

OPINION 6
IGNORING NEIGHBOURS TO
EMBRACE THE WORLD

WORLD 8
SUNAK FACES RESISTANCE OVER
SMOKING BAN PLANS

MONEY 10
MARKETS SLUMP
FOR THIRD DAY

Published From
DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA

Late City Vol.20 Issue 104
*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

BHUBANESWAR, WEDNESDAY APRIL 17, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹4

Established 1864

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www.dailypioneer.com

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Modi, Mamata faceoff in Bengal



(Left to right): Prime Minister Narendra Modi with BJP candidate Sukanta Majumdar during a public meeting ahead of Lok Sabha elections, in Balurghat and West Bengal on Tuesday; Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during an election campaign rally ahead of Lok Sabha polls, at Hill Cart road in Siliguri on Tuesday

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Bengal witnessed a virtual duel between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee even as the former accused the Bengal Government of stopping Ram Navami celebrations and honouring those who throw stones at Ram Navami processions while the latter asked the people, particularly the minorities not to walk into the trap of the BJP which is trying to trigger communal riots in Bengal. The Prime Minister, who was addressing election rallies at Balurghat and Raiganj in North Bengal, alleged how the Bengal administration has

been doing everything to spike the Ram Navami celebrations. "Tomorrow the entire nation goes to celebrate the Ram Navami ... but here the Trinamool Congress has always tried to stop it from taking place in Bengal ... they tried many conspiracies. And we were forced to get permission from the High Court and tomorrow, with devotion and faith, we will celebrate Ram Navami," the Prime Minister said. "It has always been that the TMC stops such religious programmes and promotes and honours those people who throw stones at these processions," he said.

However, the Chief Minister hit back from a rally at Moinaguri in Jalpaiguri district asking people to remain alert against the "evil designs of the BJP to trigger riots in the name of festivals." In a statement that most Opposition parties, including the BJP read as a bid to act the messiah of the Muslims before elections, Mamata said, "Bengal is for every religion but here are some people who are trying to play communal politics by triggering riots I ask the people, particularly my minority brothers and

sisters to keep your cool and do not walk into the trap laid by them ... some people are spreading fake videos ... some may raise slogans ... but if you hear such slogans keep your cool and pray to Allah so that things pass off without fuss ... because Ram Navami is a festival of mutual respect and honour." The BJP sends NIA in Bengal to disturb and victimise the innocent people, she said. Earlier the High Court had allowed Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Anjani Putra Sena to take out processions,

but under certain conditions, the maximum participants should not be more than 200 and that there would be no play of arms or DJs. Tuesday's development came against the backdrop of weeks' long riots at Howrah, Serampore and Dalkhola in the days following Ram Navami. The Modi-Mamata spar came at a time when in a major development the Jadavpur University authorities on Tuesday allowed the celebrations of Ram Navami at the campus even as sources said "if Saraswati Puja can be organised why Ram Navami cannot be celebrated here." This is the first time that such

celebrations would be allowed inside the campus. Elsewhere in North Bengal the Chief Minister warned the people against the Citizenship Amendment Act, comparing it with the head of a big fish which has a tail in the National Register of Citizens. "If it is a big fish then the CAA is the head and NRC is the tail and the Uniform Civil Code is its torso," Mamata said accusing the BJP government of playing "dirty politics of polarisation." Attacking the Centre for "defaming Bengal with allegations of corruption," she demanded a white paper to be released on the issue.

Chattisgarh encounter leaves 29 Naxals dead

PTI ■ KANKER

At least 29 Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security personnel in Chhattisgarh's Kanker district on Tuesday, police officials said. Three security personnel suffered injuries in the fierce gun-battle and a large quantity of weapons was also recovered from the spot, they said. The gunfight took place at around 2 pm in Hapatola forest between Binagunda and Koronar villages under Chhotabethiya police station limits, when a joint team of the Border Security Force (BSF) and the state police's District Reserve Guard (DRG) was out on an anti-Naxal operation, Inspector General of Police (Bastar Range) Sundarraj P said. The operation was launched based on inputs about the presence of senior cadres of north Bastar division of the outlawed CPI (Maoist) Shankar, Lalita, Raju and others, he said. During patrolling in the area, a fierce gun-battle broke out between the two sides, the senior IPS officer said. "Bodies of 29 Maoists along with a huge cache of weapons, including AK-47, SLR, Insas and .303 rifles, were recovered from the spot," the IG said. Polling in the Naxalite-hit



Bastar Lok Sabha seat will take place on April 19 in the first phase, while the Kanker constituency, part of the Bastar region, will vote in the second round of general elections on April 26. The search operation was still underway in the area amid intermittent firing between security personnel and Naxalites, said Sundarraj. "Three security personnel sustained injuries in the gunfight and their condition was stated to be out of danger," he said, adding they were referred to hospital for treatment. After the latest encounter, 79 Naxalites have been killed in separate gun-battles with security forces in the Bastar region, comprising seven districts, including Kanker, so far this year. On April 2, as many as 13 Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security forces in Bijapur district.



Ranjan Dimri / The Pioneer

Congress leads in complaints to EC

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Amid allegations by Opposition parties that the Government is misusing probe agencies to target its leaders, the Election Commission on Tuesday shared a data saying around 200 complaints have been filed by various political parties and candidates across States. The Congress is the top in the list of filing complaints to the EC, followed by the BJP for violation of Model Code of Conduct. According to the EC, the BJP has filed 51 complaints, of them, action has been taken in 38 cases while the Congress filed 59 and action taken on 51 cases. Several political parties from the INDIA Bloc had approached the poll panel seeking its intervention in the alleged misuse of probe agencies by the Government to target their leaders over

graft. Following the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal by the Enforcement Directorate in a money laundering case linked to the alleged excise scam, the Opposition parties had mounted renewed attack on the Government for its alleged bid to silence their leaders ahead of parliamentary elections. According to the EC, suo motu removal of officers holding dual charges as Principal Secretaries to Chief Ministers in six States namely Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand, as they were holding charge of Home/General Administration department also. This was to distance election related senior officers with control over, DMs/DEOs/ROs and SPs, from Chief Minister's offices.

In Kendrapada dist 5 including woman die in lightning

RAJESH BEHERA ■ KENDRAPADA

As many as five persons, including a woman, died in separate incidents of lightning in various places of Kendrapada district on Tuesday. The first incident was reported from Bangari and Pundilo villages under Garadpur block. The two deceased were identified as a youth, Purnachandra Chhatoi, and an elderly man, Asutosh Jena. Lightning struck

Purnachandra when he was standing near his house. Asutosh died when he was on the rooftop of his house when lightning struck him. Though their families' members shifted him to hospital, they were declared brought dead. One Shiba Prasad Sahu of Birijanga village of Talakusuma GP under the Kudanagari police station died on the spot while he was working in his farmland when lightning struck him. The family members took him to the Patkura CHC, but the

doctor declared him brought dead. Similarly, a 45-year-old woman Ambika Malik of Biraswati village of Ostapur GP under Sadar police station died when lightning struck him. A 37-year-old prawn farmer, Anil Behera, of Salianacha village under the Aul police station died on the spot as lightning struck him while he was working in his prawn ghery. He was rushed to the Aul CHC but was pronounced dead by the doctor.

BBSR records temp of 41.9 deg Mercury to rise further in State in next 3 days

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Even as the heat wave continued to singe the State, Bhubaneswar virtually turned into a blast furnace recording a temperature of 41.9 degree Celsius by 2.30 pm on Tuesday. However, the Baripada recorded the day's highest temperature of 43.6 degree.

Besides the capital city, six other places recorded temperatures of 40 degrees Celsius and above. Chandbali recorded 41.6 degree, Jharsuguda 41.4 degree, Baleswar 40.5 degree, Sambalpur 40.3 degree and Keonjhar 40 degree. The Regional office of the IMD here warned that the day temperature is very likely to increase by 2 to 4 degree at many places in the State during the next three days. "Due to prevailing north-

westerly/ westerly dry air and high solar insolation, day temperature is very likely to rise by 2 degree to 4 degree at many places over the districts of Odisha during the next three days. Consequently, maximum temperature (day temperature) is likely to be more than 40 degree or above at many places over the districts of the State and likely to be above normal by 3 to 5°C over some districts of Odisha during next four to five days," the IMD said.

Dilip Ray to contest from Rourkela Assembly seat

BJP releases 21 names in 2nd list of candidates

NALINI SAHU ■ BHUBANESWAR

After a hiatus of five years, former Union Minister and BJP leader Dilip Ray has returned to electoral politics as he made a cut into the second list candidates that was released by the party for Assembly elections. The BJP, which had on April 2 cleared 112 names for Assembly polls, released 21 names in the second list on Tuesday. Dilip, who was elected to the Assembly in 2014 by defeating Sarada Nayak of the ruling BJD in Rourkela, had refrained from contesting the elections in 2019. "Dilip is a great asset for us. His presence in the electoral battlefield will make a huge difference. He carries the



power to inspire the party's cadres," said senior BJP leader Biranchi Tripathy. As many as four BJD turncoats, who recently joined the BJP, have found place in the second list. They include Jagannath Nundruka, Kailash Kulesika, Amarendra Dash and Dambaru Sisa. "I was in the BJD. They had assured me that they would give me a ticket. They ignored my case and gave ticket to Prabhu Jani as he protects and promotes their mining business interests in our area. They

even tried to bribe me which I rejected," said Kulesika. The full list of BJP candidates on Tuesday: Rourkela: Dilip Ray, Patna (ST): Akhil Chandra Naik, Saraskana (ST): Bhadav Hansdah, Rairangpur (ST): Jolen Barda, Bangiriposi (ST): Sanjali Murmu, Karanjia (ST): Padmacharan Haibru, Jharigam (ST): Narsingh Bhatra, Bissam Cuttack (ST): Jagannath Nundruka, Rayagada (ST): Basanta Kumar Ullaka, Laximpur (ST): Kailash Kulesika, Kotpad (ST): Rupa Bhatra, Pottangi (ST): Chaitanya Nandibali, Chitrokonda (ST): Dambaru Sisa, Dabugam (ST): Somnath Pujari, Rajanagar: Lalit Behera, Balikuda-Ersama: Satya Sarathi Mohanty, Jagatsinghpur: Amarendra Dash, Kakatpur (SC): Baidhar Mallick, Ranpur: Surama Padhy, Sanakhemundi (ST): Uttam Kumar Panigrahi and Mohana (ST): Prasanta Mallik

Aditya tops UPSC exams, Animesh second, Donuru third

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

The announcement of civil services results 2023 on Tuesday stirred up more excitement than usual. Social media platforms were agog with compliments, best wishes, filmy dialogues, gyan and pravachan on the mother of all examinations conducted by Public Services Commission (UPSC). Led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, his entire Council of Ministers, BJP contestants in the Lok Sabha, other political figures from ruling and Opposition sides were first time on the same page wishing the toppers and successful candidates who cleared the exams held last year.

In fact the UPSC results were trending on various media platforms. Aditya Srivastava, originally selected for the Indian Police Services (IPS) last year, added another feather to his cap as he secured the top rank in the UPSC Civil Services Examination 2023. Hailing from Lucknow, Srivastava's journey has been remarkable, characterised by his stint in the corporate world before pursuing civil services, reflecting his resilience and dedication. Joining Srivastava in this remarkable achievement are Animesh Pradhan from Odisha, a Bachelor of Technology degree holder in computer science from NIT Rourkela, and Telangana

native Donuru Ananya Reddy, a graduate from Delhi University's Miranda House College with a degree in geography, securing the second and third ranks respectively. Soon after the results were announced, Modi congratulated those who cleared the examination, emphasising their hard work, perseverance, and dedication. "I congratulate all those who have successfully cleared the Civil Services Examination, 2023. Their hard work, perseverance and dedication has paid off, marking the start of a promising career in public service. Their efforts will shape the future of our nation in the times to come. My best wishes to them," the



(Left to right): Aditya Srivastava (All India Rank (AIR) 1), Uttar Pradesh; Animesh Pradhan (AIR 2), Odisha's and Donuru Ananya Reddy (AIR 3), Telangana

Prime Minister wrote on X (previously Twitter). Senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi too joined in congratulating the candidates, "Congratulations to all the candidates who have successfully cleared this year's UPSC Civil Services Examination. With dedication and commitment, you are now entrusted with the responsibility of serving our great country. My best wishes for your future endeavours." Among the 1,016 recommended candidates, comprising 664 men and 352 women, the top five positions are evenly distributed, with three men and two women. An IPS trainee from Kerala PK Sidharth Ramkumar

secured the fourth rank with anthropology as his optional subject, while a Gurugram resident Ruhani secured the fifth rank with economics as her optional subject. Among the top 25 candidates, there are 10 women and 15 men, reflecting a diverse range of educational backgrounds, including engineering, humanities, science, commerce, business administration, architecture, and law from premier institutions such as IIT, IIM, NIT, University of Delhi, and National Law University. The selected candidates also include 30 people with benchmark disabilities, reflecting the UPSC's commitment to inclusivity.

In Keonjhar Truck mows down two to death

PNS ■ KEONJHAR
A truck mowed down two persons to death and left another one critically injured on NH-20 near Dhrupada in Keonjhar district on Tuesday. As per reports, the truck hit a motorcycle by which three persons were travelling. Two occupants of the motorcycle, identified as Lalmoan Behera and Tapas Nayak, died on the spot under the impact of the collision. Another person, identified as Bapi Behera, sustained critical injuries in the accident and was admitted to the District Headquarters Hospital for treatment.



The collision was so severe that the motorcycle caught fire and was completely damaged. Police started an investigation into the incident.

Reports indicated that before the accident, the truck driver was trying to flee the spot after the vehicle hit a transgender on the road.

In Angul Bus hits truck; driver dies, 20 hurt



PNS ■ ANGUL
The driver of a bus was killed while 20 passengers sustained injuries as the vehicle hit a dumper truck on NH-55 near Jarapada Square in Angul district early in Tuesday morning. Reports indicated that the bus, carrying 30 passengers from Korba in Chhattisgarh to

Puri, collided with the truck parked on roadside from the rear, resulting in the driver's death on the spot. On being informed, police and fire brigade teams rushed to the spot and initiated a rescue operation. The injured were taken to the District Headquarters Hospital in Angul, with five of them reported to be in critical conditions.

Illegal gun factory busted in Sambalpur

3 held; 22 guns seized

PNS ■ SAMBALPUR
Police unearthed an illegal gun manufacturing unit and arrested three persons in this connection in the Jamankira area of Sambalpur district on Tuesday. Acting on a tipoff, a police team conducted a raid at Basupali and unearthed the firearms manufacturing unit. The police initially arrested two persons, Ganesh Singh and Arun Bhoi, of Chirgonikhola under the Sambalpur police station. The cops also recovered a double-barrel rifle and a single-barrel gun from their possession.



