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BAIL FOR SANJAY SINGH Bane or Boon for AAP?

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

In a relief to AAP leader and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh, the Supreme Court on Tuesday granted bail to him in the money laundering case related to the Delhi liquor policy case after the Enforcement Directorate conceded that it has no objections. The AAP leader is not supposed to make any public statement regarding the case, the court added, while dismissing as infructuous the second petition filed by Singh challenging his arrest and remand.

The top court decision has brought a big relief to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in midst of Lok Sabha poll campaigning as two of its top leaders — national convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and former Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia — are in jail in connection with the case. The bench comprising Justices Sanjiv Khanna, Dipankar Datta and PB Varale passed the order to grant him bail, who has been in jail for six months, observing that no money has been recovered from his possession and there is no trace of it, while orally commenting that Singh would be entitled to indulge in



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

political activities during the period of bail. “We clarify that the concession given in the court today would not be treated as a precedent. We also clarify that we have not made any comments on the merits of the case. The impugned judgment is set aside and the appeal is allowed and disposed of in the above terms,” the court said in its

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

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

of the statement made, we allow the present appeal and direct that Sanjay be released on bail during pendency of trial on terms and conditions set by the trial court.”

The bench said the concession of bail granted to Singh will not be treated as “precedent”. Consequently this bail order may not be of much help to other jailed AAP leaders, including Arvind Kejriwal. The bench clarified that the bail was granted to Singh on the concession granted by the ED and not on merits. As AAP MP Sanjay was given bail by the Supreme Court in the liquor “scam” case on Tuesday, the atmosphere was jubilant at Singh’s residence as supporters with “dhol and nagada” gathered outside his house to celebrate the bail.

They raised slogans like “Jail ke taale toot gaye, Sanjay bhaiya choot gaye” and “Sanjay tum sangharsh karo, hum tumhare sath hain”. Reacting on the bail, Singh’s wife Anita Singh said the happiness is incomplete with three of her “brothers”, Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia and Satyendar Jain, still behind bars. Describing Singh’s bail as the “victory of truth”, his wife said the AAP will celebrate when all its leaders are cleared in the case.

Sleep timing of Ram Lalla keeps Ayodhya awake

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

Controversy has erupted the district administration’s proposal to keep Ram Lalla awake for 24 hours during the upcoming Ram Navami festival, drawing objections from saints and members of the Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust.

Anticipating a significant surge in devotees during Ram Navami, the district administration has suggested keeping the temple doors open round-the-clock, discarding the traditional ‘shayan’ (sleeping) timing, to accommodate the expected influx of worshippers.

District Magistrate Nitish Kumar had announced that the Ram Temple management will graciously open its doors round the clock from April 16 to April 18, with the pinnacle of celebrations slated for April 17. However, the proposal has been met with skepticism from saints, who question the prudence of such a decision. Senior Priest Satendra Das remarked, “Never ever any temple remained open for 24 hours, that too for three days. This is against Hindu tradition. Bhagwan also needs rest.” While the Trust asserts that it is consulting with the saints



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

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

‘Transfer 2 DMs, 6 senior cops immediately’

ECI asks State Govt

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Tuesday asked the Odisha Government to immediately transfer two district Collectors and six senior police officials ahead of the General Elections 2024.

According to sources, the eight senior officers to be transferred with immediate

effect are Cuttack Collector Vineet Bhardwaj, Jagatsinghpur Collector Parul Patawari, Angul Superintendent of Police (SP) Sudhansu Sekhar Mishra, Brahmapur SP in Ganjam Saravana Vivek M, Khordha SP Jugal Kishore Banoth, Rourkela SP Mitrabhanu Mahapatra, Sundargarh SP Kanwar Vishal Singh and Inspector General of Police (Central Range) in Cuttack Ashish Kumar Singh. Writing a letter to the

Chief Secretary of Odisha Pradeep Kumar Jena in this regard, ECI Secretary Rakesh Kumar said the eight senior officials be transferred to non-election-related posts. A panel of three eligible officers should be provided in respect of each of the above-mentioned posts.

Notably, the Secretary requested the State Government to send a compliance report to the RCI latest by 5 pm on April 2, 2024.

Cong names 49 MLA, 8 MP candidates

Bahinipati, Ulaka re-nominated PCC chief to contest from Nuapada

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Congress on Tuesday released a list of 49 MLA candidates and eight MP candidates for the upcoming Assembly and Lok Sabha polls in the State.

The party has re-nominated Tara Prasad Bahinipati from the Jeypore Assembly constituency. A senior Congress leader, Bahinipati is a four-time MLA and has successfully contested polls twice from the



Koraput seat in 2000 and 2004 and from the Jeypore constituency in 2014 and 2019.

Besides, the party also re-nominated Koraput MP Saptagiri Ulaka from the same parliamentary constituency. Ulaka had defeated the BJD’s Kausalya Hikaka in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

Among other prominent leaders, the Congress has re-

nominated Santosh Singh Saluja from Kantabanji and nominated Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee president Sarat Pattanayak from Nuapada, Balabhadra Majhi from Lanjigarh and Bhakta Charan Das from Narla.

Actor-turned-politician Manoj Mishra was fielded by the party from the Balangir Lok Sabha seat.

49 new faces, five women in first list

NALINI SAHU ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Tuesday announced its list of candidates for the upcoming Assembly elections in Odisha. Of the total 147 Assembly constituencies, the party named candidates for 112 seats.

BJP State president Manmohan Samal will contest polls from Chandbali while former party State chief Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo was nominated for Patnagarh in Balangir district.

For the three seats in the State capital, the BJP nominated Jagannath Pradhan (Bhubaneswar Central), Priyadarshi Mishra (Bhubaneswar North) and Babu Singh (Ekamra-Bhubaneswar).

Almost all the sitting MLAs were re-nominated while there 49 new faces in the list.

Bargarh MP Suresh Pujari’s name has figured in the list of Assembly contestants. He will contest from Brajarajnagar.

The party, which denied a ticket to Kalahandi Lok Sabha member Basant Panda, has nominated his son Abhinandan Kumar Panda to

contest from Nuapara.

