



Modi takes dig at Rahul, Akhilesh

PM says film of do shehzade already rejected by people

PTI ■ AMROHA (UP)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi took a veiled dig at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav on Friday, saying the shooting of the film 'do shehzade ki jodi' is on but it has already been rejected by people.

"Every time these people seek votes from the people of Uttar Pradesh, they carry a basket of dynasty, corruption and appeasement. They do not leave any chance to attack our faith," Modi said, addressing a rally here.

In a veiled attack on Gandhi and Yadav, he said, "The shooting of the film 'do shehzade ki jodi' (a pair of princes) is going on. But their film has already been rejected by people."

Hitting out at Danish Ali, the Congress candidate from Amroha, Modi alleged that he has objections in saying "Bharat Mata ki jai".

"Will a person, who cannot accept Bharat Mata ki jai, look

good in the Indian Parliament? Should such a person be allowed entry into the Indian Parliament?" he asked the gathering.

Slamming the opposition, the prime minister said, "The SP and the Congress declined the invitation for the Ram temple's consecration ceremony in Ayodhya. People hankering for vote banks refused the invitation for the ceremony. Instead, look at those who fought the Babri Masjid case in the Supreme Court but still participated in the consecration ceremony after losing the case."

Iqbal Ansari, a litigant in the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid case, attended the consecration ceremony of the Ram temple on January 22.

"They are not satisfied even after refusing the invitation, so they abuse the Ram temple and Sanatan Dharma. The SP, for its vote bank, calls Ram bhakts 'pakhandi' (hypocrites). Those in the INDIA opposition bloc hate Sanatan Dharma," Modi said.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi being felicitated by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath during a public meeting for the Lok Sabha elections, at Gajraula in Amroha, on Friday

The prime minister alleged that when he went under the sea to offer prayers in Gujarat's Dwarka, where Lord Krishna had gone from Amroha, "the prince of the Congress said there is nothing to pray under the sea. They are rejecting our faith only for their vote banks".

Hitting out at Akhilesh Yadav as well as Bihar's Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav, Modi said, "Those in Bihar, who say they are Yaduvanshi, in Uttar Pradesh, the leader

who takes the benefits of being Yaduvanshi, I want to ask them, how can they sit with a party that insults Lord Krishna? How can you have an agreement with them?"

He criticised the Congress, SP and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) governments in Uttar Pradesh in the past for allegedly ignoring farmers and said those growing sugarcane were given Rs 500 crore annually during the SP's rule, whereas the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government gave Rs 1,500 crore to them.

Blaming vote-bank politics for communal riots, Modi said, "This vote-bank politics burnt western Uttar Pradesh in the fire of riots. The people of Uttar Pradesh can never forget that era of Goonda Raj. People had to migrate and leave their houses behind."

"In several western Uttar Pradesh neighbourhoods, posters with 'makan bikau hai' (house for sale) written on those were put up. But, Yogi (Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath) got rid of criminals for your safety. We must ensure that these forces are not strengthened again in any manner."

The Prime Minister accused the previous governments of cheating the Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC) communities in the name of social justice, and said he is working towards achieving the dream of social reformers Jyotiba Phule, B R Ambedkar and Chaudhary Charan Singh.

"The previous governments have only cheated the people of the SC, ST and OBC communities in the name of social justice. Modi is working day and night to achieve the social justice dream of Jyotiba Phule, Ambedkar and (former prime minister) Chaudhary Charan Singh," he said.

The prime minister addressed the rally as polling was underway in eight western Uttar Pradesh constituencies in the first phase of the Lok Sabha polls.

Amroha will go to polls in the second phase on April 26. The counting of votes will be taken up on June 4.

The prime minister began his speech with an appeal to people to vote.

"I appeal to everyone to exercise their right to vote given by the Constitution," he said while emphasising that youngsters should especially go out and vote to secure their future and that of the country.



People not excited about polls, claims farmer leader Naresh Tikait

PTI ■ MUZAFFARNAGAR (UP)

Farmer leader Naresh Tikait on Friday expressed skepticism about the BJP's claim of the NDA crossing the 400-mark and claimed "there is no excitement among people" about the polls.

"If they are saying 400, then what is the need for them to contest elections? It is special that they can perceive this in advance. Do they have any astrologer who has predicted that this is going to happen?" said Tikait, national president of the Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU) while speaking to 'PTI Videos'.

Polling in eight Lok Sabha constituencies of western Uttar Pradesh, including Muzaffarnagar, are underway on Friday in the first phase.

"People express their feelings through their votes. However, the voting is slow, and it will be like this till evening. There is no excitement among people, they are disillusioned now. Also, elections are being held in several phases... Elections should be held in a single

phase and the results should be declared on the third day and (new government's) oath-taking in the next four-five days," he suggested.

"There is an Emergency-like situation in the country. These are the talks among the public," Tikait further said.

"People of this area don't like slavery. There might be some region, state or seat that likes slavery. People are opposing slavery by not casting their votes."

"The era of booth capturing has passed... Everyone is complaining about the machine, then why are the polls not being conducted through ballot papers? 90-95 per cent people are against the machine (EVM). It is a machine and can be tempered with," Tikait claimed.

Talking about payment to sugarcane farmers, Tikait said, "They show the payment as a favour. Are they giving it for free? Have we not given them our sugarcane produce? The farmers today are feeling cheated and feel they have lost everything. Farmers are sad."

Close to 55 per cent polling recorded in 12 LS seats in Rajasthan

PTI ■ JAIPUR

A voter turnout of close to 55 per cent was recorded in 12 parliamentary constituencies of Rajasthan where polling was held in the first phase of the Lok Sabha elections on Friday.

The election authorities said 54.97 per cent of the electorate cast their votes. The final figures would be released later.

The highest voter turnout of 62.93 per cent was recorded in the Ganganagar Lok Sabha seat while Jhunjhunu saw the lowest turnout of 47.98 per cent, it said. Jaipur recorded a poll percentage of 61.23. The voting percentage in Bikaner was 52.53, Churu 61.05, Sikar 55.06, Jaipur Rural 54.44, Alwar 55.82, Dausa 49.57, Bharatpur 50.97 and Nagaur 56.89.

As many as 114 candidates are in the fray in the first phase of polling that began at 7 am in the state and ended at 6 pm. There are 25 Lok Sabha seats in Rajasthan and the remaining 13 will go to poll in the second phase on April 26.

Rajasthan Governor Kalraj Mishra, Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma, former deputy chief minister Sachin Pilot and other leaders cast their votes in the initial hours. Mishra and his wife Satyawati Mishra cast their votes at a polling booth in C Scheme.

"Voting is not only a constitutional right but also the duty of every citizen of India. This strengthens democracy," the governor said later.

The chief minister exercised his franchise at a polling



station of Patnik Jagatpura and expressed confidence that the NDA will win over 400 seats across the country in this general election. He said people of the state were voting for 'guarantees' of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

On the other hand, Pilot said people want change and this election was going to be for change in the country.

"The BJP had a long tenure of 10 years. Now people are bored and I am convinced that the Congress will win more seats than the BJP in Rajasthan. We will win across the country and the INDIA bloc will get a majority," he told reporters after casting

his vote.

Deputy Chief Minister Diya Kumari also cast her vote in this phase.

Former BJP state president Satish Poonia cast his vote at a polling booth in Rani Sati Nagar in Jaipur during the day.

Elderly citizens and some newly married couples were also seen at the polling booths.

Shivani, a resident of Dampura village in Dholpur district, reached her polling booth before entering the woodlock. Dressed in bridal attire, she also took a selfie at a 'selfie point' after casting her vote.

