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BRINK OF WAR OR HYPE

**WORLD 8**  
UKRAINIAN AND WESTERN  
LEADERS LAUD US AID PACKAGE

**MONEY 10**  
DIRECT TAX COLLECTIONS  
EXCEED ESTIMATES IN FY24

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12 SPORTS

# Bihar ravaged by drugs deluge after liquor ban

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■  
PATNA/BHAGALPUR

The ban on liquor is ideally taking a toll in all aspects including social, economical on the citizens of Bihar. While the ‘banned’ alcoholic substance is made available easily by ‘peddlers’ in form of women and children, what is worrying the elderly generation of the State is the proliferation of drugs in form of gaanja, cocaine, heroin and other psychotropic substances. Beggars too are involved in transportation of liquor to in the dry State of Bihar.

What the concerned people term “sukha nasha” has penetrated deeply in villages, rural areas, towns and cities and youths particularly teenagers, college students, daily wagers are hooked to these illegal intoxicating agents taking a toll on the future of Bihar once known as land of Buddha and Mahavira. The liquor ban which came into force almost seven years ago is ruining the health of youths and economy since all kinds of brands are “smuggled” from neighbouring Nepal, Assam, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand.

Lallan Mahota, a resident of Bihiya in Patna, when asked about what is the major concern in the ensuing general elections, expressed dismay over the precarious situation bothering majority of the household in the State. “Sukha Nasha ghush chuka hai Sir. Sharab bund ho gaya lekin youth tarah tarah ke drugs le rahe hain. Yahan har varg ke log ko inka naam bhi pata ho gaya jo Bihar mein jaanta bhi nahi tha. Sarkarein soyi hai,” Mahto said. He meant to say drugs which the people of Bihar never knew are conveniently available while the Government is in

deep slumber. As far as liquor ban is concerned, Faraz, from Nathnagar in Bhagalpur, said the ban is only on paper and administration while anyone desires to consume liquor they get it delivered. The modus operandi is more vulnerable. “Alcohol is supplied by using kids in their school bags or women folks worth ₹100-₹200 as delivery charge as there can be no need of suspicion on them. People from poor background are more into this and what will shock you is that those involved in this illegal supply



chain of liquor have become lakhapatis (millionaires). Any kind of brand is available twice its original price and hence the ‘traders’ have built homes of marble,” Faraz said and also took this journalist to show one of the duplex (though unverifiable) that was built in two years time by a person who was into manihari (cosmetic hawker). Unfortunately and interestingly, those who cannot afford such expensive liquor or drugs get intoxicated by use of tertiary forms like cough syrups, nail polish spirits, shoe lotions, thinner, diluter and many more.

In most of the cities, including Muzzafarpur, Darbhanga, Purnea, Katihar the above mentioned daily use items are difficult to find as they are considered for use of minor hallucinations. The use of shoe lotions or spirit is rampant and these are used by young people by rolling the open can of shoe lotion in a piece of cloth like handkerchief or dhoti and then inhaled for intoxicate self. The family which are prone to above mentioned issues are now talking openly about their wards involvement either in liquor peddling for

want of money or their wards being prey to use of the sukha nasha. “My 21-year-old son is on gaanja dosage. I took him to rehabilitation centre in Phulwari near Patna even. He is still into it and when taken to task he threatens to harm himself. I have no option but have urged my son to take only two times a day. I have also given him a tea stall to keep him engaged. He supports his gaanja intake by liquor peddling in a bag of a leading coaching institute in Patna city,” explained Vishnu Yadav, a hamlet near Malighat Chowk in Muzzafarpur.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma during a public meeting for Lok Sabha elections, in Jalore, on Sunday

PTI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
JALORE/NEW DELHI

In a veiled attack on Congress leader Sonia Gandhi for choosing the Rajya Sabha, Prime Minister Narendra Modi without naming her on Sunday said those who cannot win an election have taken the Rajya Sabha route to Parliament. Addressing a public meeting in Rajasthan’s Jalore, Modi said, “Jo log chunav nahi lad sakte, jeet sakte (those who can’t contest and win an election) fled the ground and took the Rajya Sabha route.” Jalore will go to the election in

the second phase on April 26. Modi also addressed a rally in Banswara in support of BJP’s Mahendrajeet Singh Malviya. Former Congress president Sonia is among the MPs elected to the Rajya Sabha from Rajasthan in February. In a major decision, Sonia vacated her Raebareli seat citing her health condition. The Congress is yet to announce any candidate from Raebareli, and so is the BJP for the seat that will go to the polls on May 20. Several Congress veterans have not been fielded in this Lok Sabha election, but the party has rejected suggestions

that they were shying away from contesting. Congress first sent a leader from South (KC Venugopal) to the Rajya Sabha from Rajasthan; then Rajasthan helped former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. “Manmohan was ill for a long time. But was he ever seen here in Rajasthan? Now Rajasthan has again come to Congress’s help. Another Congress leader (Sonia) has been elected from Rajasthan to the Rajya Sabha,” he said. Modi said the country is

punishing the Congress for its “sins” and the party that had once won 400 seats is unable to contest 300 seats in this Lok Sabha election. “In the first phase of voting, half of Rajasthan has punished Congress. Rajasthan, which is full of patriotism, knows that Congress can never make India strong,” Modi said. He said the country does not want the conditions which existed before 2014 to return. “The Congress has hollowed out the country by spreading

termite of nepotism and corruption. And today, the country is angry with the Congress and is punishing it for these sins. The youths are so angry that they do not want to see the Congress’ face again.” Modi was addressing the public meeting in Bhnimal in support of BJP candidate Lumbaram Choudhary. “They have formed an opportunistic INDI Alliance, (it is like) a kite whose string has been cut before it could fly,” he said. Modi said it was an alliance only in name as its constituents were fighting against each other in many States.



## Kerala poll campaign reaches crescendo

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Election campaign for the Lok Sabha poll to be held in Kerala reached a crescendo by Sunday, the last Sunday before the April 26 polling. Unemployment, poverty, farmers and fall in standards of education are out of e narratives as secularism, pluralism and safety of minorities are the hotly discussed topics in public rallies as well as street side meetings across the state. The three glamour stars of the CPI(M), Sitaram Yechury, Prakash Karat and Brinda Karat (popularly known as the “available polit bureau”) are rocking the State with their claims that their political outfit is the most secular one in the world. “Secularism which is better than our secularism could be seen only in dreams,” the trio speak in unison while blaming the Narendra Modi Government for destroying the secular fabric as well as pluralism of India. “No force in this world could raise their fingers at Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan or his family members. Vijayan is the best chief minister and administrator India has ever seen. His life is dedicated to serve the poor and downtrodden in the country. His name is synonymous with secularism of the highest order,” thundered Yechury while addressing rallies at Thiruvananthapuram and Kochi. The CPI(M) general secretary also dared Modi, the BJP and the ED to arrest Pinarayi Vijayan against whom they have foisted many fake cases. “No scams have taken place in the cooperative banks of the State and no financial irregularities have come to the notice of the State government. What business the ED has got to do in Kerala?” asked Yechury.

## INDIA Bloc leaders throng Ranchi



Leaders of Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) during 'Ulgulan Nyay' rally, in Ranchi, on Sunday

PTI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
RANCHI

The leaders of INDIA Bloc, including the wives of jailed Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and former Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren allege that the BJP-led Centre is ruling the nation with the sole agenda to topple non-BJP State Governments and put them behind bars by faking charges. While Kejriwal’s wife Sunita accused the C e n t r a l Government of denying insulin to her husband alleging that it wants to kill him, Hemants wife Kalpana alleged the BJP was trying to topple Governments in Opposition-ruled States. Both spoke at the INDIA Bloc ‘Ulgulan Nyay’ rally, which was attended by leaders of 28 parties. Addressing the joint rally in Ranchi as part of campaign for

the Lok Sabha polls, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on hit out at the BJP for trying to “terrorise” Hemant Soren, and asserted that the JMM leader preferred going to jail rather than parting ways with the INDIA bloc. He was addressing the Opposition INDIA Bloc’s ‘Ulgulan Nyay’ rally at Prabhat Tara ground in Ranchi, which was attended by leaders of the anti-BJP alliance. Kharge also attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi, alleging that he insulted President Droupadi Murmu and the tribal community by not inviting her to Ram temple consecration and inauguration of the Parliament building. Addressing the rally, Sunita asserted that the opposition INDIA bloc will fight against the “dictatorship” of the BJP and win. “They want to kill my husband Arvind Kejriwal. His food is under camera observation; he is denied insulin. My husband is a sugar patient who has been

on insulin for 12 years; he needs 50 units of insulin daily,” Sunita said at the Ulgulan Nyay Rally in Ranchi. “We will fight against dictatorship and win. The gates of jail will break and Arvind Kejriwal and Hemant Soren will come out,” she said. Kejriwal was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on March 21 in a money laundering case linked to the now-scrapped Delhi excise policy. He is lodged in Tihar jail. The ED also arrested Soren on the night of January 31 in a money laundering case linked to an alleged land fraud. Kalpana also read out a message from jail by her husband Hemant Soren. “Arvind Kejriwal and my husband Hemant Soren were jailed just before the elections by forces that were hatching conspiracies against their governments,” she alleged. Reading out her husband’s message, she said, “Central agencies such as the ED and CBI are being misused to suppress the opposition’s voice but BJP and such forces will be driven out from Jharkhand.” Urging the people to show the “exit doors” to the BJP, she claimed that if the party wins the ongoing elections it would be a “big threat” to tribals. Kalpana Soren is likely to contest the bypoll to the Gandey Assembly seat, which is slated for May 20.

## BJP, AAP political showdown over insulin for Kejriwal

STAFF REPORTER ■  
NEW DELHI

Amidst politics over Asurrounding Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal’s diabetes treatment in Tihar jail, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader and Delhi Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj on Sunday alleged that the Tihar authorities have requested a diabetologist from AIIMS, contradicting their earlier claim of adequate medical facilities for diabetics in the prison. After the AAP shared a letter written by the Director General of Prisons requesting a senior AIIMS doctor for

Kejriwal, countering the prison authorities claim of adequate medical facilities in Tihar jail, Samajwadi party president Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday said high-level cognisance should be taken of the news that he is being denied insulin. Yadav in a post on X said, “Kejriwal has a fundamental right to good health. This news is unbelievable that he is being denied insulin to control his rising sugar level in jail. Immediate high level cognisance of this news should be taken and it should be found out whose instructions are behind this conspiracy.” He also used the hashtag

‘Give\_Insulin\_to\_Kejriwal’ and ‘Nahi\_Chahiye\_BJP’ in his post. Reacting to this, South Delhi BJP candidate and leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri said the AAP is trying to make Kejriwal’s issue alive to get sympathy vote in the upcoming Lok Sabha. “AAP leaders are playing a victim card but they are silent on corruption in their eight years rule. Team Kejriwal is the biggest liar in the country. Their politics depends on fake narratives. Look how they conduct four to five press conferences on the same issue, just to spread lies,” he added.

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# Baripada hottest at 44.6 deg in State

BBSR records 41.6 deg

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

As many as thirty places in the State recorded maximum temperatures at 40 degrees Celsius or above on Sunday. Baripada recorded the day's highest temperature of 44.6 degree.

Baripada was followed by

Nuapada at 44 degree, Talcher 43.8, Jharsuguda and Keonjhar 43.6 each, Angul 43.3, Balangir 43.2, Boudh and Sundargarh 43 each, Dhenkanal 42.9, Titilagarh 42.5, Rourkela 42.1, Bhawanipatna and Nayagarh 42 each, Chandbali and Hirkud 41.9 each, Bhadrak 41.8, Malkangiri and Sambalpur 41.7 each ,said the Regional Office of the India Metreological Department (IMD) here.

The twin cities of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack recorded 41 degree each.

There would be no large change in the maximum temperature during the next 24 hours while there would be a gradual fall by 2 to 3 degree during thesubsequent three days and a rise by 2 degree to 3 degree thereafter at many places in the districts of the State, said the IMD.

## Surge in wildfire incidents

### 5,375 fire points detected in 7 days in State

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

With the progressing summer, the rising number of forest fires across Odisha has raised concern of environmentalists and nature lovers. As many as 5,375 fire points were detected in different forests of the State during the last seven days, a Forest Survey of India (FSI) data revealed on Saturday.

These fire points were detected in different forests of Malkangiri, Nabarangpur, Koraput, Kalahandi, Rayagada, Balangir, Jharsuguda, Kandhamal, Sundargarh, Gajapati, Ganjam, Sambalpur, Deogarh, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Nuapada, Bargarh, Angul, Boudh, Nayagarh, Khordha,



FSI source mentioned.

Worth mentioning, any fire hotspot detected by satellite i.e. MODIS and/or SNPP-VIIRS sensors which gets filtered in the forest area of India [based on either state RFA (Recorded Forest Area) or state FCM (Forest Cover Maps) as per FSI] is regarded as a 'forest

Probably, the wildfires raged due to a rise in the temperature and dry weather conditions.

Notably, 1,564 fire points had previously been detected in different forests of the State between April 7 and 14. Since then, there has been a substantial rise.

# 115 fire points at Similipal till now

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Altogether 115 fire points were reported from the Similipal National Park and Tiger Reserve in Mayurbhanj district till April 20 (Saturday) this year, revealed the Forest Department on Sunday.

All these fire points were extinguished by employees of the department, said Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) Susanta Nanda.

He further claimed that the fire points at Similipal were detected and extinguished in time and they could not cause any damage to the flora and fauna.

"Till yesterday, Similipal sanctuary had received fire alerts for 115 points this year and all were extinguished by our green soldiers in time before it could cause any damage in scorching heat," said Nanda in a Twitter (X) post.

Earlier, there were media reports that at least 134 fire points were reported from Similipal between March 20 and April 20. The forest fire has caused extensive damage to the Similipal sanctuary and caused troubles for its wildlife, claimed the media reports.

The reports further stated that many wild animals are straying into human settlements due to the forest fire at Similipal.

# Two more die of sunstroke in State

Govt confirmation yet to be made

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

With Odisha sizzling under intense heat wave conditions, two persons, including a girl, believably died of sunstroke in two separate incidents in the State on Saturday.

Santosh Jena (34) of Osala village under the Korei police limits in Jajpur district was returning home by a motorcycle

at around noon when he fell from the two-wheeler. He was rescued and rushed to the Korei Community Health Centre, from where he was referred to the SCB Medical College Hospital in Cuttack for better treatment.

However, he died while an ambulance was being arranged to shift him to Cuttack.

In another incident, 21-year-old Bhubaneswari Das of Kaji Diha under the Madhupatna police limits in Cuttack city fell ill after reach-

ing home from college at around noon. She was taken to the SCB Hospital in an ambulance.

She was initially admitted to the heatstroke ward of the hospital and later shifted to an ICU, where she died during treatment.

It was being suspected that the two deaths were incidents of sunstroke. However, confirmation in this regard by any concerned official was yet to be made. The State Government has confirmed one sunstroke death so far.

## PhD candidates' selection in ILS raises eyebrows

Process non-transparent, allege scholars

SUMEET SHARMA ■ BHUBANESWAR

The recently-concluded interviews for the selections of ILS students at the Institute of Life Sciences (ILS), a premier institute in the country funded by Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Government of India, have raised eyebrows.

Some meritorious students, who have secured higher ranks in the examination conducted by the institute, have alleged that they have not been given the opportunity to work with the guides of their choice whereas the candidates with lower rank have been preferred

for the same.

They have also questioned why the selection and guide allocation to perspective PhD candidates has not been done transparently which is leading to disillusionment among hopeful PhD candidates.

It might be mentioned here that the ILS is not getting enough PhD scholars though it requires to carry out various research and development projects despite being one of the most prestigious institutes in the country.

Sources said the number of applicants for the PhD programme has decreased dramatically over the last couple of years and candidates, who get selected for the PhD programme, eventually, do not prefer to join here. This is severely impacting the

ability of the ILS to perform its duties to the nation in the research sector.

Notably, the PhD candidates are at the mercy of the guides from the time of the interview.

It might also be mentioned that there was an attempt by a scholar to harm herself due to torture by the PhD guide a few months back in the institute. The scientists do not seem to care about the PhD scholars.

Besides that, the institute had also illegally fired some efficient employees last year. Later, some of them were re-hired due to the illegal nature of their firing.

The scholars have alleged that the ILS has a habit of making the recruitments in a non-transparent manner.

## Parties urged for rehab of youths, ecosystem restoration

Those vulnerable to climate change

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The 'Youth4Water India', a campaign initiated by Water Initiatives, WaterAid India and sixty-eight other organisations, released a 23-point manifesto for political parties contesting in the general elections urging upon them to commit to special rehabilitation and support programmes for the youth who are most vulnerable to climate change impacts such as sea-level rise and displacement.

"This manifesto was prepared based on interviews and focus-group discussions involving 100 youth from Odisha coasts, especially from villages that are facing the wrath of an invading sea, conducted by our volunteers, it was then supported by inputs from experts. Our experience of working with such villages for the last more than three decades also helped strengthen the manifesto," said convenor of Water Initiatives and co-founder - cum - mentor of the 'Youth4Water' campaign Ranjan Panda.

"Odisha is one of the highly vulnerable geographies in the

world when it comes to climate change impacts, and sea-level rise and related impacts could displace thousands of people from more than 300 villages. While many villages are already submerged under the sea, many more are on the verge of being taken over. Putting up a strategy to deal with such a situation has become essential. With this manifesto, we urge upon each political party to support a 'strategy for inclusive rehabilitation of climate displaced communities,' that we have already suggested to the State Government," added Panda, informing, the manifesto's relevance is for the entire country.

"Besides covering a host of suggested initiatives that can help vulnerable youth get their rightful support from the system, the manifesto also covers provisioning of 'Water, Sanitation and Hygiene' for both the people who choose to stay and the ones who choose to move," said technical specialist - Water at the WaterAid India, Bikash Pati who was also involved in guiding the survey.

"The youth who were covered under the survey have demanded for several layers

of protection including employment guarantee with dignified income, health insurance, right to education, and so on. We are sure the political parties will support the manifesto as climate displacement and migration have already become a huge area of concern for the policy makers and Odisha is a hotspot in this regard," added Pati.

Dhaneswar Mallick of the Astaranga area, a youth actively involved in the survey, demanded for safe drinking water, safety for girls who are migrating out, involvement of youth in all the eco-restoration initiatives and provisioning of local employment opportunities for youth who don't want to move out of their native areas.

For Manjulata Swain from Satabhaya area, another youth involved in the survey, safety of girls and equal wage opportunity for them must be the priority of all political parties contesting the elections. She emphasised on the inhuman condition of transport modes which carry migrant workers and suggested better and dignified ways of transport with all basic amenities provided.

## INBRIEF

### AMIT SHAH TO VISIT ODISHA ON APR 25

Bhubaneswar: Union Minister of Home Affairs Amit Shah would arrive in Sonepur town of Subarnapur district on April 25, a BJP State leader informed on Sunday. He is to address a huge public gathering in Sonepur in the afternoon as part of the BJP's electioneering ahead of the General Elections. From there, Shah would proceed to Bhubaneswar and take part in a discussion with senior BJP State leaders. He would stay in Bhubaneswar at night and return to New Delhi the next morning.



### GOVT ANNOUNCES SCHOOL SUMMER VACATION FROM APR 25

Bhubaneswar: In view of the prevailing intense heat wave conditions across Odisha, the State Government on Sunday declared summer vacation in all schools for students from April 25. Besides, based on the weather forecast, the



government has decided to conduct morning classes for students for the next three days. As per the order, the morning classes will be held in all government and private schools from 6.30 am to 10.30 am between April 22 and 24.

### POLICE RED CROSS' WATER KIOSKS OPENED IN CITY

Bhubaneswar: As the temperature is soaring, in a bid to provide service to the commuters, the Indian Red Cross Society, Regional branch of the Commissionerate Police has opened



two water kiosks in front of the Capital and the Kharavel Nagar police stations. The kiosks were inaugurated by Commissionerate Police Red Cross chairman and Commissioner of Police Sanjeeb Panda. During the inauguration, Bhubaneswar DCP Prateek Singh, Zone 1 ACP Subhrakant Muduli and Red Cross executive committee member Dillip Dashsharma were present.

## Youtuber Monalisa, hubby under ED scanner

For hunting scheduled wild animals

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) will launch a probe against popular YouTuber Monalisa Bhadra of Odisha under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002.

Monalisa and her husband Badri Narayan Bhadra of Jajpur district were arrested by the Forest Department in March this year for hunting scheduled wild animals in violation of Sections 9 and 39 of Wildlife Protection Act 1972.

The Bhadra couple was accused of displaying scheduled wild animals in their social media accounts for pecuniary gains.

The YouTube account of the Bhadra couple (@Badrinarayan Bhadra) was blocked by the authorities concerned on the basis of the complaint lodged by the Forest Department.

The department had written to the Director of ED to invoke Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 against Monalisa and her husband.

"The accused persons had millions of subscribers for their YouTube and other social media platforms. It is suspected that they might have received hefty amounts as revenue from YouTube and social media platforms. It is requested to take necessary action as per provisions of Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002," said the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) and Chief Wildlife Warden of Odisha, Susanta Nanda, in his letter to the ED Director.

He had also urged the ED to initiate a probe under the Money Laundering Act against snake rescuer and YouTuber Mirza Mohammad Arif of Bhadrak district in Odisha. The Forest Department had arrested Arif for hunting scheduled wild animals in March this year.

## April 22: World Earth Day

# Say No to plastic; stop the pollution

SUNDARA NARAYANA PATRO

The World Earth Day on April 22, since its inception in 1970, has grown into a global movement, raising awareness about pressing ecological issues. From climate change to biodiversity loss, the Earth Day serves as a reminder of our collective responsibility to safeguard the planet for future generations. It inspires action, education and advocacy for a healthier, more sustainable

Earth.

Anthropogenic activities are the primary causes of the warming up of planet Earth, climate change, weather aberrations and such other miseries. The 'dangerous heat wave index' has gone up in a greater pace. Heat waves in India are 30 times more likely than they would be without climate change. Forest fire throughout the world has increased enormously in proportion. In Similipal, a forest of dense canopy, forest fire is menacing. The water storage capac-

ity in 150 major reservoirs in India has been reduced by 31 per cent.

Founded by American Senator Gaylord Nelson in the form of environmental education, the Earth Day was first celebrated on April 22, 1970.

This year, the Earth Day celebration is centred around the theme 'Planet vs. Plastics'. Plastic is a new-generation product. Plastic is non-biodegradable. The plastic is one of the biggest sources of environmental pollution. Micro-plastic is now a critical health haz-



ard problem. The theme aims to raise awareness of the harms of plastic pollution for human and planetary health.

Micro-plastic flows through our blood stream, adheres to our internal organs and carries with it heavy metals known to cause cancer and disease.

Now, this once-thought amazing and useful product has become something else and our health and that of all other living creatures hangs in the balance.