During interrogation, the two revealed the name of one Bidyadhar Pradhan who was engaged in assembling and selling illegal firearms. While Bidyadhar was nabbed, police recovered 20 single-barrel guns, rifle butts

and five barrels along with materials used in the manufacture of firearms. According to the police, several cases are pending against the three accused at different police stations in the district.

KIMS docs cure 61-yr-old of prostate cancer

Through advanced laparoscopic surgery

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
In a major achievement by doctors at the Kalinga Institute of Medical Sciences (KIMS), a 61-year-old male patient has been completely cured of prostate cancer following sophisticated laparoscopic surgery.

A team of doctors, led by Dr Sumanta Mishra, Associate Professor and HoD of Urology at KIMS, performed the advanced laparoscopic radical prostatectomy procedure on the patient, who was discharged after four days. The patient had approached the KIMS Urology Department with symptoms indicative of prostate issues. Elevated levels of Prostate-Specific Antigen (PSA) in his tests raised concerns, leading to a TRUS-guided prostate biopsy and a PSMA PET scan. These advanced diagnostic tools confirmed the presence of localised prostate cancer, offering a clear path toward treatment. The highly specialised laparoscopic radical prostatectomy procedure, which involved the complete removal of the prostate gland along with the cancer cells and re-connecting the urinary bladder to the urethra, allowed the patient to experience a swift recovery and minimal scarring thanks to the precision of laparoscopic surgery. With the success of the case, KIMS has joined a select few hospitals in Odisha offering advanced prostate cancer treatment. The success was made possible because of the state-of-the-art equipment available at the KIMS cancer center, such as the PSMA PET scan, TRUS-guided biopsy, and a skilled team of urologists led by Dr. Mishra. Founder of KIIT and KISS Dr Achyuta Samanta congratulated the doctors for the pioneering treatment, underlining KIMS focus on advanced care and treatment.



Dr. Mishra. Founder of KIIT and KISS Dr Achyuta Samanta congratulated the doctors for the pioneering treatment, underlining KIMS focus on advanced care and treatment.

Miming town Talcher sizzles at 45 deg temp

All measures taken to prevent heatwave related death: Admn

DHIRMOHAN RAY ■ TALCHER
Sweltering heat has thrown normal life out of gear in mining town Talcher and several adjoining areas as the peak temperature of the day soared as high as 45 degree Celsius. In Talcher, though the temperature remained below 43 degrees C till April 13, it shot up after April 15, while other areas recorded around 43-46 degrees C. However, the temperature in coal mine areas remained three to four degrees higher. Meanwhile streets wore a deserted look during the peak hours from 11.30 am to 4.30



pm. Massive industrialisation, rampant deforestation and burning of coal in power plant boilers and in mines have contributed to the upsurge of heat wave conditions in Talcher. Besides, another reason for the rise in temperature is the

burning of coal in NTPC, Kaniha and Nalco power plants which reportedly consume around above 1 lakh tonnes of coal per day. Also, deforestation in Talcher coal belt and emission from trucks carrying coal to other parts of

the State add to the woes. Sub-collector Manoj Kumar Tripathy said, "We have asked coal mining and other industrial units not to allow anyone to work beyond 11 am. Also, health care professionals are on alert to treat sun stroke patients at nearby hospitals." Though no heat-related health issues have been reported as yet, the administration has geared up for possible emergencies. "We are monitoring public health conditions of various village points and further course of action will be taken accordingly. Besides, locals are being enlightened on ways to protect themselves from the heat," said SDMO in charge of Talcher Sub Divisional Hospital Dr Arabinda Nandi.

In Jharsuguda Undertrial makes suicide bid, jumps from court bldg

PNS ■ JHARSUGUDA
Tension prevailed after an undertrial prisoner reportedly made a suicide bid by jumping from the second floor of the District Court building in Jharsuguda on Tuesday. The prisoner, identified as Sanatan Singh of Junadihi village under the Belpahar police limits, was shifted to the District Headquarters Hospital in a critical state. As per reports, Singh had been arrested under the POCSO Act for his alleged involvement in a rape case in April last year and was scheduled to appear in the court on Tuesday. The hearing was underway when he suddenly created a scene and, before anyone could restrain him, jumped from the second floor of the building. He suffered grievous injuries and was rushed to the hospital for treatment. After recuperating, he claimed that he resorted to this extreme step out of distress as the victim girl and lawyers were extorting money from him and blackmailing him.

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Fire Service Week kicks off at Paradip Port

PNS ■ PARADIP
The Paradip Port Authority (PPA) observed the Opening Ceremony of the National Fire Service Week on Monday. The National Fire Service Day is observed every year on April 14 to pay homage to the brave firemen and officers who lost their lives in the Bombay Dock Explosion on April 14, 1944 and on subsequent occasions. A massive fire safety awareness drive is underway since April 1 which will continue till April 20 under the direction of Chairman, Paradip Port Authority, so as to educate the port workers and stakeholders as well as local public and school children about fire hazard, fire prevention and fire-fighting. The theme for the year 2024 is: "Ensure Fire Safety to Contribute Towards Nation Building."

The Opening ceremony was held at the main fire station of CISF fire wing. Chairman PPA PL Haranadh was the chief guest on the occasion. Addressing the gathering, he stressed on creating fire safety awareness among stakeholders and congratulated CISF, Fire wing of PPA for bagging the runners-up trophy recently in the country amongst a total of 114 fire wing units. At the outset, CISF Commandant Akshat Patel welcomed the invitees and presented the annual report. At the end, Deputy Commandant/Fire Bishnu Swarup presented a vote of thanks. The event was conducted by Company Commander Fire Wing Inspector Bhaskar Das and the same was highly appreciated by one and all present on the occasion.

Puri police busts inter-dist dacoit gang

11 held; valuables, cash, guns, seized

PNS ■ BALANGA
The Puri police busted a notorious inter-district dacoit gang that was allegedly involved in dacoities in the Balanga, Pipili, Konark and Astaranga police station areas by arresting 11 persons on Tuesday. The police also seized 462 grams of gold ornaments, 566 grams of silver ornaments, cash of Rs 18 lakh, guns, seven unexploded bombs, vehicles from the possession of the accused. Puri SP Pinak Mishra said the police had formed a special squad following an inci-



dent of dacoity in Dr Rabindra Mohapatra's house at Dakhina Sahi village under the Balanga police station on April 6. The gang looted 350-gram gold ornaments and cash from the house of Dr Mohapatra after attacking the family members with sharp weapons. Under the guidance of the SP, the team conducted investigations and arrested

11 members of the gang. The arrested were identified as Hafiz Khan, Md Arman, Rahulsha, Aslam Khan, Jagannath Pushpalak, Ayub Khan, Urmansha, Asif Khan of the Pipli police station area and Subrajit Parida of the Balianta PS area, Rashmi Ranjan Samantray of the Balanga PS area and Pradipta Khuntia of the Astaranga PS area.

Nimapara SDPO PK Mallik, Pipli SDPO Biranchi Narayana Pati, Astaranga PS IIC Rajesh Baliarsingh, Konark PS IIC Purnachandra Sethi, Pipli PS IIC Dipak Khandayataray, Balanga PS OIC Dibyanjan Panda, SI Mamata Biswal and SR Jena were members of the special team.

Sri Ram Navami Let Marjyadapurush Lord Ram be our role model

RADHAKANTA DAS

Sri Ram is Lord Krishna. He performed the Ram Avatar. Mother Sita is Maa Laxmi. Laxman performed Leela as Balaram. Satrugna and Bharat performed Leela as Sankha and Chakra respectively. Mahaprabhu Ram was born in the traditional Raghubansha family. The administration of Maharaj Dasharath was of very high standard. He married 360 women at that time called as Ranis. Among them Koushalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra were important. His worry was that he didn't have a son though he was growing old. One day he discussed the issue with Kulaguru Basistha and sought remedies. He was asked to organise a "Parastya Yajna" what he obliged. He gave a half of the Kheer (sweet rice) of the Yajna to

queen Koushalya and another half to queen Kaikeyi and Sumitra respectively. The three queens became pregnant and gave birth to four sons. Ram was born of Koushalya, Bharat of Kaikeyi and Laxman, Satrugna were born of Sumitra. King Dasharath and people of Ayodhya become very happy getting the four Rajkumars. Prabhu Ram performed his noble deeds right from his childhood recovering blighted Ahalya from a stone and killing very many demons who were creating nuisances and tormenting the Sadhus in their Ashrams. In course of time, the four Rajkumars became young. Guru Basistha taking permission from Dasharath took them to participate in the Soyamber festival of Devi Sita, who was daughter of King Janak. The king had kept a condition that anyone who could brake the Shiva Dhanu at his palace

would be only marry her daughter. Except Ram, nobody could do it. Accordingly, Ram married Devi Sita. Once, Maharaj Dasharath had gone to forest on a hunting expedition (Paridhi). Shruvan Kumar was taking his blind parents on pilgrimage and was lifting them in swing on his shoulder. When he had gone into the forest to fetch water for his blind thirsty parents, King Dasharath mistook him to be a bear and hunted him with his arrow. Shruvan died there. But before that he introduced him and explained why he had come there. Before collapsing, he requested Raja Dasharath to take the pot of water to his thirsty parents. On knowing from Dasharath that Shruvan was killed by him, his parents were shocked and cursed Dasharath to suffer similar plight of theirs of having to die craving for son. In the absence of Bharat and Satrugna, one day Maharaj



Dasharath proposed Kulaguru Basistha to perform Abhisekh of Jubarath of Ram on his Janma Tithi. He said that he was too old and in his absence Ram will perform duty of king. All became very happy and Kulaguru Basistha suggested the next day to be the most suitable for the coronation ceremony. In another incident Maharaj Dasharath had given words to queen Kaikeyi to fulfill her two wishes because the latter had done him a great favour. All queens including Kaikeyi were very happy over the news of coronation of Ram. But in the meantime, Kaikeyi's maid Manthara colluded with her to make Kaikeyi's son Bharat the Yuvaraj instead of Ram. She persuaded queen Kaikeyi to take advantage of the promises Dasharath had made and ask the king to make her son the Yuvaraj and send Ram to 14 years' of exile to forest. Tempted, when Kaikeyi did so, Dasharath was helpless. Finally,

Ram with Sita and Laxman proceeded to forest for 14 years. When Bharat got this news he rushed back from his uncle's house to the palace and from there ran to brother Ram who was at Chitrakut Ashram. All queens, members of the court and people of Ayodhya proceeded to the Chitrakut Ashram to bring back Ram to Ayodhya, but failed to move Ram. Ram said he was following his father's order and was ready to take hardship to honour his father's promises. On the other hand, Dasharath died bemoaning and craving for his dearest son Ram. When Ram was in the forest, he had to fight against all odds. Demons who had wrecked havoc were killed by him. This endeared him with the Rishis who blessed him. One day, Demon King Ravana came in the vestige of a Rishi and took away Sita from her hut while Ram and Laxman were not present. After inquiry with

help of monkeys, Ram came to know from Prabhu Hanuman that the demon Ravana had stolen away Devi Sita and kept her in the Ashoka forest. At last by help of Banara Sena, he conquered Lanka, killed Ravana and released Devi Sita from captivity. After completion of 14 years in forest, Lord Ram, Devi Sita and Lord Laxman returned back to Ayodhya. The same tithi is observed as Vijaya Dashami. Here a question arises is why various opera parties perform Ram Leela and people observe Ram Navami Utsav with much fanfare? The answer is Mahaprabhu Sri Ram Chandra is the Marjyada Purusha. He performed his duties with honesty and perfection as a son, as a father, as a king and as a husband. If people follow his noble deeds, a healthy and prosperous society can be created. (Das is PRO, ISKCON, Bhubaneswar; Mob No: 9132090199)



Contribute fully in 400 seats goal: PM to Bengal

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi resumed his electoral campaign in North Bengal once again giving out a 400-seat-call so as to enable him translate his "trailer" of a performance into a full-fledged act of making India the third largest economic power in the world.

breach the 400-seat mark ... this large gathering conveys this message to me that the people of Bengal will definitely bless us to achieve that feat," of 400 seats, the Prime Minister said. However, Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee who was holding a rally barely 200 km away at Jalpaiguri said "let them cry hoarse for 400-seats ... but they will not get more than 200 this time round," wondering "if they are so confident of getting 400 seats then why are they sending agencies and sending opposition leaders to jail."



administration ... the corruption in the primary school teachers' recruitment is a big example." Saying that every raid by the central agencies in the houses of ministers and TMC leaders yielded crores of rupees the Prime Minister said how "even the investigating agencies are not spared by the Trinamool Congress goons who attack and injure them when they come in search of operations."

The TMC Government was stoking infiltration and thwarting the Citizenship Amendment Act which was made to provide citizenship to genuine people the Prime Minister said, "they are misleading the people on CAA and promoting infiltrators" which would ruin the future of the people of Bengal.

AAP announces final list of four more candidates in Punjab

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

The Aam Aadmi Party on Tuesday announced its final list of four more candidates in Punjab for the Lok Sabha polls, fielding three legislators and a turncoat. With this announcement, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has declared its candidates for all 13 parliamentary seats in Punjab.



three party MLAs - ?Jagdeep Singh Kaka Brar from the Ferozepur Lok Sabha seat, Amansher Singh Kalsi from Gurdaspur and Ashok Parashar Pappi from the Ludhiana parliamentary seat. Brar is an MLA from Muktsar. He had defeated SAD nominee Kanwaljit Singh in the 2022 assembly polls. Brar had unsuccessfully contested the 2017 assembly polls.

The Congress is yet to name its candidate from the Gurdaspur seat. From Ludhiana seat, AAP has fielded Ludhiana Central MLA Pappi. He will face three-time MP Ravneet Singh Bittu, who is now the BJP candidate. Bittu had quit the Congress and joined the BJP. The Shiromani Akali Dal and the Congress are yet to name their candidates from Ludhiana.

RLD joining BJP will not impact Muzaffarnagar Lok Sabha elections: INDIA Bloc candidate

PTI ■ MUZAFFARNAGAR (UP)

Samajwadi Party leader SHarendra Singh Malik, who is contesting the Lok Sabha election from Muzaffarnagar as INDIA bloc nominee, said the RLD aligning with the BJP will not have any poll impact in the constituency.

Jayant Chaudhary-led Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) switched sides to leave the INDIA bloc and align with the BJP. The move left many in the region surprised. In the 2019 polls, Balyan had defeated Chaudhary's father and former RLD chief Ajit Singh by a close margin of around 5,000 votes.