In Jaipur, a 95-year-old retired naval officer reached a polling station with his family members to vote. He said although he could have chosen the 'voting from home' option, he preferred to cast his vote at a polling station.

Newlywed Rohit and Sonia Chaudhary went to a polling station in Jaipur's Purani Basti to cast their votes. They got married on Thursday night.

Rajasthan Director General of Police Utkal Ranjan Sahoo said tight security arrangements have been made for free, fair and peaceful voting. The Rajasthan Police, along with companies of the Central Armed Forces and Home Guard personnel, has been deployed to maintain peace and law and order.

According to Chief Electoral Officer Praveen Gupta, a total of 2.54 crore people are eligible to vote in the first phase and around 23,000 polling booths have been set up in this phase.

Shah files nomination from Gandhinagar LS seat

Says election is all about giving Modi third term

PTI ■ GANDHINAGAR

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday submitted his nomination papers for the Gandhinagar Lok Sabha seat from where he is the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate and said the general election is all about giving a third term to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Shah was accompanied by Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel when he submitted the nomination papers to Gandhinagar collector and district election officer M K Dave in the state capital at exactly 12.39 pm, considered as 'Vijay Muhurat'. Talking to reporters, Shah said this general election is all about giving a third term to



Union Home Minister and BJP candidate Amit Shah files his nomination papers for the Lok Sabha elections, in Gandhinagar, on Friday

foundation for 'Viksit Bharat', he said.

Thanking the BJP for renominating him from the seat once represented by stalwarts Atal Bihari Vajpayee and LK Advani, Shah said the seat holds significance also because PM Modi is a registered voter from here.

"I have been associated with this seat for the last 30 years. Before becoming an MP, I was an MLA from assembly segments that fall under this seat. Thanks to your love, I rose from a humble booth worker to becoming a member of parliament now. People of Gandhinagar gave me their blessings whenever I sought their votes," he said.

Developmental works of more than Rs 22,000 crore were undertaken in the Gandhinagar Lok Sabha seat in the last five years, he said.

Shah, a former BJP president, won from the Gandhinagar constituency by a margin of more than 5 lakh votes in the 2019 general elections.

PTI ■ PUDUCHERRY

Polling picked up momentum in Puducherry through the morning as the union territory gets set to elect their lone representative to the Lok Sabha, on Friday.

A visit to some of the polling stations in the rural areas brought to the fore a mixed picture of voter turnout, which was mediocre in some places and high in others.

Kothandapani (89) along with his 86-year-old wife Krishnammal turned up at a booth in the Veerampattinam coastal village in Ariyankuppam Assembly constituency to cast their votes.

Kothandapani is the grandfather of the AIADMK

Polling picks up in Puducherry, 89 years old comes out to vote

contendant G. Tamizhvendan, family sources told media at the booth. Voters turned up before commencement of the polls at most of the booths, official sources said. In one of the polling stations in Mudaliarpattinam constituency, the VVPAT developed some snags and there was a delay of 45 minutes in the commencement of polling. Official sources said that as soon as the VVPAT developed technical snags, the engineers of BEL were called to

rectify the defects. Pink booths were the center of attraction. The green environment at a booth housed on the premises of the more-than-century-old VOC Government Boys school in the town added to the lustre of the arrangements. The elections department distributed gruel, nutritious cereals and millets and also buttermilk to the voters, sources said.

Volunteers were deployed to help aged and disabled voters

to approach the booth without difficulties. Police also took care of the senior citizens and helped them get into the booth to cast their votes. Puducherry recorded 28.10 percent polling till 11 a.m.

There are 26 aspirants in the fray in this seat. The BJP nominee and Home Minister of Puducherry A Namassivayam and the Congress president and sitting member of Lok Sabha VVaithilingam are locking horns in the poll battle.

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Long queues were seen outside booths since the morning as polling was underway for five constituencies in Assam in the first phase on Friday.

Poling began at 7 am in Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Lakhimpur, Sonitpur and

Long queues outside polling booths in Assam

Upper Assam remaining cloudy, but gradually the sky cleared up.

"It is really a good sign that people are coming out in such a large number. People's spontaneous participation will strengthen democracy," Sonowal, the BJP candidate of Dibrugarh, said after casting his vote at a polling booth in

Kaziranga seats, and 86.5 lakh voters are eligible to vote.

Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal of the BJP and Congress's deputy leader in Lok Sabha Gaurav Gogoi were among those who cast their votes in the first hour.

There were apprehensions that the weather might play a spoilsport with the entire

Laxminath Bezbaruha Bhawan in Khowkiding.

People are happy under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi and that is why they are coming out in large numbers, he claimed.

Gogoi voted at a polling booth in Devi Charan Barua Higher Secondary School in Jorhat town.

India standout performer amidst sluggish global growth: IEA Secretary

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Despite a challenging global scenario, India's economy has shown robust growth over the past year backed by sustained consumption and investment demand, a top Indian official told members of a World Bank committee here.

The GDP growth estimate for the fiscal, which has been revised upwards from 7.3 per cent to 7.6 per cent in the second advance estimates, highlights the enduring strength and resilience of the Indian economy, India's Economic Affairs Secretary Ajay Seth said while addressing the Development Committee meeting here on Thursday.

"India grew above 8 per cent for three consecutive quarters of FY24, reaffirming its position as a standout performer amidst sluggish global growth trends," Seth said.

He said that similar sentiments have been echoed by various agencies who have revised India's fiscal 24 growth

estimate closer to 8 per cent. India's proactive stance on reform and investment in sustainable growth avenues sets a benchmark for emerging economies.

The Indian delegation at the annual Spring Meeting of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank is being represented at the official level this time. Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is not attending the annual gathering of global financial leaders due to the ongoing Lok Sabha elections.

Seth told the Development Committee that India's thrust on capex continued to crowd in private investment resulting in enhanced Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF) at constant prices registering a growth above 10 per cent in FY24.

India's inflation outlook appears positive with headline and core inflation trending downwards, indicating a broad-based moderation in price pressures, he said.

Seth said that on the external front, the narrowing



merchandise trade deficit and the rising net services receipts are expected to improve the current account balance in fiscal 2024.

To catalyse and democratise the Artificial Intelligence (AI) innovation ecosystem in the country, the Centre has approved the "India AI Mission" with a budget outlay of INR 103 billion for building computing infrastructure, developing indigenous AI capabilities, streamlining access to datasets, attracting AI talent, and financing AI start-ups.

"The Mission aims to establish a robust AI ecosystem through strategic programmes and partnerships across the public and private sectors. The focus on infrastructure and technology is expected to propel India to stay on the curve of technological innovation, consolidate and solidify its position in the global supply chain," he said.

Observing that the manufacturing sector registered double-digit growth in Q3 of 24 fiscal years, driven by a surge in investment, improved investor confidence, and strong domestic demand conditions, Seth said the year

also saw continued strong growth in services, led by non-contact-intensive services sectors.

Emphasising that India has the highest digital transactions globally with a share of 46 per cent of global real-time transactions in 2022, Seth noted that the monthly transactions for March 2024 stood at 13.44 billion totalling an amount of INR 19.78 trillion.

The volume of UPI online transactions witnessed a 54 per cent YoY growth in Q3 FY24, which can be attributed to convenience, security, increased financial flexibility, and avenues in ease of spending for consumers, he said.

"Today this increased mobile connectivity and its linkage with the bank accounts has become an integral part of India's inclusive economic growth story with consumers, small traders, vendors, and vulnerable populations from the lowest rung of the society, being the key beneficiaries," he said.

