

OPINION 6

AUNG SAN SUU KYI: PRISON OR HOUSE ARREST?

WORLD 8

UKRAINE CLAIMS IT SHOT DOWN RUSSIAN STRATEGIC BOMBER

MONEY 10

STOCK MARKETS STAGE STRONG REBOUND

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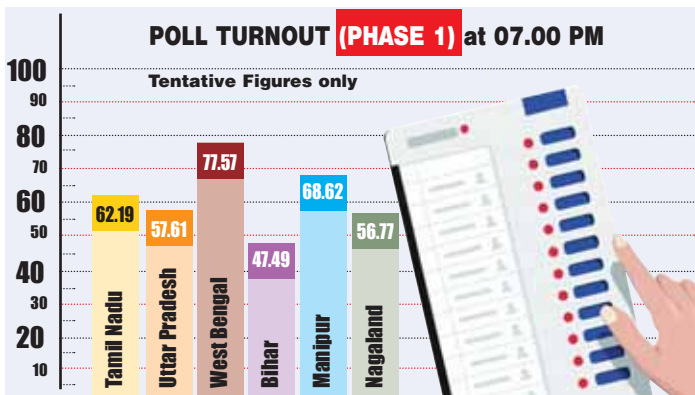
RISHABH PANT SET FOR HOMECOMING 12 SPORTS



Over 62 per cent polling in 1st phase of LS polls

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI
In a kaleidoscope of democracy in action, voters of all ages — from wheelchair-bound seniors to newlyweds and Great Andamanese Tribe from Strait Island in South Andaman to the world's shortest woman cast their vote on Friday with an estimated 62.37 per cent turnout recorded till 6 pm in the first phase of Lok Sabha elections.

explosion of a grenade launcher shell in Chhattisgarh left a CRPF jawan dead. The highest voter turnout on the first day of polling under Phase 1 of the Lok Sabha elections was recorded in Tripura at 79.90 per cent, followed by West Bengal at 77.57 per cent and Assam at 71.38 per cent, with Bihar witnessing the lowest turnout at 47.49 per cent till 7 pm. According to officials, the prevailing heatwave condition in Bihar could be a possible reason for the low voter turnout. In strife-torn Manipur, around 68.62 per cent polling was recorded



amid incidents of shooting, damage to electronic voting machines (EVMs), threats to voters and polling agents by armed miscreants while voters in six districts of eastern Nagaland stayed indoors following an indefinite shutdown call by an apex body of tribal organisations to press for its demand for a separate state. Tamil Nadu recorded a voter turnout of 72.09 per cent in the Lok Sabha polls with no major

untoward incidents while 58 per cent voter turnout was recorded on eight seats of western Uttar Pradesh. According to the Election Commission's Voter Turnout app, 63.29 per cent voting was reported in Saharanpur, 57.83 per cent in Moradabad, 60.39 per cent in Kairana, 59.17 per cent in Pilibhit, 54.68 per cent in Bijnor, 52.42 per cent in Rampur and 54.91 per cent in Muzaffarnagar. These seats fall in the Jat and sugarcane belt of the

State. The commission described the turnout as "high", noting that voting remained "largely peaceful". In the first phase of the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the voter turnout was recorded at 69.43 per cent. Some of the constituencies were different then and the total number of seats which went to polls were 91. Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged voters to exercise their franchise in record numbers as the seven-phase Lok Sabha polls started with polling being held in 102 constituencies.

THE PIONEER REPORTS FROM GROUND ZERO

TAMIL NADU

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI
As polling in the first phase of the general election concluded by Friday 6 pm, Tamil Nadu registered a voter turn-out of 63.2 per cent till 5 pm, according to the Election Commission of India. Final figures would be released by 8 pm, said the ECI officials. Dharmapuri registered 73.51 per cent while Krishnagiri recorded 64.24 per cent (figures recorded till 5 pm). Chennai Central, from where former Telangana Governor Dr Tamilisai Sounderarajan was contesting

recorded 41.47 per cent till 3 pm, according to Satyabrata Sahoo, chief electoral officer. Latha Ravishankar, a BJP activist in Chennai Central, had disappointment written all over her face as voters failed to make it to the polling booths despite lot of cajoling by her and other volunteers. But the DMK camp sounded positive as the low-turnout out is expected to make the prospectus of the party candidates smooth. The State has 39 constituencies while the neighboring Puducherry has one seat.

WESTERN UTTAR PRADESH

VIRENDRA NATH BHATT ■ LUCKNOW
Voter turnout of 57.54 per cent was recorded till 5 pm in all eight parliamentary constituencies of Western Uttar Pradesh where polling was held in first phase of Lok Sabha elections on Friday. Total turnout of voters was expected to be marginally above 60 per cent. The eight constituencies where polling was held on Friday included Pilibhit, Saharanpur, Kairana, Muzaffarnagar, Bijnor, Nagina, Moradabad and Rampur. Of these,

Saharanpur, Kairana, Bijnor, Moradabad and Rampur are general constituencies. Over 25 per cent turnout was recorded till 11 am, and it rose to an average of 37 per cent till 1 pm. By 3 pm over 47.44 per cent voters had cast their votes in the eight constituencies. The voter turnout was 54.68 per cent in Bijnor, 58.68 per cent in Kairana, 57.65 per cent in Moradabad, 54.91 per cent in Muzaffarnagar, 58.05 per cent in Nagina, 60.23 per cent in Pilibhit, 52.42 per cent in Rampur and 63.29 per cent in Saharanpur.

WEST BENGAL

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA
There were sufficient reasons for the Election Commission of India to heave a big sigh of relief as the first round of elections for Bengal's three parliamentary constituencies of Cooch Behar, Alipurduar and Jalpaiguri passed off without any loss of life though reports of "stray incidents of clashes, stone-pelting or booth capture," came in from many areas. Polling passed off near-peacefully amid stray incidents of violence and complaints of booth capture

by both the Trinamool Congress and the BJP, sources in the ECI said adding the three constituencies witnessed a brisk polling of about 77.5 per cent till 5 pm. The polling percentage was likely to go beyond 82 per cent as many voters were still standing in the queue. While Cooch Behar recorded a comparatively high polling rate of 77.33 per cent, about 75.54 per cent voters voted at Alipurduar whereas Jalpaiguri witnessed about 79.33 per cent franchise.

NAGALAND & MANIPUR

PTI ■ IMPHAL/KOHHIMA
At least four Electronic Voting Machines were damaged at different polling booths in conflict-hit Manipur on Friday where polling was held in the first phase of Lok Sabha elections, according to sources. Meanwhile, the lone Lok Sabha seat in Nagaland recorded a voter turnout of over 50 per cent till 4 pm, the closing time for voting, on Friday, officials said. The polling began at 7 am. The polling was held, amid a call given by the Eastern Nagaland People's

Organisation (ENPO) to abstain from voting in six districts of the region over its demand for a separate State. People in the six districts, which have over four lakh votes spread over 738 polling stations, remained indoors in solidarity with the ENPO. Under the shadow of a long-drawn ethnic conflict, Manipur was set to go to polls on Friday for the two constituencies — Inner and Outer Manipur. Polling is also scheduled in some areas of the Outer Manipur constituency in phase 2 on April 26.

BIHAR



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PATNA/AURANGABAD/GAYA

Around 46.32 per cent of the 75 lakh voters in four Lok Sabha constituencies in Bihar exercised their franchise till 5 pm on Friday, officials said. The polling began at 7 am and went on till 6 pm, a senior election official said. The voters will decide the fate of 38 candidates in these four seats. Tight security arrangements were in place at Nawada and Aurangabad, besides the reserved seats of Gaya and Jamui, where a majority of nearly 5,000 polling booths have been marked as "sensitive". Over 49.95 per cent voters have exercised their franchise in Aurangabad Lok Sabha constituency, 48.54 per cent in Gaya, 47.09 per cent in Jamui and 40.20 per cent in Nawada till 5 pm, officials said. Of the four seats, Nawada has the highest number of 20.06 lakh voters, where altogether eight candidates are in the fray though the contest is primarily between Vivek Thakur, a BJP Rajya Sabha MP seeking entry into the Lok Sabha, and RJD's Shrawan Kushwaha. Gaya has 18.18 lakh voters, but the highest number of 14 candidates. Here, former chief minister Jitan Ram Manjhi, an NDA ally, who is just a few months shy of turning 80, is making yet another bid to enter Parliament.

MAHARASHTRA



TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

More than 55 per cent of total 95.54 lakh voters exercised their franchise in five constituencies that went to polls in the first phase of Lok Sabha polls eastern Maharashtra on Friday, with the naxalite-infested Gadchiroli-Chimur accounting for a maximum of 65 per cent polling. With no untoward incident reported from anywhere, the polling passed off peacefully in Nagpur, Chandrapur, Bhandara-Gondiya, Ramtek (SC), Gadchiroli-Chimur (ST) constituencies, as voters turned out in large numbers braving harsh temperatures. As per the polling percentages put out by the Chief Election Officer, Maharashtra at 5 pm, an average of 54.85 per cent of the total electorate in five poll-bound constituencies cast their votes. The final poll percentages (as of 5.30 pm) were expected only after 9.30 pm. The average final polling percentage in the five constituencies may be anywhere from 57 to 60 per cent. In Nagpur where the two-time sitting MP and Union Minister Nitin Gadkari is taking on Congress Vikas Thakre, there was a relatively lowest turnout of 47.11 per cent of voters. The polling percentage might have either touched or barely crossed 50 per cent when the polling ended at 5.30 pm. In contrast, the Maoist-infested Gadchiroli-Chimur recorded the highest poll percentage of 64.95, while the voter turn-outs reported from three other Lok Sabha constituencies where the elections were held were: Bhandara-Gondiya-56.87 per cent, Chandrapur-55.11 per cent and Ramtek-52.38 per cent. Nitin Gadkari, his wife Kanchan and other family members voted at a

polling station near their residence in Nagpur. Talking to media persons after exercising his franchise, Gadkari expressed that the ruling BJP will cross a winning tally of 400 seats in the country, while he would win the polls from Nagpur by a margin of more than 5 lakh votes. "We are also targeting a record voting turnout this time, from 54 per cent in 2019 to 75 per cent in 2024. I appeal to all the people to step out and exercise their right to vote, and celebrate the greatest festival of democracy," Gadkari said. Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) Sarsanghchalak Dr. Mohan Bhagwat cast his vote at a polling booth near Reshimbagh in Nagpur. Dr Bhagaat was among the earliest to arrive at a polling station and waited for nearly 15 minutes before the polling started, entered to cast his vote and emerged soon thereafter, displaying his inked left-hand forefinger with pride. "I have performed my personal duty for the day and I call upon all the people to cast their vote since as citizens it is our right as well as a duty," Dr Bhagwat said. Maharashtra Congress president

Nana Patole exercised his franchise along with his family members at Sukli village in Bhandara district. Talking to media persons after he cast his vote, Patole said that the BJP-led government had "cheated" people for 10 years and they were determined to end the 10-year dictatorship of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "The people of Vidarbha have always stood firmly behind the Congress. We are receiving great support from the people this time as well. I am confident that we will win all the five Lok Sabha seats that went to poll today," he said. Barring Nagpur where voter turn-out was the lowest, there was considerable enthusiasm among voters in four other poll-constituencies of Chandrapur, Bhandara-Gondiya, Ramtek (SC), Gadchiroli-Chimur (ST). Lakhs of people, including large numbers of first-time voters, youth, senior citizens and transgenders, exercised their voting rights. In a heart-warming sight witnessed in Gadchiroli-Chimur constituency, nine handicapped senior citizens were brought in a 'rath yatra' by people, accompanied by a brass band playing on the roads, to cast their votes at a polling station.



An elderly woman along with others waits to cast votes for the first phase of Lok Sabha polls, in Sivasagar, Assam, on Friday

Google Doodle salutes Indian democracy

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

As India's much-awaited 2024 Lok Sabha elections' first phase unfolded on Friday, Google's iconic Doodle joined the country's democratic journey by featuring the iconic ink mark on the index finger, a hallmark of Indian democracy. A click on the Google Doodle takes the users, from across the globe, to witness the monumental scale of India's vibrant democratic process being held in the seven phases from April 19 to June 1 in the country. In the first phase, starting on Friday a total of 102 constituencies in 21 States have gone to vote, including 5



constituencies from Assam. Phase 2 of the polls will be held next week on April 26, and 89 constituencies in 13 States will be voting, including five Assam constituencies. Social media platforms were already buzzing with excitement as users shared the Doodle online and expressed their thoughts on this significant moment. @RT_India_news posted on X, "Google Doodle Salutes Indian Elections - Democracy's Biggest Dance. Friday's illustration depicts a hand with the index finger marked with ink, symbolising the start of the world's largest elections in which nearly one billion people are eligible to vote. "The first phase

of India's 2024 Lok Sabha elections is currently underway, with significant participation across multiple regions," it posted. Stella Paul with @stellasglobe handle termed Google's move as "pretty cool" while one @virgojyoti02 found the move exciting "Let the festival of

democracy begin!!! Google doodle". Naveen Athresh, having twitter handle @naveenathresh said, "Google Doodle with our Indian elections voting to push people to vote. A nice touch." Pritansu Priyadarshini Biswal from Bhubaneswar in Odisha too was excited at Google's innovative idea saying that, as citizens across

the country exercise their right to vote, Google Doodle stands as a virtual companion, reminding us of the significance of our collective journey towards a more inclusive and democratic society." Jagdish Kaur, founder of the WILGA, an NGO engaged in empowerment of women shared that, "Through this Doodle, Google aims to educate people about the importance of voting and to highlight the significance of democracy. This also shows how our democracy has become stronger every passing year." "I think the vibrancy of any democracy lies in the power of an individual vote which decides the future of any powerful country like ours. It is a welcoming move

by Google which is presently the only country with 1.4 strong population to create awareness about elections," added Dr Rahul Bhargava, a bone marrow transplant specialist and haematologist at Fortis Hospital, Gurgaon echoed similar sentiments. For Sanjay Ojha, Corporate Communication head at the ACME Green Solutions, it was "like a significant moment for India. The Google Doodle seems like a thoughtful way to commemorate the start of such an important event. It's great to hear about the high level of participation in the elections. The democratic process is a vital aspect of any nation's

governance." A senior official from Delhi Election Office informed that the classic symbol of Indian polls will be visible everywhere — a left hand with only its index finger extended, marked by a purple-black indelible ink. Devised as a method to prevent a person from casting more than one vote, to preserve the principle of "one man, one vote", the ink manufactured by Mysore Paints and Varnish Ltd, a Karnataka Government Undertaking has been used in Indian elections for decades. The ink manufactured in India has also travelled to other parts of the world to be used in other elections.

