

**OPINION 6**  
GRAFT DOMINATES  
ELECTION DISCOURSE

**WORLD 8**  
CHINA BLASTS US MILITARY  
AID TO TAIWAN

**MONEY 10**  
INDIA PHARMA EXPORTS RISE  
10 PER CENT IN FY24

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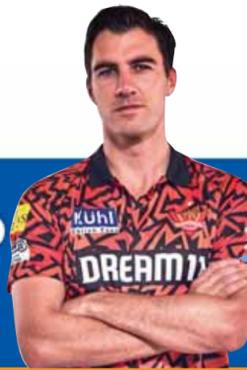
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## Congress taxed on inheritance as Modi rips into Sam Pitroda remark

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ AMBIKAPUR/NEW DELHI

Yet another 'foul' play by a Congress leader gave an opportunity to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP to mount attack on the grand old party over the ongoing controversial remarks related to wealth and tax. This time it's Sam Pitroda and the BJP-led by PM seized on his remarks on inheritance tax saying "zindagi ke saath bhi, zindagi ke baad bhi" as the Opposition party's mantra to "loot" people.

As Pitroda's comments provided fresh fodder to the BJP, its leaders latched on to them to target the Congress ahead of the second phase of Lok Sabha elections on Friday. Congress also marshalled a counter-offensive as its functionaries shared past comments of BJP leaders, including former Union Minister and MP in the outgoing Lok Sabha Jayant Sinha, in "favour" of such an tax.

In his poll rallies, Modi framed Pitroda's comments in his wider onslaught against the Congress, asserting that they have exposed its hidden agenda and that the party has become so removed from the country's social and family values that it wants to legally rob people of their assets and lifelong savings they want to bequeath to their children. Pitroda had spoken about inheritance tax in the US while delving into the issue of



Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a public meeting for the Lok Sabha elections, in Surguja district, Chhattisgarh, on Wednesday

PTI

redistribution of wealth. Pitroda, himself, sought to clear the air saying it is unfortunate that what he said as an individual on inheritance tax in the US is twisted by "godi media" to divert attention from the "lies" Modi is spreading about the Congress manifesto. Modi's comments on Mangal Sutra and gold snatching are simply unreal, he added.

Congress, however, swung into damage control, distancing itself

from the comments of the US-based president of party's overseas wing and asserting that it has no plan to introduce such a tax. "Sensationalising his comments now and tearing them out of context are deliberate and desperate attempts at diverting attention away from Modi's malicious and mischievous election campaign; that is anchored only in lies and more

lies," Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh said on a statement.

At an election rally in Chhattisgarh's Ambikapur, Modi said the dangerous intentions of the Congress are coming to the fore one by one and now "it says it will impose inheritance tax". "The advisor of shehzada" the 'shahi parivar', who was also the advisor to the shehzada's father, said

that more tax should be imposed on the middle class and those who earn by toiling hard," Modi said, apparently referring to Rahul Gandhi and Pitroda.

"The Congress will impose a tax on the assets inherited by people from their parents and the "panja" (Congress' poll symbol) will snatch the assets from their children. Congress ka mantra hei Congress ki loot 'zindagi ke saath bhi, zindagi ke baad bhi' (Congress' mantra is looting people when they are alive and afterwards too)," Modi said taking a cue from LIC tagline. "Till you are alive, the Congress will impose more tax and after your life ends, it will impose the burden of inheritance tax on you. They (Congress) want to snatch your assets and rights of your children," the prime minister alleged. He spoke on similar lines in his rallies in Madhya Pradesh.

Amid the fierce attack from the BJP, the Congress has been insisting that its manifesto does not talk about "redistribution" and that it favours a "comprehensive socio-economic caste census".

"I mentioned US inheritance tax in the US only as an example in my normal conversation on TV. Can I not mention facts? I said these are the kinds of issues people will have to discuss and debate. This has nothing to do with the policy of any party including Congress," Pitroda said on social media.

### LOK SABHA ELECTION PHASE 2 SEATS

2024 LS voting concludes for States marked in red

STATES	NO. OF SEATS	CONSTITUENCY
<b>KERALA</b>	20	Kasaragod, Kannur, Vatakara, Wayanad, Kozhikode, Malappuram, Ponnani, Palakkad, Alathur, Thrissur, Chalakudy, Ernakulam, Idukki, Kottayam, Alappuzha, Mavelikkara, Pathanamthitta, Kollam, Attingal, Thiruvananthapuram
Karnataka	14	Udupi Chikmagalur, Hassan, Dakshina Kannada, Chitradurga, Tumkur, Mandya, Mysore, Chamarajanagar, Bangalore Rural, Bangalore North, Bangalore Central, Bangalore South, Chikballapur, Kolar
<b>RAJASTHAN</b>	13	Tonk-Sawai Madhopur, Ajmer, Pali, Jodhpur, Barmer, Jalore, Udaipur, Banswara, Chittorgarh, Rajsamand, Bhilwara, Kota, Jhalawar-Baran
Maharashtra	8	Buldhana, Akola, Amravati (SC), Wardha, Yavatmal-Washim, Hingoli, Nanded, Parbhani
Uttar Pradesh	8	Amroha, Meerut, Baghpat, Ghaziabad, Gautam Budh Nagar, Aligarh, Mathura, Bulandshahar
Madhya Pradesh	7	Tikamgarh, Damoh, Khajuraho, Satna, Rewa, Hoshangabad, Betul
Assam	5	Karimganj, Silchar, Mangaldoi, Nawgong, Kaliaor
Bihar	5	Kishanganj, Katihar, Purnia, Bhagalpur, Banka
West Bengal	3	Darjeeling, Raiganj, Balurghat
Chhattisgarh	3	Rajnandgaon, Mahasamund, Kanker
Jammu & Kashmir	1	Jammu
Manipur	1	Outer Manipur
<b>TRIPURA</b>	1	Tripura East

## Campaign for Phase II LS poll ends

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

After whirlwind roadshows, political tit-for-tats, and a fresh cycle of controversies on redistribution of wealth, inheritance tax and reducing the quota for SCs, STs and OBCs to favour Muslims, the curtains came down on Wednesday evening on a high-voltage campaigning for the second phase of Lok Sabha polls in 89 seats across 13 States on April 26.

The upcoming second phase polls will cover several important constituencies such as Wayanad (Kerala), from where Congress leader Rahul Gandhi is seeking re-election and Thiruvananthapuram (Kerala), which will witness a high-profile showdown between Shashi Tharoor and Rajeev Chandrasekhar, Meerut where Arun Govil who played Ram in the hit Ramayan TV series of the 1980s,



Mathura where Hema Malini is seeking reelection, Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar's brother DK Suresh from Bengaluru Rural Lok Sabha constituency and former Karnataka Chief Minister HD Kumaraswamy (JDS) from Mandya. Polling is scheduled in all 20 seats of Kerala, 14 of the 28 seats in Karnataka, 13 seats in Rajasthan, 8 seats each in Maharashtra

and Uttar Pradesh, 7 seats in Madhya Pradesh, 5 seats each in Assam and Bihar, 3 seats each in Chhattisgarh and West Bengal, and 1 seat each in Manipur, Tripura and Jammu and Kashmir.

Amid heat wave conditions, the poll body on Wednesday extended the poll timings by two hours in some Assembly segments — Banka, Madhepura, Khagaria and Munger Lok Sabha constituencies was from 7 am to 6 pm to ensure enhanced voter participation. In other polling stations in Bihar, under these constituencies, the poll timings remain 7 am to 4 pm. Staggered over seven stages, the first phase of the elections held last Friday for 102 seats across 21 states and Union territories saw a voter turnout of around 65.5 per cent. After Friday's phase, polling will be over in Kerala, Rajasthan and Tripura.



From left to right: Mahesh Sharma, Rajendra Singh, Mahendra Singh Nagar

## Noida readies for triangular contest

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Despite being associated with the 'jinx', which many considered to have ended the careers of Chief Ministers in Uttar Pradesh, including Mayawati, Yogi Adityanath has held his fort despite having made visits to Noida, soon after he assumed the CM's chair in 2017.

He became the first CM of the State to return after completing a five years term and breaking the 'Noida jinx' in the 2022 Assembly polls. The popular NCR city, which falls under the Gautam Buddha Nagar seat, will go to elections on Friday in the second phase of Lok Sabha elections 2024.

Previously under Khurja Lok Sabha, the Gautam Buddha Nagar Lok Sabha constituency was established in 2008 on the recommendation of the Delimitation Commission of India, is set to witness a three way contest between BJP, SP and BSP for the upcoming elections on April 26.

In the upcoming 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the electoral contest will primarily feature the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA), the Samajwadi Party (SP)-led INDIA Bloc and the BSP. As many as 15 candidates are in the fray to secure the seat with BJP MP Mahesh Sharma, a two-time winner from this seat in Uttar Pradesh, in the battle for the third time. This new constituency covers Bulandshahar and Gautam Buddha Nagar districts and comprises five Vidhan Sabha constituencies: Noida, Jewar, Dadri, Sikandrabad, and Khurja.

The SP, which is part of the Opposition INDIA Bloc, has fielded Mahendra Singh Nagar, a seasoned politician who served as the Congress district president from 1999 to 2016 before joining the SP in 2022. On the other hand, representing the BSP is Rajendra Singh Solanki, who recently joined the party.

## Ghaziabad: BJP eyes 4th straight win in Gateway to UP

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

One of the 80 Lok Sabha constituencies of Uttar Pradesh, Ghaziabad Lok Sabha constituency, considered as one of the most VIP constituencies and a gateway of the State is all set to witness a three-cornered fight between BJP, Congress and BSP for April 26 polls. The Ghaziabad Lok Sabha seat has gained a reputation for being a stronghold of the BJP with the party's candidates consistently winning by significant margins in the three elections held in this constituency, and the BJP's vote share increasing with each successive election, further solidifying their position in this constituency.

The Ghaziabad Lok Sabha seat will witness a triangular contest in the general elections. The BJP has fielded Atul Garg, replacing sitting MP General (retired) VK Singh. The Congress has given ticket to Dolly Sharma and BSP has pitted Nand Kishor Pundir against the other two. The constituency has been a BJP stronghold and the party will be hoping to repeat its show in the previous two elections. Though the BJP has retained the seat since 2009 and is eyeing win for the fourth consecutive time.



Garg is currently a Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) in Uttar Pradesh from Ghaziabad seat in the district. The party has fielded him on the seat, hoping to hand over the seat once again to the party. The BJP is banking on Modi's charisma. Notably, the Rajput Jat community also held a series of maha panchayats across western Uttar Pradesh, calling for a boycott of BJP candidates. Members of the Jat community — considered a traditional voter base of BJP ally Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) — held two meetings, one in Indirapuram on Sunday and the other near Bamheta on April 18, to discuss their stand during these elections. Their leaders said their list of grievances against the ruling party was a long one.

## IED explosion damages bridge on NH 2 in Manipur

PTI ■ IMPHAL

A bridge on the National Highway 2 in ethnic violence-hit Manipur's Kangpokpi district was partially damaged in an IED explosion early on Wednesday, disrupting traffic movement in the area, police said. The blast occurred on the bridge between Sapermeina and Koubru Leikha areas around 12.45 am, an officer said. No casualties were reported so far in the improvised explosive device (IED) blast, he said.

Three craters and cracks on both ends of the bridge were noticed, the officer said. Movement of heavy vehicles has been stopped on the bridge connecting Manipur's capital Imphal with Nagaland's Dimapur. Minutes after the explosion, police personnel rushed to the spot and cordoned off the bridge, he said, adding that an investigation into the IED blast has been initiated. Some two-wheelers, however, were seen plying on the bridge this morning. The IED explosion occurred hours after gunfights broke out between village volunteers of the two warring communities in Imphal West district.

## SC tells EVM critics it cannot pass directions on basis of suspicion

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court said on Wednesday it cannot "control the elections" or issue directions simply because doubts have been raised about the efficacy of Electronic Voting Machines (EVM), as it reserved its judgement on a clutch of petitions claiming the polling devices can be tinkered with to manipulate the results. The court said it cannot change the thought process of those doubting the



advantages of polling machines and advocating going back to ballot papers. A bench of Justices Sanjiv

Khanna and Dipankar Datta reserved its verdict on a batch of pleas seeking complete cross-verification of votes cast using EVMs with Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT), after taking note of the answers to queries it had posed to the Election Commission. It sought answers from an official of the poll panel to five questions related to the functioning of EVMs including whether the microcontrollers fitted in them are reprogrammable.

## RBI bars Kotak Mahindra Bank from onboarding customers online

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Cracking down on repeated non-compliance of IT norms, the RBI on Wednesday barred Kotak Mahindra Bank from onboarding new customers through its online and mobile banking channels and issuing fresh credit cards with immediate effect after the regulator found "serious deficiencies" in the lender's IT risk management. These actions, the RBI said, are

necessitated based on significant concerns arising out of Reserve Bank's IT examination of the bank for the years 2022 and 2023 and the continued failure on part of the bank to address these concerns in a comprehensive and timely manner. Meanwhile, Kotak Mahindra Bank said in a statement that it has taken measures for adoption of new technologies to strengthen its IT systems.

## Churn in Congress over Delhi candidates

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Disrespect on part of the party high command representative who used 'Get Out' on a three time Minister and biggest Dalit leader, Raj Kumar Chauhan, resigned from the Congress after serving the party for nearly three decades. Brewing dissatisfaction in Delhi Congress over distribution of tickets to 'outsiders', for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls in the national capital next month, prominent Dalit leader and three time former minister in the Sheila

Dikshit cabinet, Chauhan, resigned from the grand old party accusing those appointed to oversee the Lok Sabha elections in the city of disrespecting him publicly, a day after the meeting of Delhi Congress' disciplinary committee.

Chauhan was under fire for allegedly mobilising a section of Congress workers against its North West Delhi candidate, Udit Raj. On Monday, when its Delhi unit was officially introducing its three Lok Sabha candidates to the media, the protesters raised slogans of "Bahari



ummeedwar nahi chalega (an outsider candidate will not be allowed)", criticising Raj for his affiliation with the BJP till 2019.

Talking to The Pioneer, Chauhan said he has resigned from the party. Chauhan said he had no plan to join any other party including BJP. "AICC incharge for Delhi Deepak Babaria called a meeting at his house. When I started speaking in the meeting, Babria asked me to 'get out' and he repeated it four to five times. I was trying to tell him that the candidate, who has been given the ticket (Udit Raj), has been abusing every caste. I am a four-time MLA and a three-time minister (in Delhi government). We have done

so much development work for Delhi. An outsider was telling me to get out. That's why I was angry and sent my resignation to DPCC chief Arvinder Singh Lovely," Chauhan said. "I have resigned because a meeting was called...to discuss the election candidates...some 20 to 25 main leaders from North East Delhi, including Arvinder Singh Lovely, were a part of that meeting. During the meeting, we were trying to put our side forward but we were not allowed to," Chauhan alleged.

# Cong wants to snatch wealth of people in name of economic survey

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Congress had talked about conducting an economic survey in its manifesto. Congress wants to snatch the wealth of the poor, Dalits, tribals and backward people by conducting economic surveys. The then Congress government had also snatched away the land of farmers by bringing the Ceiling Act in 1974. The leaders of the arrogant alliance are worried about their own families, but Prime Minister Narendra Modi is worried about the 140 crore people of the country. The Prime Minister is continuously working to bring honor and respect to the country. Congress wants to snatch the hard earned money said Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav, while addressing the public meetings organized in Bartuma in support

of BJP candidate Gajendra Patel from Khargone Lok Sabha constituency and BJP candidate from Sagar Lok Sabha constituency Lata Wankhede. Congress wants to snatch the hard-earned money of all of us including the poor, backward, Dalits, tribals of the country. This can never happen in a democracy. Before 2013, there was a Congress government in the country and at that time the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had also said that Muslims have the first right in this country. How unfortunate that Congress has always ruled by creating divisions between Hindus and Muslims. The people of the arrogant alliance drink water and abuse a single person every day. They don't find anyone else. Sonia Gandhi abuses because she is not allowing Rahul

Gandhi to become the Prime Minister, Lalu Yadav abuses because she is not allowing Tejashwi to become the Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee abuses because she is not allowing her nephew to come forward. All of them have set out to take their respective families forward. They are not worried about the country. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is doing the work of worrying about the country and its 140 crore people. He is continuously working to bring respect to India. The Prime Minister devoted his entire life to serving the country. Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav said that just as Hanuman's life was always about sacrifice and giving to others, similarly Prime Minister

Shri Narendra Modi also dedicated his entire life to serving the country. When he was the Chief Minister of Gujarat, he also donated his salary and allowances for the education of the children of his employees. He never did anything for himself. Whatever amount of salary and allowances comes, it is now being used in the service of Mother Ganga. He did not even build a house for himself, but has built more than 4 crore houses for the poor of the country. Chief Minister Dr Yadav said that a similar Sir Dr Harisingh Gaur was born on the land of Sagar, who also gave his entire property for a university and today the name of that university is known all over the world. Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav said that BJP loves people of every section. We love the poor,

the tribals, the Muslims, that is why we appoint them to the highest positions in the country. This work was never done during the Congress government. He never made any tribal or Muslim the President of the country. We love the poor, that is why people from poor families become Prime Ministers and Chief Ministers here. Only Bharatiya Janata Party and Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi can do this work. Congress people keep fighting each other and their politics runs on this basis. They have been doing this work for years. Their mentality has been like this since the country's independence. When the country became independent, they first got India-Pakistan divided and then continued to rule by creating division between Hindus and Muslims.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi pays tributes to Pt Chandrashekhar Azad during a road show for Lok Sabha elections, in Bhopal on Wednesday. Pioneer photo

# Cash and other materials worth Rs 244.55 cr seized

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

The investigation committees formed for the Lok Sabha elections have so far seized cash and other materials worth Rs 244.55 crore compared to the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. This is three times which was seized five years ago when the code of conduct was in force. The maximum amount of liquor worth Rs 33.77 crore has been seized. The Chief Electoral Officer has given instructions to be more strict in this investigation 48 hours before the second phase of voting. After the implementation of the code of conduct for the Lok Sabha elections, police and other enforcement agencies are continuously conducting investigations through inter-state checkpoints and 871 checkpoints set up within the state. These investigation teams have seized Rs 19.54 in cash from

**During the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, materials worth Rs 85.12 lakh were seized. Drugs worth Rs 22 crore, liquor worth Rs 33.77 crore were seized**

March 16 to April 22 and including the seizures made in other cases, a total of materials worth Rs 244.55 crore have been seized. Earlier, during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, materials worth Rs 85.12 lakh were seized. Drugs worth Rs 22 crore, liquor worth Rs 33.77 crore were seized. According to Chief Electoral Officer Anupam Rajan, in just 37 days, various unwanted materials worth almost three

times more than the previous Lok Sabha elections have been seized. According to CEO Rajan, during the investigation, since the implementation of the code of conduct till April 22. Similarly, more than 16715 kg of drugs worth Rs 22.23 crore and more than 2.144 kg of precious metals worth Rs 11.59 crore have also been seized. Besides, other valuable materials worth Rs 157.39 crore have also been seized. No one came to collect Rs 1.28 crore found in the bus in Jabua. In this case, Rs 1.28 crore cash was found in a bus going from Jabua to Gujarat. This amount was being taken from MP to Gujarat in sacks. Till now no one has come forward to claim the amount which was seized ten days ago. CEO Anupam Rajan had also recently denied information regarding the return of this amount.

# Weather to remain changed for three days in 35 districts of Madhya Pradesh

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Weather conditions would continue to remain abrupt as there is an alert of rain, storm and hailstorm in Madhya Pradesh for the next 3 days. The weather will remain changed in about 35 districts on April 25 and 26. The entire Malwa-Nimar including Bhopal, Indore, Gwalior, Jabalpur, Ujjain will also witness rainfall. Earlier on Tuesday, it rained in many districts including Chhindwara. Hailstorm was also witnessed in Chhindwara. Due to this the day temperature has also dropped. According to the Meteorological Department, such a system is present in the state due to Western Disturbance, Cyclonic Circulation and Trough Line. It has been raining for 5 con-

secutive days. The weather will remain the same on Wednesday, the sixth day. Rain is expected in 17 districts including Bhopal, Indore, Ujjain. Amidst the rain, the effect of heat was also seen in many districts on Tuesday. The highest temperature recorded in Khargone was 41.2 degrees. Whereas in Narsinghpur the temperature was 41 degrees. The mercury crossed 40 degrees in Khandwa, Khajuraho, Nowgong and Rewa. In the big cities, mercury was recorded at 38.9 degrees in Bhopal, 38.4 degrees in Indore, 39.5 degrees in Gwalior, 38.3 degrees in Jabalpur and 38 degrees in Ujjain. Pachmarhi was the coldest. The temperature here was 31.4 degrees. It was 34.2 degrees Celsius in Seoni and 34.6 degrees Celsius in

**The entire Malwa-Nimar including Bhopal, Indore, Gwalior, Jabalpur, Ujjain will also witness rainfall**

Chhindwara. IMD Bhopal, said that it has rained in many districts in the last 24 hours. The weather remained changed in both eastern and western parts. Currently Western Disturbance, Cyclonic Circulation and Trough Line are passing. Another Western Disturbance is coming from Western India on April 26. Due to this, rain will continue in the state for the next few days. There is possibility of rainfall in Bhopal, Indore, Ujjain,

Jabalpur, Neemuch, Mandsaur, Ratlam, Jabua, Alirajpur, Barwani, Dhar, Khargone, Ratlam, Agar-Malwa, Rajgarh, Shajapur, Dewas, Harda, Khandwa, Burhanpur, Sehore, Narmadapuram, Betul, Chhindwara, Pandhurna, Narmadapuram, Betul, Chhindwara, Pandhurna, Narsinghpur, Sagar, Tikamgarh, Chhatrapur, Sheopur, Shivpuri, Niwari, Tikamgarh districts in the next 24 hours. In the next two days Indore, Gwalior, Jabalpur, Neemuch, Mandsaur, Dhar, Khargone, Khandwa, Burhanpur, Harda, Narmadapuram, Betul, Raisen, Vidisha, Ashoknagar, Guna, Shivpuri, Sheopur Kalan, Pandhurna, Chhindwara, Narsinghpur, Sagar, Tikamgarh, Chhatrapur, Damoh, Seoni, Mandla, Balaghat, Dindori, Anuppur, Shahdol, Umaria, Katni, Maihar, Panna, Satna, Rewa

districts would witness rainfall. There is no warning of rain in the state on April 27, but it will remain cloudy. These include Agar-Malwa, Rajgarh, Guna, Khargone, Khandwa, Burhanpur, Harda, Betul, Narmadapuram, Raisen, Pandhurna, Chhindwara, Narsinghpur, Sagar, Tikamgarh, Chhatrapur, Panna, Damoh, Jabalpur, Dindori, Mandla and Balaghat districts. Many rainfall records were broken in April. About two and a quarter inches of rain fell in Bhopal. At the same time, a record of rain for 11 consecutive days in April has also been made. There has been continuous rain in the state from April 7 to April 17. Now the state is getting drenched again. It is expected to rain till April 27. It has rained from the second system for five consecutive days.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a road show for Lok Sabha elections, in Bhopal on Wednesday. Pioneer photo

# Three booked for circulating indecent video of a woman

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Aishbagh police have booked three persons including a woman under IT act after a woman complained of sharing her indecent viral made by the accused youth. Police said that victi girl was scheduled to marry but before one of them he eloped with her boyfriend and married him the next day. Humiliated over the act, the youth who was scheduled to marry the young woman sent indecent videos to the her husband which he made viral. After which her husband sent it to the girl using his mother's mobile. Irritated over the act, the girl lodged a complaint with the Aishbagh police based on which police have

**Humiliated over the act, the youth who was scheduled to marry the young woman sent indecent videos to the her husband which he made viral**

registered a case against the girl's husband, his brother and mother. During the investigation police found that the youth who was scheduled to marry the girl captured an obscene video of the girl while talking on video call. Since this marriage was happening due to pressure from the family, the girl went away with her

lover even before the marriage and the next day she married her lover. Here, upset over the breakdown of the marriage, the young man sent the captured obscene video to his husband. The husband made the video of his girlfriend-turned-wife viral. After this the girl complained against her own husband, brother-in-law and mother-in-law. According to information received from the police, the 19-year-old girl lives in the Aishbagh area. Recently her family members had fixed her marriage with a young man. Whereas the girl was in love with another young man. Under pressure from the family, the girl started talking to the young man recommended by her family, but she had to marry her lover only. While talk-

ing on video call, the young man captured an obscene video of the girl. The girl went away with her lover just before the marriage. When both of them returned the next day, they got married with the consent of their families. Despite marriage, the husband did not take her with him. The family members also remained reluctant in taking the daughter-in-law. With the intention of taking revenge, the boy with whom the girl was going to marry sent the captured obscene video of the girl to her husband. The husband sent the same video from his mother's mobile to his own wife's mobile. After this the girl went to the police station and lodged a complaint against her husband, brother-in-law and mother-in-law.