Stock markets stage strong rebound

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Stock markets rebounded from early lows to close higher on Friday, snapping the four-day losing streak on heavy value buying in banking and auto shares.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 599.34 points or 0.83 per cent to settle at 73,088.33. The index opened lower and tanked further 672.53 points or 0.92 per cent to hit a low of 71,816.46 in early trade. However, the index rebounded in the second half on value-buying in banking shares.

The NSE Nifty jumped 151.15 points or 0.69 per cent to close at 22,147. The broader index dropped to a low of 21,777.65 in early trade before paring its losses to end in the green.

From the Sensex basket, Bajaj Finance, Mahindra & Mahindra, HDFC Bank, JSW Steel, Maruti, Wipro, Bharti Airtel, Bajaj Finserv, ICICI Bank and ITC were the major gainers. Nestle India, HCL Technologies, Larsen & Toubro, Tata Consultancy Services, Tata Motors and Infosys were among the laggards.

Infosys declined nearly 1 per cent after the company's revenue growth guidance for FY25 failed to meet market expectations.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai, and Hong Kong settled in the negative territory. European markets were trading in the red. Wall Street ended mostly lower on Thursday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.55 per cent to USD 87.62 a barrel.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 4,260.33 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data.

"Despite global weakness, Indian markets staged a strong recovery driven by large-cap stocks, buoyed by the expectation of limited prospects



of escalation following Israel's action against Iran. However, fragility persists with elevated oil prices, posing inflation risks," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

"Nifty reversed a four-day losing streak to end higher," Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities. In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge declined 0.39 per cent and smallcap index dipped 0.04 per cent.

Among the indices, bankex jumped 1.02 per cent and metal climbed 0.85 per cent. Financial services (0.83 per cent), consumer durables (0.78 per cent) and commodities (0.54 per cent) also gained. IT, telecommunication, utilities, realty and tech were among the laggards.

On the weekly front, the BSE benchmark declined 1,156.57 points or 1.55 per cent and the Nifty dipped 372.4 points or 1.65 per cent. Meanwhile, the 2024 Lok Sabha polls kicked off on Friday with the beginning of polling for the first phase. The BSE benchmark tanked 454.69 points or 0.62 per cent to settle at 72,488.99 on Thursday. The NSE Nifty declined 152.05 points or 0.69 per cent to 21,995.85.



Nestle shares continue to decline; mcap erodes by ₹10,610.55 crore in two days

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of Nestle India continued to decline on Friday, ending the day over 1 per cent lower, amid reports that the global FMCG major sold infant milk products with more sugar content in less developed countries.

The stock declined 3.53 per cent to Rs 2,375.75 during the day on the BSE. It later ended at Rs 2,437.10 a share, down 1.04 per cent.

On the NSE, shares of the company dipped 2.13 per cent to Rs 2,410 during the day. The stock ended at Rs 2,430 apiece, reflecting a decline of 1.32 per cent.

On Thursday, shares of Nestle India had declined over 3 per cent.

In two days, the company's market capitalisation (mcap) got eroded by Rs 10,610.55 crore to Rs 2,34,974.74 crore.

Nestle India on Thursday said it has reduced added sugar on baby food products in India by up to 30 per cent, depending on variants, over the past five years, amid reports that the global FMCG major sold products with more sugar content in less developed

countries.

According to findings by Swiss NGO, Public Eye and International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), Nestle sold baby products with higher sugar content in less developed South Asian countries, including India, Africa and Latin American nations as compared to markets in Europe.

When reached out for comments, a company spokesperson said, "Reduction of added sugars is a priority for Nestle India. Over the past 5 years, we have already reduced added sugars by up to 30 per cent, depending on the variant."

The spokesperson further said, "We regularly review our portfolio and continue to innovate and reformulate our products to further reduce the level of added sugars, without compromising on nutrition, quality, safety, and taste."

Nestle India asserted that its "infant cereal products are manufactured to ensure the appropriate delivery of nutritional requirements such as protein, carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals, iron etc. For early childhood."

Strong growth momentum provides RBI policy space to focus on price stability: Das

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The strong growth momentum and the GDP projections for 2024-25 give the RBI a policy space to unwaveringly focus on price stability, Governor Shaktikanta Das stressed while voting for a status quo in the interest rate earlier this month.

The Reserve Bank had maintained status-quo on the benchmark lending rate (repo) at 6.5 per cent since February 2023 on concerns over inflation after the three-day meeting of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) earlier this month.



The central bank on Friday released the minutes of the meeting.

"The gains in disinflation achieved over last two years have to be preserved and taken forward towards aligning the headline inflation to the 4 per cent target on a durable basis," he said, according to the minutes.

Five of the six MPC members had voted for the status quo in the policy rate.

MPC member Jayanth R Varma, however, had advocated a reduction in the repo rate by 25 basis points as "high interest rates entail a growth sacrifice".



Gold jumps ₹400 to breach ₹74k mark, silver hits fresh peak

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold and silver prices soared to fresh record high levels on Friday with the precious metal breaching Rs 74,000 per 10 grams mark here on bullish global trends.

According to HDFC Securities, gold price jumped Rs 400 to hit its lifetime high of Rs 74,100 per 10 grams in Delhi. It had closed at Rs 73,700 per 10 grams on Thursday.

Similarly, silver prices rose by Rs 100 to hit a new peak of Rs 86,600 per kg.

"Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at a record high of Rs 74,100 per 10 grams, up by Rs 400 amid a positive trend in the overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the overseas markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,390 per ounce, up by USD 15 from the previous close.

Gold in the global market surged near a record high in the Asian trading hours on Friday, following reports that Israel had struck targets on Iranian soil, days after Iran had launched an attack on Israel in retaliation for a raid on its

consulate in Syria.

This has increased the possibility of a larger regional conflict that would support higher gold prices.

Additionally, silver was quoted higher at USD 28.29 per ounce. In the previous close, it had finished at USD 28.25 per ounce.

According to market analysts, a string of reports, including US inflation data which has remained hotter than forecast this year, have pushed the top US Federal Reserve officials to say recently they could hold interest rates high for a while.

That's a letdown after the Fed earlier had signalled three cuts to interest rates could be possible this year. But Fed officials have been adamant they want to be sure inflation is heading down toward their 2 per cent target before lowering the Fed's main interest rate from its highest level since 2001.

"Gold prices are expected to react to news developments related to both geopolitical tensions and updates on interest rates from the Federal Reserve," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst of Commodity and Currency at LKP Securities, said.

BUSINESS BRIEF



VITEEE-2024 KICKS OFF AT VIT AP UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

The Vellore Institute of Technology Engineering Entrance Examination (VITEEE)-2024 has officially begun today at the VIT-AP campus in Amaravati. The computer-based entrance exam, conducted annually, aims to facilitate admissions to B.Tech programs offered at VIT's campuses in Vellore, Chennai, Amaravati (Andhra Pradesh), and Bhopal.