3.8-kg gold seized from passenger at city airport

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Two days after a passenger with around 1 kg of gold inside his rectum was caught at the Biju Patnaik International Airport (BPIA) here, Income Tax (I-T) department officials seized 3.8 kg of gold during a raid at the domestic cargo terminal of the airport on Friday. The yellow metal was being taken to Mumbai. Hansraj

Deora, the sales manager of Fashion Jewellery Private Limited, was detained in connection with the gold seizure. Deora was reportedly carrying six gold bars and nine gold biscuits weighing around 3.8 kg along with clothes and other items in a tin box. During interrogation, Deora reportedly told the I-T sleuths that the gold was

being taken to the headquarters of Fashion Jewellery Private Limited in Mumbai. Soon after the seizure, the I-T officials searched the concerned jewellery store at Janpath in Bhubaneswar. Notably, the officials of Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) arrested a passenger at the BPIA here for smuggling gold into the country on April 17.

The DRI sleuths seized around a kilogram of gold from the passenger after he arrived at the BPIA from Bangkok. The officials extracted the gold from three capsules hidden in the passenger's rectum. The DRI officials reportedly took the passenger to a lavatory at the airport and extracted the capsules containing the gold

'Take action against Aparajita for using kids in campaign'

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
BJD urges CEO
The Biju Janata Dal (BJD) on Friday moved the State Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) alleging use of children in poll campaigns by BJP's Bhubaneswar MP candidate Aparajita Sarangi. A delegation of the party met the CEO and filed a complaint demanding action against Sarangi. The team also

presented photo evidence to support their claims. "We are writing to bring to your attention a serious concern regarding the misuse of children in election rallies by Aparajita Sarangi, the BJP MP candidate from Bhubaneswar. It has come to our notice that Sarangi has been using small children in BJP election meetings and rallies for political gains. This is a clear violation of ethical

norms and the rights of children, who should not be exploited for the mere political interests of any party," the BJD delegation said in the complaint. "It is deeply troubling that despite our earlier complaint regarding the use of children in a rally in Khordha, Sarangi has continued to use children in her election campaigns. This time, she has used an infant with a BJP 'uttariya' for

her election campaigning along with the BJP's Bhubaneswar Ekamra MLA candidate Babu Singh in an election campaigning in Bhubaneswar," the BJD alleged. The party urged the CEO to take immediate and strict action against Sarangi to ensure that she does not use children or infants in any form in her political rallies or other such events.

In city Mystery shrouds entrepreneur's death



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Mystery shrouded the death of an entrepreneur, whose decomposed body was recovered from a guesthouse at Maitri Vihar in Bhubaneswar on Thursday. The deceased was identified as Tapan Prasad Acharjya. As per initial reports, Acharjya was from Phulbani and owner of a company, Subham Bio-CNG Pvt Ltd. He had come to the capital city to attend a corporate meeting on Tuesday. Acharjya had checked in at the Shanti Guest House the same day and was handed over room number 202.

It is not clear about the circumstances and the exact reason behind Acharjya's death. Meanwhile, police recovered Acharjya's body and sent it to the Capital Hospital for a post-mortem. An investigation has been initiated by police into the incident to ascertain whether it was a murder or under which circumstances the young entrepreneur died. The mystery surrounding the death of the businessman would become clear after the postmortem report is availed, police said. On getting information, family members of the deceased have reached here.

Nuapada guy, peers prove sound can be seen

By their experiment called Schlieren imaging at APU

AJIT PANDA ■ NUAPADA
We all know, sound can only be heard and vibrations can be felt. However, students studying physics will say, 'Sound can also be seen.' Sourabh Panda from Khariar of Nuapada district and two of his friends, Shreyansh Tripathy from Hyderabad and Kinshuk Ghosh from West Bengal, who are studying undergraduate physics at Azim Premji University in Bangalore, have shown it through an experiment called Schlieren imaging.



Schlieren imaging is a scientific technique used in photography for visualising density variations in transparent media. Kripa Gowrishankar, the physics teacher at APU, closely guided the students in their experiment. Sourabh enthusiastically explains, "We have read in physics that unlike light, sound requires a medium to travel - say air. When sound waves travel, they create disturbances to the molecules, which we call vibrations that can be heard or felt. It can be seen as ripples in a water tank when you drop a stone in water. But to visualise sound in air, you need to go through the experiment called Schlieren imaging."

"In the science lab at APU, we made a 'Jugadu Set up' of the technique. All we needed was a dark cardboard room, a light source, a speaker, a concave mirror, a sharp edge, a camera to record the outcome, and of course, the guidance of our physics teacher. The APU trio had decided to take this experiment as a part of their class project. We worked hard for about a week. We stumbled many times, but our teacher helped us overcome the problems. In this process, we could

figure out how strong the light source should be, what types of mirror would work, etc. We finally succeeded just ten minutes before our scheduled presentation," said a beaming Shreyansh. A report published in the website of APU about this experiment says, "On paper, the set-up seemed simple enough. A light is shone on a mirror, and the reflected light is focused at a point and captured by a concave mirror. The dis-

turbance, in this case, sound from a speaker, is placed in the path of the light. A knife edge is placed at the focal point of the reflected light. When the speaker is turned on, sound waves start emanating from it, causing a change in the density of the air above it. The knife edge blocks out the light that is bent by the disturbed air, and this causes those sections of the image to be darkened. The result: visible sound waves!"

In Keonjhar Man gets 20-yr RI for raping orphan minor

PNS ■ KEONJHAR
Additional and Sessions Judge and Special Judge (POCSO) Subhashri Tripathi on Thursday sentenced a man to 20 years' rigorous imprisonment (RI) for raping a minor girl in Keonjhar district. The convict, identified as Sisira Dangua (25), was also ordered to pay a fine of Rs 10,000 and in default to undergo one more year's RI. Sources said that as the 14-year-old victim's father and mother had died, she was living in her uncle's house. After a quarrel with his uncle's son, she was driven out. With no option left, she took shelter alone in an abandoned house near the Dimbo village panchayat office under the Town police station. On March 27, 2022, when she was alone, Sisira went to the abandoned

house at night and raped her. On March 30, a resident of the village reported the matter to the Sakhi-One Step Centre in the District Headquarters Hospital. Later, the centre staffs rescued her and came to know about the rape and a complaint was lodged in the Town police station on April 3, 2022. After receiving the complaint, police registered a case and arrested Sisira under the POCSO Act and forwarded him to court. Special Public Prosecutor (POCSO) Ganesh Prasad Mohapatra said, "The court has passed the above sentence on the basis of the statement of 11 witnesses and the police investigation report. The court has also ordered the District Legal Service Authority to pay Rs 6 lakh to the victim."

No respite from heat for 2 more days

Jharsuguda hottest in State at 43.8 deg; BBSR 41.4 deg
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
The mercury again breached the 43-degree mark in the State on Friday as Jharsuguda reported the day's highest maximum temperature of 43.8 degree Celsius by 2.30 pm. Apart from Jharsuguda, Sambalpur also recorded a maximum temperature of 42.4 degree, Keonjhar and Chandbali 42.2 degree each and Hirakud recorded a maximum temperature of 42 degree as per the Regional Of-

fice of the IMD here. Rourkela recorded a maximum temperature of 41.8 degree while Bhubaneswar recorded 41.4 degree. Notably, the capital city had recorded a temperature of 43.6 degree on Thursday. As per the weather office, there would be no large change in the maximum temperature during the next two days and it would slightly fall by 2 to 3 degree thereafter at many places over the districts of the State. Though thunderstorm activities would provide some respite from the scorching heat and humid conditions, the maximum temperature is likely to rise again from April 25.

First cadaveric liver transplant in State

Performed at Utkal Hospital
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
The Utkal Hospital here on Friday announced the successful completion of its first cadaveric liver transplant, marking a milestone in the field of organ transplantation in Odisha. The transplant, performed on Wednesday, saw a cadaveric liver extracted from the IMS & SUM Hospital and

swiftly transported to the Utkal Hospital for transplantation. The surgery, which lasted several hours, was led by a team of consultants including Dr Satya Prakash Ray Choudhury, Dr Salil Kumar Parida, Dr P Balachandran Menon and Dr Shakti Swaroop. "This is truly inspirational for cadaveric organ donation, in which one person can save and live in many lives even after death," remarked Dr

Satya Prakash Ray Choudhury, Utkal Hospital. "The successful collaboration between Utkal Hospital and AIG Hyderabad and the dedication of our surgical team have made this groundbreaking procedure possible." The recipient of the cadaveric liver transplant, a patient suffering from liver cirrhosis, is currently recovering well under the care of the medical team at Utkal Hospital.

Moreover, this transformative surgery was made possible through the invaluable assistance of skilled surgeons from AIG Hospital, Hyderabad, highlighting the collaborative efforts aimed at advancing healthcare delivery in the region. The Utkal Hospital extended its gratitude to the families of the organ donors, whose selfless contributions have made a profound impact on the lives of those in need.

Two die in Jharsuguda boat mishap

CM announces ex-gratia for victims' kin
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik expressed grief over the death of two persons in a boat tragedy in Jharsuguda district on Friday. The CM also announced an ex-gratia of Rs 4 lakh each to the families of the deceased persons. Two persons died and six others went missing after a boat capsized in Hirakud dam in the afternoon on Friday. There were around 50 passengers in the boat. Local fishermen managed

to rescue over 40 passengers. All the passengers were from neighbouring Chhattisgarh. They were on their way to Ambavona block of Odisha when the mishap took place. The Chief Minister also directed the officials to send five scuba divers and two search cameras to Jharsuguda to trace the missing persons. Besides, the CM asked Chief Secretary PK Jena and Special Relief Commissioner (SRC) Satyabrata Sahu for proper coordination for the rescue operation and quick medical treatment for the missing persons upon their rescue from the dam.

Sr Clerk held taking Rs 20K bribe

PNS ■ CUTTACK
The Vigilance police on Friday caught Rabindranath Padhi, Senior Clerk, office of Block Education Officer (BEO), Harbhanga in Boudh district, while accepting a bribe of Rs 20,000 from a person. Padhi had demanded the bribe from the complainant (a woman school teacher) as first installment out of overall Rs 40,000 from him to get her work done. Following the trap, simultaneous searches were carried out on the parental house of Padhi's village Hatipali under the Manmunda police station in Boudh, residential house at Udayanagar in Subarnapur and his office room. Later, Padhi was arrested and forwarded to court.

INTACH's Passion Project

Kerang fabric of Gadabas of Koraput revived

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
On the occasion of the World Heritage Day, the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) unveiled its 'Passion Project' on the Kerang fabric of the Gadabas of Koraput. In an event held at Bhubaneswar, Gadaba tribeswomen, attired in Kerang sarees, showcased the revival of the age-old heritage. The use of hand-woven clothes made out of Kerang fibre by the Gadaba and Bonda tribes has a long history and has occupied an important place in their culture

and mythology. The women of these two tribes wear clothes made out of the bark of the Kerang plant which grows wild. Tribal men and women collect the bark of the tree and after soaking it in waters of the nearby hill streams, sundry it and extract the fibre out of the bark. They use different vegetable colours before weaving it in a set pattern that has been followed for centuries. While the Gadaba women wear full-length cloth or saree with colourful stripes which covers the entire body, the Bonda women wear a small piece of cloth called Ringa which wraps the lower part of



the body in a certain customary manner. These colourful fabrics last for several generations and have a usable life of a century. The weaving of the Kerang fabric is a rite of passage for every Gadaba girl; she wears it during her marriage and is also draped in it when

she dies. This ancient tradition of weaving the Kerang fabric was on the wane. During INTACH's study in 2020, it was found that there were hardly any villages which had existing looms and none of the Gadabas were engaged in

making the Kerang fabric. The INTACH undertook a "Passion Project" to revive the dying tradition. Four villages were selected in Lamptapat block and looms and assistance were provided to the villagers. The project was initiated by

INTACH State Convener AB Tripathy and a proposal sent to INTACH's head office at Delhi. After approval of the project, it was headed by former bureaucrat Sanjib Chandra Hota with the other members being Dr PC Mahapatra, Convener Koraput

Chapter, Anil Dhir and Dr Rajendra Padhee. The team interacted with the Gadaba tribesmen in different villages through workshops and open discussions. The report was released by Justice Sashikanta Mishra, Judge of the High Court of Orissa in the presence of Vandana Manchanda, Head of INTACH's Heritage Crafts and Community Division. Sanjib Hota said the Koraput district administration and the Odisha Government have agreed to provide adequate handholding to ensure that this ancient tradition of the Gadabas does not vanish.

Balangir LS seat: Whose turn is it in 2024?

Cong hinges on cine star, BJD on turncoat, BJP repeats sitting MP

SUDHIR MISHRA ■ BALANGIR

Political parties have stepped up their activities and campaign here to woo voters to their side in Balangir Parliamentary constituency.