Among the important names who have been announced are Jayanarayan Mishra (Sambalpur), K. Anil Kumar (Berhampur, Sidhant Mohapatra (Digaphandi), Pratyusha Rajeswari Singh (Nayagarh), Jagannath Pradhan (Bhubaneswar Central), Priyadarshi Mishra (Bhubaneswar North), Babu Singh (Ekamra-Bhubaneswar), Ashrit Kumar Pattnayak (Pipili), Jayanta Kumar Sarangi (Puri), Mohan Charan Majhi (Keonjhar), Sitansu Sekhar Mohapatra (Bhadrak), Manas Kumar Dutta (Balasore), Prakash Ch. Sethi (Cuttack-Sadar) and Nayan Kishore Mohanty from Choudwar-Cuttack.

The full list of candidates: Padampur: Gobardhan Bhoj, Bijepur: Sanat Kumar Gartia, Bargarh: Ashwini Kumar Sarangi, Attabira: Nihar Ranjan Mahananda, Bhatli: Irasis Acharya, Brajrajnagar: Suresh Pujari, Jharsuguda: Tankadhar Tripathy, Talsara: Bhabani Shankar Bhoi, Sundargarh: Kusum Tete, Biramitrapur: Shankar Oram, Raghunathpali: Durga Charan Tanti, Rajgangapur: Narsingha Minz, Bonai: Sebati Nayak, Kuchinda: Rabi Narayan Naik, Rengali: Nauri Nayak, Sambalpur: Jay Narayan Mishra, Rairakhol: Debendra Mohapatra, Deogarh: Subash



Ch. Panigrahi, Anandapur: Aloke Sethi, Keonjhar: Mohan Majhi, Jashipur (ST): Ganesh Ram Singh Khuntia, Udala (ST): Bhaskar Madhei, Badasahi (SC): Sanatan Bijuli, Baripada (ST): Prakash Soren, Morada: Krushna Chandra Mohapatra, Jaleswar: Braja Pradhan, Baleswar: Manas Kumar Dutta, Remuna (SC): Gobinda Chandra Das, Soro (SC): Rajendra Das, Simulia: Padmalochan Panda, Bhadrak: Sitansu Sekhar Mohapatra, Dhamnagar (SC): Suryabanshi Suraj, Chandbali: Manmohan Samal, Binjharpur (SC): Babita Mallick, Barchana: Amar Kumar Nayak, Dharamasala: Smruti Rekha Pahi, Jajpur: Gautam Ray, Korei: Akash Das Nayak, Sukinda: Pradeep Bala Samanta, Dhenkanal: Krushna Ch. Patra, Kamakhyanager: Satrugna Jena, Parjanga: Bibuti Bhusan Pradhan, Pallahara: Ashok

Mohanty, Talcher: Kalandi Ch. Samal, Angul: Pratap Ch. Pradhan, Chhendipada: Agasti Behera, Athamallik: Sanjeeb Sahoo, Biramaharajpur: Raghunath Jagdala, Sonapur: Pramod Mahapatra, Loisingha: Mukesh Mahaling, Patnagarh: Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo, Balangir: Gopalji Panigrahi, Titilagarh: Naveen Jain, Kantabanji: Laxman Bag, Nuapada: Abhinandan Kumar Panda, Khariar: Hitesh Kumar Bagartti, Umakote (ST): Nityananda Gond, Nabarangpur (ST): Gouri Sankar Majhi, Lanjigarh (ST): Ramesh Chandra Majhi, Junagarh: Manoj Kumar Meher, Dharmgarh: Sudhir Pattjoshi, Bhawanipatna (SC): Pradipta Kumar Naik, Narla: Aniruddha Padhan, Baliguda (ST): Kalpana Kumari Kanhar, G. Udayagiri (ST): Managobinda Pradhan, Phulbani: Uma Ch. Mallick, Kantamal: Kanhai Ch. Danga, Boudh: Saroj Pradhan, Baramba: Sambit Tripathy, Banki: Tusharkant Chakrabarti, Athagarh: Abhay Ku Barik, Choudwar-Cuttack: Nayan Kishore Mohanty, Niali: Chhabi Mallick, Cuttack-Sadar: Prakash Ch. Sethi, Mahanga: Sumant Ghadei, Patkura: Tejeswar Parida, Aul: Krushna Ch Panda, Mahakalpada: Durga Prasanna Nayak, Paradip: Sampad Ku Swain, Tirtol: Raj

Kishore Behera, Nimapara: Pravati Parida, Puri: Jayanta Kumar Sarangi, Brahmagiri: Upasana Mohapatra, Satyabadi: Om Prakash Mishra, Pipili: Ashrit Kumar Pattnayak, Jayadev (SC): Arabinda Dhali, Bhubaneswar Central: Jagannath Pradhan, Bhubaneswar North: Priyadarshi Mishra, Ekamra-Bhubaneswar: Babu Singh, Jatni: Biswaranjan Badajena, Chilika: Prithiviraj Harichandan, Ranpur: Tapas Ranjan Marthia, Khandapada: Dushmantha Swain, Daspalla (SC): Raghav Mallick, Nayagarh: Pratyusha Rajeswari Singh, Bhanjanagar: Pradyumna Kumar Nayak, Polasara: Gokulananda Mallick, Kabisuryanagar: Pratap Chandra Nayak, Khallikote (SC): Purna Chandra Sethi, Chhatrapur (SC): Krushna Chandra Nayak, Aska: Saroj Kumar Padhi, Surada: Nilamani Bisoyi, Hinjili: Sisir Mishra, Gopalpur: Bibhuti Bhusan Jena, Brahmapur: K. Anil Kumar, Digaphandi: Sidhant Mohapatra, Chikiti: Manojaranjan Dyan Samantary, Paralekhmundi: K Narayan Rao, Gunupur: Trinath Gomanga, Koraput: Raghuram Machha, Pottangi: Chaitanya Hantali and Madkangiri: Narsingh Madkami

Crackdown on vehicles with tinted glass intensifies

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

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

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



Representational Image

per cent, ensuring adequate visibility.

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

place in India’s Capital.

These violations were frequently happening mainly in West and South west Delhi including areas of Najafgarh, Nangloi, Punjabi Bagh, Tilak Nagar, Dwarka, Karol Bagh, IGI Airport, Kapashera, Rajouri Garden, and Badarpur.