Sharing his insights on VITEEE 2024 Dr. S.V. Kota Reddy -Vice-Chancellor highlighted that the entrance examination will continue at various exam centres until April 30, 2024. Candidates hailing from 125 cities across the nation and 6 cities abroad will participate in the online entrance examination. The results are tentatively set to be available on May 3, 2024, on www.vit.ac.in. Dr. Jagadish Chandra, Registrar, said that the examination is conducted in three sessions daily, from 9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., 12:30 p.m. to 3 p.m., and 4 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

INDUSTRY, ACADEMIA MEET AND EXHIBITION TODAY

The Department of Architecture, Zakir Husain College of Engineering and Technology (ZH CET), Aligarh Muslim University is organising an Industry-Academia Meet and Exhibition on April 20, 2024, to bring together the professionals, academicians and students for interaction and exchange of ideas. AMU Vice Chancellor is the chief patron and Prof Mirza Salim Beg, Dean, Faculty of Engineering and Technology and Prof MM Sufyan Beg, Principal, ZH CET are the co-patrons. The talks will be focused on the present scenario in building design and construction practices and the eminent speakers are Prof Manoj Mathur, SPA, New Delhi; Prof Rajat Ray, Ex-Dean, Guru Govind Singh Indraprastha University, New Delhi; Dr. Arun Kapur, Amity School of Architecture, Lucknow and also Honorary Architect, Gunjan and Associates, Lucknow; Architect Gaurav Gupta, De:Cape Studio, Lucknow; Architect Manish Kr Sahai, Sahai Architects, Aligarh; Architect Hemlata Singh, White Fox Designs LLP, New Delhi and Architect Udit Gaurav, Green Building Consultant, Greater Noida.



HDFC AMC Q4 profit soars 44 pc to ₹541 crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

HDFC Asset Management Company (AMC) on Friday reported a 44 per cent jump in profit after tax at Rs 541.1 crore in three months ended March 2024.

In comparison, the company posted a profit after tax (PAT) of Rs 376.1 crore in the year-ago period, the fund house said in a regulatory filing to the stock exchanges.

The firm's total income surged by 33 per cent Year-on-Year (YoY) to Rs 851 crore in the quarter under review from Rs 637.8 crore in the January-March quarter of the financial year 2022-23 (FY23).

Additionally, the company's expenses grew 18 per cent YoY to Rs 172 crore in the fourth quarter ended March 2024.

The company's average asset under management (AAUM) stood at Rs 6.13 lakh crore as of March 2024 as against Rs 4.5 lakh crore a year earlier.

For the full financial year 2023-24 (FY24), the fund house's PAT surged by 37 per cent year-on-year to Rs 1,946 crore and total income rose 27 per cent YoY to Rs 3,162.5 crore. HDFC AMC is an investment manager for HDFC Mutual Fund, one of the leading mutual funds in the country.

Shares of HDFC AMC settled 1.73 per cent lower at Rs 3,707.15 apiece on the BSE.

Hyundai Motor India rolls out Grameen Mahotsav

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Auto-maker Hyundai Motor India has expanded its 'Grameen Mahotsav' initiative to 16 new locations across the country, after the success of its inaugural event held in Gujarat this month. The 'Grameen Mahotsav' initiative aims to further strengthen HMIL's connection to rural India with specially curated events and product displays including live music, folk dance, and regional talent shows among others.

It also serves as a platform for Hyundai to delve into the vast potential of rural markets. By closely engaging with communities and discerning market trends, HMIL aims to not only cater to evolving

aspirations but also identify and welcome new customers, Hyundai Motor India said in a statement on Friday.

The inaugural 'Grameen Mahotsav' event was held successfully in Mahemdavad, Gujarat. Now, Hyundai Motor India looks forward to extending its reach and impact across rural landscapes.

"Our sustained efforts towards bolstering rural connect are bearing great fruits and Hyundai Motor India has witnessed a remarkable growth in rural markets in the financial year 2023-24. We sold 1.15 lakh vehicles in rural India last year, a growth of 11 per cent over 2022-23," Hyundai Motor India Ltd. COO Tarun Garg said. "We are confident

that with good monsoon, increasing income levels and improved infrastructure, the contribution from rural markets will further increase," he said. Hyundai Motor said nearly 40 per cent of sales and service networks were in rural areas. HMIL is committed to fostering strong bonds with rural communities.

"With initiatives like Grameen Mahotsav, we hope to nurture our customers in every part of the country and also understand the market trends to fulfill their expectations. As we continue to innovate and engage with rural consumers, we are confident in our ability to contribute to the inclusive development of the country," Garg added.

Infosys shares decline nearly 1 per cent after Q4 earnings

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of Infosys on Friday ended nearly 1 per cent lower after the company's revenue growth guidance for FY25 failed to meet market expectations.

The stock fell 2.87 per cent to Rs 1,379.70 during the day on the BSE. It finally ended at Rs 1,411.60 apiece, lower by 0.63 per cent.

On the NSE, it declined 2.85 per cent to Rs 1,378.75 in intra-day trade. Shares of the company ended at Rs 1,411.95 each, down 0.51 per cent.

The company's market capitalisation (mcap) declined by Rs 3,655.37 crore to Rs



5,85,936.45 crore.

In volume terms, 8.65 lakh shares of the company were traded on the BSE and over 206.04 lakh shares on the NSE during the day.

IT company Infosys on Thursday said its consolidated profit jumped 30 per cent to Rs 7,969 crore in the March 2024 quarter. The company posted a profit of Rs 6,128

crore in the year-ago period, according to a regulatory filing.

The consolidated revenue of Infosys during the quarter increased 1.3 per cent to Rs 37,923 crore from Rs 37,441 crore in the same quarter a year ago.

The company expects a revenue growth of 1-3 per cent in constant currency for FY25 and an operating margin of 20-22 per cent. The growth projection is lower compared to the outlook of between 4 per cent and 7 per cent for FY24.

"Infosys guided for 1-3 per cent constant currency revenue growth for FY25, missing expectations," as per a report by JM Financial Institutional Securities.

CAG signs pact with SAI Bulgaria to enhance international collaboration

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has signed an agreement with SAI Bulgaria, the Bulgarian National Audit Office, in Sofia, in a bid to foster international cooperation.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), inked by the two Supreme audit institutions, aims to enhance collab-

oration and the exchange of expertise in the field of auditing between the two nations, the CAG said in a statement.

Through the MoU, a platform will be established for the exchange of knowledge and experience amongst auditing professionals and technical teams through collaboration in training programs, and mutual assistance in conducting audits, it said.

Girish Chandra Murmu, the CAG of India, expressed confidence in the partnership and said the MoU will further strengthen bilateral cooperation.

"We look forward to working closely with you and assure you of our support and commitment to energize our capacity development initiatives and exchange of knowledge and information between our SAIs,"

he said.

The MoU signing ceremony was attended by Goritsa Grancharova - Kozhareva, Acting President of the Bulgarian National Audit Office.

Murmu further highlighted the broader implications of the MoU, stating it will also help cementing the ties that already exist between the two nations.



Air India cancels Dubai flights

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Air India on Friday said it has cancelled flights to and from Dubai due to continued operational disruptions at the airport in the Gulf city.

Passengers of Air India who have booked the flights for travel till April 21 will be offered a one-time waiver on rescheduling and full refunds for cancellation.

An Air India spokesperson said the airline has cancelled the flights to and from Dubai due to continued operational disruptions at the Dubai airport.

"We are doing our best to get affected customers on their way by re-accommodating them on flights as soon as operations resume," the spokesperson said in a statement.

Dubai airport operations have been hit by unprecedented rains and floods.