Plastics extend beyond an

imminent environmental issue; they present a grave threat to human health as alarming as climate change.

Plastic production now has grown to more than 380 million tonnes per year. All this plastic is produced by a petrochemical industry with an abysmal record of toxic emissions, spills and explosions.

"Say No to plastic. Stop the pollution. Be part of the solution."

(Dr Patro is president, Orissa Environmental Society)



## In Nabarangpur 3 including 2 women die as truck hits auto

PNS ■ NABARANGPUR

Three persons, including two women, were killed and eight others sustained grievous injuries when an auto-rickshaw by which they were travelling had a head-on collision with a speeding truck near Jodenga under the Raighar police station in Nabarangpur district on Sunday.

The identities of the de-

ceased and injured were yet to be ascertained, a police official said.

Reports said the mishap occurred when the truck driver was negotiating a turning by overtaking a passenger bus. About ten persons were travelling in the ill-fated three-wheeler.

Three occupants of the auto-rickshaw died on the spot. They were on their way

to attend the tenth-day ritual of a relative. The truck was on its way from Jeypore to Raipur.

Some locals rescued the injured and rushed them to a hospital in Jodenga.

On being informed, the Raighar police reached the spot and seized the two vehicles. Police registered a case in this connection and initiated a probe into the mishap.

## In Aul Ex-MLA sells land to meet daughter's poll expenses!

RAJESH BEHERA ■ KENDRAPADA

To contest the poll is certainly not the cup of tea of a person with poor financial strength as these days elections have become highly expensive, at times running into crores.

As a matter of fact, a former MLA has had to sell his ancestral property to meet his daughter's poll expenses who

is contesting elections this time.

According to sources, the incident has happened in Aul. Though he and his father are former MLAs with their family representing a rich political legacy, former Congress MLA Debendra Sharma whose daughter is contesting election from Aul Assembly seat this time didn't have the resources required to meet the expenses.

Consequently, he sold off his 5 decimal homestead land in his native village at Niala village recently to meet election expenses of his daughter.

Notably, Debendra represented Aul Assembly constituency from 2014 to 2019. "As I am sick and cannot contest the poll, so my supporters forced my daughter Debasmita to contest the poll from the Aul segment, where

I and my father were MLAs from Congress party. But since my daughter will be locking horns with rich and influential leaders including incumbent MLA and royal scion Pratap Deb, who is likely to spend hugely, I decided to sell a portion of my ancestral property to arrange money to fight the poll," said Debendra.

"Respecting the senti-

ments of Congress supporters and my father I tendered my resignation from the Government job and decided to contest the poll. I know it is going to be a tough one to cross the poll hurdles against the opponent BJD MLA Pratap Keshari Deb, but I have prepared accordingly," said Debasmita, who is a doctor by profession and has been fielded by the Congress.

## In Kendrapada Cong nominees begin campaign with Baladevjew darshan

RAJESH BEHERA ■ KENDRAPADA

The Congress candidates for various Assembly seats and Kendrapada Lok Sabha seat on Saturday kicked off their poll campaign by a darshan of Lord Baladevjew here.

According to sources, Congress candidate for Kendrapada Parliamentary constituency, Siddharth Swarup Das, for Aul Dr Debasmita sharma, for Patkura, Ratikanta Kanungo, for Rajnagar, Ashok Pratihari, besides former MLA Prasant Kumar Rout and Sipra Mallick, who recently joined Congress by leaving BJD and DCC members participated in a motorbike rally from Tinimuhani to the Ichapur-based Baladevjew temple. Nearly, two thousands of Congress supporters participated in the rally.

"When a new work starts everybody takes the blessings of Almighty. As Lord Baladevjew is the presiding deity of our district, so I



wanted to kick off my poll campaign by taking the blessings of the Lord," stated MP nominee Das.

When asked about desertion of stalwarts like Ganeshwar Behera and Anshuman Mohanty from Congress and their joining the BJD camp, the Congress leaders stated that they were opportunists and their absence would have no impact on the poll prospects of the party.

"Only for personal gain they jumped to BJD; so it would not affect the Congress party as it is a national party. The voters are now conscious and they know what is the motive behind these leaders for leaving the party and joined the rival camp. The Janatajanardhan( voters) would definitely choose their right candidate," opined a leader.

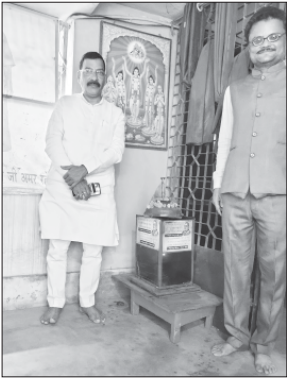
## BJP Dhenkanal LS Pravari meets Hota For better results in polls

PNS ■ DHENKANAL

BJP State vice president and Dhenkanal Lok Sabha Pravari Golak Prasad Mohapatra on Friday met BJP leader Er Debashisha Hota at his home and discussed for an hour with him for better results in Assembly and Parliament polls. Mohapatra first gave respect to Akhand Jyoti which covered all districts of Odisha demanding CBI enquiry of Swami Laxmananand's murder led by Hota.

Notably, a news was published in The Pioneer in which it was mentioned that since selfish people like Lekhasri Samantsinghar and Bhruhu Buxipatra were in high positions in the BJP cadre for a long period, BJP could not come to power in Odisha during 2019 despite a heavy Modi wave and possessing lakhs of dedicated party workers.

According to Er Hota, lakhs of workers like him became members of BJP for the last



many years only for the solution of problems related to Rastra-Dharma. Their sole aim is not to be an MLA or MP. He said he himself has been a BJP member for the last 23 years. BJP never gave him any top position in the party or tickets to be an MLA or MP.

"I am happy that Mohapatra today came to my home after reading yesterday's news published in the Pioneer newspaper and if the party could implement my suggestions, then certainly the party's performance in the Assembly and Parliament polls would be improved," Er Hota said on the occasion.

## Balikuda-Erasama seat Dissidence grows over BJP nominee choice

KAHNU NANDA ■ JAGATSINGHPUR

Dissidence has been growing in the BJP cadre in Balikuda area after the party gave ticket to one Satya Sarathi Mohanty for the Balikuda-Erasama Assembly seat for this election.

As many as six saffron party leaders were aspirants for party ticket from the seat and they have been openly revolting against party higher-ups, mainly State president Manmohan Samal.

They have claimed that the candidature of Mohanty was not acceptable to them. "We request party seniors to reconsider the decision and change

Mohanty's ticket for the Balikuda- Erasama seat and field a candidate having winnability factor," they said at a meet in Balikuda recently.

One of the dissatisfied leaders, Siba Brata Das hit out at the BJP leadership. He alleged that without considering the ground reality of the party in the constituency, the top leaders have awarded ticket to Mohanty who made his appearance in Balikuda area just six months ago eying the party ticket for 2024 elections. The true BJP sympathizers and ticket aspirants who are in the party in Balikuda and Erasama areas for the last five years have been ignored, Das lamented.

Another party leader and State BJP executive body member Sanjaya Mohanty who was an aspirant for ticket alleged that money transaction was made to get party ticket.

Ironically, party ticket holder Mohanty who is not capable of winning even a panchayat sarpanch or ward member election is dreaming of becoming the MLA of Balikuda- Erasama, said Dr Sasanka Sahani.

Sources informed that these six rebel BJP leaders have the potential in Balikuda and Erasama areas. Former Minister late Damodar Rout had contested the Balikuda-Erasama Assembly seat in

## DBF holds eye camp for underprivileged

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Dalmia Bharat Foundation (DBF), the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) arm of Dalmia Bharat Limited (DBL) in collaboration with Care Netram, an organization for vision care for the underprivileged, organized a free eye check-up camp at the Occupational Health Centre at Dalmia Cement's Cuttack plant-Kapilas Cement Works



(KCW), Odisha.

The camp provided accessible and affordable vision care services benefitting 94 individuals from the periphery villages of Suniupada, Biswali,

Kanpur, Kushapada, Garudagaon, Kanamira, Aamiyajhari, Byree, Mania, Sapanpur, Barunia, and other KCW workers, employees and their families. During the check-up, spectacles were provided at subsidized rates to persons with refraction defects.

Patients with conditions such as cataracts and retina abnormalities were counselled for further evaluation and referred to for treatment in

Bhubaneswar. Notably, four special cases were counselled for cataract operations free of cost at the affiliated hospital, Vision Care in Bhubaneswar.

Commenting on the initiative, Deputy Executive Director, DCBL and Unit Head-KCMW, Bhavesh Wala stated, "At Dalmia Bharat, we are committed to making a positive difference in the communities we are a part of, ensuring sustainable development."

## Dilip Ray in poll fray Rourkela to witness keen fight between BJP, BJD

It remains to be seen whether Sarada or Dilip will make record as both are 3-time MLAs

AUROBINDA DAS ■ ROURKELA

Finally, BJP has declared former Union Minister Dilip Ray as its MLA candidate for Rourkela Assembly seat for the 2024 simultaneous elections in the State.

Of course, it was presumed from the day Ray knocked on the door of the Delhi High Court, seeking a stay order on his three years' conviction pronounced by the CBI Court

in October 2020 for his alleged involvement as Union Minister of State for Coal in irregularities of coal block allotment in Jharkhand. But it was always in suspense whether he would prefer a ticket from BJD or BJP. However, the speculation was put to an end after BJD declared sitting MLA and Minister Sarada Prasad Nayak as its candidate for Rourkela on April 5.

With Ray getting the ticket from BJP, it is clear that a big fight between BJD and BJP is in the offing. Congress is not in the race and it would struggle to retain the security. So, now the talk in the city is who would make the record by winning for the fourth term in Rourkela as both Nayak and Ray have won thrice each as MLA.



Dilip Ray

Sarada Nayak

Ray won in 1985, 1990 and 2014 while Nayak won from the seat in 2004, 2009 and 2019. The only difference is Nayak has been participating in electoral politics since 2000 while Ray after the shameful defeat in 1995 was virtually inactive till 2014. Though he became MLA in 2014 by defeating Nayak but before completing the tenure he resigned from the post and primary membership of BJP as his repeated demands for Rourkela were not fulfilled by the Modi Government at the Centre. His slogan then was 'mati aga,

party pachha' (first soil, then party). Since then, he has remained in the wilderness.

Now after getting relief of 'stay' of his punishment of 3 years imprisonment and Rs 10 lakh fine (sentenced by CBI Court on October 6, 2020) by Delhi High Court, he has succeeded to obtain a ticket from BJP to contest from Rourkela seat. So, once again Rourkela will witness the replica of 2014 as both Nayak and Ray are powerful leaders and key contenders. But in comparison to 2014, the battle of 2024 will be stiffer, feel many political experts here.

According to them due to the incident of May 29, 2012 (Pyaribabu's coup bid where Nayak was allegedly with Pyari), Nayak was quite defamed and he had many oppositions in his party. Though he patiently con-

tinued his political activities and succeeded to win the confidence of party boss and obtained the ticket, but taking advantage of the situation and cashing in on the advantage of BJD rebellions and Modi-wave, Ray got elected in 2014. Despite losing the election, Nayak never left politics or Rourkela. Rather, he continued his activities more vibrantly for which he again won in 2029 and is now a Minister.

On the other hand, after winning the 2014 election, Ray was available in the city on very rare occasions and resigned from the position of MLA on November 30, 2018. He also sent a joint resignation with Bijay Mohapatra from the party. "It is with deep anguish that I have decided to quit as the member of State Legislative

Assembly as well as from the membership of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)," Ray said in a twitter post at that time.

Even putting the Prime Minister in dock, he said due to the nonfulfillment of promises made by Modi regarding two important projects of 2nd Brahmani bridge and upgradation of Ispat General Hospital to a Medical College and Super Specialty Hospital during his election campaign in Rourkela, the party as well as he himself (Ray) became a liar before the Rourkela people. So, considering his priority of 'mati' (soil), he quit the party. Even in the 2019 election, he had played a passive role for BJD. But suddenly arriving at Rourkela on April 10, he said he is still in the BJP as his resignation was not accepted.

# Iran-Israel conflicts: Challenges for Indian diplomacy

West Asia is in news, as ever. This time Iran and Israel are in the battlefield. Iran's attack on Israel early Sunday came in response to what it is discussed was an Israeli strike on Iran's Consulate in Syria on April 1. Israel's military chief asserted that his country would respond to the Iranian attack, while world leaders caution against retaliation trying to avoid a spiral of violence. Even, Pope Francis, while speaking to pilgrims in St. Peter's Square, said, Iran's drone missile attack on Israel has given him pain and he is concerned. He urged both Iran and Israel to avoid steps that could feed a spiral violence that risked plunging the West Asia deeper into conflict. He also added that, "No one should threaten the existence of oth-



BISHNUPRIYA PADHI

ers. All nations should stand, instead, for peace, and help Israelis and Palestinians to live in two States, side by side, in safety." He called for ceasefire in Gaza and negotiations to allow humanitarian aid to be provided for its people and to help free Israeli hostages seized by Hamas in its October 7, 2023 attack on Israel.

Enough war, enough attack, instead, for peace. Yes to dialogue, yes to peace.

As situation unfolds, on April 18, 2024, the US and UK imposed a new round of sanctions on Iran as concern grows that Tehran's unprecedented attack on Israel could fuel a wider war in West Asia. Treasury Office of Foreign Assets Control targeted 16 people and two entities in Iran that produce engines that power the drones used in April 14 attack. The UK is targeting several Iranian military organizations, individuals and entities involved in Iran's drone and ballistic missile industries. European Union leaders have also vowed to ramp up sanctions as Iran is targeting its drone and missile deliveries to proxies in Gaza, Yemen and Lebanon. EU foreign policy chief,

Josep Borrel, is in favour of strengthening and expanding further sanctions to punish Iran. At the same time, he also expressed his views in no uncertain terms saying that Israel needs to exercise restraint.

"I don't want to exaggerate, but we are on the edge of a war, a regional war in the Middle East, which will be sending shockwaves to the rest of the world, and in particular to Europe. So, stop it," he warned.

As on date, Iran has fired air defence batteries to shoot down three drones over Isfahan, as regional tensions rise. Anonymous US officials have told US media that Israel launched an attack against a site in Iran, but Israel army has yet to comment. Foreign Ministers from Group Seven major democracies called on

Israel and Iran to de-escalate hostilities in West Asia following Israel's retaliatory strikes in Central Iran earlier today, Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani told.

**Challenges for Indian Diplomacy**

This unprecedented turn of the shadow war into real war between the two power houses in West Asia puts Indian diplomacy to litmus test.

As expressed by Bhopinder Singh, in his article, the enduring ties between India and Iran, in The Pioneer dated, April 19, 2024, "The template of 'strategic interdependence' (used in the Russian-Ukraine conflict), could be afforded to this conflict which conjoins morality with practicality to take a deliberately mealy-mouthed position that offends none and yet genuinely beseeches peace."

It is worth reiterating that Indian leadership has spoken to their counterparts in the region such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Israel, Egypt, Jordan and Palestine expressing concern about the possible escalation of conflict at the time of attack by Hamas in Southern Israel on October 7, 2023. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi had also exchanged views over telephone on the matter. On January 25-26, during French President, Emmanuel Macron's visit to India, PM Modi and President Macron expressed grave concerns over the conflict, including the Red Sea.

India has strategic ties with both Iran and Israel for decades. It has been maintaining the balance between the two. If the conflict gets out of

hand, it would be difficult for India to maintain an ambivalent position.

With Iran, India has close trade and economic relations. Iran also plays a key role in India's energy security. From the point of geopolitics, it is the gateway to Central Asia. There are about 5,000 to 10,000 Indians in Iran. About 90 lakh Indians work in the Gulf and West Asian region. Indian Diaspora of that regions is a main source of remittance. Any conflict in that region would pose great risk to Indian communities. Besides, the West Asian region accounts for 80% oil supplies to India. India has been able to minimize the impact of oil prices due to the Russian-Ukraine War by buying Russian oil at a discounted price, but the conflict will have ad-

verse impact on energy prices.

With Israel, India has growing and ever expanding multi-dimensional ties: trade, technology, defence, security, intelligence sharing and agriculture. Therefore, peace and stability in West Asia is of paramount importance for India. India is also close to the backers of both sides: with US, which is solidly behind Israel, and with Russia which fully backs Iran.

India's diplomacy is having a tough time ahead. For larger national interests, India should use backdoor channel, and civilisational bonhomie, to de-escalate the situation as both the countries are vital to India which needs to prioritize peace over binary choice.

(Prof Dr Padhi is a researcher, specialising on international diplomacy)



# Tirthankaras teachings on non violence gained new relevance: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said here teachings of Indian Tirthankaras have gained a new relevance at a time when “many countries are getting into wars” and , asserted that India is making a place for itself as “Vishwa Bandhu in a divided world.” Addressing the 2,550th Bhagwan Mahaveer Nirvan Mahotsav, he also said India is now projecting the principles of truth and non-violence on the global fora as a solution to the problems in the world, and its cultural image is playing a big role in it as well. The Prime Minister also released a commemorative stamp and a coin on the occasion and thanked the Jain community for their blessings. He said his Government put emphasis on promoting her-

itage as well as material development when it came to power in 2014 at a time when the country was engulfed in despair, a swipe at the previous UPA dispensation. He cited his Government's promotion of Indian heritage like yoga and Ayurveda, asserting that the country's new generation now believes that self-pride is its identity. Modi praised the dance drama ‘Vartaman Mein Vardhaman’ that was showcased on the occasion and said the dedication of the youth towards the values of Bhagwan Mahaveer is a sign of the nation moving forward in the right direction. Modi also bowed before the Jain saints present at the event and conveyed his best wishes to all on the auspicious occasion of Mahaveer Jayanti on Sunday. In his address, he said the “teachings of our Tirthankaras have gained a new relevance in the time when, globally, many



countries are getting into wars”. Tirthankaras are gurus or preachers of Jainism. Modi recalled the philosophies

such as Anekantavada and Syadvada that teach people to look at all the aspects and embrace the views of others

too. Today, humanity is expecting peace from India in these times of conflict, he said. The “new role” of this “New India”

is being credited to India's growing capabilities and foreign policy. “But, I want to tell you that the our cultural image has a big role in it,” he said. “Today we put forward the principles of truth and non-violence with full confidence on the global fora. We tell the world that the solution to global problems is found in the ancient Indian culture and tradition. This is why India is making a place for itself as ‘Vishwa Bandhu’ in a divided world”, the prime minister added. He mentioned India's initiatives such as Mission LiFE for combating climate change and the vision of ‘One Earth One Family and One Future’ along with a roadmap of One World-One Sun-One Grid and International Solar Alliance. During his address, Modi also paid tributes to Acharya Shri Vidyasagar Maharaj who passed away in February and

recalled his recent meeting with him, saying “his blessings are still guiding us”. Referring to the Lok Sabha polls, he said a big festival of democracy is happening “and, the country believes from here a new journey into future will also begin”. The prime minister also suggested to the audience that they should use their franchise early in the day and added in a lighter vein that saints have links to lotus, a flower often used in holy events which also is the BJP's poll symbol. “We are celebrating Bhagwan Mahaveer's Nirvan Diwas even after 2500 years and I'm sure that the nation will continue to celebrate his values for thousands of years to come”, the he said. He asked people to follow the teachings of Bhagwan Mahaveer as revival of those values is the demand of the time. The prime minister said

that Jainism is the path of ‘jini’ or the victorious. The event is a rare occasion and is happening at the beginning of ‘Amrit Kaal’, Modi said, adding the country is working to make centenary year of freedom a “golden centenary”. The Prime Minister underlined that the idea of ‘Amrit Kaal’ is not merely a resolution but India's spiritual inspiration. “For India, modernity is its body, spirituality is its soul. If spirituality is removed from modernity, anarchy is born,” he said. Modi said India is emerging from the period of corruption and despair as more than 25 crore Indians have come out of poverty. Union ministers of state for Culture Arjun Ram Meghwal and Meenakashi Lekhi were also present on the occasion among other dignitaries and saints from the Jain community.

## Steel cutting ceremony of Cadet Training Ship held at TN shipyard

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

Steel Cutting ceremony of the third Cadet Training Ship (Yard-18005) was held at L&T Shipyard, Kattupalli, Tamil Nadu on Saturday. The ceremony was presided by Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane in the presence of Arun Ramchandani, Executive Vice President, L&T Precision Engineering & System, navy said here. Giving details, officials said the contract for indigenous design and construction of three Cadet Training Ships was concluded between MoD and M/s L&T in March 2023. These Cadet Training Ships will be utilised for training officer cadets at sea after their basic training ashore. These ships



will also extend training facility to cadets from friendly foreign countries. These ships are likely to be delivered to the Indian Navy commencing Sep 2026. This is yet another significant

milestone in Indian Navy's pursuit towards indigenous shipbuilding and is in consonance with Government of India's vision of 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' and 'Make in India' initiative.

## Connecting Sikkim to railway network gets major boost

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

The Sivok-Rangpo Rail Project (SRRP), which will connect Sikkim to the railway network for the first time, has got a major boost with the completion of an 855-metre-long emergency exit tunnel. A 20-metre section of the tunnel runs under National Highway (NH)-10, along the Teesta river, and according to officials, mining through its soft and loose soil was the most challenging part of the whole project as there was a high risk that it might cave in, snapping Sikkim's road connectivity with the rest of the country. “NH-10 is the only road network that connects Sikkim with other parts of the country. It was a huge challenge for us to mine a tunnel 18 metres below the highway, because the soil is very soft and loose, just like the river sand bed (fine to coarse-grained), with



alternate bands of pebble, cobble and boulders,” an official from Ircon International, which is constructing the project, said. “Mining for only that 20-metre distance, which is the width of NH-10 including

the impact areas on both sides along the highway, has been the most challenging moment of the project so far. We completed it successfully, without causing a single millimetre of deformation to the highway,” he added.

Railway officials said they used the secant-piling method, rarely used in tunnel mining. After getting it proof-checked by the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Ircon officials prepared a case study, explaining the ingenu-

ity of the mining work. The study says, “To provide fool-proof safety to NH-10, it was suggested to prepare a secant pile wall. Secant piles are designed by constructing reinforced concrete piles that interlock with each other and are reinforced with steel rebar. Typically, primary piles are cast in situ, leaving space in between them, and this is followed by secondary piles cut into the primary piles to form a continuous wall of piles.” The Sivok-Rangpo Rail Project (SRRP), covering a total length of 44.96 km between Sivok in West Bengal and Rangpo in Sikkim, has 14 tunnels, 22 bridges (13 major, nine minor) and five railway stations — Sivok, Riyang, Teesta Bazar, Melli and Rangpo. The Indian Railway has set a new deadline of August 2025 to finish the SRRP that will connect Sikkim with the rest of the country through the rail network for the first time.