The Balangir Lok Sabha seat comprises seven Assembly segments in Balangir and Subarnapur districts. While five Assembly segments namely, Loisingha, Balangir, Patnagarh, Kantabanji and Titilagarh segments are in Balangir district, two Assembly segments, namely Sonepur and Birmaharajpur are in Subarnapur district. There are a total of 17,93,211 voters in the LS seat and Sangeeta Singh Deo of BJP is



Sangeeta Singh Deo

the incumbent MP.

The BJP is hopeful of maintaining its winning spree in 2024 based on the development works initiated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

MP Singdeo said despite the Covid 19 pandemic, major development works have been undertaken, especially in the Railway sector while major interventions have been made to reduce unemployment and distress migration in the area in the last few years. Besides,



Surendra Singh Bhoi

foundation stone has been laid for a wagon overhauling factory, she added.

However, the headache for the BJP is the rise of dissidents after declarations of Assembly ticket by the saffron party which has left many dissatisfied. In Balangir, Titilagarh, Birmaharajpur and other areas, reports of dissidence by party leaders are coming out regularly in local media reports, making the task of sitting MP more difficult to retain the seat.



Manoj Mishra

It remains to be seen how the BJP is tackling the issue.

The BJD has fielded Congress turncoat Surendra Singh Bhoi of Saintala as its MP nominee from Balangir LS seat. Bhoi was the president of Balangir district Congress, who quit the party to join BJD recently.

"Inspired by the development work of CM Naveen Patnaik, I joined BJD and his development and pro poor programme would be his

trump card while seeking votes, besides the BJD organisation and party base all over the Parliamentary constituency," said Bhoi.

The Congress has fielded actor Manoj Mishra as its candidate for the LS seat. Although Mishra hails from Sambalpur, he decided to contest from here, capitalising on a host of issues including regional imbalance, neglect to the western Odisha, endemic poverty and distress migration etc. In fact, before joining politics, Mishra had a rift with a section of film producers and actors over his allegation of neglect to the films and actors of western Odisha region and he was creating a regional pride by uniting people of the area by holding meetings.

"My father was working here in the Forest Department and I have spent a lot of time in Balangir. People of the area know me as I always speak

against regional discrimination," said Mishra. Congress has a base in Balangir with its stalwart leader and current MLA Narasingha Mishra who won from the Balangir Assembly seat repeatedly in 2014 and 2019. This time he is not contesting election but will play a major role in deciding the poll prospects of Congress.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, there was a triangular contest between BJP, BJD and Congress. Singhdeo of BJP defeated BJD's Kalikesh Singhdeo by a margin of 19,516 votes while Congress had finished third. After the announcement that CM Naveen Patnaik would contest from Kantabanji Assembly seat which is under Balangir Parliamentary seat, it is expected that it would have a ripple effect across the western Odisha, including the Balangir LS seat helping the BJD candidates win.

AAP names 4 Assembly candidates in B'garh

PNS ■ BARGARH

Two graduates, an engineer and a doctor have been nominated for four Assembly seats in Bargarh district by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). They are Jayakrishna Chhuriya from Attabira, Dr Ashish Satpathi from Bargarh, Shahrukh Lodhia from Bhatli and Balmiki Naik from Padampur.

AAP district convener Bhabani Sahu emphasized the applicants' qualifications. The well-known paediatrician from Bargarh, Dr Ashish Satpathi, attended George High School and Bargarh Basic Training.

The Bhatli nominee, Shahrukh Lodhia, hails from Pune and specializes in chemical engineering, while Padampur's Balmiki Naik is a graduate of science and a social activist. Jayakrishna Chhuriya of Attabira, a farmer's son and economics Postgraduate, worked as a secretary for a student group.

The party promises 300 units of free energy, fair crop prices, monthly aid of Rs 1,000 for women, coupled with an old age stipend of Rs 2,000. The party also pledges to solve issues related to education, healthcare, employment, and agriculture.

Vigilance case

Junior Asst dismissed after conviction

PNS ■ CUTTACK

Pradeep Kumar Sahu, Junior Revenue Assistant, Office of Settlement Officer, Ganjam has been dismissed from government service after being convicted in a Vigilance case. Sahu was arrested and charge-sheeted by the anti-corruption agency for demanding and accepting bribe from a person for supply of copy of Yadast relating to his land properties.

He was convicted by the Special Judge, Vigilance,

Brahmapur on September 11, 2023 and sentenced to undergo rigorous imprisonment (RI) for a period of two years.

The court had also imposed a fine of Rs 10,000 on him and in default he had to undergo another two months imprisonment. Following the conviction of Sahu, the Vigilance had communicated in this connection to the competent authority of Major Settlement Office, Berhampur to take appropriate action against him. Accordingly, on Thursday Sahu was dismissed from service.

Man gets 7-yr RI for killing father in JSpur

PNS ■ JAGATSINGHPUR

The District Judge Court here on Wednesday sentenced a man to seven years' rigorous imprisonment on the charge of killing his father three years ago in Jagatsinghpur district. The court also asked him to pay a fine of Rs 5,000.

The convict Biswamohan Ray alias Sania, a resident of Khairagada village under Naugaon block, had attacked his father Surendra Nath following a family feud with a

stick. Surendra had suffered serious head injuries and was shifted to the SCB Medical College Hospital in Cuttack, where he succumbed to his injuries three days later.

The deceased's wife Kunkuma Bala Ray had lodged an FIR at the Naugaon police station. Later, police arrested Sania and filed a charge-sheet against him. Taking cognizance of the case and the testimony of four witness, the court pronounced the judgement.

Akhand Sikar Tribals on hunting drive of wild animals in K'jhar

Though environmentalists up against practice

PNS ■ KEONJHAR

These days, tribal people holding traditional weapons are seen marching towards nearby forests, certainly not for any war or lodge a protest but to do 'Akhand Sikar or Paridhi', a practice they have been continuing as a part of their tradition.

The 'Akhand Sikar' literally means 'mass hunting'. Now, the tribal people of Keonjhar are observing the 'Akhandi Parva', a unique festival. This is observed for two to three days. During this time, the



tribal groups go to the nearby forests armed with traditional weapons for mass hunting or 'Akhand Sikar'.

"We are observing the festival every year. As per our tradition, we went for mass hunting. We have observed the day for a long time. After worship-

ing the village deity, we went to the forest and returned back before the evening. Whatever wild animals we hunted, we shared their flesh among the villagers," said Rajan Munda, a tribal hunter of Jagadala area under Jhumpura block. Mass deforestation due to

mining operations and timber smuggling has declined the habitation of wild animals. The number of wild animals has also declined. In this situation mass hunting due to lack of awareness about the different laws for the protection of wildlife by the tribal people has posed a threat to the wild animals. Like animal sacrifice, the Government should ban the traditional Akhand Sikar, demanded environmentalist Dr Bimbadhar Behera.

Assistant Conservator of Forest, Keonjhar, Jitendra Kumar Behera said, "We are keeping a watch over the practice. We are discouraging the tribals through awareness programmes and taking strict action as per the laws against the violators."

Summer brings cheer to palm leaf fan makers

25 families are busy in making and selling hand fans in Kendrapada

RAJESH BEHERA ■ KENDRAPADA

Thanks to the ongoing scorching heat coupled with rise in day temperature, the demand for palm leaf fan (Binchana) is high among the people here. As most of the time electricity is playing truant, especially in the day hours making life difficult, these fans come handy.

These fans are also very cheap and one can operate them by spinning the handle. A poor person can purchase the palm leaf fan as its minimum price starts from Rs 25. To make palm leaf fans, at least 25 families in Kendrapada township are now busy.



"First, we collect palm leaves. Later, we dry them in the sun for a day or two before using them for a fan. In order to make a palm leaf fan, we need around an hour or so. One can prepare more than 30 fans in a day. It is not difficult for a palm leaf maker to get the raw materials like palm leaf, bamboo stick and colour," said Babu Behera of Badamangala, a fan maker.

"We are now getting a lot of consignments for preparing palm leaf fans as its demand is high all over the district and one can use it in every season also, apart from summer," stated Ramesh, another artisan.

Despite the advent of latest gadgets like cooler, air conditioner and electric fan, palm leaf fan has not lost its lustre among the people. One

needs a palm leaf fan in summer despite the fact that he uses AC, cooler and electric fans in his house. The palm leaf fan can be used as an alternative to advanced gadgets during power outages, said artisan Arjuni Behera of Santasahi.

Sangeeta Behera, an artisan, said the palm leaf fans are in high demand for being eco-friendly and less expensive.

No ATR on Rukuda dam displaced NHRC warns WR Secy, S'garh DM of action

Seeks report in 4 weeks afresh

RAJESH BEHERA ■ BHUBANESWAR

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on April 15 issued a warning to the Principal Secretary, Department of Water Resources, Government of Odisha and district Collector, Sundargarh, pertaining to not submitting action taken report (ATR) on the lack of rehabilitation measures to resettle the displaced villagers due to construction of Rukuda Dam in Sundargarh district despite directions.

failing which it warned to invoke its coercive power u/s 13 of the PHR Act, 1993 calling for the personal appearance of the authorities concerned before it.

Acting on a petition filed by lawyer and rights activist Radhakanta Tripathy, the NHRC passed the order.

The petition stated that one Jitaban Kandeiburu and more than 200 other residents under Tikayatpali police limits of Sundargarh were allegedly displaced on account of Rukuda Dam Project. The Government of Odisha had forcefully displaced the victims without any rehabilitation. Son of Jitaban died on account of snake bite as his family was shel-

ter-less and staying in a nearby jungle. Jitaban was implicated in a false case because of his protest against the displacement. He was put behind the bars and subsequently, he died. The displaced victims are deprived of their entitlements and legitimate rights under the provisions under Section 4 and Section 5 of the Forest Rights Act, 2006 and Rules framed there-under, Tripathy said.

The petitioner also stated that inhabitants of Bandhabhuin village and others have lost more than 30 acres of FRA land, besides their revenue land. He annexed the copies of Records of Rights and land patta in favour of the victims. It is being averred that though

the Government of Odisha has a policy of rehabilitation and resettlement and specific provisions of RFCTLARR Act, 2013, yet the victims like Jitaban are yet to be rehabilitated, Tripathy added.

The State may constitute a High Power Committee (HPC) to reach each and every area and assess the ground realities with recommendations for solutions with assured implementation of the recommendations in a time-bound manner. A fresh survey of the access to justice (both social and legal) is required, Tripathy contended.

He requested the NHRC to investigate the case in details by a team of officials with re-

gard to the issues, seek updated comprehensive reports from the Chief Secretary, Odisha and district Collector, Sundargarh to ensure proper compensation and benefits of rehabilitation and resettlement, social welfare schemes reach the land oustees and save them from wild animals and police threats.

The NHRC observed that in the instant case despite direction, the authorities have not submitted any report till date. The NHRC forwarded the proceedings to the Chief Secretary, Government of Odisha for information and for ensuring compliance of direction of the Commission by the authorities.

'45 days' cap-dues-clear policy no boon for MSMEs'

UBACHAK MOHANTY ■ BALESWAR

An apparent faulty policy of the Central Government with a noble intention which was made to protect small and micro industries and service sectors against financial losses is not meeting the purpose.

According to sources, the Union Ministry of Finance had made a policy which came into force from the Financial Year 2023-24 directing that dues for every purchase made from any small and micro units or service availed from the service sectors by the medium or large industries have to be cleared within 45 days, else the defaulters have to pay penalty as per the IT law.

INBRIEF

B'PUR SCULPTOR MAKES MINIATURE RAMLALA STATUE

Brahmapur: On the holy occasion of Sri Ram Navami, renowned sand artist of Brahmapur Satya Moharana prepared a wooden idol of Sri Ramlala of a height of five and a half inches. Though the idol is small, it looks quite attractive. It took only four days for Satya to prepare the idol.



2 POETS TO GET CHANDRA KUMAR MOHANTY AWARDS

Baleswar: Two young poets, Dr Shakti Mohanty and Hemant Dalpati would be given awards instituted in the memory of poet Chandra Kumar Mohanty for the year 2024, informed Krushna Kumar Mohanty, convener of Chandra Kumar Mohanty Memorial Committee. The felicitation ceremony would be held on July 6. The award is instituted after the demise of noted poet and advocate Chandra Kumar Mohanty in 2018. Every year, poets below the age of 50 are given this award. The two adjudged poets of this year have enriched Odia literature by their own style of presenting new ideas, said Utpal Mohanty, a member of the jury.



ODISHA'S SUKUMAR MISHRA APPOINTED IIT-DHANBAD DIRECTOR

Bhubaneswar: Prof (Dr) Sukumar Mishra from Odisha has been appointed as the Director of IIT-Dhanbad. The Union Ministry of Education on Thursday appointed new directors to six IITs. Mishra was earlier a professor in the electrical engineering department at IIT-Delhi.



HANS RAJ JAYANTI AT DAV PUBLIC SCHOOL

Bhubaneswar: The Principal and staff members of the DAV Public School, Chandrasekharpur, Bhubaneswar, observed the birth anniversary of Mahatma Hans Raj, the pioneer of DAV



movement, amidst various activities including performing a Vedic havan in the school premises on Friday. Principal Dr Sujata Sahu offered floral tributes to the great saint and appealed to all to follow his ideals in every aspect.

TIGRESS 'SNEHA' DIES AT NANDANKANAN

Bhubaneswar: White tigress 'Sneha' died while undergoing treatment at the Nandankanan Zoological Park on the outskirts of Bhubaneswar on Thursday. The 14-year-old tigress was under treatment after she fell ill reportedly due to old age and sum-



mer heat wave. She was administered saline and medicines. However, she succumbed.