REVIVING THE LEGACY OF RAM

Ram Aagman stands as a testament to **SHOVANA NARAYAN'S** unparalleled artistry and her unwavering commitment to preserving India's cultural heritage. **GYANESHWAR DAYAL** witnessed the performance

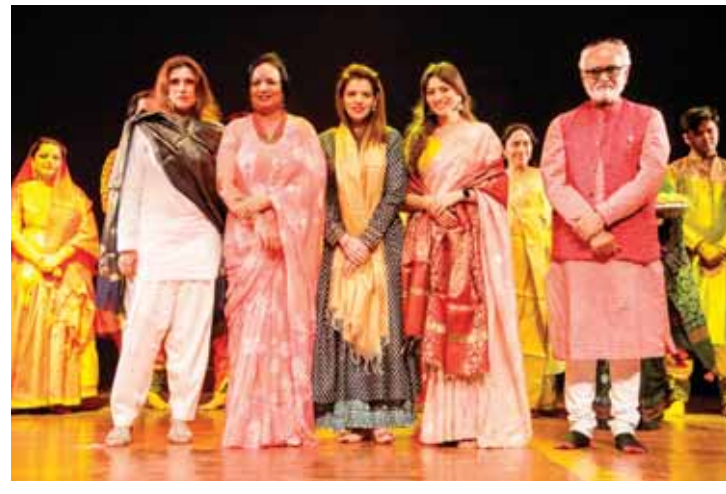
Renowned classical dancer Shovana Narayan, a Padmashree awardee celebrated for her mesmerising performances, once again captivated audiences with her scintillating dance production "Ram Aagman." Held on the auspicious occasion of Chaitra Navratri, this spectacle, presented at the Kamani Auditorium in New Delhi, was a testament to Narayan's dedication to preserving and promoting Indian classical dance forms.

'Ram Aagman,' choreographed and directed by Narayan herself along with Lalita Narayan, delved into the timeless tale of Lord Ram, from his birth to Sita's disappearance into the earth. With a team of 19 skilled dancers from her repertory ASAVARI, Narayan masterfully brought to life lesser-known incidents from Ram's life, offering a fresh perspective on the epic narrative. The event was graced by esteemed personalities such as Sangita Saxena, Meenakshi Lekhi, Dr Sachchidanand Joshi, and Dr Sandhya Purecha, among others. Their presence underscored the significance of Narayan's contribution to the cultural landscape of India.

'Ram Aagman' was not just a dance performance; it was a rich tapestry of cultural exploration. Through insightful talks by Lady Kishwar Desai and Dr. Alka Pande, the production seamlessly integrated cultural geography and visual arts, shedding light on the influence of Sri Ram's journey in Punjab and the profound symbolism present in hand-held paintings depicting his darshan.

Narayan's choreography skillfully portrayed the myriad emotions stirred by Lord Ram's arrival, from the joyous anticipation of his devotees to the impact on his family and subjects. Her commitment to social messaging was evident as she unearthed new dimensions of the Ram Katha, resonating with audiences on both intellectual and emotional levels.

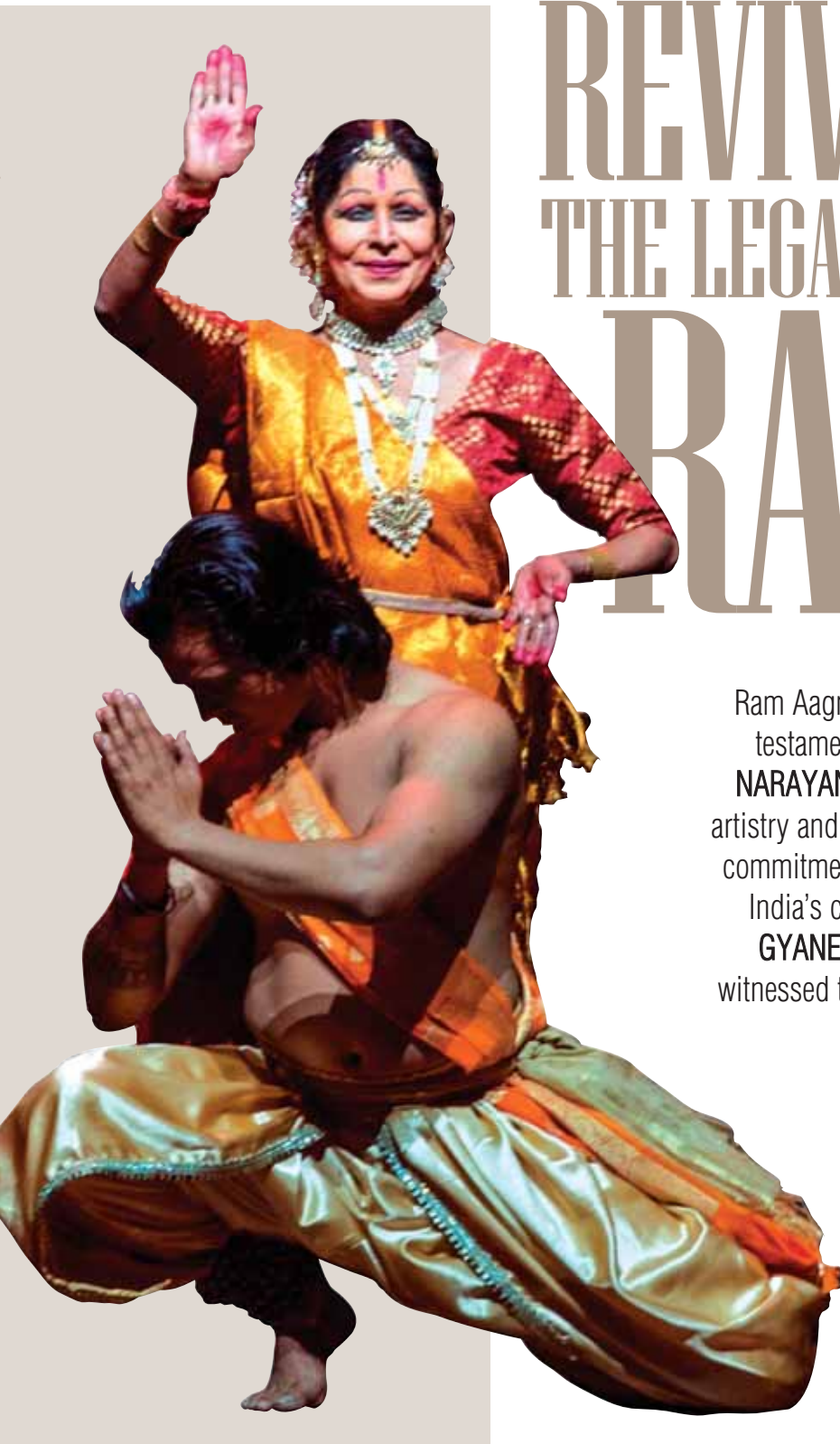
One of the distinctive elements of "Ram Aagman" was its homage to Goddess



Durga, emphasizing the celebration of divine femininity and her pivotal role in the universe. Narayan's reverence for tradition, coupled with her innovative approach, breathed new life into this timeless tale, making it relevant for contemporary audiences. The success of 'Ram Aagman' owes much to the collective efforts of the talented team behind the scenes. From the soul-stirring music composed by Pt. Jwala Prasad, Pt. Madho Prasad, and Dinesh Parihar to the meticulous lighting by Milind Srivastava, every aspect contributed to the immersive experience. Narayan's dedication to her art form is evident in every aspect of "Ram

Aagman." Through her evocative choreography and profound storytelling, she continues to inspire audiences and keep the rich heritage of Indian classical dance alive. As she eloquently puts it, "The absence or the presence of 'Ramatva' became evident through various emotions portrayed, offering food for thought to the audiences."

'Ram Aagman' stands as a testament to Shovana Narayan's unparalleled artistry and her unwavering commitment to preserving India's cultural heritage. With each graceful movement, she not only honours the legacy of Lord Ram but also enriches the cultural tapestry of our nation.