Comparatively, the violations in these areas have also increased manifold over the years. While 50 violations were seen in Punjabi Bagh in 2022, the number went up to 417 in 2024.

Similarly, in a period of a year the number of tinted glass violations in Tilak Nagar area went to 365 from

just 129 in 2023.

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

2 run over by vehicle in Khordha



2 die, 2 hurt as SUV rams into truck in Bhadrak

PNS ■ KHORDHA/BHADRAK

As many as four persons were killed in separate road accidents in Khordha and Bhadrak districts on Tuesday. An unidentified vehicle hit a motorcycle by which a man

and his sister were travelling near Gedimundia under Bolagarh block of Khordha district, killing the two on the spot.

The deceased were identified as residents of Banamalipur village in Nayagarh district. Police sent the bodies for postmortem and started an investigation into the incident.

An SUV hit a stationary truck from the rear on National Highway-16 near Nalanga in Bhadrak district, leaving two occupants of the vehicle dead. Besides, three other occupants of the SUV sustained critical injuries in the accident and were admitted to the District Headquarters Hospital. The SUV was on its way to Puri from West Bengal.

On Puri-Konark Road Hotelier electrocuted; locals block highway



PNS ■ PURI

A hotelier was electrocuted after coming in contact with a low-lying high voltage electric wire at Helipad Square on the Puri-Konark Road on Tuesday.

The deceased, identified as Bhaskar Behera, president of Chandrabhaga Traders' Association, was on his way by a motorcycle from home to his hotel when he came in contact with the live wire dangling from a damaged electric pole. He died on the spot.

Behera's death triggered out-

rage among the irate locals, leading to a roadblock on the Puri-Konark Road. The protesters expressed anger, saying that despite multiple complaints to the Energy Department to relocate the electric pole away from the road, no action was taken.

The roadblock led to traffic jam, causing inconvenience to tourists visiting Puri and Konark. Many vehicles and passengers were left stranded due to the protest.

Police reached the place and tried to restore normalcy by pacifying the irate locals.



The authorities are unconcerned even though the road in front of the Puri railway station continues to remain in a dilapidated condition for months. Ranjan Ganguly

Rashmi heads FICCI FLO BBSR



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Ruchi Foodline Managing Director Rashmi Sahoo has taken over as the chairperson of FICCI FLO Bhubaneswar Chapter for the term 2024-25. The transition of leadership was announced during a ceremony held in New Delhi,

where Sahoo succeeded the outgoing chairperson Poonam Mohapatra to steer the chapter towards new heights of growth and development.

As the director of Ruchi Foodline, Frozit, FarrmB, Rashmi Sahoo brings a wealth of experience and expertise in the food and agriculture sector.

Her leadership is expected to contribute significantly to the objectives of the FICCI FLO Bhubaneswar Chapter. In her role as chairperson, Sahoo aims to foster a conducive environment for women entrepreneurs, facilitate skill development programmes and promote inclusive growth across industries.

'NDA to win over 400 LS seats'

PNS ■ KENDRAPADA

BJP national vice-president and Kendrapada Lok Sabha candidate Baijayant Panda on Monday claimed that the BJP-led NDA would win over 400 Lok Sabha seats in the 2024 elections.

Panda, while kick-starting his poll campaign by seeking blessings of Lord Baldevjw here and holding a massive road show, said the NDA would cross the mark of 400 Lok Sabha seats because of the rising popularity of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"Under PM Modi's regime, India has emerged as the fifth largest economy in the world. The people in the country are filled with enthusiasm as Ram



temple was constructed in Ayodhya after 500 years," said Panda.

He also underscored some other achievements of the NDA Government like abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution that accorded special status to Jammu & Kashmir and passing of Triple Talaq Bill.

Alert for heat wave in State sounded

Temp to rise further by 2 to 4 deg

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Even as eight places in the State on Monday recorded temperature above 40 degree Celsius, the weather office of Tuesday warned people to remain prepared for an intense summer in coming days as the mercury level would soar further in next couple of days.

As per the prediction by the Regional Office of the India Meteorological Department here, the State would experience a rise in temperature by two to four degree Celsius in

the next two days.

As per the IMD, the heat wave condition would be intense during April and the surge in temperature is likely to break all-time record during the period. The duration of heat wave condition would be longer during this April.

Similarly, the State is likely to witness intense heat wave condition for more than six to fourteen days during April, May and June in comparison to previous years.

Moreover, as per IMD sources, the heat wave condition would increase during day time while humid condition would be experienced at night. Mainly,

coastal, interior and northern parts of Odisha would witness such type of condition for the next two days. The maximum temperature in these parts of the State may touch up to 40 degree Celsius during the period.

"Temperature is likely to rise by two to four degree Celsius in many parts of the State in next two days. Coastal and interior parts of Odisha may witness maximum temperature up to 40 degree Celsius. North, coastal and interior parts of Odisha will experience intense heat wave condition between April 4 and 6," said IMD Regional Director Manorama Mohanty.

Ex-Min Ganeswar quits Cong

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Former minister Ganeswar Behera resigned from the primary membership of the Congress on Tuesday.

He sent his resignation letter to Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee (OPCC) president Sarat Pattanayak.

He also thanked the party for giving him opportunity to serve the people of Odisha as an MLA and a minister.

Behera is likely to join the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) soon,



sources said.

He told reporters that he would contest the upcoming Assembly elections.

Registers 10.73% growth

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The progressive gross GST collection during the Financial Year (FY) 2023-24 was Rs 54,747.97 crore with a growth of 10.73 percent over corresponding period of financial year 2022-23.

According to official data, Odisha has recorded the sec-

ond highest ever collection of gross GST (CGST+ IGST+ OGST + Cess) with a collection of Rs 5,109.33 crore during March 2024 against corresponding collection of Rs 4,749.02 crore recorded during March 2023 registering a growth rate of 7.59 percent. The highest ever collection of gross GST was recorded during February 2024 with a collection of Rs 5,135.81 crore.

The State has also recorded

the third highest ever collection of State GST (OGST + IGST settlement) with a collection of Rs 2,305.90 crore in the month of March 2024 against the corresponding collection of Rs 1,919.43 crore during March 2023 registering a phenomenal growth rate of 20.13 percent.

The highest and second highest ever collection of State GST were also recorded during the current FY with

collection of Rs 2,700.85 crore during November and Rs 2,528.41 crore during December respectively.