B'pur BJP MLA nominee takes out bike rally

Along with supporters

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

On the occasion of Sri Ram Navami, BJP MLA candidate for Brahmapur constituency K Anil Kumar conducted a grand motorcycle procession with more than one thousand party workers.

The procession moved throughout the city, chanting Jay Shree Ram. They started the rally from their party office at Gandhinagar, next offering prayers at Hanuman Temple near Goutam Talkies.

Along with K Anil Kumar, Sunil Kumar Sahu, Tutun Patra, Madan Mohan Patra, Corporator Savita Sahu, former Corporator Ashok Shukla, Badri Narayan Nayak, Ranjit Patnaik, N Dhananjay Rao, Sanjay Jena, Patitapaban Gantayat, K Sai Kumar, Chittaranjan and thousands of party leaders as well as workers participated.



Your votes safe, EVMS 100 per cent safe: CEC to voters

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar on Friday dismissed apprehensions about Electronic Voting Machines (EVMS) and assured people that their vote was safe and secure. Kumar asserted that the EVMS were 100 per cent safe as a large number of safeguards – technological, administrative and process-oriented – were in place. “It is a settled issue. It is 100 per cent safe. It has been raised in the honourable court also. We are awaiting judgment, nothing can happen to the machines. Every stage political parties and their candidates are involved. Mock polls are done,” he said to questions on doubts raised on the EVMS. “There are a large number of safeguards, technological, administrative, and process-oriented. Just enjoy the voting. This is a time to enjoy the voting, not doubt anything,” the CEC said. “Enjoy your voting, your vote is safe, secure and will be recorded as you vote,” Kumar said. The first phase of the Lok Sabha elections got underway across 102 constituencies in 21



states and union territories on Friday. “We are getting reports from the field that even if rains are happening, people are really coming out in large numbers. Women, youth, old age people... everyone is rushing towards the polling stations. It is really a delightful situation to see that people are dancing to the tune of democracy,” Kumar said. He said the Election Commission has used technology to a great extent to ensure better voter turnout by reaching out to the youth and women voters by mapping parliamentary constituencies where voting has been traditionally less. “A turn out plan was made

depending on the local context. Lots of celebrities were roped in, a number of organisations have worked with us – petrol pumps, banks, post offices in the outreach program,” Kumar said. “We are very hopeful that people will come out to vote. It is our appeal, please join in this festival of democracy. Youth, women, transgender, PwD, all geographies...It is your right, your duty, your responsibility, your pride,” the CEC said. Kumar, along with fellow Election Commissioners Gyanesh Kumar and S S Sandhu, was monitoring the progress of the election process from the control room set up at the Election Commission headquarters here.

India ready to take next step towards becoming science powerhouse: Journal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Science journal ‘Nature’ has said India along with being an economic power is also more than ready to take the next step towards becoming a science powerhouse, as it called for a rise in the country’s research and development spending, especially from the private sector. The prestigious British weekly said in its editorial headlined “How India can become a science powerhouse” cited researchers to highlight that basic research has been neglected by successive governments and that a thriving research system needs much greater autonomy. “Along with being an economic power, India is also more than ready to take the next step towards becoming a science powerhouse. This is not yet a given, but it can happen,” it said. “In this editorial, we discuss a third aspect: how to bridge the funding gap. One thing India’s government can do is to boost science spending by encouraging businesses to contribute more, as is the case for other leading economies. If policymakers and industrialists can get this right, an opportunity to put rocket boosters under the country’s impressive scientific achievements is there for the



taking,” the journal said. The editorial noted that in 2021-22, according to government data, India had the world’s third-largest pharmaceutical industry by volume and was the leading supplier of affordable medicines and generic drugs, some of which were “crucial” to fighting the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide. Last year, India became the fourth country ever to achieve a soft landing on the Moon and the first to land near the lunar south pole, it said, adding that the country also has the world’s largest constellation of remote-sensing satellites. The magazine said India is among the world’s most prolific countries in terms of research output after the United States and China. From 2014 to 2021, the number of universities increased from 760 to 1,113. In the past decade, seven more Indian

Institutes of Technology have been established, raising the total to 23. In the same period, two new Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research were also established. “Now consider that these gains were achieved by a nation that spent just 0.64 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on research and development (R&D) during 2020-21,” it said. “Whichever political formation is elected to power in the ongoing polls, it must consider how to increase the country’s R&D spending, as well as what could be achieved with more money, it said. Nature said around 60 per cent of India’s research spending can be traced to central and state governments and universities, and around 40 per cent to the private sector. In comparable nations, there is often much more private-sector funding. “In 2022, the private sector contributed, on average, 74 per cent of OECD nations’ R&D spending and 66 per cent of such funding for the 27 members of the European Union. India today has many global companies in construction, information technology, manufacturing, pharmaceuticals and more. They could be contributing a lot more to the nation’s research -- both in terms of funding researchers and also infrastructure,” it said.

On voting day Rahul urges voters to open Mohabbat ki Dukaan



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

As polling began in the first phase of the Lok Sabha polls on Friday, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi urged voters to strengthen democracy and open ‘Mohabbat ki Dukaan’ in every corner of the country by defeating hatred. “Today is the first phase of voting! Remember, each and every vote of yours is going to decide the future of India’s democracy and its generations,” Rahul Gandhi said in a post in Hindi on X. “Go out and strengthen democracy by applying the balm of your vote on the wounds inflicted on the soul of the country in the last 10 years,” he said. Open ‘Mohabbat Ki Dukaan’ in every

corner of the country by defeating hatred, the Congress leader added. Rahul Gandhi also shared a graphic of the key Congress guarantees to the people, including the right to apprenticeship, a legal guarantee of MSP and a nationwide caste census. The 2024 Lok Sabha polls kicked off Friday with polling being held for the first phase scheduled in 102 seats spread across 21 states and Union territories. Among those in the fray are Union ministers Nitin Gadhkari, Sarbananda Sonowal and Bhupendra Yadav, Gaurav Gogoi of the Congress, the DMK’s Kanimozhi and K Annamalai of the BJP. Assembly elections in Arunachal Pradesh (60 seats) and Sikkim (32 seats) are also being held simultaneously.

1992 batch IPS officer Nalin Prabhat appointed NSG chief

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Senior Indian Police Service (IPS) officer Nalin Prabhat has been appointed as the chief of National Security Guard (NSG), the country’s counter-terrorism force, according to a Personnel Ministry order. Prabhat, a 1992 IPS officer of Andhra Pradesh cadre, is presently working as Additional Director General in the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF). The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) has approved his appointment as the Director General, NSG for a period up to August 31, 2028 i.e. The date of his superannuation, the order said. Popularly known as the “black cats”, the federal contingency force NSG was raised in 1984. Sashstra Seema Bal (SSB) chief Daljit Singh Chawdhary



was holding the additional charge of the NSG. The ACC has also approved appointment of Sanna Tewari as the Special Director in the Intelligence Bureau (IB). Tewari, a 1992 batch IPS officer of Odisha cadre, is currently working as Additional Director in the IB. She has been appointed as the Special Director, IB for a tenure of two years from the date of assumption of charge of the post or up to the date of her superannuation i.e. April 30, 2026, the order said.

Civil Services topper Aditya scores 54.27 per cent in UPSC exams

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Civil services examination topper Aditya Srivastava scored 54.27 per cent in the prestigious exam conducted by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC), according to the detailed marks of the recommended candidates released by the Commission on Friday. Following closely behind is Animesh Pradhan, who scored 52.69 per cent in the Civil Services Examination 2023. As many as 1,016 candidates -- 664 men and 352 women -- have qualified in the examination, results of which were announced on Tuesday. The civil services examination is conducted annually by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) in three stages -- preliminary, main and personality test (or interview) -- to select officers for the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Indian Foreign Service (IFS) and Indian

Police Service (IPS), among others. The preliminary examination consists of two objective type (multiple choice) question papers of 400 marks. This stage is meant to serve as a screening test only, and the marks obtained in it by the candidates, who are declared qualified for admission to the main examination, are not counted for determining their final order of merit. The merit is determined out of the total of 2,025 marks -- written or main exam is of 1,750 marks and the interview is of 275. Srivastava (27) got a total of 1,099 marks -- 899 in the written and 200 in the personality test, according to the marks of recommended candidates disclosed by the UPSC. A trainee Indian Police Service (IPS) officer, he hails from Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh. Srivastava completed his BTech in electrical engineering from the Indian



Institute of Technology (IIT) Kanpur and also possesses an MTech degree. He had electrical engineering as his optional subject in the civil services exam. Pradhan (24), resident of Talcher town in Odisha’s Angul district, scored 1,067 marks -- 892 in written and 175 in interview -- and secured the second rank.

He had chosen sociology as his optional subject in the examination. Pradhan completed his BTech in computer science from the National Institute of Technology (NIT) Rourkela and is currently an employee of the Indian Oil Corporation’s (IOC) refineries division here. Third rank holder Donuru Ananya Reddy, who appeared

in the exam as an economically weaker section candidate, got 1,065 marks (52.59 per cent) -- 875 in the main and 190 in the interview -- and fourth rank holder P K Sidharth Ramkumar scored 1,059 marks (52.29 per cent) -- 874 in written and 185 in the interview. Reddy (22), who has a BA (Hons) in geography from Miranda House, Delhi University, had anthropology as her optional subject. She hails from Mahabubnagar in Telangana. Ramkumar (27) has a bachelor’s degree in architecture from the College of Architecture in Trivandrum. Ruhani got the fifth rank with a total of 1,049 marks (51.8 per cent) -- 856 in written and 193 in the interview. She completed her BA (Hons) in economics from St Stephens College, Delhi University. The UPSC has put details of marks achieved by all the 1,016 candidates on its web-

site. The Civil Services (preliminary) Exam 2023 was conducted on May 28. A total of 10,16,850 candidates applied, of which 5,92,141 appeared in the examination. As many as 14,624 candidates qualified for the written (main) examination, which was held in September. “A total of 2,855 candidates qualified for the personality test of the examination,” the UPSC said. Of these, 1,016 candidates were finally recommended for different government services. The government had reported 1,143 vacancies -- 180 in IAS, 37 in IPS, 200 in IPS, 613 posts in different central Group A services and 113 in Group B services -- to be filled through the civil services examination 2023, the UPSC said. As many as 240 candidates have been put on a reserved list, it said, adding that the candidature of 355 recommended candidates has been kept provisional.

Congress raps Centre

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Congress charged Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday with protecting the paper-leak and recruitment “scams” in Madhya Pradesh and asked him why the crime rate against Dalits is “increasing” in the state. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh hit out at the Bharatiya Janata Party-led Centre ahead of Modi’s rally in Damoh in Madhya Pradesh. “Today’s questions for PM Modi as he heads to MP: Who is the PM protecting in MP’s paper leak and recruitment scams? Why has the BJP let down Adivasis in Forest Rights Act implementation? MP has the highest crime rate against Dalits. Why is it increasing?” Ramesh asked in a post on X. Elaborating on what he said were details of “jumlas” (rhetoric), the Congress leader said the government might have changed the name of the Employees Selection Board in Madhya Pradesh but nobody has forgotten the notorious Vyapam “scam” that rocked the state 10 years ago. Since then, allegations of rigging have cropped up in the recruitment of nursing staff, school teachers, constables and agriculture development officers, but all that the BJP government has done is deny and subvert, he alleged. “Just last year, allegations broke out of a scam in the patwari recruitment examination. Seven of ten toppers in the examination came from the same exam centre in Gwalior which is owned by a BJP MLA.



“A few years earlier, in 2021, three tests -- for agriculture extension officers, senior agriculture officers and nursing staff -- were cancelled when the evidence of foul play became too obvious to ignore,” Ramesh said. He said a probe subsequently found out that the papers for the exams were leaked by a private company that was already implicated in the Vyapam “scam.” Who is the PM protecting in these scams? What is PM Modi doing to ensure that our youth never face such injustice again?” the former Union minister asked. In 2006, the Congress passed the revolutionary Forest Rights Act (FRA) that granted the Adivasi and forest-dwelling communities legal rights to manage their forests, and economically benefit from the forest produce they collect, he pointed out. “The BJP government, however, has obstructed the implementation of the FRA, depriving millions of Adivasis of its benefits. Only 47 per cent (2,94,877 claims) of the 6,27,513 individual claims filed have been granted, and land titles distributed cover only 10 per cent (5,931 sq. km) of the 57,948 sq. km eligible

for community rights,” Ramesh alleged. Why have the successive BJP governments in Madhya Pradesh failed to provide the Adivasi communities their rights, he asked. Citing data compiled by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), the Congress leader pointed out that Madhya Pradesh has the highest crime rate against Dalits in the country. “In 2021 (the latest year for which data is available), the crime rate against SCs was 63.6 as compared to the national average of 25.3. The state also recorded high crime rates against Dalits in 2019 and 2020 -- 46.7 and 60.8 against the national averages of 22.8 and 25 respectively. It is disgusting and shameful that the rate of crimes against Dalits has actually increased year-on-year,” he said. “The BJP has been in power in MP for more than two decades now. Why is it that Dalits have to increasingly fear for their safety? Does PM Modi feel no shame for the countless atrocities that Dalits have endured under his watch?” Ramesh asked and said the prime minister should break his silence on the issue.