## Researchers identify abnormal accumulation of proteins in cells that cause Alzheimer's



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

Researchers from Tokyo Metropolitan University have identified how proteins collect abnormally in neurons, a feature of neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's. They used fruit flies to show that depletion of mitochondria in axons can directly lead to protein accumulation. At the same time, significantly high amounts of a protein called eIF2β were found. Restoring the levels to normal led to a recovery in protein recycling. Such findings promise new treatments for neurodegenerative diseases. Every cell in our bodies is a busy factory, where proteins are constantly being produced and disassembled. Any changes or lapses in either the production or recycling phases can lead to serious illnesses. Neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's and Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), for example, are known to be accompanied by an abnormal build-up of proteins in neurons. However, the trigger behind this accumulation remains unknown. A team led by Associate Professor Kanae Ando of Tokyo Metropolitan University have been trying to determine the causes of abnormal protein build-up by studying Drosophila fruit flies, a commonly studied model organism that has many key similarities with human physiology. They focused on the presence of mitochondria in axons, the long tendril-like appendages that stretch out of neurons and form the neces-

sary connections that allow signals to be transmitted inside our brains. It is known that the levels of mitochondria in axons can drop with age, and during the progress of neurodegenerative diseases. Now, the team have discovered that the depletion of mitochondria in axons has a direct bearing on protein build-up. They used genetic modification to suppress the production of miltion, a key protein in the transport of mitochondria along axons. It was found that this led to abnormal levels of protein building up in fruit fly neurons, a result of the breakdown of autophagy, the recycling of proteins in cells. Through proteomic analysis, they were able to identify a significant upregulation in eIF2β, a key subunit of the eIF2 protein complex responsible for the initiation of protein production (or translation). The eIF2a subunit was also found to be chemically modified. Both of these issues hamper the healthy action of eIF2. Importantly, by artificially suppressing levels of eIF2β, the team discovered that they could restore the autophagy that was lost and regain some of the neuron function that was impaired due to axonal mitochondria loss. This not only shows that depletion of mitochondria in axons can cause abnormal protein accumulation, but that this happens via upregulation of eIF2β. As populations age and the prevalence of neurodegenerative conditions continues to increase, the team's findings present a vital step in developing therapies to combat these serious illnesses.

## Take action against hospitals involved in illegal organ transplants: Health Ministry

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

Alarmed at the kidney transplant racket which was busted in Jaipur, where a Bangladeshi national was found to have undergone a kidney removal procedure under suspicious financial arrangements, the Union health ministry has directed all states and Union Territories (UTs) to investigate violations and take necessary action against hospitals involved in illegal organ transplants. The recent case of the organ trafficking racket, involving Bangladeshi nationals, in Haryana and Rajasthan, seemed like a warning bell for the authorities, calling for urgency to address illegal

organ trafficking and ensuring ethical transplant practices across the country. Dr Atul Goel, Director General of Health Services (DGHS), Union Health Ministry in a letter to the States and authorities emphasized the need for regular collection and sharing of transplant data, including cases involving foreign nationals, with the National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation (NOTTO) on a monthly basis. He highlighted a surge in organ transplants involving foreigners and stressed the importance of monitoring such cases. The letter, issued on April 10, instructed the appropriate state authorities to investigate transplant cases involving foreign nationals and take action in



case of any violations of the Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act (THOTA), 1994.

This includes suspension of registration for hospitals engaged in illegal activities. “Investigate any violation of the

THOTA, 1994 and rules thereunder and take appropriate action including suspension of registration for performing Organ Transplant, of the hospitals involved in illegal activities,” the letter said. Furthermore, the ministry mandated the generation of a unique NOTTO-ID for both donors and recipients in all transplant cases, ensuring compliance with allocation protocols and timely identification. Regular inspections of registered transplant hospitals were also recommended to monitor activities and ensure quality transplantation. “It should be ensured that a unique NOTTO-ID for both donor and recipient is generated by the hospital from

website (Notto.Mohfw.Gov.In), in all cases of organ transplant, whether from a living donor or deceased donor,” the letter said. Despite previous requests, complete transplant data, especially regarding foreign cases, has not been consistently shared with NOTTO. The health ministry urged states and UTs to submit an action-taken report on these instructions within 15 days. A senior official from the Ministry said “the involvement of foreign nationals in these cases adds another layer of complexity, necessitating enhanced monitoring and regulation to prevent exploitation and uphold ethical standards in organ transplantation.”

## INDIA coalition Government will return country to higher growth trajectory, claims Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has caused an “unprecedented decline” in worker wages adjusted for price rise and said that an INDIA coalition Government will return the country to a higher growth trajectory. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said multiple data sources, including the Modi government's own official statistics, are unanimous in showing the simple fact that workers can buy less today than they could 10 years ago. A combination of slow wage growth and back-breaking inflation has caused an unprecedented decline in real wages, he said in a statement. “Labour Bureau's Wage Rate Index (Government Data): Between 2014 and 2023, real wages for labourers have stagnated, with clear declines in real wages in Modi-II,” he said. Ramesh also pointed out that the Ministry of Agriculture's Agricultural Statistics said that under former prime minister Manmohan Singh, real



wages for agricultural labourers grew at 6.8 per cent each year. “Under PM Modi, real wages for agricultural labourers declined by -1.3 per cent each year,” he said. “Periodic Labour Force Survey Series (Government Data): Average real earnings over time have stagnated between 2017 and 2022 across all employment types - salaried workers, casual workers, and self-employed workers,” he said in a statement. Citing Center for Labour Research and Action data, Ramesh said real wages of brick kiln workers have stagnated or declined between 2014 and 2022. Brick kilns involve intensive labour and are a low-paying work of last resort for India's

poorest, he pointed out. “Stagnant wages underpin the economy's poor performance under PM Modi: Real wages for India's people have stagnated since the PM came to office,” the Congress leader said in the statement. “Stagnant real wages have dragged down consumption growth as revealed by the NSSO's Consumption Expenditure Survey which showed a decline in rural consumption for the first time in almost 50 years (and which the Modi Sarkar tried to suppress),” he said. With slowing consumption growth and deepening fear, the private sector no longer has an incentive to invest in the economy, Ramesh argued. “Investment in India has dropped to historic low levels,

threatening our long-term growth: Investment as % of GDP (10-year average) was 33.4% under the UPA but just 28.7% under Modi. FDI as % of GDP rose from 0.8% in 2004 to 1.7% in 2014 under Manmohan Singh's stewardship. It has fallen to just 1.5% of GDP as of 2022,” the statement read. He further pointed out that manufacturing as a percentage of GDP (10-year average) fell from 16.5 per cent in UPA to 14.5 per cent under Modi and the gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) in India, or the total investment in fixed assets, averaged 32 per cent for the 10 years of Manmohan Singh, while the GFCF under Modi has been below 29 per cent for 10 years. “Together, all these factors are dragging down economic growth and causing an unemployment crisis,” Ramesh said. “In the economy, all good things go together. The UPA performed strongly on real wages for workers, private-sector investment, and consumption growth, enabling 7.5% real GDP growth rates, compared to the Modi Sarkar's 5.8% average,” he said in the statement.

## Jaro Education announces collaboration with CEC IIT Roorkee

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Leading higher Edtech firm, Jaro Education, has announced a transformative collaboration with the Continuing Education Centre at IIT Roorkee (CEC IITR), underscoring a shared commitment to inspiring excellence in a technology-driven world. “This collaboration signifies a significant moment in technical education, combining Jaro Education's expertise in business intelligence, marketing, and technology infrastructure with IIT Roorkee's unparalleled academic excellence,” the company said in a statement. Renowned for its excellence in higher technological education, engineering, and research, IIT Roorkee has long been regarded as a beacon of innovation and academic prowess. Consistently ranked among the world's top technological institutions, IIT Roorkee boasts a rich history of shaping the country's technical landscape. Through this strategic alliance, Jaro Education aims to leverage IIT Roorkee's esteemed faculty and cutting-

edge curriculum to offer new-age and holistic technical courses. “CEC IIT Roorkee is proud and excited to announce a collaborative effort with Jaro Education,” said Coordinator of Continuing Education Centre at IIT Roorkee. “This exciting new program leverages the strengths of both institutions to equip learners with the skills they need to flourish in today's technology-driven world. It aligns perfectly with CEC's commitment to providing learners with the knowledge and tools needed to navigate the ever-evolving landscape of our professions,” the institute said in a statement. “We are excited to begin on this journey with top Institute like IIT Roorkee. This partnership presents an extraordinary opportunity to equip working professionals with cutting-edge skills tailored to the dynamic demands of today's rapidly evolving technological landscape. We empower individuals to not just survive, but thrive in the face of relentless disruption,” said CEO at Jaro Education, Ranjita Raman.



# BJP banks on Modi magic, development to tide over Rajput ire in Chittorgarh

PTI ■ CHITTORGARH

Facing protests from a section of the Rajput community over Union Minister Parshottam Rupala's remarks, the BJP in Rajasthan's Chittorgarh — a Rajput-dominated seat — is hoping that the 'Modi factor' and the development work undertaken by his Government will help it retain the Lok Sabha constituency.

Meanwhile, the Congress is raising the issues of farmer welfare and inflation to seek votes from the people of constituency, which goes to the polls in the second phase of the ongoing general elections on April 26. The BJP has fielded its State president C P Joshi from the seat while the Congress has placed its bet on former state minister Udailal Anjana.

Joshi, who won the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha polls from Chittorgarh, is aiming for a hat-trick of wins — an unprecedented feat — and cited the "increased rail connectivity, running of new trains and construction of new highways" in his constituency to highlight the development done by the BJP.

"Due to the development work, this region is about to change. I am confident that people of Chittorgarh constituency will choose development," Joshi told PTI.

Joshi, who is contesting the Lok Sabha elections for a third time, is hoping that the 'Modi factor' and the development work undertaken in the constituency will shield the



BJP from the negativity created against the party in the Rajput community.

Members of the Kshatriya community, also called Rajputs, have demanded that the BJP remove Rupala as the party candidate for the Rajkot Lok Sabha seat in Gujarat, following his remarks a few days back. Addressing a gathering in Rajkot on March 22, Rupala had remarked that erstwhile 'maharajas' succumbed to the persecution of foreign rulers as well as the Britishers. Rupala further said these maharajas broke bread with them and also married their daughters to them.

Though Rupala tendered an apology for his comments, the Rajputs refused to accept it.

Amid intensifying election campaigning, Anjana is presenting himself as 'Kisan Ka Beta' (son of a farmer) and is

seeking votes on the issue of farmers' welfare while cautioning people that the BJP is likely to end reservation for SCs, STs and OBCs if it gets more than 400 seats.

"Today, the Constitution is under threat. The BJP has made a joke of the Constitution. If they get more than 400 seats, then reservation to STs, SCs, OBCs will be abolished," he said.

While Joshi refuted the claim, saying the BJP was not against reservation and accused the Congress of being anti-Dalit, the Congress' narrative appeared to influence some people from the reserved categories.

"Reservation is our right and whether it is BJP or Congress, no government can withdraw this," Ramkishore Meena, a tribal in Gangrar town of Chittorgarh, said. Anjana also

promised Chittorgarh's opium cultivators to raise their issues in parliament, if he wins.

"I will not allow corruption in opium cultivation. I will work to get policies made in the interest of the farmers. Today injustice is being done to the farmers and there is no one to speak to them," he said.

Anjana said that inflation and unemployment were rising in the country under the BJP rule and the "distressed" people want a change.

Famous for its tales of bravery, heroism and patriotism, Chittorgarh's economy runs primarily on the cement industry while the marble and granite industries are booming, said Aanchal Bohra, an entrepreneur from the city.

Also, a lot of people are employed in ancillary activities like the transportation of cement and stones, he told PTI in Chittorgarh.

"Connectivity to Chittorgarh has significantly increased by road and by rail, which has positioned Chittorgarh on the economic corridor. Marble and granite industry is booming and chances of new cement factories coming up are increasing that will create more employment opportunities," Bohra said.

"The locals here understand the trickle-down impact of infrastructure development in the region and therefore, they would go with development and future growth," he added.

Sunil Ojha, a local resident, said people have benefitted from the increased rail connectivity in the constituency.

# Intense battle in Kannur as Congress, CPM and BJP vie for dominance

PTI ■ KANNUR (KERALA)

The Northern Kerala constituency of Kannur is witnessing an intense battle between the Congress and the CPI(M), while the BJP is focusing on the newly registered young voters to make an impact in the seat.

With 39 percent minorities, including Muslims and Christians, the voters often support the CPI(M)-LDF in most of the assembly seats falling under this Parliament constituency in the polls to the legislature, but the Lok Sabha constituency has often swayed towards the Congress-led UDF, hoping to replace the BJP at the Centre.

The strong minority vote base is what helped the UDF win the seat as the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) is its major partner.

The rubber farmers in areas like Irikkur and Peravoor, predominantly Christians, have also been a strong vote bank for the Congress.

Hoping to retain the seat this time as well, the Congress has fielded Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee chief K Sudhakaran here. Considering his candidature in the seat, Sudhakaran had recently temporarily handed over his organisational responsibility to his party colleague M M Hassan. Sudhakaran did not want to contest the elections this time, but he entered the fray as the party leadership felt that there was nobody who could ensure a win in Kannur for Congress other than him, the party's local strongman.

"I am confident about the win and am only bothered about



bettering my majority," Sudhakaran, the sitting MP, told PTI during his campaign at Kandakassery near Payyavoor. Sudhakaran, who has landed in controversies several times by his remarks supporting the BJP during the fight between the saffron party and the CPI(M) in the district, reiterated that the main enemy of Congress in Kerala is the Left party.

"They are the enemy number 1 in Kerala, and the BJP comes only second. The BJP has no strength in Kerala, and our main fight is against the LDF, against their politics of violence," Sudhakaran said.

The Congress, in their campaigns in Kerala, mainly focuses on criticizing the Pinarayi Vijayan-led government because of this, he added.

The 75-year-old Sudhakaran is the topmost leader who helped Congress sustain its presence in the CPI(M)-dominated Kannur politics and hopes that people will support him once again to get to the Parliament. CPI(M), however, is not ready to let

history bother them and has fielded M V Jayarajan, the Kannur district secretary of the party.

Campaigning at Aichery in Irikkur, Jayarajan was received by enthusiastic party workers with drum beatings and paper flower spray. Without much of an introduction, he addressed the gathering, telling them to be aware of "the danger the country is in."

"The Congress has no politics to speak about and is now engaged in a defamation campaign against the LDF candidates," Jayarajan told the gathering, referring to allegations of cyberbullying against the party's candidate in the Vadakara Lok Sabha seat, K K Shailaja, allegedly by the workers of the Congress-led UDF.

"The LDF is going to win back Kannur this time. Congress has been taking a stand to support the BJP. They do not want to speak about the key issues and are only involved in a defamation campaign against LDF candidates due to a fear of losing," Jayarajan alleged, while talking to PTI.

# KCR to undertake roadshows ahead of Lok Sabha elections

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

BRS president and former Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao will undertake roadshows for 17 days beginning April 24 as part of his campaign for the Lok Sabha polls.

The roadshow programme will begin at Miryalguda, about 140 kms from Hyderabad, on April 24 and it will end at the district headquarters town of Siddipet on May 10. Polling for the 17 Lok Sabha seats in Telangana will be held on May 13.

The roadshows will be held in various Lok Sabha constituencies, including Bhuvanagiri, Mahabubnagar, Nagarkurnool, Warangal, Khammam, Mahabubabad, Nizamabad, Medak and Karimnagar, according to the route plan for roadshows released by BRS on Sunday.

Rao, also known as KCR, has already kicked off his campaign for the Lok Sabha polls with rallies at Chevella near here and in Andole assembly constituency.

BRS had won nine of the 17 Lok Sabha seats in 2019. Following its shock defeat in the Telangana Legislative Assembly polls held in November last year, the regional party is now making efforts to bounce back with a decent performance in the parliament elections.

The BRS has seen a number of party leaders switching over to either the ruling Congress or the BJP recently.

# Shobha Karandlaje under pressure to win in her party stronghold

PTI ■ BENGALURU

After she was shifted to Bangalore North segment for the coming Lok Sabha elections, Union Minister Shobha Karandlaje is determined to prove a point or two and wants to ensure that BJP continues its winning streak here.

Bangalore North has remained a BJP stronghold since 2004 and the 57-year-old is banking on the "Modi factor". She is facing Congress candidate and former Rajya Sabha member M V Rajeev Gowda, who is putting up a

spirited fight. Both belong to the Vokkaliga community. Karandlaje is a two-time MP from Udupi-Chikmagalur but was moved out after she faced a "Go back Shobha" campaign there from a section of her party.

Karandlaje has been telling people how India is on the development path in the past 10 years under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership.

"This is an election to save India's culture and 'Sanatan' traditions," the Union Minister of State for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, who hails from



coastal Karnataka, said.

According to BJP sources, she has a strong backing of former Chief Minister and

BJP stalwart B S Yediyurappa.

Since 2004, BJP is holding this seat, which was a

Congress fortress from 1952 to 2004 barring the 1996-1998 period when the then Janata Dal's C Narayanaswamy was the MP. Former Railway Minister late C K Jaffer Sharief was the longest serving MP of this constituency who represented it seven times, including for five terms uninterruptedly from 1977 to 1996.

Since 2004, BJP had three MPs from here-- former Karnataka Director General of Police H T Sangliana, late D B Chandre Gowda and former Union Minister D V Sadananda Gowda, who

were all considered "outsiders".

Of the eight Assembly segments under Bangalore North, five are represented by the BJP and the rest by the Congress.

Karandlaje is known for indulging in "communally divisive" speech and polarisation which people don't want here, alleges Rajeev Gowda, who is making his debut in the Lok Sabha elections.

People want to enjoy a good quality of life and grow and prosper, and don't want this area to become communally charged and divided, says

the former Professor of Indian Institute of Management Bangalore where he taught economics and policy. The Chairman of the AICC Research Department appeared upbeat about his electoral prospects. There is no Modi wave in Karnataka in this Lok Sabha election, the 60-year-old claimed.

It's the five guarantee schemes of the Siddaramaiah-led Congress government delivered within 10 months of coming to power that are helping people who are in trouble, he said. Also, the "sense of

injustice" to Karnataka (in terms of devolution of funds by Centre) and the (dismal) record of the previous BJP government here are what will work in favour of the Congress, he added.

"We did not get proper candidates", a voter said referring to BJP fielding "outsiders" here in the last few elections.

"People who were rejected elsewhere have been dumped here on us. We are not happy," the voter added.

Nearly 12,000 voters opted for 'None Of The Above' in the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha polls here.

# BJP Chandigarh candidate pins hope on Modi wave, local roots for landslide win

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

Local roots and a "strong Modi wave" will help him score a "landslide" victory in the Chandigarh Lok Sabha election, feels BJP candidate Sanjay Tandon.

Tandon took a dig at Congress candidate Manish Tewari, who fought the 2009 and 2019 Lok Sabha polls from Ludhiana and Anandpur Sahib in Punjab, saying, "Chandigarh needs a person who is one of them and who has been with them through thick and thin."

The BJP has been calling Tewari an "outsider" in Chandigarh while the Congress leader has hit back, saying he has local roots.

The 2024 Lok Sabha elections in Chandigarh will be held in a single phase on June 1. The votes will be counted on June 4. Sixty-year-old Tandon, the son of former Chhattisgarh governor and one of the founding members of the Jan Sangh late Balamaji Das Tandon, has replaced incumbent MP Kirron Kher while the Congress has named senior party leader Tewari (58), for the electoral fight in Chandigarh.

Kher won the lone Chandigarh seat in the 2014 and 2019 general elections, defeating Congress' Pawan Kumar Bansal. Bansal was elected MP from Chandigarh in 1991, 1999, 2004 and 2009.

This time, the Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party, which are part of the INDIA bloc, are fighting the polls from Chandigarh in an alliance.

"There is a strong Modi wave," Tandon asserted.

When BJP workers visit

people's houses while campaigning, they are told, 'Saada vote Modi nu (our vote is for Modi)', Tandon said, adding, "We are heading for a landslide victory." He claimed that the people of Chandigarh are enthusiastic over his nomination as he is a local resident and has a connection with them. A poll campaign named — 'Hamara Sanjay Tandon' —has been initiated, he said.

"I will be going door-to-door and there will be a heart-to-heart connect," said Tandon, a chartered accountant by profession. He said he had been working for the people of the city for the last several years and was available for them whenever they faced any problem.

Replying to a question on Tewari's statement that he was born and raised in Chandigarh, the BJP leader said it is for the people of Chandigarh to decide who is a local resident and who is not.

"Chandigarh needs a person who is one of them. Chandigarh needs a person who has been available for them," he told PTI here.

"Let the people decide who has been available for them and let the people decide who understands the issues of Chandigarh and let the people decide 'Chandigarh ka beta kaun hai' (who is the son of Chandigarh)," he added.

Tewari had to tell people that he was born in Chandigarh whereas, "people here know me. If 50 people come to meet me, I know the names of 40 of them," Tandon, who served as the president of the Chandigarh BJP for nearly a decade, said.

# Congress synonym for scams, terrorism, Naxalism: Yogi

PTI ■ RAIPUR

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday hit out at the Congress, claiming the grand old party is a synonym for scams, terrorism and Naxalism.

Addressing an election rally in Chhattisgarh's Kabirdham district, he said the wait of 500 years for Ram Lalla (installation of his idol) in Ayodhya ended because of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.



Kabirdham district comes under the Rajnandgaon Lok Sabha constituency.

"Congress is a synonym for scams, terrorism and Naxalism. At the age when a

tablet and a good book should be in the hands of youth and they should have the spirit to take the world ahead, the Congress handed over pistols in the hands of those youth. The Congress instigated them to fight against the country in the name of Naxalism and terrorism," Adityanath claimed.

Under the leadership of PM Modi, people have seen the country changing in the last 10 years, the senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader said.

"Modi ji has said that this

country has to be made a big power in the world. A developed India has to be made...To create a self-reliant India, where every citizen feels safe. Be it a daughter or a businessman, only the BJP can provide complete guarantee of security to all of them. Only the Bharatiya Janata Party can respect your faith," he said.

Adityanath asked the gathering whether the Congress could have given free ration to the people, built the Ram temple, reduced the problem of Naxalism and

given security to the daughters and businessmen.

"Congress is the synonym for problem, it gives the problem while the BJP is the name of solution," he said.

Adityanath appealed to the people to vote for the BJP candidate from Rajnandgaon Lok Sabha seat—Santosh Pandey.

He further targeted the Congress, saying it has fielded former CM Bhupesh Baghel who was allegedly involved in multiple scams during the previous government in the State.

# Kerala nonagenarian dies soon after casting vote at home

PTI ■ KOTTAYAM (KERALA)

A 99-year-old man died soon after casting his vote in Lok Sabha polls at home in Kerala's Kottayam district, family members said on Sunday.

The deceased man, A K Raman Nair, was a native of Manakkunnu in Pala here. He had been suffering from age-related ailments for some time and died within minutes after exercising his franchise on Saturday as part of the vote-from-home facility launched by the Election Commission, they said.