# Himanshu Rai, Director of IIM Indore, receives Global empowerment awards

PNS ■ INDORE

Medi-Caps University Indore, in collaboration with Witty Gossips Association, Philippines, organized the 'Global Peace and Sustainable Development Summit 2024' across multiple institutions in India and abroad. The summit's primary objective is to raise awareness among youth about the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) established by the United Nations. The event showcased 170 speakers hailing from 70 countries, along with representatives from 17 international organizations, engaging in comprehensive discussions aimed at empowering youth and fostering global progress. Annually at this summit, 'The Global Empowerment Awards 2024' are presented to individuals for their exceptional contributions to empowerment in fields like education and social justice. This year, the award was bestowed upon

Prof. Himanshu Rai, Director of IIM Indore, in recognition of his remarkable achievements. The Vice Chancellor of Medi-Caps University, Prof. (Dr.) D K Patnaik, expressed his delight at the active participation of various faculty and students, highlighting the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations as reminiscent of ancient Indian culture. Additionally, the Honorable Chancellor, Shri. R.C Mittal, OSD to the Chancellor, Mr. Palash Garg, and Director of Branding and Promotion, Ms. Saloni Garg, extended their heartfelt congratulations to everyone. On this auspicious occasion, Sumant Chinchwadkar, representing the WittyGossip Association Indore chapter, along with Dr. Ravindra Pathak, Head of the Office of International Affairs, Dr. Parul Sharda, Convener, and Neeraj Yadav, Coordinator of Medi-Caps University, graced the event.

# Histology drawing competition held

Bhopal: The Annual Dissection and Histology Drawing Competition were organized by the Department of Anatomy, AIIMS Bhopal on Wednesday. On this occasion, Professor (Dr.) Ajai Singh, Executive Director of AIIMS Bhopal was the chief guest. He carefully observed the dissection done by the students and also asked questions related to it. Along with asking questions, he explained the children about different organs. Professor Singh also awarded prizes to the winning participants of the Dissection and Histology Drawing Competition. Expressing his views, Professor Singh said that I see a better future in the medical field in these students and the dissection done by these students today definitely reflects their knowledge and their dedication. All the children who participated in today's competition should be rewarded, because everyone has done their work with hard work and dedication. 125 first year MBBS students participated in this dissection competition. A total of five teams were formed from these 125 students, who demonstrated their knowledge based on dissection techniques and anatomy. Each team had to dissect different parts of the human body.

# BHEL Bhopal designed, fabricated guide apparatus for PH Project

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

BHEL Bhopal has successfully designed, fabricated, machined and assembled its largest ever Guide Apparatus for Polavaram Hydroelectric Project. The Guide Apparatus assembly is a major component of the Hydroelectric Project which serves as water inlet through its 24 guide vanes each weighing 4 MT and is approximately 4 meters in length. On assembly, its cylindrical structure weighs 255 MT with a diameter of 9.5 m and height of 6.5 m. S M Ramanathan, Executive Director, BHEL Bhopal inspected the assembly on 24-04-2024 and congratulated the employees for this achievement. G P Baghel (GM - Quality) and V Shrinivas Rao (GM - Hydro) were also present on the occasion. On completion, Polavaram hydro-electric project will be producing a total of 960 MW electricity with the help of its twelve similar Kaplan hydro turbine and hydro-generator sets of 80 MW

each. The machines for Polavaram are the largest being manufactured by BHEL. BHEL is supplying the major part of the machinery for Polavaram hydro-electric project which is being set up by Megha Engineering and Infrastructure Limited for M/s Andhra Pradesh Power Generation Corporation Limited. The project is located on the Godavari river in the East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh. Meanwhile, In a simple program held at the Administrative building, BHEL, Bhopal, SM Ramanathan, Executive Director bade farewell to Rajeev Sarma, General Manager (ELX), Dhan Singh, Dhurve, Additional General Manager (WTM), Ravindra Pratap Singh, Officer and 07 Supervisors on their superannuation. Ramanathan in his address urged all the retiring employees to make the second innings of their life meaningful and enjoy as much as possible while staying healthy. BK Singh, General Manager (Human Resources) was also present on this occasion.



Senior Congress leader and Rajya Sabha MP Vivek Tankha with Congress State President Jitu Patwari addresses a press conference at PCC headquarters in Bhopal on Wednesday. Pioneer photo

# Armed forces college, Kathmandu officials visit IGRMS

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

As per the instructions of the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, officials of Armed Police Force Command and Staff College Kathmandu under the guidance of Sashtra Seema Bal Academy Gandhi Nagar Bhopal, today visited Indra Gandhi rashtriya manav

ities. While visiting, Deputy Inspector General of Armed Police Force Command and Staff College, Kathmandu, Nepal, Shri Kamal Giri said that an innovative effort has been made to protect and preserve the cultural heritage here. This museum is not only a center of informal education but is also a unique institution for imparting education by awakening interest in art.

# 19 candidates file 21 nomination papers for the fourth phase

STAFF REPORTER ■ 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 fourth phase is going on. For the fourth phase, on Wednesday, the sixth day, 19 candidates submitted 21 nomination papers. So far, 83 nomination papers have been filed by 58 candidates. Chief Electoral Officer Rajan said that for the fourth phase, on April 24, on the sixth day, 1 nomination paper was filed by 1 candidate in Lok Sabha parliamentary constituency No. 21 Dewas (SC), 1 nomination paper by 1 candidate in No. 23 Mandasaur, 6 nomination papers by 5 candidates in No. 24 Ratlam (ST), 3 nomination papers by 3 candidates

**the affidavits and other information of the candidates who have filed nomination papers can be seen on the website of the Election Commission of India at the link <https://affidavit.eci.gov.in/>**

in No. 25 Dhar (ST), 5 nomination papers by 5 candidates in No. 26 Indore, 3 nomination papers by 2 candidates in No. 27 Khargone (SC) and 2 nomination papers were filed by 2 candidates in No. 28 Khandwa. No nomination papers were filed by any candidate today in Lok Sabha Parliamentary Constituency No. 22 Ujjain (SC) of the fourth phase. Chief Electoral Officer Rajan said that the affidavits and other information of the candidates who have filed nomination papers can be seen on the website of the Election

Commission of India at the link <https://affidavit.eci.gov.in/>. He said that the last date for filing nomination papers is Thursday, April 25. The nomination papers will be scrutinized the next day on Friday, April 26. Candidates who have filed nomination papers will be able to withdraw their names till Monday, April 29. Voting for the fourth phase will take place on Monday, May 13. Counting of votes in all phases will take place on Tuesday, June 4. 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 fourth phase is going on. For the fourth phase, on Wednesday, the sixth day, 19 candidates submitted 21 nomination papers. So far, 83 nomination papers have been filed by 58 candidates. Chief Electoral Officer Rajan said that for the fourth phase, on 24th April, on the sixth day, 1 nomination paper was filed by 1 candidate in Lok Sabha parliamentary constituency No. 21 Dewas (SC), 1 nomination paper by 1 candidate in No. 23 Mandasaur, 6 nomination papers by 5 candidates in No. 24 Ratlam (ST), 3 nomination papers by 3 candidates in No. 25 Dhar (ST), 5 nomination papers by 5 candidates in No. 26 Indore, 3 nomination papers by 2 candidates in No. 27 Khargone (SC) and 2 nomination papers were filed by 2

candidates in No. 28 Khandwa. No nomination papers were filed by any candidate today in Lok Sabha Parliamentary Constituency No. 22 Ujjain (SC) of the fourth phase. Chief Electoral Officer Rajan said that the affidavits and other information of the candidates who have filed nomination papers can be seen on the website of the Election Commission of India at the link <https://affidavit.eci.gov.in/>. He said that the last date for filing nomination papers is Thursday, April 25. The nomination papers will be scrutinized the next day on Friday, April 26. Candidates who have filed nomination papers will be able to withdraw their names till Monday, April 29. Voting for the fourth phase will take place on Monday, May 13. Counting of votes in all phases will take place on Tuesday, June 4.



Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav during the nomination rally of BJP candidate from Khargone Lok Sabha constituency Gajendra Patel ahead of the Lok Sabha elections in Khargone, Madhya Pradesh on Wednesday. Pioneer photo



BJP supporters during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's road show for Lok Sabha elections, in Bhopal on Wednesday. Pioneer photo

## Continuous deaths of leopards in Mhow Sub Division forest an alarming call

PNS ■ INDORE

On Wednesday, the leopard which was limping in an injured state in the Manpur range of the Mhow sub division and was caught unconscious after a tranquilizer gun shot in the forest, died on the way to the hospital for treatment. The sudden death raised many questions among Mhow city and animal lovers because the leopard was seen limping and wandering in the forest area for many days but was alive, but as soon as the leopard was made unconscious with a tranquilizer gun to catch it in the forest department, the leopard died. People say that the leopard died due to overdose

of medicine to make it unconscious. Just last week, a dead body of a leopard was found in Manpur forest range. Thus, in the last one week itself, animal lovers are shocked by the death of two adult leopards in Manpur forest range. According to sources about six leopards were killed in Manpur forest range in the last one year. Mhow tehsil located in Indore district is spread over about 1600 square kilometers and there is about 20% forest area in Indore district, which is entirely located in the Mhow tehsil area. Seven rivers originate from the Janpav mountain of Mhow, which all flows through the forest area of the Mhow

**Just last week, a dead body of a leopard was found in Manpur forest range**

tehsil and keeps forest green. But since some time, Mhow and Indore Forest Department is not paying attention to the forests of Mhow and to protect the forest animals. Due to this, leopards are being killed continuously in Manpur forest range. Dozens of farm houses, hotel, colonies are being developed in the forest area. Which has become a big threat to the forests and wild animals. According to the

information received from the sources, on the pretext of staying in the farm houses adjacent to the forests, hunters and people smuggling the parts of wild animals also regularly visit the Mhow forest area. Many times these hunters hunt the leopard and make the whole leopard disappear due to which the leopard hunting doesn't come in light but many times the leopard gets injured by the hunter's and is unable to be caught by the hunter. And runs away into the forest in an injured state, which is noticed by the villagers and then the villagers inform the forest department and then the forest department becomes active. According to the sources, the

leopard's body parts are sold for crores of rupees, also the cremation of the dead body of leopard is also done by the forest department employees at a secluded place where questions are also being raised on this issue. Additional Chief Secretary of Madhya Pradesh Forest Department, J N Kansotiya while talking to The Pioneer told he is very sad hearing the deaths of leopards in Mhow sub division and he will immediately form a committee to find out the reason for the continuous deaths of leopards in Manpur range of Mhow, which will reach Mhow very soon for detail investigation. He himself will also visit Mhow forest area.

## Motorola Solutions signs up with Arya Omnitalk

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Arya Omnitalk, a joint venture between two of India's most reputed business houses, Arvind Ltd. and the JM Baxi Group, has secured an exclusive partnership with Motorola Solutions to distribute Professional and Commercial Radios in India. Arya Omnitalk operates three business divisions, namely Shared Mobile Radio services (SMR), GPS-based Fleet Tracking and Management Solutions, Toll and Highway Traffic Management Systems (HTMS). Under this collaboration, Arya Omnitalk will exclusively distribute Motorola Solutions' MOTOTRBO Portfolio of

products, along with continuing to distribute Wave PTX and associated services. A leading provider of PMRTS (Public Mobile Radio Trunking Services), CMRTS (Captive Mobile Radio Trunking Services) and Broadband Push-to-talk devices, Arya Omnitalk holds licenses to operate in 18 cities including Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Indore, Kolkata, Bharuch, Navi Mumbai, Gurgaon, Noida, Mumbai, Pune, Surat, Vadodra, Visakhapatnam, Hyderabad, Kochi, and Jaipur. These radios are specially designed for organisations operating in today's fast-moving business environment. They allow real-time,

instant communication among teams, improving coordination in fast-paced environments. It allows cross-platform compatibility, works across various devices and platforms, ensuring seamless communication between different teams and devices within the company. These radios connect teams spread across different locations and facilities. It can integrate with existing communication systems and tools, streamlining processes and enhancing overall connectivity within the company. These radios provide secure communication channels, crucial for the industries where confidentiality and data protection are paramount.

## State level slogan competition

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Chief Electoral Officer Anupam Rajan has said that a state level slogan competition is being organized on the theme "Pratyek Vote Zaroori Hai" under the voter awareness campaign for better voting percentage in the Lok Sabha elections-2024. The participants securing first, second and third positions in the competition will be honoured with certificates and prize money. Along with this, 10 participants will be honoured with special awards. A state level selection committee has also been constituted to evaluate the entries received in the competition. The results will be

declared after evaluation by the selection committee. He informed that the participants will have to send their entries on <https://mp.mygov.in/> portal. Along with this, information related to the competition will also be available on the website of the Chief Electoral Officer's office. Participants will be able to submit entries until Thursday, April 25. Winning participants will prize money First Prize - Rs 51,000 and certificate Second Prize - Rs 21,000 and certificate Third Prize - Rs 11,000 and certificate 10 participants will be given a special prize and certificate of Rs 5,100 each.

## Fake CBI officer, others cheat bizman of Rs 2 cr

PNS ■ UJJAIN

Posing as CBI officers, five miscreants defrauded a businessman from Ujjain of Rs 2 crore online. The police have arrested the accused in this case, but have not yet seized the looted money. A robbery incident came to light in Ujjain. Here a gang from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh looted two crore rupees from a businessman. They trapped the businessman by pretending to be a CBI officer. The businessman was cheated by giving fear of being named in a CBI case. In this incident that happened about 15 days ago, the police conducted an investigation and caught five criminals of the gang. However, they have not yet found the looted money. Police are investigating for this. The matter was disclosed by SP Pradeep Sharma

on Tuesday evening. In fact, on April 8, a businessman in the city received calls from different mobile phones. Some people spoke on the phone, calling themselves agents of CBI and said that the money of the fraud committed by Jet Airways owner Naresh Goyal has come into his bank account, which CBI is investigating after registering the case. Out of fear, the businessman first deposited Rs 1.5 crore in an account of Punjab National Bank branch of Nalanda in Bihar and after two days, after two days, on demand, Rs 50 lakh was deposited as RTGS. To convince the businessman, the robbers sent him the arrest order on letters from various departments of the Government of India, agreement of consent to confidential settlement and signed letters of a CBI officer on WhatsApp. But

after two days, after realizing that he was cheated, he approached SP Pradeep Sharma. When they got the investigation done, the gang's actions came to light. In this case, police arrested Mukesh Kumar of Nalanda Bihar, Amarendra Kumar (Bahubali) of village Barapur, Shahnawaz Alam of village Kinjar, Anil Yadav of Mainpuri (UP) and Sharad Pandey and seized 10 mobiles from them. But, the defrauded amount was not found. SP Sharma told that Mukesh had a loan of about Rs 3.50 lakh. His friend Amarendra told him how to earn up to Rs 50 thousand every month along with repaying the loan. As per the plan, Mukesh formed a firm in the name of Mukesh Enterprises and opened an account in Punjab National Bank branch, Nalanda and also took a GST number.



A voter awareness rally was organized in Mhow by the administration under SVEEP on Wednesday, in which Mhow Tehsildar Vivek Soni, Naib Tehsildar Radhavallabh Dhakad, Women and Child Development Officer Rekha Sharma, Janpad panchayat Mhow CEO Pankaj Darrothia and officials and employees of all the government departments and Cantonment Board Mhow participated. Pioneer photo

## Boy electrocuted

New Delhi: A 12-year-old boy was electrocuted when he came in contact with an electric pole in Delhi, which saw thunderstorms on Tuesday evening. The victim, identified as Kaif Mohammad, was declared brought dead by the doctors. According to the Delhi Police, he was outside his house when the incident took place in Khaira village in Chhawla area. He got electrocuted after coming in contact with an electric pole amid thunderstorm and dust storm in the national capital. The boy was rushed to RTRM Hospital where he was declared brought dead.

## Rahul indulging in politics to disintegrate India: BJP

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi BJP on Wednesday staged a protest near the Congress party headquarters here, claiming that Rahul Gandhi was indulging in politics to disintegrate India. The BJP also said that the Congress manifesto for the Lok Sabha polls was an "insult" to the culture of the country. Ahead of Lok Sabha polls, the BJP including Prime Minister Narendra Modi have launched a frontal attack on the Congress alleging its manifesto smacks of

appeasement and that if it came to power, it would redistribute people's wealth and also give reservations to Muslims from the quotas for SC, ST and OBC communities. Senior BJP leaders, including national general secretary Tarun Chugh, Delhi state president Virendra Sachdeva, and Delhi BJP Mahila Morcha president Richa Pandey, took part in the protest. Chugh said the manifesto of the Congress "conspired" to "snatch away" property and jewellery of women and give it to the minori-

ties. He alleged the Congress manifesto was an "insult" to the culture of the country and that Gandhi was indulging in politics to disintegrate India. "The manifesto of Congress is full of appeasement and it will weaken the country," Sachdeva said. He claimed the manifesto includes "jihad" and "appeasement" politics. Addressing a press conference here, Sachdeva slammed the Congress, saying the party's manifesto for the Lok Sabha elections "aims to break the country".

## Padma Vidyalyaya students give message of voting

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

In Gwalior, the students of local government Padmaraje Girls Higher Secondary School enthralled everyone by presenting a musical dance drama centered on voting on the tune of the folk song "Moko Karno Hai Matdan Ki Polling Le Chal Languria". Also gave a message to everyone to definitely vote. Chief Electoral Officer Anupam Rajan and Commissioner Gwalior Dr. Sudam Khade along with all the officers and senior citizens present in the programme appreciated this presentation. On this occasion, Chief Electoral Officer Rajan administered oath to everyone to exercise their franchise on May 07, the great festival of

**This presentation took place in the voter awareness programme held at Tansen Residency, Gwalior on Wednesday**

democracy. Also called upon to cast their vote themselves and inspire their family members, friends and neighbours present in the programme to vote. This presentation took place in the voter awareness programme held at Tansen Residency, Gwalior on Wednesday under SVEEP (Systematic Voter Education

and Electoral Participation). On this occasion, Inspector General of Police Gwalior Arvind Saxena, Joint Chief Electoral Officer Vivek Shrotriya, Local Collector and District Election Officer Ruchika Chauhan, Superintendent of Police Dharamveer Singh and District Panchayat Chief Executive Officer Vivek Kumar and other senior officers and officials of the city were present and senior and young voters were present. Chief Electoral Officer Rajan said that Gwalior district should not lag behind in voting. He said that in democracy we all have the right to choose the government through voting. We all should use our vote. Everyone should come forward and vote in the

Lok Sabha elections. Everyone should not only exercise their franchise but should also inspire others to do so. Kamakshi becomes brand ambassador of Gwalior Under the direction of Acharya Brijesh Yadav of Padma Vidyalyaya Gwalior and choreography of student Ku. Kamakshi, the presentation highlighting the importance of voting including the pink booths run by women was highly appreciated by everyone. Commissioner Dr. Khade was pleased with this excellent presentation. He announced to make Kamakshi the brand ambassador of SVEEP. He also said that people will be motivated to vote by staging of this dance drama at various places in the district.

### Aadhar Housing Finance Ltd.

Corporate Office: Unit No.802, Natraj Rustomjee, Western Express Highway and M.V.Road, Andheri (East), Mumbai-400069  
Ashta Branch : Office No. 2, 1st Floor, Prakash Commercial Complex, Opposite Canara Bank, Kannaod Road, Ward No.16, Shastri Colony, Ashta - 466116 (MP)

Authorized Officer : Lokendra Rathore, Contact : 9977783890

**PROPERTY FOR SALE UNDER PROVISIONS OF SARFAESI ACT, 2002 THROUGH PRIVATE TREATY**

Whereas the Authorised Officer, Aadhar Housing Finance Limited (AHFL) has taken the Possession u/s 13(4) of the Securitisation & Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (The SARFAESI Act, 2002) of the property ("the Secured Asset") given below The Authorised Officer has received offer of Sale from some interested party against the above mentioned Secured Asset under the SARFAESI Act for recovery of the Secured Debt. Now, The Authorised Officer is hereby giving the Notice to Sale of the above said property through Private Treaty in terms of rule 8 and 9 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002. The Details of the Account are as follows:

S. N.	Loan App.No./ Branch	Name of the Borrower/ Co-Borrowers	Demand Notice Date & Amount	Reserve Price (RP)	Total Outstanding Loan Amount as on date 29-02-2024	Description of the Secured Asset
1.	(Loan Code No. 13000000223/ Ashta Branch)	Manoj Kumar (Borrower), Radhika Soni (Co-Borrower)	24-08-2022 & ₹ 7,73,481/-	₹ 6,50,000/-	₹ 10,16,763/-	All that part & parcel of property bearing, Kh No 656 2 8 Ward No 15 Malviya Nagar Near Naveen Public School Near Ambedkar Ground, Sehore, Madhya Pradesh - 466116. Boundaries:- East: Land of Laik Bhai, West: 12 Ft Road, North: Lalita Bai House, South: Komal Singh House

The Authorised officer will hold auction for sale of the Secured Asset on 'As is where is Basis', 'As is what is basis' and 'Whatever is there is basis'. AHFL is not responsible for any liabilities whatsoever pending upon the said property. The Authorised Officer reserves the right to accept or reject the offer without assigning any reason whatsoever and sale will be subject to confirmation by Secured Creditor. On the acceptance of offer of proposed buyer, he/she is required to deposit 25% of accepted price inclusive adjustment of Earnest Money Balance immediately and the balance amount shall be paid by the purchaser within 15 (fifteen) days from date of acceptance of Offer by the Secured Creditor. The proposed buyer is to note that in case of failure of payment of balance amount by him/her within the time specified, the amount already deposited shall stand forfeited and property will be resold accordingly.