Muzaffarnagar police during the 2019 elections, including one related to an attack on the convoy of Jayant Chaudhary's wife Charu Chaudhary. He said the villagers who protected the convoy were

booked by the police and the cases have not been withdrawn till date, leading to angst in the community against the BJP. "Maybe Jayant Chaudhary has aligned with the BJP, and it's a political situation where he

may align with anyone he wants to. Now even Farooq Abdullah is praising the BJP. But the truth is that supporters of Chaudhary Charan Singh are with us," Malik claimed. On the influence of farmers groups in the elections in the region, he said the farmer organisations are apolitical but have an influence which cannot be denied.

JD(S) seeks EC action over alleged security lapse at meet attended by Deve Gowda

PTI ■ TUMAKURU (KARNATAKA)

The JD(S) on Tuesday approached the Election Commission over the alleged security lapse at an event presided by former Prime Minister and party patriarch H D Deve Gowda here and sought the suspension of police officials responsible for it.

EVMs airlifted to four remote polling booths in Arunachal

PTI ■ ITANAGAR

The first batch of 40 election officials including police personnel were airlifted to four remote polling stations in Arunachal Pradesh's Kra Daadi district to conduct polling for the simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in the north-eastern state on April 19, an official said on Tuesday.

Paper Audit Trails (VVPATs) were airlifted on Monday to the polling stations located at Pip-Sorang Circle in the remote district bordering China, the official said. "They were airlifted in two sorties by an MI-172 chopper operated in the state by Skyone airways," Toko Babu, officer on special duty (OSD) to the state's Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), said on Tuesday.

ductive, would be done as per requirements of respective district electoral officers (DEOs) of various districts, he said. "The polling teams airlifted on Monday will be stationed at Tali, the ADC headquarters in the district, from where they will undertake a foot march to reach Pip-Sorang circle," Babu said.

BJP had won the seat uncontested this time. Each polling team consists of 10 persons on an average including, a presiding officer, two polling officers, one polling attendant besides, security personnel, the official said, and added that the four polling stations in the Pip-Sorang circle include, Tedung, Pip-Sorang, Kharsang and Korapu.

There are altogether 228 polling stations in the state out of the total 2,226, which could be reached only through foot march. Out of these, to reach 61 polling stations it requires two days of foot-march, while in seven other booths, polling officials have to march for three days to reach their respective destinations.



BJP candidates in North and South Goa seats file nomination

PTI ■ PANAJI

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidates Shripad Naik and Pallavi Dempo on Tuesday filed their nominations for elections to the North Goa and South Goa seats respectively.

Dempo is pitted against Viriato Fernandes of the Congress. North Goa MP Shripad Naik filed his papers at the collectorate in state capital Panaji in the presence of CM Sawant and Tanavade. Naik said he is getting an overwhelming response from voters and has completed one round of campaigning.

Rahul attacks Modi

PTI ■ KOZHIKODE/WAYANAD (KERALA)

Senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday lashed out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, accusing him of helping a few rich businessmen in the country. Gandhi also attacked Modi over the electoral bond issue, terming it as a form of extortion where the intimidatory tactics are "much more sophisticated" as central agencies like the CBI, ED and Income Tax Department are deployed against the targeted businessmen.

"There are some people in every small town or village who extort money on the streets by threatening physical harm. In Malayalam you call this extortion 'kolla adikkal' (loot), but Modi calls it electoral bonds. What a common thief is doing on the streets, the PM is doing at an international level," he alleged. Gandhi accused the BJP-led central government of using "sophisticated" tactics to threaten targeted businessmen. "At the electoral bond level, the threats are much more sophisticated. The ED,

Rahul attacks Modi



CBI and Income Tax people will come, they will interrogate and at the end of it, they will say why don't you give this (their business) to Adani," the sitting Congress MP from Wayanad LS constituency alleged. He alleged that this is how Adani got

the Mumbai airport from its previous owner. In other instances, such intimidatory tactics also led to the businessman paying the BJP in electoral bonds, he also alleged. He raised the electoral bond issue by referring to a recent interview of

Modi. "In his interview, he was trying to defend the biggest corruption scandal on the planet — the electoral bond scheme through which the BJP got thousands of crores of rupees by extorting India's businessmen," Gandhi alleged while speaking to party supporters, workers and the huge crowd that turned up for his roadshow from Kodyathur in Kozhikode district.

Earlier in Kodyathur, Gandhi alleged that Modi "does not have the understanding to run the country". While speaking to the public in Wayanad, the Congress leader also mocked the PM for his statements asking people to bang steel utensils and switch on their mobile phone lights during the COVID-19 pandemic.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Shower of blessings

For the first time in a decade, IMD predicts above-normal rainfall across the nation

The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has marked a significant milestone by releasing its long-term forecast. For the first time in a decade, the IMD has predicted above-average rainfall across almost the entire expanse of the country. This forecast carries profound implications for various sectors, ranging from agriculture to water resource management and beyond. Policymakers and farmers will welcome this news, although ordinary individuals may find themselves contending with a more pronounced monsoon season than usual. It would indeed be a sigh of relief for all farmers. The agricultural sector, which forms the backbone of India's economy, is heavily reliant on timely and adequate rainfall. Adequate precipitation is essential for the cultivation of crops and the sustenance of agricultural activities. With an anticipated surplus in rainfall, farmers can expect better soil moisture levels, leading to improved crop yields. Additionally, the forecast offers them an opportunity to plan their cropping patterns and maximise agricultural output. Besides, India's water resources are intricately linked to the monsoon patterns. Above-normal rainfall augurs well for the replenishment of reservoirs, lakes and groundwater aquifers. It provides the much-needed boost to water levels, especially in regions grappling with water scarcity. Adequate rainfall can alleviate the stress on water resources, ensuring better availability for domestic, industrial and agricultural purposes. A bountiful monsoon also facilitates the generation of hydroelectric power, thus contributing to the energy sector. However, it may be too early to celebrate a normal or above-normal monsoon. Weather forecasts are probabilistic in nature; even a good monsoon across the country is a rare occurrence. While above-normal rainfall brings several benefits, it also presents certain challenges. Excessive precipitation can lead to flooding, particularly in low-lying areas and regions prone to inundation. Flooding not only causes damage to property and infrastructure but also poses risks to human life. Therefore, authorities must undertake pre-emptive measures such as strengthening infrastructure, improving drainage systems and implementing effective flood management strategies. Heavy rainfall increases the risk of soil erosion and landslides, particularly in hilly terrains. Adequate soil conservation measures and afforestation efforts are essential to mitigate these risks and safeguard vulnerable ecosystems. Also, authorities need to ensure efficient water management practices to prevent wastage and optimise the utilisation of water resources. The IMD's forecast heralds promising prospects for farmers to enhance productivity and for authorities to address water scarcity concerns. By adopting a comprehensive approach that combines preparedness, conservation and sustainable practices, India can harness the benefits of abundant rainfall while minimising associated risks, paving the way for socio-economic development and environmental sustainability.



However, it may be too early to celebrate a normal or above-normal monsoon. Weather forecasts are probabilistic in nature; even a good monsoon across the country is a rare occurrence. While above-normal rainfall brings several benefits, it also presents certain challenges. Excessive precipitation can lead to flooding, particularly in low-lying areas and regions prone to inundation. Flooding not only causes damage to property and infrastructure but also poses risks to human life. Therefore, authorities must undertake pre-emptive measures such as strengthening infrastructure, improving drainage systems and implementing effective flood management strategies. Heavy rainfall increases the risk of soil erosion and landslides, particularly in hilly terrains. Adequate soil conservation measures and afforestation efforts are essential to mitigate these risks and safeguard vulnerable ecosystems. Also, authorities need to ensure efficient water management practices to prevent wastage and optimise the utilisation of water resources. The IMD's forecast heralds promising prospects for farmers to enhance productivity and for authorities to address water scarcity concerns. By adopting a comprehensive approach that combines preparedness, conservation and sustainable practices, India can harness the benefits of abundant rainfall while minimising associated risks, paving the way for socio-economic development and environmental sustainability.

PICTALK



Devotees stand in a queue to offer prayers at Dakshineswar Kali Temple on Bengali New Year, in Kolkata

Ignoring neighbours to embrace the world



ASHOK K MEHTA

The BJP Government has put Neighbourhood First Policy on backburner, leaving it underperforming amid rising anti-India sentiments in the region

BJP government has made foreign policy a key election issue: Prime Minister Modi has stated, 'Neighbour first and Act East second'. Foreign Minister S Jaishankar is campaigning how G20 has enhanced India's image and influence as a global player. Quest for High Table has shifted focus from Neighbourhood First Policy (NFP). S Jaishankar explained that politics can go up and down in neighbourhood but people generally have good feelings for India. That is certainly not the ground reality today when in almost every country, anti-India feeling is prevalent. NFP which was formally launched in 2008, has not performed optimally due to internal and external factors. Act East appended later has also failed to take off. Followed several add-ons: *sab ka saath sab ka vikas*; SAGAR; Vishva Mitra; First Security Responder and so on.

Former Minister Jaswant Singh in his book *Defending India*, has noted that India is strategically confined by Macmahon Line, Durand Line, LAC and LoC. Still it was once the regional hegemon having promulgated the Indira Doctrine and employed military force in national interest. India's geography and asymmetry with neighbours are both asset and liability. Congenital problems with Pakistan and later China have made it the least connected South Asian region. NFP was designed to shape the neighbourhood, especially the periphery, extending the neighbourhood to Mauritius and Iran in the West and Myanmar in the East. Curating friendly regimes, winning the goodwill of people through economic linkages and connectivity, creating strategic assets, minimising liabilities and most of all, being sensitive to genuine concerns of neighbours were some objectives of NFP. Rubbing neighbours the wrong way was not, nor meshing domestic politics with diplomacy. That an aspirational India would create glitches for NFP was not envisioned. China, gate-crashed after hiding its strength and biding its time arriving with deep pockets, BRI, MSR and Wolf Warrior



diplomacy. With ups and downs in politics regional rivalries were in full flow. Nepalese scholars were first to note change. The founding father, King Prithvi Narayan Shah had observed that Nepal is a yam between two boulders: China and India. They corrected that gospel to three boulders, adding US. Till late last year, Maldives followed India First policy, the only country to publicly proclaim the choice. That has changed to India Out with President Muizzu demanding the 88 Indian soldiers leave before elections next month. He even hinted that Delhi tried bullying Male. Its strategic geography is pivotal in the Indian Ocean. Maldives is for now China First but India could have been more gentle with its smallest neighbour. Raking up the Kachhatheevu issue that the government admitted it was settled in 2015, was a self goal but both Modi and Jaishankar wished to politically embarrass the ruling DMK in Tamil Nadu and INC. Instead it has infuriated Sri Lankan media and ordinary Lankans, especially fisherfolk among the lakhs of Sri Lankan and Indian Tamils. US Assistance Secretary of State for South Asia and Central Asia, Donald Lu has called Sri Lanka's economic recovery a "comeback story" with concessional loans from India and USAID. That story



MOST, IF NOT ALL, REGIONAL COUNTRIES WANT SAARC TO BE REVIVED, BUT INDIA'S IRON-CLAD POLICY OF NOT DEALING WITH PAKISTAN UNTIL TERRORISM FROM ITS SOIL STOPS HAS BEEN AGGRAVATED BY THE REMOVAL OF ARTICLE 370

will suffer a setback lead to revival of anti-India sentiment and further tilt towards China to whom Lanka owes USD 10 bn. In Bangladesh BNP has started an India Out campaign. China is heavily invested in projects including constructing a submarine port near Cox's Bazar adequate for 8 to 10 submarines. Bhutan was within a whisker of a land swap with China by the previous government. Otherwise Doklam could have been lost to the Chinese which would have endangered Siliguri Corridor, the India-Bhutan-China tri-junction dispute. The new Lotay Tshering government might delay the Doklam swap. In Myanmar, the military is rapidly losing ground in the civil war with Ethnic Armed Organisations and NUG. It has lost border control with China, Bangladesh, India and Thailand to EAOs. Most critical for India is Sittwe Port vital for the multi-modal Kaladan project and also the trilateral highway to Thailand. Reuters reported that junta troops nearby have fled and an attack on Sittwe is imminent. But Sohail Kazan, executive director, Bharat Freight, said last week that Sittwe will be safe following a deal between junta and Rakhine state government. If true, that is good news. Kaladan project was contracted in 2008 and is nowhere near completion dislocating India's two signature Act East pro-

jects. Delhi has to rethink its relations with the junta. Most if not all regional countries want SAARC to be revived. But India's iron clad policy of not dealing with Pakistan till terrorism from its soil stops has been aggravated by removal of Article 370. Trade potential according to World Bank between Pakistan and India is between USD 15 and 20 bn. India's NFP has not worked because its global ambitions have diluted its zeal for the neighbourhood. Further, it has been unable to compete with China despite geography being on its side. Under NFP and Act East, India has concentrated mainly in the maritime domain resulting in neglect of inland connectivity. The Government brags about North East shining (Manipur is a shame) but little progress is seen over connectivity of BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan India Nepal) or South East Asia. The Bangladesh China India Myanmar (BCIM) is also dead. India's focus on neighbourhood has wavered, failing to secure the periphery. Some diplomats have advocated India setting red lines? Winning over neighbours is now a huge challenge. (The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka and a founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. Views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CONSTITUTIONAL MORALITY

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Constitutional Morality: The Pillar of India's Democracy", published on April 15, this is my response. India's electoral fervour every four years embodies the essence of democracy, echoing the aspirations of its constituent assembly. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's vision of constitutional morality as the cornerstone of governance rings true today. It's a conscious cultivation, not merely a natural sentiment, vital for a vibrant democracy. Justice D.Y. Chandrachud aptly emphasises the judiciary's role in upholding constitutional values like dignity and equality. This jurisprudence, evolving alongside societal dynamics, ensures the Constitution remains a living document. Recent landmark judgments, from LGBTQ+ rights to adultery laws, highlight the judiciary's commitment to constitutional morality over popular sentiment. Yet, navigating societal and religious intersections, as seen in the Sabarimala case, poses ongoing challenges. The court's role in reconciling evolving beliefs, evident in decisions on euthanasia and abortion rights, underscores its pivotal position in shaping India's moral landscape. As we navigate these complexities, constitutional morality stands as a beacon, guiding our journey towards a more just and equitable society.