Tradition, Transformation, Empowerment

Poonam Dhillon returns in *Ek Kori Prem Katha* alongside newcomer Khanak Budhiraja, a film that tackles the sensitive subject of the Kori tradition. In this conversation with **SAKSHI PRIYA** the film's cast dwells on the gravity of sensitive social issues and the challenge of questioning outdated traditions.

Poonam Dhillon, can you elaborate on the journey your character undertakes in the film?

In *Ek Kori Prem Katha*, my character embodies the acceptance of the Kori tradition, deeply rooted in her family, village, and society, which she embraces without a question. The story progresses with a newlywed girl who enters a family, deeply in love with the son. Initially happy with the union, tensions arise in the family when the daughter-in-law refuses to participate in the Kori tradition, leading to shock and hostility where my character begins to gauge the unjust nature of the tradition and the need to refuse the perpetuation of such practices. This marks a transformation in my character, as she starts to support her daughter-in-law in opposing the Kori tradition. Together, they stand up against this outdated tradition in their powerful journey of change and empowerment. The film narrates my character's journey as she challenges outdated traditions for the greater good of evolving our cultural norms.

How did you prepare to play a character with a different perspective than your own?

Well, every time I play a character, it is different, and 99 per cent of the time she is not the real me. So, I always start with the physical attributes of the character, how she dresses, talks and walks, and slip into the role from the director's, and the writer's, point of view.

How did you feel working with Raj Babbar in this film? Working with Raj Babbar after so many years felt really good. Today, I feel our communication is much better. As an actor and a person, he is great, and in this stage in life it feels good to talk to him. I must admit, I didn't even have his phone but now we are far more comfortable and enjoy working together.

Were there any humorous moments during the shoot? Our shooting location was actually quite funny, or perhaps the set itself was, I'm not entirely sure, but I think we had our funny and sad moments. We were told that we would be shooting in a *haveli*, (a large bungalow) but when we reached the location we were surprised because in villages, they refer to old houses as *haveli*. In our minds the visual of a *haveli* is more like a grand palace, like in Rajasthan. In reality what we faced was actually humorous.

How did you handle the challenges of outdoor shoots?

Outdoor shoots come with their own set of challenges and difficulties. If we think everything should be according to our expectations and perfect that is impossible. Undue expectations

make you unhappy which disturbs the whole unit. So, one adapts and adjusts.

Khanak Budhiraja, what drew you to the role of Sabhayata, the challenges you faced in bringing her story to life, given the gravity of the film's subject?

I am an introvert and feminine by nature and I am not a sportsperson. So playing Sabhayata was a very challenging task. Like Poonam said, 99 per cent of the time you do not find a role which you relate to, thereby the challenges. Apart from learning how to ride a bus and drive a bike, my character had to be bold on-screen. In our society we still fight shy of issues like virginity. I am happy that at the outset of my career, I could play such a role.

Khanak, as a newcomer, what did you learn while filming?

I think filming everyday on the sets is in itself a learning process. We prepare ourselves for something which is poles apart from the scenes we actually shoot. As my first film, I was nervous, wondering about the surprise element in every scene. It took time, but I got used to it.

Khanak, your character fights against a regressive tradition. How did you prepare for the role of Sabhayata?

I researched, and met two victims in Rajasthan, although they were initially not forthcoming about their experiences. I did manage a conversation with one of them. It is unfortunate to see that girls continue to bear such atrocities in a society which speaks of gender inequality. Our film is about the change that is unfolding.

Is there an artist in this industry who influences you? I think Priyanka Chopra and Parineeti Chopra who was my senior in school. I am really inspired by both of them. Their journey is truly motivational. I will try my best to keep moving ahead.

Chinmay Purohit (Director), what do you hope the audience will take away from this film?

I hope the audience will understand the depth of the subject and plot, and they will take away the learning that we should not treat women like we do and what needs to be done.



Sculpting Novel Ideas

Inspired by Beethoven and her Indian roots, Niyamat Mehta, all of 23, has already carved a niche in art history, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**

Sculptor Niyamat Mehta is making waves in the art world with sculptures that blend traditional techniques and contemporary themes. Inspired by Beethoven and her Indian roots, her work resonates with deep historical and cultural significance. At the Venice Biennale, she became the youngest artist to showcase her talent, drawing global acclaim. Her first solo exhibit, *Meraki*, featured 27 sculptures inviting viewers to contemplate their own journeys.

At a tender age of 23, Niyamat has already etched her name in the annals of art history, hailed by *Firenze Yes Please* as the 'Emerging Artist to Invest In 2023'. Her artistic journey began at the prestigious Venice Biennale, where she became the youngest artist to exhibit at the renowned Palazzo Albrizzi, sharing space with luminaries like Anish Kapoor, Simone Leigh, and Célestin Faustin.

Niyamat's journey is a testament to the harmonious blend of diverse influences and traditions. Being the youngest artist at the Venice Biennale was not just a milestone but a transformative moment that shaped her artistic vision. Exhibiting at Palazzo Albrizzi was both encouraging and overwhelming, with the rich history and heritage of the venue enhancing her experience. The sculptor draws inspiration from Beethoven's 'String Quartets' that unveils a deep connection between music and visual art. Niyamat listens to Western classical while sculpting to stay in the creative flow and translate intangible energy into tangible texture in her sculptures. This is a systematic process that begins with clarifying what she wants to create and why. Her Indian heritage is a fundamental part of her identity, influencing her sculptures and artistic vision.



Niyamat believes that the diversity of preferences, dislikes, and opinions across various regions enriches the world, making her work inherently fascinating. When collaborating with collectors, she strives to find a balance between her artistic vision and their desires, creating something meaningful together. Mehta's training in "drawing in space" and the sight-size method is not just a technical foundation but the essence of her artistic expression. She views these techniques as languages that serve as alphabets of her craft.

Her meticulous nature extends to her creative process,

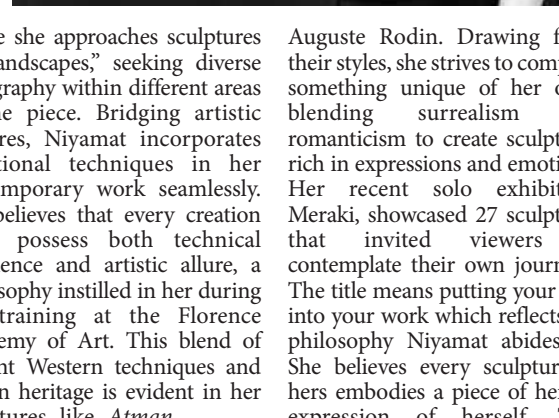


where she approaches sculptures as "landscapes," seeking diverse topography within different areas of the piece. Bridging artistic cultures, Niyamat incorporates traditional techniques in her contemporary work seamlessly. She believes that every creation must possess both technical excellence and artistic allure, a philosophy instilled in her during her training at the Florence Academy of Art. This blend of vibrant Western techniques and Indian heritage is evident in her sculptures like *Atman* and *Amor Fati*.

The young sculptor operates from her private studio, Atelier Della Firenze, located in New Delhi. Her studio is more than just a workspace; it is a sanctuary. With an atmosphere akin to heaven, it provides the perfect backdrop for her masterpieces. Here, not only does she sculpt, she also imparts her knowledge through masterclasses, nurturing a new generation of sculptors. Niyamat's sculptures are a testament to her creativity and attention to detail. Her sculptures, particularly the Dali series, are inspired by artists like Salvador Dali and

Auguste Rodin. Drawing from their styles, she strives to compose something unique of her own, blending surrealism and romanticism to create sculptures rich in expressions and emotions. Her recent solo exhibition, *Meraki*, showcased 27 sculptures that invited viewers to contemplate their own journeys. The title means putting your soul into your work which reflects the philosophy Niyamat abides by. She believes every sculpture of hers embodies a piece of her, an expression of herself. This guiding principle is evident in every sculpture she presents, imbuing them with a soulful essence.