Nair, who had been living with his grandson, was discharged from the hospital two days ago.

The polling officials went with the ballot paper when the nonagenarian man was having lunch.

Despite health issues, he was excited to cast his vote and breathed his last soon after the process, the family added.

# Bengal political landscape witnesses rise of dynasties this LS elections

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Dynastic politics has been a prominent feature of Indian democracy, but its increased presence in Bengal this Lok Sabha election marks a significant departure from the state's tradition of cultivating leaders from grassroots politics.

Out of the 42 Lok Sabha seats, 13 have candidates from political dynasties. This represents a significant increase compared to previous elections, where political dynasts were limited to just three seats.

Traditionally known for its vibrant student politics, Bengal is experiencing a notable shift as influential political families are gaining prominence.

"This is a new trend or an evolution of Bengal politics from class-based politics to dynasty politics. Never in the polls have so many candidates come from political families," political scientist at Centre for

Studies in Social Sciences, Maidul Islam, told PTI.

He said in Bengal where politics is dictated by the charisma of mass leaders, party symbols and issues, "it remains to be seen how people accept these political dynasties."

The TMC has fielded five, the Congress four, and the two parties, the BJP and the CPI (M), which used to decry dynasty politics, also have two candidates each.

According to TMC, BJP, and Congress leaders, several factors contribute to the rise of political dynasties in Bengal.

According to them, family members are valued for their loyalty and trustworthiness, making them reliable allies.

"The success of established family names in politics is attributed to two main factors - name recognition and networking, which make it easier for them to garner electoral support," a senior TMC leader said.

TMC national general secretary and two-time MP from Diamond Harbour, Abhishek Banerjee, the nephew of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, tops the chart of political dynasty contesting the polls. He is seeking re-election from the seat.

BJP's candidate from Kanthi Lok Sabha seat, Soumendu Adhikari, comes from the powerful Adhikari family of East Midnapore, with his father Sisir Adhikari being a three-term MP from the seat, and his brother Suvendu Adhikari is the Leader of the Opposition in the West Bengal assembly.

In Malda South seat, the Congress has passed on the representation mantle from an indisposed Abu Hasem Khan Choudhury, Congress patriarch ABA Ghani Khan Choudhury's brother who won the seat without a break from the 2006 bypolls, to his son Isha Khan Choudhury, a former Congress MLA.

# Independent Pappu Yadav overshadows NDA vs INDIA contest

PTI ■ PURNEA

A surefooted NDA challenged by a determined INDIA bloc may be the big story of the ongoing Lok Sabha polls, but in a Bihar seat, the narrative has come to be centred around an Independent candidate.

Situated in the state's northeastern corner, Purnea, named after the eponymous district, has been known to literature aficionados as the land where Phanishwar Nath Renu lived and breathed life into famous characters like Hiranam, played on the big screen by Raj Kapoor in 'Teesri Kasam'.

In the battle for 2024, the place is hogging the limelight, primarily because of Rajesh Ranjan alias Pappu Yadav, who according to some opinion polls, may turn out to be the dark horse when votes are counted on June 4.

This is despite the fact that the



NDA candidate is JD(U) MP who is aiming at a hat-trick while the INDIA bloc has thrown its weight behind Bima Bharti, who recently quit Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's party and was promptly rewarded by arch-rival Lalu Prasad with the RJD ticket.

Yadav has represented the seat thrice, in the 1990s, winning by huge margins, twice as an Independent and once on the ticket of Samajwadi Party, which is a major force in Uttar Pradesh but has never been a serious player in Bihar.



# New beginnings

The CJI hopes new criminal justice laws will expedite cases lingering on for long years

Chief Justice of India (CJI) DY Chandrachud has lauded the enactment of new criminal justice laws, hailing it as a watershed moment for the nation's judicial organ. The judiciary plays a pivotal role in shaping the legal landscape and the CJI's endorsement of the new laws underscores the profound impact these legislative reforms are poised to have on the Indian society. The recent amendments to criminal justice laws mark a paradigm shift in how the legal system approaches crime, punishment and rehabilitation. With a focus on expediting trials, enhancing victim protection and ensuring fair treatment to all parties involved, these laws signify a departure from archaic colonial practices towards a more equitable and efficient framework. One of the key aspects of the new laws is the emphasis on expeditious trials. Delayed justice has long been a concern in India, with cases hanging in courts for years. At times, individuals awaiting trial may spend more time in jail than they would have if found guilty and sentenced.



This situation can extend for years, if not decades. As of December 2022, 4,34,302 prisoners in Indian jails were under trial, which is 75.8 per cent of the total prison population. The new criminal laws set out to correct this. By streamlining procedures and introducing stringent timelines for trials, the amendments aim to address this issue and ensure that justice is swift and accessible to all. Moreover, the heightened emphasis on victim protection programmes is a crucial development. Victims of crime often find themselves marginalised within the legal process, facing intimidation, harassment and prolonged trauma. The new laws incorporate provisions to safeguard their rights, providing them with legal support, counselling services and other forms of assistance to navigate the judicial system with dignity and resilience. Furthermore, the reforms underscore the principle of equality before the law by ensuring fair treatment to all individuals, irrespective of their social status or background. By promoting transparency, accountability and due processes, the amendments seek to instill public confidence in the legal system. The CJI has rightly emphasised the transformative potential of these legislative changes, highlighting their role in fostering a more just and equitable society. However, while the enactment of these laws represents a significant milestone, their success ultimately hinges on their implementation. Effective enforcement, adequate resource allocation and ongoing monitoring are imperative to ensure that the intended objectives are achieved in practice. Nonetheless, a beginning has been made to correct the existing anomalies. Moreover, the journey towards a more equitable criminal justice system is an ongoing process that requires continuous evaluation and refinement. As societal dynamics evolve and new challenges emerge, it is essential to remain adaptive and responsive, constantly seeking ways to enhance the effectiveness and fairness of the legal framework.

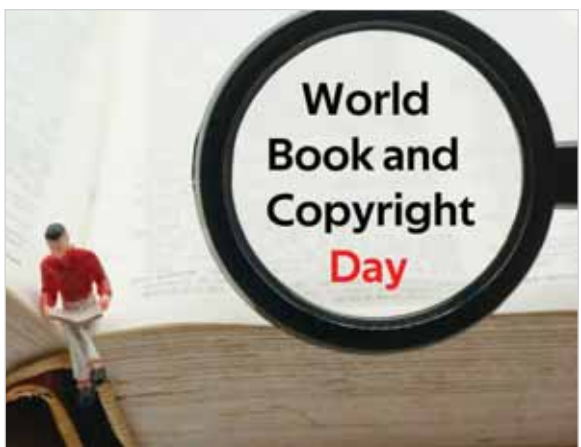


Students celebrate their success after the declaration of Uttar Pradesh Board 10th and 12th class results, in Noida

# Celebrating World Book and Copyright Day

From serving as conduits of wisdom and imagination to safeguarding cultural heritage, books play a vital role in shaping our collective consciousness

Books have long served as companions to humanity, bridging the present with the past and future through a rich tapestry of historical narratives and fiction. Each book, a product of its time, reflects the sociocultural nuances prevalent in the society of its era. They serve as invaluable archives, documenting the thoughts, experiences and ideas of past generations, offering us a well-spring of wisdom to draw from and learn. By delving into literature spanning different epochs, we glean insights into the beliefs, values and perspectives of our predecessors, acting as conduits for the transmission of ideas across generations and cultures. Moreover, books kindle the flames of imagination, inspiring us to envision and strive for the seemingly impossible. As repositories of knowledge, wisdom and creativity, books provide solace in solitude and guidance in uncertainty. A singularly remarkable tome possesses the power to transport us to distant realms, broadening our horizons and fueling our imaginations. They serve as windows to diverse societies and cultures,



offering immersive experiences that transcend geographical boundaries. Whether through captivating novels or enlightening travelogues, books possess the remarkable ability to transport us to unexplored territories, fostering empathy and understanding. In the realm of creativity and innovation, books serve as catalysts, igniting the flames of imagination and propelling us towards new frontiers. They enable us to visualise and conceptualise in ways that transcend the limitations of our physical reality. Moreover, in the preservation

of cultural heritage, books play an indispensable role, in safeguarding languages, traditions and values for posterity. By recording historical events, traditions and societal norms, they provide invaluable insights into the tapestry of human civilization, ensuring that our cultural legacy endures through the ages. Yet, as we navigate the digital age, the landscape of literature undergoes profound transformations. The advent of e-books and interactive digital formats ushers in new possibilities, offering enhanced reading experiences enriched with augmented reality, virtu-

al reality and artificial intelligence. However, amidst this digital revolution, the sanctity of copyright laws faces unprecedented challenges. Rampant piracy and unauthorised distribution of digital copies undermine the rights of authors and publishers, necessitating renewed efforts to uphold intellectual property rights. Hence, on April 23rd, World Book and Copyright Day, under the auspices of UNESCO, serves as a poignant reminder of the enduring power of books and the imperative to uphold copyright laws. This year's theme, "Read Your Way," encourages individuals to celebrate the joy of reading while fostering awareness about the importance of respecting intellectual property rights. As we commemorate this day, let us reaffirm our commitment to preserving the legacy of literature and honouring the contributions of literary luminaries past and present.

(The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, views are personal)



BIJU DHARAMAPALAN

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# Iran-Israel: On the brink of war or hype

Iran's attack and Israel's retaliation threaten to reshape the established rules of engagement and have the potential to destabilise the region

Iran launched a significant assault on Israel during the night of April 13-14, deploying 300 drones and missiles from its territory towards Israeli territories, including Jerusalem, the Golan Heights and the southern Negev. This bold action marks an unprecedented event since Israel's founding in 1948. The attack on Israel by Iran was a direct response to an airstrike on the Iranian consulate in Damascus, Syria, on April 1, which Iran accuses Israel of carrying out. This assault resulted in the deaths of sixteen individuals, including two Revolutionary Guards generals. Iran's drone and missile assault on Israel, lasting several hours, has reshaped the established rules of engagement between the two nations and heightened tensions in the West Asia, potentially paving the way for a broader conflict with destabilising effects on the region. The strike on Damascus was viewed as a significant Israeli action against Iranian interests in Syria, surpassing previous incidents. Iran had been issuing warnings of retaliatory actions against Israel following an earlier airstrike that destroyed Iran's consulate in Syria, which was seen as a breach of diplomatic conventions. Iran justified its actions by citing Article 51 of the UN Charter, following the Israeli attack on the Iranian Embassy in Damascus. The drone attack was interpreted as a message from Tehran to Tel Aviv. Despite refraining from officially declaring it as an "Act of War," Tehran's response aimed to prevent being dragged into a larger conflict while signalling a readiness to retaliate more forcefully to maintain regional deterrence. The targeted strikes on Israel aimed to re-establish Iranian deterrence and highlight a shift in Tehran's approach to risk. By setting new red lines in the conflict with Israel, Iran made it clear that it would take action if Israel's actions against Iran and its allies persisted. While some may perceive the attack as a failure due to Israel's successful interception of Iranian drones and missiles, a more severe strike using precision-guided ballistic missiles could have inflicted



greater harm on Israel with less time to react. In simpler terms, if Iran truly intended to harm Israel, they would have kept their plans secret and employed more powerful weapons to catch Israel off guard. By providing advance notice and employing less effective tactics, it seems like Iran was issuing a warning rather than seeking to inflict serious damage. It's akin to saying, "If you cross the line, there will be serious consequences in the future." In a similar fashion, Israel also retaliated with quadcopter strikes with little damage to Iran. A warning for warning if you like. Regarding India's stance, which maintains strategic relationships with both Iran and Israel, it finds itself walking a diplomatic tightrope due to its ties with both nations. India has a longstanding partnership with Iran, with Tehran being a major supplier of crude oil despite challenges from Western sanctions. The Chabahar Port serves as a crucial gateway for Indian goods to Afghanistan and Central Asia, given Pakistan's restrictions on land transit. India also has robust defence and security ties with Israel, which supported India during the Kargil War and is a leading supplier of military equipment. Trade between India and Israel has grown to approximately \$7.5 billion.

THE GAZA CONFLICT IS IMPACTING BOTH BIDEN'S AND TRUMP'S POLITICAL PROSPECTS. BIDEN FACES CHALLENGES WITH VOTERS SYMPATHETIC TO PALESTINIANS, WHO HAVE EXPRESSED DISCONTENT WITH HIS GAZA POLICY BY VOTING 'UNCOMMITTED' IN DEMOCRATIC PRIMARIES

During Italy's presidency of the G7, leaders are expected to jointly urge Israel to show restraint following an unprecedented attack by Iran over the weekend, which involved numerous drones, ballistic missiles and cruise missiles aimed at the Jewish State. The United States, Britain and several European Union nations have proposed expanding existing sanctions against Iran due to its involvement in Russia's conflict in Ukraine, with a focus on restricting drone and missile transfers to Iran. The dividing line isn't merely between Iran and Israel or Ukraine and Russia; rather, it lies within the emerging power dynamics of these two central regions. The Gaza conflict is impacting both Biden and Trump's political prospects. Biden faces challenges with voters sympathetic to Palestinians, who have expressed discontent with his Gaza policy by voting "uncommitted" in Democratic primaries, potentially leading to decreased voter turnout in the upcoming presidential election. Biden's stance on the conflict puts him in a difficult position, balancing support for Netanyahu to maintain pro-Israeli voter support while avoiding alienating progressive Democrats. If Trump returns to office, it could disrupt Western grand strategy, especially concerning support for

Netanyahu's Gaza approach and relations with European allies. The impact of the recent hostilities on the U.S. president's approach remains uncertain. Israel has shown mixed reactions, reopening a Gaza crossing and participating in ceasefire negotiations while also indicating intentions to invade areas like Rafah. Biden's success in brokering a peace deal would align with his grand strategy, but achieving a temporary ceasefire is just the initial step in a complex process. Prolonged conflict in the West Asia could significantly complicate broader Western geopolitical goals. Iran is one of the most heavily armed States in the area, boasting a sizable standing army of around 5,80,000 personnel and possessing an estimated stockpile of 3,000 ballistic missiles, as indicated by Western assessments. Despite this military capability, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader, has emphasized in the past six months during the Gaza conflict that Iran seeks to avoid being drawn into a broader confrontation. So, Iran is not willing to go to war, but it also remains prepared for any kind of conflict if provoked.

(The writer is an eminent expert on counter-terrorism in West Asia and advisor to cyber and aerospace Security; Views are personal)

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

**CLIMATE'S CAPRICIOUS FURY**  
Madam — Apropos the news article, "India Battles Volatile and Unpredictable Weather", published on April 21, this is my response. The Indian Meteorological Department's promising forecast of above-normal monsoon rainfall offers a glimmer of hope for agriculture and water resources. However, amidst this optimism, lies the harsh reality of erratic weather wreaking havoc across the nation. India's climate resembles a rollercoaster ride, with unpredictable twists affecting lives from Uttar Pradesh to Kerala. The recent contrast of Delhi's moderate cold one day to record-breaking warmth the next epitomises the volatility of regional climates. Rambha Devi, an 80-year-old, reflects on humanity's disregard for nature. She witnesses nature's retaliation through extreme weather: scorching heat waves, torrential rains and unpredictable storms, disrupting lives and livelihoods. Farmers like Ramesh Tiwari and Priya share tales of crop destruction, leaving families struggling. Dr. Mrutyunjay Mohapatra warns of increased heavy rainfall events, exacerbating challenges. As the world faces climate extremes, proactive measures are crucial. Marginalised communities are particularly vulnerable, emphasising the urgent need for climate resilience. Vaibhav Chaturvedi underscores the necessity for immediate action to mitigate the compounded impacts of climate change.

Aarav Patel | Mumbai

**EDUCATION EVOLUTION**  
Madam — Apropos the news article, "Transformative trends in India's higher education", published on April 20, this is my response. India's higher education landscape is experiencing a significant evolution spurred by policy reforms and technological advancements. Initiatives like the New Education Policy and increased FDI signal a shift towards innovation and global competitiveness. The burgeoning market size, coupled with a vast network of institutions, underscores the sector's importance in shaping the country's future.

**Political manoeuvrings**  
  
Apropos the news article, "Rahul Gandhi holds on to Wayanad despite speculation", published on April 20, this is my response. The dynamics of political alliances and rivalries in Kerala reveal a complex web of strategies and ambitions. Rahul Gandhi's decision to contest from Wayanad underscores the importance of securing a stronghold in the region, amidst shifting allegiances and ideological battles. The CPI(M)'s resentment towards the Congress, softened by tactical considerations, reflects the pragmatic nature of politics. While public posturing may suggest discord, behind the scenes, strategic alliances are being nurtured to counter a common adversary—the BJP. A K Antony's nuanced silence on CPI(M) candidates speaks volumes about the intricate history of alliances and betrayals in Kerala politics. His past affiliations highlight the fluidity of loyalties, where former foes become temporary allies in pursuit of power. As Kerala gears up for future elections, the blurred lines between secularism and opportunism will continue to shape the political landscape, reminding us that in politics, alliances are often forged in the crucible of expediency.

Vikram Singh | Delhi

Digitalisation, accelerated by the pandemic, offers opportunities for wider access and skill development. The changing course preferences reflect a demand for interdisciplinary learning and industry-relevant skills. EdTech's rise democratises education but requires addressing digital disparities. Ensuring quality amidst diversification necessitates robust regulatory frameworks. The push for internationalisation promises to enrich educational practices and boost the economy. As India navigates these changes, smart scaling is imperative, ensuring not just expansion but also excellence and inclusivity. This journey towards a globally competitive education system holds the promise of empowering every student for a brighter tomorrow.

Rajiv Mishra | Lucknow

**BURDENS AND LIBERATION**  
Madam — Apropos the news article, "Mind, the key to Hidden Fortune", published on April 20, this is my response. The story of the woman and her son, burdened by past debts and future anxieties, resonates deeply with the human struggle for liber-

ation. Theirs is a narrative of hidden treasures, not just of material wealth but of profound lessons on the nature of existence. In their quest to protect their riches from creditors, they unwittingly ensnared themselves in a cycle of fear and secrecy, failing to embrace the present moment. The tragedy of their lives underscores a universal truth: true freedom lies in being untethered from the shackles of past regrets and future uncertainties. Through the lens of Buddhist wisdom, the narrative acquires a timeless relevance. The Zen Master's insight into the nature of the mind echoes the imperative of being anchored in the present. Similarly, the young monk's realisation that he is already where he seeks to be symbolises the attainment of true happiness through mindfulness. In essence, the story serves as a poignant reminder that true wealth lies not in external possessions but in the liberation of the mind from the constraints of time.

Rohan Desai | Ahmedabad

Send your feedback to: [letterstopioneer@gmail.com](mailto:letterstopioneer@gmail.com)



FIRST COLUMN

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF FOMO

In the age of social media, the Fear Of Missing Out has become rampant



SHAINY SHARMA

Ever found individuals befuddling when they see photos or updates from parties, gatherings, or events they were not invited to or witness their colleagues or peers receiving accolades, promotions or career advancements... Well such situations may evoke FOMO in individuals who feel stagnant or unproductive in comparison. "FOMO," or the Fear of Missing Out, arises from a perceived discrepancy between one's own experiences and the experiences of others. Whether online or offline, the fear of missing out can exert a powerful influence on individuals emotions, behaviours and decision-making processes, thereby highlighting the need for self-awareness and coping mechanisms to navigate the pressures of modern life. Now a days it is a prevalent phenomenon among Generation Z (Gen Z) and other demographics. It can be a double-edged sword, driving ambition while fostering anxiety. There is no denying the fact that Gen Z have grown up in a digital age which is characterized by constant connectivity and instant access to information promoting products, experiences and lifestyles that appear glamorous and desirable. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, X and Facebook have become integral part of their daily lives, shaping their perceptions, behaviours and social interactions in profound ways. Various studies and research too have consistently shown a strong association between social media usage and FOMO among this generation, the consequences of which extends beyond mere discomfort and impact mental health, self-esteem and interpersonal relationships. Individuals plagued by FOMO due to the constant exposure to curated content and the pressure to maintain a certain online image may experience increased stress, anxiety, depression and feeling of loneliness as they constantly compare their lives to others' highlight reels.



To mitigate the negative effects of FOMO on Gen Z, it becomes utmost important to promote digital literacy, encourage healthy social media habits and foster offline connections and experiences. Now this can include multiple practices such as practicing mindfulness or journaling that promote gratitude and positive thinking. Setting boundaries for screen time and cultivating meaningful relationships and activities that are not dependent on social media validation. Additionally, fostering a supportive and inclusive online community can help alleviate feelings of FOMO by emphasizing authenticity, empathy and acceptance. Not only this but practicing the art of Digital Detox will allow individuals to reconnect with themselves and prioritize meaningful offline interactions and relationships. This will result in emphasizing the importance of quality over quantity when it comes to social connections and encourage face-to-face communication, genuine conversations and shared experiences with their friends and loved ones. Also, encouraging them to engage in activities such as sports, art, music or dance will not only provide opportunities for personal growth and development but also reduces dependence on social media for validation and self-worth. Practicing such activities will encourage the Generation Z to seek support from trusted friends, family members or mental health professionals if they're struggling with feelings of FOMO or its effects on their well-being. Remember, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) raises stress hormones, inflammation and dysregulates an individual's nervous system. One needs to learn to self-love and be protective of their time and energy. In the hyper connected world, it does take courage to be with own thoughts so, try to be one...