Sunandna Sharma | Hisar

HISTORICAL REFLECTIONS

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Unravelling the Roy family's legacy", published on April 15, this is my response. The political landscape for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections reveals not just contemporary rivalries but also echoes of Bengal's tumultuous past. Amidst accusations and justifications, the saga of Siraj-ud-Daula's downfall resurfaces, highlighting the intricate web of alliances and betrayals that shaped the region's destiny. Delving into history, one confronts the pivotal Battle of Plassey in 1757, altering the trajectory of Bengal's identity. The

Revitalising railway realms



Apropos the news article, "Desolate railway tracks transformed into a verdant oasis", published on April 15, this is my response. The transformation of a once-ignored stretch of land into the lush oasis of 'Evergreen Nursery' is a testament to human innovation and environmental stewardship. This verdant haven, nestled amidst the bustling railway tracks, not only rejuvenates the landscape but also symbolises a paradigm shift in urban con-

servation efforts. The metamorphosis from a crime-ridden wasteland to a vibrant botanical sanctuary reflects the power of collaborative endeavours between public and private entities. The partnership between the Delhi Division of Northern Railway and Evergreen Nursery exemplifies a shared commitment to sustainable development and beautification. Moreover, the altruistic purpose behind the nursery, where plants are nurtured not for profit but for communal enrichment, resonates deeply with the ethos of community service. It serves as a poignant reminder of the interconnectedness between humanity and nature, where each leaf and bloom embodies a story of renewal and hope. As we traverse through these green corridors, we are reminded not only of the beauty of flora but also of our collective responsibility to safeguard our planet for future generations.

Neeraj Shah | Delhi

clash between Bengali and Islamic cultures, symbolised by Siraj-ud-Daula's reign, echoes through the ages. The triumph of Clive and the merchant princes ushered in a new era, fostering a renaissance that birthed luminaries like Tagore and Bose. The revelation from Atlee underscores the lesser-known role of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, a beacon of resistance against British rule. His legacy, intertwined with Bengal's ethos, stands as a testament to the region's indomitable spirit, shaping not just India's past, but its future. In this electoral battleground, as parties jostle for power, Bengal's historical tapestry reminds us of the enduring struggle for identity and freedom.

Roshan Kumar | Bhubaneswar

CAFFEINE CHRONICLES

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Exploring the world of single origins, flat whites and beyond!", published on April 14, this is my response. Melbourne's caffeinated landscape is a saga of passion, history and innovation, woven into the

city's very fabric. With an abundance of cafes that surpass a thousand, each sip of espresso unveils a narrative steeped in Italian heritage and modern-day craftsmanship. Monique Bayer's guided tour offers a portal into this world, where every alleyway hides a treasure trove of coffee delights. From the legacy of Pellegrini Espresso Bar to the emergence of artisanal roasters like Industry Beans, Melbourne's coffee evolution is palpable. Monique's curated journey delves deep, introducing nuances like filter coffee and cold drip variants, enriching the sensory experience. In this city, coffee isn't just a beverage; it's a cultural phenomenon. From paleo-friendly butter coffee to innovative frozen concoctions, Melbourne's cafes cater to every palate. With terms like cupping and AeroPress echoing through the streets, it's evident that coffee here is more than a drink—it's a way of life.

Kundan JM | Bhopal

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Reflections on class and age discrimination

From a childhood encounter at a political rally to navigating workplace dynamics, an individual's journey unveils lessons in equality and empathy



SANJAY CHANDRA

The then Prime Minister was to address a public rally in Ghaziabad. My father, posted as the head of the electricity department in the city, was responsible for the electrical arrangements at the venue. He took us to listen to her speech from a vantage point. I do not remember the speech. What I do remember is that my father came back immediately after the event ended and rushed us from the venue. He kept looking back surreptitiously, asking us to walk faster. I was to learn that a supervisor working under my father and wanting to make a good impression, was also pursuing us to introduce his family. Much later, at a more mature age, I could understand that this was an incidence of class discrimination prevalent in our society. I was to learn quite a few life-altering lessons a few years later as I joined Indian railway services. During my first posting in Calcutta, I was asked to study an old machine and propose measures to improve its productivity, taking the assistance of an experienced supervisor. The two of us



spent innumerable hours studying the machine. I became an apprentice to a more knowledgeable person, even though he was lower in the hierarchy. Then and even later in my subsequent postings, or even after I quit an active professional life, I learnt a lot about handling work-related issues and even man management, from my junior colleagues, by not dwelling on the so-called finer nuances of a superior status. I also learnt empathy for others. In yet another posting, as a branch head, I was approached by irate union leaders who complained

about the rude language by a junior colleague. His fault was that he had used the term 'tum' to address a worker rather than the more respectable 'aap'. This was Bengal, where everyone is expected to use a respectful salutation when talking to another person, whatever the status. I tried to assuage the hurt sentiments by pointing out that the junior colleague came from north India where it was a common practice to use the more affectionate 'tum' even while addressing parents. The representatives were not done. They pointed out that I was

always respectful even though I was from the same region. This was another lesson learnt, never to be forgotten, about the futility of status discrimination. We were visiting relatives a few days back. My wife's uncle, now nearing 80, narrated a recent experience. He had gone to some office for work, where a much younger person jumped the queue. The uncle objected which was rudely brushed aside by the young man, "How is it material? Have I pointed a gun at you?" This was a status discrimination of another kind - a perceived superiority of the youth against old age. Or was it the gun power? We ought to remember what Nelson Mandela said, "No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite." (The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN STRIVE TO DEVELOP FAITH

The pursuit of guidance from the Divine holds the promise of revelation



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

Let me start with why we often don't endeavour to develop faith, as is commonly observed. Lord Krishna has aptly stated, "Out of thousands of men, hardly anyone strives for perfection" (The Bhagavad Gita 7.3). The essence of a perfect life lies in becoming a devotee of God, for He is the ultimate controller of the entire world. There exist numerous reasons, or perhaps excuses, for this reluctance. Beginning with a straightforward argument: who has truly seen Him? If God holds such significance, why does He not present Himself so that we may behold Him? In this age of the internet, one might argue that He could easily make His presence felt. Some may argue that God is unmanifest, yet we lack any tangible experience of such an entity. If God is indeed a reality without whom we cannot thrive, then why do some ideologies, such as communism, appear to manage so well, especially in certain countries? Why is there pervasive poverty and suffering in the world? If God possesses omnipotence as described, why does He not rectify these injustices? We encounter many ascetics on the streets, leading some to conclude that only those who have failed turn to God, while they believe they can manage without divine intervention. Perhaps they might consider turning to God later if the need arises. These excuses, however, varied, ultimately lead us to a sense of emptiness. In reality, it is often our ego that serves as the primary hindrance. We struggle to accept an entity so vast and incomprehensible, leaving us feeling insignificant and powerless. Another significant barrier lies in the acceptance of spiritual practices, which may seem unfamiliar and daunting. Yet, all these excuses only serve to deepen our sense of emptiness. Why not begin by praying for what we deeply desire? Even a child can pray and often does. If our prayers are sincere and aligned with righteousness, God may consider them.



The next step involves seeking guidance from God, who is eager to provide it. Given His omniscience, God communicates in various ways; to advanced devotees, He may impart intuition or even speak directly, while beginners may receive guidance through mediums such as family members, friends, or even seemingly random occurrences like messages in newspapers. It should be evident that following God's instructions is a wise course of action, yielding manifold benefits. Let us now explore some basic practices that are both accessible and highly rewarding. My personal favourite is 'darshan' — simply gazing upon an image or idol of God. Observing God's benevolent countenance, we can feel His attraction towards us. However, it's crucial to remember that adherence to righteousness, or 'dharma,' is of paramount importance to God. While deity forms or images serve as focal points, God's presence transcends physical limitations, permeating all existence. Another simple yet profound practice is offering 'namaskar' — paying homage to God with folded hands. This act serves to humble our egos, which often obstruct our connection with the divine and hinder our interactions with fellow beings. As we persist in these practices, we will gradually experience God's responses, not necessarily through miraculous events, but through subtle yet discernible manifestations. We can liken this experience to connecting to the internet—where there is a network, there is connectivity. Similarly, God, omnipresent as He is, can be experienced in various ways. God's subtle presence is accessible to all. He eagerly awaits our approach, desiring nothing but our well-being. Let us cast aside our doubts and excuses and wholeheartedly commit to forging a deeper connection with the divine.

(The writer is a spiritual guide; views are personal)

Iran strikes threaten regional stability

The assault, though primarily symbolic in nature, highlights the mounting tensions in the region. However, the US endeavours to uphold a balance of power



NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA



REUTERS

At a time when people in several countries in South Asia and East Asia were celebrating the traditional New Year, Iran, the second-largest country in West Asia, launched a series of missile attacks targeting its arch-enemy Israel. Jordan and Saudi Arabia supported Israel and intercepted most of the missiles fired by Iran. The attack appears to be symbolic, aimed at boosting the morale of organisations such as Hamas in Palestine, Yemen's Houthis, pro-Iranian militias in Iraq and Hezbollah in Lebanon, all of which have declared war against Israel in West Asia, as well as countries like Lebanon and Syria, rather than engaging in an official war against Israel. This attack serves as a morale booster. Shortly after the attack, Hamas rejected the Cairo agreement, a result of discussions between top intelligence agencies, the CIA and Mossad, together with other stakeholders mediated by Egypt, concerning Israeli hostages. However, many encouraged Israel to respond quickly. However, United States President Biden stated that he would not yield if attacks were made against Iran. It is seen as a matter of prior agreement by both parties rather than a threat. The truth is, that the US administration cannot afford to assist Israel in another war at this point. At a time when the country's reputation has been tarnished at the international level and when Biden's political power is extremely weak if the United States makes such an unwise decision, it will have to face unprecedented consequences shortly, similar to how the United States has caused irreversible damage to world peace and order. Elon Musk's recent statement that the possibility of the United States becoming the victim of a September 11-style surprise attack is very high seems to hold deep truth. The consequences of these conflicts may not only affect Washington or New York but also American military bases around the world. The likelihood of an attack similar to the one on Pearl Harbor is high. The United States cannot always continue to create military conflicts in other countries for its war trade and keep its superpower status as it desires. The superpower, as history has proven, will inevitably crumble at any



THE ATTACK BY IRAN WAS RETALIATION. IT IS A RESPONSE TO THE ISRAELI PROVOCATION AT THE IRANIAN CONSULATE IN SYRIA, A GROSS VIOLATION OF THE VIENNA CONVENTION, WHICH CLAIMED THE LIVES OF THE IRANIAN REVOLUTIONARY GUARD CORPS

given point. Compared to its lifespan, the United States is a relatively young superpower in the grand scheme of civilisation, considering the collapse of great empires. Throughout history, mighty empires have risen and fallen, leaving lasting legacies. The Roman Empire, spanning from 27 BC to AD 476, peaked in the 2nd century AD, but internal strife, economic instability and external invasions, such as by the Visigoths and Vandals, led to its fragmentation. The Ottoman Empire, dominant in the 16th and 17th centuries across the Eastern Mediterranean, North Africa and Western Asia, declined due to internal conflicts and challenges from European powers like Russia and Austria. The Mongol Empire, founded by Genghis Khan in the 13th century, stretched from Eastern Europe to the Pacific Ocean, but internal divisions and the death of key leaders led to its fragmentation by the late 14th century. Lastly, the British Empire, spanning from the 16th to the 20th century, faced economic strain and nationalist movements, ultimately dissolving due to internal weakness and external pressures. These collapses, driven by political, military and socioeconomic factors, reshaped the world, underscoring the transient nature of power and the enduring impact of history on modern geopolitics and civilisation. However, the deep state of the United States has certainly studied and comprehended global history better than many other countries. That is why the basic strategy of the United States has been to create new wars while talking about peace and turn those wars into long-term tragedies to keep uncertainties. This strategy can weaken its rivals and maintain its power continuously. These issues become clear when many conflicts are understood in their political and economic context. The ideology that Israel has contin-

uously pursued against Iran in national and international forums is not a single opinion or rivalry of Israel, but it is a long-term propagation through carefully selected facts and objectives together with the United States. On one hand, the West fuels wars against hostile countries. On the other, it manufactures internal crises in those nations by imposing international sanctions. This remains a persistent behaviour of the West. The thing that should not be forgotten here is that the attack by Iran was a retaliation. It is a response to the Israeli provocation on the Iranian consulate in Syria, a gross violation of the Vienna Convention, which claimed the lives of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. Iran's calculation, as some analysts pointed out, was that if it did not respond, Israel would seek to push back and degrade the axis of resistance across the region. However, it is unreasonable to think that Israel miscalculated its attack on the Iranian diplomatic site in Syria as Israel continues to keep deep intelligence penetration of IRGC and Hezbollah networks in Syria, making those networks highly vulnerable to Israeli attacks. Iran must uphold its reputation among its allies and address internal political crises effectively. Therefore, prioritising attacks conducted through proxies is advisable, while occasional skirmishes from both sides should be acknowledged. Moreover, it is very important to consider the government's domestic policies and openly mention Iran's inherent weaknesses amid escalating tensions among some politicians and officials in Iran. They highlighted the many crises facing the Iranian government and warned against engaging in direct conflict with Israel without first addressing these pressing issues, which they argued would only worsen the situation. They emphasised the impor-

ance of prudent governance and effective crisis management and the need to mitigate ongoing crises to prevent system collapse. Economic challenges and psychological instability in society are urgent issues that need to be addressed as they are now breeding grounds for enemy penetrations. They advocated the adoption of conciliatory policies to reduce tensions and promote harmony and empathy in Iranian society. The regime's repressive domestic policies, particularly regarding the mandatory hijab enforcement campaign, have fuelled widespread discontent and delegitimised the government. Recent anti-Israel actions, like seizing a cargo ship, have caused Iran's markets to react negatively. The national currency's value has hit a record low. President Ibrahim Raisi faces criticism and calls for a cabinet reshuffle to address economic hardships affecting many Iranians. Over the years, Israel has demonstrated its capability in targeting Iranian nuclear scientists and infrastructure. Notably, the Stuxnet cyber-attack, jointly orchestrated by the United States and Israel, delivered a significant blow to Iran's nuclear ambitions. This proves that national interests are never compromised for domestic political issues, except for former President Trump. Stuxnet marked a pivotal moment, ushering in the era of cyberwarfare, where lines of code wielded the power to reshape geopolitical landscapes. Its impact reverberated globally, highlighting the evolving nature of warfare and the formidable role of technology in modern conflicts. In this situation, Iran cannot continue to be silent. It must prove its power numerically. Therefore, the recent attack was more a reputational-preservation move than a declaration of war. (The writer is a Sri Lankan Journalist. Views are personal)

Uttarakhand women: Agents of change in State politics

From leading environmental crusades to confronting social injustices head-on, they embody the spirit of the region, epitomising resilience and fortitude

