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SRH EYE ANOTHER RUN FEST 12 SPORTS



Congress taxed on inheritance as Modi rips into Sam Pitroda remark

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE AMBIKAPUR/NEW DELHI

Yet another 'foul' play by a Congress leader gave an opportunity to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP to mount attack on the grand old party over the ongoing controversial remarks related to wealth and tax. This time its Sam Pitroda and the BJP-led by PM seized on his remarks on inheritance tax saying "zindagi ke saath bhi, zindagi ke baad bhi" as the Opposition party's mantra to "loot" people. As Pitroda's comments provided fresh fodder to the BJP, its leaders latched onto them to target the Congress ahead of the second phase of Lok Sabha elections on Friday.



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

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

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

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

that more tax should be imposed on the middle class and those who earn by toiling hard," Modi said, apparently referring to Rahul Gandhi and Pitroda. "The Congress will impose a tax on the assets inherited by people from their parents and the "panja" (Congress' poll symbol) will snatch the assets from their children. Congress ka mantra hei Congress ki loot 'zindagi ke saath bhi, zindagi ke baad bhi' (Congress' mantra is looting people when they are alive and afterwards too)," Modi said taking a cue from LIC tagline. "Till you are alive, the Congress will impose more tax and after your life ends, it will impose the burden of inheritance tax on you. They (Congress) want to snatch your assets and rights of your children," the prime minister alleged. He spoke on similar lines in his rallies in Madhya Pradesh. Amid the fierce attack from the BJP, the Congress has been insisting that its manifesto does not talk about "redistribution" and that it favours a "comprehensive socio-economic caste census". "I mentioned US inheritance tax in the US only as an example in my normal conversation on TV. Can I not mention facts? I said these are the kinds of issues people will have to discuss and debate. This has nothing to do with the policy of any party including Congress," Pitroda said on social media.

Campaign for Phase II LS poll ends

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

After whirlwind roadshows, political tit-for-tats, and a fresh cycle of controversies on redistribution of wealth, inheritance tax and reducing the quota for SCs, STs and OBCs to favour Muslims, the curtains came down on Wednesday evening on a high-voltage campaigning for the second phase of Lok Sabha polls in 89 seats across 13 States on April 26. The upcoming second phase polls will cover several important constituencies such as Wayanad (Kerala), from where Congress leader Rahul Gandhi is seeking re-election and Thiruvananthapuram (Kerala), which will witness a high-profile showdown between Shashi Tharoor and Rajeev Chandrasekhar, Meerut where Arun Govil who played Ram in the hit Ramayan TV series of the 1980s,



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

and Uttar Pradesh, 7 seats in Madhya Pradesh, 5 seats each in Assam and Bihar, 3 seats each in Chhattisgarh and West Bengal, and 1 seat each in Manipur, Tripura and Jammu and Kashmir. Amid heat wave conditions, the poll body on Wednesday extended the poll timings by two hours in some Assembly segments — Banka, Madhepura, Khagaria and Munger Lok Sabha constituencies was from 7 am to 6 pm to ensure enhanced voter participation. In other polling stations in Bihar, under these constituencies, the poll timings remain 7 am to 4 pm. Staggered over seven stages, the first phase of the elections held last Friday for 102 seats across 21 states and Union territories saw a voter turnout of around 65.5 per cent. After Friday's phase, polling will be over in Kerala, Rajasthan and Tripura.