(The write is an educator; views are personal)

# With power freebies, debt comes calling



UTTAM GUPTA

The core dilemma persists: How to prevent debt while ensuring universal electricity access? This issue entails policy intricacies and power sector reforms



In an interview, Union Power Minister RK Singh revealed he has been telling States that electricity is not free. "If any State wants to give free power to any category of people, they can go ahead and do so, but you have to pay for it". Singh's exhortation to the States assumes significance in the backdrop of a spate of announcements by the latter to give free electricity to certain consumers which affect the viability of power distribution companies or discoms (they buy power from generating companies or genscos and supply to the consumers). He argues "like any other commodity, generation and distribution of electricity involves cost and if a State is to provide it for free to a section of consumers, it also needs to have finances to pay the genco. If the genco isn't paid, electricity will not be produced in the first place". But, there can't be any compromise on the generation of electricity as any shortfall could lead to a stoppage of economic activity. To meet the surge in demand (due to the impending summer), the Union Government has invoked the provisions of the Electricity Act (2003) under Section 11asking gas-based genscos and thermal plants based on imported coal to increase generation even if it entails extra cost. That is the reaction to meeting incremental demand. How could it tolerate massive cuts in generation inevitable when genscos are not paid? So, States must ensure that they are paid. When pressurized, the concerned States borrow money to pay the genscos resulting in a debt trap. For instance, in the first two years of the AAP Government, Punjab borrowed as much as Rs 47,000 crore adding to the already high debt of the State. How can the States avoid debt trap? The Electricity Act (2003) and the Guidelines issued by the Ministry of Power require the discoms to fix the charge (or tariff) on electricity supplied to consumers in a manner such that the average revenue realization (ARR) from its sale is equal to the average cost of supply (it includes the cost of purchase, transmission and distribution), or ACS. The discoms are



CURRENTLY, ALMOST 95 PER CENT OF POWER CONSUMERS IN PUNJAB AVAIL OF SUBSIDIES, A MAJOR PORTION OF WHICH ISN'T EVEN REIMBURSED TO DISCOMS

free to decide the modalities of how this is to be ensured subject to approval by the concerned State Electricity Regulatory Commissions (SERCs). Ideally, the discoms should charge from 'all' consumers a tariff equal to the total cost of supply say Rs 'X' crore divided by the number of units. But, they don't follow this principle. They charge less from certain consumers especially households (HHs) and farmers. For instance, in Delhi, the tariff applicable to HHs consuming 200 units a month is Rs 3 per unit which is about half of the ACS. Including a plethora of levies adding to 44.6 per cent, the shortfall comes to Rs 4.3 per unit. For HHs consuming between 201 and 400 units, the tariff is Rs 4.5 per unit implying an under-recovery of Rs 1.5 per unit. Including the levies, this comes to Rs 2.2 per unit. These under-recoveries are cross-subsidized by charging more from industries and business establishments for which the tariff can go up to a high of Rs 16 per unit. The low tariff charged from the target consumers (read: HHs consuming up to 400 units a month) is nothing but a freebie given by political parties. But, it goes unnoticed as the State exchequer doesn't have to pay for these under-recoveries. The industries that are made to foot the bill can't even murmur as discom being the sole supplier of electricity, they have no other option. But, political parties don't want the target HHs to even pay this small tariff. In Delhi, the AAP Government tells discoms not to raise any bill on HHs consuming up to 200 units. Likewise, in Punjab, consumption of up to 300 units a month by an HH is free. This extra under-recovery of Rs 4.3 per unit in Delhi (applicable tariff Rs 3 per unit plus 44.6 per cent levies) has to be reimbursed by the State to the dis-

com. But, most States don't reimburse or do it partially and after considerable delay. This leads to losses of discoms. The availability of free power also drives people to manipulate their reported consumption. For instance, in Punjab, an HH consuming 900 units a month, gets three meters installed to keep consumption of each under 300 units thereby ensuring zero bills. Reportedly, more than 100,000 meters have been bifurcated or trifurcated enabling even high-end consumers to avail of the free bonanza. As for farmers who are eligible for free power in the State, they report even consumption for running multiple ACs in their homes under farming head thereby avoiding any payment. As a consequence, currently, almost over 95 per cent of power consumers in Punjab avail of subsidies, a major portion of which isn't even reimbursed to discoms. Discoms' losses also increase due to AT&C (aggregate technical and commercial) losses - a sophisticated nomenclature for power theft. According to Singh, AT&C's losses used to be high at 27 per cent. In Punjab, reportedly, an overwhelming share of electricity that leaves the generating stations/power dispatch centres remains unaccounted for. The discoms have funded these losses by borrowings from banks and other financial institutions (FIs) apart from keeping bills pending. At the end of FY 2021-22, their total debt was Rs 620,000 crore. In June 2022, they owed about Rs 1,40,000 crore to Genscos and transmission companies (transcos). The Center has taken several measures to force discoms to clear their dues. The late payment surcharge (LPS) Rules, implemented in 2022 made it mandatory for discoms to clear their legacy dues as existing on June 3, 2022, in a time-bound manner in 12 EMIs with the

benefit of non-applicability of the LPS after its implementation date. The rules are also provided for time-bound clearance of current dues failing, which will attract a power supply cut. This has resulted in legacy dues decreasing from Rs 1,40,000 crore in June 2022 to around Rs 70,000 crore in July 2023 and further down to Rs 40,000 crore currently. Under the 'Reforms-Linked, Result-Based Scheme for Distribution' (RLRBSD) launched in July 2021, the Centre has undertaken a massive investment of Rs 300,000 crore to improve the reliability and quality of the power supply and enhance the efficiency of discoms. It has compulsory pre-paid and smart metering components to be implemented across the power supply chain, including in about 250 million households. As a result, AT&C losses decreased from 22.32 per cent during 2020-21 to 13.5 per cent during 2022-23. However, according to the Minister, today power pilferage is 15 per cent. On this much electricity, discoms get 'nil' revenue. On a much larger percentage of power used by target HHs and farmers, the States promise to pay on their behalf. But, they don't pay in full and whatever payment comes, it is delayed. Even for making payments, the States borrow money. And, the vicious cycle continues. It won't end unless discoms are unshackled from State controls and given the freedom to decide their pricing and distribution policies. If, States want certain HHs and farmers to get power free, let them give the money directly to them. This reform will also pave the way for the deregulation of electricity distribution, more options for consumers to source their needs and a reduction in tariffs.

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

## Govt schemes are transforming lives in rural Rajasthan

### Loyara village serves as a microcosm of resilience and progress, fuelled by education and community empowerment

We typically receive our ration between the 1st and 3rd of each month. If it's ever delayed, my grandchildren inquire why we haven't received it from the ration dealer. The younger generation in my household is quite aware. They've made sure that all the necessary ration-related documents are in order, ensuring a seamless supply. Also, my pension now arrives punctually. Thanks to various Government schemes, these youngsters are reaping benefits. They educate themselves about these schemes and then proactively apply for them at the Panchayat office," shares 76-year-old Amba Bai, residing in Loyara village within



MOHAN LAL GAMETI

Udaipur district, Rajasthan. Situated just 8 km from Udaipur, this village falls within the Badgaon tehsil. With a population of approximately 2500, the majority belong to the Scheduled Tribe community. Alongside the OBC Dangi community, there are various other castes. The village reflects the influence of its proximity to Udaipur city,

evident in the transition of most houses to concrete structures. However, economically, the village still grapples with challenges. While individuals from OBC and general castes are involved in agriculture, trade, and animal husbandry, the majority of male members from the Scheduled Tribes work as labourers in marble factories surrounding Udaipur city. Some also engage in daily wage labour. Meanwhile, women in these households contribute to the family's income by working as domestic helpers in affluent homes within the city. Economically, Loyara village may face challenges, but socially and educationally, it has seen significant

development. Consequently, awareness about Government schemes has risen among the villagers, leading to increased benefits. The younger generation in the village has embraced education, with even Scheduled Tribe boys and girls pursuing studies up to the 12th grade. This educational advancement has also fostered greater awareness within the community. For instance, the Public Distribution System (PDS), part of the Food Security scheme, has been embraced in the village. Shiv Lal, aged 45, attests to this positive change. Despite working in a marble factory in Bengaluru after completing his 12th grade, he remains well-informed about



Government schemes benefiting his family and the village. He recalls, "In the past, the ration dealer would often deny us ration with flimsy excuses. But now, thanks to education and awareness, such actions are no longer tolerated. Whenever we face ration shortages, we raise our concerns and seek information from the Panchayat office. Even in my absence,

my children handle these matters diligently, ensuring the timely arrival of our ration." Taru Bai, a respected elder at 70, sheds light on the changing face of education and Government support in Loyara village. "Back in my day, girls rarely pursued education," she recalls. "But now, over half of the girls in our community are completing high school, and they're bringing back valuable information about Government programs. Their schooling has even helped smooth out the process for my pension, as they handle all the paperwork." Looking back, Taru Bai remembers, "We used to hear about Government schemes, but getting clear

information was a challenge, even after asking around at the Panchayat. But things are different now; the younger generation knows exactly how to navigate these programs and fill out the necessary forms." However, amidst these educational strides, economic challenges persist. "The majority of the Scheduled Tribe families in the village are economically very weak. Most families do not have enough money to start a business, nor do they have enough land to do farming or vegetable production. Although the new generation has started studying, only a few people from this community are in Government jobs. But I think as the trend of educa-

tion and awareness has increased among children, they will also soon start getting recruited in Government jobs." In the same village, there is also the family of Mangi Lal and Tulsiram, who are deprived of the benefits of the PDS. Last year, the ration status of Mangi Lal's family which consists of seven members, was changed from BPL to APL. As a result, they stopped receiving ration. Similarly, Tulsiram mentions that due to missing documents, their family is unable to access ration benefits. For this, they've been in constant communication with the e-Mitra.

(The author is a social worker from Rajasthan; views are personal)



# Ukrainian and Western leaders laud US aid package

**AP ■ KYIV**

Ukrainian and Western leaders welcomed a desperately needed aid package passed by the US House of Representatives, as the Kremlin warned the passage of the bill would “further ruin” Ukraine and cause more deaths.

The House swiftly approved \$95 billion in foreign aid for Ukraine, Israel and other US allies in a rare Saturday session as Democrats and Republicans banded together after months of hard-right resistance over renewed American support for repelling Russia’s invasion.

Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who had warned that his country would lose the war without US funding, said that he was grateful for the decision of US lawmakers. “We appreciate every sign of support for our country and its independence, people and way of life, which Russia is attempting to bury under the rubble,” he wrote on social media site X.

“America has demonstrated its leadership since the first days of this war. Exactly this type of leadership is required to maintain a rules-based international order and predictability for all nations,” he said.

The Ukrainian president noted that his country’s “warriors on the front lines” would feel the benefit of the aid package. One such “warrior” is infantry soldier Oleksandr, fighting around Avdiivka, the city in the Donetsk region that Ukraine lost to Russia in February after months of intense combat.

“For us it’s so important to have this support from the US and our partners,” Oleksandr told The Associated Press. He did not give his full name for security reasons.

“With this we can stop them and reduce our losses. It’s the first step to have the possibility to liberate our territory.”

Ammunition shortages linked to the aid holdup over the past six months have led Ukrainian military commanders to ration shells, a disadvantage that Russia seized on this year — taking the city of Avdiivka and currently inching towards the town of Chasiv Yar, also in the Donetsk region.

“The Russians come at us in waves — we become exhausted,

lamenting that soldiers “have nothing to protect us.”

“They need weapons, they need gear, they need it. We always need help. Because without help, our enemy can advance further and can be in the center of our city,” the 26-year-old said.

Other Western leaders also lauded the aid package. “Ukraine is using the weapons provided by NATO Allies to destroy Russian combat capabilities. This makes us all safer, in Europe & North America,” NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg wrote on X.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said that “Ukraine deserves all the support it can get against Russia.”

Her statement was echoed by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who called it “a strong signal in these times.”

“We stand with the Ukrainians fighting for their free, democratic and independent country,” Scholz posted on X.

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk thanked House Speaker Mike Johnson, while also noting the holdup in Congress.

“Better late than too late. And I hope it is not too late for Ukraine,” he wrote on X.

In Russia, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov called the approval of aid to Ukraine “expected and predictable.”

The decision “will make the United States of America richer, further ruin Ukraine and result in the deaths of even more Ukrainians, the fault of the Kyiv regime,” Peskov was quoted as saying by Russian news agency Ria Novosti.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova also took to social media to speak against the aid package.

# Israeli strikes on southern Gaza city of Rafah kill 22, mostly children

**AP ■ RAFAH (GAZA STRIP)**

Israeli strikes on the southern Gaza city of Rafah overnight killed 22 people, including 18 children, health officials said Sunday, as the United States was on track to approve billions of dollars of additional military aid to its close ally.

Israel has carried out near-daily air raids on Rafah, where more than half of Gaza’s population of 2.3 million has sought refuge from fighting elsewhere. It has also vowed to expand its ground offensive to the city on the border with Egypt despite international calls for restraint, including from the US.

The House of Representatives approved a \$26 billion aid package on Saturday that includes around \$9 billion in humanitarian assistance for Gaza.

The first strike killed a man, his wife and their 3-year-old child, according to the nearby Kuwaiti Hospital, which received the bodies. The woman was pregnant and the doctors managed to save the baby, the hospital said.

The second strike killed 17 children and two women, all from the same extended family, according to hospital records. First responders were still searching the rubble. An airstrike in Rafah the night before killed nine people, including six children.

Mohammed al-Beheiri said his daughter, Rasha, and her six children, ranging in age from 18 months to 16 years, were among those killed overnight and into Sunday. Her husband’s second wife and their three children were still under the rubble, al-Beheiri said.

The Israel-Hamas war has killed over 34,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, devastated Gaza’s two largest cities and left a swath of destruction across the territory. Around 80% of the population have fled their homes to other parts of the besieged coastal enclave, which experts say is on the brink of famine.

The conflict, now in its seventh month, has sparked regional unrest pitting Israel and the US against Iran and allied militant groups across the Middle East.

Israel and Iran traded fire directly earlier this month, raising fears of all-out war between the longtime foes.

Tensions have also spiked in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Israeli troops killed two Palestinians who the military says attacked a checkpoint with a knife and a gun near the southern West Bank town of Hebron early Sunday. The Palestinian Health Ministry said the two killed were 18 and 19 years old, from the same family. No Israeli forces were wounded, the army said.

The Palestinian Red Crescent rescue service meanwhile said it has recovered a total of 14 bodies from an Israeli raid in the Nur Shams urban refugee camp in the West Bank that began late Thursday. Those killed include three militants from the Islamic Jihad group and a 15-year-old boy. The military says it killed 10 militants in the camp and arrested eight suspects. Nine Israeli soldiers and officers were wounded.

In a separate incident in the West Bank, an Israeli man was wounded in an explosion Sunday, the Magen David Adom rescue service said. A video circulating online shows a man approaching a Palestinian flag that had been planted in a field. When he kicks it, it appears to trigger an explosive device.

At least 469 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli soldiers and settlers in the West Bank since the start of the war in Gaza, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry. Most have been killed during Israeli military arrest raids, which often trigger gunbattles, or in violent protests.

The war in Gaza was sparked by an unprecedented Oct 7 raid into southern Israel in which Hamas and other militants killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted around 250 hostages. Israel says militants are still holding around 100 hostages and the remains of more than 30 others.

Thousands of Israelis have taken to the streets to call for new elections to replace Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and a deal with Hamas to release the hostages. Netanyahu has vowed to continue the war until Hamas is destroyed and all the hostages are returned.

The war has killed at least 34,097 Palestinians and wounded another 76,980, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. The ministry does not differentiate between combatants and civilians in its count but says at least two-thirds have been children and women. It also says the real toll is likely higher as many bodies are stuck beneath the rubble left by airstrikes or are in areas that are unreachable for medics.

Israel blames Hamas for civilian casualties because the militants fight in dense, residential neighbourhoods, but the military rarely comments on individual strikes, which often kill women and children. The military says it has killed over 13,000 Hamas fighters, without providing evidence.



People gather around a component from an intercepted ballistic missile that fell near the Dead Sea in Israel on Saturday. Open fighting between Israel and Iran began April 1 with the suspected Israeli killing of Iranian generals at an Iranian diplomatic compound in Syria. That prompted Iran’s retaliatory barrage last weekend of more than 300 missiles and drones that the US, Israel and regional and international partners helped bat down without significant damage in Israel. And then came Friday’s strikes that hit near military and nuclear targets in Iran.

AP/PTI

## Vehicle crashes into birthday party; two dead, 15 injured

**AP ■ BERLIN TOWN (US)**

A young brother and sister died and 15 people were injured, several seriously, when vehicle driven by a suspected drunken driver crashed into a birthday party Saturday at a boat club, a Michigan sheriff said.

Monroe County Sheriff Troy Goodnough said an 8-year-old girl and her 5-year-old brother died in the crash when a 66-year-old woman crashed 25 feet into the building at about 3 p.m. at the Swan Creek Boat Club in Berlin Township, about 30 miles south of Detroit.

He did not identify the woman driving the vehicle but said she was taken into custody suspected of operating a motor vehicle while intoxicated causing death.

He said she was cooperating with authorities.

## Khamenei acknowledges Tehran hit little in attack on Israel

**AP ■ JERUSALEM**

Iran’s supreme leader on Sunday dismissed any discussion of whether Tehran’s unprecedented drone-and-missile attack on Israel hit anything there, a tacit acknowledgment that despite launching a massive assault, few projectiles actually made through to their targets.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei’s comments before senior military leaders didn’t touch on the apparent Israeli retaliatory strike Friday on the central city of Isfahan, even though air defences opened fire and Iran grounded commercial flights across much of the country.

Analysts believe both Iran and Israel, regional archrivals locked in a shadow war for years, are trying to dial back tensions following a series of escalatory attacks between them as Israel’s war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip rages on and inflames the wider region.

Khamenei, 85, made the comments in a meeting attended by the top ranks of Iran’s regular military, police and paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, a powerful force within its Shiite theocracy.

“Debates by the other party about how many missiles were fired, how many of them hit the target and how many didn’t, these are of secondary importance,” Khamenei said in remarks aired by state television.

“The main issue is the emergence of the Iranian nation and Iranian military’s will in an important international arena. This is what matters.”

Iran launched hundreds of drones, ballistic missiles and cruise missiles that sought to overwhelm Israel’s air defences in the April 13 attack — the first on Israel by a foreign power since Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein launched Scud missiles at Israel in the 1991 Gulf War.

However, Israeli air defences

and fighter jets, backed by the US, the United Kingdom and neighbouring Jordan, shot down the vast majority of the incoming fire.

Satellite images analysed Saturday by The Associated Press showed the Iranian attack caused only minor damage at the Nevatim air base in southern Israel, including taking a chunk out of a taxiway that Israel quickly repaired.

Iran’s attack came in response to a suspected Israeli strike on April 1 targeting a consular building next to the Iranian Embassy in Damascus, Syria, which killed two Guard generals and others.

“Today, thanks to the work done by our armed forces, the Revolutionary Guard, the army, the police, each in its own way, praise be to Allah the image of the country around the world has become commendable,” added Khamenei, despite Iran facing public anger over its economy and crackdowns on dissent.

# Litmus test for President Muizzu as Maldives goes to polls amidst regional power dynamics

**PTI ■ MALE**

Maldivians on Sunday cast their ballots in a crucial parliamentary election, seen as a litmus test for President Mohamed Muizzu, whose policies are being closely monitored by both India and China amidst regional power dynamics.

According to information released by the Elections Commission (EC), 181,406 people cast their ballots as of 4:00 pm local time, making for a voter turnout of 63.73 per cent. This includes 88,230 women and 93,176 men. About 284,000 people were eligible to vote.

A total of 602 ballot boxes have been set up in the Maldives and three other countries for the parliamentary election. Polling stations are also open in 34 resorts, prisons, and other industrial islands. The countries in which ballot boxes are placed for voting are Thiruvananthapuram in India, Colombo in Sri Lanka and



Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, psmnews.mv reported. Parliamentarians will be elected to a total of 93 constituencies, with 368 candidates contesting from six parties, including Muizzu’s People’s National

Congress (PNC) and the main opposition the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), and as independents.

Muizzu cast his vote at the polling station in Thaaajuddin School at 8:40 am. Speaking to

reporters after casting the ballot, he urged every citizen to exercise their right to vote as soon as possible, newportal edition.mv reported.

“Voting is a constitutional right and responsibility afforded to every citizen. All citizens should come out and exercise their right to vote as soon as possible. It is the responsibility of eligible voters to not wait until evening and quickly attend their respective polling stations to cast ballots,” he said.

No major issues or complaints were noted during the voting, the EC said.

“Nothing major has been noted as a complaint up until now. There have been complaints about showing ballot papers. That is, complaints about ballots put in the box without being folded,” Hassan Zakariyya, EC member and spokesperson, was quoted as saying by Adhathu news portal.

Such complaints have also been few, he said.

# Indian-origin mayoral candidate wants to run London like a ‘seasoned CEO’

**PTI ■ LONDON**

Tarun Ghulati, the Indian-origin candidate in the race to challenge Sadiq Khan from winning a third term as Mayor of London, has said that the citizens of the UK capital have been let down by all the major political parties and he wants to run London like a “seasoned CEO” which delivers profits for all.

The Delhi-born businessman believes his investment expertise is what London needs to revive its fortunes as the “global bank of the world” by attracting the investment it needs.

The 63-year-old is standing as an Independent candidate among 13 contestants in the fray for the local elections on May 2, when Londoners will vote for their Mayor and also for members of the London Assembly.

“I view London as a unique global city, akin to the ‘global bank of the world’ where diverse cultures converge to flourish,” Ghulati said in a speech this week.

“As Mayor, I will build London’s balance sheet such that it is the premier choice for investment, safeguarding safety and prosperity for all its residents. I will transform and run London effectively and efficiently like a seasoned CEO. London will be a profitable corporate where profitability means the wellbeing of all. You will all be part of the journey. Let’s do it for our



Indian-origin candidate for London Mayor Tarun Ghulati addresses a gathering in London

PTI

London, our home,” he said.

Safety on the streets of the city is among his other major priorities, with visible community policing and more officers patrolling on the beat on the agenda.

“It is about having enough bobbies on the beat, having the resources for police officers to do their jobs; which means making the streets safe for women to walk at night, with muggers and burglars being caught and punished,” he said.

Scrapping some of the Labour

Party incumbent Sadiq Khan’s unpopular policies, such as the high costs associated with Ultra Low Emissions Zone (ULEZ) charges and Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) across the city, also make up Ghulati’s key policy planks.

“We did not want ULEZ, LTNs or 20mph speed limits and many other poor policies... Climate change is happening and we need to mitigate its effects but that cannot be done by making everyone live 15

minutes from home or to penalise commuters in areas with little public transport. What changes we need to make must be paced with public opinion, not imposed in an arbitrary way on wallets coping with the cost of living,” said Ghulati, who has called London his home for 20 years.

He is equally scathing about the Conservative Party candidate for Mayor, Susan Hall, who he claims failed to block the Mayor’s controversial policies despite being an Assembly member for London for many years. “I would not be a candidate for Mayor if the political candidates were doing what they should be doing. They have let us down. This is all about London and Londoners,” he declared.

Creating more affordable housing, minimising council tax, increasing focus on tourism to the UK capital and ensuring free school meals are among some of Ghulati’s other focus areas. He claims to have canvassed from borough to borough across London to garner his required signatures to support his mayoral candidature.

Ghulati also features in the official mini manifesto booklet, which costs each candidate GBP 10,000.

The winning mayoral candidate will be responsible for all local issues affecting Londoners, from transport and policing to housing and the environment.

# Russia warns Pakistan of banning rice imports over phytosanitary concerns

**PTI ■ KARACHI**

Russia has warned Pakistan that it would ban rice imports again if Moscow’s phytosanitary concerns are not addressed in future consignments after a quarantine organism was detected in the rice consignment.

The warning came after Russia’s Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Surveillance (FSVPS) issued a notification regarding violations of international and Russian phytosanitary requirements over a shipment of rice imported from Pakistan.

Dated April 2, the notification highlights the presence of a quarantine organism, “Megaselia scalaris (Loew),” in the rice consignment.