This is 15 DAYS SALE NOTICE UNDER SARFAESI ACT, 2002 is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower (s), Co-Borrower (s) and Guarantor (s) that the above described immovable property mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the Physical Possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of Aadhar Housing Finance Limited (AHFL) Secured Creditor, will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is" and to the amount due to Aadhar Housing Finance Ltd., in full before the date of sale, auction is liable to be stopped.

If the Borrower(s), co-borrower(s) has any buyer who is ready to purchase the mortgage property/secured asset at price above the given reserve price of then Borrower(s), Co-borrower(s) must intimate to AHFL on or before 10-05-2024 AHFL shall give preference to him. If Borrower(s), Co-borrower(s) fails to intimate on or before 10-05-2024 the AHFL will proceed sale of property at above given reserve price.

**The Date of Auction is fixed for 10-05-2024.**

**Place : Madhya Pradesh, Date : 25-04-2024**

(Authorised Officer)  
For Aadhar Housing Finance Limited



# Nations must invest in resilient infrastructure for better tomorrow: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said natural disasters are becoming more frequent and more severe, and their true impact on people, families and communities is beyond just numbers. In a recorded message played at the 6th edition of the International Conference on Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), the Prime Minister said, "Countries must invest in resilient infrastructure today for a better tomorrow. Resilience needs to be factored into new infrastructure creation and it also needs to be a part of post-disaster rebuilding after disasters." "As we all have witnessed, natural disasters are becoming more frequent and more severe. The damage they cause is usually reported in dollars, but their true impact on people, families and

communities is beyond just numbers. "Earthquakes destroy houses, making thousands of people homeless. Natural disasters can disrupt water and sewage systems, putting the health of people at risk. Some disasters can impact energy plants, leading to potentially dangerous situations. These things have a human impact," Modi said. He said nature and disasters have no borders and disasters and disruption cause widespread impact in a highly interconnected world. "The world can be resilient collectively only when each country is resilient individually. Shared resilience is important because of the shared risks. CDRI and this conference help us come together for this collective mission," the prime minister said. Citing the high risk of disasters in small island developing States, Modi said countries must support the



most vulnerable to achieve shared resilience. "CDRI has a programme which is funding projects across 13 such places. Resilient housing in Dominica, resilient transport networks in Papua New Guinea and enhanced early burning systems in the Dominican Republic and Fiji are some examples," Modi said. It is heartening that CDRI also has a focus on the global south, he said. The prime minister said that during India's G20 presidency, a new disaster risk reduction working group was formed with financing at the heart of the discussions. Along with the growth of CDRI, such steps will take the world to a resilient future, he said.

Modi added that the growth of the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure has been impressive in the last few years. Launched in 2019, CDRI is now a global coalition of 39 countries and seven organisations. Investment in infrastructure suffered setbacks during the COVID-19 pandemic years, and the recent rebound has been highly unequal, with developing countries falling behind, P K Mishra, the principal secretary to the Prime Minister at the conference. He said disaster and climate risks are increasing and countries will be forced to divert more funding to recovery and rebuilding if they do not build resilience in the infrastructure systems. "During the pandemic years, investment in infrastructure suffered setbacks, and lately, we observe sustained revival. However, this rebound is highly unequal, with developing countries lagging,

We must ask ourselves why?" he said. Mishra said research by CDRI has shown that the annual investment required to address the infrastructure deficit, achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), reach net zero and strengthen resilience by 2050 amounts to USD 9.2 trillion. "If we do not design resilience into our project pipelines, it will be increasingly difficult to achieve the high levels of funding needed to close the infrastructure deficit, particularly in the global south," he said. Mishra said the prime minister has given a clarion call to make India a developed country, and many other countries in the global south are also aiming at becoming developed countries or developing faster. "In all these cases, a lot of infrastructure is going to be built. Therefore, ensuring disaster and climate resilience of infrastructure systems,

particularly in the context of uncertainties posed by a changing climate, is a shared global challenge," he said. Mishra said India recognises that closing the infrastructure deficit and doing so in a manner that all new infrastructure is resilient go hand in hand. He said the investment made in infrastructure in the country over the past two decades has created better livelihood opportunities for millions of citizens, and this progress needs to be sustained. "The infrastructure we build today needs to be resilient to present and future disaster risks for decades," he said. Mishra urged the participants of the conference to focus on creating opportunities for better articulation of infrastructure challenges faced by the global south. He sought the conference to find new ways to mobilize finance and incentivize investments in resilient infrastructure in the global south.

## Congress manifesto influenced by foreign forces, claims BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Wednesday launched an all-out attack on the Congress over Sam Pitroda's "inheritance tax" remarks, alleging he has exposed the party's "nefarious design" of taking away common people's wealth and property. The BJP's accusation came after Pitroda, the president of the Indian Overseas Congress, talked about "inheritance tax in the United States" on the Congress' "redistribution of wealth" issue. Latching on to his remarks, BJP national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi said, "Sam Pitroda has elaborated the nefarious design of the Congress. We are a saving based economy. In India, one generation (of a family) earns by doing hard work. The second generation builds on that and then the third generation gets some comfort." "And, the Congress wants to snatch away that happiness and peace from the people with Sam Pitroda talking about imposing tax on gold," he charged. "People in India purchase gold



as their savings and even those who are poor say there should be gold. And you want to impose 45 per cent tax on them (gold)," Trivedi added. The Congress distanced itself from Pitroda's remarks, alleging that sensationalising them are attempts at diverting attention from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "malicious" poll campaign. "By doing an X-ray of the Congress' manifesto, their high tech guru Pitroda has made it clear that both the lives and wealth of the people of the country are in danger. You want to take away the wealth of people from them," the BJP spokesperson hit back, saying the Congress can hide its "nefarious intentions" now. He also alleged that the

and gold snatching is simply unreal." "I mentioned US inheritance tax in the US only as an example in my normal conversation on TV. Can I not mention facts? I said these are the kind of issues people will have to discuss and debate. This has nothing to do with the policy of any party including Congress," he said. "Who said 55 percent will be taken away? Who said something like this should be done in India? Why is BJP and media in panic," Pitroda asked. Attacking the Congress over Pitroda's remarks, Modi said at a rally in Chhattisgarh, "The Congress party's dangerous intentions have come to fore yet again. Now these people are saying they will impose inheritance tax on properties bequeathed to children by their parents." Home Minister Amit Shah also flayed Pitroda's remarks, saying "The appeasement politics of the Congress stand exposed today with Sam Pitroda's statement on wealth redistribution. He reaffirmed the party's intention to seize the property of the majority and distribute it among the minority."



Modi greets people on Panchayati Raj Day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday greeted people on the Panchayati Raj Day, asserting that his government will continue to work to strengthen local body institutions. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj observes April 24 as National Panchayati Raj Day, marking the enactment of the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992, which came into force on this day in 1993 and paved the way for empowering of local bodies. Modi said on X, "On Panchayati Raj Day, greetings to all those working at grassroots to transform rural India and ensure a better quality of life for the people. Our Government will continue to work to strengthen Panchayati Raj institutions and give wings to people's dreams."

## Navy official freed from Qatar prison; father thanks Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Captain Saurabh Vashisht, one of the eight imprisoned former Indian Navy personnel released by Qatar following India's diplomatic efforts, and his father have written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to convey their heartfelt thanks and laud his leadership. Vashisht said his heart is brimming with appreciation and reverence, as he praised Modi for his unwavering support and tireless efforts during one of the most challenging phases of his life, officials noted on Wednesday. He said in the letter to the prime minister that, "In the face of seemingly insurmountable odds, you emerged as a steadfast beacon of hope and resilience, transcending the realms of politics to embody a guiding force of unparalleled significance." He added, "Your solemn vow that no Indian would be left behind resonated deeply within our spirits, and time and again, you have demonstrated the profound sincerity of that commitment." All eight officials were given



the capital punishment by Qatar on reportedly espionage charges which was later committed. However, India's persistent intervention ensured their release in February and they returned home. Vashisht said in his solitary confinement in a Qatar prison, he was sustained by the hope that no stone will be left unturned to ensure his release as he observed the prime minister's major diplomatic engagements such as being the State guest of the United States government, Chief Guest of Honour at Bastille's Day parade in France and hosting the G20 summit, in India. He said, "Witnessing your auspicious inauguration of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, I felt that our Lord Ram was also blessing us to attain our freedom. I remain eternally indebted to you for restoring

our freedom, for the unwavering advocacy you extended to our plight, and for safeguarding the welfare of our families during our protracted separation." Modi's resolute commitment to the well-being of every Indian, irrespective of circumstance, evokes profound admiration and reverence, he said, praising him for exemplifying the true essence of leadership and empathy. Officials said Captain Vashisht's father Wing Commander Rajinder Kumar Vashisht (Retired) also praised and thanked Prime Minister Modi for the return of his son. "In this agonising saga spanning over 18 months, you emerged as our rock, our unwavering pillar of hope. At 86 years of age, I find myself extremely overwhelmed with gratitude for your relentless efforts in bringing my son back from the brink of despair," he said. He said in his decades of life, he has traversed through changing times and eras, witnessed myriad leaders, yet none have radiated the "unwavering compassion, foresightedness, and devotion to our nation and its citizens, as you have".



## DRDO builds lightest bullet proof jacket

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Research and Development Organisation's (DRDO) Defence Materials and Stores Research and Development Establishment (DMSRDE), Kanpur has successfully developed the lightest bullet proof jacket in the country for protection against 7.62 x 54 R API (Level 6 of BIS 17051) ammunition, Defence Ministry has said. Recently, this bullet proof jacket was successfully tested at TBRL, Chandigarh as per BIS 17051-2018. This jacket is based upon new design approach, where novel material along with new processes has been used. The front Hard Armour Panel (HAP) of this jacket defeats multiple hits (06 shots) of 7.62 x 54 R API (Sniper rounds) in both ICW (In-conjunction with) and Standalone design. The ergonomically designed front HAP is made up of monolithic ceramic plate with polymer backing which enhances the wearability and comfort during the operation. The areal density of ICW Hard Armour Panel (HAP) and standalone HAP is less than 40 kg/m2 and 43 kg/m2 respectively.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Army Chief General Manoj Pandey said here on Wednesday evolution of technology has impacted warfare but technological advantage may just be reduced to a tactical level when it is taken away from the larger strategic context and regarded as the "sole driver" of success in a war. In his address at a seminar here, he also said technologies are emerging in new uncharted domains, and "revolutionising and establishing a 'new normal' in different fields". General Pandey further said technology has also emerged as the "new strategic arena of competition, driving geo-political power plays and is being leveraged for weaponisation of many domains, ranging from information to supply chains". The Army chief was addressing a gathering during a seminar on "Year of Technology Absorption: Empowering the Soldier" organised by a defence think-tank at Manekshaw Centre at Delhi Cantonment. Technology from a warfighting

## Technologies emerge as strategic arena of competition: Army Chief

perspective, has undergone significant evolution over the centuries, and has "impacted warfare in a profound manner," he said. General Pandey cited the examples of rifles, railroads, telegraphs and ironclad ships in the 19th-century wars; the machine gun, tank, aeroplane, aircraft carriers and atomic weapons in the 20th-century wars; to the niche technologies that have today permeated into the military domain. They "all highlight examples of how technologies change the face of wars and influence their outcomes," he said. History shows that armies that have managed to adopt and integrate new technologies have gained advantage on the battlefield and achieved success, he underlined. Infusion of technologies such as computers, radars, code-breaking and aircraft production by the Allies in World War II was instrumental



in securing victory for them, while in the early years of the War, it was Germany and Japan which leveraged their industrial and technological capacities to "accrue advantages of scale," over the Allies, the Army chief added. "On the other hand, technological advantage may just be reduced to a tactical level, when it is taken away from the larger strategic context and regarded as the

sole driver of success in war. Vietnam and Afghanistan are examples of the same," he asserted. "Therefore, understanding of new technologies, harnessing their potential and accruing strategic superiority -- is the essence of leveraging technology from a warfighting perspective," the Army chief said. The Indian Army is observing 2024 as the 'Year of Technology Absorption'. The scope of grey zone warfare too, has "enhanced" due to technological advancements. Consequent to these developments, the battle space has become "more complex, contested and lethal, and shall remain so in the future," the Army chief said. The impact of external dependency on critical components, supply chain disruptions and "weaponisation of denial regimes" came to the fore, during the pandemic and also from the lessons of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, he said. "We need to recognise that, even if we were to import some warfighting systems, no country will share the latest, advanced and critical technology. Being import-dependent for critical technologies hence entails the risk of remaining one technological cycle behind, in niche areas," the Army chief said. Therefore, the need to be self-reliant in warfighting platforms and systems and achieving self-sufficiency in critical technologies through indigenous research and development, is an "imperative," he added.



## India, Japan discuss developments in nuclear non proliferation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Top officials of India and Japan on Wednesday exchanged views on developments in the areas of disarmament and non-proliferation relating to nuclear, chemical and biological domains. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said the 10th Round of India-Japan Consultations on Disarmament, Non-Proliferation and Export Control was held in Tokyo. "The two sides exchanged views on developments in the areas of disarmament and non-proliferation relating to nuclear, chemical and biological domains, outer space security, non-proliferation issues, conventional weapons and export control," the ministry said in a statement. The Indian delegation was led by Muanpui Saiawi, Joint Secretary (Disarmament and International Security Affairs), Ministry of External Affairs, while the Japanese delegation was led by Katsuro Kitagawa, Director General for Disarmament, Non-proliferation and Science Department, it added.

## WHO for doubling efforts to beat challenges posed by malaria

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

On the eve of the World Malaria Day, the World Health Organisation (WHO) on Wednesday emphasised on the need for heightened focus on addressing the obstacles to health equity, gender equality and human rights in malaria responses. Saima Wazed, WHO Regional Director for South-East Asia, stressed on redoubling efforts to overcome challenges posed

by malaria and ensure all individuals, irrespective of their socio-economic status or geographical location, have access to prevention, diagnosis and treatment services for the disease. "Moreover, by leveraging digital technology, we can better understand the diverse health needs of populations, collect and analyse data and monitor progress in real-time, enabling us to identify and address health inequities through both proven

interventions and innovation in service delivery," Wazed said. "On World Malaria Day 2024, we unite under the theme 'Accelerating the fight against malaria for a more equitable world'," she said. This theme, which is in sync with this year's World Health Day theme -- "My Health, My Right" -- underscores the urgent need to address the stark inequities that persist in access to malaria prevention, detection and treatment services.



Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Anurag Thakur campaigning in a road show for the BJP Hyderabad candidate Madhavi Lok Sabha on Wednesday



# Campaigning ends for Friday Lok Sabha polls in Kerala

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

People across Kerala heaved a sigh of relief as the strenuous campaign for the Lok Sabha election to be held in the State came to an end by Wednesday evening. The Grand Finale of the campaign concluded by 6 pm on Wednesday and the State goes to the poll on Friday to elect 20 candidates as members of the Lok Sabha. The campaign was by and large peaceful except for bomb blasts in the district of Kannur which claimed the life of a local CPI(M) leader. According to the police, the bomb exploded while it was being assembled by the professional explosive experts under the party leadership. On Tuesday, the police seized a dozen 'steel bombs' stored secretly in a property

belonging to a supporter of the party. The last three days of the campaign saw the CPI(M), Congress and Muslim League unleashing a high pitch propaganda against Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his election rally speech delivered at Rajasthan. Starting from Mallikarjun Kharge, the AICC president to M M Mani, the CPI(M) MLA and leaders of the Muslim League termed Modi's speech as hate speech and declared that they would teach the Prime Minister a lesson after June 4. What stood out in the three weeks long campaign was the claims by the sitting MPs about the number of development programs and infrastructure development measures implemented by them during the last five years



and the BJP's State leadership had a hearty laugh. "There was no allegation that the Centre was showing discrimination to Kerala in allocation of funds for development projects," said P

Sujathan, veteran journalist and political observer. While the Congress leaders like V D Satheesan, M M Hassan, Ramesh Chennithala claimed that the UDF led by the Congress would sweep all

the 20 seats at stake, M V Govindan, the CPI(M) state secretary claimed that there was no doubt about the LDF's victory in any of the constituencies. If Govindan's claim is to be believed, the

Muslim League stronghold of Malappuram and Ponnani (popularly known as Kerala's Pakistan) would see the two constituencies ditching E T Mohammed Basheer and Abdussamad Samadani, an unlikely proposition. Though previous Lok Sabha polls were fought between the two fronts led by the CPI(M) and the Congress, what makes the 2024 polls unique is the challenge thrown at both the fronts by the BJP. There is a strong Narendra Modi wave in most constituencies though one may not be able to forecast whether this wave would turn into seats. If public perception is any indication, the BJP has emerged as a force to reckon with in four to five constituencies. Harikiran Muraleedharan, a young lawyer and keen follower of

the State's politics is of the view that the 19 April disruption of Thrissur Pooram at the instance of a CPI(M) MLA, a powerful minister in the Pinarayi Vijayan Government have played havoc with the prospectus of both the Congress and the CPI candidates. "Please remember that this district has two ministers and they failed miserably to ensure the smooth conduct of the Pooram. This has not gone down well with the devotees," said Harikiran. Sujathan, who has no love lost for the BJP, is of the view that there were seven constituencies which is witnessing tough fight between the three fronts. "In earlier elections, the BJP competed as also rans but not anymore. Don't be surprised

if the Hindutva party wins in two constituencies this time," he told The Pioneer. What is baffling the electorate in the State is the decision of the trio from New Delhi (Sitaram Yechury, Prakash and Brinda Karat) to call off their campaign meetings within two days and return to Delhi. "Either they are confident of a 20-0 win by the LDF or a dismal failure in the hustings. No polls in the State were complete without the presence of these three intelligentsia from national capital," said Sujathan. Mallikarjun Kharge, who was in the State on Wednesday for campaigning refused to reply to queries by reporters that who were the rivals of the Congress. "Better you ask the KPCC leaders," retorted the AICC chief.

## Congress wants to rob rights of Dalits, backward classes: Yogi



PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday alleged that Congress wants to rob the rights of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Backward Castes with its caste census. Addressing a press conference at the state BJP headquarters, Adityanath said the Congress and the INDIA bloc will tear the social fabric of the country with its caste census. Citing a 2006 speech by then prime minister Manmohan Singh, Adityanath said the Congress leader had said that Muslims had the first right on the country's resources. "Congress will conduct a survey of people's properties and then distribute it. They are making the caste census its basis," the chief minister said, claiming that the Congress has expressed such an intention in its manifesto.

"Congress's intention has always been to gain power by any means. They want power at the expense of the country. For this, they will bring in Talibani tendencies in India that will cause barbaric atrocities of women," he said. The Congress talks of implementing Muslim Personal Law and Sharia Law after coming back to power, Adityanath said. "Their (Congress) intentions are not good towards the country. It is trying to work as per the same old DNA which led to the partition of the country in 1947, due to which the country came in the grip of terrorism, extremism and separatism," he added. Adityanath claimed that implementing the recommendations of Justice Ranganath Misra commission during the Congress government had adverse consequences. "Under this, efforts began to take away the reservation

rights of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other backward classes which were given to members of a specific community. "The commission had recommended that out of the 27 per cent reservation given to the other backward classes, six per cent be given to the minority community," he said. Adityanath also claimed that malicious attempts were made even in the Sachar Committee report "to infiltrate" into the reservation for Dalits and Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and to forcibly give a part of it to the Muslim community. There was huge opposition to this at that time, he added. The chief minister claimed that in the last 10 years, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has worked towards all-round development on every front with full accountability and today the country was getting its benefits.

## 189 cases of major election violations booked in Karnataka, says EC

PTI ■ BENGALURU

As Karnataka gears for the first phase of Lok Sabha elections on April 26, the Election Commission on Wednesday said all the polling stations in the Bangalore Rural and Mysore constituencies will be webcast. As of now, a total of 189 cases have been booked against political parties or candidates for major violations under the Model Code of Conduct

(MCC), they said. Addressing a press conference, Karnataka Chief Electoral Officer Manoj Kumar Meena said 1.4 lakh polling officials will be on duty at the 30,602 polling stations across the 14 constituencies which are going for polls in the first phase on Friday. Besides them, 5,000 micro observers, 50,000 civil police personnel, 65 companies of Central Parliamentary Force



and State Armed Police force of other states will also be deployed for security at these polling stations, he said. "All the 2,829 polling stations

of Bangalore Rural parliamentary constituency will be 100 percent webcast. This is as per the request of our returning officers and observers; so we have given more than double central parliamentary force for the Bangalore Rural Constituency. Seven companies of central paramilitary forces have been inducted at the constituency since April 22," he said. The 14 segments facing polls

in the first phase are: Udupi-Chikmagalur, Hassan, Dakshina Kannada, Chitradurga, Tumkur, Mandya, Mysore, Chamarajanagar, Bangalore Rural, Bangalore North, Bangalore Central, Bangalore South, Chikkaballapur and Kolar. There are a total of 2,88,19,342 electors in these constituencies — 1,44,28,099 male, 1,43,88,176 female and 3,067 third gender.

## Akhilesh maintains suspense over his candidature from Kannauj seat

PTI ■ ETAWAH (UP)

Two days after the Samajwadi Party declared its candidate for the Kannauj parliamentary seat, SP chief Akhilesh Yadav on Wednesday stoked speculation that he might himself contest from the constituency. The Samajwadi Party (SP) has already declared Tej Pratap Yadav as its candidate from the seat for which nominations will start from April 25. When asked whether he will contest from the seat or Tej Pratap will remain the party's candidate, Yadav told reporters, "See, when there are nominations, you will get



to know. Maybe you will get to know before nominations also." When asked whether party workers of Kannauj wanted him to contest from the seat, Yadav said, "The question here is of historic victory from the seat. The BJP will become history in this election as people have made up their mind for INDIA bloc. People are going to vote

against the NDA. PDA (picchde, Dalit, alpsankhyak) will defeat the NDA this time." Tej Pratap, who has been made party candidate from Kannauj, was the SP MP from Mainpuri between 2014-2019. He is also the son-in-law of JD president Lalu Prasad Yadav and Akhilesh Yadav's nephew. Akhilesh had won from the Kannauj seat in 2000. Later, he represented the seat in 2004, 2009 and he left the seat after he became chief minister in 2012, and his wife Dimple Yadav won the by-election unopposed. Later, Dimple won from the seat in 2014 but she lost to BJP's Subrat Pathak in 2019.