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

Noida readies for triangular contest

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

One of the 80 Lok Sabha constituencies of Uttar Pradesh, Ghaziabad Lok Sabha constituency, considered as one of the most VIP constituencies and a gateway of the State is all set to witness a three-cornered fight between BJP, Congress and BSP for April 26 polls. The Ghaziabad Lok Sabha seat has gained a reputation for being a stronghold of the BJP with the party's candidates consistently winning by significant margins in the three elections held in this constituency, and the BJP's vote share increasing with each successive election, further solidifying their position in this constituency. The Ghaziabad Lok Sabha seat will witness a triangular contest in the general elections. The BJP has fielded Atul Garg, replacing sitting MP General (retired) VK Singh. The Congress has given ticket to Dolly Sharma and BSP has pitted Nand Kishor Pundir against the other two. The constituency has been a BJP stronghold and the party will be hoping to repeat its show in the previous two elections. Though the BJP has retained the seat since 2009 and is eyeing win for the fourth consecutive time. Garg is currently a Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) in Uttar Pradesh from Ghaziabad seat in the district. The party has fielded him on the seat, hoping to hand over the seat once again to the party. The BJP is banking on Modi's charisma. Notably, the Rajput Jat community also held a series of maha panchayats across western Uttar Pradesh, calling for a boycott of BJP candidates. Members of the Jat community — considered a traditional voter base of BJP ally Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) — held two meetings, one in Indirapuram on Sunday and the other near Bamheta on April 18, to discuss their stand during these elections. Their leaders said their list of grievances against the ruling party was a long one.

Moquim's daughter may contest



PNS ■ CUTTACK

Sitting Congress MLA Mohammed Moquim's daughter Sofia Firdous is likely to contest from his Cuttack-Barabati Assembly constituency. Sofia will soon apply to the Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee (OPCC) for a ticket. According to sources, Moquim will vie for her daughter's candidature. He held a meeting of some Congress party workers on Wednesday and decided to support her. He took the opinions of his ardent supporters in the party before taking this decision. Notably, the Supreme Court on Tuesday suspended the sentence of Moquim in the Orissa Rural Housing Development Corporation (ORHDC) loan fraud case but declined to grant stay on his conviction involving jail sentence.

Heat wave alert issued for State

BBSR temp 43.2 degree

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Normal life continued to be affected due to the scorching heat in Bhubaneswar as the mercury crossed the 43-degrees Celsius mark on Wednesday. However, thundershowers in some parts of the capital city and strong winds brought respite from the heat. As per the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) Regional Office here, besides Bhubaneswar, Jharsuguda recorded maximum temperature of 42.9 degree, Chandbali 42.2 degree and Baleswar 41.4 degree. No respite seems to be in view as the IMD has predicted a further rise in the maximum temperature in different parts of Odisha. "The maximum temperature (day temperature) is likely to rise by 4 to 6 degrees during next four to five days at many places over the district of Odisha," said the IMD. The IMD also issued an Orange Warning for severe heat

wave conditions in different parts of the state. Issuing the Orange warning, the weather office said heat wave to severe heat wave condition is very likely to prevail in the districts of Gajapati and Ganjam on Thursday. Heat wave condition is very likely to prevail in the districts of Jharsuguda, Sundargarh, Mayurbhanj, Baleswar, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Kendrapada, Jagatsinghpur, Angul, Nayagarh, Balangir, Boudh, Nuapada, Kandhamal, Khordha, Cuttack and Dhenkanal.

people of Odisha know their true nature. No one has become successful by opposing development," Patnaik said. Speaking about the transformational initiatives of his government, Patnaik said, "Around 70 lakh women have become the drivers of transformation in the State. Farmers are getting loan at zero-percent interest in the State. Likewise, Misson Shakti members have so far received Rs 18,000-crore interest-free loan. This is a milestone in development

Naveen starts poll campaign from Hinjili

Slams Opp for 'opposing development' Says Odisha to be No. 1 State by 2036

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

State. He also mentioned about the flagship developmental projects of the BJD government and vowed to make Odisha the number one State of the country by 2036. "Development is our identity. However, it is sad to see that opposition parties are opposing it. Be it Srimandir Parikrama project or Ekamra project or Samalei project, the opposition parties have been politicising everything. The

of Odisha. The BJD is number one in giving women their rights." The CM also said that Odisha has pioneered in many fields. "Odisha is a leading State in women empowerment, disaster management, PDS and investment. The Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana (BSKY) is unique in the country while special budget for farmers in the State is first of its kind in the nation," he said. He further said that his government would introduce a

youth budget in coming days. "The decade 2024-34 will be a golden opportunity for youths. The youth budget will emphasise on industrial investment and skill development. 2024-34 will be the decade of Odisha. In the year 2036, Odisha will complete 100 years of its formation. By 2036, Odisha will become the number one State," said Patnaik. "With the blessing of people of Odisha, the BJD will continue its victory streak," he concluded.