Pakistan’s trade representative at its embassy in Russia was asked to carry out an immediate investigation into the matter.

The Russian authorities have written to the Pakistan embassy to prevent such violations and ensure all Pakistani rice exporters follow phytosanitary standards to ensure the safety of agricultural products traded between the two countries.

The trade wing of the Pakistani embassy in Moscow, while forwarding the Russian authority’s letter to the Department of Plant Protection (DPP) in the Ministry of Food Security and other relevant government offices, has warned of a possible ban on rice exports in future if more complaints were received from Russian author-

ities.

Russia had previously imposed a ban on rice imports from Pakistan in 2019 because of health safety reasons.

Similarly, in December 2006, Russia stopped the import of rice from Pakistan for not meeting food safety standards.

Chairman of the Pakistan Rice Exporters Association, Chela Ram Kewlani, said that Pakistani rice exporters needed to be very careful in choosing and packaging all rice for export.

He said that Pakistan had benefited from India banning exports of non-Basmati rice last year, given that India has a nearly 40 per cent share in the globally traded rice.

Last year, India banned the export of white non-Basmati

and parboiled rice.

According to a leading Pakistani rice dealer, about 700,000 tonnes of rice were exported in December 2023 alone, the highest in a month for the fiscal year.

He said Pakistan exported rice with an increase in higher production and demand and elevated global prices last year.

The Rice Export Corporation is projecting a 60 per cent jump in exports of Basmati rice to over a million tonnes and a 36 per cent jump for non-Basmati rice to 4.25 million tonnes from Pakistan.

It is eyeing exports of above five million metric tonnes of all rice in the fiscal year of 2023/2024, which would be much higher than last fiscal year’s exports of 3.7 million tonnes.



# 2 Japanese navy helicopters crash, 1 dead and 7 missing

AP ■ TOKYO

Two Japanese navy helicopters carrying eight crew members crashed in the Pacific Ocean south of Tokyo during nighttime training in a possible collision, leaving one dead while rescuers on Sunday searched for seven others missing, the defence minister said. The two SH-60K choppers from the Maritime Self-Defence Force were carrying four crew each and lost contact late Saturday near Torishima island, about 600 kilometres south of Tokyo, Defense Minister Minoru Kihara told reporters. The cause of the crash was not immediately known, but officials believe the two helicopters “highly likely” collided before crashing into the water, Kihara said. The navy chief of staff, Adm. Ryo Sakai, said training involving the SH-60s will be suspended until the cause of the crash is determined and preventive measures are adopted. Rescuers recovered a flight data recorder, a blade from each helicopter, and fragments believed to be from both choppers in the same area, signs that the two SH-60Ks were flying

close to each other, Kihara said. Search and rescue efforts for the missing crew were expanded Sunday with the deployment of 12 warships and seven aircraft. Japan coast guard patrol boats and planes also joined the operation. US Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel offered his country’s to help with the search and rescue. “We will stand together, side by side, with our friend and ally, Japan. My thoughts are with the crew members, and their families and friends during this challenging time,” he wrote on the social platform X. The twin-engine, multi-mission helicopters developed by Sikorsky and known as Seahawks were modified and produced in Japan by Mitsubishi Heavy Industries. They were on nighttime anti-submarine training, Kihara said. One lost contact at 10:38 p.m. and sent an automatic emergency signal a minute later. Only one distress signal, called an emergency locator transmitter, was heard — another sign the helicopters were near the same place, because their signals use the same frequency and could not be differentiat-

ed, Kihara said. One helicopter belonged to an air base in Nagasaki, and the other to a base in Tokushima prefecture. Officials were interviewing the pilot of a third aircraft that also participated in Saturday’s training, Kihara said. The SH-60K aircraft is usually deployed on destroyers for anti-submarine warfare, but is also used for search and rescue and other missions. Japan has about 70 of the modified helicopters. Saturday’s training only involved the Japanese navy and was not part of a multinational exercise, defense officials said. Japan, under its 2022 security strategy, has been accelerating its military buildup and fortifying deterrence in the southwestern Japanese islands in the Pacific and East China Sea to counter threats from China’s increasingly assertive military activities. Japan in recent years has conducted its own extensive naval exercises as well as joint drills with its ally the United States and other partners. Saturday’s training was part of routine drills involving warships, submarines and Seahawk helicopters, the Japanese navy

chief of staff said. During training, a number of helicopters hover together as they lower sonars into the water to detect submarines. In 2017, a Japanese navy SH-60J, an earlier generation Seahawk, crashed during nighttime training due to human error, killing three crew. In July 2021, two SH-60s had a minor collision off the southern island of Amamioshima, both suffering blade damage, but causing no injuries. Following the 2021 collision, the navy introduced a set of preventive measures to ensure enough distance between aircraft. Sakai said Saturday’s crash could have been prevented if all safety measures were adequately followed. In the US, the fatal crash of a MH-60S Seahawk during training off California in 2021 was attributed to mechanical failure from unsuspected damage during maintenance, according to the Navy. The crash in Japan also comes a year after a Ground Self-Defense Force UH-60 Blackhawk crashed off the southwestern island of Miyako due to an engine output problem known as “rollback,” leaving all 10 crew members dead.

# Polling ends in 21 national and provincial seats in by-elections in Pakistan

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD/LAHORE

Polling ended on Sunday for 21 national and provincial seats in the by-elections in Pakistan, which took place amidst tight security and suspension of cellular and internet services in some districts of Punjab and Balochistan to maintain law and order. According to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), voting began at 8 am and continued without any break until 5 pm with the provision that voters present within the premises of polling stations would be allowed to cast votes even after the expiry of official timing. It will be followed by counting, while results are expected later tonight. Despite elaborate security measures taken by authorities to maintain the law and order situation, at least one person was killed and several others injured in clashes during the polling in Punjab province, according to the police. “Violent clashes took place in Narowal, Sheikhupura and Rahim Yar Khan in which one person was killed and several injured,” the Punjab police said. In Narowal, some 120 km from

Lahore, a clash took place between the supporters of former prime ministers Imran Khan and Nawaz Sharif outside a polling station. Punjab Information Minister Azma Bokhari said the victim was a member of Sharif’s Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) who was killed by workers of Khan’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party. In the Sheikhupura and Rahim Yar Khan districts of Punjab, at least five workers of the two rival parties suffered bullet injuries during clashes. Similarly in Lahore, the PTI and PML-N workers scuffled on setting up polling camps. Police arrested four persons, including PTI leader Shabbir Gujjar. The general elections were held across the country on February 8 to elect representatives for the national assembly and four provincial assemblies. Polls were, however, cancelled for one National Assembly seat, two Punjab Assembly seats and one seat of the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Assembly. Apart from these, candidates who won more than one seat opted for only one after the elections, leaving the ECP to

organise by-elections on 21 seats, including five national and 16 provincial assembly seats. A day earlier, the federal government announced that cellular services would remain temporarily suspended in specific districts of Punjab and Balochistan during the by-elections. The suspension request was made by the electoral watchdog. In a statement, the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) said the decision was taken to safeguard the integrity and security of the electoral process. Social media platform X (formerly Twitter) has also been shut down in Pakistan since February 17, after a top bureaucrat accused the Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja and Chief Justice of Pakistan Qazi Faez Isa of being involved in rigging at the behest of the military establishment to install the Shehbaz Sharif government. By-elections were held on two seats of the National Assembly each in Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and one seat in Sindh, while polling began on 12 seats of the Punjab Assembly and two each of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and

Balochistan assemblies. In Punjab, NA-132 (Kasur) and NA-119 (Lahore) were vacated by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz, while Shehbaz also gave up two of his provincial assembly seats in Lahore. The prime minister retained his NA-123 seat in the National Assembly. Elaborate security measures were taken by authorities to control the law and order situation with the deployment of regular army troops to maintain peace during the day-long process of by-elections. The ECP had asked the federal government to approve the deployment of Pakistan Army and Civil Armed Forces (CAF) troops to keep peace. The federal government endorsed the move and announced the use of armed forces units as a quick response force. The Ministry of Interior, in its notification issued on Friday, said the CAF and Pakistan Army units would be used as second and third tiers of security, and they would be available with immediate effect till April 22 in all 21 constituencies.

# Scotland Yard chief under pressure over antisemitism row at London protest

PTI ■ LONDON

The Scotland Yard chief is under growing pressure on Sunday amid an antisemitism row during a pro-Palestinian protest march in London, with former UK home secretary Suella Braverman among those calling for his resignation. Sir Mark Rowley, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, is in the firing line after Britain’s largest police force rendered two apologies to an antisemitism campaigner for calling him “openly Jewish.” Rowley “personally” reiterated the force’s apologies as London Mayor Sadiq Khan and UK Home Office, in charge of the city’s policing, said the force was right to apologise. “I personally reiterate our apology from earlier this week. Today, as with every other day, our officers will continue to police with courage, empathy and impartiality,” said Rowley. But he has now been summoned to a meeting with UK

Policing Minister Chris Philp, who has said he was “deeply concerned” by the force’s handling of counter-protesters at pro-Palestinian rallies. “No one should be told their religion is provocative, nor an innocent person threatened with arrest solely because of someone else’s anticipated unreasonable reaction,” said Philp. In a video on social media, Campaign Against Antisemitism chief executive Gideon Falter – wearing his Jewish yarmulke cap – is seen being told by a Met Police officer that he is worried about the reaction to his presence at the march. “The video posted by the Campaign Against Antisemitism will further dent the confidence of many Jewish Londoners, which is the opposite of what any of us want,” said Met Police Assistant Commissioner Matt Twist in a statement following the incident last weekend. “The use of the term ‘openly Jewish’ by one of our officers is hugely regrettable. It’s

absolutely not the basis on which we make decisions, it was a poor choice of words and while not intended, we know it will have caused offence to many. We apologise,” he said. Twist went on to highlight a trend at the demonstrations in London, in protest against the Israel-Hamas conflict, where those opposed to the main protests appear along the route to express their views. He added: “The fact that those who do this often film themselves while doing so suggests they must know that their presence is provocative, that they’re inviting a response and that they’re increasing the likelihood of an altercation. “They’re also making it much more likely officers will intervene. They don’t do so to stifle free speech or to limit the right to protest, but to keep opposing groups apart, to prevent disorder and keep the public – including those taking part in or opposing the protest – safe.”

# Polish voters choose mayors in runoff polls

AP ■ WARSAW (POLAND)

Polish voters are casting ballots on Sunday to chose mayors in hundreds of cities and towns where no candidate won outright in the first round of the country’s local elections two weeks ago. Mayors will be chosen in a total of 748 places, including in the cities of Krakow, Poznan, Rzeszow and Wroclaw. Those are places where no single candidate won at least 50 per cent of the vote during the first round of elections on April 7. The local and regional elections are being viewed as a test for the pro-European Union government of Prime Minister Donald Tusk four months after it took power at the national level. Tusk’s party did well in big cities including Warsaw, where his party’s candidate, Rafal Trzaskowski, easily won re-election as mayor two weeks ago. The main opposition party, Law and Justice, which held power at the national level from 2015-23, won a greater percentage of votes in the provincial assemblies.

# Live video of man who set himself on fire proves challenging for news organisations

AP ■ NEW YORK

Video cameras stationed outside the Manhattan courthouse where former President Donald Trump is on trial caught the gruesome scene Friday of a man who lit himself on fire and the aftermath as authorities tried to rescue him. CNN, Fox News Channel and MSNBC were all on the air with reporters talking about the seating of a jury when the incident happened and other news agencies, including The Associated Press, were livestreaming from outside the courthouse. The man, who distributed pamphlets before dousing himself in an accelerant and setting himself on fire, was taken to a hospital where he later died. The incident tested how quickly the networks could react, and how they decided what would be too disturbing for their viewers to see. With narration from Laura Coates, CNN had the most extensive view of the scene. Coates, who at first incorrect-



ly said it was a shooting situation, then narrated as the man was visible onscreen, enveloped in flames. “You can smell burning flesh,” Coates, an anchor and CNN’s chief legal analyst, said as she stood at the scene with reporter Evan Perez. The camera switched back and forth between Coates and what was happening in the park. Five minutes after the incident started, CNN posted the onscreen message “Warning: Graphic Content.”

Coates later said she couldn’t “overstate the emotional response of watching a human being engulfed in flames and to watch his body be lifted into a gurney.” She described it as an emotional and unbelievably disturbing moment here.” Fox’s cameras caught the scene briefly as reporter Eric Shawn talked, then the network switched to a courtroom sketch of Trump on trial. “We deeply apologize for what has happened,” Shawn said. On MSNBC, reporter Yasmin

Vossoughian narrated the scene. The network showed smoke in the park, but no picture where the body was visible. “I could see the outline of his body inside the flames,” Vossoughian said, “which was so terrifying to see. As he went to the ground his knees hit the ground first.” The AP had a camera with an unnarrated live shot stationed outside the courthouse, shown on YouTube and APNews.com. The cameras caught an extensive view, with the man lighting himself afire and later writhing on the ground before a police officer tried to douse the flames with a jacket. The AP later removed its live feed from its YouTube channel and replaced it with a new one because of the graphic nature of the content. The news agency distributed carefully edited clips to its video clients — not showing the moment the man lit himself on fire, for example, said executive producer Tom Williams.

# Haitians scramble to survive amidst gang violence

AP ■ PORT AU PRINCE (HAITI)

As the sun sets, a burly man bellows into a megaphone while a curious crowd gathers around him. Next to him is a small cardboard box with several banknotes worth 10 Haitian gourdes — about 7 US cents. “Everyone give whatever they have!” the man shouts as he grabs the arms and hands of people entering a neighbourhood in the capital of Port-au-Prince that has been targeted by violent gangs. The community recently voted to buy a metal barricade and install it themselves to try to protect residents from the unrelenting violence that killed or injured more than 2,500 people in Haiti from January to March. “Every day I wake up and find

a dead body,” said Nounne-Carme Manoune, an immigration officer. Life in Port-au-Prince has become a game of survival, pushing Haitians to new limits as they scramble to stay safe and alive while gangs overwhelm the police and the government remains largely absent. Some are installing metal barricades. Others press hard on the gas while driving near gang-controlled areas. The few who can afford it stockpile water, food, money and medication, supplies of which have dwindled since the main international airport closed in early March. The country’s biggest seaport is largely paralysed by marauding gangs. “People living in the capital are locked in, they have nowhere to go,” Philippe Branchat,

International Organisation for Migration chief in Haiti, said in a recent statement. “The capital is surrounded by armed groups and danger. It is a city under siege.” Phones ping often with alerts reporting gunfire, kidnappings and fatal shootings, and some supermarkets have so many armed guards that they resemble small police stations. Gang attacks used to occur only in certain areas, but now they can happen anywhere, any time. Staying home does not guarantee safety: One man playing with his daughter at home was shot in the back by a stray bullet. Others have been killed. Schools and gas stations are shuttered, with fuel on the black market selling for USD 9 a gallon, roughly three times the official price. Banks have

prohibited customers from withdrawing more than USD 100 a day, and checks that used to take three days to clear now take a month or more. Police officers have to wait weeks to be paid. “Everyone is under stress,” said Isidore Gedeon, a 38-year-old musician. “After the prison break, people don’t trust anyone. The state doesn’t have control.” Gangs that control an estimated 80 per cent of Port-au-Prince launched coordinated attacks on February 29, targeting critical state infrastructure. They set fire to police stations, shot up the airport and stormed into Haiti’s two biggest prisons, releasing more than 4,000 inmates. At the time, Prime Minister Ariel Henry was visiting Kenya to push for the UN-backed

deployment of a police force. Henry remains locked out of Haiti, and a transitional presidential council tasked with selecting the country’s next prime minister and Cabinet could be sworn in as early as this week. Henry has pledged to resign once a new leader is installed. Few believe this will end the crisis. It’s not only the gangs unleashing violence; Haitians have embraced a vigilante movement known as “bwa kale,” that has killed several hundred suspected gang members or their associates. “There are certain communities I can’t go to because everyone is scared of everyone,” Gedeon said. “You could be innocent, and you end up dead.” More than 95,000 people have fled Port-au-Prince in one month alone.

# IMF team to visit Pak next month to negotiate new bailout package

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan’s Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb has said that an IMF team is expected to visit Islamabad next month to negotiate a new long-term bailout package to secure a staff-level agreement for the cash-strapped country by mid-July. Speaking to the media after his week-long visit to Washington, the minister said the contours of the new International Monetary Fund programme will shape up later. “We will start getting into the granularity of the programme by mid-May,” Dawn News quoted Aurangzeb as saying on Saturday. Cash-strapped Pakistan has made a formal request to the IMF to seek the next bailout package

in the range of USD 6 to USD 8 billion with the possibility of augmentation through climate financing. Addressing journalists at the Pakistan Embassy in Washington, Aurangzeb expressed the hope that the global lender’s board of governors would convene to consider the last tranche of the current programme by the end of this month, with the final instalment released shortly thereafter. In earlier statements, Aurangzeb had said Pakistan would prefer a long-term, preferably a three-year programme. However, when asked at Saturday’s briefing, Aurangzeb said he would not speculate on the size or the duration of the programme yet. Earlier, Aurangzeb said that

Pakistan can repay its debt to Beijing only after completing the second phase of the multi-million dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The minister’s candid remarks followed discussions with key financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank, alongside senior US officials in Washington this week. Explaining his stance on this sensitive issue, Aurangzeb said: “The CPEC was a champion project for Pakistan and a lot of infrastructure was created during its first phase. Now, what’s supposed to happen was for us to go into CPEC Phase 2, which was and remains the way we monetise that infrastructure because that’s where the special economic zones come in.”

# Putin wants to get closer to Afghanistan’s current rulers?

THE CONVERSATION ■ NEWCASTLE (UK)

Russia is currently considering taking the Taliban off its list of terrorist organisations, officials have indicated. While no final decision has yet been taken, one sign of their increasingly cordial relationship is the Taliban’s invitation to an international economic forum being held in Kazan, Russia, in May. The Kremlin has opened up discussions with the Taliban before, and Russia was one of the few nations to accredit a diplomat when the organisation took control of Afghanistan. But Afghanistan’s political and economic crisis and western

sanctions on Russia due to the Ukraine war mean both sides have something to gain from a stronger relationship. In 1999, the UN security council adopted resolution 1267, in which the Taliban was found responsible for “the provision of sanctuary and training for international terrorists”. A few months later, Vladimir Putin signed a decree implementing the UN resolution and imposing sanctions against the Taliban. In 2003, the Russian supreme court recognised the Taliban movement as a terrorist organisation, saying it maintained links with illegal armed forces in Chechnya and tried to seize power in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan

and Kyrgyzstan. Russia launched a regional initiative in 2017 to negotiate between the Kabul government and the Taliban as an effort to create a peacemaker role for itself. These negotiations were aimed at offering solutions to the Afghanistan crisis, and were usually held with the participation of China, Iran, Pakistan and central Asian republics. Russia continued to maintain contact with the Taliban, despite labelling them a terrorist group. Since taking over control of Afghanistan, no foreign states have recognised the Taliban government. There are few signs yet that many are close to

doing so, partly because of the Taliban’s continuing erosion of women’s rights and recognition of human rights more generally. The Taliban wants international sanctions to be withdrawn, to take Afghanistan’s UN seat and for frozen assets to be released, which will help the country’s economic development. Afghanistan should benefit economically from developing the important Lapis-Lazuli trade corridor which links Afghanistan to Istanbul and Europe, and the Uzbekistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan railway line, if international sanctions are withdrawn. Russia taking the Taliban off

their terrorism list would be a first step toward international recognition for the current Afghan government. Russia also benefits from its cooperation with the Taliban. It aims to present itself as the region’s security provider, especially compared to the US’s failure to create stability in Afghanistan. Moscow considers central Asia a zone of historical interest (the Soviet Union was involved in an armed conflict within Afghanistan from 1979-89). It is also concerned about the stability of the region, drug trafficking and threats from Islamist terrorism, especially after the recent Isis-K attack on the Crocus City Hall, Moscow.

To increase its geoeconomic and geopolitical presence in the region, Russia can use the alliances it has already built – the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (a military alliance with Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, formed in 2002) and the Eurasian Economic Union (an economic union of five post-Soviet states). Russia’s 2023 foreign policy plan mentions prospects for Afghanistan’s integration into “the Eurasian space for cooperation”. The increasing cooperation between the Taliban and Russia has implications in terms of the ongoing rivalry between Russia and the west. Since the begin-

ning of the Ukraine war, Moscow has tried to get other nations to support its strategic view of why the war is happening. This version of history and policy positions Russia as a protector of traditional religions and values and places it among major world civilisations, contrasting it with the “godless” west. It also details the right of civilisations to exist and develop within their own values, something that should appeal to the Taliban, and that Russia presents as a contrast to the west. In 2022, Putin said: “Real democracy in a multipolar world is primarily about the ability of [...] any civilisation to follow its own path and organ-

ise its own socio-political system. If the United States or the EU countries enjoy this right, then the countries of Asia, the Islamic states, the monarchies of the Persian Gulf [...] certainly have this right as well.” These ideas are popular in the Muslim world because they promise an alternative non-western order and recognise Islamic values as equal and fundamental, with no need to conform to the western interpretations of right and wrong. The potential rapprochement with the Taliban is a sign to the Islamic world in particular, that, unlike the US, Russia is an ally that will not interfere in another country’s internal affairs or dictate its values.



# Six of top ten valued firms take ₹1.40 lakh crore hit in mcap

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The combined market valuation of six of the top 10 valued firms eroded by Rs 1,40,478.38 crore in a holiday-shortened week, with IT majors Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) and Infosys taking the maximum hit. Last week, the BSE benchmark declined 1,156.57 points or 1.55 per cent. Stock markets were closed on Wednesday on account of Ram Navami.

While Reliance Industries, HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel and Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC)



were the gainers from the top-10 pack, TCS, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India, Infosys, ITC and Hindustan

Unilever suffered erosion in their valuation. The market valuation of TCS tanked by Rs 62,538.64 crore

to Rs 13,84,804.91 crore, the most among the top 10 firms. Infosys faced an erosion of Rs 30,488.12 crore from its

valuation which stood at Rs 5,85,936.45 crore. 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 market capitalisation (mcap) of ICICI Bank diminished by Rs 26,423.74 crore to Rs 7,49,023.89 crore and that of State Bank of India declined by Rs 14,234.76 crore to Rs 6,70,059.86 crore. The valuation of ITC slumped Rs 6,616.9 crore to Rs 5,30,350.97 crore and that of Hindustan Unilever went lower by Rs 176.22 crore to

Rs 5,24,487.51 crore. However, Bharti Airtel's mcap zoomed Rs 37,797.09 crore to Rs 7,30,658.36 crore and that of HDFC Bank climbed Rs 9,420.17 crore to Rs 11,63,314.93 crore. Reliance Industries added Rs 4,397.82 crore taking its valuation to Rs 19,90,195.52 crore and the mcap of LIC advanced Rs 1,201.75 crore to Rs 6,15,453.90 crore. In the ranking of top-10 firms, Reliance Industries remained the most valued company followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Bharti Airtel, State Bank of India, LIC, Infosys, ITC and Hindustan Unilever.