## BJP veteran Yediyurappa challenges Congress to name PM candidate



PTI ■ TUMAKURU (KARNATAKA)

Veteran BJP leader B S Yediyurappa on Wednesday challenged the Congress to name its prime ministerial candidate and reveal the names of at least three to four constituencies in Karnataka where they will win in the Lok Sabha elections. He also asserted that his party along with alliance partner JD(S) will be victorious in all the 28 Lok Sabha constituencies in the state. Yediyurappa, member of BJP's Parliamentary Board and former Chief Minister, was speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the campaign for party candidate from Tumkur V Somanna. "Everyone knows about the cordial bonding between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and JD(S) patriarch and former PM H D Deve Gowda. As BJP and JD(S) are in alliance, they (Congress) have realised the alliance will win every seat with a huge margin, so Congress leaders are saying whatever they want," he said. "My question to Congress is — name your prime ministerial candidate, and secondly say the name of three to four constituencies where you will win. They are unable to reveal it so far. Defeat is certain for them. We (BJP-JD(S)) will win all the 28 seats," he added. A total of 28 Lok Sabha seats in Karnataka will go for polls in two phases. While 14 segments in the southern part of the state will vote on April 26, in the second phase covering

remaining constituencies, mostly northern districts, will go for election on May seven. Rejecting Congress' allegations that BJP on coming to power once again will change the Constitution, Yediyurappa termed it a "foolish statement." "No one can touch the Constitution written by Ambedkar. It is sacred and it needs to be saved and taken forward for future generations. Modi has also said the same thing. There is no value for such false propaganda," he said. Responding to a Congress leader's claim that for BJP, Modi is the only PM face, but for Congress that has democracy within-- any one can become the PM, Yediyurappa sarcastically said, "let them do it, we will see." Noting the situation in the state is "very good", Yediyurappa said, "we (BJP) are getting public support beyond our expectations, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's wave is everywhere... Our expectation is to win all the 28 Lok Sabha seats (along with JD(S)) in the state and I'm confident that we will be successful in it." In the Tumkur seat too, it is certain that Somanna will win and the question is about the victory margin, he said. Asked about current MP Muralathala Ambareesh, who recently joined the BJP, not campaigning in favour of JD(S) leader H D Kumaraswamy in Mandya Lok Sabha segment where he is contesting, the senior party leader said she has said she will campaign if called.

## Sampla will continue to support BJP, says Rupani

PTI ■ HOSHIARPUR

Senior BJP leader and former Gujarat chief minister Vijay Rupani on Wednesday met former MP Vijay Sampla, who was apparently upset after he was denied the party ticket from the Hoshiarpur (reserve) Lok Sabha constituency. It was the second visit of a senior party leader days after Punjab BJP chief Sunil Jakhar met Sampla. Sampla, the former Union minister, was apparently expecting the party ticket from Hoshiarpur but the BJP fielded Anita Som Parkash, the wife of sitting MP and Union Minister Som Parkash, from the constituency. Rupani, who is the BJP's Punjab in-charge, after the meeting said that he came here to energise the party workers for the Lok Sabha elections. He was accompanied by Jakhar, who had met Sampla on April 20. In response to a question, Rupani said Sampla is a senior and dedicated BJP member who has previously served as the state unit chief. He expressed confidence that Sampla will continue to support the BJP and play a crucial role in securing victory for the party candidate in the Hoshiarpur Lok Sabha seat. On the farmers opposing the BJP candidates in villages, Rupani stated that he has no such information.

## Deve Gowda slams Rahul over wealth redistribution promise

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda on Wednesday slammed Rahul Gandhi's "wealth redistribution promise", stating that only someone with no practical knowledge can speak like that. The 90-year-old JD(S) supremo ridiculed the Congress manifesto claiming that only a party that is sure of never coming to power can make as many promises. "The Congress has promised so many things in its manifesto that only a party that is very sure of never coming to power will promise so much," Gowda said at a press conference here. He claimed the Congress

wants to turn this country "upside down" and the promises made by it indicated that it wants to come to power "at any cost." "Rahul Gandhi wants to do a wealth survey and redistribute the wealth. Does he think he is a Maoist leader," Deve Gowda said. "Is he dreaming of a revolution? By talking about wealth redistribution, Rahul Gandhi has insulted and humiliated two Congress Prime Ministers who brought market reforms and increased the wealth of the nation," he added, recalling the contribution of P V Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh in economic liberalisation. Accusing Gandhi of indirectly trying to say that



what the two Congress Prime Ministers did was wrong, Gowda said, "He (Rahul Gandhi) has torn up their economic reforms like he had torn up an ordinance

(which sought to overturn the rule that disqualifies convicted MPs and MLAs issued by the then) Manmohan Singh (government)."

Picking up points from the Congress manifesto 'Nyay Patra', Gowda said, "Rahul Gandhi wants to give 30 lakh new central government jobs. I have run this country. There are only 40 lakh sanctioned jobs. How can he add 30 lakh more jobs overnight? How much will he pay these people? Where will he employ them?" He wondered whether Rahul Gandhi would make them lift operators in Government offices in four shifts. "Only someone with no practical knowledge can speak like this. P Chidambaram was the manifesto committee chairman. Does he agree with Rahul Gandhi's immature economic ideas," Gowda said.

## LS polls will mark rise of BJP in Punjab: Party leader Subhash Sharma

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

The Lok Sabha polls will mark the rise of the BJP in Punjab where the ruling AAP's "downfall" has begun, a senior BJP leader claimed on Wednesday. Punjab BJP general secretary Subhash Sharma said his party is getting immense support from people in the state for the elections polling for which will be held in the last phase on June 1. The BJP is contesting the Lok Sabha polls on its own for the first time since 1996. The Shiromani Akali Dal had walked out of the NDA in



2020 over the now-repealed farm laws. Addressing the media here, Punjab BJP leader Sharma said the party leadership will announce the candidates for remaining seats — Ferozepur,

Sangrur, Anandpur Sahib and Fatehgarh Sahib — this week. The BJP has already announced its candidates for nine Lok Sabha constituencies in Punjab. Sharma said despite propaganda and mudslinging by the rival parties, people of Punjab were supporting the BJP whole-heartedly. The BJP has emerged as a "big strength" in state politics, he said. The 2024 Lok Sabha election will mark the rise of the BJP in Punjab, Sharma said. "It will also show that the Aam Aadmi Party's downfall has begun in the state."

Replying to a question on farmers protesting against BJP candidates in the state, Sharma dubbed it as "politically motivated." "Some people and some organisations are holding protests," he said. The BJP is campaigning in a big way in villages and the party is getting immense support, he said. Notably, to register their protest over their unmet demands, farmers of Punjab have been holding protests against the BJP candidates and showing them black flags when they campaign for the Lok Sabha polls.

## Campaign ends for five Bihar Lok Sabha seats

PTI ■ PATNA

Campaigning ended on Wednesday for five Lok Sabha seats in Bihar where electors will decide the fate of 50 candidates in the second phase of polling on April 26. Leading the NDA charge, Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed a rally in Patna, a seat which is being contested by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's JD(U). Congress leader Rahul Gandhi addressed his first election meeting in Bihar at Bhagalpur, a seat the party is contesting after more than two decades.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Turncoats

Former Veep Venkaiah Naidu flags party-hopping, calls for strengthening anti-defection law

The pervasive trend of politicians of all hues switching parties, for better career prospects or in pursuit of election tickets especially ahead of Assembly or Lok Sabha polls, is nothing new. This phenomenon, commonly known as party-hopping, has now been flagged by former Vice-President Venkaiah Naidu as particularly damaging to our democracy. It also raises questions about the efficiency of the anti-defection law in curbing such practices. The law, enshrined in the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution, was introduced to deter elected representatives from switching allegiance to other political parties after being elected. The law aims to maintain stability and integrity within the political system by penalising defections and preserving the sanctity of electoral mandates. However, despite its existence, party-hopping remains a disturbing trend in Indian politics. Politicians often defect from their original party to join another for a ticket, ministerial position or personal ambitions. Additionally, the anti-defection law is limited in its scope and does not address the broader issues of political morality and ethics. Politicians often exploit legal loopholes and engage in prolonged legal battles to circumvent disqualification, thereby escaping accountability for their actions. This not only undermines the democratic process but also erodes public trust in the political system. However, the toothlessness of the anti-defection law and the failure to effectively address this issue reflect deeper systemic challenges within the political system.



So, why is the anti-defection law still toothless in addressing this issue? One of the primary reasons is the loophole in the law that allows for defection without disqualification under certain circumstances. The law permits defection if one-third or more of the members of a legislative party together decide to join another party, effectively legitimising mass defections. This provision has been exploited by political parties to engineer defections and destabilise rival Governments. Moreover, the anti-defection law lacks stringent enforcement mechanisms and timely interventions. While the law penalises individual defections, it does little to address the systemic factors that incentivise party-hopping, such as the allure of power, patronage politics and lack of internal democracy within parties. Furthermore, the anti-defection law is subject to political manipulation and selective application by ruling parties. To strengthen the anti-defection law and address the scourge of party-hopping, comprehensive reforms are necessary. This includes closing loopholes, imposing stricter penalties for defections, enhancing oversight mechanisms and promoting internal democracy within parties. There needs to be a concerted effort to foster a political culture based on principles of integrity, accountability and ethical conduct. Urgent reforms are needed to strengthen the law, uphold democratic principles and restore public trust in the integrity of the political process.

is the loophole in the law that allows for defection without disqualification under certain circumstances. The law permits defection if one-third or more of the members of a legislative party together decide to join another party, effectively legitimising mass defections. This provision has been exploited by political parties to engineer defections and destabilise rival Governments. Moreover, the anti-defection law lacks stringent enforcement mechanisms and timely interventions. While the law penalises individual defections, it does little to address the systemic factors that incentivise party-hopping, such as the allure of power, patronage politics and lack of internal democracy within parties. Furthermore, the anti-defection law is subject to political manipulation and selective application by ruling parties. To strengthen the anti-defection law and address the scourge of party-hopping, comprehensive reforms are necessary. This includes closing loopholes, imposing stricter penalties for defections, enhancing oversight mechanisms and promoting internal democracy within parties. There needs to be a concerted effort to foster a political culture based on principles of integrity, accountability and ethical conduct. Urgent reforms are needed to strengthen the law, uphold democratic principles and restore public trust in the integrity of the political process.

### PICTALK



Devotees carrying holy water from Ganga river wait in queues to perform 'puja' at Vindhyachal Dham, in Mirzapur

# Graft dominates election discourse

Mounting concerns over corruption and economic uncertainties are shaping the contours of the political contest



SHIVAJI SARKAR

Innocuous developments are unfolding amidst the growing fervour of the impending elections. Despite concerns of the RBI regarding inflation, escalating toll rates, and transportation costs, the nation finds itself amidst a politically charged atmosphere. Nonetheless, certain court rulings are adding intrigue to the evolving scenario.

In addition to the impact of electoral bonds, which have added colour to the political landscape and influenced prices, three other judgments are exerting significant influence. These include the Supreme Court's hearings on the Voters Verifiable Print Audit Trail (VVPAT), commonly known as the voting slip; a judgment regarding the denial of payment to Reliance Infra for the Delhi Airport Metro EPL; and the severe criticism of Patanjali's owners, who are contemners of court orders regarding their advertising. These developments are intensifying the dynamics of the electoral contest.

Not less interesting is the ED mounting fresh money laundering probe into the Chhattisgarh liquor scam and the ED linking Kerala CPM leaders to bank fraud. Could there be more arrests even after Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal and Kavita of BRS? Will prices take a backseat to politics and court rulings, or will they remain pressing concerns alongside these factors? Voters, though reticent, are far from oblivious. Whether attending rallies of prominent leaders or not, they are keenly aware of every development that influences their lifestyle. Conversations range from questioning why individuals with questionable backgrounds align themselves with the BJP to analysing defections from BJP to Congress factions. Both voters and party members evaluate the potential implications of each unfolding event, particularly returning officers of Chandigarh municipal polls and Himachal defections.

Corruption is not a non-issue. Arrests of select opposition State leaders on corruption charges by central investigative agencies such as CBI, ED, and income-tax department are unlikely to change



the general public perception that corruption pervades all political parties. Many view the pre-election arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal as a strategic move aimed at thwarting the popular politician's participation in the election campaign, rather than a genuine effort to address corruption.

It leads them to think that possibly price surges of many medicines and commodities or galloping rises in tolls have electoral bond connections. Former Vice President Venkaiah Naidu's recent remark on corruption involving all parties has given it a new dimension for the voters to rethink the extent of the impact of corruption. Amidst the dropping of corruption charges against former Union Civil Aviation Minister Praful Patel, allegedly implicated in an Rs 25,000-crore aircraft purchase scandal, questions arise as to why Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal faces arrest for his alleged involvement in a Rs 100 crore State liquor policy issue. People ponder whether the Air India sell-off was conducted transparently or mired in controversy. The action against Kejriwal has spurred opposition unity, evident from the overflowing rally at Delhi's Ramlila Ground. The recent Supreme Court decision concerning Reliance Infra's Delhi Airport Metro's EPL has prompted questions



THE COURT'S REJECTION OF PATANJALI'S APOLOGY IN A CONTEMPT CASE STEMMING FROM MISLEADING ADVERTISEMENTS CONTRAVENING ITS ORDER SERVES AS A STARK EXAMPLE OF HOW THE RULE OF LAW CAN RECTIFY CORRUPT PRACTICES

about corporate exploitation of public sector Delhi Metro. The Court overturned its own 2021 order directing Delhi Metro to pay Reliance Infra Rs 2782 crore, which had ballooned to Rs 7686 crore with accrued interest. Chief Justice DY Chandrachud, along with Justices R Gavai and Surya Kant, justified this drastic action, citing a 'miscarriage of justice' resulting in an 'undeserved windfall' for Reliance Infra. This ruling, following closely after the electoral bond controversy, has heightened voter scepticism. Had Delhi Metro been forced to pay, it could have burdened commuters with significantly higher fares.

Likewise, the court's rejection of Patanjali's apology in a contempt case, stemming from misleading advertisements contravening its order, serves as a stark example of how the rule of law can rectify corrupt practices, unveil false brand images, and maintain price stability. The court's warning to be prepared for consequences, along with its criticism of the Uttarakhand Government, underscores the power of legal intervention. Erratic power bills and arbitrary demands in UP and many States are also potential issues. Each of these cases, people realise, are instances of political linkages affecting price rises and profiteering. The glaring lapses on the part

of the executive and administration add to the woes of the people and the breakdown of the law-and-order machinery. The judiciary is uncovering corrupt practices that impact economic and administrative systems, consequently rising cost of living. Dainik Bhaskar has done a study on prices in Rajasthan. It finds that compared to 2019, prices of petrol, diesel and cooking gas increased by 42 per cent; food items cost 34 per cent more; medicine prices for diabetes and heart diseases rose by 54 per cent and people's dining outside has been reduced by 40 per cent. Pulses have become costlier by 20 per cent, vegetables by 233 per cent; taxi fares by 67 per cent, edible oil 100 per cent, and FMCG rose by 60 per cent. Salaries during the period for different classes have risen by 11 per cent to 26 per cent. Price concerns persist, with numerous unnecessary infra, road airport and metro projects shocking even political workers. However, this doesn't diminish the significance of religious fervour surrounding the Ram temple and Modi's assurances, which remain potent issues in certain regions, albeit overshadowed by economic factors and caste considerations. Amethi and Raebareli, however, remain in focus, more than Varanasi. (The author is a senior journalist; views are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### EMBRACING NANO INFLUENCE

Madam — Apropos the news article, "The rising power of nano influencers", published on April 24, this is my response. The rise of nano influencers marks a shift towards authenticity in social media marketing. These individuals, with modest followings of 1,000 to 10,000, offer brands a refreshing avenue to connect with consumers. Unlike macro and celebrity influencers, nano influencers embody relatability and community-driven engagement. Their appeal lies in their resemblance to ordinary individuals—friends, family and colleagues—eschewing the polished facades of traditional influencer marketing. This authenticity fosters genuine rapport and trust, essential commodities in an era inundated with impersonal ads.

Brands increasingly gravitate towards nano influencers for their cost-effectiveness and heightened engagement rates. Moreover, their endorsements carry the weight of peer recommendations, bolstering consumer confidence and purchase decisions. Yet, challenges persist. Identifying influencers aligned with brand values and managing logistics pose hurdles. Nonetheless, the allure of genuine connections propels brands towards embracing nano influence, fostering deeper, more meaningful consumer relationships amidst the din of commercialism.

Meera Iyer | Bhopal

### PHULE'S PROGRESSIVE LEGACY

Madam — Apropos the news article, "A timeless inspiration for India's reform agenda", published on April 24, this is my response. Jyotirao Phule's legacy as a pioneering social reformer resonates strongly in modern India. His relentless efforts to uplift marginalised communities, particularly women and Dalits, laid the groundwork for a more inclusive society. Phule's advocacy for education, gender equality and social justice remains as relevant today as it was in the 19th century. His establishment of the Satyashodhak

### Unveiling historical wounds



Apropos the news article, "Historic legal battle unfolds over Gyanvapi", published on April 24, this is my response. The ongoing legal battles concerning worship rights at Gyan Vapi, from Varanasi courts to the Supreme Court, resonate with ethical implications. Both sides' legal prowess seems even-

ly matched, yet the essence of the dispute is far from symmetric. One side defends worship rights, while the other asserts property ownership, blurring the lines of justice. The roots of this conflict delve deep into history, where Aurangzeb's divisive legacy still casts its shadow.

Reverend Sherring's accounts vividly depict the systematic desecration of Hindu temples under Mughal rule, highlighting a painful chapter often overlooked. The struggle over Gyan Vapi transcends legalities; it's a battle to reclaim dignity and heritage. As the judiciary delves into this sensitive matter, it must recognise the injustice endured, ensuring that this trial isn't merely legalistic but a reaffirmation of justice for a wounded community. History's scars must not dictate the present; it's time for healing and restoration.

Divya Menon | Chennai

Samaj provided a platform for empowerment and caste equality, echoing the need for grassroots movements in contemporary times.

Moreover, Phule's forward-thinking educational reforms, such as vocational training and multilingual education, mirror present-day policies like the New Education Policy, of 2020. Embracing Phule's vision means prioritising the inclusion of marginalised groups in all spheres of society, from politics to education. As we commemorate Phule's legacy, it's imperative to mainstream the periphery, ensuring every citizen's voice is heard and valued. By doing so, we honour Phule's spirit and move closer to realising his dream of a truly egalitarian society.

Kavita Mehra | Jaipur

### ETERNAL QUEST FOR LIBERATION

Madam — Apropos the news article, "The Mysteries of Afterlife", published on April 24, this is my response. The Upanishads, with their timeless wisdom, unravel the intricacies of existence

and the journey of the soul beyond mortal realms. Central to their discourse is the juxtaposition of the transient with the eternal, delineating the essence of the self (Atman) from the cycles of birth and death.

Karma, the architect of destiny, weaves the fabric of our lives, transcending the boundaries of time and space and shaping our journey through successive rebirths. Yet, amidst the karmic tapestry, lies the ultimate pursuit — moksha, liberation from the shackles of samsara, a merging with the divine essence. Through contemplation of these profound concepts, the Upanishads beckon us to introspect, to seek beyond the veneer of mortality, towards the realisation of our true nature and the attainment of eternal bliss. In embracing their teachings, we embark on a voyage of self-discovery, navigating the depths of consciousness towards the shores of enlightenment.

Naina Kapoor | Chandigarh

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## Nurture workplace safety and inclusivity

Effective workplace safety and inclusivity initiatives demand a holistic approach, addressing fundamental needs while nurturing higher aspirations

In the ever-changing landscape of workplace safety and inclusivity, this journey is quite often likened to Maslow's theory where foundational components set the stage for higher aspirations. Like Maslow's hierarchy that progresses from physiological needs to self-actualisation, our modern-day approach must deal with basic requirements before going up to more ambitious aspirations. The demand of today goes further than what organisations aspire for but rather addresses what is most urgent at the particular moment. Statistics indicate a diverse workforce composition inclusive of X-Gens, Millennials, Gen Zs and soon Generation Alpha. As this demographic shift occurs, are we ready? What kind of policies and practices should be considered for this new era?



**Safe Workplaces:** Organisations are increasingly investing in creating both physically and psychologically safe environments. Initiatives encompass Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) policies, which not only ensure workplace safety but also serve as a magnet for high-performing employees. ESG's emphasis on societal contributions resonates with individuals seeking purpose beyond monetary benefits.

**Respectful Workplaces:** Establishing psychologically safe environments mandates clear policies, including Codes of Business Conduct, Grievance Redressal protocols and Workplace Harassment guidelines (including Prevention of Sexual Harassment). Additionally, dedicated committees should address issues promptly while proactively working on prevention initiatives. Diversity and Inclusion: To remain relevant, organisations must adopt equal employment policies, refine communication practices, foster employee resource groups and establish Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) councils. Failure to prioritise these initiatives could deter potential candidates and partners, underscoring their importance in today's landscape. **Flexibility:** Sensitivity toward employees' diverse needs is paramount. Accommodations for special circumstances, accessibility for differently-abled individuals, gender-neutral facilities and amenities such as nursing spaces are essential. **Appreciation:** Cultivating a culture of appreciation is pivotal for fostering a sense of belonging among employees. Initiatives such as team bonding activities and addressing unconscious biases contribute significantly to creating supportive environments. This culture of appreciation propels individuals

toward self-actualisation, the pinnacle of Maslow's theory, counteracting toxicity and promoting inclusivity. **Training and Development:** Prioritising continuous training and development programs is essential to cultivate a culture of growth and inclusivity within organisations. By equipping employees with the necessary tools and resources to excel, companies demonstrate their unwavering commitment to fostering a supportive and inclusive workplace environment. **Accessibility and Accommodation:** Guaranteeing accessibility for all employees, irrespective of their physical capabilities, is imperative to foster inclusivity. This involves implementing measures such as installing wheelchair ramps, providing ergonomic workstations and offering assistive technologies to facilitate equal participation in the workplace. Additionally, organisations need to establish policies that address accommodation requests promptly and with utmost respect for employees' needs and preferences. (The writer is founder Kelp; views are personal)



SMITA SHETTY KAPOOR



## FIRST COLUMN NAVIGATING WORKPLACE ANXIETY

The pressure to consistently perform and deliver causes stress and anxiety



SAKSHI SETHI

In today's fast-paced and competitive work environments, it is not uncommon for employees to experience feelings of stress, worry and anxiety. While it is commonly associated with professional settings, at the same time it is important to recognise that similar dynamics even occur in educational environments, particularly at the school level. One of the primary contributors to workplace anxiety is the pressure to perform at a high level consistently. Employees often face demanding deadlines, complex projects and performance expectations that can create a sense of overwhelm and inadequacy. Workplace anxiety can manifest in various forms, ranging from mild nervousness before a presentation to debilitating panic attacks triggered by overwhelming workloads or toxic office dynamics. Left unaddressed, it can have detrimental effects on both individual well-being as well as organisational productivity. Various studies and researchers have found a negative correlation between workplace anxiety and job performance that indicates that higher levels of anxiety are associated with lower performance ratings across various job tasks and responsibilities which brings in a dire need for employers to understand the root causes of workplace anxiety and implement strategies to mitigate its impact. By understanding the root causes of anxiety and implementing strategies to address them, not only the schools but also the organisations can create supportive environments where all members of the community can thrive. The recent concept of 'Unhappy leaves' which isn't even a standard term in employment or HR terminology, could soon refer to situations where employees take leave from work due to dissatisfaction, stress or burnout caused by their job or work environment. Employees might take such leave to address their mental health, seek new opportunities or simply take a break from the stresses of their current job.