Vice Admiral Dinesh Kumar to become new Navy Chief



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Vice Admiral Dinesh Kumar Tripathi will be the new Navy Chief by the end of this month succeeding incumbent Admiral R Hari Kumar. Admiral Kumar will retire from service on April 30. Tripathi is currently serving as Vice Chief of the Naval Staff. “The government has appointed Vice Admiral Dinesh Kumar Tripathi, presently serving as Vice Chief of the Naval Staff as the next Chief of the Naval Staff with effect from the afternoon of April 30,” the defence ministry said. Born on May 15, 1964, Vice Admiral Tripathi was commissioned into the executive branch of the Indian Navy on July 1, 1985. A communication and electronic warfare specialist, he has had a long and distinguished service spanning nearly 30 years. Prior to taking over as Vice Chief of Navy, he had served as Flag Officer Commanding-

in-Chief of the Western Naval Command. Tripathi has served in a variety of command, staff and instructional appointments. He has commanded INS Vinash. He has also held various important operational and staff appointments which include Fleet Operations Officer of the Western Fleet, Director of Naval Operations, Principal Director Network Centric Operations and Principal Director of Naval Plans at New Delhi. As Rear Admiral, he served as Flag Officer Commanding of the Eastern Fleet. He also served as Commandant of the prestigious Indian Naval Academy, Ezhimala. An alumnus of the Sainik School, Rewa and National Defence Academy (NDA), Khadakwasla, Vice Admiral Tripathi has undergone courses at the Naval War College, Goa and Naval War College USA. He is a recipient of the Ati Vishist Seva Medal (AVSM) and Nau Sena Medal (NM).

DRDO hands over indigenous actuators, air brake modules to HAL



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

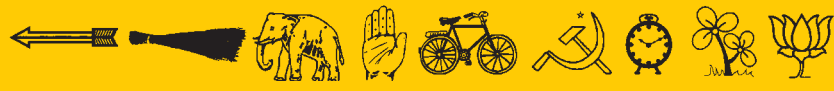
Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)’s Aeronautics Development Agency (ADA) has handed over the first batch of the indigenous Leading Edge Actuators and Airbrake Control Module to Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), marking a significant leap towards self-reliance in aeronautical technologies, defence ministry said here on Friday. Giving details, officials said Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), Lucknow has already made preparations for the production of these units for the current 83 LCA Tejas Mk1A order. The Secondary Flight Control of LCA-Tejas, comprising Leading Edge Slats and Airbrakes, now boasts state-of-the-art Servo-Valve based electro-hydraulic servo actuators and control modules. These high pressure, redundant servo actuators and control module, characterised by astute design, precision manufacturing, assembly, and testing, represent a culmination of ADA’s relentless pursuit of indigenous technological prowess.

Medical experts for reintroduction of Indian Medical Services

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Medical experts representing the public and private sector have batted for reintroduction of Indian Medical Services (IMS), akin to Indian Administrative Service, to boost the healthcare sector infrastructure, and enhance coordination in healthcare policy formulation. Led by the Think Change Forum (TCF), a think tank, the experts submitted a five-point agenda to the government to roll-out the IMS following discussion at a recently held panel discussion titled ‘Is it time for India to resurrect Indian Medical Services?’. The deliberation highlighted the imperative of strengthening the public healthcare system and emphasised the pivotal role that IMS can play in achieving this objective. The IMS will help bring the sheen and trust back to public health sector which has been lost to private sector; help stop brain drain from public medical services by attracting and retaining the best medical talent; allow for superior healthcare outcomes with better managed facilities and processes, as no longer generalists will be managing the specialists, said the experts. Overall, the healthcare infrastructure is fractured and falls short of providing quality and effective healthcare at scale. These shortcomings primarily stem from inefficient bureaucratic management rather than lack of skills among healthcare

professionals, noted the experts. Dr Rajesh Gupta, Additional Director, Pulmonology and Critical Care, Fortis Healthcare, Noida, said, “The majority of the Indian public relies on the private sector for healthcare services, with 60 per cent of inpatient admissions (IPDs) and 80 per cent of outpatient visits (OPDs) occurring in private facilities.” The second point highlighted challenges in staffing the public healthcare system with skilled doctors. Lack of incentives for these highly educated professionals to work under generalist administrators has resulted in brain drain, they noted. Dr Sharad Kr Agarwal, the immediate past national president of IMA, said, “The implementation of IMS holds the promise of enhancing service quality through induction of skilled doctors and addressing the persistent doctor shortage, especially in rural areas. Crucial to its success is equipping the cadre with ample facilities and resources comparable to those provided to IAS or IPS officers.” “This will ensure that doctors are incentivized to join IMS, drawn by a clear career trajectory and motivated to serve communities, even in remote areas,” he said. It was also felt that the IMS will be able to enable seamless coordination and cooperation between the central and state health departments, for improved national healthcare policies for the country.



Modi takes dig at Rahul, Akhilesh

PM says film of do shehzade already rejected by people

PTI ■ AMROHA (UP)
Prime Minister Narendra Modi took a veiled dig at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav on Friday, saying the shooting of the film 'do shehzade ki jodi' is on but it has already been rejected by people. "Every time these people seek votes from the people of Uttar Pradesh, they carry a basket of dynasty, corruption and appeasement. They do not leave any chance to attack our faith," Modi said, addressing a rally here. In a veiled attack on Gandhi and Yadav, he said, "The shooting of the film 'do shehzade ki jodi' (a pair of princes) is going on. But their film has already been rejected by people." Hitting out at Danish Ali, the Congress candidate from Amroha, Modi alleged that he has objections in saying "Bharat Mata ki jai". "Will a person, who cannot accept Bharat Mata ki jai, look

good in the Indian Parliament? Should such a person be allowed entry into the Indian Parliament?" he asked the gathering. Slamming the opposition, the prime minister said, "The SP and the Congress declined the invitation for the Ram temple's consecration ceremony in Ayodhya. People hankering for vote banks refused the invitation for the ceremony. Instead, look at those who fought the Babri Masjid case in the Supreme Court but still participated in the consecration ceremony after losing the case." Iqbal Ansari, a litigant in the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid case, attended the consecration ceremony of the Ram temple on January 22. "They are not satisfied even after refusing the invitation, so they abuse the Ram temple and Sanatan Dharma. The SP, for its vote bank, calls Ram bhakts 'pakhandi' (hypocrites). Those in the INDIA opposition bloc hate Sanatan Dharma," Modi said.



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

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

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

who takes the benefits of being Yaduvanshi, I want to ask them, how can they sit with a party that insults Lord Krishna? How can you have an agreement with them?" He criticised the Congress, SP and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) governments in Uttar Pradesh in the past for allegedly ignoring farmers and said those growing sugarcane were given Rs 500 crore annually during the SP's rule, whereas the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government gave Rs 1,500 crore to them. Blaming vote-bank politics for communal riots, Modi said, "This vote-bank politics burnt western Uttar Pradesh in the fire of riots. The people of Uttar Pradesh can never forget that era of Goonda Raj. People had to migrate and leave their houses behind." "In several western Uttar Pradesh neighbourhoods, posters with 'makan bikau hai' (house for sale) written on those were put up. But, Yogi (Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath) got rid of criminals for your safety. We must ensure that these forces are not strengthened again in any manner." The Prime Minister accused the previous governments of cheating the Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC) communities in the name of social justice, and said he is working towards achieving the dream of social reformers Jyotiba Phule, B R Ambedkar and Chaudhary Charan Singh. "The previous governments have only cheated the people of the SC, ST and OBC communities in the name of social justice. Modi is working day and night to achieve the social justice dream of Jyotiba Phule, Ambedkar and (former prime minister) Chaudhary Charan Singh," he said. The prime minister addressed the rally as polling was underway in eight western Uttar Pradesh constituencies in the first phase of the Lok Sabha polls. Amroha will go to polls in the second phase on April 26. The counting of votes will be taken up on June 4. The prime minister began his speech with an appeal to people to vote. "I appeal to everyone to exercise their right to vote given by the Constitution," he said while emphasising that youngsters should especially go out and vote to secure their future and that of the country.



People not excited about polls, claims farmer leader Naresh Tikait

PTI ■ MUZAFFARNAGAR (UP)
Farmer leader Naresh Tikait on Friday expressed skepticism about the BJP's claim of the NDA crossing the 400-mark and claimed "there is no excitement among people" about the polls. "If they are saying 400, then what is the need for them to contest elections? It is special that they can perceive this in advance. Do they have any astrologer who has predicted that this is going to happen?" said Tikait, national president of the Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU) while speaking to 'PTI Videos'. Polling in eight Lok Sabha constituencies of western Uttar Pradesh, including Muzaffarnagar, are underway on Friday in the first phase. "People express their feelings through their votes. However, the voting is slow, and it will be like this till evening. There is no excitement among people, they are disillusioned now. Also, elections are being held in several phases... Elections should be held in a single

phase and the results should be declared on the third day and (new government's) oath-taking in the next four-five days," he suggested. "There is an Emergency-like situation in the country. These are the talks among the public," Tikait further said. "People of this area don't like slavery. There might be some region, state or seat that likes slavery. People are opposing slavery by not casting their votes." "The era of booth capturing has passed... Everyone is complaining about the machine, then why are the polls not being conducted through ballot papers? 90-95 per cent people are against the machine (EVM). It is a machine and can be tempered with," Tikait claimed. Talking about payment to sugarcane farmers, Tikait said, "They show the payment as a favour. Are they giving it for free? Have we not given them our sugarcane produce? The farmers today are feeling cheated and feel they have lost everything. Farmers are sad."

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

PTI ■ JAIPUR
A voter turnout of close to 55 per cent was recorded in 12 parliamentary constituencies of Rajasthan where polling was held in the first phase of the Lok Sabha elections on Friday. The election authorities said 54.97 per cent of the electorate cast their votes. The final figures would be released later. The highest voter turnout of 62.93 per cent was recorded in the Ganganagar Lok Sabha seat while Jhunjhunu saw the lowest turnout of 47.98 per cent, it said. Jaipur recorded a poll percentage of 61.23. The voting percentage in Bikaner was 52.53, Churu 61.05, Sikar 55.06, Jaipur Rural 54.44, Alwar 55.82, Dausa 49.57, Bharatpur 50.97 and Nagaur 56.89. As many as 114 candidates are in the fray in the first phase of polling that began at 7 am in the state and ended at 6 pm. There are 25 Lok Sabha seats in Rajasthan and the remaining 13 will go to poll in the second phase on April 26. Rajasthan Governor Kalraj Mishra, Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma, former deputy chief minister Sachin Pilot and other leaders cast their votes in the initial hours. Mishra and his wife Satyawati Mishra cast their votes at a polling booth in C Scheme. "Voting is not only a constitutional right but also the duty of every citizen of India. This strengthens democracy," the governor said later. The chief minister exercised his franchise at a polling



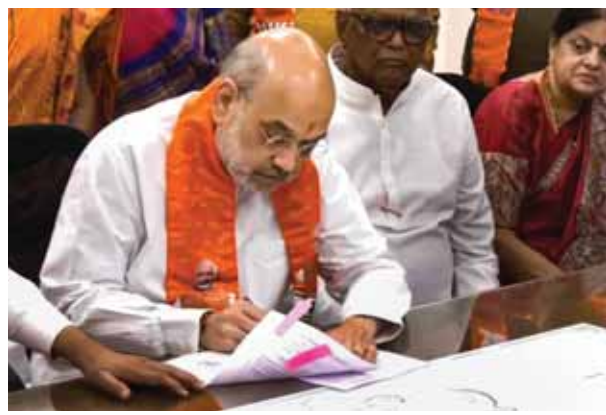
station of Patnik Jagatpura and expressed confidence that the NDA will win over 400 seats across the country in this general election. He said people of the state were voting for 'guarantees' of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. On the other hand, Pilot said people want change and this election was going to be for change in the country. "The BJP had a long tenure of 10 years. Now people are bored and I am convinced that the Congress will win more seats than the BJP in Rajasthan. We will win across the country and the INDIA bloc will get a majority," he told reporters after casting

his vote. Deputy Chief Minister Diya Kumari also cast her vote in this phase. Former BJP state president Satish Poonia cast his vote at a polling booth in Rani Sati Nagar in Jaipur during the day. Elderly citizens and some newly married couples were also seen at the polling booths. Shivani, a resident of Dampura village in Dholpur district, reached her polling booth before entering the woodlock. Dressed in bridal attire, she also took a selfie at a 'selfie point' after casting her vote. In Jaipur, a 95-year-old retired naval officer reached a polling station with his family members to vote. He said although he could have chosen the 'voting from home' option, he preferred to cast his vote at a polling station. Newlywed Rohit and Sonia Chaudhary went to a polling station in Jaipur's Purani Basti to cast their votes. They got married on Thursday night. Rajasthan Director General of Police Utkal Ranjan Sahoo said tight security arrangements have been made for free, fair and peaceful voting. The Rajasthan Police, along with companies of the Central Armed Forces and Home Guard personnel, has been deployed to maintain peace and law and order. According to Chief Electoral Officer Praveen Gupta, a total of 2.54 crore people are eligible to vote in the first phase and around 23,000 polling booths have been set up in this phase.

Shah files nomination from Gandhinagar LS seat

Says election is all about giving Modi third term

PTI ■ GANDHINAGAR
Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday submitted his nomination papers for the Gandhinagar Lok Sabha seat from where he is the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate and said the general election is all about giving a third term to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Shah was accompanied by Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel when he submitted the nomination papers to Gandhinagar collector and district election officer M K Dave in the state capital at exactly 12.39 pm, considered as 'Vijay Muhurat'. Talking to reporters, Shah said this general election is all about giving a third term to



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

foundation for 'Viksit Bharat', he said. Thanking the BJP for renominating him from the seat once represented by stalwarts Atal Bihari Vajpayee and LK Advani, Shah said the seat holds significance also because PM Modi is a registered voter from here. "I have been associated with this seat for the last 30 years. Before becoming an MP, I was an MLA from assembly segments that fall under this seat. Thanks to your love, I rose from a humble booth worker to becoming a member of parliament now. People of Gandhinagar gave me their blessings whenever I sought their votes," he said. Developmental works of more than Rs 22,000 crore were undertaken in the Gandhinagar Lok Sabha seat in the last five years, he said. Shah, a former BJP president, won from the Gandhinagar constituency by a margin of more than 5 lakh votes in the 2019 general elections.