# Indian Biogas Association joins hands with HAI to promote hydrogen



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Biogas Association (IBA) has partnered with Hydrogen Association of India (HAI) to promote bio-based energy solutions with a special emphasis on green and blue hydrogen. Talking to PTI, IBA Chairman Gaurav Kedia said, "IBA and HAI have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) aimed at promoting the production of green energy within the nation". This strategic alliance will facilitate comprehensive measures — including training, capacity building, and policy advocacy — directed towards catalysing the promotion and advancement of bio-based energy solutions with a special focus on green and blue hydrogen. The green hydrogen market in India is forecasted to achieve a total worth of USD 8 billion by 2030 and USD 340 billion

by 2050, Kedia informed. With a shared objective of minimising the country's reliance on imported energy sources, the MoU marks commitment to joint efforts in propelling sustainable energy initiatives forward. The agreement is focussing on harnessing synergies from both associations, thereby catalysing the continued growth of the growing bio-based energy sector. While Indian Biogas Association remains dedicated to advancing the biogas industry, Hydrogen Association of India is committed to delivering comprehensive services and seeking optimal solutions for key stakeholders, spanning the entirety of the hydrogen sector's diverse industries. The partnership can also give an extra push to blue hydrogen, whose projections indicate that it is poised to increase to 80 million metric tons by 2050, contingent upon ongoing governmental

endeavours worldwide to enforce more stringent regulations to foster the adoption of emission-free fuel sources, Kedia said. "The discourse surrounding the utilisation of hydrogen within the steel industry has garnered significant attention. However, it is crucial to note that carbon remains indispensable in the process. "By breaking methane molecules, inherent within biogas, we can simultaneously yield both carbon and hydrogen, thereby offering a viable solution to address this requirement," he added. HAI president RK Malhotra stressed the importance of policy advocacy for the bio-hydrogen and biogas ecosystem. This collaborative approach aims to leverage government initiatives within the sector and empower the industry to achieve India's green energy goals, ultimately supporting the nation's sustainable growth, he stated.

# Insurance regulator IRDAI abolishes age restriction on health insurance product

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

With a view to widen the market and foster adequate protection from healthcare expenses, insurance regulator IRDAI has removed the age limit of 65 years for individuals buying health insurance policies. This marks a significant departure from the conventional constraints that limited individuals in securing comprehensive coverage. By abolishing the maximum age restriction on purchasing health insurance plans, the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) aims to foster a more inclusive and accessible healthcare ecosystem, ensuring adequate protection against unforeseen medical expenses. As per the earlier guidelines, individuals were allowed to purchase a new insurance policy only till the age of 65. However, with the recent amendment, which has been effective from April 1, anyone, regardless of age, is eligible to buy a new health insurance policy. In a recent gazette notification, IRDAI said, "insurers shall ensure that they offer health insurance products to cater to all age groups. Insurers may design products specifically for senior citizens, students, children, maternity, and any other group as specified by the Competent Authority." Besides, insurers have been mandated to offer health policies to individuals with



pre-existing medical conditions of any kind. Consequently, insurers are prohibited from refusing to issue policies to individuals with severe medical conditions like cancer, heart or renal failure, and AIDS. According to the notification, insurers are allowed to offer premium payment in instalments for the convenience of policyholders. Travel policies can only be offered by general and health insurers, it said. There is no limit on AYUSH treatment coverage. Treatments under systems like Ayurveda, Yoga, Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy will receive coverage up to the sum insured without any cap, it said. Policyholders with benefit-based policies can file multiple claims with various insurers, enhancing flexibility and options, it said. The proposed regulation seeks to handle the complaints and claims of senior citizens via a specialised channel, ensuring a more tailored and responsive approach to their requirements, it added.

# UltraTech Cement acquires grinding unit from India Cements

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Aditya Birla group company UltraTech Cement has announced the acquisition of a grinding unit from India Cements for Rs 315 crore and said it will invest an additional Rs 504 crore to expand capacity of two units. In a stock exchange filing, UltraTech said its board has approved acquisition "of a grinding unit having installed capacity of 1.1 million tonnes per annum in addition to a captive railway siding at Parli, Maharashtra from The India Cements Limited... For a consideration of Rs 315 crores". The company said it has entered into an Asset Purchase Agreement with the seller. "This purchase will help the Company to strengthen its presence in the rapidly growing Maharashtra markets," Making a similar regulatory filing, The India Cements said out of the total consideration of Rs 315 crore (exclusive of taxes and levies), "Rs 307 crore will be received by the company shortly and the balance Rs 8 crore within nine months from the date of the agreement". The unit being sold had a turnover of Rs 250.66 crore in the fiscal year ended March 31 2023 and net asset value of Rs 75.10 crore. In a separate filing, UltraTech said its board has also approved brownfield capacity expansion — 1.2 million tonnes per annum at Parli at a cost of Rs 166.4 crore post acquisition of the grinding unit, and 1.8 million tonnes at Dhule in Maharashtra at a cost of Rs 338 crore.

# Direct tax collections exceed estimates in FY24



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's net direct tax collections surged by a massive 17.7 per cent year-on-year to Rs 19.58 crore in the fiscal year ended March 2024, surpassing even revised estimates by a wide margin, the tax department said on Sunday. Net collections of income and corporate taxes, which make up for most of the direct taxes, in 2023-24 financial year exceeded the Budget estimates by Rs 1.35 lakh crore (7.40 per cent) and the revised estimates by Rs 13,000 crore. The government had raised the target for direct tax collection in FY24 (April 2023 to March 2024) to Rs 19.45 lakh crore in the interim Budget presented on February 1. With this, the gross tax collection target as per the revised estimate stood at Rs 34.37 lakh crore for FY24. While gross direct tax collections (provisional) for the FY 2023-24 rose 18.48 per cent to Rs 23.37 lakh crore, net proceeds (after accounting for refunds) surged 17.7 per cent to Rs 19.58 lakh crore, reflecting buoyancy in the economy and rise in income levels of individuals and corporates. Refunds aggregating to Rs 3.79 lakh crore have been issued in FY 2023-24, the CBDT said in a statement. "The provisional figures of Direct Tax collections for the financial year (FY) 2023-24 show that net collections are at Rs 19.58 lakh crore, compared to Rs 16.64 lakh crore in the preceding financial year i.e. FY 2022-23," it said, adding the Budget for 2023-24 fiscal had pegged the collections for the year at Rs 18.23 lakh crore, which were revised to Rs 19.45 lakh crore later. "The provisional Direct Tax collections (net of the refunds) have exceeded the Budget Estimate by 7.40 per cent and Revised Estimates by

0.67 per cent," it said. The gross collection (provisional) of Direct Taxes (before adjusting for refunds) for the FY 2023-24 stood at Rs 23.37 lakh crore, showing a growth of 18.48 per cent over the gross collection of Rs 19.72 lakh crore in FY 2022-23. The gross corporate tax collection (provisional) in FY 2023-24 was up 13.06 per cent to Rs 11.32 lakh crore as compared to the gross corporate tax collection of Rs 10 lakh crore of the preceding year. The Net Corporate Tax collection (provisional) in FY 2023-24 at Rs 9.11 lakh crore showed a growth of 10.26 per cent over the net corporate tax collection of Rs 8.26 lakh crore of the preceding year. The Gross Personal Income Tax collection including Securities Transaction Tax (provisional) in FY 2023-24 at Rs 12.01 lakh crore was up 24.26 per cent over previous year's collection of Rs 9.67 lakh crore. The Net Personal Income Tax collection including STT (provisional) in FY 2023-24 at Rs 10.44 lakh crore showed a growth of 25.23 per cent over preceding fiscal year's figure of Rs 8.33 lakh crore. Refunds of Rs 3.79 lakh crore have been issued in the FY 2023-24 showing an increase of 22.74 per cent over the refunds of Rs 3.09 lakh crore issued in FY 2022-23, the statement added. Even the indirect tax collection for FY24 has exceeded the revised estimates (RE) of Rs 14.84 lakh crore by "a handsome margin", helped by a record GST mop-up, a top government official said. CBIC chairman Sanjay Kumar Agarwal, in a letter to field officials, recently said, "I am happy to inform that the indirect tax collections for the Financial Year 2023-24, including Customs and Union Excise Duty have exceeded the Revised Estimates by a handsome margin."

# Majority of top 100 companies making disclosures about carbon emissions: PwC India

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Supplementing the efforts of the Indian government to achieve a net-zero emission target by 2070, as many as 51 per cent of the top-100 companies have started making disclosures on a voluntary basis about carbon emissions, says a PwC India survey. The survey further said that about 31 per cent of the respondent companies have disclosed their net-zero targets. The government and the regulators have introduced

new regulations pertaining to ESG (environmental, social and governance) for businesses. India's transition to BRSR Core positions the nation as a frontrunner in the global transition towards a more credible and transparent sustainability reporting landscape. "51 per cent of India's top 100 listed companies by market capitalisation disclosed their Scope 3 data for FY23 despite it being a voluntary disclosure in Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR)," said the report, 'Navigating India's Transition



to Sustainability'. This, it added, "sheds light on how Indian businesses are

taking a step further in ESG reporting as Scope 3 emissions are crucial to

understand an entity's net zero journey." "With the BRSR becoming a mandatory report for businesses, ESG considerations have become key strategic priorities in boardroom discussions. This is a testimony of the enhanced awareness of the importance of sustainability and responsible business practices," said Sambitosh Mohapatra, Partner & Leader, ESG, PwC India. ESG reporting through the BRSR has ushered in greater transparency and a holistic view of a business's

environmental and societal impact, thus, enabling investors and other stakeholders to form key decisions through an ESG lens, make comparisons across companies and sectors, and track progress over time, PwC India said. The survey further said 44 per cent of the top 100 listed companies conducted the life-cycle assessment of their products or services, 89 per cent of the companies disclosed their information on leadership indicators, 49 per cent have increased their energy consumption from

renewable sources. According to the report, the key initiatives which led to a reduction in emissions included transitioning to energy-efficient technologies such as LEDs, adopting efficient air-conditioning, ventilation, and heating systems, shifting to renewable sources for securing energy needs, purchasing carbon offsets, and entering into off-site power purchase agreements. "As India commits to achieve its net zero vision by 2070, the business sector is being viewed as a critical enabler in

furthering this ambition," it said. India's transition to BRSR Core positions the nation as a frontrunner in the global transition towards a more credible and transparent sustainability reporting landscape, it added. The report has analysed the publicly accessible BRSR reports of top 100 companies (NIFTY 50 companies and NEXFT 50 listed companies) and their response to the regulatory requirement of mandatory reporting under the BRSR for the financial year ended 31 March 2023.

# Expect rural sales contribution at record levels this fiscal, says Hyundai

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hyundai Motor India expects sales contribution from rural areas to remain at record levels in the current fiscal as well on account of various factors including anticipation of a favourable monsoon, according to a senior company executive. The company's second-largest automaker, which sells models like Creta and Venue, reported 11 per cent growth in rural

areas last fiscal as compared to 4 per cent in urban centres. "We are confident that the contribution from rural markets to our total sales will grow further to around 20 per cent this financial year," Hyundai Motor India COO Tarun Garg told PTI. The automaker plans to further expand its presence in smaller towns as it firmly believes that for the nation to prosper, both rural and urban regions must progress in tandem, he added.

Patanjali Ayurved fully respects the dignity of the Hon'ble Supreme Court. We sincerely apologize for the mistake of publishing advertisements and holding a press conference even after our advocates made a statement in the apex court. We are committed to not let such a mistake be repeated ever in the future. We reassure you that we shall remain committed to uphold the constitution and the dignity of the Hon'ble Supreme Court.

**Patanjali Ayurved Limited, Haridwar, Uttarakhand.**

# Land deals on upswing; 721 acres closed in January, March in FY24, says Anarock

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Builders and other entities have closed at least 29 land deals involving 721 acres during January-March this year to expand their businesses amid surge in demand especially for housing, according to Anarock. During the entire 2023-24 fiscal, property consultant Anarock said that real estate developers and other entities have closed 101 land deals, cumulatively accounting for 2,989 acres. Land deals in terms of acres have increased 61 per cent annually in January-March 2024 and 58 per cent annually in 2023-24. At least 26 land deals for around 449 acres were closed during January-March 2023,

while 88 land deals for 1,886 acres were struck during the full 2022-23 fiscal. These land deals, which were struck across major tier I, tier II and tier III cities, include outright purchase-sale transactions and also partnerships with landlords called Joint Development Agreements (JDAs). Anarock Chairman Anuj Puri said, "Out of the total land deals in 2023-24, over 83 deals for about 1,135 acres were closed in the top 7 cities alone. "The remaining 18 deals, accounting for over 1,853 acres, were sealed in various tier 2 and 3 cities like Ahmedabad, Ayodhya, Jaipur, Nagpur, Mysuru, Ludhiana, and Surat. "Tier 2 & 3 cities have once again emerged as growth

engines, thanks to their rapidly improving infrastructure and growth opportunities," Puri said. Among cities, Anarock highlighted that Delhi-NCR clocked maximum 12 land deals for 160 acres during January-March 2024 and 29 land deals for 313 acres in the entire 2023-24 fiscal. Commenting on the findings, Aakash Ohri, Joint Managing Director of DLF Home Developers Ltd, said, "Land deals in the NCR have peaked due to urbanization, infrastructure development, and investment opportunities. Future developments and potential returns on investment are high contributors to the rise in land transactions." The surge in land deals

underscores the buoyancy of the housing market, Ohri noted. Signature Global Chairman Pradeep Aggarwal said, "The demand is robust for all kinds of properties from mid-segment to luxury and this is resulting in a significant number of land deals across the country including Delhi-NCR." "This is expected to pave the way for a robust pipeline of new projects in the coming months, which in turn is likely to provide homebuyers a wider range of options to choose from," Aggarwal added. Mohit Malhotra, Founder & CEO of realty firm NeoLiv, said the surge in land deals reflects the enduring demand for housing that has sustained since 2023.

# SRM College of Pharmacy, Scitus Pharma enter pact to promote expertise, innovation

PNS ■ KATTANKULATHUR

SRM College of Pharmacy, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Scitus Pharma Services, among the pioneers of speed and quality in clinical research, and a leading contract research firm based out of Chennai. The MoU will pave the way for SRM College of Pharmacy (SRMCP), a part of SRM Institute of Science and Technology, to engage in collaborative research projects, including joint research initiatives and knowledge exchange of best practices for continuous improvement and innovation, with focus on social relevance, and healthcare initiatives. Support to Startups: The agreement will also



foster facilitation of technology transfer from Scitus Pharma to SRMCP and vice-versa which including licensing agreement for Intellectual Property, joint development of technology and commercialisation of products. The aspect of skill development is the focal point for both students and faculty by introducing training programmes, workshops, internships, and industrial placements to be conducted by SRMCP and Scitus Pharma together.



# BRAIN WELLNESS

The Centre has set up a ‘National Task Force on Brain Health’, to address the rising concerns surrounding neurological disorders in India. ARCHANA JYOTI speaks to its Chairman and Director of IHBAS, DR RAJINDER K DHAMIJA, unveiling the task force’s healthcare impact

In low- and middle-income countries, 43 per cent of children under the age of five face challenges in reaching their developmental potential due to factors like extreme poverty and growth stunting. This not only results in financial losses but also predicts a 26 per cent reduction in annual earnings during adulthood. Against such disturbing background, the Government’s top think tank Niti Aayog’s has come forward to set up the high-level panel to formulate policies for primary, secondary, and tertiary level hospitals in the country. Spearheaded by Dr RK Dhamija who is also the Director of the Delhi-based Institute of Human Behaviour and Allied Services (IHBAS), the task force has nine members. These are Dr Manjri Tripathi, HOD Neurology, AIIMS Delhi, Dr Veena Kalra, ex-professor and Head Paediatrics, AIIMS Delhi, Dr Rabinder Singh, Neuro-rehabilitation scientist, ICMR, Rajib Kumar Sen, senior advisor, NITI Aayog, Indrani Kaushal, Economic Advisor, Union Health Ministry, the others are Radhika Chakravarthy B and Rajesh Yadav, Joint Secretaries from Union Ministry of Social and Justice empowerment and Dr Suvarna from NIMHANS, Bangalore.

**Excerpt from the interview:** Dr Dhamija, kindly tell us more about the establishment of the National Task Force on Brain Health and its objectives? Thank you for having me. The World Health Organisation (WHO) in its 75th General Assembly adopted the Inter-sectoral Global Action Plan on epilepsy and other neurological disorders 2022–2031. This provides the vision, goal, guiding principles and strategic objectives with their action areas and targets for member states. India being major economic power is also signatory to this resolution which suggests a range of proposed actions for member states. The task force is in line with WHO resolution as well as in response to the growing challenges posed by neurological disorders, especially in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. Its primary objective is to address the gaps in brain healthcare accessibility and quality across all levels of healthcare



DR RAJINDER K DHAMIJA  
Chairman, National Task Force on Brain Health and Director IHBAS, Delhi

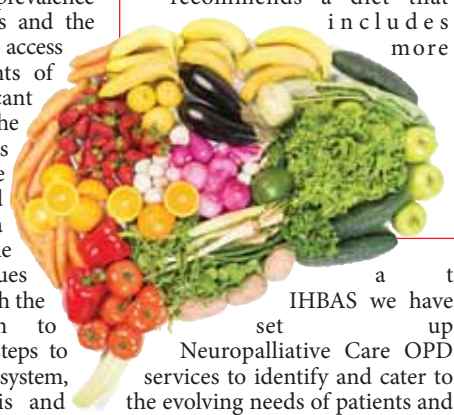
delivery in India, from Aayushman Arogya Mandirs to District Hospitals and tertiary institutions. **How do you envision it making an impact?** As I said, the increasing prevalence of neurological disorders and the disparities in healthcare access across different segments of society were significant motivating factors in the establishment of this central task force. The government recognized the urgent need for a coordinated effort to tackle these issues comprehensively. Through the task force, we aim to recommend actionable steps to strengthen the healthcare system, improve early diagnosis and treatment, and promote neurological health through preventive measures. **Can you elaborate on some of the specific challenges or gaps in brain healthcare that the task force aims to address?** Certainly. One major challenge is the unequal distribution of healthcare resources, particularly in rural and underserved areas. This leads to disparities in access to specialized care and diagnostic facilities for neurological conditions. Additionally, there is a lack of awareness about neurological disorders among the general population, which often results in delayed diagnosis and treatment. The task force will work towards bridging these gaps by recommending strategies to improve healthcare infrastructure, raise awareness, and enhance the capacity of healthcare providers. Here I would like to mention that

## Tips to Boost Your Brain

DR JAMES E. GALVIN, a professor of neurology and psychiatry at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine in his study points out

- Yoga can help you relax. It has been found that people who did two weeks of Yoga Nidra—a specific type of yoga that incorporates meditation and mindfulness—had improvements in sleep quality, attention, and memory.
- Good nutrition is key for brain health. The Alzheimer’s association recommends a diet that includes more

veggies and lean meats with fewer fatty and processed foods. Galvin cites a study published in Frontiers in Nutrition which found foods high in fat can negatively impact the brain.- Regular exercise can also help your brain.
- Staying socially engaged can protect the brain. Chronic isolation can increase the risk of premature death as much as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day.
- Sleep is also vital for overall brain health. According to Johns Hopkins, a healthy amount of sleep promotes “brain plasticity” or the brain’s ability to adapt to input.



at IHBAS we have set up a Neuropalliative Care OPD services to identify and cater to the evolving needs of patients and caregivers with aim to improve their quality of life, enhance well-being and overall psychosocial functioning through holistic multidisciplinary approach. **What are some of the key priorities or focus areas for the task force particularly in the coming months?** Your brain allows you to think, feel, communicate, move, coordinate, remember, make decisions, and live a productive life. That’s why keeping it healthy is so important and that’s what will be our panel’s priority. We will conduct a comprehensive assessment of the current state of brain healthcare in India, including an analysis of existing policies, infrastructure, and resources. Based on this assessment, we will develop a set of action, give recommendations to address the identified gaps and challenges. The panel has to submit report by July 15, 2024.

**Brain health is the state of brain functioning across cognitive, sensory, social-emotional, behavioural and motor domains, allowing a person to realize their full potential over the life course, irrespective of the presence or absence of disorders.**

**How do you see the task force contributing to the broader goal of improving brain healthcare in India?** Our ultimate aim is to create a more inclusive and effective healthcare system that meets the needs of all individuals affected by neurological disorders. Through

collaboration with government agencies, healthcare providers, and other stakeholders, we aim to build a more resilient and responsive healthcare system that prioritizes brain health for all. Neurological disorders rank as the leading cause of disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) globally, resulting in approximately 9 million deaths annually. The prevalence of neurological disorders underscores their significant impact, with 1 in 3 individuals expected to experience such conditions during their lifetime. These disorders rank as the foremost cause of disability and the second leading cause of death globally. The WHO’s position paper launched on August 9, 2022, provides a detailed framework for understanding brain health and the importance of optimizing brain health for all. **What is the status of brain health in India vis a vis world?** In India, as in many parts of the world, issues related to brain health present significant challenges that require urgent attention. While specific data on the status of brain health in India compared to the rest of the world may vary, neurological disorders are increasingly recognized as a major public health concern in India. Conditions such as stroke, epilepsy, headache disorders, Parkinson’s disease, and dementia impose a substantial burden on individuals, families, and healthcare systems. Moreover, disparities in healthcare access and infrastructure are pervasive in India, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Limited availability of specialized professionals, diagnostic facilities, and trained healthcare paramedics pose significant challenges for individuals seeking diagnosis and treatment. Due to lack of awareness and understanding of neurological disorders among the general population in India, patients are diagnosed late. Also, inadequate treatment, and social stigma further add the burden on affected individuals and their families. Socioeconomic factors such as poverty, limited education, and inadequate access to healthcare services contribute to the burden of neurological disorders in India.

## TAILORED SUNSCREEN Matched to Your Skin Type

Majority of dermatologists focus on the important role sunscreen plays in protecting our skin from the harmful UV radiation. But sunscreen selection can be daunting with the plethora of options available in the market. **DR ATULA GUPTA**, senior dermatologist, says and suggests the ideal sunscreen for each skin type to ensure effective protection

### THE TWO SUNSCREENS: PHYSICAL VS. CHEMICAL

**Physical Sunscreens (Mineral Sunscreens):** Physical sunscreens contain minerals like titanium dioxide and zinc oxide. They act as a physical barrier that reflects and scatters UVA and UVB rays. Physical sunscreens offer broad-spectrum protection and are generally well-tolerated even on sensitive skin. But they can leave a white cast on the skin, especially with higher concentrations of minerals. **Chemical Sunscreens:** These sunscreens use organic compounds like oxybenzone, avobenzone, and octinoxate. They absorb UV radiation, converting it into heat that is then released from the skin. Chemical sunscreens are lightweight and cosmetically elegant, offering a clear, non-greasy feel. But some people may experience irritation due to certain chemical ingredients.