Addressing workplace anxiety requires a multi-faceted approach that involves both the individual experiencing the anxiety and the organisation. Today, an increasing number of employers are becoming aware of the adverse effects that stress can have on an employee's performance and are offering different programs to help employees manage stress in their lives. This approach is an initiative that will prove to increase workplace performance as well as employee loyalty and retention in the long run.

Employers must work to improve employee satisfaction through measures such as providing support for mental health, fostering a positive work environment, offering opportunities for professional development and addressing any concerns or grievances that their employees may have.

On an individual level, employees can take proactive steps to manage workplace anxiety and safeguard their well-being which may include practicing self-care activities such as regular exercise, mindfulness meditation and relaxation techniques to reduce stress levels. Setting boundaries, prioritising tasks and seeking social support from colleagues or professional networks can help alleviate feelings of anxiety and promote resilience in the face of workplace challenges. Organisations and schools can implement policies and practices that promote work-life balance, stress management and mental health awareness. Providing access to resources such as counselling services, Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) and wellness initiatives can equip employees with tools and strategies to cope with workplace anxiety proactively and foster positive working relationships for creating a psychologically healthy workplace.

Remember that overcoming workplace anxiety is a journey and it may take time to find what works best for you.

*(The writer is an educator; views are personal)*

# The democratic status of India under scanner



UTTAM CHAKRABORTY

The latest report from the V-Dem Institute categorises India as one of the 'worst autocracies' globally, significantly undermining its democratic reputation

The Gothenburg-based V-Dem Institute's report on Democracy Report 2024 claims that India has been reduced to the status of an "electoral autocracy" in 2018 and has further downgraded to "one of the worst autocracies". The report categorically found that almost all elements of democracy have worsened in more countries than improved and the report also singled out freedom of expression, fair elections and freedom of association/civil society as the three most affected elements of autocracy. There is ostensibly a clarion call for India to take on this global index based on arbitrary methods. The time has come to decolonise the democracy index and frame a domestic democracy index in the global area.

Suffice it to say, that this report based on faulty methods has shaken India's sentiment. The dichotomy is quite apparent that India has been measured in a biased manner in the scale. The flawed methodology and nonchalant attitude of people who helm the global index have put India on a declining global index. The global criticism has allegedly hurt India's sovereign ratings. The Indian Government publicly rejected this global democracy index, arguing that Delhi did not need the sermons. India has accused the rank and file of hypocrisy, calling them self-appointed guardians of the world who find it very difficult to stomach the fact that no one in India seeks their approval.

Democracy Index of the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) gives an overview of the State of democracy in 165 independent countries and two territories. This includes almost the entire world population and most of the world's States (micro States are not counted). Rated on a scale of 0-10, the democracy index is based on five categories: electoral process and pluralism, Government activity, political participation, political culture and civil liberties. Based on the results of various indicators in these categories, each country is classified into one of four regime types- "full democracy", "flawed democracy", "hybrid regime" or "authoritarian regime". Note that since 2015, the EIU has observed a decline in democratic standards in India. While democracy can be subjective, the EIU Democracy Index is based on five key indicators - the electoral process and pluralism, the functioning of Government, political participation, political culture and civil liberties. It is criticised that this democracy index sent out faulty information to the entire world.

According to the EIU Democracy Index, India's civil liberties score was lower than in 2014. Civil liberties are assessed by freedom of expression, freedom of speech, restrictions on the Internet, the independence of the judiciary of the State and the ability of citizens to address their complaints to citizens. The perceptions of human rights, perceptions of religious discrimination and whether the Government uses new risks and threats as an excuse to limit civil liberties. Since 2017, civil liberties scores have been in free fall. It was 7.35 in 2017 and 2018, then dropped to 6.76 in 2019 and bottomed out in 2020 at 5.59.

In 2021 and 2022, India's civil liberties score was 6.18 and by 2023 it had fallen again to 5.88, the score of Ghana, Thailand, Ecuador and Guatemala, all of which have lower Democracy index scores than India. While the civil liberties scores of developed countries have not improved over this peri-



THE LATEST REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS (RSF) REPORT SAYS INDIA'S RANKING IN THE 2023 WORLD PRESS FREEDOM INDEX HAS FALLEN TO 161 OUT OF 180 COUNTRIES. IN COMPARISON, PAKISTAN FARED BETTER IN TERMS OF MEDIA FREEDOM, RANKING 150TH, AN IMPROVEMENT FROM 157TH LAST YEAR

od, India's deterioration has meant that India no longer ranks above them in this parameter. Precisely, according to the report declining civil liberties have affected India's democracy scores. As a result, the Indian Government decided to create its framework for democracy ratings after it was downgraded by international groups and indices. It contacted the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), one of India's largest think tanks, which has partnered with the Government on several projects and initiatives.

According to the EIU Democracy Index, national elections will be held in 2024 in eight of the world's ten most populous countries - Bangladesh, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Pakistan, Russia and the United States. There are no choices in half of them for free and there is no lack of justice and many other prerequisites of democracy, such as freedom of speech and association. Not surprisingly, elections in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Russia - where opposition forces are subject to State repression - do not lead to regime change or democracy. Elections in the United States, Brazil, India and Indonesia - all classified as "flawed democracies" - at least offer the possibility of change, although they are also likely to see incumbents or anointed followers win. The EIU Democracy Index's position on India's elections is problematic in terms of the methodology used in the study.

The World Happiness Report is a publication that contains articles based on respondents' ratings of their own lives and national happiness ratings, which the report also correlates with various life (quality of) factors. In March 2024, Finland was declared the happiest country in the world seven times in a row. However, India is currently ranked 126 out of 146 countries with a happiness score of 4,054. India is lower in the happiness index than its neighbouring countries like Nepal, Bangladesh and China. The decline in happiness levels is closely linked to India's deepening mental health crisis, exacerbated by the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pan-

dem. However, one can understand the situation in China. Then China can be ahead of India in terms of the happiness index.

In the report, experts from fields such as economics, psychology, survey analysis and national statistics discuss how well-being measures can effectively measure national progress and address other related topics. Each report is structured into chapters that address the issue, delving deeper into topics related to happiness such as mental health, the tangible benefits of happiness, the role of ethics, political implications and links to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) approach to measuring subjective well-being and other international and national initiatives.

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) publishes a World Press Freedom Index every year. RSF is an international non-Governmental organisation whose mission is to protect and promote media freedom. It is headquartered in Paris and has consultative status with the United Nations. This annual World Press Freedom Index aims to "compare the level of press freedom for journalists and the media in 180 countries and territories" with the previous calendar year. The latest Reporters Without Borders (RSF) report says India's ranking in the 2023 World Press Freedom Index has fallen to 161 out of 180 countries. In comparison, Pakistan fared better in terms of media freedom, ranking 150th, an improvement from 157th last year. In 2022, India was ranked 150th on the scale. However, the press freedom index of India seems manufactured or could be based on flawed methodology. The history of Pakistani journalism has been turbulent, with periods of relative openness interspersed with severe restrictions on press freedom, especially during the military dictatorship.

Similarly, press freedom in Afghanistan has been dismal for years. Even two years after the fall of Kabul, we hear almost every day from Afghan journalists, both

domestic and in exile, about the hostile environment they face.

The Committee to Protect Journalists' attempt is to provide support and assistance to journalists in exile. Since 2021, Afghan journalists have become one of the largest groups of journalists in exile receiving annual grants from CPJ, contributing to a 227 per cent jump in the CPJ grants to journalists in exile over the three years 2020-2022. It received increasing reports of Afghan journalists in exile who were targeted in immigration-related incidents. Afghan journalists seeking asylum in Pakistan told us they have been arrested and blackmailed for overstaying their visas and many are living in hiding and in fear. Then how India can be put below Pakistan and Afghanistan's press freedom index on the scale of press freedom?

The importance of methodology in any study remains vital. Research methodology is a way of explaining how the researcher intends to conduct his research. It is a logical, systematic plan for solving a research problem.

It provides researchers with a road map to ensure that their research is systematic, rigorous and objective. Without a well-defined research methodology, it is difficult to obtain accurate and reliable results, draw meaningful conclusions and contribute to the data set. Research methodology lends legitimacy to the research and provides scientifically sound results. It also includes a detailed plan to help keep researchers on track, making the process smooth, efficient and manageable. The methodology of the researcher allows the reader to understand the approach and methods of concluding. However, the methodology used in the democracy index has invited numerous issues. At this juncture, when the entire world is conspiring against India in terms of the democracy index, India must decolonise the index.

*(The writer is an associate professor at the School of Management, Presidency University Bengaluru; views are personal)*

# Determining the limits of corruption, the Indian way

The recent raids on public functionaries and private individuals speak volumes about the deep roots of corruption still existing in Indian society

Whether it is the issue of electoral bonds, the liquor policy of Delhi or many others involving politicians, bureaucrats and even private individuals, perhaps after some hiatus, the ghost of corruption is back haunting the national discourse at present. People may have different perceptions and views on the prevalence of corruption in India depending upon their experiences, knowledge or even interests. Some may think that corruption is highly prevalent within the Government functionaries and in the political class, whereas others may opine that corruption of some form or the other exists in every sphere including in the private sector, even in small businesses. While there may



SIDDHARTH MISHRA

be some others who may justify corruption and yet others who vehemently criticize it. Does it mean that it is how one looks at the scenario that shapes the societal perspectives in this regard and if it is treated as true, does it require looking at the whole issue from different perspectives? Speaking honestly, corruption seems to be prevalent in all walks of life irrespective of whether it is the public or pri-

ate sector. There is some other form of corruption visible everywhere in this country. However, the form of corruption that usually becomes the talk of the town is the Governmental or the political class corruption. By that account, for that matter, should even a rickshaw puller or a vegetable or fruit vendor asking for more than the genuine price or overcharging not amount to corruption? Should not the boss, in a private enterprise, dominating, harassing or seeking undue favours from subordinates as a condition of promotion, be seen as corrupt? Ironically, the law does not seem to be treating such attitudes as, falling in the purview of, and, requiring to be prohibited by corruption law, though perhaps, the law

might be providing some other type of remedy in such cases. It is not just that the corruption is not confined to the Government sector, rather monetary is also not the only type of corruption that exists. Other forms of corruption do exist in this country that usually go unnoticed or unchecked. Arrogance in people in power, delaying even genuine work and harassing, or humiliating ordinary people unnecessarily should amount to corruption. Public functionaries take oaths before assuming office and vow to remain honest in their duties, they hold public offices as the trustees for people, who have faith in them and it is their primary duty to serve the common people

and refrain from breaching people's faith. Scores of people throughout the country face tremendous challenges, harassment and humiliation in getting work done in the Government departments at every level but public memory is short-lived and people easily forget such issues as time passes. There is no doubt that corruption is not in the interest of the society or the State. Therefore, to curb the menace of corruption, the subsequent Governments have adopted numerous legal measures including the enactment of laws and the establishment of enforcement machinery. However, as is evident from the recent incidents of corruption, all such measures do not seem to deter people from

involving in acts of corruption. Does it mean that the laws have failed to curb corruption or is it that the laws per se cannot provide a solution to this problem? Does one need to look beyond the legal measures to get rid of this menace that is eating into the vitals of this country? Can this country do away with the menace of corruption through law and its enforcement? If that was true, then this country would have become corruption-free long back. Does it mean that corruption inherently exists in ourselves and has acquired the status of an accepted norm and it is not possible to get rid of corruption in this country? The question that arises is whether corruption has become a way of life in this

country and whether should people now stop criticising corruption or people involved in it. Moreover, another disturbing aspect is whether involvement in corruption attaches any stigma or invites social backlash to the accused any longer. Doubts do exist about whether considerations of a person's involvement in corrupt practices weigh on people's psyche while making choices, especially political ones. Does this all not call for revisiting the whole gamut of social, educational and cultural moorings. The recent raids upon public functionaries and private individuals speak volumes of the deep roots of corruption still existing in Indian society. The author recalls a high-ranked IT officer, who was

once involved in the anti-corruption raids, telling him that one of the former bureaucrats who was raided for unaccounted assets, had illegally acquired numerous properties, most of which were not even ever seen or visited by him. That officer sadly quipped, 'how much corruption would or should one do and that there has to be a limit to corruption'. This Statement unfortunately and ironically seems to resonate with the general sentiment of the masses who seem to have painfully accepted administrative or political corruption as fait accompli, but wish that at least 'they must do it in limits'.

*(The author is a Sr Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Law, the University of Delhi; views are personal)*

# US Senate passes \$95.3 bn package for Ukraine, Israel

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The US Senate has voted overwhelmingly to provide a USD 95.3 billion aid package to Ukraine and Israel and to strengthen the security of America and its allies in the Indo-Pacific, including Taiwan.

The final approval on Tuesday night by the Senate ends months of uncertainty and delays about whether the US would continue to back Kyiv in its fight against Russian aggression.

The bill was passed in a bipartisan vote of 79-18.

The bill passed on Tuesday by the House of Representatives earlier now heads to the White House for President Joe Biden to sign it into law.

"I will sign this bill into law and address the American people as soon as it reaches my desk tomorrow so we can begin sending weapons and equipment to

Ukraine this week," Biden said in a statement.

"The need is urgent: for Ukraine, facing unrelenting bombardment from Russia; for Israel, which just faced unprecedented attacks from Iran; for refugees and those impacted by conflicts and natural disasters around the world, including in Gaza, Sudan, and Haiti; and for our partners seeking security and stability in the Indo-Pacific," he said.

The bill broadly has four parts: First, a USD 60.8 billion Ukraine aid measure, a USD 26.4 billion bill for Israel and humanitarian relief, a USD 8.1 billion package for Taiwan and other Indo-Pacific region allies and a "sidecar" bill dealing with issues ranging from TikTok to frozen Russian assets.

The bill gives USD 23.2 billion to replenish stocks of US weapons and equipment sent to Ukraine through presidential drawdown authority and to

expand defence industrial base and it allocates USD 13.8 billion in direct support for the Ukrainian military. It directs the president to transfer long-range tactical missiles, known as ATACMS, to the Ukrainian Army, unless the president determines that doing so would be detrimental to US security interests. The bill gives USD 5.4 billion to replenish stocks of US weapons and equipment delivered to Israel and to expand the defence industrial base, USD 5.2 billion for Iron Dome, David's Sling and Iron Beam defence systems and USD 2.4 billion for US Central Command operations in the Middle East.

It also allocates USD 9.2 billion for humanitarian assistance in Gaza, Haiti, Sudan, Ethiopia, Congo and other conflict zones. However, no funds can be transferred to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency; certification is required that no fund-

ing is diverted to Hamas.

On the Indo-Pacific the bill allocates USD 3.3 billion to develop US submarine infrastructure, including dry dock construction; USD 2 billion in assistance for Taiwan, the Philippines and other regional allies to purchase US weapons and equipment.

To replenish US stocks of weapons and equipment sent to the region and expand the defence industrial base USD 2 billion was allocated; USD 542 million for US Indo-Pacific Command operations and USD 250 million for World Bank International Development Association loans and grants. Among other things, the bill requires Chinese-owned ByteDance Ltd. to divest its stake in TikTok within one year of enactment or US app stores and internet hosting services would be barred from carrying the product.

# Pakistan & Iran agree to focus on ways to combat terrorism

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan and Iran have recognised the need to focus on combating terrorism and the need to develop a "united front" against the menace, the two countries said on Wednesday as Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi wrapped up his three-day maiden trip to the neighbouring nation.

Raisi's visit to Pakistan was the first by any head of state to Islamabad after the February 8 general election.

"Recognising that terrorism posed a common threat to regional peace and stability and presented a major impediment to the development of the region," the two neighbours agreed to "adopt a collaborative approach to confront this menace ... while fully upholding the principles of the UN Charter," a joint statement issued by the two countries said.

The Pakistan government has complained regularly to Iran and Afghanistan, with which it shares a border, to rein in the militants belonging to the outlawed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and other splinter groups who cross the border and carry out strikes in Pakistan.

The joint statement said, both sides "reaffirmed their commitment to the development of Afghanistan as a peaceful, united, sovereign and independent state, free from the threats of terrorism and drug trafficking." It further added that the two countries reaffirmed their willingness to "enhance cooperation on counter-terrorism and security and to develop a united front against terrorism." Noting the relevance of coordinating regional and international efforts to ensure security and stability in the region, both Pakistan and Iran "recognised that increasing participation of all strata of

Afghans in basic decision-making will lead to the strengthening of peace and stability in this country."

The statement further said that both sides "stressed the importance of peaceful settlement of disputes through dialogue and diplomacy."

Tehran and Islamabad also agreed to "expeditiously finalise" a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) as the two sides signed eight MoUs while vowing to increase trade to USD 10 billion in the coming years. Raisi said Tehran was ready to exchange its prowess in industry, science, and technology with Pakistan while showing his resolve to remove trade barriers between the two neighbours.

According to the Foreign Office, the two sides held productive talks during the visit. "The two sides held productive discussions and agreement to advance bilateral cooperation in multiple domains including

in trade, connectivity, energy and people-to-people contacts," the FO said in a statement.

Raisi arrived on Monday with a large delegation to promote ties about three months after the relationship suffered a setback due to tit-for-tat air strikes against each other, apparently to hit terrorists.

In Islamabad, he held detailed talks with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, President Asif Ali Zardari and Chief of Army Staff General Asim Munir focussing on key security and economic issues. The two sides agreed to eradicate the threat of terrorism which caused a fissure in ties in January when they resorted to air strikes against alleged militant hideouts on each other's soil. The two countries voiced their support for the people of Palestine as they demanded Israel to halt attacking Gaza. On Tuesday in Lahore, Raisi was received by Punjab chief minister Maryam Nawaz.

# Aus police arrest 7 teens for extremism, linked to recent stabbing of bishop

AP ■ SYDNEY

Australian police arrested seven teenagers accused of following a violent extremist ideology in raids across Sydney on Wednesday to protect the community from a potential attack, officials said. The seven, aged 15 to 17, were part of a network that included a 16-year-old boy accused of the stabbing of a bishop in a Sydney church on April 15, police said.

Five other teenagers were still being questioned late Wednesday by the Joint Counter-Terrorism Team, which includes federal and state police as well as the Australian Security Intelligence Organization, the nation's main domestic spy agency, and the New South Wales Crime Commission, which specialises in extremists and organised crime. More than 400 police officers executed 13 search warrants at properties across southwest Sydney because the suspects were considered an immediate threat, New South Wales Police Deputy Commissioner David Hudson said.

"We will allege that these individuals adhered to a religiously motivated, violent extremist ideology," Hudson told reporters.

"It was considered that the group ... posed an unacceptable risk and threat to the people of New South Wales, and our current purely investigative strategies could not adequately ensure public safety," Hudson added. Australian Federal Police Deputy Commissioner Krissy Barrett said investigators found no evidence of specific targets or timing of an intended "violent act".

She said the police operation was not linked to Anzac Day on Thursday, a public holiday when Australians remember their war dead.

It has been a potential target of extremists in the past. A 16-year-old was charged on Friday with committing a ter-

rorist act, a crime that carries a maximum penalty of life in prison, following the knife attack in which an Assyrian Orthodox bishop and priest were injured.

An Australian Federal Court judge on Wednesday extended an order banning social media platform X from showing videos of Bishop Mar Mari Emmanuel being repeatedly stabbed. Justice Geoffrey Kennett extended the ban, which the court put in place on Monday, until May 10. X, formerly called Twitter, announced last week it would fight in court Australian orders to take down posts relating to the attack. Australia's eSafety Commission, which describes itself as the world's first government agency dedicated to keeping people safer online, applied to the court for the temporary global ban.

Hoynes, a lawyer for X, told the judge on Wednesday that the bishop didn't want the video banned. Emmanuel recently signed an affidavit "stating that he is strongly of the view that the material should be available," Hoynes said.

Hoynes said the eSafety Commission was attempting to exercise "exorbitant jurisdiction" with "injunctions that effectively operate throughout the whole world".

Hoynes also said a court ordered ban on the video "might be futile".

"It appears that this material is now appearing in lots of different places," Hoynes added.

The commission's lawyer Christopher Tran said X had not complied with Monday's order. Hoynes said he did not "have instructions about that one way or the other".

X has not responded to The Associated Press's questions on Tuesday about the company's compliance with the order. X's owner, Elon Musk, has accused Australia of stifling free speech, while Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has labeled Musk an "arrogant billionaire".

# Columbia University progresses post-Gaza protester arrests

AP ■ NEW YORK

Columbia University said early Wednesday that it was making "important progress" with pro-Palestinian student protesters who set up a tent encampment and that it was extending a deadline to clear out, yet standoffs remained tense on the Ivy League campus in upper Manhattan.

Student protesters "have committed to dismantling and removing a significant number of tents," the university said in a statement. A smaller encampment remained on campus Wednesday morning. Across the country, protesters at California State Polytechnic University, Humboldt, some 480 kilometers north of San Francisco, started using furniture, tents, chains and zip ties to block the building's entrances Monday evening.

Both campuses are part of intensifying demonstrations over Israel's war with Hamas by university students demanding that schools cut financial ties to Israel and divest from companies that are enabling its



months-long conflict. Dozens have been arrested on charges of trespassing or disorderly conduct.

Columbia President Minouche Shafik in a statement Tuesday set a midnight deadline to reach an agreement with students to clear the encampment, or "we will have to consider alternative options." By around 3 a.m., the university said that there was "con-

structive dialogue" and that it will continue conversations for 48 hours.

The statement said student protesters "will ensure that those not affiliated with Columbia will leave. Only Columbia University students will be participating in the protest."

Student protesters also will comply with city fire department requirements and "have

taken steps to make the encampment welcome to all and have prohibited discriminatory or harassing language," the statement said.

The university's statement was released hours before US House Speaker Mike Johnson's trip to Columbia to visit with Jewish students and address antisemitism on college campuses.

Earlier on Tuesday night, police arrested more than 200 protesters blocking traffic during a non-college demonstration demanding a permanent ceasefire in Gaza at Grand Army Plaza in Brooklyn, near the home of Sen. Chuck Schumer. The protest was organized by the Jewish Voice for Peace on the second night of Passover, and protesters lay down a large circular banner depicting the food on a Seder plate.