Women in Uttarakhand are renowned for their extraordinary resilience and hard work, characteristics deeply rooted in their Himalayan heritage. Despite grappling with the challenges of life in this rugged terrain, Uttarakhand's women have consistently been at the forefront of social and environmental movements, epitomized by figures like Gaura Devi of the Chipko movement and Tinchari Mai (Deepa Nautiyal), who spearheaded the Anti-Liquor movement. These women have fearlessly confronted injustice, embodying the spirit of Uttarakhand. This article seeks to underscore the political engagement of women in Uttarakhand, shedding light on their role in bol-



SHEETAL ARYA

stering democracy. The political participation of women in Uttarakhand can be delineated into two primary spheres: first, women assuming leadership positions within the political domain and second, women exercising their electoral rights as voters. Since the inception of the state, the representation of women in the legislative assembly has seen a significant

albeit gradual rise. From four women members in the first assembly, the number has increased by 50% in the 2022 elections, marking a commendable stride. However, despite this progress, women remain a minority in the assembly, constituting a mere fraction of the total members. Presently, the legislative assembly boasts eight women members, including three Dalit women, the highest number in Uttarakhand's history. Notably, Smt. Ritu Khanduri serves as the speaker, while Smt. Rekha Arya is the lone female minister in the cabinet. Despite these advancements, the disparity in political representation persists, underscoring the challenges women face in accessing political power. While women's representa-

tion in the parliamentary arena remains scant, with only two female MPs out of eight, the discrepancy between the female population (49%) and their political representation is stark. Despite their active participation in grassroots movements, women's presence in formal politics remains disproportionately low. Women in Uttarakhand constitute the backbone of the rural economy, grappling with issues like migration, environmental degradation and inadequate healthcare services. However, societal norms and economic constraints often deter their political involvement. Moreover, political parties' reluctance to field female candidates exacerbates this disparity. For instance, in the upcoming 2024 Lok Sabha



elections, the Congress has not nominated any female candidates, while the BJP has nominated only one, Mrs. Mala Rajya Laxmi Shah. Nevertheless, women voters in Uttarakhand have emerged as a formidable force, outnumbering men in recent elections. Their increasing political awareness, fueled by issues directly affecting their lives,

coupled with higher literacy rates and government initiatives like reservation quotas, has galvanized their participation. Policies such as 30% horizontal reservation in government jobs and 50% reservation in Panchayats have bolstered women's political agency, enabling them to assume leadership roles at the grassroots level. In the run-up to the 2024 Parliamentary elections, both major parties are vying for women's support, employing diverse strategies. Congress has pledged financial assistance and job reservations for women, emphasizing women's security and justice. Conversely, the BJP highlights its implementation of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) as a milestone for women's rights,

coupled with grassroots mobilization efforts. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal among women voters, attributed to his grassroots connect and initiatives like the Women Reservation Bill, further consolidates BJP's electoral prospects. The "Modi factor" has resonated with Uttarakhand's women, contributing to BJP's continued dominance since 2017. To bolster women's empowerment, the state government has allocated a substantial gender budget for 2024-25, earmarked for bridging gender disparities and promoting equality. Additionally, measures like deploying women employees to oversee polling booths and facilitating pregnant women's access to voting booths underscore the commitment to

inclusive governance. In conclusion, Dr Ambedkar's assertion that a community's progress is contingent upon women's advancement holds for Uttarakhand. While women have historically been instrumental in social movements, their underrepresentation in formal politics remains a pressing concern. Addressing these challenges is imperative for ensuring women's political representation and expediting the state's development. As Uttarakhand gears up for the upcoming Chunav Kauthig, with women comprising 48.1 per cent of the electorate, their increased participation promises to be a harbinger of democracy's triumph in the state. (The writer is a research scholar; views are personal)

'Pak needs years to implement IMF-advised structural reforms'

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Cash-strapped Pakistan would need two or three years to implement structural reforms prescribed by the IMF, Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb has said, warning that the country would be looking for another bailout programme if it fails to go through these measures.

— doesn't go through the structural reforms, the country would still be looking for another programme, the report said. "We have known the what and why not for years but for decades," he was quoted as saying in the report.

reforming the Bretton Woods twins — the IMF and the World Bank. "We are dealing with adaptation and financing and to the extent that these institutions come in to help countries like Pakistan from inclusive growth perspective and climate change perspective. Our interests are going to be very well aligned," he said.

Inquiry commission gives clean chit to ex-ISI chief Gen Hamid

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's former Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) director general Lieutenant General (ret'd) Faiz Hamid has been exonerated by the inquiry commission established to investigate the 2017 sit-in by a hardline religious group here and Rawalpindi, it emerged on Tuesday.



Syed Akhtar Ali Shah, a former civil servant, who also served as Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa's police chief and included Tahir Alam Khan, a former Islamabad police chief and Khushal Khan, an additional secretary at the Ministry of Interior. It was tasked to identify those

who planned, financed, and supported the protest and also recommended legal action against its planners and executives which disrupted life in Rawalpindi and Islamabad between November 6 and November 27, 2017.

Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) protestors. "Since no one including the former Prime Minister, former Interior Minister, former Law Minister, and former Chief Minister of Punjab, accused intelligence agencies or any other official of the agency for extending facilitation to the protestors nor other evidence was brought forward, therefore, the Commission could not connect any organization or state official in supporting TLP to organise the dharna," it stated.

'Russia's invasion of Ukraine threatens global security'

AP ■ BEIJING

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz told Chinese leader Xi Jinping who hosted him in Beijing on Tuesday that Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine threatens global security, in an apparent call for China to apply greater pressure on its neighbor and close strategic partner to resolve the conflict.

which has threatened to spread into a regional conflict and has disrupted energy and global food supplies and other trade. Russia's actions "violate a principle of the United Nations Charter and the principle of the inviolability of national borders," Scholz was quoted as saying by German media.

community. Despite that, China continues to insist that the United Nations charter should prevail in international affairs and that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations be respected, in apparent contradiction with Russia's military agenda.

as saying. Scholz on Monday called for fair competition in trade relations while warning about dumping and overproduction during a talk to college students in the financial hub of Shanghai, where German companies have major investments.

ministers and business executives visited a partially German-funded company and other sites in the vast city, which is a production base for China's auto and other industries.

Shanghai that borders "must not be moved by force." "We should not be afraid of our neighbors," he said, emphasizing the importance of international institutions such as the World Trade Organization.

'Pak sustained its N-programme despite economic turmoil'

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Pakistan sustained its nuclear modernisation efforts last year despite its economic turmoil as its contentious relationship with India continues to drive its defence policy, the top US intelligence official has told Congress.

However, cross-border violence between the countries has decreased since their February 2021 recommitment to a ceasefire, he said. "Islamabad is modernising its nuclear arsenal and improving the security of its nuclear materials and nuclear C2 (command and control)."

China's GDP grew by 5.3% in 1st quarter of 2024

PTI ■ BEIJING

China's economy grew at 5.3 per cent in the first quarter, making a stronger-than-expected start to the year even as the downturn of its property market continued while the domestic demand remained subdued.

tum and got off to a good start," Sheng Laiyun, Deputy Head of the NBS, said at a press conference. Sheng mentioned positive factors during this period, such as rising production demand, stable employment and prices, and growing market confidence.

property investment fell 9.5 per cent, highlighting the challenges faced by China's real estate firms. "You cannot manufacture growth forever, so we really need to see households come to the party if China wants to hit that around five per cent growth target," Harry Murphy Cruise from Moody's Analytics told the BBC.

from stable to negative a week after it cut its projection for the country's sovereign credit rating, reflecting pessimism in the world's second-largest economy and concerns over Beijing's capacity to support its biggest lenders.

More homes flooded in Kazakhstan

AP ■ MOSCOW

Nearly 14,500 homes have been flooded in a Russian region bordering Kazakhstan after water levels spiked in a local river, local authorities said Tuesday.

according to officials. The situation is more dire in the southwest of the region near the Kazakh border, where authorities said the river there has risen to a dangerous level in the town of Ileik.

'Singapore PM Lee to continue to be part of govt after stepping down next month'

Singapore (PTI): Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong will stay in the Cabinet as Senior Minister after stepping down as the leader of the government on May 15, Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong, who will succeed him, said on Tuesday.

Ukrainian pres signs law to boost conscription to fend off Russia's aggression

Kyiv (AP): Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed a controversial law Tuesday, days after it was passed by parliament, potentially helping Kyiv to boost conscription to replenish depleted forces to fend off Russia's continued aggression.



bat. Authorities said a separate bill on demobilisation and rotation would be prepared in the coming months. But the delay caused public outrage among Ukrainians whose relatives have been fighting without breaks for two years.

Heavy rains lash UAE, death toll in Oman flooding rises to 18

Dubai (AP): Heavy rains lashed the United Arab Emirates on Tuesday, flooding out portions of major highways and leaving vehicles abandoned on roadways across Dubai. Meanwhile, the death toll in separate heavy flooding in neighboring Oman rose to 18 with others still missing as the sultanate prepared for the storm.

over 120 millimeters (4.75 inches) of rainfall had soaked the city-state — the typical average for a year in the desert nation — with more expected in the coming hours.

largely working remotely if able. Many workers stayed home as well, though some ventured out, with the unfortunate stalling out their vehicles in deeper-than-expected water covering some roads.

UK criminalises creation of 'deepfake' images without consent

London (PTI): Despicable people who create sexually explicit "deepfakes" will face prosecution under a new law going through its parliamentary journey, the British government said on Tuesday.

is then shared more widely, offenders could be sent to jail. "The creation of deepfake sexual images is despicable and completely unacceptable irrespective of whether the image is shared," said Laura Farris, UK Minister for Victims and Safeguarding.

Under the new offence, those who create such images without consent face a criminal record and an unlimited fine. If the deepfake content

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Markets slump for third day

On fears of escalating tensions in Middle East; IT stocks drag

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty continued to slump on Tuesday dragged down by heavy selling in IT stocks amid weak global trends and fears of escalating tensions in the Middle East. Outflow of foreign fund also dented investors' sentiment. Continuing its downtrend for the third day running, the 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 456.10 points or 0.62 per cent to settle at 72,943.68. During the day, it slumped 714.75 points or 0.97 per cent to 72,685.03. The NSE Nifty declined 124.60 points or 0.56 per cent to finish at 22,147.90. From the Sensex basket, Infosys, IndusInd Bank, Bajaj Finserv, Wipro, HCL Technologies, Bajaj Finance, Tech Mahindra, Tata Consultancy Services, and Larsen & Toubro were the major laggards. Titan Company, Hindustan Unilever, HDFC Bank, Maruti, ITC, Power Grid and Reliance Industries were the gainers. "The domestic market sustained its consolidation trend for the



third consecutive day, amid apprehensions regarding geopolitical tensions and drop in the probability of a rate cut in the short-term. Heightened concerns arose following stronger-than-anticipated US retail sales, amplifying the assumption that the US Federal Reserve might delay rate cuts, leading to a notable uptick in the dollar index and US bond yields. "The IT sector saw the most significant decline, primarily due to expectations of earnings

being affected by the weak discretionary spending in the US and muted domestic Q4 results," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.57 per cent and midcap index advanced 0.05 per cent. Among the indices, IT declined 2.32 per cent, teck (2.09 per cent), bankex (0.50 per cent), metal (0.36 per cent), capital goods (0.26 per cent) and commodities (0.24 per cent). Energy, consumer discretionary,

healthcare, industrials, consumer durables, oil & gas, and power were the gainers. Stock markets would remain closed on Wednesday for Ram Navami. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai, and Hong Kong settled lower. European markets were quoting in the red. Wall Street ended in negative territory on Monday. Israel's military chief said on Monday that his country will respond to Iran's weekend attack, but he did not elaborate on when and how as world leaders urged against retaliation, trying to avoid a spiral of violence in the Middle East. Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.26 per cent to USD 89.87 a barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 3,268 crore on Monday, according to exchange data. The BSE benchmark tanked 845.12 points or 1.14 per cent to settle at 73,399.78 on Monday. The NSE Nifty declined 246.90 points or 1.10 per cent to finish at 22,272.50.

Petrol sales up 7 per cent, diesel declines 9.5 per cent in April

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's petrol consumption soared 7 per cent in the first half of April but diesel sales were down 9.5 per cent ahead of the onset of a harsh summer season that is set to crank up fuel demand, preliminary data of state-owned firms showed on Tuesday. Petrol sales of three state-owned firms, which control 90 per cent of the fuel market, rose to 1.22 million tonnes during April 1 to 15 when compared to 1.14 million tonnes of consumption in the same period last year. Diesel demand dropped 9.5 per cent to 3.14 million tonnes. While petrol sales were up mostly due to an increase in use of personal vehicles on the back of a price cut, crop harvesting season as well as the onset of summer which will increase the demand for air conditioning in cars is likely to reverse the trend in diesel demand. Petrol and diesel prices were last month reduced by Rs 2 per litre, ending a nearly two-



year-long hiatus in rate revision. Month-on-month petrol sales dropped 3.6 per cent when compared to 1.27 million tonnes of consumption in March 1-15. Diesel demand too was down 2.7 per cent month-on-month when compared to 3.22 million tonnes in the first half of April. Diesel is India's most consumed fuel, accounting for almost 40 per cent of all

petroleum product consumption. Transport sector accounts for 70 per cent of all diesel sales in the country. It is also the predominant fuel used in agriculture sectors, including in harvesters and tractors. Petrol consumption has consistently shown a year-on-year rise, diesel consumption has been on a see-saw - rising in one month and falling in another. Consumption of petrol

during the first half of April was 9.2 per cent more than in the COVID-marred April 1-15, 2022, and 56.5 per cent more than in the first half of April 2020. Diesel demand was up 4.7 per cent over April 1-15, 2022, and 27.9 per cent compared to the first half of April 2020. Jet fuel (ATF) sales rose 10.4 per cent year-on-year to 3,35,700 tonnes during April 1-15, 2024. But this was 1.2 per cent lower month-on-month. Like petrol and diesel, ATF demand too is now firmly above pre-Covid levels. ATF consumption was 34.3 per cent more than in April 1-15, 2022, and 18.4 per cent more than in the first half of April 2020. Cooking gas LPG sales were up 8.8 per cent year-on-year at 1.2 million tonnes in April 1-15, 2024. LPG consumption was 15.3 per cent higher than in April 1-15, 2022, and 28.3 per cent more than in the first half of April 2020. Month-on-month, LPG demand fell 11.6 per cent against 1.36 million tonnes of LPG consumption.