PTI ■ PUDUCHERRY

Polling picked up momentum in Puducherry through the morning as the union territory gets set to elect their lone representative to the Lok Sabha, on Friday. A visit to some of the polling stations in the rural areas brought to the fore a mixed picture of voter turnout, which was mediocre in some places and high in others. Kothandapani (89) along with his 86-year-old wife Krishnammal turned up at a booth in the Veerampattinam coastal village in Ariyankuppam Assembly constituency to cast their votes. Kothandapani is the grandfather of the AIADMK

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

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

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

to approach the booth without difficulties. Police also took care of the senior citizens and helped them get into the booth to cast their votes. Puducherry recorded 28.10 percent polling till 11 a.m. There are 26 aspirants in the fray in this seat. The BJP nominee and Home Minister of Puducherry A Namassivayam and the Congress president and sitting member of Lok Sabha VVaithilingam are locking horns in the poll battle.

Long queues outside polling booths in Assam

PTI ■ GUWAHATI
Long queues were seen outside booths since the morning as polling was underway for five constituencies in Assam in the first phase on Friday. Polling began at 7 am in Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Lakhimpur, Sonitpur and

Kaziranga seats, and 86.5 lakh voters are eligible to vote. Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal of the BJP and Congress's deputy leader in Lok Sabha Gaurav Gogoi were among those who cast their votes in the first hour. There were apprehensions that the weather might play a spoilsport with the entire

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

Laxminath Bezbarua Bhawan in Khowkidung. People are happy under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi and that is why they are coming out in large numbers, he claimed. Gogoi voted at a polling booth in Devi Charan Barua Higher Secondary School in Jorhat town.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Theatre of the absurd

The ever-falling state of polity touches a new low, trivialising life for political gains

In the realm of politics, where governance and public welfare should reign supreme, a disturbing trend has emerged — the trivialisation of human life for the sake of political benefits. Recent events surrounding Delhi's Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal exemplify this worrying trend, where his health crisis has become a point of one-upmanship and is being used to serve narrow political narratives rather than addressing the genuine concerns of his health. The case took a curious turn when the Enforcement Directorate (ED) claimed that Kejriwal intentionally indulged in a high-sugar diet to fabricate grounds for bail. Kejriwal's colleague Atishi has countered this assertion, alleging a conspiracy to deny the jailed Chief Minister access to essential insulin and home-cooked food, potentially putting his life at risk. Both claims, while patently opposite, underscore a distressing reality — the callous politicisation of a health crisis. In the theatre of politics, where power dynamics often overshadows ethical considerations, the sanctity of human life seems to have been direly neglected. The focus has shifted from genuine concern for an individual's well-being to exploiting their vulnerabilities for partisan gains. Such a narrative not only reflects poorly on the integrity of political discourse but also raises profound questions about the moral compass of those entrusted with governance.



The ED's assertion of Kejriwal deliberately manipulating his health for legal advantage is a damning indictment of the extent to which political opponents are willing to go to discredit their adversaries. It underscores a culture where the personal struggles of individuals are weaponised for political advantage. Conversely, Atishi's allegations of a plot to endanger Kejriwal's life highlight the dangerous consequences of unchecked political rhetoric. Accusations of attempted murder, if unsubstantiated, not only sow seeds of distrust but also trivialise the gravity of such heinous crimes. At its core, the Kejriwal saga underscores a broader crisis within the polity — the prioritisation of political expediency over human dignity. In the relentless pursuit of power and influence, the inherent value of human life is often sacrificed at the altar of partisan interests. This erosion of empathy and decency not only corrodes the fabric of democracy but also threatens the fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens. Without delving into the merits of the case or passing judgment on who is truthful, Kejriwal, like everyone else, must be given the best treatment at the moment, even if the illness is self-inflicted. To reclaim the integrity of polity, it is imperative for political actors to realign their priorities with the values of compassion, integrity and accountability. The welfare of individuals should never be subjugated to the exigencies of political gamesmanship. Instead, leaders must demonstrate a commitment to upholding the dignity and wellbeing of every citizen, irrespective of their political affiliations. The Kejriwal saga serves as a sobering reminder of the perils of allowing politics to trump humanity.

Atishi's allegations of a plot to endanger Kejriwal's life highlight the dangerous consequences of unchecked political rhetoric. Accusations of attempted murder, if unsubstantiated, not only sow seeds of distrust but also trivialise the gravity of such heinous crimes. At its core, the Kejriwal saga underscores a broader crisis within the polity — the prioritisation of political expediency over human dignity. In the relentless pursuit of power and influence, the inherent value of human life is often sacrificed at the altar of partisan interests. This erosion of empathy and decency not only corrodes the fabric of democracy but also threatens the fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens. Without delving into the merits of the case or passing judgment on who is truthful, Kejriwal, like everyone else, must be given the best treatment at the moment, even if the illness is self-inflicted. To reclaim the integrity of polity, it is imperative for political actors to realign their priorities with the values of compassion, integrity and accountability. The welfare of individuals should never be subjugated to the exigencies of political gamesmanship. Instead, leaders must demonstrate a commitment to upholding the dignity and wellbeing of every citizen, irrespective of their political affiliations. The Kejriwal saga serves as a sobering reminder of the perils of allowing politics to trump humanity.

PICTALK



School students with their faces and hands painted as part of voter awareness campaign pose for photos, in Jammu PTI

Transformative trends in India's higher education

The surge in EdTech presents opportunities for democratising education but also highlights challenges such as the digital divide and ensuring quality

India's higher education landscape is undergoing a transformative shift. With initiatives like the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020, skill development programs by the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and the encouragement of 100 per cent FDI in education, the landscape is ripe for innovation and investment. Additionally, UGC's push for setting up international campuses in India and the Ministry of Education's focus on global learning is reshaping our educational framework. The market size of the Indian higher education system was estimated at around \$40 billion in 2023, growing at a CAGR of 15 per cent. With over 1,200 universities, 49,400 colleges and 12,600 stand-alone institutions, India hosts one of the largest higher education ecosystems in the world. Catering to more than 50 million students — a number expected to grow substantially in the next five years — these institutions are crucial in achieving an enhanced Gross Enrollment Ratio and improving the skill set of our future workforce.



Amidst this expansion, the post-pandemic era has seen a significant influx of digitalisation in learning, with universities offering online programs and various platforms providing a broad spectrum of courses online. Considering our current infrastructure and the expected demand, it is essential for the country to further explore online learning and skill development opportunities. Aligning these opportunities with the next 10-year growth plan is crucial for preparing a skilled workforce that enhances graduate employability. However, the selection of courses among students has also seen a paradigm shift. India is moving beyond tra-

ditional domains like engineering, medicine and management. Today, students are increasingly drawn to interdisciplinary programs and new-age courses that promise quicker skill acquisition and certification. There is a significant opportunity for institutions to expand their offerings in these certification/degree courses where students can learn new skills in less duration. The surge in EdTech has been transformative and represents a key area ripe for investment and innovation. By providing everything from career guidance to student counselling digitally, these platforms have democratised access to education, ensuring that students from all regions have better career opportunities. Yet, realising the full potential of these advancements requires overcoming significant challenges. Addressing the digital divide, ensuring equitable access to technology and improving internet connectivity, especially in underserved areas, are critical. Moreover, as the field rapidly diversifies, strengthening quality assurance and adapting accredita-

tion and regulatory frameworks are essential to maintaining standards and credibility. These bodies must adapt to the changing dynamics of higher education to uphold academic integrity and student outcomes. The Ministry of Education's current focus on the internationalization of higher education in India is set to have profound effects, not only on educational practices but also on the broader economy and society. This strategic emphasis will enable transnational education and student/faculty exchanges, thereby building a globally competent workforce and fostering knowledge exchange between nations. As we look ahead, the future of higher education in India is not just about scaling up but also about smart scaling. By embracing these trends and addressing inherent challenges, we can ensure that the sector not only expands but also elevates, providing every student with a world-class education and global opportunities.

(The writer is the founder and director of OneStep Global; views are personal)



ARITRA GHOSHAL

The news website, *The Irrawaddy*, cites "informed sources in Naypyitaw and Yangon" as saying that Aung San Suu Kyi (78), the emblem of the Myanmar's struggle for democracy and Win Mint (72), incarcerated president of the country's democratically-elected Government ousted by the coup on February 1, 2021, remain in prison. This, indeed, is likely to be the case given the high level of credibility that the website enjoys. It would be instructive to read what it has to say in this connection. The ball, so to say, was set rolling late on the afternoon of April 16 when a pro-regime media outlet said that both had been moved to a new location. It was followed by the regime's spokesman, Major-General Zaw Min Tun telling the Burmese services of VOA and the BBC: "Not only Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and U Win Myint but also some [other] older prisoners were given necessary care since the weather is extremely hot." However, he did not say that Suu Kyi had been moved to a new location. When media outlets pressed him for further information, he did not provide any details. Despite this and the absence of any photographic or other evidence showing their having been moved to house arrest, both local and international and news agencies carried stories saying that it was the case. That this is not so is further suggested by Aung San Suu Kyi's son, Kim Aris, who told Kay Burley of Sky News during a breakfast interview, "They are saying house arrest. She only has one house and she's not there." Given the utterly unsavoury reputations that the junta and news outlets which act as its mouthpieces enjoy, the confusion may, in all likelihood, have been deliberately created by both acting in tandem. If this, indeed, is the case, what purpose was sought to have been achieved? The most plausible answer would be that it was to show that the junta cared. Why suddenly? It has been known for some time that Aung San Suu Kyi was very ill in prison and the junta was

not providing her the kind of medical attention she needed. It has also been speculated that the junta could murder her in prison and claim that she had died of old age or other natural causes. Whatever it is, it would serve the generals well to create the impression that it was not their fault if something untoward happened to her. The other reason could be differences within the junta, a section of which wants to do a deal with her to end the civil war they are losing and another would hear nothing of it. The Sit-Tat (which and not Tatmadaw, is the real name for Myanmar Army), is now facing defeat at a none-to-distant future. It has been suffering one major reverse after another since the opposition Three Brotherhood Alliance (henceforth Alliance) launched its current offensive, codenamed Operation 1027, on October 27, 2023. The latest, the loss of Myawaddy, an important border town, on April 11, 2024, to the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and Karen National Army, is clearly the most devastating blow suffered by



THE JUNTA IS REPORTEDLY PREPARING TO LAUNCH A COUNTER OFFENSIVE. WHETHER IT MATERIALISES AND, IF IT DOES, WITH WHAT SUCCESS, REMAINS TO BE SEEN



Aung San Suu Kyi: Prison or house arrest?



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

Concerns over Suu Kyi's whereabouts as the junta stares at defeat

the junta since the Alliance's current offensive began. A key trading hub close to the eastern end of Myanmar's border with Thailand—the total value of imports and exports passing through it has been valued at \$ 1 billion in 2023—it is also regarded as Myanmar's opening to South-East Asian countries. The Junta is reportedly preparing to launch a counter offensive. Whether it materialises and, if it does, with what success, remains to be seen. But even if it is successful and the Sit-Tat is able to retain the town after regaining it, the event is unlikely to be a turning point in the civil war which is going overwhelming in favour of the Alliance—comprising the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), active in the Kokang Special Region of northern Shan State, the Taang National Liberation Army (TNLA), also active in the Shan State and the Arakan Army (AA), based in the Rakhine State in the country's western part. Acting in close cooperation opposition National Unity Government's military arm, the People's Defence Force (PDF) and other ethnic armies like the KNLA and KLA. At the time of writing, the AA has brought almost the entire Rakhine State under its control. By early April, it had captured some 170 junta camps and posts, several larger bases, battalion headquarters and training facilities. It seized the important town of Paletwa on January 15, 2024. Kyaukphyu, where China is developing a port and a special economic zone spread over 1,600 hectares, is about to fall. The AA is pressing hard on Sittwe, an important port town, after seizing control of the small towns around it and cutting off access to it through road and waterways. India shifted its staff from its consulate there to Yangon earlier in April, 2024. Initially, one had thought that the Junta's ouster, even though inevitable, would take a long time to come about. It now seems that it would be defenestrated much sooner than one had thought. India must bear this in mind. (The author is Consulting Editor, *The Pioneer*. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BJP'S STRATEGIC MANIFESTO

Madam — Apropos the news article, "A Vision for India's Global Leadership", published on April 19, this is my response. The Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) manifesto signals a shift towards a policy-centric approach, departing from traditional electoral strategies. By highlighting achievements and projecting a vision for India's future, it aims to secure votes based on governance rather than populist promises. The absence of significant Pakistan-centric rhetoric suggests a nuanced understanding of foreign policy priorities, focusing instead on global engagement and regional stability. Prime Minister Modi's emphasis on "Neighbour First" and "Act East" policies reflects a proactive stance in regional diplomacy, enhancing India's influence and fostering solidarity among neighbouring nations. The manifesto's commitment to global advocacy for the Global South underscores India's aspirations for a leadership role in international affairs. However, challenges persist, particularly in integrating India into global supply chains and enhancing the rupee's acceptability. Yet, the manifesto's articulation of strategic goals and pledges for collaboration within the Indo-Pacific region portrays a coherent vision for India's role in the evolving geopolitical landscape. Sneha Gupta | Delhi

OTT LANGUAGE DEBATE

Madam — Apropos the news article, "How justified is abusive language on OTT?", published on April 19, this is my response. India's OTT platforms have reshaped entertainment, offering diverse content but facing criticism for excessive profanity. The Supreme Court's recent ruling defends free speech, sparking debates on cultural integrity. Profanity may enhance realism yet risks societal norms, especially impacting youth. While OTT isn't solely responsible, it amplifies existing trends. Education reforms emphasise cultural values, conflicting with profanity's normalisation.