Looking ahead, Niyamat aims to persist with commissioned work, hold solo exhibitions, and ensure that her sculptures find their way into the collections of art collectors who truly value her artistry. She wants the next generation of sculptors to approach this career without fear, embrace commissioned work, participate in exhibitions, and serve as their own most discerning critics. Niyamat is a shining example of talent and passion, notwithstanding an artist's age. Her exhibitions are not just displays of art but experiences that transcend words. Each sculpture tells a story, inviting viewers to immerse themselves in her world of creativity. A hidden artist with immense talent, the world deserves to know and appreciate her work. In a world where creativity knows no bounds, Niyamat Mehta stands out as a beacon of artistic excellence, her sculptures showcasing her talent, passion, and dedication.





RISHABH PANT SET FOR EMOTIONAL HOMECOMING

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

An emotional homecoming awaits Rishabh Pant when he leads Delhi Capitals out at the Arun Jaitley Stadium here, hoping to halt the marauding run of Pat Cummins' Sunrisers Hyderabad on Saturday and continue the resurgence which has come to define his life both on and off the field. The last time Pant was seen at the refurbished stadium, he needed crutches to walk but that now seems a distant memory given how remarkably well he has managed to come back both as a wicketkeeper and batter after enduring a life-threatening car accident in 2022. Capitals have had a mixed season so far, but a couple of impressive wins against Lucknow Super Giants and Gujarat Titans have put them back in the mix. In all, they have three wins and four defeats in seven outings so far. Placed fourth in the IPL points table, Sunrisers Hyderabad have set a different template altogether with two of the highest-ever totals of 277/3

and 287/3, which will require a lot of heart and skill to counter. Hence, 'Captain Pant' will have to use his resources with extreme caution and guile on a track which will have good bounce and carry for a change. Travis Head (235 runs) — IPL's foreign flavour of the season — will be keen to build on his 39-ball century and his partner Abhishek Sharma (211 runs) is no pushover either. Both have a penchant for taking the aerial route during powerplay. Head and Abhishek's intimidating strike rates of 199 and 197 respectively will pose a serious challenge for the pace trio of Ishant Sharma, Khaleel Ahmed and Mukesh Kumar. Adding to the threat is Heinrich Klaasen, who is also striking at 199, who is one of the best finishers in international cricket with propensity to hit balls out of the stadium, which gives SRH's batting a scary look. But Kuldeep Yadav's (economy of 6.06) left-arm wrist spin could well prove to be a game-changer and in Tristan Stubbs, Pant has got an ideal third spin option alongside Axar Patel (6.75). Pant, who is himself



getting back to the top of his game, wouldn't mind if he can win the toss and opt to bat. But David Warner's knuckle injury is a cause for concern for Pant and head coach Ricky Ponting although Jake Fraser-McGurk has impressed one and all in his first two matches. While SRH's batting has been top-notch on beltlers, their bowlers have suffered a lot on those tracks with only skipper Cummins (7.87) having an economy rate of less than eight runs per over, which is considered good in T20. However, the seasoned duo of Jaydev Unadkat (11.35) and Bhuvneshwar Kumar (10.45), have both been average while the tweakers — wrist spinner Mayank Markande (11.23) and left-arm spinner Shahbaz Ahmed (ER 12.44) — have been sent on a leather hunt. The best option for Pant would be to open the batting and go for the jugular against SRH, putting a scoreboard pressure on the rampaging Orange Army. In case Capitals have to chase, the idea would be to keep SRH down to 210-220 which would be chaseable against an attack

which may not be able to hold its own on a good batting track.

TEAMS (FROM):
Delhi Capitals: Rishabh Pant (c&wk), David Warner, Abhishek Porel, Ricky Bhui, Yash Dhull, Shai Hope, Prithvi Shaw, Tristan Stubbs, Kumar Kushagra (wk), Swastik Chikara, Ishant Sharma, Jhwe Richardson, Rasikh Dar Salam, Vicky Ostwal, Anrich Nortje, Mukesh Kumar, Kuldeep Yadav, Praveen Dube, Khaleel Ahmed, Sumit Kumar, Axar Patel, Mitchell Marsh, Lalit Yadav, Jake Fraser-McGurk.
Sunrisers Hyderabad: Pat Cummins (c), Abdul Samad, Abhishek Sharma, Aiden Markram, Marco Jansen, Rahul Tripathi, Washington Sundar, Glenn Phillips, Sanvir Singh, Heinrich Klaasen (wk), Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Mayank Agarwal, T. Natarajan, Anmolpreet Singh, Mayank Markande, Upendra Singh Yadav (wk), Umran Malik, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Shahbaz Ahmed, Travis Head, Jaydev Unadkat, Akash Singh, Jhathavedh Subramanyan



It was my dream to play sweep shot against Bumrah: Ashutosh

PTI ■ MULLANPUR (PUNJAB)

Punjab Kings' batting sensation Ashutosh Sharma said he lived a "dream" when he swept "world's best fast bowler" Jasprit Bumrah during his team's IPL clash against Mumbai Indians here. The 25-year-old Ashutosh put the Bumrah-led Mumbai Indians' bowling to sword here on Thursday when he hammered seven sixes and two fours to make 61 off a mere 28 balls, a knock which brought PBKS back from the brink after an early collapse. PBKS were 17/4 inside the powerplay but courtesy the stunning fightback from Ashutosh and Shashank Singh (41), they were able to get close to MI's 193-run target before losing by nine runs. It was in the 13th over of Punjab's chase when Ashutosh got down low on his front to convert an attempted yorker from Bumrah into a full toss and smack it for a six over backward square leg. "It was my dream to hit a sweep shot against Bumrah. I was practising for that shot but it came against the best bowler in the world - it is a part of the game," Ashutosh told the media here after the match. Ashutosh said he was confident of taking Punjab over the line. "I had belief in myself that I would be able to win the game



questions," Ashutosh said. "He gave me a chance, and also the entire Punjab team which showed belief in me. Our head coach Trevor Bayliss, Ashish (Tuli) paaji, Shikhar (Dhawan) paaji, everyone believed in me, so it was for all of them," he added. Punjab slumped to their fifth defeat in seven matches as well as to the ninth spot in the points table, but Ashutosh said his side has been playing well. "Winning and losing are part of the game. How you are playing is something that matters and we are playing well as a team. If we will play well, we will win," he said. Mumbai Indians' pacer Gerald Coetzee conceded his side was tense after Ashutosh's stunning onslaught. "He really brought it to us. We just wanted to be really clear tactically what we wanted to do. We executed really well to him in the back end to shut it down and win the game," the South African bowler said. "But it was tense, as I think everyone saw. But it was just all tactical discussions," he added. Coetzee conceded Mumbai Indians could've been better with their slower balls, something that PBKS used perfectly in the first half. "We just really learned from their innings. We adapted our plans and I think it worked," Coetzee added.

for the team," he said. Ashutosh credited former India player and coach Sanjay Bangar, head of cricket development at PBKS, for his improvement this season. "Sanjay sir told me that I am not a slogger and that I can play proper cricket shots. It was a small statement but carried a huge meaning for me. I am only following it - I am not a hard-hitter, I am playing proper cricketing shots and that is what has changed my game," Ashutosh said.