Out of this, the collection of OGST during March stood at Rs 1,659.31 crore, which is also the third highest ever OGST collection. The highest and second highest ever collection of OGST was recorded during April 2022 of Rs 1,714.78 crore and Rs 1659.57 crore during April

2023.

Similarly, the progressive collection of State GST (OGST + IGST Settlement) up to the month of March 2024 is Rs 24,051.45 crore against collection of Rs 18,600.52 crore up to March 2023, thereby registering a growth rate of 29.31 percent.

The collection under all Acts monitored by the Commissionerate of CT and GST, Odisha including OGST,

IGST settlement, VAT and Professional Tax during last month was Rs 4,458.83 crore against the collection of Rs 3,899.40 crore in March 2023. Therefore, it has registered a growth rate of 14.35 percent.

The progressive collection under all Acts up to March 2024 is Rs 37,160.81 crore with a growth rate of 19.80 percent over corresponding collection up to March 2023.

ICAI EIRC BBSR holds felicitation fest



Also, Peer Review Training Prog

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

It was a momentous occasion recognizing the outstanding leadership and dedication of these individuals in furthering the objectives and vision of ICAI.

The event saw felicitation of CA Ranjeet Kumar Agarwal, president of ICAI, CA Sanjib Sanghi, chairman of EIRC of ICAI, CA Vishnu Kumar Tulsyan, vice chairman of EIRC of ICAI, and CA Mayur Agarwal, secretary and trea-

surer of EIRC of ICAI, among others. CA Janhavi Deo, chairperson, Bhubaneswar branch expressed sincere appreciation for their contributions and emphasized their crucial role in advancing the profession to new heights.

The ceremony was graced by the presence of eminent professionals including CA Rajib Sekhar Sahoo, former chairman of ICAI Bhubaneswar, CA Mahendra Kumar Sahoo, vice chairman, ICAI Bhubaneswar, CA Goutam Lenka, secretary, ICAI Bhubaneswar and CA Pradip Kumar Sahoo, immediate past chairman and trea-

surer, ICAI Bhubaneswar. CA Sarat Chandra Bhadra, CA Prasant Panda, CA P Venugopal, CA Aswini Kumar Kar, CA Mihir Sahu, former Chairman of ICAI, Bhubaneswar also graced the occasion.

In addition to the felicitation programme, the Bhubaneswar Branch also successfully concluded a Peer Review Training Programme tailored for potential Peer Reviewers. The programme was coordinated by CA Ranjan Kumar Prusty, CA Gagan Bihari Das, and CA Saswat Tripathy and saw participation from over 200 members.

IIT-BBS pays tribute to Odisha's heritage

On Utkal Divas

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bhubaneswar celebrated the Utkal Divas in a grand manner. Chief guest Prof Parthasarathi Ajay Barik, an eminent speaker of Odia and English literature and Editor of a weekly newspaper "The Chira Sandhaan" graced the occasion, in the presence of Director, IIT Bhubaneswar Prof Shreepad Karmalkar, Dean (Student Affairs) Prof Rajesh Roshan Dash and Registrar of the institute Bamadev Acharya.

"IIT Bhubaneswar is committed and working consistently towards transforming the education sector of Odisha. Recently, the institute has launched the ambitious 100-Cube Start-up Initiative, which aims to create 100 start-ups, each with a valuation of Rs 100 crore by the 100th Anniversary of Odisha in 2036. The institute is also fo-



cus on researching the ancient knowledge resources to unearth mysteries behind the scientific insight and the engineering marvels of ancient Odisha," said Director Prof Karmalkar.

Speaking on the occasion, Registrar Acharya cherished the rich legacy and heritage of the land of Odisha.

Chief guest Prof Barik appreciated IIT Bhubaneswar for upholding and promoting the heritage of Odisha by organising various programmes.

Through various literary references, and poetic inferences, he recollected the contributions of different Odia leaders, who made efforts towards

making Odisha an independent State.

At the outset, Dr Remya Neelancherry, Coordinator, Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat (EBSB) delivered the welcome address. The programme was coordinated by the EBSB Team of IIT Bhubaneswar.

The celebration also included a quiz on Odisha. A vi-

brant cultural programme by the members of the institute showcased the spirit of the occasion and enthralled the audience.

To mark the occasion, the Central Library of the Institute initiated a special book display celebrating the enchanting land of Odisha and its rich cultural heritage.

Paradip No. 1 cargo handling major port in '23-'24

Breaks all records set by Deendayal Port, Kandla

PNS ■ PARADIP

The Paradip Port achieved new heights with the recent record-breaking achievement of clocking incredible 145.38 MMT cargo throughput in FY 2023-24 and thereby overtook Deendayal Port, Kandla to emerge as the highest cargo handling major port of the country.

During the financial year, the port achieved highest ever coastal shipping traffic of 59.19 million metric tonnes, with a growth of 0.76 million metric tonnes i.e. 1.30% over the previous year. The thermal coal coastal shipping has



reached 43.97 million metric tonnes i.e. 4.02% over the previous year cargo handling.

The port has been able to improve its berth productivity to 33,014 MT from 31,050 MT of previous financial year, thus registering 6.33% growth. The berth productivity is the highest among all the ports of the country. The port has handled 21,665 rakes, registering a growth of 7.65% over the previous financial year. Also, the port handled 2,710 ships, register-

ing an increase of 13.82% over the previous financial year.

Improved system of operation at mechanized coal hand plant to reduce idle time between rake unloading has resulted in highest handling of thermal coal at MCHP i.e. 27.12 million metric tonnes.

The northern dock of the port has been declared for handling 16 meters draught cape vessels.

In terms of provisional financial results, the operating

revenue has crossed Rs 2,300 crore against Rs 2,074 crore in comparison to previous fiscal, resulting in an increase of 14.30%. The operating surplus has crossed Rs 1,510 crore against last year of Rs 1,300 crore with a growth of 16.44%.

Paradip Port, which has mechanized 80% of the berths as on date, plans to become 100% mechanized by 2030 with the mechanization of existing 4 semi-mechanized berths.

PPA Chairman PL Haranadh has congratulated the entire team comprising exporters and importers, officers, staff unions, PPP operators, stevedores, shipping agents etc, whose combined effort has resulted in the stupendous achievement.