India's unemployment rate to decline 97 basis points by 2028: ORF Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's unemployment rate is likely to decline by as much as 97 basis points by 2028 as the country's economy hits the USD 5 trillion mark, fuelling a rise in employment, a new report said on Tuesday. Unemployment rate -- the percentage of people in the labour force who are without jobs -- is projected to fall from 4.47 per cent in 2024 to 3.68 per cent in 2028, the India Employment Outlook 2030 report by thinktank Observer Research Foundation (ORF) said. "India's job market is experiencing a transformation as the country has become the world's fastest growing large economy in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic," the report said. The country's young population, whose median age is 28.4 years, holds a key to fuelling economic expansion. "With a GDP growth rate of 7.8 per cent, India

could potentially achieve its target of becoming a USD 5-trillion economy by 2026-27, with such growth being underpinned by strong private consumption and public investment," it said. India's gross domestic product (GDP) size is estimated at just under USD 4 trillion in 2024. An ORF press statement said the report identifies sectors that the country's 600-million-plus population of people aged 18-35 years regard as aspirational, as these sectors could act as engines of growth in the years ahead. "The report forecasts that as India approaches its USD 5 trillion goal, overall employment could rise 22 per cent, while unemployment could decline by 97 basis points by 2028," the statement said. The service sector in particular is set to witness significant job creation with each unit rise in services output expected to contribute to a substantial 0.12 per cent increase in employment. The report singles out ten especially high-opportunity sub-sectors in the services space.



These include digital services, financial services, and services related to health, hospitality,

consumer retail, e-commerce, and renewable energy. Other areas poised for rapid growth are global capability centres, and MSME and startup ecosystems. The burgeoning service sector also offers encouraging avenues for women's employment. Hence, investing in women's skilling, financial inclusion, and entrepreneurship needs to be prioritised further, argues the report. "The projections for India's manufacturing sector are less optimistic. In spite of the US' growing imports from India, India's competitive cost structures and labour resources, and the government's push for manufacturing through flagship schemes such as Make in India, employment in the sector appears to have declined. "Technological advances and increased automation continue to cast doubts upon the country's ability to absorb its expanding workforce," the statement said. In this context, transitioning towards industrial

value chains associated with the service sector could help rejuvenate employment. Nilanjan Ghosh, a director at ORF and one of the authors of the report said, "Policymakers and public sector schemes could partner more closely with other stakeholders to identify employability and skill gaps. The next step would be to upgrade curricula and skills to make India's talent pool more industry ready." Ghosh added that nurturing entrepreneurship would be crucial for improved next-gen employment. "A new class of entrepreneurs could stimulate job creation, expand India's startup ecosystem, spur innovation, and promote youth participation. But we also need to ensure that the workplaces of the future are gender-sensitive and inclusive," he said. The report concludes that a multistakeholder approach towards employment generation and enhancement could help realise India's vision of a digitally empowered, skilled, innovative, and self-reliant economy.

Heating equipment maker JNK India IPO to open on April 23

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Heating equipment maker JNK India Ltd is set to open its initial public offering (IPO) on April 23. The initial share-sale will conclude on April 25 and the bidding for anchor investors will open for a day on April 22, according to the red herring prospectus (RHP) filed on Tuesday. The IPO is a combination of fresh issue of equity shares worth up to Rs 300 crore and an Offer-for-Sale (OFS) of up to 84.21 lakh equity shares by promoters and an existing shareholder. Those offloading shares in the OFS are promoters -- Goutam Rampelli, Dipak Kacharalal Bharuka, JNK Heaters Co. Ltd and Mascot Capital and Marketing Pvt Ltd. -- and a shareholder Milind Joshi. Proceeds from the fresh issue will be used for funding working capital requirements and for general corporate purposes. JNK specialises in processed heaters, commanding a market share of about 27 per cent within the Indian heating equipment market for new order bookings during fiscal year 2023, according to F&S Report.



As of March 2023, it had an order book of about Rs 868 crore, way higher than the over Rs 143 crore order book in March 2021. In terms of financials, the company's consolidated revenue from operations surged by 37.42 per cent to Rs 407.30 crore for the fiscal year 2023, from Rs 296.40 crore a

year earlier and net profit increased by 29 per cent to Rs 46.36 crore in fiscal 2023 from Rs 35.98 crore in fiscal 2022. IIFL Securities and ICICI Securities are the book-running lead managers of the public issue. The equity shares are proposed to be listed on BSE and NSE.

India fastest growing economy during last three years, says Sitharaman

PTI ■ JAIPUR



Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said here on Tuesday that India has been the fastest growing economy in the last three consecutive financial years and this growth can continue in the coming years as well. She said the next 25 years will be critical for India. In the financial year 2023-24, India witnessed a growth rate of eight per cent in three quarters and is expecting a similar level of growth in the fourth quarter, she said, adding it has been a sustainable growth. "India has been the fastest growing economy in the last

three consecutive financial years and this growth can continue in the coming years as well. The next 25 years will be very critical for India," Sitharaman said in a dialogue programme with industrialists and businessmen. She said that foreign investors are coming to invest in India due to the credibility of its economy. "Due to the economic policy, larger macroeconomic stability, stable government, stable taxation policy, transparent tenders and procurement, there has been immense credibility of India's economy abroad. So, the investors are coming here to invest," she said.

Gold, silver prices hit fresh peaks

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Extending gains for the second day in a row, gold and silver prices hit fresh all-time high levels on Tuesday, tracking strong trends in the international markets amid fears of escalating tensions in the Middle East. According to HDFC Securities, gold prices zoomed Rs 700 to hit its lifetime high of Rs 73,750 per 10 grams in the national capital on Tuesday. It had closed at Rs 73,050 per 10 grams on Monday. Similarly, silver price jumped Rs 800 to hit a record high of Rs 86,500 per kg. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at a new record high of Rs 73,750 per 10 grams, up by Rs 700, taking positive cues from overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst, Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the global markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,370 per ounce, up by USD 15 from the previous close. Gold rose as demand for the haven asset grew amid fears of escalating tensions in the Middle East following Iran's unprecedented attack on Israel last week.

RupeeQ aims to treble loan disbursement portfolio to ₹300 crore by 2027

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Home-grown platform for online loans and credit cards RupeeQ aims to treble digital loan disbursements portfolio to Rs 300 crore by 2027 on the back of government's push towards high-speed internet services in semi-urban and rural areas. Talking to PTI, Neeru Puri, Managing Director and Chief Financial Officer of RupeeQ, said, "It is estimated that total value of digital lending business in India will exceed USD 1 trillion over next 5 years. At RupeeQ, we expect to treble our loan disbursement portfolio by 2027, while in fiscal 2023-24 we clocked about Rs 100 crore." According to reports, India shall have 900 million active internet users by 2025, while 56 per cent of all new internet users will be from rural areas, and 65 per cent of new internet users will be female. Puri opined that the government's push on digitalisation and penetration of high-speed internet even in semi-urban and rural areas will help the company materialise its goal.

Puri said the digital lending space in India saw a phenomenal growth in value from USD 270 billion in 2022 to an estimated worth of USD 350 billion by end of next year with a remarkable compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 39.5 per cent. In the current financial year, the digital footprint of financial services consumers would increase to 75 per cent (from current 50 per cent). This is primarily due to the explosion of smartphones as well as mobile internet, Puri explained. As per a recent Boston Consulting Group's (BCG) report, loan disbursement models in the last few years have seen frenetic activity. There are a few fundamental drivers which are all coming together to turbo-charge this space. First, consumer behaviours are changing dramatically, shaped by experiences offered by internet giants. Second, there have been some rapid technological advances, led by the ever increasing penetration of smartphones as well as the proliferation of data.

Road execution to grow 5, 8 per cent in FY25: Icra

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Road execution in India is likely to grow 5-8 per cent to 12,500-13,000 km in the current fiscal, after recording a robust expansion of 20 per cent in 2023-24, rating agency Icra said on Tuesday. It added that the pace of execution in this fiscal will be supported by a healthy pipeline of projects, increased capital outlay by the government and focus on completion of projects by



Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH). Icra noted that road execution was impacted in the first half of FY24 on account of a prolonged monsoon in certain geographies, which affected productive days. According to Icra, the ministry's project award pipeline is healthy, at above 45,000 km as of March 2024. This is despite the awarding being significantly impacted in FY24 amid delay in approval from the Cabinet for

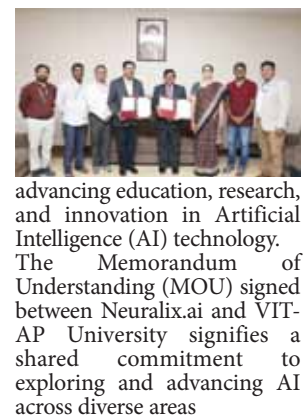
the revised cost estimates of Bharatmala Pariyojana Phase 1 (BMP), it added. Consequently, the overall awards declined by 31 per cent to 8,551 km in FY24 from 12,375 km in FY23. Icra pointed out that a similar trend was seen in FY19 before the last general elections, when the project awarding had declined by over 67 per cent on a year-on-year basis. The rating agency said engineering, procurement, and construction (EPC)

mode continues to be the mainstay of this process, accounting for 70-75 per cent of the awards in FY24, followed by Build, Operate, Transfer (BOT)-Hybrid Annuity Mode (HAM), accounting for 25-30 per cent share. "There were no awards under BOT-Toll in FY2024," Icra said, adding that in March 2024, the ministry amended the BOT-Toll model concession agreement to improve its attractiveness.

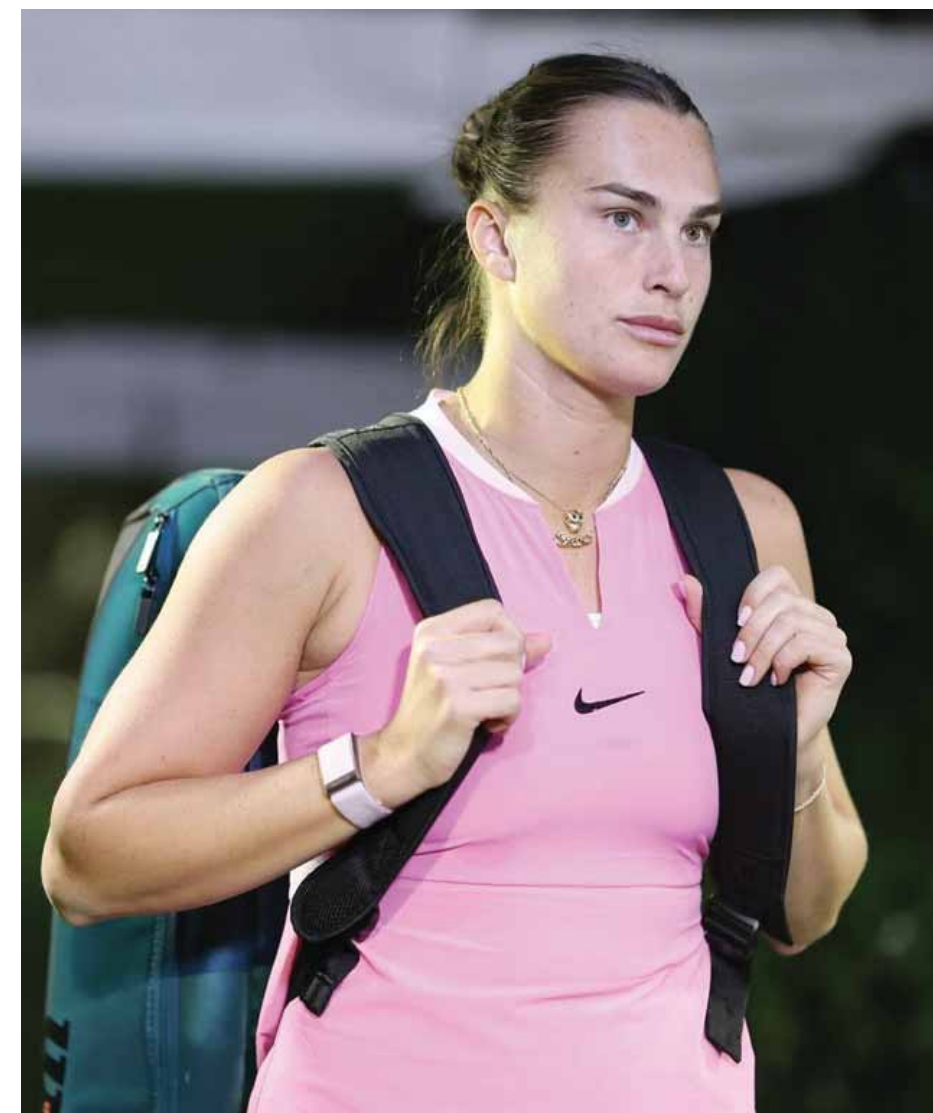
Neuralix Inc, VIT AP University announce collaboration to advance AI research

PNS ■ AMARAVATI, ANDHRA PRADESH

Neuralix Inc. and VIT-AP University announce strategic collaboration to advance Artificial Intelligence (AI) knowledge and research. Neuralix Inc., a leading AI startup specializing in digital transformation across various industries, and VIT-AP University, with its commitment to academic excellence and technological innovation, have formalized a collaboration aimed at



advancing education, research, and innovation in Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between Neuralix.ai and VIT-AP University signifies a shared commitment to exploring and advancing AI across diverse areas



SABALENKA TO FACE GOOD FRIEND BADOSA IN STUTTGART OPENER

AP ■ STUTTGART, GERMANY

Paula Badosa battled past Diana Shnaider 6-3, 6-4 to set up a match with friend and world No. 2 Aryna Sabalenka at the Porsche Grand Prix. Shnaider fended off four match points before former No. 2 Badosa took her fifth opportunity at the clay-court tournament on Monday. Badosa's 10 double faults allowed Shnaider eight break point opportunities. The 20-year-old Russian was unable to

take any of them on the center court in Stuttgart. Sabalenka has finished runner-up on her last three appearances in Stuttgart, losing the final to former No. 1 Ashleigh Barty in 2021 and current No. 1 Iga Swiatek in 2022 and 2023. Sachia Vickery of the United States defeated Aliaksandra Sasnovich of Belarus 7-6 (2), 7-5 and will next face compatriot Coco Gauff, the world No. 3. Veronika Kudermetova of Russia outlasted Barbora Krejčíková 5-7, 6-4, 6-4 for a

second-round meeting with No. 4 Elena Rybakina. Kudermetova was a break down in the deciding set but fought back and took her first match point to prevail after 3 hours, 6 minutes - one of the longest ever matches in Stuttgart. Gauff, Sabalenka, Swiatek and Rybakina all received first-round byes. Eight of the top 10 women are at the tournament. Swiatek is bidding to become the first three-time champion in Stuttgart since Maria Sharapova won from 2012-14.