DR ATULA GUPTA

### SUNSCREEN SELECTION FOR SKIN TYPE

**Normal Skin:** Choose a broad-spectrum sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher. Look for lightweight, non-greasy formulas and sunscreens with added antioxidants for extra skin nourishment. **Dry Skin:** Choose fragrance-free, moisturizing sunscreens. Lotions or creams containing hyaluronic acid or ceramides can provide added hydration. Seek sunscreens labelled as “hydrating” or “moisturizing” for more benefit. **Oily Skin:** Look for oil-free, non-comedogenic (won’t clog pores) sunscreens. Lotions with a matte finish or lightweight gels are ideal for oily skin. Gel-based or matte-finish sunscreens control the extrashine. Ingredients like niacinamide or zinc oxide can also help regulate oil production. **Sensitive Skin:** The gentlest option for sensitive skin are mineral based sunscreens. Opt for fragrance-free products with calming ingredients like aloe vera or colloidal oatmeal. Opt for hypoallergenic sunscreens to minimize irritation. Perform a patch test before full application to ensure safety. **Combination Skin:** Sunscreens labelled for combination skin often have a balanced, lightweight formula. Gel-creams or lotions can provide sun protection without excess

oiliness. Consider lightweight, gel-based sunscreens that provide hydration without greasiness. Choose products that balance oil production in the T-zone while moisturizing drier areas. Sunscreens labelled as “for all skin types” or “balancing” are often suitable. **Aging/Mature Skin:** Opt for sunscreens with added anti-aging ingredients like peptides or retinoids. Broad-spectrum sunscreens with SPF 30 or higher help prevent premature aging. Look for formulations targeting fine lines, wrinkles, and age spots for holistic care.

### ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

When selecting a sunscreen, factors beyond skin type should be considered: **Sun Protection Factor (SPF):** This rating indicates protection against UVB rays, the primary cause of sunburn. The American Academy of Dermatology recommends an SPF of 30 for daily use, with higher SPFs needed for extended sun exposure or people with fairer skin. **Broad-Spectrum Protection:** Ensure the sunscreen protects against both UVA and UVB rays. UVA rays penetrate deeper into the skin and contribute to premature aging and skin cancer. **Water Resistance:** For activities involving water or sweat, choose a water-resistant sunscreen. Reapplication is crucial after swimming or excessive sweating. Remember, regardless of your skin type, reapply sunscreen every two hours, especially when outdoors or after swimming or sweating. Additionally, complement your sunscreen with other sun protection measures such as wearing protective clothing, seeking shade, and avoiding peak sun hours. Consult with your dermatologist to address any specific skin concerns. With the right sunscreen regimen, you can safeguard your skin against sun damage and maintain a healthy, radiant complexion for years to come.





## 10,000 STEPS FOR BETTER HEALTH

Walking 10,000 steps a day has emerged as a widely acknowledged benchmark for daily physical activity, endorsed by health professionals worldwide. Neuro and Spine Surgeon, **DR VIKAS KUMAR**, at Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS), Ranchi, Jharkhand, underscores the significance of this goal. Let’s delve into the key benefits, as guided by Dr Kumar

- The capacity of the lungs increases
- Mood improves (increases serotonin and dopamine - good hormones).
- Improvement in the venous system.
- Enhances immune function.
- Speeds up digestion.
- Works against disabilities in old age (strengthens joints).
- Helps in weight loss.
- Improves heart health.
- Reduces the risk of stroke.
- Corrects diabetes (forms new insulin receptors).
- Reduces blood pressure



## NUTRITIOUS DELIGHT

Chef **RAJIV KUMAR MALHOTRA**, known for his culinary expertise at Habitat World, India Habitat Centre, shares with **SHARMILA CHAND** the essence of summer embodied in their latest creation: the Kodo Millet & Fresh Mango Salad. The delectable blend has the wholesome goodness of kodo millet intertwines with the sweet succulence of fresh mango, creating a symphony of taste and health in every delightful bite

### RECIPE

#### Kodo Millet & Fresh Mango Salad



**Ingredients:**

- 40g Kodo millet
- 1 ripe Mango
- 30gm Pomegranate Seeds
- 15g Bell Pepper (any color), diced
- 15g Rocket Lettuce
- 10g Peeled Almonds
- 10g Raisins
- 150g Corn Kernels
- 15g Hung Curd/Feta Cheese

**For the dressing:**

- 5ml Olive Oil
- 2ml Lemon Juice
- 1gm Fennel Seed Powder
- Salt & Pepper to taste

**METHOD**

**Cook Kodo Millet:** Rinse the kodo millet under cold water. In a pot, add 1 part kodo millet to 2 parts water. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to low and simmer, covered, for 20-25 minutes, or until the millet is tender and the water is absorbed. Once cooked, let it cool & squeeze extra water.

**Prepare Ingredients:** Peel the mango and dice it into bite-sized pieces. Dice the bell pepper into small pieces. Wash the rocket

lettuce in cold water & tear it into bite-sized pieces.

**Assemble Salad:** In a large bowl, combine the cooked and cooled kodo millet, diced mango, pomegranate seeds, corn diced bell pepper, torn rocket lettuce, sliced almonds, and raisins.

**Prepare Dressing:** In a small bowl, whisk together the olive oil, lemon juice, and fennel seed powder until well combined. Season with Salt &

Pepper. Drizzle the dressing over the salad ingredients.

**Toss Gently:** Using salad tongs or two large spoons, gently toss the salad until all ingredients are evenly coated with the dressing. Serve in bowls.

(Sharmila Chand writes on food, travel, art, holistic wellness and lifestyle)





# Mi eye revenge against RR in reverse fixture

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Resurgent Mumbai Indians will need to address their bowling woes as they look to exact revenge on table-toppers Rajasthan Royals in their reverse fixture of the Indian Premier League here on Monday.

With three wins in last four games, MI have hit the recovery road to reach sixth spot in the points table after a poor start this season, while RR are on a rampaging run as they occupy the top spot with 12 points.

The five-time champions survived a late onslaught from Ashutosh Sharma to eke out a nine-run win over Punjab Kings in the last game.

It was once again Jasprit Bumrah, who was left to do the heavy lifting as he stood out with his three wickets. The star India pacer shone with the new ball and then returned to produce a breakthrough, and he did all

this without conceding much. With 13 scalps, Bumrah tops the list of the most wickets this IPL. He also has the second-best economy of just under six runs but while he has been on the mark, his bowling colleagues have struggled.

Gerald Coetzee, too, has made an impact with 12 wickets but has gone for runs. But Akash Madhwal and skipper Hardik Pandya have been inconsistent.

While Shreyas Gopal has taken a wicket each in the three games he has played so far, MI also need to use the experience of veteran Afghanistan all-rounder Mohammed Nabi as a bowler. In batting, former skipper Rohit Sharma's scintillating century, albeit in a losing cause, has been the highlight, while Ishan Kishan has been inconsistent. Hardik, too, hasn't made much of an impact so far, while Tilak Verma has done moderately well.



A huge positive for MI is Suryakumar Yadav's return to form. His 53-ball 78 against PBKS was the cornerstone of MI innings and on his day he can destroy any attack.

The last time MI faced the RR bowling unit, they looked like a rabbit caught in the headlights, as Trent Boult removed three of their top-order batters for naught and

the veteran left-arm pacer will again be a massive threat. Avesh Khan has been entrusted with the responsibility of bowling at the death and he has done

well. Kuldeep Sen, too, showed his skills but he needs to work on his economy. With 12 wickets, leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal has been

RR's most valuable player in the bowling department, though off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin has struggled.

For RR, Riyan Parag has been the batter of the season. The young Assam batter has reinvented himself and his 318 runs is one of the reasons why RR find themselves at the top of the pecking order.

While the batting has revolved around him, skipper Sanju Samson too has produced some fine knocks for the team, aggregating 276 runs so far.

England's Jos Buttler single-handedly chased down a 200-plus total to win RR their last match against Kolkata Knight Riders but the form of fellow opener Yashasvi Jaiswal has been a matter of concern as he has failed to capitalise on his starts.

Shimron Hetmyer has also hit top gear when needed, rescuing the team against PBKS the other day.

**TEAMS**

**Rajasthan Royals:** Sanju Samson (c), Jos Buttler, Shimron Hetmyer, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Dhruv Jurel, Riyan Parag, Donovan Ferreira, Kunal Rathore, Ravichandran Ashwin, Kuldeep Sen, Navdeep Saini, Sandeep Sharma, Trent Boult, Yuzvendra Chahal, Avesh Khan, Rovman Powell, Shubham Dubey, Tom Kohler-Cadmore, Abid Mushtaq, Nandre Burger, Tanush Kotian, Keshav Maharaj.

**Mumbai Indians:** Hardik Pandya (c), Rohit Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav, Dewald Brevis, Jasprit Bumrah, Piyush Chawla, Gerald Coetzee, Tim David, Shreyas Gopal, Ishan Kishan (wk), Anshul Kamboj, Kumar Kartikeya, Akash Madhwal, Kwena Maphaka, Mohammad Nabi, Shams Mulani, Naman Dhir, Shivalik Sharma, Romario Shepherd, Arjun Tendulkar, Nuwan Thushara, Tilak Varma, Harvik Desai, Nehal Wadhwa, Luke Wood.

## You cannot always rely on Kohli: Varun to RCB

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

It's high time India's domestic players step up for Royal Challengers Bengaluru this IPL season and reduce the dependence on Virat Kohli, former India pacer Varun Aaron said on Sunday.

Kohli has been the standout performer for RCB this IPL season and is the current Orange Cap holder with 361 runs in 7 innings. His strike rate is 147.34, with the highest score being 113 not out.

Speaking to Star Sports, Aaron said, "It's just that RCB are not finding the rhythm, the domestic players are just not stepping up."

The 34-year-old Aaron, who announced his retirement from first-class cricket earlier this year, added, "If you have to be anywhere at the top of the table or the middle of the table at this point of the table, you have to have domestic players who are firing and you cannot always rely on Virat Kohli."

"The other guys have to step up and also all their money, is sitting in the dug-out. You can't spend that much cash on players and not have them play."

In 2014, Aaron was bought by Royal Challengers Bangalore for Rs 2 crore, and was retained by the franchise ahead of the 2016 auction. Australia's former skipper in



the limited overs formats, Aaron Finch feels RCB needs an explosive middle-order batter who can complement Kohli.

"He's (Kohli) scored a lot of runs everywhere. He's a modern day great. And I think the fact that he's getting runs and RCB are still not making it is a positive sign in one degree."

"It's that when Virat is playing well, that genuinely carries the rest of the players with him."

"They just need to find a partnership with him, they need to find an explosive middle order player who is in form, Lomror has been in and out, so it's got all the makings of an epic game," Finch said.

RCB are playing Kolkata

Knight Riders at Eden Gardens on Sunday.

Speaking of Travis Head's blazing 89-run knock for Sunrisers Hyderabad against Delhi Capitals in Delhi on Saturday, Finch said the left-handed opener has taken the "fear of failure out of his mind."

"It's always been in him, the ability to play like this. I guess the freedom to express himself and be able to deal with the ups and downs of playing such an aggressive and high-risk brand of cricket, I think has just released him to a new level."

"And I think if you look back at the World Cup final, he kept playing his shots even when there were wickets falling around him, the ball was moving. Because he's

taken the fear of failure out of his mind.

"If he misses out five or six times in a row, it doesn't bother him because he knows he's one shot away. He's the type of player that needs one ball in the middle. And that's all it will take for him to get going again," Finch said.

In a match that saw over 460 runs being scored, seamer T Natarajan finished with excellent figures of 4/19, and Finch believed the bowler getting all his wickets in the death when the game was as good as over, prevented him from getting the Man-of-the-Match Award.

"When 460 runs are scored in a game and a guy gets 4 for 19, that's a special performance, I think the thing that didn't give him the man of the match is the 4 wickets were right at the death when the game was done and dusted."

Set an imposing target of 267, DC were stopped at 199. "I think the ability of Delhi to get that run rate under 12 an over was extraordinary and at that stage of the innings, they were in the box seat to win it."

"The wicket slowed up a bit just like Pat Cummins talked about it and the ball got a little softer and made it easier for the slower bowlers to grip. It was just one of those things where they couldn't sustain it," Finch said.

## Watched a lot of Kuldeep videos, did simulation: Abhishek

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Thoroughly dissecting Kuldeep Yadav's bowling videos and doing match simulation by facing left-arm wrist spinners in the nets went a long way in helping Abhishek Sharma annihilate the India international during Sunrisers Hyderabad's 67-run victory over Delhi Capitals in an IPL game here.

Abhishek smashed 46 off just 12 balls with half a dozen of sixes and four of them came off Kuldeep's deliveries.

Kuldeep has been DC's most consistent bowler with his guile and variations troubling the batters, but Abhishek

went back and forth to disturb his length and forced him to go flatter.

So what was his preparation like for Kuldeep?

"Personally, I always try to plan really well for the spinners and the main bowlers of the other team and this year... This match also, I was very careful with Kuldeep because I know he is their main bowler and I've been watching his videos," the Punjab state team skipper said after the match.

"I try to play similar bowlers a day before, net bowlers and local bowlers, and that helps me a lot. I try to just make sure that they are pretty much



similar to the bowlers that I'm going to face. So that helps me a lot," Abhishek explained.

Not bowling because of Impact Player Rule

While he is primarily a batter, Abhishek also bowls handy left-arm spin but hasn't been summoned a lot to bowl in

this edition, thanks to the Impact Player rule.

Does he think it can affect his selection or chances of showcasing his other facet of the game?

"No, I think everybody knows that I can bowl, but obviously, there's because of this impact player, there's always an extra bowler or a better, so probably with every all-rounders, this is going to happen. Even this happened last year."

"For me, especially, I believe that I should be ready whenever I'm called. Just get the chance because I know somehow I will get the chance and I should be ready for that."

## We are not getting too far ahead of ourselves: Head

NEW DELHI, APR 21 (PTI)

Riding on explosive starts, Sunrisers Hyderabad may have won four games on the bounce this IPL season, but their swashbuckling opener Travis Head says "we are not getting too far ahead of ourselves."

SRH crushed Delhi Capitals by 67 runs in their most recent match here on Saturday, following sensational knocks from their in-form openers Travis Head (89) and Abhishek Sharma (46).

SRH have made a habit of posting big totals this season, going past 260 for the third time on Saturday.



"It is very enjoyable. It is nice to be here and play well, and it is hard not to smile and enjoy yourself with the batting order that we have got, and the order is working well through the first seven, so it is very enjoyable," Head told JioCinema.

Batting first, Hyderabad

scored their fourth 200+ innings this edition by scoring 266 runs, while Delhi were bowled out for 199 runs at the Arun Jaitley Stadium.

This was SRH's fifth win of the season.

Head also spoke on SRH's momentum and positive energy around the team.

"We will take it easy for a minute. I think it was Murali's (Muttiah Muralitharan) birthday a couple of days ago, so we have a party for him tomorrow night, so that will be enjoyable."

"I think it's a nice group, we are not getting too far ahead of ourselves. Obviously, we are excited. We have got four wins on the bounce now, we

are playing well, and the energy is always better when you are winning."

"The environment is really good. That's what Dan (Daniel Vettori) and Pat Cummins are going to bring. If there is a loss here or there, a couple of poor performances, that's okay. We are showing how good we can be."

"As long as we can keep instilling that confidence around how well we are playing, I guess the ceiling is as high as it wants to be," Head said.

Former India pacer Zaheer Khan praised Jake Fraser-McGurk (65 runs) and T Natarajan (4/19).

## OTHER SPORTS

## HI names 28 members core probable group for men camp ahead of Olympics

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hockey India on Sunday announced a 28-member core probable group for the men's national coaching camp to iron out the flaws ahead of the Paris Olympics.

The camp commenced on Sunday and will last till May 13 at the SAI Centre in Bengaluru.

The team returns to camp after suffering a 0-5 loss in a five-match Test series in Australia.

After this camp, the team will travel to Belgium and London for their next two legs of the FIH Pro League, where they will be up against Argentina, Belgium, Germany and Great Britain.

"We are looking to begin an important block of training in this camp, and we need to make sure that we are in the best shape possible ahead of the Paris 2024 Olympics. We have an exciting group of experienced players along with some young players," chief coach Craig Fulton said in a HI release.

"The tour to Australia has helped us in realising where we need to work on and I always believe that we can work on our shortcomings and look to set things straight well before



the final leg of the Pro League and the Paris 2024 Olympics."

The core group of the national coaching camp includes goalkeepers Krishan Bahadur Pathak, PR Sreejesh, Suraj Karkera and defenders Harmanpreet Singh, Jarmanpreet Singh, Amit Rohidas, Jugraj Singh, Sanjay, Sumit, and Amir Ali.

The midfielders called up to the camp include Manpreet Singh, Hardik Singh, Vivek Sagar Prasad, Rabichandra Singh Moirangthem, Shamsher Singh, Nilakanta Sharma, Rajkumar Pal, Vishnukant Singh.

While the list of forwards comprises Akashdeep Singh, Mandheep Singh, Lalit Kumar Upadhyay, Abhishek, Dilpreet Singh, Sukhjeth Singh, Gurjant Singh, Mohammed Raheel Mousen, Bobby Singh Dhami, and Arajjeet Singh Hundal.

## El Gouna squash Ramit stuns world number 11 Crouin

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's Ramit Tandon notched up a stunning 3-1 win over French world No 11 Victor Crouin in the second round of the El Gouna International Open, a USD 198,000 prize money PSA Platinum squash event, in El Gouna, Egypt.

The world No 40 Tandon, who has a direct entry to the World Championships to be played in Egypt next month, won 11-9, 12-10, 8-11, 11-5 in 52 minutes for his second victory in five meetings over the Frenchman. Tandon will meet Peruvian World No 3 Diego Elias in the third round.

Elias has won both his previous meetings against the Indian.

Tandon had beaten Egyptian world No 62 Aly Hussein 11-6, 11-9, 11-5 in the first round of the 48-player draw.

Messi scores twice, Inter Miami beats Nashville SC 3-1

Fort Lauderdale (US), Apr 21 (AP) Lionel Messi scored twice to increase his Major League Soccer-leading total to seven and also had an assist to lead Inter Miami over Nashville SC 3-1.

Messi had his second two-goal game in MLS after scoring two against Orlando on March 2. He has a goal or assist in each



of the six league matches he's played, missing four because of injury.

Sergio Busquets scored his first goal with Miami since joining former Barcelona teammate Messi last summer.

Luis Suárez, another ex-Barcelona teammate, assisted on Messi's first goal.

"Very happy that the goal helped the team win the match," Busquets said in Spanish.

"What matters is the team and the victory. Today, I managed to score but the ultimate accomplishments are the positive results for our team."

Miami (5-2-3, 21 points) is unbeaten in five matches against Nashville since Messi's arrival. Miami also remained in first place in the Eastern Conference.

"We became very familiar with their style of play and that helped us today," Miami defender Tomás Avilés said.

For the second consecutive week, Miami allowed a goal in the opening minutes when an own goal by Miami defender Franco Neri put Nashville ahead. Neri deflected Daniel Lovitz's corner kick into the Miami net in the second minute. That was the only goal for Nashville (1-6-1, 4).

Miami erased the early deficit with goals from Messi and Busquets in the 11th and 39th minutes.

Nashville goalkeeper Elliot Panico deflected Messi's 12-yard shot to an open Suárez, who immediately tapped it to Messi. With Panico out of position, Messi converted a

sliding shot inside the 6-yard box for the equalizer.

"We didn't play good football during the first 10 minutes but that changed after Leo's goal," Inter Miami coach Gerardo "Tata" Martino said.

"We started finding our space and created opportunities."

Busquets scored the tiebreaker as he headed Messi's corner kick to the near post past Panico. It was Busquets' first goal since 2022, when he was with Barcelona.

Goalkeeper Drake Callender kept Miami ahead when he made a diving deflection of Hany Mukhtar's 35-yard blast in the 55th minute.

Messi gave Miami a two-goal cushion, converting on a penalty kick in the 81st minute. Nashville's Josh Bauer fouled Leo Alfonso on the edge of the penalty area then Messi beat reserve goalkeeper Joe Willis inside the right post.

Messi's former Barcelona teammate Jordi Alba didn't play because of a hamstring injury. Diego Gomez also exited after he sustained an ankle injury late in the first half. Martino said Gomez will undergo additional tests to determine the severity of the injury.

Miami will visit New England next Saturday, while Nashville hosts San Jose.

## Garbiñe retires from tennis

AP ■ MADRID

Two-time major champion Garbiñe Muguruza announced she's retiring from professional tennis at age 30 after an extended time away from the court.

"I feel that it is time to retire and open up a new chapter in my life," the former world No. 1 told a news conference in Madrid on Saturday.

Muguruza beat Serena Williams in the 2016 French Open final and Venus Williams in the 2017 Wimbledon final, making her the only player to defeat each Williams sister in a Grand Slam title match.

The Spanish player earned 10 career titles and was also the runner-up at 2015 Wimbledon and the 2020 Australian Open. She earned nearly \$25 million in prize money - 13th on the all-time list - and finished with a win-loss record of 449-238.



Her last important victory was the 2021 ATP Finals.

"The word retirement sounds very harsh to be because I am only 30 years old, but I have achieved so much since I started playing 25 years ago," she said. "I am proud of what I have achieved, for having stuck to reaching my goals even through the tough times."

Muguruza has not played since January 2023. In April that year, she announced she was extending her hiatus from playing and said, "Spending time with my family and friends (has) really been healthy and amazing."

Born in Caracas to a Spanish father and Venezuelan mother, Muguruza moved to Barcelona when she was a child to continue her tennis training. She became the first Spanish woman to lift a Grand Slam trophy since Arantxa Sánchez Vicario at the 1998 French Open.

### PUBLIC NOTICE

This is for notice of the general public that a political party is proposed to be registered by the name of "Odisha Loka Dala". The office of the party is located At Niladripur, P.O. Mahipur, PS. Nuagaon, Dist. Nayagarh. This party has submitted an application to the Election Commission of India, New Delhi for its registration as Political Party under section 29A of the representation of the People Act, 1951.

Name & Address of the Office Bearers of the Party are as follows:

**President** : Santosh Narayan

**General Secretary** : Saras Samantaryay

**Vice-President** : Pravas Ranjan Khatua

**Treasurer** : MahabirSwain.

If anyone has any objection to the registration of "Odisha Loka Dala", they may send their objection with reason thereof, to the secretary (Political Party) Election Commission of India, Nirvachan Sadan, Ashok Road, New Delhi-110001 within 30 days of the publication of this notice.