BJD neglecting interest of State: Congress



PNS ■ PHULBANI

BJD, the 5th largest regional party in the country, has received 1019.5 crore political donations through Electoral Bonds. The BJD is neglecting the interests of Odisha and the people. It is allowing the capitalists to take over the State's wealth, said Kandhamal district Congress Chandrashekhar Parida here on Monday.

The BJP is the using Enforcement Directorate, CBI and Income Tax against various industrialists and forcibly collection funds from them. It is no surprise that the BJP has received 8,247 crore

through Electoral Bonds within six years. However, the biggest surprise is that despite being a regional party, the BJD has received Rs 1,019 crore mainly from mining and steel companies, said Parida.

He questioned why all these mining companies and steel companies had donated hundreds of crores of rupees to the BJD. He said that the leaders of Bjd should explain it to the people of Odisha. While the BJP is collecting political donations through intimidation and threats, the bank account of the Congress was frozen illegally by the IT Department though elections are only two months away, said Parida.

Phulbani Bar Assn polls Patra elected prez, Satpathy secy



PNS ■ PHULBANI

The results of the Phulbani Bar Association election have been declared. Senior lawyer Nirod Kumar Patra was elected as the president, while Kunj Bihari Satapathy was elected as the secretary.

Similarly, others such as Har Prasad Samanta was elected as vice president, Sushant Kumar Sahu as joint secretary, Mohan Kumar Panda as library secretary, Asmita Kumari Naik as treasurer and Pratap Kumar Patra, Ajay Kumar Singh,

Gauri Shankar Behera, Dillip Kumar Banerjee, Binapani Pradhan, Biswajit Patnaik as executive members. Election Officer and senior lawyer Bijay Krishna Patnaik announced the results. Former president of Phulbani Bar Association Bhagban Mohanty and former secretary Kamal Kumar Behera and senior lawyer Bijay Kumar Mohanty welcomed the newly elected office bearers. The former members will hand over the charge to the newly elected members on April 2.

Nalco sets new records in output, sale

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The National Aluminium Company Limited (Nalco) has created new records in production and sales for the year 2023-24.

The company has achieved the highest-ever cast metal production of 4,63,428 Metric Tonnes, highest-ever bauxite excavation of 76,00,230 Metric Tonnes and highest-ever metal sale of 4,70,108 Metric Tonnes, surpassing all previous records since inception.

In FY 23-24, the company has also added a new Aluminium Alloy Ingot (AL-59) to its product range.

Achieving 101.15 % capacity utilisation, Nalco's Alumina Refinery has

produced 21,24,000 Metric Tonnes of Alumina Hydrate, while the Captive Power Plant has generated a gross 7,193.62 million units of power.



Worth mentioning that in FY 2023-2024, Nalco has developed and operationalised its Utkal D coal block and has also produced 2 Million Tonnes of coal, which is the peak rated capacity of the mine

Nalco CMD Sridhar Patra said that the company has always striven to do better than the previous set benchmarks. He congratulated the Nalco collective and stakeholders.

BJD nominees seek Lord Baladevjew's blessings

Before launching poll campaign

RAJESH BEHERA ■ KENDRAPADA

Following the announcement of their names as nominees to contest the 2024 simultaneous elections, the BJD candidates kicked off their poll campaign from Lord Baladevjew on Sunday evening.

According to sources, sitting MLA of Mahakalapada Assembly constituency and Minister Atanu Sabyasachi Nayak, Rajnagar MLA Dhruba Sahu, Arabinda Mohapatra, son of Bijay Mohapatra, who has got ticket to contest from Patkura Assembly seat, former Rajnagar MLA Anshuman Mohanty, who, after joining



BJD, has got ticket to contest from Kendrapada Lok Sabha seat, among their supporters, visited the Baladevjew temple. BJD observer for Kendrapada district and Mahanga MLA Pratap Jena accompanied them.

"As Baladevjew is the presiding deity of the district, so we came unitedly to take the blessings of the Lord to start the poll campaign for the en-

suing elections," said Atanu.

Dhruba said Lord Baladevjew is the presiding deity of the district; so the divine blessing of Lord Baladevjew will ensure victory.

Arabinda said when a new work starts everybody takes the blessings of almighty. He also stated he would ensure the BJD nominee for Kendrapada Parliamentary seat, Anshuman, wins.

District BJD observer Jena stated they came to take blessings and prayed before the Lord Baladevjew to ensure Kendrapada parliamentary seat would once again prove to be the citadel of BJD along with all the five Assembly seats of the district.

Anshuman said the blessings of Lord Baladevjew will help cross all hurdles.

Sitting Kendrapada MLA Shashi Bhushan Behera, former MLA of Kendrapada Kishore Tarai, District BJD president Dhiren Sahu, Sipra Mallick, youth BJD leader Rajesh Das, ZP president Gitanjali Sethy and Kendrapada Municipality Chairman Sarita Sahoo were present, apart from nearly 2,000 BJD supporters.

In Gajapati Woman arrested for plotting hubby's murder

Paramour also held

PNS ■ PARALAKHEMUNDI

Police have cracked the mysterious murder of Minor Irrigation Department employee M Lingaraju at Totagumuda village under the Gurandi police station in Gajapati district by arresting his wife and her paramour, said Gajapati SP Swathy S Kumar on Tuesday.

The victim's body had been recovered on March 29 near a paddy field at Totagumuda. The deceased's wife was identified as K Jayalakshmi and her accomplice N Upendra.

According to the SP, Jayalakshmi and Upendra had hatched a conspiracy to eliminate Lingaraju ever since the woman got married to the victim youth.

"Upendra had asked Lingaraju to come along with him to consume liquor together. Both travelled on a motorcycle and on the way, the accused man initially

stabbed the victim with a screwdriver on his neck, while the two-wheeler was moving. Both of them fell from the vehicle and then again the youth was stabbed almost 25 times on his chest and 27 times on his back. The accused man fled from the spot soon after committing the crime," the SP said.

"CCTV footage showing that Lingaraju and Upendra travelled on a motorcycle has been obtained. Police have seized mobile phones of Lingaraju, Jayalakshmi, and

Upendra, a motorcycle used in the crime, a gold chain and a ring which was taken away by the accused man following the murder, and dresses of Upendra worn on the intervening day, including the weapon of crime," the SP said.