At Cal Poly Humboldt, protesters chanted, "We are not afraid of you!" before officers in riot gear pushed into them at the building's entrance, video shows. Student Peyton McKinzie said she was walking on campus Monday when she saw police grabbing one

woman by the hair, and another student having their head bandaged for an injury.

"I think a lot of students are in shock about it," she said. Three students have been arrested, according to a statement from the school, which down the campus until Wednesday. Students had occupied a second campus building Tuesday.

Another encampment was set up Tuesday at the University of Rochester in upstate New York. Omar Darwesh, a Palestinian senior, said he has lost relatives to the war. "We're not calling for the destruction of Israel, we're never talking about threatening Jews - the focus is on us and what we need, and that's being treated like a human. We have to find a way to coexist," he told TV station WHCC.

University of Rochester officials said in a statement that the protesters must follow ground rules, including presenting university identification if asked. The upwelling of demonstrations has left universities struggling to balance campus safety with free speech rights.

Many long tolerated the protests, which largely demanded that schools condemn Israel's assault on Gaza and divest from companies that sell weapons to Israel. Now, universities are doling out more heavy-handed discipline, citing safety concerns as some Jewish students say criticism of Israel has veered into antisemitism.

Protests had been bubbling for months but kicked into a higher gear after more than 100 pro-Palestinian demonstrators who had camped out at Columbia were arrested Thursday.

By late Monday at New York University, police said 133 protesters were taken into custody and all had been released with summonses to appear in court on disorderly conduct charges. In Connecticut, police arrested 60 protesters, including 47 students, at Yale after they refused to leave an encampment on a plaza at the center of campus. Yale President Peter Salovey said protesters had declined an offer to end the demonstration and meet with trustees.

# China blasts US military aid to Taiwan

AP ■ BEIJING

China on Wednesday blasted the latest package of US military assistance to Taiwan on Wednesday, saying that such funding was pushing the self-governing island republic into a "dangerous situation." The US Senate late Tuesday passed USD 95 billion in war aid to Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan after months of delays and contentious debate over how involved the United States should be in foreign wars. China claims the entire island of Taiwan as its own territory and has threatened to take it by force if necessary.

The mainland's Taiwan Affairs Office said the aid "seriously violates" US commitments to China and "sends a wrong signal to the Taiwan independence separatist forces." Office spokesperson Zhu Fenglian added that Taiwan's ruling pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party, which won a third four-year presidential term in January, is willing to "become a pawn for external forces to use Taiwan to contain China, bringing Taiwan into a dangerous situation." On Tuesday, Taiwan's President-elect

Lai Ching-te told a visiting US Congressional delegation that the aid package would "strengthen the deterrence against authoritarianism in the West Pacific ally chain" and "help ensure peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and also boost confidence in the region."

The package has had broad congressional support since Biden first requested the money last summer. But congressional leaders had to navigate strong opposition from a growing number of conservatives who question US involvement in foreign wars and argue that Congress should be focused instead on the surge of migration at the US-Mexico border. The package covers a wide range of parts and services aimed at maintaining and upgrading Taiwan's military hardware. Separately, Taiwan has signed billions in contracts with the US for latest-generation F-16V fighter jets, M1 Abrams main battle tanks and the HIMARS rocket system, which the US has also supplied to Ukraine. Taiwan has also been expanding its own defense industry, building submarines

and trainer jets. Next month, it plans to commission its third and fourth domestically designed and built stealth corvettes to counter the Chinese navy as part of a strategy of asymmetrical warfare, in which a smaller force counters its larger opponent by using cutting edge or nonconventional tactics and weaponry. China launches daily incursions into waters and airspace around Taiwan by navy ships and warplanes. It has also sought to pick away Taiwan's few remaining formal diplomatic partners. However, only two People's Liberation Army Air Force planes and seven navy vessels were found operating in areas around Taiwan between Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday morning, possibly as a result of heavy rainstorms and low visibility overnight along the island's west coast facing China. At times of heightened tensions, China has launched dozens of such missions over a 24 hour period, many of them crossing the center line in the Taiwan Strait dividing the sides or entering Taiwan's air defense identification zone.

# Blast near ship off Yemen may mark new attack by Houthi rebels

AP ■ JERUSALEM

A ship near the strategic Bab el-Mandeb Strait saw an explosion in the distance Wednesday, marking what may be a new attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels through the crucial waterway for international trade. The explosion, reported by the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations centre, comes after a relative lull from the Houthis after they launched dozens of attacks on shipping in the region over Israel's ongoing war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

The Houthis did not immediately claim responsibility for the blast, but suspicion fell on the group as they've repeatedly targeted ships in the same area. It typically takes the Houthis several hours before acknowledging their assaults. The explosion happened some 130 km (80 miles) southeast of Djibouti in the

Gulf of Aden. "The master of a merchant vessel reports an explosion in the water a distance from the vessel," the UKMTO said. "Vessel and crew reported safe. Authorities are investigating." The private maritime security firm Ambray separately reported the apparent attack.

The Houthis have launched more than 50 attacks on shipping, seized one vessel and sank another since November, according to the US Maritime Administration.

Houthi attacks have dropped in recent weeks as the rebels have been targeted by a US-led airstrike campaign in Yemen and shipping through the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden has declined because of the threat. American officials have speculated that the rebels may be running out of weapons as a result of the US-led campaign against them and firing off drones and missiles steadily in the last months.

The Houthis have said they would continue their attacks until Israel ends its war in Gaza, which has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians there. The war began after Hamas-led militants attacked Israel on Oct 7, killing 1,200 people and taking some 250 others hostage.

The ships targeted by the Houthis largely have had little or no direct connection to Israel, the US or other nations involved in the war. The rebels have also fired missiles toward Israel, though they have largely fallen short or been intercepted.

The assaults on shipping have raised the profile of the Houthis, who are members of Islam's minority Shiite Zaydi sect, which ruled Yemen for 1,000 years until 1962. The group seized Sanaa, Yemen's capital, in late 2014. A Saudi-led coalition has been battling the group in a stalemated conflict since 2015.

# Microsoft, Amazon face scrutiny from UK competition watchdog

AP ■ LONDON

British competition regulators said Wednesday they'll scrutinise recent artificial intelligence deals by Microsoft and Amazon over concerns that the moves could thwart competition in the AI industry. The Competition and Markets Authority said it's looking into Microsoft's partnership with France's Mistral AI and the company's hiring of key staff from another startup, Inflection AI. The watchdog also separately announced that it's investigating Amazon's \$4 billion investment in San Francisco-based Anthropic.

Big Tech companies have been pouring money into generative AI startups amid growing public and business interest in the technology, but the investments have also drawn attention from

antitrust authorities. The UK watchdog said it was seeking comments from "interested third parties," before deciding whether to carry out an in-depth antitrust investigation.

"We will assess, objectively and impartially, whether each of these three deals fall within UK merger rules and, if they do, whether they have any impact on competition in the UK," the watchdog's executive director of mergers, Joel Bamford, said in a statement.

Microsoft said it will provide the watchdog with the information it needs to carry out its inquiries. "We remain confident that common business practices such as the hiring of talent or making a fractional investment in an AI start-up to promote competition and are not the same as a merger," the company said.

Microsoft last month hired Mustafa Suleyman, who co-founded Google's DeepMind AI research lab, to head up its consumer artificial intelligence business, along with the chief scientist and several top engineers and researchers from Inflection, his AI startup. Microsoft also teamed up earlier this year with Mistral, which has become France's AI darling after being founded only last year. That followed Microsoft's previous existing partnership with ChatGPT maker OpenAI, which is also facing scrutiny from the CMA. Amazon, meanwhile, has spent billions for a minority stake in Anthropic. The two companies are collaborating to develop so-called foundation models, which underpin the generative AI systems that have captured global attention.

# Ex-Japanese PM Taro Aso meets Trump

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Ex-Japanese prime minister Taro Aso has met former president Donald Trump and both the leaders discussed the enduring importance of the US-Japan alliance to their physical and economic security in the strategic Indo-Pacific region.

Aso, vice president of Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party, met Trump on Tuesday at the Trump Tower in Manhattan. Both the leaders discussed the enduring importance of the US-Japan alliance to both countries' physical and economic security and stability in the Indo-Pacific, according to a statement issued by the Trump Campaign on the meeting with the 83-year-old visiting Japanese leader. "They also discussed challenges posed by China and



North Korea. President Trump praised Japan's increased defence spending," the press release said after the meeting. "He's a highly respected man in

need of the Republican Party in the 2024 US presidential race, told reporters in New York. The Trump-Aso meeting comes after US President Joe Biden hosted Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida earlier this month at the White House for a state visit, during which the president touted the US-Japan alliance as being "stronger than it's ever been" and announced new plans for military cooperation with the country. The meeting between Trump and Aso took place after the former president's appearance in court for his hush money trial. Trump has in recent weeks increasingly met with foreign leaders, who have sought to bolster ties as polls continue to show a tight race to the White House between him and President Biden when the elections take place in November.

# Smoke seen as ANA flight carrying 200 lands safely

Smoke was seen coming from an All Nippon Airways plane as it landed safely at Shin Chitose airport in northern Japan on Wednesday, public broadcaster NHK reported. The ANA flight from Tokyo was carrying about 200 people and no injuries were reported, NHK said. The smoke, coming from the wing area, subsided when the engines stopped, it said. In January, a Japan Airlines flight and a coast guard plane collided and burst into flames at Tokyo's Haneda Airport. All 379 passengers and crew members were evacuated from the JAL plane and survived.

# Blinken begins key China visit

## Tensions rise over new US foreign aid bill

AP ■ SHANGHAI

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has begun a critical trip to China armed with a strengthened diplomatic hand following Senate approval of a foreign aid package that will provide billions of dollars in assistance to Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan as well as force TikTok's China-based parent company to sell the social media platform - all areas of contention between Washington and Beijing.

Blinken arrived in Shanghai on Wednesday just hours after the Senate vote on the long-stalled legislation and shortly before President Joe Biden is expected to sign it into law to demonstrate U.S. resolve in defending its allies and partners. Passage of the bill will add further complications to an already complex relationship that has been strained by disagreements over numerous global and regional disputes.

Still, the fact that Blinken is making the trip - shortly after a conversation between Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping, a similar visit to China by Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and a call between the U.S. and Chinese defense chiefs - is a sign the two sides are at least willing to discuss their differences.

Of primary interest to China, the bill sets aside \$8 billion to counter Chinese threats in Taiwan and the broader Indo-Pacific and gives China's ByteDance nine months to sell TikTok with a possible three-month extension if a sale is in progress. China has railed against U.S. assistance to Taiwan, which it regards as a renegade province, and immediately condemned the move as a dangerous provocation. It also strongly opposes efforts to force TikTok's sale.

The bill also allots \$26 billion in wartime assistance to Israel and humanitarian relief to Palestinians in Gaza, and \$61 billion for Ukraine to defend itself from Russia's invasion. The Biden administration has been disappointed in China's response to the war in Gaza and has complained loudly that Chinese support for Russia's military-industrial sector has allowed Moscow to subvert Western sanctions and ramp up attacks on Ukraine.

Even before Blinken landed in Shanghai - where he will have meetings on Thursday before traveling to Beijing - China's Taiwan Affairs Office slammed the assistance to Taipei, saying it "seriously violates" U.S. commitments to China, "sends a wrong signal to the Taiwan independence separatist forces" and pushes the self-governing island republic into a "dangerous situation."

China and the United States are the major players in the Indo-Pacific and Washington has become increasingly alarmed by Beijing's growing aggressiveness in recent years toward Taiwan and Southeast Asian countries with which it has significant territorial and maritime disputes in the South China Sea.

The U.S. has strongly condemned Chinese military exercises threatening Taiwan, which Beijing regards as a renegade province and has vowed to reunify with the mainland by force if necessary. Successive U.S. administrations have steadily boosted military support and sales for Taiwan, much to Chinese anger.

A senior State Department official said last week that Blinken would "underscore, both in private and public, America's abiding interest in maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait. We think that is vitally important for the region and the world."

In the South China Sea, the U.S. and others have become increasingly concerned by provocative Chinese actions in and around disputed areas.

In particular, the U.S. has voiced objections to what it says are Chinese attempts to thwart legitimate maritime activities by others in the sea, notably the Philippines and Vietnam. That was a major topic of concern this month when Biden held a three-way summit with the prime minister of Japan and the president of the Philippines.

On Ukraine, which U.S. officials say will be a primary topic of conversation during Blinken's visit, the Biden administration said that Chinese support has allowed Russia to largely reconstitute its defense industrial base, affecting not only the war in Ukraine but posing a threat to broader European security.

# N Korea sends delegation to Iran

AP ■ SEOUL

A high-level North Korean economic delegation was on its way to Iran, the North's state media said Wednesday, for what would be the two countries' first known talks since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Embracing the idea of a "new Cold War," North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is pushing to build up cooperation with countries confronting the United States, as his intensified weapons tests prompted the US and South Korea to expand their military drills. Pyongyang's delegation led by Yun Jung Ho, North Korea's minister of external economic relations, flew out Tuesday for the trip to Iran, official Korean Central News Agency said Wednesday. State media did not immediately provide further details.

Pyongyang and Tehran are among the few governments in the world that support Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine, and both have been accused of providing Russia with military equip-

ment. The last known time North Korea sent senior officials to Iran was in August 2019, when a group led by Pak Chol Min, vice chair of Pyongyang's rubber-stamp parliament, made a weeklong visit. The two countries had active diplomatic exchanges until North Korea sealed its borders in an effort to stave off the pandemic, before a cautious reopening in 2023. South Korea's Unification Ministry, which handles affairs with the North, did not immediately comment on Yun's visit to Iran. North Korea has made efforts for months to boost the visibility of its ties with Russia and China as Kim attempts to break out of diplomatic isolation and join a united front against the US.

In 2023, Kim visited Russia's Far East for a rare summit with Putin, which highlighted the countries' expanding military cooperation, including the North's alleged transfers of artillery shells, missiles, and other munitions to Russia. Earlier this month, Kim hosted top Chinese official Zhao

Leji, who heads the ceremonial parliament and ranks third in the ruling Communist Party hierarchy. It was the highest-level meeting between the countries in years. On Wednesday, Kim Yo Jong, the North Korean leader's powerful sister, slammed the latest rounds of US-South Korean joint military drills and insisted that the allies will never break the North's determination to build up "our overwhelming and most powerful military muscle." The statement comes a week after US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield called for the international community to be alert to the possibility of military cooperation between North Korea, Iran and Russia. Iran has been accused of providing drones to Russia for use in the war against Ukraine. "We are concerned about ... the Iranians providing weapons to the Russians and the Russians also supporting efforts to help (North Korea) expand their own research into developing weapons."

# Ukrainian officials thank US for its latest military aid

AP ■ KYIV

Ukrainian officials on Wednesday expressed thanks for a fresh batch of US military aid that threw Kyiv's armed forces a lifeline in their more than two-year war with Russia, even though the vital new supplies aren't expected to have an immediate impact on the battlefield.

Ukrainian troops have faced acute shortages of shells and air defense systems as political quarrels in Washington held up the aid for months, allowing the Kremlin's forces to edge forward in some parts of eastern Ukraine by sheer weight of troop numbers and firepower in what has largely become a war of attrition. The US decision came as the Kremlin's army extended its bombardment of the Kharkiv region and Ukrainian long-range

drones struck more fuel and energy facilities inside Russia.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy thanked the US Senate for approving the \$61 billion aid package late Tuesday.

"Ukraine's long-range capabilities, artillery and air defence are extremely important tools for the quick restoration of a just peace," Zelenskyy said on the social platform X, referring to the aid Kyiv expects to receive in the coming weeks and months. Two Russian S-300 missiles struck Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city near the northeastern border with Russia, during the night, and another two hit the Kharkiv region town of Zolochiv, local officials said. They reported no casualties. Another missile hit the southern city of Odesa, injuring one woman, Mayor Hennadii Trukhanov said.

# Nepal Pres seeks Qatar Emir's aid for student held by Hamas

AP ■ KATHMANDU

Nepal President Ram Chandra Poudel has sought the help of Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani to secure the safe release of a Nepali student held hostage since October by the Hamas in the Gaza Strip, an official said on Wednesday.

The emir on Tuesday called on President Poudel at the Shital Niwas where the two leaders discussed matters related to bilateral interests and diplomatic relations, according to a statement issued by the President's Office.

On the occasion, President Poudel requested the emir to help secure the release of Bipin Joshi, who was taken hostage by Hamas during an attack against Israel in October last year, said Kiran Pokharel, press advisor to the president. "Sheikh Tamim assured the president that he would take necessary initiative for the release of the Nepali student," Pokharel told PTI. The emir of Qatar said that he had earlier also taken the initiative for the same. Joshi was among 17 Nepali stu-

dents pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Agriculture at Sudur Paschim University who had gone to Israel under an 11-month learn and earn programme. During the Hamas attack on southern Israel in October, 10 Nepalese students were killed, and six injured while Joshi was abducted and taken to Gaza.

The two sides also discussed the issue of migrant workers' conditions in the Gulf state, an official said.

On Sunday, New York-based Human Rights Watch called on Qatar, Nepal and Bangladesh to prioritise labour protection for migrant workers during the emir's visit.

Qatar hosts about 400,000 Nepali workers, mostly in construction and manual labour. Concerns about working in extreme heat in Qatar - that could reach over 40 degrees Celsius (104 F) - inadequate living facilities and abuse have risen in recent years.

"Both leaders expressed happiness over the cordial relations subsisting between the two countries and agreed to further enhancing bilateral relations and cooperation for the mutu-



al benefit of the two countries and peoples," according to a press release issued by the Foreign Ministry. Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Narayan Kaji Shrestha, Minister for Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation Shakti Bahadur Basnet and other officials were also present at the delegation-level meeting. On Wednesday, Sheikh Tamim met Nepal Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' and discussed the regional and international issues of common interest as well as ways to enhance bilateral cooperation as the two sides inked eight agreements. Sheikh Tamim, who arrived here on a two-day visit to Nepal on Tuesday, met Prachanda at the Soaltee Hotel where the two leaders discussed the whole gamut of bilateral relationships to expand and deepen their cooperation for mutual benefit, according to the prime minister's office. Prime Minister Prachanda welcomed the emir and the accompanying delegation, highlighting that the emir is the first Arab leader to visit Nepal, which reflects the depth of

relations between the two countries.

On his part, the emir expressed his thanks to Nepal, its leaders and its people for the warm reception and hospitality.

He said he discussed with President Poudel and Prime Minister Prachanda about developing bilateral economic relations and strengthening them with various partnerships that raise bilateral cooperation to the desired level.

He also praised the Nepali community residing in Qatar, and its contribution to various development fields in the Gulf country.

During the meeting, the two sides also discussed aspects of cooperation between the two friendly countries, ways to enhance and develop them and exchanged views on the most prominent regional and international issues of common interest.

Following the talks, both leaders witnessed the signing ceremony of bilateral agreements and Memorandums of Understanding. Six agreements are at the government level while the other two are related to the private sector.

"The signing of these documents has paved the way for further enhancing cooperation and collaboration between the two countries on important areas," according to the Foreign Ministry. The deals include a MoU for cooperation in the field of education, higher education and scientific research, an MoU for cooperation between the Public Prosecution in Qatar and the Office of the Attorney General in Nepal, and an MoU for cooperation in the field of youth and sports.

Later, Prime Minister Prachanda hosted a luncheon in honour of Sheikh Tamim which was attended by his delegation members and dignitaries from Nepal.

The emir left Nepal in the evening after successfully concluding the two-day visit. Nepal government conferred the highest honour to the Qatar Emir during his less than 24-hour stay in Kathmandu amidst tight security.

The Nepali government declared a public holiday on Tuesday in honour of the emir's visit, the first high-level trip to Nepal from the Gulf nation.

# Pak docs advise 'gastroenterology review' to Imran's wife Bushra Bibi

Islamabad (PTI): A three-member medical team from a top institute has advised incarcerated former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan's wife Bushra Bibi to get a "gastroenterology review" done to assess any underlying medical conditions related to her health issues, according to a media report. The advice from the doctors of the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) came following their visit to the former first lady's home for a medical examination after she complained of acidity and chest pain, Geo News reported on Wednesday. Bushra Bibi's medical check-up was conducted by the doctors at her Bani Gala residence. The residence has been converted into a sub-jail for the former prime minister's wife. Bushra Bibi, convicted in two different cases, is being held at the Bani Gala home since the couple was sentenced in the 'un-Islamic nikah' case in February. Dr Bushra Liaquat, Dr Hira and Dr Sidra - a cardiologist - examined Khan's spouse, suggesting she make changes in her diet and lifestyle, the report quoted sources as saying. The team of doctors, the sources said, visited Bani Gala Monday night at 11 pm to examine Khan's wife following her health concerns. They also advised her "gastroenterology review." The team remained at Bani Gala for at least 75 minutes to conduct the medical examination. Last week, a comprehensive medical evaluation of Bushra Bibi was performed under the observation of Khan's family physician, while the doctors at a private hospital declared Bushra Bibi, the former first lady, to be in good health. The former first lady stayed at a private hospital in Islamabad for six hours for diagnostic tests, including endoscopy, but refused to undergo a blood test and did not provide a blood sample, sources told Geo News.



Foreign Secretary Lord David Cameron visits the National Carpet Museum in Ashgabat in Turkmenistan during his five day visit to Central Asia, on Wednesday. AP/PTI

# Indonesia declares Subianto president-elect after court rejects rivals' appeal

AP ■ JAKARTA

Indonesia's electoral commission formally declared Prabowo Subianto president-elect in a ceremony on Wednesday, after the country's highest court rejected challenges to his landslide victory lodged by two losing presidential candidates.

Subianto, who is currently defense minister, won the election with 58.6 per cent of the votes, or more than 96 million ballots, more than twice the amount received by either of the other two candidates. But his rivals alleged that his victory had depended on large-scale fraud and widespread state interference. Authorities blocked streets leading to the General Election Commission compound, where more than 4,200 police and soldiers were deployed. Wearing matching long-sleeved



white shirts, Subianto and vice president elect Gibran Rakabuming Raka waved to their supporters as they arrived at the building. "The race has finished ... the tough contest, with sometimes heated debates, is over," Subianto said during the ceremony, attended by the country's political elite, including rival candidate Anies Baswedan and his running mate Muhaimin

Iskandar. "And now our people demand that political leaders must work together and collaborate for the people's welfare and to eliminate poverty and corruption in Indonesia," Subianto said. Subianto will take office in October, succeeding the popular Joko Widodo, the country's first president from outside the Jakarta elite.