Political quagmire



Apropos the news article, "Corruption and political defections: A telltale sign of democratic decay", published on April 19, this is my response. The article delves into the unsettling reality of political manoeuvring, where corruption probes seem to act as a revolving door for politicians, raising questions about the integrity of the system. It draws a

sharp contrast between the flawed current State of affairs and the ideal governance system envisioned in ancient scriptures like Manusmriti. The Manusmriti's principles, though controversial, present a compelling blueprint for a more righteous governance model, emphasising a party-less system, voter recall rights and alignment with moral principles. The chasm between this ideal and the existing political landscape is vast, highlighting the urgent need for reform. While achieving perfection may be a distant goal, even partial adoption of Manusmriti's principles could yield significant improvements, reducing electoral malpractice, corruption and divisive politics. As the nation awaits potential reforms under the Modi Government, India, with its rich spiritual heritage, can transcend its current challenges and emerge as a global exemplar of moral governance. Ishaan Shukhi | Ludhiana

Despite honouring women in tradition, derogatory language persists, undermining societal respect. Education institutions oppose abuse, but OTT exposure challenges efforts. A balanced approach is crucial, fostering dialogue on artistic freedom versus cultural preservation. OTT's influence demands responsible content creation, respect for diverse audiences and societal values. Ultimately, societal progress intertwines with cultural preservation, demanding nuanced solutions to maintain integrity amidst evolving entertainment landscapes. Rishab Vashisht | Bhopal

INSIGHTS ON INDIAN JEWELRY

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Heritage Indian jewellery dazzles the world", published on April 19, this is my response. Dr Alka Raghuvanshi's posthumously published masterpiece, "Rendezvous with Traditional Indian Jewellery," transcends the boundaries of a mere book. It's a heartfelt journey delving into the soul of India's cultural heritage, where artistry intertwines with pro-

found symbolism. The meticulous attention to detail reveals a rich tapestry of craftsmanship, history and significance. The book's thematic chapters unravel the evolution and diversity of Indian jewellery, from the majestic influences of the Mughal era to the intricate designs of South India. It showcases stunning visuals and explores the deep symbolism ingrained in each piece, reflecting social, religious and cultural narratives. Moreover, it sheds light on the craftsmanship and techniques passed down through generations, preserving the essence of traditional jewellery-making. Regional variations highlight the unique aesthetics across India, celebrating its diverse cultural tapestry. This book is a captivating ode to India's cherished art form, offering insights for enthusiasts, historians and admirers alike, encapsulating the beauty and legacy of Indian jewellery. Lavanya Sharma | Lucknow

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FIRST COLUMN

MIND, THE KEY TO HIDDEN FORTUNE

True wealth lies not in material possessions but in the freedom of mind



RAVI VALLURI

Once upon a time lived a woman. She was struck with an unexpected tragedy as her husband passed away untimely. The lady was now left with only one son and precious jewellery. Since she was hounded by creditors to repay the debts accrued by her husband, she conjured a trick to hide the wealth. In sheer desperation to keep the jewellery safe from creditors, the lady wrapped the precious wealth in a piece of cloth and hid it under a tree. The mother and son lived in an impoverished State. Her mind was always disturbed by the fact that she did not share this piece of vital information with her only son. As it turned out, she carried this secret to the grave. Consequently, the son inherited plenty of debt, a barren hut and a cot. The son had to work hard for sustenance and to repay the ever-rising liabilities. He toiled hard to survive and regretted his misfortune. 'Property is not the sacred right. When a rich man becomes poor it is a misfortune, it is not a moral evil. When a poor man becomes destitute, it is a moral evil, teeming with consequences and is injurious to society and morality,' opined Lord Acton. Indeed, the impoverishment of the poor is heart-wrenching. One day while cutting the branches of a tree, he stumbled upon the jewellery. Dumbfounded and stupefied, the strapping youngster hid the bijouterie in a pit he dug in the hut, petrified that the creditors would appropriate the wealth. He too committed the cardinal mistake of not sharing the secret with his wife and carried it to his grave. The mother and son were not mindful and wakeful enough to be in the Present Moment and remained prisoners of their past and future.



Two Buddhist monks were once discussing a flag flapping in the wind. While one felt it was the wind moving, the other conjectured it was the flag fluttering. The imbroglia could not be resolved and they sought the intervention of a Zen Master. The master impassively said, 'It is the MIND that moves, neither the flag nor the wind.' Humans need freedom from their past and future to be in the present. And being in the NOW or present is true enlightenment and mindfulness. The past is full of sorrows and regrets while the future brims with anxieties and worries and humans are caged in that mindset, thereby postponing their happiness quotient. To appreciate true happiness and joy, the human mind should not vacillate between the past and the future but remain in the PRESENT. A young monk was once travelling in pursuit of happiness and truth. During his travels, he encountered a massive river that he could not cross. A short while later, he saw a senior monk on the other side of the river. He hailed him and sought assistance to cross the river to reach the other side. The senior monk pondered and replied, 'You are already on the other side'. This fact can be appreciated only when the mind is centred. Breathing techniques such as Sudarshan Kriya, Pranayama, Yoga, Meditation and Vipassana all help in dissolving the mind so that it becomes centred. 'True happiness is not possible without freedom. We have to learn the habit of being free. We do not allow our past, the future, our projects, or our fear to get hold of us. We are free. Every step is free. Every step is nourishment. Every step is healing. Every step is joy,' says Thich Nhat Hanh.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

Human-elephant conflict: The way out

To ensure the protection of these majestic creatures, it is imperative to revisit and revise legislative frameworks with a focus on ecological sustainability



BKP SINHA



ARVIND JHA

India's rich biodiversity includes a significant population of Asian elephants, which are not only an integral part of the country's wildlife heritage but also hold cultural and religious significance. However, the increasing instances of human-elephant conflict (HEC) have become a pressing concern for both conservationists and those living near elephant habitats. The root causes of HEC are multifaceted, primarily stemming from habitat loss and fragmentation due to human activities. As India's population expands, so does the need for land for agricultural and developmental activities. This expansion often leads to encroachment into elephant territories, resulting in the destruction or fragmentation of their natural habitats. Consequently, elephants are forced to venture closer to human habitations in search of food and space. Mining activities, in particular, lead to deforestation and habitat degradation, disrupting elephant migratory routes and undermining the scope and health of elephant habitats. Similarly, urbanisation and infrastructure development often intersect with elephant corridors, pushing these gentle giants into unfamiliar and potentially dangerous territories. Climate change is another significant factor in this conflict. Changes in climate patterns can affect the availability and distribution of food and water sources in elephant habitats. Extreme weather events like droughts, floods and high temperatures can force elephants to migrate in search of these resources, often bringing them into conflict with humans. The current State of HEC in India is alarming. Over 500 humans are killed annually in encounters with elephants and more than 100 elephants lose their lives due to human-related activities, including poaching for ivory, poisoning, electrocution and collisions with trains. Train collisions are the second-highest cause of unnatural elephant deaths in the country, following accidental electrocution. Over the past decade, train collisions have claimed the lives of more than 200 elephants.

As mega-herbivores, elephants consume up to 150 kilograms of forage and drink up to 190 litres of water per day. This necessitates a large foraging area, typically spanning 100-1,000 km for a family herd, to provide a diverse diet of grasses, shrubs and fruits. However, navigating large areas to find sufficient food and water becomes a challenge when these areas overlap with human activities. This often results in crop raiding, property damage, and, in some tragic instances, human casualties. These incidents, unfortunately, lead to retaliatory actions from humans that can be fatal for these majestic creatures, further intensifying their fear and mistrust of humans. Farmers, particularly those with limited resources struggle to cope with crop losses. This hardship breeds resentment towards elephants, undermining conservation efforts and trapping both humans and elephants in a cycle of violence. Since 2019, there have been over 1500 human fatalities reported due to elephant attacks. In 2023-24 alone, Odisha reported 149 elephant deaths due to HEC. Mineral-rich districts like Dhenkanal, Angul, Keonjhar and Sundargarh have been hit the hardest, with Dhenkanal alone witnessing 130 elephants and 227 human deaths over the last decade. In August 2023, three elephants were electrocuted at the Rani Tea Estate near Guwahati due to low-hanging high-voltage



WESTERN MAHARASHTRA, A REGION NOT TRADITIONALLY KNOWN FOR ELEPHANT HABITATION, SAW A SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN 2002 WHEN ELEPHANTS MIGRATED FROM KARNATAKA. THIS MOVEMENT WAS LARGELY ATTRIBUTED TO THEIR DISPLACEMENT FROM THE DANDELI WILDLIFE SANCTUARY, A PLACE THEY HAD INHABITED COMFORTABLY UNTIL 1990

wires. This was not an isolated incident; back in October 2021, sagging power lines near the Dihing-Patkai National Park claimed the lives of another three elephants. The situation worsened in October 2022, when within a single week, 11 elephants across Assam lost their lives to human-related hazards including electrocution, crop poisoning and train collisions. Western Maharashtra, a region not traditionally known for elephant habitation, saw a significant change in 2002 when elephants migrated from Karnataka. This movement was largely attributed to their displacement from the Dandeli Wildlife Sanctuary, a place they had inhabited comfortably until 1990. The construction of the Kali hydro-electric project is believed to have been the catalyst for their relocation to the districts of Kolhapur and Sindhudurg in Maharashtra, leading to notable incidents of crop raiding. A similar pattern emerged in 2022 when a herd of 22 elephants trekked from Chhattisgarh to Maharashtra, settling in the lush forests along the Wain-Ganga, Pranrita and Dina river basins. This migration has been linked to increased human encroachment, the construction of two canals in Odisha and mining disturbances in their traditional corridors. The Wayanad region, a vital watershed for Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, is currently facing a multitude of environmental challenges such as deforestation, irresponsible tourism and unscientific development. Such activities are posing a significant threat to the ecological balance of the region, endangering the lives of both humans and wildlife. Wayanad plays a critical role in maintaining regional biodiversity. However, ongoing habitat degradation in this region could potentially intensify the water crisis in the Kaveri basin and escalate the HEC, which has tragically led to 41 fatalities already. Similarly, in the northeastern States of Assam and West Bengal, expanding tea plantations and human settlements have encroached on elephants' traditional grounds, leading to frequent HEC incidents. Addressing HEC requires a multi-

pronged approach that balances the needs of wildlife conservation with the socio-economic realities of human populations living near elephant habitats. This includes securing and restoring elephant corridors to ensure safe passage for elephants between different habitats, thereby reducing the likelihood of them entering human-dominated landscapes. Recognising this need, the Indian Government has launched an ambitious initiative known as Project Elephant. This program focuses on enhancing elephant habitats by creating a network of reserves, corridors and protected areas. To address the common issue of crop raiding in human-elephant interactions, the project employs innovative technologies such as early warning systems and elephant-proof barriers. It also implements various strategies like durable and solar-powered electric fences and biological deterrents including bio-fencing with cacti, beehive fences and chilli smoke to deter elephants. Enhancing the natural food supply within forests is another essential strategy for preventing elephants from entering human territories. This involves improving water conservation, regenerating forests by replanting and nurturing native trees and plants, implementing fire protection and removing invasive species. Programs focused on ecotourism and livelihood diversification not only engage local communities in conservation but also provide them with sustainable economic alternatives. Success stories from the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve and the Kaziranga-Karbi Anglong landscape underscore the effectiveness of community-led conservation endeavours, strategic land-use planning, trans-border collaboration and habitat restoration in diminishing conflict incidents. Kerala has also taken a bold initiative to relocate people from forest regions and reforest agricultural lands, despite the central Government's refusal to fund this Rs. 620 crore project. The State's declaration of HEC as a State-specific disaster and the involvement of the Kerala State Disaster Management Authority in

conflict management, are significant steps towards addressing this complex issue. Statutory support is fundamental in the conservation efforts addressing the HEC. Elephants, listed as endangered on the IUCN Red List, are protected under the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. Recent amendments to the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 have raised concerns regarding their impact on elephant reserves and corridors, particularly within the 100 km strip of India's boundary where the majority of these reserves and corridors are located. These changes could potentially worsen the fragmentation and degradation of these vital habitats, thereby intensifying the HEC. The Forest Rights Act of 2006, while well-intentioned in empowering forest-dwelling communities, has also had unintended consequences. Its implementation has sometimes resulted in further encroachments and habitat fragmentation, which can force elephants to venture into new areas in search of refuge and resources, increasing the likelihood and severity of conflicts. Post-project monitoring, particularly in the mining industry, is often insufficient, leading to a neglect of wildlife protection measures that were stipulated during the project's approval. This oversight can result in significant harm to elephant populations and their habitats, undermining conservation efforts. As we move forward, let us remember that our fates are intertwined with those of the elephants and all wildlife. Their survival is our survival. Their well-being reflects the health of our planet and their continued existence enriches our world in ways that cannot be quantified. It's high time we recognise our role and act responsibly, ensuring a future where humans and wildlife coexist harmoniously, each playing their part in maintaining the balance of our shared ecosystem. (The writers are former principal chief conservator of Forests, UP and Maharashtra; views are personal)

Rahul Gandhi holds on to Wayanad despite speculation

The decision comes as a strategic move, influenced by a variety of factors, including local dynamics and broader political alliances in Kerala

Even as the Indian National Congress was burning midnight oil about the Lok Sabha constituency from where Rahul Gandhi would contest this time, The Pioneer has reported that the scion of the Nehru-Gandhi clan would not leave Wayanad from where he was elected with a mammoth majority of four lakh votes in the 2019 edition of the General Election. The report was prepared after speaking to a cross-section of the electorate in the Wayanad constituency who were unanimous in their opinion that Rahul Gandhi should contest from Wayanad itself. Those who reacted to the queries posed to them included hardcore CPI(M) members and activists who



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

made it known that Rahul should register a much bigger majority than that of the 2019 poll because the opponent happened to be Annie Raja of the CPI and K Surendran of the BJP. Annie, the spouse of D Raja, CPI's national general secretary, had rubbed Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan in the wrong way and the CPI(M) cadres consider it as a cardinal sin.

