Yes, the CAB has informed us that local police has asked for rescheduling of the date and the matter is being looked into. We haven't yet decided on the new date," a senior BCCI official told PTI on Monday.

On part of CAB, a senior office-bearer had informed: "We have suggested two dates, April 16 or 18. In any case, it is KKR's home match and will be played at the Eden Gardens."

The CAB had suggested that the match be advanced either by a day (16 April) or pushed back by 24 hours to 18 April. KKR is currently in Visakhapatnam for a game against Delhi Capitals on Wednesday.

They had begun the season with a thrilling four-run victory over Sunrisers Hyderabad at the Eden Gardens, followed by a seven-wicket thumping of Royal Challengers Bengaluru at M Chinnaswamy Stadium.

The Shubman Gill-led Gujarat Titans are placed fourth in the standings with four points, following two wins and a loss from four outings.

We never give up, we will keep fighting, asserts Hardik

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Mumbai Indians skipper Hardik Pandya on Tuesday asserted that the former champions will not give up and will continue to fight in the ongoing IPL despite slumping to a hat-trick of defeats.

"If there's one thing you should know about this team, we never give up. We'll keep fighting, we'll keep going," Hardik posted on X.

Hardik has been facing the ire of fans since replacing Rohit Sharma as MI captain. The all-rounder was booed in the team's opening two matches and the crowd hostility was at its peak in MI's first home game of the season on Monday.

To add to the woes, under his captaincy MI's campaign at the 2024 IPL got off to a disastrous start as they sit at the bottom of the table following three losses on the trot.

However, MI are known to be perennial slow starters. In 2015, they lost their first four games before going on to win the title.

Hardik's poor captaincy calls have also been questioned -- whether it was not giving Bumrah the new ball or sending Tim David ahead of himself against Gujarat Titans.

नाम परिवर्तन
मैं अंशुल जैन (ANSHUL JAIN) पुत्र श्री अशोक जैन सर्वसाधारण को सूचित करता हूँ कि मेरे घर का बोलता नाम आशुतोष जैन (ASHUTOSH JAIN) था जो मेरी भारतीय जीवन बीमा पॉलिसी एवं राशन कार्ड में लिखा गया है जबकि वर्तमान एवं भविष्य में मैं अंशुल जैन श्री अशोक जैन के नाम से जाना पहचाना एवं पुरकारा जाता हूँ एवं जाड़ा। जो मेरे आधार कार्ड, पासपोर्ट, पैन कार्ड, बैंक पास बुक, अन्य प्रपत्रों में लिखा गया है आशुतोष जैन के स्थान पर अंशुल जैन लिखा एवं पढ़ा जावे। आमजन एवं सर्वजन सूचित हो। पुराना नाम: आशुतोष जैन वर्तमान नाम: अंशुल जैन पुत्र श्री अशोक जैन जासूस महल गली नं. 02 जनकगंज लखनऊ बंगालियर म.प्र.

Change of Name
I, Divyansh Gangil (DIVYANSH GANGIL), son of Durgesh Gangil, inform the general public that my family name was Shivam Gangil (SHIVAM GANGIL). Which is written in the nomination (successor) of HSBC (MUTUAL FUND) of my grandfather late Salik Ram Gangil, whereas in the present and future, I am known and called by the name of Divyansh Gangil, son of Durgesh Gangil. Which is written in my Aadhar Card, PAN Card, Bank Pass Book, etc. forms. Both Shivam Gangil and Divyansh Gangil are my names, hence my late grandfather in the nomination (successor) of Salik Ram Gangil of HSBC (MUTUAL FUND), my name should be written and read as Divyansh Gangil in place of Shivam Gangil. The general public and all should be informed. Old name: Shivam Gangil New name: Divyansh Gangil S/o Durgesh Gangil Address- Sadar Bazar Near Gir-raj Ji Mandir Morar Gwalior M.P.

Kohli seems to have evolved again: Hussey

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Virat Kohli seems to have "evolved again" avowed former Australia cricketer David Hussey, who warned against writing off the champion player after a debate ensued on the Indian batter's strike rate.

Despite leading the run chart for Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the ongoing edition of IPL, Kohli faced some criticism for not batting aggressively enough against KKR in their last game.

Kohli is the joint-highest run getter so far with RR's Rryan Parag, scoring 181 runs in three matches with two fifties at a strike rate of 141.4.

With the T20 World Cup impending, Kohli's place in the team has also been a topic of discussion even though he played one of the most memorable innings for India in their clash against arch-rivals Pakistan in Melbourne.

"Virat Kohli is the leading run scorer, isn't he in the IPL currently?" Hussey replied when asked about what he made of the debate around

Kohli's strike rate.

"He's a pretty good player. I don't think he's going to have too many issues. If you see the strike rate in this IPL, he seems to have taken his game to a new level, he's evolved again," Hussey told the media here on the sidelines of the announcement of the launch of Melbourne Cricket Academy, a partnership between Cricket Victoria and KheloMore.

"You never write off champions, like you never write off Steve Smith, (like) you never write off Ricky Ponting, Sachin Tendulkar, Rohit Sharma."

"You never write them off and I'm certain that Virat Kohli is going to come out in the next World Cup and be the dominant force that he has been for the better part of a decade. Never write off your champions," Hussey reiterated.

Hussey, who played in the IPL for Chennai Super Kings, the then Kings XI Punjab and Kolkata Knight Riders, said the competition has evolved with teams moving on from a conservative approach to an



ultra-aggressive one.

"It's hit-hit, bang-bang from ball one now, whereas back in 2008, (it) was (about) take your time, get yourself in, try and have wickets in hand at the first 10-over mark and then try and get 180 or 190, (and) that was out of this world," he said.

"Now teams are getting 270 runs and other teams are almost chasing them down. If you face a couple of dot balls

early and your strike rate is under 100, you're sort of ostracised, you don't fit to the T20 mould, so the planning that's evolved from 2008 till now is phenomenal - every ball, every over is really important," he said.

Hussey, who was present at the Cricket Club of India along with Cricket Victoria CEO Nick Cummins and KheloMore CEO and selector Jatin Paranjape, said 10 years

from now IPL would be entirely different.

"The game has evolved out of sight and like Nick (Cummins) said, I can't wait to see what the IPL and what T20 cricket looks like in a decade's time, because teams might get 300 runs and chase it down, which should be not good for fast bowlers or spinners but it's great for the game of cricket," he said.

Hussey felt Australia will have a selection headache going into the World Cup, adding that players who are likely to feature in the T20 World Cup are getting an excellent opportunity to prepare for it in the IPL.

"There's competition for places, isn't there, in the Australian team? There's Travis Head who also opens up batting as well, who's playing particularly well," Hussey said.

"Anybody can beat anybody on their day, the pitch is a different, foreign conditions, but the players are very, very fortunate to have the IPL to play in and prepare very well in order to go to the World Cup and execute their skills," Hussey said.