"During the detailed probe, it was known that Lingaraju had been in depression since his marriage. This information led us to suspect Jayalakshmi and verify her call records (CDR)," the SP added while briefing mediapersons.

Police Foundation Day held in K'mal

PNS ■ PHULBANI

The 89th Police Foundation Day was celebrated by the Kandhamal police at the Madikunda Reserve Grounds in Phulbani of Kandhamal district on Monday.

Led by Armed Reserve Police Inspector Birrsen Shabar three platoons of police personnel held a parade. Additional Superintendent of Police Balabhadra Deep was the chief guest.

The chief guest awarded

Havildar Sudarshan Kahar, Best APR Constable Jitendra Bagh, Best OR Constable Babu Chandra Pradhan, Best ASI Balakrushnan Swami Babufor their outstanding work.

Among others, Commandant Officer of the 99 Battalion, the SDPOs of Baliguda, G Udayagiri and Sadar , former police officers including District Press Club secretary Birendra Kumar Subudhi, District Media Forum secretary Aditya Prasad Tripathy, Sadasib Patra, Vaidya Nath Naik were present.

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

The Ganjam district administration observed the 89th Utkal Divas in Brahmapur on Monday in accordance with the Model Code of Conduct.

The statutes of iconic leaders responsible for the formation of the separate of the Odisha were garlanded and tributes were paid recalling their sacrifices and contributions.

The Brahmapur Mahanagar Nigam also paid floral tributes



to all statues of great leaders responsible for formation of the State. In the evening, a meeting was conducted at Diamond Town Hall in memory of the great

personalities. Along with recitation of State Anthem 'Bande Utkal Janani' by school children, various cultural organisations presented patriotic songs and

dances.

Similarly, students of different schools, colleges and members of various organisations also observed the Utkal Divas.

INBRIEF

GADAKANA CITIZENS' FORUM HOLDS UTKAL DIVAS

Bhubaneswar: The Citizen's Forum Greater Gadakana celebrated its 8th annual day and the Utkal Divas at a function at the Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra Odishi Research Audito-



rium here on Monday. The function was presided over forum president Surendra Mohan Mishra. Omnath Mohanty was the chief guest and journalist Pradyumna Satpathy the chief speaker. Odishi dancer Kum Kum Mohanty was presented with the Citizen's Legend Award for 2024. The organisation also awarded Ramesh Chandra Nanda for protection of the environment. Forum media cell convenor Dillip Dashsharma was, vice-president Pradip Kumar Jena and secretary Jagabandhu Pani were present.

SHANTI HOSPITAL CELEBRATES 34TH FOUNDATION DAY

Bhubaneswar: The Shanti Memorial Hospital celebrated its 34th Foundation Day on April 1, 2024. Its CMD Dr Sreejoy



Patnaik, Executive Directors Prof Dr Rekha Das and SJ Bagchi along with others were present on the occasion.

JINDAL STEEL & POWER CELEBRATES UTKAL DIWAS

Angul: The Jindal Steel and Power (JSP) celebrated the 89th Utkal Divas at its Angul plant premises on April 1 with patriotic fervour and enthusiasm. Head of the Angul location and Executive Director Pankaj Malhan along with



Damodar Mittal and others paid homage to the great sons of Odisha, including Utkalgaurab Madhusudana Das and Utkalmani Gopabandhu Das.

OPGC BEGINS WATER SUPPLY TO 9 GPS IN J'SUGUDA

Jharsuguda: In a bid to address the acute drinking water scarcity prevailing in the summer season, the Odisha Power Generation Corporation (OPGC) on Monday commenced the summer season drinking water supply through tankers to 72 periphery villages of ITPS, which come under nine gram panchayats, Telenpali, Kusraloi, Remanda, Kumbharbandh, Dalgaon, Tilia, Piplikani Pandri, and Rampelaof of Lakkanpur block in Jharsuguda district. The water supply would continue till July 15. Fifteen tractors along with tankers with a capacity of 5,000 litres each have been deployed for this purpose



Police Foundation Day held in B'pur



9 cops felicitated by SP

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

The 89th Police Foundation Day was celebrated by Brahmapur Police District at the Reserve Police Round in Ambapua here. Brahmapur SP Saravana Vivek M joined as chief guest and took guard of honour. He remembered those martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the security of the country.

He sought cooperation from the public so that the police can provide better services to the common people in the society.

The officers and personnel of Brahmapur police who were awarded for their extremely commendable contributions in policing are SI Bibhuti Sethy, ASI B Tirupati, Havildar Brahma Narayan Samantray, Constable Kruna Chandra Mahankud, Constable Santosh Behera, Constable Kanha Dakua, Traffic Constable Debendra Rao, Traffic Constable Tukuna Behera and Driver Tapan Ransingh. Additional SP Ramesh Sethi conducted the event while all police officers and staff of Brahmapur Police District were present and assisted.

Odias hold 1st Utkala Dibasa in Brussels

Along with Holi

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

On March 23, the Belgium Odia Association organised its very first Utkala Dibasa and Holi celebration at Brussels. Deputy Chief of Mission in the Indian Embassy of Belgium Debasish Prusty inaugurated the event by lighting the lamps in the gracious presence of Odias staying in Belgium.

With the true spirit of Utkala Dibasa, the event consisted of a plethora of cultural programmes, including song and dance performances filled



completely with the flavours and fragrance of Odisha. More than 60 Odia families participated in the unique event which marks the first Utkala Dibasa celebration in Belgium. The cultural programme

commenced with the recital as well as dance performance of Odisha's anthem 'Bande Utkala Janani', followed by performance of Odissi dance, popular Odia and Sambalpuri songs, besides classic Odia cin-

ema songs. The event saw active participation from kids and elders alike. Kids games, Fashion Show/Ramp walks were also some of the highlights. The event concluded with the celebration of Holi.

Utkal Divas held across all TPCODL offices

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The TP Central Odisha Distribution Limited (TPCODL) celebrated Utkal Divas with pomp and show. TPCODL CEO Arvind Singh graced the celebration at the Head Office at Power House with senior management and other staff members. Colleagues from Circle, Division, Sub-Division and Section Officers joined the event virtually.