Four titles in seven months, success of Kolkata Big Three will have huge impact: AIFF president

PTI ■ KOLKATA

The success of Kolkata's 'Big Three' — Mohun Bagan, East Bengal and Mohammedan Sporting — will not just have a massive impact on state football but will also have a positive effect on the sport in the country, said All India Football Federation president Kalyan Chaubey on Tuesday. Seven months, four titles, and the 'Mecca of Indian football' was celebrating after Mohun Bagan's maiden League Winners Shield triumph following their 2-1 win over Mumbai City FC at the packed Salt Lake Stadium here on Monday. "Bringing home the ISL Shield, I-League Trophy, Super Cup and Durand Cup to West Bengal is a sign of new-age football in the state, and adaptability of these clubs to the newer norms of

football," Chaubey told PTI.

"The three giants of Kolkata enjoy enormous fan support in West Bengal, India and globally. I'm sure the success of MB and EB, along with Mohammedan Sporting joining the two in ISL next season, will have a massive impact on Indian football." It all began with Mohun Bagan starting the season with their first Durand Cup title in 23 years, defeating arch-rivals East Bengal 1-0 on September 3 last year. East Bengal made amends to win the Super Cup, beating Odisha FC 3-2 in Bhubaneswar on January 29. It marked the end of their 12-year trophy drought. Having faced multiple relegation, Mohammedan Sporting came back from oblivion to defeat Shillong Lajong FC 2-1 earlier this month to win the I-League with a round to spare and



confirm their promotion to ISL. Mohun Bagan then went on to lift the ISL Shield in front of a record 61,000-plus home crowd at the Salt Lake Stadium. The Green and Maroon brigade will now aim to finish season by lifting the ISL Trophy, which would be a 'High

Five' for the Maidan 'Big Three'. Mohun Bagan is the oldest club in India, having been established in 1889, while Mohammedan Sporting came into existence two years later in 1891. East Bengal (established in 1920) also recently celebrated their centenary year. "They are the 'Big Three' of Kolkata football. With historic milestones and to have ruled Indian football for decades, the three have centuries-old football culture and I'm just glad that they have all come around once again to help the city earn the bragging rights," he said. "It's a remarkable year for Kolkata football to bring home four titles this season." "Millions of football fans, having their loyalties to these Big Three, have joined in to reverberate Kolkata's legacy," he added.

Goal Palmer scores four in 6-0 demolition of dismal Everton

AP ■ LONDON

Cole Palmer put on an unstoppable display with a perfect first-half hat trick and a fourth in the second half as Chelsea demolished Everton 6-0 in the English Premier League. Palmer scored with his left foot, head and right foot in the 13th, 19th and 29th minutes on Monday to become the first Chelsea player to score in seven successive home games. "It all happens so fast," Palmer told Sky Sports. "We started well and I scored another hat trick - buzzing. First one was my favorite, my right foot was a bit of a swinger." The Manchester City reject

stroked home a superb first from just outside the box and nodded in the second from close range after Jordan Pickford could only parry Nicolas Jackson's shot. His third was a wonderful 35-yard lob after Pickford needlessly gifted him possession. Nicolas Jackson added a fourth a minute before halftime, and Palmer made it 5-0 from the penalty spot in the 64th. Substitute Alfie Gilchrist's first goal for the club made it six in injury time. Palmer's goals took his season tally to 20 in the league, tied with Manchester City's Erling Haaland. The result extended a depressing few days for



Everton. Just hours before kickoff, the club lodged an appeal against a two-point deduction for a second breach of the Premier League financial rules. Everton was docked two points last week for overspending in a

three-year spell up to the end of the 2022-23 season. It was a second deduction this season for Everton, which had six points removed - reduced from 10 following an appeal - for breaching spending limits from 2019-20 to the 2021-22

season. "We've already agreed that's gone, we have to get on with it," Everton manager Sean Dyche said. "(The points deduction) is out of our control." Dyche described Monday as a "collective down day" and said his team was miles off the pace. "We can't perform like that at a place like this. The key moments when they got chances, finding the back of the net, we haven't done that all season." The Liverpool club sits in 16th place, only two points and two places above the relegation zone. After running its unbeaten streak to eight, Chelsea was in ninth place, only one point behind West Ham.



Muddappa begins season with double victory

PTI ■ PUNE

Multiple-time national champion Hemant Muddappa of Mantra Racing began the season with a double victory at the summer edition of the Valley Run 2024 at Amby Valley here on Tuesday. Bengaluru's Muddappa was also adjudged as the fastest rider of the day. Muddappa, the 12-time national champion, punched above his weight as he won the unrestricted class with a 1000cc bike, the BMW S1000RRR, and managed to set a national record of 09.480 seconds for this category. He edged past seasoned rider Mohammed Riyaz from

Hyderabad. In the four stroke 851 to 1050cc Open class, Muddappa clocked 09.692s to take the second gold ahead of Riddhihi Patil of Mumbai but had to be content with a second place in the third category he took part. Astride a Dayatona, Riyaz won the 4-stroke 551 up to 850cc Open class in 10.421 seconds, pushing Muddappa's Kawasaki Ninja 6R to second place. The FMSCI event was scheduled to run concurrently with the first round of the Nationals, but since the MMSC event was postponed, Elite Octane and Sportsraft, the organisers of this race, successfully completed the 2024 edition.

Australian aggression can be countered with better innovative passing: Rupinder Pal Singh

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The recent 0-5 drubbing notwithstanding, former drag-flick specialist Rupinder Pal Singh feels the Olympic-bound Indian men's hockey team can counter Australia's aggressive style of play with better defensive coordination and some innovative passing. India were blanked in the five-Test series in Perth some days ago, a disappointing outing for the team, which did reasonably well in the FIH Pro League before that and is expected to better or match its bronze from Tokyo Olympics at the Paris Games in July-August. Singh, who was part of the 2014 Asian Games gold-winning side, is not too concerned by the final result as he felt the team kept improving with every game. "We lost the first match 5-1, after that the team improved and the score-lines were close, we missed some chances, some work needs to be done prior to the Olympics. The series was a preparation for Paris Olympics, as new variations and players were tried out," he told PTI Videos. Asked how should the team counter Australia's attacking style of play, he said innovative passing could do the trick.



"Australia's hard press can be countered, high level of coordination is required for that, defender-to-defender ball transfer, quick passes from defenders to the mid-field, overhead passes would be useful in countering such a style of play," the 33-year-old suggested. He sees no fault in India's reliance on penalty corners for scoring. "...All international teams, all are dependent on penalty corners — the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Australia. Defences have become stronger, here PC conversion is such an important tool that in every match about 1-2 goals have to be scored from them," he pointed out.

He described current India captain Harmanpreet Singh as one of the best drag-flickers in the world. He was, however, concerned about the penalty corner conversion rate of the women's team, which is seeking to rebuild itself after its stunning failure to qualify for the Olympics. "That's a worry (Penalty corner conversion), its penalty corner is an important tool in today's hockey we need to work on that," he said. Singh was speaking on the sidelines of a three-day training program organised by Hockey India. It was also attended by former India goalkeeper Yogita Bali, along with India goalkeepers Adrian D'Souza, Bharat Chetri, Helen Mary, Dipika Murty, Akash Chikte, and PT Rao. Apart from Singh, the other eminent former India drag-flickers who attended the training were Gurjinder Singh, VR Raghunath, and Jaspreet Kaur. The former stars have drawn up a curriculum on the basics

of drag-flicking and goalkeeping which would be implemented across all academies and centres in the country. **FUTURE BRIGHT FOR WOMEN'S HOCKEY:** Despite the Olympic heartbreak, women's hockey will do well, according to Bali, who picked Manipur's Bichu Devi Kharibam as the successor for long-serving goalkeeper Savita Punia. "In Bengaluru, we trained with top six goalkeepers of India, and I found Bichhu to be the best in India after Savita. She could be India's number one after Savita," Bali said. Bali said Indian women's hockey has grown by leaps and bounds in recent years. "Compared to when I started playing, there are a lot more facilities, now there are scientific advisors, nutrition experts to help the development of the players. "Earlier Indian Railways was the prominent employment provider for hockey players, now several departments are offering jobs, so things are going well," she said.

Paris bound Olympians look forward to a post COVID Games with fans in stands

AP ■ NEW YORK

The biggest races, routines and games for many of this generation's Olympic athletes were contested in front of mostly empty stands, largely devoid of coaches to help them out or friends and family to cheer them on. That was three years ago at the COVID-19 Summer Olympics and two years ago at the COVID-19 Winter Olympics. Now that they're preparing for the Paris Olympics that begin in July - and a return to something that feels normal - the Americans heading back to the Games know they can never take for granted the screaming fans and a hug from Mom or Dad. "I think it's super important to be able to share these massive moments with people you care about," said BMX rider Aise Willoughby, who has been to the last three Olympics. Willoughby and about 100 other U.S. Athletes are doing interviews and photo shoots this week at the Team USA media summit at a hotel in

Times Square - an event that itself was made impossible in the lead-up to the Tokyo Games in 2021 amid the coronavirus pandemic. One topic of conversation this week is how grateful the bikers, rowers, gymnasts and the rest are to be past the days of contact tracing, quarantines and daily swabbing or spitting for COVID-19 tests inside the so-called Olympic bubble. In Paris, there will be celebrations with relatives and one-on-one contact with coaches, most of whom were not allowed into the venues three years ago. The USA House - a traditional stop for athletes to wind down and kick back, especially after they're done competing - will be doing brisk business once again. Mostly, athletes are looking forward to the chance to soak in the feeling from the crowd, an element sorely missing in the cavernous and largely unfilled venues in Tokyo. "I'll be able to see the audience's emotions. I want to build that with them and I can tailor my routines to



that," said American rhythmic gymnast Evita Griskanen, who plans French music to accompany one routine and "All-American" number for another, all with the goal of getting fans caught up in the moment. Griskanen said she already feels a different vibe. Preparing for the Olympics in Tokyo - Games that were initially delayed by a year, then held in an atmosphere nobody quite recognized - became a largely solitary, and joyless, affair. "It turned into training in my basement and throwing things outside," she said. This year, a different

experience awaits, and some athletes are even looking forward to a crowd rooting against them because, hey, at least it's a crowd. "The boys have been saying, 'We want to play France in, like, the semifinals,'" rugby player Perry Baker said. "You just visualize how big that can be, and how fun that can be. Their crowd. Our crowd. We live for those moments." With crowds, naturally, come other issues that were mostly set on the sideline in 2021. On Monday, French President Emmanuel Macron said the much-touted opening ceremony scheduled for the Seine River could be

viewing audience, the rise of streaming services and the 13-hour time difference between New York and Japan. But also: COVID-19. "Even for those who were back home, it wasn't the most important thing going on for us at that time," USOPC CEO Sarah Hirshland said of the renewed possibilities presented by the first COVID-19-free Games since 2018. "This is about an opportunity to really focus on this incredible thing called Olympic and Paralympic sport. It brings us together almost like nothing else." The way things went in Tokyo took some of the luster away from what was nearly a perfect experience for indoor volleyball player Jordyn Poulter. Yes, she won a gold medal in her first Olympics, three years ago. Yes, it was a once-in-a-lifetime type of triumph. Still, there was something missing. "Not being able to relish in that moment with friends and family in that immediate time - it's something that I'm looking forward to in this next one," she said.

Beijing half marathon results under investigation after runners appear to hand win to Chinese star

AP ■ BANGKOK

Organisers are investigating a half marathon race in Beijing after three African runners appeared to let China's top long-distance runner move ahead of them shortly before the finish line and sprint to victory, sparking public speculation that the result was rigged. There was a flood of public reaction online expressing suspicion about the race after video from the final moments of Sunday's Mengniu Beijing Half Marathon circulated online. On Monday, organizers of the race issued a statement saying they would investigate the results. "The organising committee attaches great importance to the issue raised by netizens about the results of the (race)," organisers said. "A special investigation team has been set up to conduct an investigation, and the results of the investigation will be released to the public in a timely fashion." The Beijing Sports Bureau, which was in charge of the race, did not respond to a

request for comment. He Jie, who won the marathon at the Asian Games and holds the Chinese national record in the event, was trailing behind three runners from Kenya and Ethiopia as they approached the finish line. One of the runners then seems to gesture for the others to slow down as He moves in front and sprints to the finish line. One of the other runners, Willy Mnangat of Kenya, told BBC Sport Africa that they allowed He to win but that they had been hired to serve as pacemakers and were not competing to win the race. However, all three had entered the race as official competitors rather than as pacemakers. "I was not there to compete," Mnangat was quoted as saying. "My job was to set the pace and help the guy win but unfortunately, he did not achieve the target, which was to break the national record." He finished with a time of 1 hour, 3 minutes, 44 seconds, which was more than a minute slower than the Chinese half marathon record.



GUJARAT TITANS, DELHI CAPITALS SEARCH FOR CONSISTENCY

PTI AHMEDABAD
Gujarat Titans will be striving for much needed consistency when they meet Delhi Capitals in an Indian Premier League match here on Wednesday. Unlike the past two editions, the Titans have not been able to play like a well-oiled machine though they still have time to fix the flaws. A last ball win over table leaders Rajasthan Royals on April 10 was just the kind of result the Titans needed to infuse fresh life to their campaign. They have only managed only two wins from their first six games but with another eight matches remaining, the Shubman Gill-led team has enough time to turn things around. The absence of Mohammad Shami has hurt them but they must best use the available resources. Umesh Yadav has taken seven wickets but has leaked more than 10 runs per over. His new ball partner

Spencer Johnson and the seasoned Mohit Sharma too can improve on their economy rate. Star spinner Rashid Khan has been at his frugal best but would like to have more wickets in his kitty. His cameo in the last game helped Titans seal a thrilling win and the team would also be expecting more out of him with the bat. Delhi Capitals, on the other hand, have struggled to assemble their playing eleven due to form and fitness issues. After four losses in five games, they got a much needed boost with the win against Lucknow Super Giants but they still have a lot to sort out if they are to push themselves for a place in the play-offs. The presence of a fit again Kuldeep Yadav made a huge difference as he broke the backbone of the opposition with three timely strikes in Lucknow. Kuldeep, who has added more speed to his craft, seems to be at the peak of his powers and it could be difficult



for Titans batters to face him, especially against his googlies. In Jack Fraser-McGurk, Capitals seem to have found an able number three and will be hoping that the Australian builds on the success of his maiden IPL game. Anrich Nortje, who has been taken to the cleaners by the batters so far in the IPL, did not play the last game. Mukesh Kumar has conceded 10 runs per over in the five games and was also expensive in his comeback game against LSG. The biggest positive for the team has been the batting form of skipper Rishabh Pant, who seems to be getting better with every outing. It would be fair to say that the southpaw is in prime position to make India's squad for the T20 World Cup despite stiff opposition from the likes of Sanju Samson and Ishan Kishan. Thin on Indian batting talent, the Capitals rely heavily on the likes of David Warner, who would itching to make an

impact after not contributing much in the last three games. **THE TEAMS (FROM):** Gujarat Titans: Shubman Gill (c), David Miller, Wriddhiman Saha, Sai Sudharsan, Shahrulkh Khan, Matthew Wade, Kane Williamson, Azmatullah Omarzai, Abhinav Manohar, Rashid Khan, Vijay Shankar, Rahul Tewatia, Spencer Johnson, Kartik Tyagi, Joshua Little, Darshan Nalkande, Noor Ahmad, Ravishrivasan S Kishore, Mohit Sharma, Jayant Yadav, Umesh Yadav, Sushant Mishra, Sandeep Warrier, Sharath BR, Manav Suthar. Delhi Capitals: Rishabh Pant (c), David Warner, Abhishek Porel, Ricky Bhui, Yash Dhull, Shai Hope, Prithvi Shaw, Tristan Stubbs, Kumar Kushagra, Swastik Chikara, Ishant Sharma, Jhye Richardson, Rasikh Dar Salam, Vicky Ostwal, Anrich Nortje, Mukesh Kumar, Kuldeep Yadav, Praveen Dubey, Khaleel Ahmed, Sumit Kumar, Axar Patel, Mitchell Marsh, Lalit Yadav, Jake Fraser-McGurk.