The General Election Commission certified the election results on March 20, but the formal declaration ceremony was put on hold following legal challenges from rival candidates, former Jakarta Gov Anies Baswedan and former Central Java Gov Ganjar Pranowo, who sought to annul the result and demand a revote. They also alleged nepotism, challenging the candidacy of outgoing President Joko Widodo's eldest son, Raka, as Subianto's running mate. Baswedan and Pranowo argued

that Raka, 37, should have been disqualified because the minimum age for candidates is 40, and they asked the court to bar him from a revote. Before the election, Raka was granted a controversial exception to that requirement by the Constitutional Court, which was then led by Anwar Usman, Widodo's brother-in-law. Usman was later forced to resign as chief justice for failing to recuse himself.

In a 5-to-3 decision, the Constitutional Court rejected the arguments on Monday, saying the legal teams of the losing candidates had failed to prove allegations that Subianto's victory was the result of widespread fraud. That verdict cannot be appealed. The case was decided by eight justices instead of the full nine-member court because Usman, who is still on the court as an associate justice, was required to recuse himself.

# Muizzu further consolidates position after six independents join his party

PTI ■ MALE

President Mohamed Muizzu and his People's National Congress on Wednesday further consolidated their position in Parliament with six independent candidates, elected in Sunday's polls, joining the ruling party. The pro-China Maldivian president led the People's National Congress (PNC) to win a landslide 66 out of 93 seats in parliament and its coalition partners Maldives National Party (MNP) and Maldives Development Alliance (MDA) won one and two seats, respectively. The six independent members joined the PNC at a function attended by President Muizzu, who is also the President of the party. With the addition of the



strong endorsement of his pro-Beijing foreign policy, as both India and China closely watched the outcome of the polls in the strategically-located archipelago nation in the Indian Ocean. According to the news portal Sun.mv, a spokesperson from the PNC confirmed on Wednesday that six independent candidates joined the PNC on Tuesday. The MP-elects, who signed with PNC on Tuesday include former party members who lost the PNC primaries held in January. They later ran in the elections as independent candidates, with the government backing their candidacy over that of the ruling party's own candidates, the report said. Meanwhile, Hassan Zareer, the

incumbent Mathiveri MP, won the 2019 elections on a ticket from the main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP). But he, along with 13 other lawmakers from MDP, defected to PNC after MDP's Ibrahim Mohamed Solih lost re-election, the portal said. In this year's polls, Zareer ran for re-election as an independent candidate, but with the government's backing. The move by the six independent MP-elects to join PNC comes after the MDP-majority Parliament passed an anti-defection bill on April 1. The bill, which stipulates that parliamentarians will lose their seat for floor crossing, was signed into law by President Dr Mohamed Muizzu last week, it added.

# Russian priest who held Navalny's memorial service suspended by Moscow church

AP ■ MOSCOW

A priest who oversaw a memorial for late Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny has been suspended for three years by the head of the country's Orthodox Church. Dmitry Sazonov held a memorial service by Navalny's grave in Moscow on March 26 to mark 40 days since the politician's death, an important ritual within Russian Orthodox tradition. An order published Tuesday on the Moscow diocese website publicly demoted Sazonov from his position as priest to that of a psalm-reader and stripped him of the right to give blessings or to wear a cassock for the next three years. He was also transferred to another church within the capital. No reason was given for the decision, which was

signed by Patriarch Kirill, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church and a key ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin. Navalny died suddenly on Feb 16 in the remote Arctic penal colony where he had been serving a 19-year sentence on extremism charges widely seen as politically motivated. The cause of Navalny's death remains unexplained, although the politician's allies have blamed the Kremlin for his demise. Russian authorities initially refused to release Navalny's body, citing the need for further investigations. The politician's team later said that they had struggled to find a hearse to transport Navalny's body after funeral directors had received threats from unknown individuals. Sazonov was among the clergymen who previously

signed a public letter calling for Navalny's remains to be returned to his family. During his more than two decades in power, Putin has massively boosted the Russian Orthodox Church's standing, increasing its prestige after decades of oppression or indifference under Soviet leaders.

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# India pharma exports rise 10 per cent in FY24

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The country's drugs and pharmaceuticals exports increased 9.67 per cent year-on-year to USD 27.9 billion in 2023-24, even as the total exports dipped by 3 per cent in the last fiscal.

According to the commerce ministry data, pharma exports in March grew by 12.73 per cent to USD 2.8 billion.

In 2022-23, the exports stood at USD 25.4 billion.

The top five export markets, for the sector during the last fiscal, are the US, the UK, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, South Africa and Brazil.

The US accounts for over 31 per cent of India's total pharma exports, followed by the UK and Netherlands (about 3 per cent each).

In 2023-24, the outbound shipments also entered new geographies like Montenegro, South Sudan, Chad, Comoros, Brunei, Latvia, Ireland, Chad, Sweden, Haiti and Ethiopia.

An industry expert said that



increasing market opportunities and healthy demand in countries like the US are helping exports to record healthy growth rates month after month. Experts have said that India's pharmaceutical business may exceed USD 130 billion by 2030, supported by expanding market opportunities and heightened demand in the overseas markets. The business stood at over USD 50 billion for the 2022-23. On average, India exports

pharma products worth USD 2-3 billion every month. India's pharmaceutical industry is the third largest by volume and the 13th largest by value in the world, producing more than 60,000 generic drugs across 60 therapeutic categories. The government has rolled out two production-linked incentive (PLI) schemes to promote domestic manufacturing of key pharmaceutical ingredients and generic medicines.

# Indian IT sector staring at second straight year of muted revenue growth: Crisil

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Indian IT services sector is staring at a second consecutive year of muted revenue growth due to modest increase in tech spends in Europe and the US, a domestic rating agency said on Wednesday.

Crisil Ratings said it expects the sector to grow at 5-7 per cent in FY25, after a growth of 6 per cent estimated to have been achieved in FY24. The overall industry size is pegged at USD 250 billion and it creates over 50 lakh direct jobs. "The slowdown in technology spend will continue this fiscal, weighing on the revenue growth of IT service providers," said Aditya Jhaver, director at Crisil.

The industry is, however, expected to sustain in the key metric of profitability, as the operating profit margins will be stable at 22-23 per cent, the agency said, attributing it to prudent management of employee costs.

Crisil said the sectoral revenues achieved a compounded annual growth rate of 12 per cent for the decade through FY24.

High interest rates and



economic slowdown in client markets led to a modest single-digit growth in tech spends by companies in the banking, financial services and insurance (BFSI), retail, technology and communications sectors in FY24, the agency said. It said these four sectors account for nearly two-thirds of the industry's revenues. Jhaver said revenue from BFSI and retail segments will continue to be a drag with

subdued growth of 4-5 per cent in FY25. Manufacturing and healthcare, which contribute a tenth of the revenue, were the only bright spots and continued double-digit growth in tech spend given the focus on process automation and research and development-based analytics, especially in healthcare. As revenue growth remained subdued, IT service companies pulled back on

addition of fresh talent, resulting in headcount reductions by 4 per cent in 2023 by top 12 companies.

This, along with the decline in attrition to 13 per cent as of December 2023 from the high of 20 per cent in FY23 provided a breather by limiting higher-cost replacement hiring during FY24, it said.

Associate director Joanne Gonsalves said the ratings company expects IT service providers to remain "cautious" on fresh hiring in FY25 too, which will maintain employee utilisation at a healthy level of ~85 per cent. Continued healthy cash generation, strong balance sheets and sizeable cash surplus will keep the credit quality of IT service providers stable, the rating agency said.

Players will continue to eye acquisitions, especially small and mid-sized opportunities that could enhance their product baskets and increase digital capabilities, it said.

An appreciation in the rupee value or sustained delay in economic revival in key markets amid ongoing geopolitical conflicts could pose downside risks, it added.

# M&A deal value surged 60 per cent: PwC India

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Merger and acquisition (M&A) deal value soared by 60 per cent to USD 19.6 billion in January-March 2024, while that of private equity (PE) experienced a slight dip, according to a PwC India report.

With 455 deals amounting to USD 25.6 billion disclosed value, the first quarter of 2024 showcases a 24 per cent rise in deal volume compared to the fourth quarter of calendar year 2023 - marking a notable resurgence, as per PwC India report 'Deals at a glance'.

"This signals a shift from the declining trend observed throughout 2023," it added. As per the report, there were 143 domestic M&A deals, with the largest one touching USD 4.5 billion. The overall deal value for the first quarter of 2024 stands at USD 25.6 billion, a significant increase from the previous quarter and the corresponding period last year.

Sector-wise, traditional sectors took the lead, drawing significant investments in the changing deal-making scenario.

# REITs, InvTs mobilise ₹1.3 lakh crore in four years: RBI data

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Investment vehicles for realty and infrastructure sectors - REITs and InvTs - have garnered Rs 1.3 lakh crore in the past four years till March-end, and are expected to facilitate more pooled funds, Reserve Bank said in a report. Experts and stakeholders are of the view that with India growing at a fast pace, REITs and InvTs are emerging as alternative investment instruments, especially for high net-worth individuals.

"India has been a late adopter of real estate investment trusts (REITs) and infrastructure investment trusts (InvTs). However, the market is flourishing - REITs and InvTs have mobilised Rs 1.3 lakh

crore since 2019-20 (up to March 2024)," said an article on 'State of Economy' published in the RBI's April Bulletin.

March witnessed the listing of an InvIT, which raised Rs 2,500 crore through a public issue, attracting substantial interest from foreign investors.

The article noted that market regulator SEBI has progressively reduced the minimum investment size and trading lot, enabling greater retail participation in these hybrid instruments.

To further develop this space, the market regulator notified regulations for small and medium REITs on March 8, 2024.

"This is expected to facilitate pooled investment in a wider

range of real estate assets as a regulated financial product, thereby facilitating further growth of REITs in India," said the article authored by a team led by RBI deputy governor Michael Debabrata Patra.

Rajeshwar Burla, Senior Vice President and Group Head - Corporate Ratings, ICRA, said the RBI allowed banks to lend to InvITs, which along with security enforcement for lenders under the SARFAESI Act, are some promising steps taken in recent times.

"Thanks to a conducive regulatory framework, and a strong pipeline of good operational assets, the industry was able to mobilise over Rs 1.3 lakh crore since FY2020. InvTs and REITs helped unwind capital blocked

in already operational infrastructure assets - which can be re-invested into under-construction projects and support infrastructure development in India," said Burla.

Indian REITs Association said SEBI's progressive regulations, particularly the reduction in lot size to bringing it on par with other listed companies to buy even single units has transformed REITs into an attractive asset class for retail investors.

"This has not only enhanced accessibility but also ensured liquidity, allowing reach to a broader investor base... We are also actively collaborating with SEBI on multiple fronts, including global benchmarking of best REIT

practices, standardising financial reporting and disclosures, and addressing other regulatory requirements, amongst others," the Association said in a statement.

A REIT is made up of a portfolio of commercial real estate assets, the majority of which are already leased out, and InvTs consist of a portfolio of infrastructure assets like highways.

Co-Founder and CEO of YOURS, a platform for fractional ownership of luxury second homes, Sudeep Chandran said it is true that India was a bit late in allowing REITs, yet in the last couple of years it has gathered momentum particularly from HNIs.

"The continuous rise in monthly inflows reflects this momentum. The recent SEBI guidelines on SM REITs provides another option to savvy investors. We anticipate significant investor interest in SM REITs, driving substantial growth in combined REIT and SM REIT investments over the next 3-5 years," Chandran said. Commenting on these investment instruments, Ritesh Kumar Shyam, Partner, M&A Tax & Regulatory Services, BDO India, said REITs and InvTs have picked up quite some traction in the domestic investment market given that these assets offer fixed income with a secured asset base and the returns are generally better than other secured asset investments.

# Rupee settles on flat note, up 1 paisa at 83.30 against \$

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee consolidated in a narrow range and settled for the day higher by 1 paisa at 83.30 against the US dollar on Wednesday, as the support from positive domestic equities was negated by rising American currency.

Forex traders said elevated crude oil prices and significant foreign fund outflows in the international market dented investors' sentiments.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.29 against the greenback. The unit hit an intra-day high of 83.26 and a low of 83.33 against the greenback.

The domestic unit finally settled at 83.30 (provisional) against the dollar, 1 paisa higher from its previous close. On Tuesday, the rupee closed at 83.31 against the American currency.

Forex traders said the rupee is expected to trade with a slight positive bias on improved global risk sentiments and easing of geopolitical tensions in the Middle East. However, any fresh aggressions in the Middle East may cap gains for the local unit.

Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.34 per cent to USD 88.12 per barrel. "Geopolitical risks in the Middle East and talks of fresh energy sanctions on Iran could see some occasional hiccups in prices to move

higher but we don't expect prices to sustain USD 85 for a short duration," said Mohammed Imran - Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was at 105.84, higher by 0.16 per cent.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a slight positive bias on rise in risk appetite in global markets and easing geopolitical tensions in the Middle East. However, hawkish comments from the Fed may support the dollar at lower levels," said Anuj Choudhary Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. However, any fresh aggressions in the Middle East may cap sharp upside. Traders may take cues from durable goods orders data from the US. Investors may remain cautious ahead of inflation data later this week. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 83.05 to Rs 83.50, Choudhary added.

On the domestic equity market front, Sensex advanced 114.49 points, or 0.16 per cent, to settle at 73,852.94 points. The Nifty rose 34.40 points, or 0.15 per cent, to close at 22,402.40 points.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Tuesday as they offloaded shares worth Rs 3,044.54 crore, according to exchange data.

# Sensex, Nifty climb on firm trend in global markets

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ticked higher for the fourth straight session on Wednesday, helped by buying in metal and commodity stocks amid a positive trend in global equities.

However, intense selling pressure on telecom, IT and tech counters capped the upside, traders said.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 114.49 points or 0.16 per cent to settle at 73,852.94. During the day, it jumped 383.16 points or 0.51 per cent to 74,121.61.

The NSE Nifty advanced 34.40 points or 0.15 per cent



to 22,402.40. The indices witnessed some selling pressure towards the fag-end of the session that erased some initial gains.

From the Sensex basket, JSW Steel, Tata Steel, Power Grid, Kotak Mahindra Bank, UltraTech Cement, NTPC and Bajaj Finance were the major gainers.

Tata Consultancy Services, Tech Mahindra, Maruti, Reliance Industries and Titan were among the laggards.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo,

Shanghai and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory.

European markets were trading mostly with gains. Wall Street ended with gains on Tuesday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.35 per cent to USD 88.11 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 3,044.54 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data. The BSE benchmark ended 89.83 points or 0.12 per cent higher at 73,738.45 on Tuesday. Trimming most of its early gains, the NSE Nifty ended 31.60 points or 0.14 per cent up at 22,368.

# Nippon Life Q4 profit jumps to ₹343 crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Nippon Life India Asset Management Ltd on Wednesday reported its highest-ever quarterly profit after tax (PAT) at Rs 343 crore for the March quarter, marking a 73 per cent jump from the year-ago period.

The company had posted a PAT of Rs 198 crore in the year-ago period, the asset management firm said in a stock exchange filing.

Total income rose to Rs 560.57 crore during the fourth quarter of FY24 from Rs 388.03 crore in the year-ago period.

# IGX launches ssLNG contracts, to take gas availability beyond national grid

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Close on the heels of receiving approval from the Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB), the Indian Gas Exchange (IGX) has launched contracts for small-scale liquefied natural gas (ssLNG) on its platform in a bid to address the demand for fuel in areas not connected to the national gas grid.

"The introduction of ssLNG contracts on IGX aims to address the growing gas demand from industries and CGD (City Gas Distribution) companies that do not have access to pipeline networks," IGX said in a statement.

Through ssLNG, they can now procure liquefied gas through LNG tankers at competitive rates under daily, fortnightly and monthly contracts. Initially, this contract is launched at Dahej and Hazira LNG terminals in Gujarat. Later, it will be launched at other terminals namely Dhamra in Odisha, Mundra in Gujarat, Ennore in Tamil



Nadu, Kochi in Kerala, and on-land ssLNG stations at Vijaipur.

Natural gas is primarily supplied through pipelines in the country. As a result, industries and commercial establishments without access to the grid primarily rely on trucks for LNG transportation.

The demand for road-transported LNG is projected to increase to 5 million standard cubic metre per day over the next five years.

Small-scale LNG contracts present a win-win situation for both the buyers as well as sellers. It would serve as a platform for sellers, who can

come and trade LNG. Transporting natural gas in liquefied form via trucks will allow larger volumes to be transported, potentially making it economically viable for buyers not connected to pipelines. Further, it will also ensure a transparent and fair procurement process with enhanced payment security.

Speaking at the occasion, PNGRB member Anjali Kumar Tiwari said, "Small-scale LNG serves as the cornerstone for our gas-based economy, enabling us to expand our reach beyond traditional pipelines. On the supply side, it can bring gas from remote and difficult fields and on the demand side, it can help an industry source gas which is not connected to the gas grid."

"With this vision, we provided approval to IGX for launching ssLNG contracts on their platform. PNGRB endeavours to be a facilitator to support the growth of ssLNG in India by providing a comprehensive regulatory framework," he said.

# Students take part in engineering entrance exam

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The SRM Joint Examinations for Engineering (SRMJEEE) 2024-Phase I for admission to B.Tech and Integrated M.Tech programmes of SRM Institute of Science and Technology - SRMIST (Kattankulathur, Ramapuram, Vadapalani, Ghaziabad, and Tiruchirappalli campuses), SRM University - Sonepat and SRM University - Andhra Pradesh was held from 20th April to 23rd April 2024.

The examination was conducted in Remote Proctored Online Mode (RPOM), where students took part in the examination from their comfort of their homes through their laptop or desktop. Students from all over India and rest of the world took part in SRMJEEE. The examinations were conducted in 3 slots per day on April 20th, 21st, 22nd and 23rd. The slot booking for the same was held on April 16th, 17th and the mock test was conducted on 18th April to help students familiarise with RPOM.

# AIMA sees 20 per cent growth in registrations for MAT entrance exam

PTI ■ MUMBAI

All India Management Association, a federation of Local Management Associations (LMAs), has witnessed a 20 per cent growth in registration for MAT (management aptitude test) in 2023 compared to the pre-Covid year.

MAT has actively expanded its test centers across the country, making the examination more accessible to aspiring candidates and increasing the number of locations where the test is conducted, eliminating geographical barriers, which allowed students from diverse regions to participate.

"This strategic expansion has undoubtedly contributed to the significant rise in the applicant count. MAT has seen a significant 20 per cent growth in candidate registrations post-Covid. "There has been a rise in the number of women candidates registering for MAT. With 45 per cent of



women candidates in 2023, there is a growth of approximately 3 per cent compared to 2019," AIMA Director Daljeet Singh told PTI.

There has also been a 3 per cent growth in registration by women candidates for MAT last year compared to 2019. The rise in popularity of MAT has led to an increasing number of registrations in tier II and III cities.

"Providing candidates from tier II and III cities an opportunity to pursue their management dream from B-Schools of choice has also played a part in increase in MAT popularity and registrations.

"There is more participation of candidates from smaller cities including Agra, Asansol, Aurangabad, Balasore, Bhalai, Darbhanga, Durgapur, Ernakulam, Erode, Salem among others," he said.

The growth was notable in southern states like Tamil Nadu (52 per cent), Karnataka (22 per cent), and Kerala (20 per cent), as well as in states like West Bengal (15 per cent), Uttar Pradesh (8 per cent), and Bihar (4 per cent).

Top B-Schools participation in MAT and acceptance of its score for MBA (Master of Business Administration) and PGDM (Post Graduate Diploma in Management) admissions has further contributed significantly for surge in candidate registrations and MAT popularity, he added.

# VIT AP University honoured



**Amaravati:** VIT-AP University proudly announces its receipt of the esteemed CSR Outstanding University in Education Excellence Award for the year 2024. This accolade, bestowed by Competition Success Review (CSR), a revered publication with a legacy of more than 60 years in India, recognizes VIT-AP University's relentless commitment to academic excellence and holistic development. VIT-AP University's selection for the CSR Outstanding University in Education Excellence Award underscores its dedication to fostering a culture of learning, innovation, and societal impact. **PNS**

# Indian golfers Aditi, Diksha set to participate in Paris Olympics

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian golfers Aditi Ashok (46) and Diksha Dagar (138) are set to participate in the Paris Olympics whereas Shubhankar Sharma (197) and Gaganjeet Bhullar (232) also have a strong chance of making it to the Games.

While it will be a third appearance for Aditi at the Olympics which is also the most for an Indian, Diksha will be competing for the second time. For Sharma and Bhullar, it would be their maiden appearance at the Olympics.

India's best performance at the Olympics came from Aditi who finished fourth in the Tokyo Games 2020. The Olympic entries are sent by the Indian Golf Union.

Qualification for Olympics is determined by rankings, limited to 60 men's and as many women's players through the Official World Golf Rankings (OWGR).

The top 15 players in the



OWGR are eligible for the Olympics with a maximum limit of four golfers allowed from a single country. The Olympic Golf Rankings (OGR) after the top 15 players consists of up to two top eligible players per country, as long as it does not have at least two golfers in the top 15.



Meanwhile, Sahith Theegala and Akshay Bhatia, the two Indian-Americans making waves on the PGA Tour, have both reached career-high rankings this week. Theegala, who logged a second runner-up finish in 2024 and Bhatia, who won his second PGA Tour title

and qualified for the Masters, are now ranked No 12 and No 33 respectively. However, neither Theegala nor Bhatia have a possibility of making an Olympic appearance since the top 15 in the world rankings have as many as eight Americans.

In 11 starts, Theegala has been a runner-up at the season-opener The Sentry and at the RBC Heritage and was fifth at WM Phoenix Open and tied-sixth at the Arnold Palmer Invitational.

Bhatia, in his 12 starts, has won once at the Texas Open and been in top 20 as many as six times. He also missed cut four times. The top four Americans are Scottie Scheffler (1), Wyndham Clark (3), defending Olympic champion Xander Schauffele (5) and Patrick Cantlay (8). Two other Americans, Max Homa (9) and Brian Haran (10), are also ahead of Theegala, who is the seventh best American in the world rankings.

While only four players can be entered for the Olympic Games, provided they in world's top 15, only US has four or more in the list. All other countries can send a maximum of two players provided both are in top 60 of the Olympic qualifiers. Meanwhile, in the women's

section, Aditi, despite a modest 2024 so far, stays on in top 50.

Diksha, who has been solid form, has been in top 10 thrice in five starts on the Ladies European Tour, and also been tied-26 or better in her two starts on the Epson Tour.

Diksha has also touched 138 in the women's world rankings, her best so far.

The next two Indian women are Pranavi Urs, playing her rookie season on LET, at 403 and amateur Avani Prashanth at 531.

Among Indian men, Sharma, the lone Indian in top 200, has a best finish of tied-seventh at the Singapore Classic and tied-16 at Dubai Desert Classic.

Bhullar's best in 2024 has been tied-43 in Oman on Asian Tour, but he also won once at Chandigarh Open on the Indian Tour, for his second win in four months in India.

The next best after Sharma and Bhullar are Veer Ahlawat at 380 and Karandeep Kochhar at 434.