The function was also observed across various TPCODL offices, including the Bhubaneswar Corporate Office



and other Divisions, Sub-Divisions and Circle Offices.

Singh highlighted Odisha's formation, recognized its leaders' contributions and underscored the need to preserve the State's identity through language and

literature. He said, "Odisha's rich tapestry of stunning architecture, history, dialects, vibrant art, music and dance is truly remarkable. As the sun rises over this land, it illuminates temples steeped in heritage. I extend my heartfelt wishes to

all our customers and stakeholders for a joyous Utkal Divas."

Utkal Divas was also joyously celebrated in various Women's Learning Centers (WLC) and Vocational Training (VT) centers under TPCODL.

EC appoints special observers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



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

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

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

ICG Samudra Paheredar makes port call at Vietnam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

Must focus on changing nature of warfare: Rajnath to forces

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



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

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

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

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

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

Kharge attacks BJP over state of railways

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

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

EC ropes in Ayushmann to urge youngsters to vote

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



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

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

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

Congress complains to EC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

Only five per cent lithium ion batteries get recycled

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI



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

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

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

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

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

Congress LS candidates feel disowned by party

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■
DEHRADUN

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

PNS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Interesting seat to watch is Trivendra Singh Rawat of BJP and Virendra Rawat of Congress in Haridwar, a constituency represented by former CM and former Union Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal. Sitting independent MLA Umesh Kumar is now giving restless nights to both the Rawats as Umesh is contesting as an independent and has gathered a large base. Sources said Umesh demanded the ticket for Haridwar seat from Congress but denied since the stand taken by former State CM Harish Rawat who insisted his son Virendra’s candidature and if denied then threatened to quit the party.

Mayawati ekla cholo reshapes UP electoral landscape

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Enough, will not contest elections anymore, says Siddaramaiah

PTI ■ MYSURU

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Congress nominated its

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Prohibitory orders imposed in Assam Cachar ahead of LS polls

PTI ■ SILCHAR (ASSAM)

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

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

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

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

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

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

Additionally, the prohibition extends to carrying guns, toy

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

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

Modi ended politics of caste and appeasement: Nadra

PTI ■ JABALPUR/SHAHDDL

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

ministers are in jail, he said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Nine nominations filed for second phase of Assam LS polls

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

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

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

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

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

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

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

independent candidate Dilip Kumar had also submitted their papers.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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FIRST COLUMN

TIME TO ROOT OUT CORRUPTION

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



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

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

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



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

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

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

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

Political chameleons: A threat to democracy



SUKHDEV SINGH

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



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

But if influenced by the strategic local individual factors concerning the prospects of the political growth of an individual involving the chances of winning elections, gaining ministerial and other positions and gaining influence, then it is a matter of serious concern for a democracy, people and a nation. Another matter of a similar concern is the growing trust deficit of the people in the political class and cynicism about human integrity and political class due to the gap between what the political leaders say and do.

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Kangana Ranaut: From stardom to political aspirations

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

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

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



K S TOMAR

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

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

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

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



the backing of the BJP machinery and the charisma of Prime Minister Modi. The bypoll for the Mandi Lok Sabha seat held on October 30, 2021, saw the Congress candidate securing victory, largely due to the sympathy factor fol-

lowing the demise of Virbhadr Singh. However, with the political landscape shifting and the Congress party grappling with internal strife, Kangana's entry into the fray could potentially tilt the scales in her favour.

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

As she embarks on this new chapter in her life, Kangana will need to shed her filmy persona and connect with the grassroots workers and voters

on a more personal level. Building rapport with the electorate and demonstrating a genuine understanding of their needs will be crucial for her success as a politician.

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

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

Kitchen charity halts Gaza ops

AP ■ DEIR AL-BALAH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

AP ■ HELSINKI

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



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

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

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

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

AP ■ CAIRO

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



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

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

AP ■ DAKAR (SENEGAL)

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



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

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

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

Israel clears way to expel Al Jazeera

Netanyahu's incitement claim is a lie

AP ■ JERUSALEM

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

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

Sunak expands free childcare as 'improving' sign before election

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

Iran vows retaliation for Israeli strike on Syrian consulate

AP ■ TEHRAN

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

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

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

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

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

Congo appoints its first female PM

AP ■ KINSHASA (CONGO)

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



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

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

Channel opened for vessels clearing wreckage at bridge collapse site

AP ■ BALTIMORE (US)

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

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

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

PML-N led ruling coalition sweeps Senate elections in Pak

AP ■ ISLAMABAD/ LAHORE

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

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

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

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

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

NAWAZ SHARIF CHAIRS YET ANOTHER MEETING

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

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

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

Bushra Bibi poisoned in sub-jail: Imran

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

'Delivering justice strengthens security in my country'

AP ■ THE HAGUE (NETHERLANDS)

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



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

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

prosecuted 104 people.

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

sion.

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

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

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

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

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

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

AP ■ ISLAMABAD

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

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

Putin vows to find masterminds of concert hall attack

AP ■ MOSCOW

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

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

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

PTI ■ MOSCOW

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



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

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

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

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

Fire at Istanbul nightclub kills at least 29 people



AP ■ ISTANBUL

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

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

Pope exposes confidential details of past conclaves

AP ■ VATICAN CITY

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



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

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

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

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

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

India manufacturing sector growth hits 16 years high in March

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

"India's March manufacturing



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

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

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

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

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

the fastest pace since May 2022, the survey said.

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

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

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

machinery tools, plastics and steel.

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

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

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

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



India, EEU bloc start negotiation for FTA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The bilateral trade with Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan was USD 134.26 million, USD 111.81 million, USD 641.62 million, and USD 56.56 million, respectively, in 2022-23.

A similar agreement was signed by India and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). The members of this bloc are Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.

India commanding higher valuations on investors trust: Buch

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

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

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

They are encouraged by data suggesting the strength of



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

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

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

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

Bajaj Auto shares climb nearly three per cent

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

Stock markets end three days winning run

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge jumped 1.28 per cent and the midcap index climbed 1.14 per cent.

Analysts said mid and small-cap stocks continued their recovery rally, although concerns about high valuations lingered.