"Back home, I was working with my coach Amay Khurasiya who had told me that the longer you stay on the pitch, the more your team has a chance of winning," he added. The right-handed batter, who made some gestures towards the PBKS dugout after completing his fifty, said the celebrations were meant for his team management. "That celebration was for our Sanjay (Bangar) sir, I have been working a lot with him and I keep asking him

Impact Player not ideal for coaches but fans have last say: Ponting

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Impact Player rule in IPL might be hampering the growth of all-rounders but Delhi Capitals head coach Ricky Ponting said on Friday that fans should be able to decide on the future of this contentious system. Ponting has never been a strong advocate of the Impact Player and the debate gained momentum after Rohit Sharma in a recent YouTube podcast said that he is not a "fan of the rule" as it hurts development of Indian all-rounders. "Look, I think, I read some really, really interesting answers from Rohit Sharma on this yesterday. This Impact Player is taking the all-rounders out of the game a little bit," Ponting said ahead of DC's match against Sunrisers Hyderabad here on Saturday. "You know you can play your specialist batsman down till No. 8. Pretty much. But look, I think for a coach and for the players, it's probably not ideal, but I think you know a lot of what this game tries to do is to entertain people," Ponting explained his point of view. "The T20 game is an entertainment package and it's probably better asking the spectator what they think about the impact player, because if everyone is loving the fact that teams are making, you know, 220 up to 250 in a lot of the games, and the spectators like seeing it, then it should stay. "But if the spectators aren't



liking it as much, then there's no reason why I couldn't go back to the old," he added. "Warner is around 85 to 90% fit" David Warner, who missed the last match due to a knuckle injury, was seen batting at the nets and also hit some balls into the stands while facing throwdowns. Ponting said he is nearly 85 to 90% fit. "David did a fitness test on game day in which he got close. He's probably sort of 85 or 90% a couple days ago. We'd expect that there would be a little bit more improvement from him today. "But he will have to do a lot of batting today against some fast bowling stuff to make sure that the pain is not there anymore," Ponting replied to a query from PTL. The coach was happy with the pitch on which DC will play its first home game. "A lot more grass on the entire square than we used to see here. You know, this is the main reason that we moved away from those couple of games at the back of WPL."

Hardik Pandya fined for slow over rate against Punjab Kings

PTI ■ MULLANPUR (PUNJAB)

Mumbai Indians skipper Hardik Pandya has been fined Rs 12 lakhs for his team maintaining a slow over rate during their thrilling nine-run victory over Punjab Kings in the Indian Premier League. Mumbai Indians, thanks to Suryakumar Yadav's blazing 78 off 53 deliveries, posted a competitive 192/7 and then dismissed PBKS, despite Ashutosh Sharma's stunning 28-ball 61 and Shashank Singh's 41, for 183 in 19.1 overs. MI rose to seventh from ninth position on the points table following their third win in seven games in IPL 2024,

while PBKS dropped a spot to ninth after their fifth defeat. "Hardik Pandya, the Mumbai Indians captain, has been fined after his team maintained a slow over rate during their Indian Premier League (IPL) 2024 match against Punjab Kings at the PCA New International Cricket Stadium, Mullanpur on April 18," said an IPL statement on Friday. "As it was his team's first offence of the season under the IPL's Code of Conduct relating to minimum over rate offences, Pandya was fined Rs 12 lakhs," the statement added. Mumbai Indians next play Rajasthan Royals in Jaipur on April 22.

OTHER SPORTS



Group condemns searches by security at Barcelona stadium

AP ■ PARIS

The director of a group that advocates for female sports fans says she and other Paris Saint-Germain supporters were subjected to "abusive" searches while entering Barcelona's stadium for a Champions League match earlier this week. Anoush Morel, the director of Her Game Too France, told L'Equipe and RMC Sport that her breasts, buttocks and groin were touched by a female security officer during a pat-down at the Lluís Companys Olympic Stadium on Tuesday night. Other women reported similarly aggressive searches, she said. Paris Saint-Germain won the match 4-1 and advanced to the Champions League semifinals. In a letter Thursday, the organization

condemned the practice and called on "relevant authorities" to take action. "It's unacceptable that spectators, fans and women in general were particularly targeted by these intrusive and humiliating searches that constitute sexual aggression," the letter read. The group said there have been similar complaints at other stadiums in Europe, usually impacting visiting fans. It called on teams, organizers of the games and stadiums to ensure their security protocols avoid the "unfair treatment" of supporters. It asks UEFA to provide answers on whether visiting fans in particular are being subjected to more aggressive searches. A request for comment from UEFA sent on Thursday evening was not immediately answered.

Olympic organisers to use AI in sports

AP ■ LONDON

Olympic organisers unveiled their plans Friday to use artificial intelligence in sports, joining the global rush to capitalize on the rapidly advancing technology. The International Olympic Committee outlined its agenda for taking advantage of AI. Officials said it could be used to help identify promising athletes, personalize training methods and make the games fairer by improving judging. "Today, we are making another step to ensure the uniqueness of the Olympic Games and the relevance of sport. To do this, we have to be leaders of change," IOC



President Thomas Bach said at a press event at the former London Olympic Park, which hosted the Summer Games in 2012. "We are determined to exploit the vast potential of AI in a responsible way," Bach said. The IOC revealed its AI strategy as it gears up to hold the Paris Olympics, which are set to kick off in just under 100 days. The IOC's AI plans also include using the technology to protect athletes from online harassment and to help broadcasters improve the viewing experience for people watching from home. The IOC earns billions of dollars through the sale of broadcast rights for the games.



Andy Murray back on practice court

AP ■ LONDON

Three-time Grand Slam champion Andy Murray has returned to the practice court after confirming that he's not going to have surgery on his injured ankle. The 36-year-old Murray tore ligaments in his left ankle during a match at the Miami Open last month. Murray's team said this week he's "out of the walking boot," wouldn't be having surgery, and was "hoping to start hitting again on court soon." A short video on Murray's Instagram account on Friday showed the former world No. 1 hitting forehands on an indoor court. There was no timeline for his return announced. The two-time Wimbledon champion, who has said he's unlikely to play past this summer, has been hoping to compete for Britain again in the Paris Olympics.

Punia, Sujeet to miss Asian qualifiers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

In a huge setback for the Indian wrestling contingent at the Asia Olympic Qualifiers in Bishkek, two of the country's best wrestlers, Deepak Punia and Sujeet Kalakal, will miss the continental event as they could not report for the weigh-in on time as their flight arrived late in the Kyrgyzstan capital owing to bad weather in Dubai. While both Punia and Kalkal eventually managed to reach Bishkek after being stranded at the Dubai international airport due to incessant rain and flooding, they could not report for the mandatory weigh-in on time, according to sources.



The sources added that the organisers did not allow late weigh-in despite request from the Indian coaches. Punia (86kg), who had come close to winning a medal at the Tokyo Games, and Sujeet (65kg), were on their way to Bishkek to participate in the Asia Olympic qualifiers - the second-last qualifying event for Paris

Olympics - when a majority of the flights leaving Dubai got cancelled or delayed because of the flooding of the airport. The duo, accompanied by Russian coach Kamal Malikov and physio Shubham Gupta, were forced to sleep on the floor and had no access to proper food due to the rain-induced crisis in Dubai. "They were stuck at the Dubai airport since April 16 and it seems the chance of qualifying for Paris Olympics is slipping out of their hands as they are scheduled to compete tomorrow. They are not getting any flights to Bishkek. I am worried about them," Dayanand Kalakal, Sujeet's father, had told PTI on Thursday.