We want to attack Power Play: Head says, revealing SRH batting philosophy



PTI BENGALURU
Sunrisers Hyderabad have taken T20 batting to the next level with sustained range-hitting in the Indian Premier League, and Travis Head said maximising Power Play segment was central to their aggressive approach. Head, whose 39-ball 100 led SRH to a record-setting 287/3 against Royal Challengers Bengaluru on Monday, underscored that approach with a fifty inside the Power Play. It was also the second time Head completed a half-century within the first six overs. "We've definitely got a lot of power through our top and

through that middle-order," Head added. It wasn't a mere tall claim as a quick check will reveal SRH's Power play scores in six matches this season as 65/1, 81/1, 58/1, 78/1, 40/3 and 76/0, and none of the other nine teams have come close to those numbers. But it was not blind hitting. Head revealed his approach in the initial six overs. "Depending on the field positions, I try to sum up what the bowlers are trying to do. In the power play, with just two fielders out, I try to think about hitting the ball 360, around the whole ground, as you only have to go over the infield or through the infielders for boundaries. "I'd worked on a few things over the last couple of days. I did not execute the way I would have liked (in the last two matches). But today, especially in the power play, I was able to strike the ball the way I wanted," said the left-hander. The 30-year-old also lauded Hyderabad bowlers, especially skipper and premier pacer Pat Cummins, for holding their nerves when RCB batters were scoring briskly. "We knew that we probably needed three or four really good overs in the game to win it. So, it's amazing to sit here and think that when we make 280, but it's going to be one of the nights for the bowlers to hold on and I thought Pat bowled exceptionally well. "We were able to get wickets throughout the middle of the overs which set the game up. DK (Dinesh Karthik) played an unbelievable innings. But we did really well to get them back at 125 or 130 for five," he added.

middle-order and I think we've sort of got to tailor the way we want to play around that power that we've got, especially in the post-match press conference. The Australian opener has a perfect ally at the top in an equally belligerent Abhishek Sharma, who blunts slower bowlers upfront while Head goes about destroying the pacers. "I guess Abhi and I at the top of the order try to maximise that (Power Play) as much as we can. It may be fours, it may be sixes. "But yeah, we want to try to attack the power play with the two of us and then obviously we've got a lot of power

PTI BENGALURU
A crestfallen Royal Challengers Bengaluru skipper Faf du Plessis conceded that a string of defeats had taken a toll on the team and the confidence had hit an all-time low after losing by 25 runs to Sunrisers Hyderabad in a match where a plethora of batting records were eclipsed. SRH posted an all-time IPL record total of 287 for 3 and then restricted RCB to 262 for 7 as 38 maximums were hit across two innings. The match also entered the record books for the highest cumulative match total of 549 scored by both teams. "It's crazy the amount of runs scored today, a world record. I wouldn't say 270 is par, Danny. It's tough (to bowl on a day like this), we tried a few things and they weren't quite working,"

No way to hide when your confidence is low: Faf du Plessis

Du Plessis said at the post-match presentation ceremony. Just like winning provides a lot of confidence, back-to-back defeat can also rob teams off it, feels the former Proteas skipper. "There's no way to hide when your confidence is low. The fast bowlers found it quite difficult out there. Similar to the batting perspective, we need to work on a few areas. Need to make sure the run rate doesn't go down after powerplay. The guys put up their hands and never gave up (in the run chase). "It was good to see the fight, 30-40 runs from the bowling perspective was a bit too



much." Du Plessis admitted that the pressure is way too much and mind could explode at any time. "It's important to go away and freshen your mind, it's such a

mental game. Sometimes you feel your mind is going to explode. When you get back to the contest you have to give full commitment," the RCB skipper said.

Winning skipper Cummins, who was the best bowler on view among the two teams, also said in jest how he wished that he was a batter on days like these. "Wish I was a batter," Cummins could afford to smile after his team emerged victorious. The SRH skipper said that when his team scored 277 a few weeks back, he never thought that total could be surpassed. "Against Mumbai a few weeks ago, I thought it won't happen again, but it has happened again. Give me a few more years please (on whether bowlers will go extinct)! It feels like you bowl an over for seven or eight feels great." The Chinnaswamy track seemed a bit slower in earlier games but things have indeed changed. "I've given up trying to read the pitches," Cummins said.

Every game is like semifinal for us now: RCB coach Flower

PTI BENGALURU
After his side's sixth defeat in seven matches in the ongoing Indian Premier League, Royal Challengers Bengaluru head coach Andy Flower confessed that each of their remaining seven matches will have to be treated like a semifinal. In the latest setback to their playoff aspirations, RCB went down by 25 runs against Sunrisers Hyderabad here on Monday. "It is obviously knockout time and every game is like a semifinal for us now. But we will have to think that we will come back stronger," Flower said on RCB Game Day. RCB conceded the highest-ever IPL total - 287 for three - as the Hyderabad batters went



on a merry ride against their directionless bowlers. Flower admitted that it was a tough night for his side. "It was a really tough night in the field, of course, as they finished so powerfully that it probably took the wind out of our souls," he said. However, Flower found shards of positives during RCB's chase such as Dinesh Karthik's superlative 83 off 35 balls and

skipper Faf Du Plessis' 28-ball 62. The Zimbabwean wanted to build on them in the coming matches. "I am really proud of the way we fought with the bat out there in the middle. We lost the game but I was really proud of the way we fought," said Flower. The former England coach lauded Karthik for the way he took on SRH bowlers, and said it would not be surprising if the wicketkeeper batter made it to India's T20 World Cup squad. "Dinesh Karthik is really making a push for the World Cup team (of India) as well and is only getting better on the field," he added. RCB will next face Kolkata Knight Riders at Eden Gardens on April 21.



RCB-SRH game was one of sixes, not of batsmanship: Finch

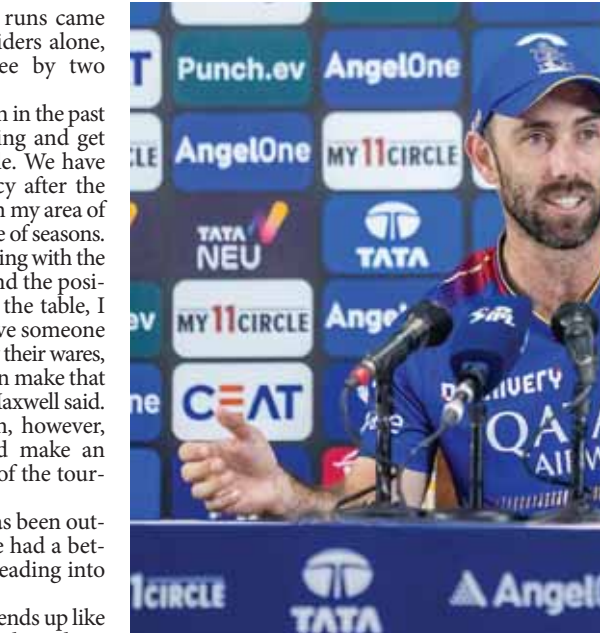
PTI BENGALURU
Sunrisers Hyderabad and Royal Challengers Bengaluru unleashing a barrage of sixes in their IPL match left little room for batsmanship and what mattered was who hit the most number of sixes, said Australia's T20 World Cup-winning skipper Aaron Finch. Travis Head's maiden T20 ton and Heinrich Klaasen's pillaging 67 drove SRH to a record-breaking 287 for three, which helped them go past their own 277/3 against Mumbai Indians at Hyderabad this March 27. Dinesh Karthik then smashed a blazing 35-ball 83 but RCB ended up losing the match in which 38 sixes were hit all around the park. "It was never going to be a game where you talk about batsmanship. It's a game where you talk about who hit the most sixes and that was the difference," Finch said on Star Sports. "They (RCB) had to start at 14 (runs per over). And if you have one bad over it goes to 16." Finch said the Hyderabad side used the Powerplay segment well. "They (SRH) were getting lucky in the first powerplay and they needed those sixes and Travis Head was the difference there. "He started off well, his intent to get the ball rolling and then a courageous move to keep Klaasen at No. 3 and say we need to keep going, we have a deep batting line-up and we are going to put the bowlers to the sword here," added Finch. Head's destructive hundred, crafted off 39 balls, was the fourth fastest in the tournament, the cornerstone of SRH's 25-run win.

Finch said IPL teams had started changing their strategies by bringing in big-hitters like Klaasen up the order as they play fearless cricket. "A lot of times teams think that Klaasen has so much power to the back end, let's hold him back. Like (RCB's) Glenn Maxwell at times, you don't want to expose him right now because if he gets out, then we've got to rebuild. Teams don't think like that anymore. " (SRH coach) Dan Vettori has talked about that, play aggressively, play fearlessly and bear the consequence if it doesn't go right. If it does go right, you don't lose." Dinesh Karthik once again underlined his value making a 35-ball 83 at a strike-rate of 237. Finch said the ability to strike the ball comes naturally to Karthik, given his more than two decades of experience in the game. "Well, once you've got 20-25 years of experience behind you, and you've got that bulk of balls you've hit throughout your whole career since you were five years old, you don't lose that ability to bat. "So, I bat, it works in their favour because they train specifically for that role which they play for their team. They don't over train, they aren't trying to improve on their skills or they aren't trying to improvise anymore, they just train specifically," said Finch. The Victorian cricketer added that players like Karthik are examples for others preparing to be specific about their roles. "That should be a lesson for players around the world, that you have to be really specific with your preparation and how you go about it.

RCB Maxwell takes mental and physical break from IPL 2024

PTI BENGALURU
Royal Challengers Bengaluru all-rounder Glenn Maxwell has decided to take an indefinite "mental and physical" break from the Indian Premier League, blaming his wretched batting form for the decision. Maxwell's absence from RCB's match against Sunrisers Hyderabad here on Monday was initially attributed to a finger injury he suffered during the previous match against Mumbai Indians. But he later admitted to dropping himself from the squad. "It was a pretty easy decision. I went to Faf and the coaches after the last game (vs Mumbai Indians) and said it was probably time we tried someone else (in his place)," Maxwell said in the post-match press meet. "It's actually a good time to give myself a bit of a mental and physical break, get my body right. If I'm required to get in during the tournament, I can, hopefully, get back into a solid mental and physical space where I can make an impact," he added. This is the second time in his career that Maxwell has opted out of competitive cricket in order to gather himself. He had taken a similar break in October 2019, stating that he felt mentally and physically ruined at that time. The 35-year-old made his comeback a couple of months later. In the ongoing IPL, Maxwell has been quite underwhelming with the bat in the six matches he has played this season, contributing just 32 runs at an average of 5.33 and a strike-rate of 94.

Twenty eight of those 32 runs came against Kolkata Knight Riders alone, helped to a great degree by two dropped catches. "I have been in this situation in the past where you can keep playing and get yourself deeper into a hole. We have had a pretty big deficiency after the power play, which has been my area of strength over the last couple of seasons. "I felt like I wasn't contributing with the bat, and with the results and the position we find ourselves on the table, I think it's a good time to give someone else an opportunity to show their wares, and hopefully, someone can make that spot their own," a candid Maxwell said. The big-hitting Australian, however, still hoped to return and make an impact in the later stages of the tournament. "The management here has been outstanding. I don't think I've had a better six months in cricket leading into this tournament. "So, it's frustrating when it ends up like this. But if I can get my body and my mind right, there's no reason I can't finish the tournament well if I do get another opportunity," he said. The sudden dip in his form was surprising, considering the hot run he had in the run-up to the IPL. Maxwell had made 552 runs from 17 T20Is from



November onwards, averaging 42 and his strike-rate was an impressive 185. But the Victorian started the IPL with a first-ball duck against Chennai Super Kings in an away match, and from that point his fortunes plummeted. "T20 cricket is a pretty fickle game. Even if you look at the first game, I ran one off the middle of the bat to the keeper. I picked up the length, saw a scoring opportunity, but opened the face a little bit too much. "When you are going well, that goes wide of the (wicketkeeper's) gloves, you

get a boundary. You are 4 off 1, and you are away for the tournament," he noted. Maxwell said luck was not on his side in this tournament. "I probably just haven't got away. In the first few games, I feel I made reasonably good decisions (for shot selection). But I was finding ways to get out. "It can happen in T20 cricket and when it snowballs like that, you can go searching and try too hard and forget the basics of the game," he said. Maxwell experienced a similar barren run in IPL 2020 while playing for Punjab Kings. During that season, the Australian scored a mere 108 runs from 11 matches and failed to hit a single six. However, Maxwell did not draw parallels between the two seasons. "I was bowling really well back then. I was actually playing more as a spinner. We had KL (Rahul) and Mayank (Agarwal) who were the two leading run-scorers at that time. "So, there weren't a lot of balls left in the game (for him). I wasn't able to get any match rhythm. So, I said the same thing to the Punjab management that we can have an overseas bowler in my place. "But we didn't have an off-spinner, so, I sort of played as an overseas off-spinner who could bat a little bit," he explained.

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