## Contingent of 33 to represent India in South Asian Triathlon Championship

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The experienced duo of Adarsh Muralidharan Sinimol and Pragnya Mohan will spearhead a 33-strong Indian challenge at the South Asian Triathlon Championship to be held alongside the Asia Triathlon Cup in Pokhara, Nepal on April 27.

Pragnya had won her third straight South Asian title in the last edition while also taking the ninth spot in the women's overall category.

Maharashtra duo of Sanjana Joshi and Mansi Mohite, who bagged silver and bronze respectively behind Gujarat's Pragnya last year, are a part of 13 Indian athletes in the women's field. Services' Muralidharan Sinimol, who finished third last year and was the winner in 2022, will headline a 20-member strong Indian challenge in the men's field that includes the Manipuri duo of Telheiba Soram and Kshetrimayum Kabadash Singh.

The competition is a sprint race comprising 750m swim, 20km cycling and a 5km run. **Indians in fray:** Men: Telheiba Soram, Kshetrimayum Kabadash Singh, Tushar Deka, Anagh Wankhade, Parth Sankhla, Angad Ingalekar, Abhishek Modanwal, Ankur Chahar, Parth Mirage, Krishiv



Patel, Koushik Vinayak Malandkar, Sai Lohitaksh Kd, Dev Ambokar, Raj Kumar Pawar, Puskar Das, Vishwanath Yadav, Adarsh Muralidharan Nair Sinimol, Ankan Bhattacharjee, Arnab Bhattacharya, Safa Musthafa Sheick. Women: Durvisha Pawar, Dolly Devidas Patil, Dhriti Koujalgi, Rama Sonkar, Hany Zalavadiya, Prerana Sravan Kumar, Riddhi Kadam, Sanjana Joshi, Snehal Joshi, Mansi Mohite, Nafisa Millwala, Pragnya Mohan, Punam Biswas.



## Juventus requires a late goal to beat Lazio 3-2 on aggregate

AP ■ ROME

A late goal that Timothy Weah set up for Arkadiusz Milik earned Juventus a spot in the Italian Cup final - keeping alive the Turin squad's chances of winning its first trophy in three years. While Lazio won the second leg of their semifinal 2-1, Juventus advanced 3-2 on aggregate. Weah sent in a cross seven minutes from time that Milik tapped in. Taty Castellanos scored a goal in each half for Lazio. Juventus won the first leg 2-0 with goals from Federico Chiesa and Dusan Vlahovic. In the May 15 final back in Rome, Juventus will face either Atalanta or Fiorentina. Fiorentina takes a 1-0 advantage into the second leg of the other semifinal on Wednesday. Juventus has won the Italian

Cup a record 14 times, with its title in 2021 the most recent trophy the Bianconeri have claimed. By reaching the final, Juventus also qualified for next season's four-team Italian Super Cup. Castellanos is no stranger to coming up big in important matches, having scored four against Real Madrid last April while with Girona. His first goal came 12 minutes in at the Stadio Olimpico when he leapt over Alex Sandro to head in a corner. Then shortly after the break, he muscled off Gleison Bremer to finish off a counterattack. Juventus midfielder and United States international Weston McKennie limped off with an apparent left ankle issue after Castellanos' second goal but then came back on before eventually being substituted in the 81st.

## Football: Former player Langam Devi set to be national women coach

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former player Langam Chaoba Devi is set to take over as the national women's football coach after the I M Vijayan-led AIFF technical committee recommended her name for the position on Wednesday. The 51-year-old Devi, who captained the national side in the 1999 Asian Championships in Philippines, has earlier been an assistant coach of the Indian team. The Manipuri has also represented the country in the 1998 Bangkok Asian Games.

"After extensive deliberations, the committee recommended Ms. Langam Chaoba Devi as the head coach of the Indian senior women's national team," the All India Football Federation (AIFF) said in a statement. Devi is the only female coach from the north-east region to have an AFC 'A' License coaching badge. The recommendation is as good as an appointment given that the AIFF executive committee will approve it in its next meeting. The technical committee meet, chaired by Vijayan, was



held virtually and was attended by Pinky Bompal Magar, Shabbir Ali, Victor Amalraj, Santosh Singh, and Climax Lawrence. Syed Sabir Pasha, the Technical Director of AIFF, was also present. The committee also recommended Priya PV and Ronibala Chanu as the assistant and goalkeeping coaches respectively for the team. All three coaches recommended by the Technical Committee did duty for the team during the Turkish Women's Cup in Alanya, Turkey, in February

this year. The committee also discussed the appointments of the coaches for the men's U-16 and U-19 teams. After going through the applications received, the committee recommended the following names:

**U16 Men's National Team:** Head Coach: Ishfaq Ahmed, Assistant Coach: Yan Cheng Law, Goalkeeping Coach: Mohammed Zakeer Hussain U19 Men's National Team: Head Coach: Ranjan Chaudhuri, Goalkeeping Coach: Sandip Nandy.

## ARCHERY WORLD CUP

### Indian men, women compound teams eye gold in Shanghai

PTI ■ SHANGHAI

The Indian men's and women's compound archery teams assured the country of a podium finish by nailing down final berths in the season-opening Hyundai Archery World Cup here on Wednesday. The fourth-seeded men's team comprising the experienced Abhishek Verma, newcomer Prathamesh Bhalchandra Fuge and reigning U-21 world champion Priyansh defeated the Philippines and Denmark before displaying ominous form to upset top qualifiers South Korea to book a title showdown against the Netherlands on Saturday. The Indian women, who are the reigning world champions and seeded No.1 here, set up a title clash with Italy, defeating Turkey and Estonia to confirm their status as the



leading side in the category. The trio of reigning U-18 and senior champion Aditi Swami, Asian Games gold-medallist Jyothi Surekha Vennam and Parneet Kaur dropped just 10 points through the two matches to confirm their superiority. The Indian men's team created a major upset defeating Korea by just two

points at 235-233. Tied at even after two ends, the Indians grabbed a point after the third and finished with a 59 to secure the final spot. "Our coordination was good today and we read the wind well," said Abhishek after the nerve-wracking semifinal contest against the Koreans. "The semifinals are always tight matches. We were

prepared to shoot well and happy to make it to gold," he added. An elated Priyansh said after the match against Korea that he was thrilled to be competing against the strong opponents, who he had so far seen only on social media. "We played alongside players that we used to watch on YouTube," said Priyansh, who trains with Abhishek in Delhi. "We could have shot even better," he added. The Indian women's team defeated Estonia 235-230 and Aditi attributed the performance to the process the side has been following for long. "We maintained our shooting process and it worked well," said Aditi. "I hope we can repeat the success of the World Cup in Paris last year where both the Indian men and women won the team gold medals."

## Sreeshankar undergoes knee surgery in Doha

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Star Indian long jumper Sreeshankar has undergone a surgery on his injured knee that ruled him out of the Paris Olympics in July-August. The 25-year-old, who is a silver medallist at the Asian and Commonwealth Games, underwent the surgery in Doha. "The surgery was successful under Dr. Bruno Olory at the Aspetar Hospital, Doha. Thank you everyone for all your love and blessings during this tough phase. 18 hours post surgery and I am already walking," wrote Sreeshankar on Instagram. Dr. Olory is a French orthopaedic surgeon. Sreeshankar had injured his left knee while training in Palakkad earlier this month. He had made the cut for the Paris Olympics as early as July 2023 when he secured a silver at the Asian Championship in Bangkok with a 8.37m jump (Olympic entry standard 8.27m).



In June last year, Sreeshankar had become only the third Indian to finish in the top three in a Diamond League Meeting with a third-place finish. "Life writes strange scripts, and some times there is courage in accepting it and moving on. That's what I will do. My journey to a comeback began the minute I injured my knee. "The road is going to be long, difficult and will take a lot out of me," Sreeshankar had stated while announcing his withdrawal from the Olympics.

# Olympic bound boxer Preeti to spearhead India's challenge

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Paris Olympic-bound boxer Preeti Pawar will spearhead a 50-member Indian team at the ASBC Asian U22 & Youth Boxing Championship, starting April 27 in Astana, Kazakhstan. The 20-year-old Asian Games bronze medallist, who has secured a Paris Olympic quota in the 54kg weight class, will have the company of former youth world champion and 2022 Asian elite boxing championship gold medallist Alfiya Pathan (81kg) in the U-22 category. Reigning youth world champions Devika Ghorpade (52kg) and Vishvanath Suresh (48kg), and senior national champions Prachi (63kg), Akash Gorkha (60kg) and Jugnoo (86kg) are also part of the U-22 squad announced by the Boxing Federation of India (BFI) on Wednesday. Both U-22 and Youth

competitions will see the participation of 25 Indian boxers each as the men's and women's sections will have 13 and 12 categories respectively. The players have been selected based on their strong performances in the trials conducted by the BFI at the Army Institute of Sports Pune from April 6 to 10 for the U-22 category and at the NCOE Rohtak from April 12-15 for the youth category. "The boxers were selected from across the country through highly competitive trials. The tournament is a significant opportunity for these young boxers to demonstrate their skills and gain invaluable international exposure in one of Asia's most prestigious tournaments," said BFI Secretary General Hemanta Kalita. The reigning junior world champions Nisha (52kg) and



Akansha (70kg) will lead the country's challenge in the youth women's section along with the Asian youth champion Nikita Chand (60kg). The youth men's section, on the other hand, will see the participation of the junior world championships silver medallists Jatin (57kg), Sahil (80kg) and Hemant Sangwan (86kg). The prestigious tournament will have 400-plus boxers from more than 24 countries fighting for the medals across 25 weight categories.

### SQUAD

#### Youth

Men: Brijesh Tamta (48kg), Aryan (51kg), Jitesh (54kg), Jatin (57kg), Sagar Jakhar (60kg), Yashwardhan Singh (63.5kg), Sumit (67kg), Priyanshu (71kg), Rahul Kundu (75kg), Sahil (80kg), Hemant Sangwan (86kg), Aryan (92kg), Lakshay Rathi (+92kg).

Women: Annu (48kg), Laxmi (50kg), Nisha (52kg), Tamanna (54kg), Yatri Patel (57kg), Nikita Chand (60kg), Shrushti Sathe (63kg), Parthavi Grewal (66kg), Akansha Phalasal (70kg), Rudrika (75kg), Khushi Pooniya (81kg), Nirjhara Bana (+81kg).

#### U 22

Men: Vishvanath Suresh (48kg), Jadumani Singh M (51kg), Ashish (54kg), Nikhil (57kg), Akash Gorkha (60kg), Ajay Kumar (63.5kg), Preet Malik (67kg), Ankush (71kg), Kunal (75kg), Dhruv Singh (80kg), Jugnoo (86kg), Yuvraj (92kg), Rhythm (+92kg). Women: Guddi (48kg), Tammana (50kg), Devika Ghorpade (52kg), Preeti (54kg), Poonam (57kg), Priyanka (60kg), Prachi (63kg), Kajal Devi A (66kg), Saneh (70kg), Muskan (75kg), Alfiya Pathan (81kg), Ritika (81+kg).



# Rampant Sunrisers Hyderabad eye another run fest against bottom placed RCB

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Sunrisers Hyderabad will look to unleash their brute batting power on struggling Royal Challengers Bengaluru when the two teams face off in their return-leg fixture of the IPL here on Thursday.

Having breached the 250-run mark thrice in this IPL edition itself, Sunrisers Hyderabad are pushing the boundaries of T20 batting with their no holds barred approach.

While Mumbai Indians were the first victim of SRH's new-found batting strength this season, RCB bore the maximum brunt when the Travis Head-led batting lineup powered the 2016 winners to IPL's highest-ever total of 287/3 in Bengaluru.

If this was not enough, SRH's carnage against Delhi Capitals - which included a record 125/0 being scored in the powerplay - brought forth the possibility of the 300-run mark being breached for the first time ever in the IPL.

And it won't be surprising if

SRH manage to do the unthinkable and that too against a bowling attack as frail as RCB's, whose struggles with in the bowling department could be gauged with the fact that their best bowler, Yash Dayal, is at 24th spot in the overall list with seven wickets. Placed at the bottom of the pool, RCB have conceded at least 180 in their last five matches. In the last two games, the opponents have raked up totals in excess of 200.

RCB batters have worked hard to make up for their severe shortcomings in bowling, but for such a lopsided squad in terms of balance, the task to produce an all-round performance looks nearly impossible.

To their credit, RCB fought incredibly hard with the bat but were unfortunate to have lost to Kolkata Knight Riders by a mere one run after conceding 222/6. Moreover, a collective batting effort must have pleased the RCB management to a large extent. He was a victim of a contentious call but Virat Kohli



remains RCB's best batter in the tournament so far, having scored 379 runs to keep the Orange Cap in possession. But hot on his heels are a few others including SRH's Head, who is making most of his purple patch.

Head's game is designed not only on aggressiveness and ability to cash in on every opportunity, his ability to find gaps at will makes him a compulsory watch.

Abhishek Sharma has flourished in Head's company and Heinrich Klaasen too has made merry with the bat this season. Overall, SRH's compelling shows with the bat have made the job of their bowlers and skipper Pat Cummins easier.

SRH are placed comfortably at the third position in the table with 10 points from seven matches. While the journey so far has been fuelled by the batters' fire, SRH would know their bowling would be tested along the way and Cummins' men could do well to watch out against a hurting RCB side.

**TEAMS (FROM):**  
**Royal Challengers Bengaluru:** Faf du Plessis (c), Glenn Maxwell, Virat Kohli, Rajat Patidar, Anuj Rawat (wk), Dinesh Karthik (wk), Suyash Prabhudessai, Will Jacks, Mahipal Lomror, Karn Sharma, Manoj Bhandage, Mayank Dagar, Vijaykumar Vyshak, Akash Deep, Mohammed Siraj, Reece Topley, Himanshu Sharma, Rajan Kumar, Cameron Green, Alzarri Joseph, Yash Dayal, Tom Curran, Lockie Ferguson, Swapnil, Saurav Chauhan.  
**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.

## Stoinis eager to play for Australia despite missing CA central contract



PTI ■ CHENNAI

Despite missing out on Cricket Australia's central contract for the 2024-25 season, all-rounder Marcus Stoinis wants to use the impact hundred against Chennai Super Kings as a leverage to extend his white ball career beyond the upcoming T20 World Cup.

Stoinis, who was not included in the 23-player central contract list, made an unbeaten 124 off 63 balls for Lucknow Super Giants here on Tuesday.

However, Stoinis didn't read much into him missing the CA contract which was announced on March 28.

"I've got a great relationship with the (Australia) coach (Andrew McDonald). Me not getting a contract, I knew that a while ago.

"I think it is great to give younger kids a crack and let them take my spot. I'm absolutely fine with that on the contract list," Stoinis said after guiding LSG to a six-wicket

win over CSK.

But the 34-year-old was firm in thoughts about his career with the national team.

"But on the playing front, obviously, I want to make sure that I'm there and that's also why it's so lucky for us and for me particularly to have this competition (IPL), that's why I love it so much," he said.

The Perth-born player was omitted from Australia's ODIs against the West Indies in January, but he is set to be part of the country's T20I World Cup campaign in the West Indies and the USA in June.

Stoinis is most likely to be slotted into No. 5 in the Australian line-up during the marquee event.

Stoinis is eligible for Australian selection for the tournament because his current contract for the 2023-24 season will run its course only on June 30.

However, Stoinis was clear that he wanted to play for Australia in the white ball series against England (away) in September and against Pakistan at home in November.

## Impact player rule: Entertaining cricket but takes all rounders out of game, says Voges

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Joining the raging debate around Impact Players in the IPL, Lucknow Super Giants consultant Adam Voges said he prefers something like the 'Power Surge' rule in the Australian Big Bash League where the batting team gets to decide a two-over phase of fielding restrictions.

The Impact Player substitution rule, introduced last season, has been a heavy topic of debate this season with lot of players, including India captain Rohit Sharma calling it detrimental to the growth of all-rounders.

Voges agreed and said while the rule makes for entertaining cricket, it hurts all-rounders.

"The scores have been going up, and the teams have got genuine batters coming in at number seven or eight, while the batters have gone hard right from the start," the Australian said after the six-wicket win over Chennai Super Kings here on Tuesday night.

"Certainly makes for entertaining cricket, but it takes the all-rounders out of the game for a little bit and

their effectiveness. The all-rounder always balances the side and perhaps it is not as important with the Impact Sub," he explained.

Asked if the rule is comparable to Power Surge in Australia's Big Bash League, Voges said the latter adds to the contest, and he is a fan of it. Unlike the IPL, which has a six-over power play at the start of the innings, the BBL features a four-over power play.

Power Surge is then a two-over phase of only two fielders outside the circle, sought by the batting team at any point following the 11th over of its innings.

"I like the Power Surge back at home. It just adds another element to the game.

"While chasing, you never feel like you are out of the game. But we have also seen multiple wickets fall during that period," he said.

**STOINIS GRABBED CHANCE WITH BOTH HANDS:** Marcus Stoinis' unbeaten 124 ensured that Lucknow Super Giants pulled off a double over defending champion



Chennai Super Kings in the ongoing edition. Stoinis, who has been promising with the bat, was promoted to number three in this clash.

Voges said the decision was easy given his successful outing as a top-order batter for Melbourne Stars in the Big Bash League.

"In the first half of the tournament, the number three batting position is something that did not work for us. We gave Marcus the opportunity since he has performed well in the top order in Big Bash," he told reporters here.

"He has certainly made the most of it.

He has been hitting the ball well the whole tournament and has always been threatening."

LSG's victory was heavily aided by the dew settling in at Chepauk on Tuesday, and Voges felt it was a good toss to win.

"At the halfway stage, we could feel the dew on the outfield, and it played a part in the back end of the game. In the end, it was a good toss to win," he added.

Voges lauded the hosts for keeping his team under pressure until the final over.

"It was a tremendous game of cricket. The batting from both sides was outstanding," he continued.

"CSK did put us under pressure with the ball, but it was our best night execution-wise. We needed someone to stand up, and Stoinis played an outstanding innings," he said.

The CSK batters did a great job by setting a challenging total of 210 for four, thanks to skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad's unbeaten 108, which was also aided by a 27-ball 66 from the in-form Shivam Dube.

### OTHER SPORTS

## Nadal says he is not 100 per cent fit ahead of Madrid debut

AP ■ MADRID

Rafael Nadal will play in the Madrid Open despite not being fully fit and didn't seem too optimistic about his chances of being ready for the French Open later this month.

Nadal said Wednesday he would not play in Paris if he arrives there feeling the same way that he is feeling ahead of his debut in Madrid this week.

"The sensations haven't been perfect this week. If it wasn't Madrid, maybe I wouldn't play. But there are a lot of emotions involved," Nadal said. "I don't

know what's going to happen in the following three weeks. I'll keep fighting and doing the things that I think I need to do to play in Paris. And if it's possible, then it's possible. If not, then not. I'm not going to play in Paris the way I'm feeling today. It was Paris, I wouldn't be playing."

The 37-year-old Nadal has said this is likely his farewell year on tour, and is hoping to be competitive one last time at Roland Garros, where he is a 14-time champion.

The 22-time Grand Slam winner is a record five-time champion in Madrid, with his last title in the



Spanish capital coming in 2017. He is scheduled to debut on Thursday against 16-year-old American Darwin Blanch.

"Hopefully I can play without many limitations," Nadal said. "Then we'll see what happens. If I play without limitations, even if I lose, that will be positive."

Nadal, who had hip surgery last summer, lost to Alex de Minaur in the second round in Barcelona in what was his first tournament in more than three months.

"The goal is be on court. Enjoy as long as possible," he said. "I mean, that's the thing. Try to finish the tournament alive in terms of body

issues, and enjoy the fact that I will be able to compete one more time in the professional tour and here at home in Madrid, a place that give me everything, no, in terms of support."

He said he is giving himself "a chance" and hopes to "find better feelings" in his body going forward.

"I don't lose hope. I just accept the situation that I have today," he said. "I mean, I am not playing bad. It's about more body limitations." He said the "body feelings are not enough good to feel myself playing with free enough in terms of body issues.

PTI ■ CHENNAI

## Trying to find batting combination that does well for us at back end of IPL: Fleming

Chennai Super Kings are not looking for a "quick fix" to their issues in the batting department and head coach Stephen Fleming is ready to give the likes of Daryl Mitchell time to get settled in top-three after their fourth loss in eight games.

CSK have been juggling batters in the top three through the season. On Tuesday against Lucknow Super Giants, Ajinkya Rahane and Ruturaj Gaikwad came to open while Mitchell was promoted to number three from five.

In the previous game, Gaikwad pushed himself down to number three to accommodate Rahane and Rachin Ravindra. Following their dramatic loss to LSG at home, Fleming said they need to get their batting combinations right.

"It's a mixture of trying to find that (combination) and also form. We're a little bit uncomfortable with some areas, so we're trying to find not a quick fix, but the right combination where players are going to contribute for the back end of this tournament," said Fleming after first loss of the season at home.

Mitchell, who was bought for Rs 14 crore at the auction, has totalled 146 runs in seven innings.

Fleming insisted that number three is the ideal spot for the fellow New Zealander.

"There's a lot of pressure, obviously. Getting up the order is more comfortable for him. Me putting him down the order in the hitting role wasn't his best position.

"So, we've looked to rectify that and get him up the order where he has had his best performances internationally. That might take a little time, but the top three need to contribute the majority of runs. Ruturaj did that today, so hopefully, he can continue his form, and the others can pick that up... We're not firing on all cylinders by any means, but we're in each game asking teams to play well to beat us. We just got to get a little bit better," he said referring to skipper's unbeaten hundred in a losing cause.



While Mitchell's promotion did not yield the desired result, LSG sending Marcus Stoinis to

number three proved to be a game changer as he singlehandedly pulled off a

memorable win for his team with an unbeaten 124 off 63 balls. Fleming, who has

worked alongside the Aussie all-rounder in the Big Bash League for Melbourne Stars,

and fours at will. Fleming considers himself among the lucky ones to witness fans' unparalleled admiration for Dhoni across venues.

"It's an experience you like to have in the stadium every time he plays. It's been lucky for me to have this magical experience for 16-17 years.

"The love for him throughout the world is a testimony to the way he has played the game. People talk about MS as a person, but he is also a great player, and he has done some great things for India and Chennai (Super Kings).

**नाम परिवर्तन**

मैं अजय जैन सर्वसाधारण को सूचित करता हूँ कि मेरी पुत्री का नाम तानी जैन (Tani Jain) है। हम उसका नाम परिवर्तित कर आरोही जैन (Aarohi Jain) करना चाहते हैं। इस निवेदन के उपरान्त मेरी पुत्री को आरोही जैन (Aarohi Jain) के नाम से सभी शासकीय/अर्धशासकीय/अन्य दस्तावेजों में जाना, पहचाना, लिखा, पढ़ा एवं पुकारा जाए।

**पुराना नाम: तानी जैन (Tani Jain)**  
**नया नाम: आरोही जैन (Aarohi Jain)**

C/O अजय जैन C-2 जीवन आनंद LIC ऑफिसर्स क्वार्टर्स गौतम नगर भोपाल मध्य प्रदेश।