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



Gold falls ₹50; silver climbs ₹430

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

Audit profession at crossroads in fight for talent: ACCA

PNS ■ DELHI

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

This suggests professionals' growing preference for flexible, project-based work arrangements, it noted.

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

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

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

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MakeMyTrip, STB ink pact to promote Singapore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

Main board IPOs collect ₹62,000 crore in FY24

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

"With a diverse array of offerings and a fervent appetite for growth capital,

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

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

crore mopped up by 37 companies in the preceding fiscal.

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

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

Rupee falls four paise to close at 83.43 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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

settled at 83.43, a fall of 4 paise over its previous close. On Thursday last week, the rupee depreciated 6 paise to settle at 83.39 against the US dollar. Forex market was closed on Friday and Monday on account of 'Good Friday' and the annual account closing of banks, respectively.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on strong US dollar and weak tone in domestic markets. Rising crude oil prices may also weigh on the domestic currency," said Anuj Choudhary Research Analyst,

Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. Traders may take cues from Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS) and speeches by various US Federal Reserve officials. USD/INR spot price is expected to trade in the range of Rs 83.20 to Rs 83.60, Choudhary added.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.05 per cent lower at 104.96. Brent crude futures advanced 1.78 per cent to USD 88.98 per barrel.



INDIAN MEN HOCKEY TEAM HEADS TO AUSTRALIA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

April 7, 10, 12 and 13.

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

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

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

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

Praggnanandhaa enters as India best bet

PTI ■ TORONTO

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

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



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

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

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

ROAD TO THE CANDIDATES:

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

PTI ■ ROHTAK

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

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

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



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

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

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

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



Atletico Madrid beat Villarreal

AP ■ MADRID

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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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



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

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

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

Inter extends Serie A lead with win over Empoli

AP ■ ROME

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

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

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



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

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

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



DELHI CAPITALS READY FOR KKR CHALLENGE

PTI ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

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

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

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

While Stubbs showcased his prowess with the bat against Rajasthan Royals, a consistent show from him will do a world of good for DC.

On the other hand, Marsh is yet to produce a glimpse of his brute power with the willow which could prove to be DC's lethal weapon.

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



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

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

Skipper Shreyas Iyer also got some runs under his belt in the win against Royal Challengers Bengaluru.

Rookie pacer Harshit Rana has impressed so far, picking five wickets in two outings, but Mitchell Starc, their record

buy, and Varun Chakravathy have gone for runs aplenty.

THE TEAMS (FROM):

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

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



Parag reminds me of young SKY: Bond

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

The 22-year-old Parag has brought his rich form from domestic cricket into the IPL, striking two high quality fifties to help Rajasthan notch up wins in all three games so far.

Parag's latest effort came against Mumbai Indians in his side's six-wicket win on Monday. He dropped anchor to spearhead Royals' chase of 126, scoring 54 not out off 39 balls with the help of five fours and three sixes.

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

Bond played a crucial role in developing bowling talents at MI in his nine-year stint with the Mumbai-based franchise from 2015 onwards, before shifting base to Jaipur this year.

"He (Parag) has had an outstanding domestic season, obviously, batting up the order. The trade we made with Devdutt (Padikkal), bringing Avesh (Khan) in, that was to put Rryan up into a position which was probably better suited," the former New Zealand fast bowler added.

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

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

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

generally pretty experienced guys," he said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

on the losing side.

Sidhu said the fans' reaction is quite understandable as Rohit is a much-loved cricketer.

"Nobody can digest the fact that India's hero, India's captain, is not the captain of our franchise. 'What wrong has he done?' is what fans of the franchise would be thinking. But what does he have to do?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



KKR-RR, GT-DC matches rescheduled: BCCI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

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

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

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

Kohli seems to have evolved again: Hussey

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

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

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

Kohli's strike rate.

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

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

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

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



ultra-aggressive one.

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

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

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

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

from now IPL would be entirely different.

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

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

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

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

EAST COAST RAILWAY	
File No. DRM/Engg/KUR/23-24/ E-Tender/147, Dt. 25.03.2024	
(1) Tender No. : e-TenderSouthKUR-464-2023, Dtd. 19.03.2024	
Description: PROPOSED CONSTRUCTION OF TRACK MAINTAINER ROOM CUM TOOL ROOMS IN GANJAM (GAM)-PALASA (PSA) SECTION UNDER THE JURISDICTION OF ASSISTANT DIVISIONAL ENGINEER/BRAHMAMPUR/KHURDA ROAD.	
Approx. cost of the work : ₹ 88.86 Lakh, EMD: ₹ 1,77,700.00.	
(2) Tender No. : e-TenderSouthKUR-465-2023, Dtd. 19.03.2024	
Description: PROPOSED CONSTRUCTION OF TRACK MAINTAINER ROOM CUM TOOL ROOMS IN KHURDA ROAD (KUR)-GANJAM (GAM) SECTION UNDER THE JURISDICTION OF ASSISTANT DIVISIONAL ENGINEER/BALUGAON/KHURDA ROAD.	
Approx. cost of the work : ₹ 104.02 Lakh, EMD: ₹ 2,02,000.00.	
(3) Tender No. : e-Tender-BRIDGEKUR-456-23, Dtd. 15.03.2024	
Description: REGIRDING OF MAJOR BRIDGES HAVING PLATE GIRDERS OF BGML LOADING STANDARD IN SENIOR SECTION ENGINEER (BRIDGE)/CUTTACK-K JURISDICTION UNDER SENIOR DIVISIONAL ENGINEER (BRIDGE), KHURDA ROAD IN CONNECTION WITH MISSION 3000 MT.	
Approx. cost of the work : ₹ 1364.81 Lakh, EMD: ₹ 8,32,400.00.	
Completion period : 06 (Six) Months (for sl. no. 1 & 2) and 18 (Eighteen) Months (for sl. no. 3).	
Tender closing Date & Time: At 1500 hrs. of 10.04.2024 (for all tenders).	
No manual offers sent by Post/Courier/Fax in person shall be accepted against such e-tenders.	
Complete information including e-tender documents of the above e-tender is available in website : www.ireps.gov.in	
Note : The prospective tenderers are advised to revisit the website 10 (Ten) days before the date of closing of tender to note any changes/corrigendum issued for this tender.	
Divisional Railway Manager (Engg.) PR-1210/O/23-24 Khurda Road	