Raja too had publicly questioned the capability of Vijayan and this made the CPI(M) activists furious. Had the Congress or BJP leaders criticized Vijayan, they would not have bothered but the CPI had crossed the Lakshman Rekha (it could be Stalinist Rekha since the comrades do not accept Ramayana). The CPI(M) comrades would certainly teach Annie Raja a lesson or two in the art of politics. The truth is that the CPI(M) leaders wanted Rahul Gandhi to contest from Wayanad so that the CPI would lose one seat for sure. The decision to field Surendran, the Kerala State president of the BJP, was made much later. Surendran himself knows that he would

lose by a big margin but he has to kowtow the party line. The information coming out of the BJP office is that he may be given a gubernatorial position even if he loses the security deposit. There are no suitable candidates in Kerala BJP to challenge the supremacy of Rahul Gandhi and the Congress. The question being asked by Wayanad voters is that how many people remember the names of the 2019 challengers to Rahul Gandhi. What is interesting is that the animosity between the CPI(M) and Congress has come down drastically with Gandhi filing the nomination from Wayanad. Though the Congress leaders lambast the CPI(M), it is just a façade to convince the hardcore mem-

bers of these parties that there is no alliance between them. But what the people of the State see in TV channels and newspapers is the video images and pictures of the Sitaram Yechury and D Raja hugging and kissing Rahul Gandhi while in Tripura former CPI(M) Chief Minister Manik Sarkar openly campaigning for the Congress party's candidates. Kerala is the only State where they act as if they are rivals and enemies. By the next election, one can see the Congress and the CPI(M) fighting it together in Kerala against the BJP-led front (provided the Hindutva party leadership throws out all the rotten eggs from its basket). There is no difference between the Congress and

the CPI(M) as of date. Political pundits have been asking both parties to officially legalize the ties so that the entire secular parties could be arrayed under the flag of the Congress across the country against the "communal and fascist" forces. The secular parties include the Muslim League! In Marxist parlance, they say that whoever aligns with the CPI(M) is secular while the BJP is "communal and fascist". The CPI(M) does not have any issues in accepting the former NDA constituents as allies once they call off the marriage of convenience with the BJP. Telugu Desam of Andhra Pradesh, BJD of Orissa, BSP and JD(U) are some of the major political outfits whose secularist cre-

dentials depend on their ties with the BJP. The press meeting addressed by A K Antony, the Bheeshma Pitamah of the Congress on 9 April 2024 at Thiruvananthapuram was an indicator of how political marriages take place in Kerala. While Antony was cursing his son Anil Antony who is contesting from Pathanamthitta as a BJP candidate and asking the electorate to ensure the defeat of his son, he was waxing eloquence on Anto Antony, the Congress candidate who is pitted against Anil. The former defence minister lambasted the BJP as anti-nationalists, communalists and dictators. But what stood out was his silence on the CPI(M) candi-

dates. Antony's ties with the CPI(M) are infamous as he had sailed with the Marxists for almost two years during 1980-1983. The CPI(M) and the Congress-led by Antony fought the 1980 general election together and ruled Kerala for almost two years. The Congress faction was pushed out of the LDF by the CPI(M) which demolished the offices of the Congress across the State with the police looking the other way. It is not without any reason political pundits say that politics make strange persons into bedfellows. Do we need more proof than A K Antony? (The writer is special correspondent with The Pioneer; views are personal)

India standout performer amidst sluggish global growth: IEA Secretary

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

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

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

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

He said that similar sentiments have been echoed by various agencies who have revised India's fiscal 24 growth estimate closer to 8 per cent. India's proactive stance on reform and investment in sustainable growth avenues sets a benchmark for emerging economies.

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

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

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

Seth said that on the external front, the narrowing



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Stock markets stage strong rebound

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

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

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

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai, and Hong Kong settled in the negative territory. European markets were trading in the red. Wall Street ended mostly lower on Thursday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.55 per cent to USD 87.62 a barrel.

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

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



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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

The stock ended at Rs 2,437.10 a share, down 1.04 per cent.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

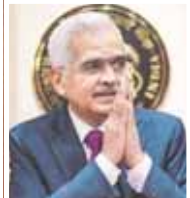
The Reserve Bank had maintained status-quo on the benchmark lending rate (repo) at 6.5 per cent since February 2023 on concerns over inflation after the three-day meeting of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) earlier this month.

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

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

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

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



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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BUSINESS BRIEF



VITEEE-2024 KICKS OFF AT VIT AP UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

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

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

INDUSTRY, ACADEMIA MEET AND EXHIBITION TODAY

The Department of Architecture, Zakir Husain College of Engineering and Technology (ZH CET), Aligarh Muslim University is organising an Industry-Academia Meet and Exhibition on April 20, 2024, to bring together the professionals, academicians and students for interaction and exchange of ideas.

AMU Vice Chancellor is the chief patron and Prof Mirza Salim Beg, Dean, Faculty of Engineering and Technology and Prof MM Sufyan Beg, Principal, ZH CET are the co-patrons. The talks will be focused on the present scenario in building design and construction practices and the eminent speakers are Prof Manoj Mathur, SPA, New Delhi; Prof Rajat Ray, Ex-Dean, Guru Govind Singh Indraprastha University, New Delhi; Dr. Arun Kapur, Amity School of Architecture, Lucknow and also Honorary Architect, Gunjan and Associates, Lucknow; Architect Gaurav Gupta, De:Capo Studio, Lucknow; Architect Manish Kr Sahai, Sahai Architects, Aligarh; Architect Hemlata Singh, White Fox Designs LLP, New Delhi and Architect Udit Gaurav, Green Building Consultant, Greater Noida.

HDFC AMC Q4 profit soars 44 pc to ₹541 crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

For the full financial year 2023-24 (FY24), the fund house's PAT surged by 37 per cent year-on-year to Rs 1,946 crore and total income rose 27 per cent YoY to Rs 3,162.5 crore.

HDFC AMC is an investment manager for HDFC Mutual Fund, one of the leading mutual funds in the country.

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

Hyundai Motor India rolls out Grameen Mahotsav

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Auto-maker Hyundai Motor India has expanded its 'Grameen Mahotsav' initiative to 16 new locations across the country, after the success of its inaugural event held in Gujarat this month.

The 'Grameen Mahotsav' initiative aims to further strengthen HMI's connection to rural India with specially curated events and product displays including live music, folk dance, and regional talent shows among others.

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

Hyundai Motor India said in a statement on Friday.

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

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

that with good monsoon, increasing income levels and improved infrastructure, the contribution from rural markets will further increase," he said.

Hyundai Motor India said nearly 40 per cent of sales and service networks were in rural areas. HMI is committed to fostering strong bonds with rural communities.

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

Infosys shares decline nearly 1 per cent after Q4 earnings

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

The company's market capitalisation (mcap) declined by Rs 3,655.37 crore to Rs 5,85,936.45 crore.

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

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

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

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

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

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



Air India cancels Dubai flights

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

CAG signs pact with SAI Bulgaria to enhance international collaboration

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), inked by the two Supreme audit institutions, aims to enhance collaboration and the exchange of expertise in the field of auditing between the two nations, the CAG said in a statement.

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

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

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

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

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

REVIVING THE LEGACY OF RAM

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

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

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

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

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

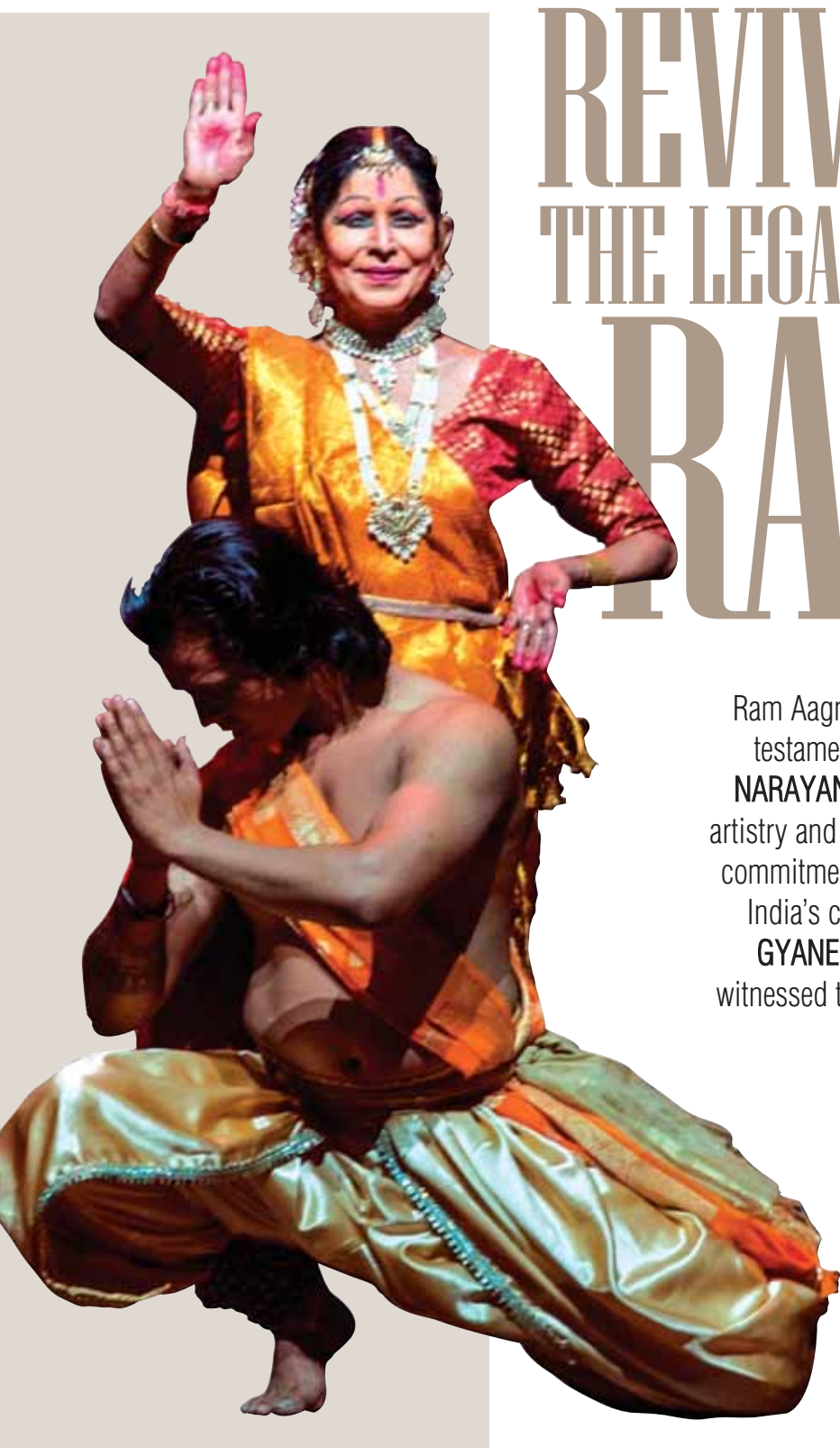
One of the distinctive elements of "Ram Aagman" was its homage to Goddess



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

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

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



Tradition, Transformation, Empowerment

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

How did you handle the challenges of outdoor shoots?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Sculpting Novel Ideas

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

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

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

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



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

Her meticulous nature extends to her creative process,



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

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

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

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





RISHABH PANT SET FOR EMOTIONAL HOMECOMING

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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



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

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

TEAMS (FROM):

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



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

PTI ■ MULLANPUR (PUNJAB)

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



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

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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

Hardik Pandya fined for slow over rate against Punjab Kings

PTI ■ MULLANPUR (PUNJAB)

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

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

OTHER SPORTS



Group condemns searches by security at Barcelona stadium

AP ■ PARIS

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

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

Olympic organisers to use AI in sports

AP ■ LONDON

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



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

Punia, Sujeet to miss Asian qualifiers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

EAST COAST RAILWAY
Tender Notice No.: 03-KUR-TRD-OT-2024-25, Dtd.: 10.04.2024
Name of Work: CONSTRUCTION OF ROB ALONG WITH LHS/RUB IN LIEU OF CLOSURE OF LC NO.183, 274, 317 AND 320 IN KUR DIVISION.
Advertised Value: Rs. 14,32,273.78, EMD: Rs. 28,700/-
Completion of Period: 180 Days
Tender closing Date & Time: At 1300 hrs. on 06.05.2024
The Tender documents complete details available at www.ireps.gov.in
Sr. Divl. Elec. Engineer (TRD) Khurda Road

AFFIDAVIT
By virtue of an affidavit before the Notary Public, Keonjhar, Dist-Keonjhar. I Suchit Sweta Mohanta, the real daughter of Army No. 4550443Y Naik Late Raghunath Mohanta (Retd.) residing at Vill-Gajapathar, P.O.: Damahunda, P.S.: Patna, Dist-Keonjhar, AU/Pre : W/o. Bimalendu Mohanta, AU/Pre : W/o. Suchit Sweta Mohanta, Odisha declares that in my father's service documents and discharge book my name & date of birth are wrongly mentioned as Suchitsmita Mohanta, DOB 15-Jan-87. That my correct name is Suchit Sweta Mohanta & Date of Birth is 05-06-1991. This is mentioned in my educational certificate & Birth Certificate. That both Suchit Sweta Mohanta, Date of Birth 05.06.1991 & Suchitsmita Mohanta, Date of Birth 15-Jan-87 belongs to one and same person. That my correct and full name is Suchit Sweta Mohanta, DOB 05-06-1991 for all purpose. This affidavit may be produced before concerned authority as & when required.