Naveen to use customised vehicle

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The BJD has arranged a customised vehicle for party president and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik to steer its campaign for the upcoming simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly polls. The air-conditioned vehicle has been fitted with a mass address system and a hydraulic lift among other facilities. Apart from the BJD's poll symbol, the vehicle displays the images of Biju Patnaik, Naveen, ST and Nabin Odisha Chairman VK Pandian and party general secretary (organisation) Pranab Prakash Das prominently. The vehicle also displays the 5T initiative of the State Government as the BJD supremo's guarantee for transformation of Odisha. Notably, Naveen had also campaigned for the party by riding a customised bus during the 2019 Lok Sabha and Assembly polls.

Rs 1.64-cr NBFC fraud: Company executive gets 7-yr RI

Brother also awarded 5 yrs in jail

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
The Baleswar OPID Court on Tuesday hearing an Economic Offences Wing (EOW) case convicted two fraudsters for cheating Rs 1.64 crore by using forged documents and sentenced them to rigorous imprisonment (RI). The court sentenced one Sashikanta Sahoo to undergo seven years' RI and fine of Rs 3 lakh in default the convict would undergo further imprisonment of two years. Besides, one Srikanta Sahoo

was sentenced to five years' RI and pay fine of Rs 2 lakh in default he would undergo further imprisonment of two years. The EOW had registered the case on a written report of V Kishore Kumar, territory manager of Sundaram Finance Ltd against Sashikanta Sahoo, executive of Baleswar branch of the company, his brother Srikanta, proprietor of Hanumanjew Furniture and others for cheating the NBFC Finance of Rs 1.64 crore by fraudulently disbursing 13 loans in favour of fictitious loanees by using forged documents. As found on investigation,

during the period from May 8, 2018 to Jul. 2019, 13 contracts against 11 customers worth of Rs 1.64 crore were recommended by Sashikanta Sahoo, Executive (Customer Relation, Tractor Unit, Balasore) of Sundaram Finance to the credit authority, head office of Sundaram Finance for approval of loan for purchase of KARTAR make harvesters. The proposals were given in the name of dealer 'Utkal Agro Centre', Bhadrak, the authorised dealer of KARTAR Harvesters in Odisha. On receipt of the approval from the credit authority of Sundaram Finance Ltd, Sashikanta falsely prepared the

loan documents, procured the KYC documents of the fictitious loanees and sent to the payment for disbursement of the loan amount. In the loan documents of loanees, Sashikanta changed the name of the dealer from Utkal Agro Centre to Hanumanjew Furniture and Utkal Enterprises which are falsely created by Sashikanta in connivance with his brothers. Accordingly, the entire loan amount of Rs.1.64 crore was disbursed in the accounts of dealer Hanumanjew Furniture and Utkal Enterprises which are owned by Srikanta Sahoo and Sunanda Kumar Sahoo, the respective brothers of Sashikanta.

In M'giri ahead of elections Police seize Rs 30L from car during check



PNS ■ MALKANGIRI
The district police have made a significant cash seizure totaling Rs 30 lakh from a car entering Odisha from neighbouring Chhattisgarh. The incident took place near Chalanguda on the Malkangiri-Sukma Road on Tuesday evening during police's vehicle-checking drive ahead of the elections. As per reports, the cops noticed a car arriving from Sukma

district in Chhattisgarh and decided to conduct a routine check. During the inspection, the officers discovered the substantial amount of cash. Neither the driver nor the passenger could provide a satisfactory explanation regarding the source of the cash. Subsequently, police seized the money and detained the two for further questioning. An investigation was initiated to determine the origin and purpose of the seized cash.

INBRIEF

ODISHA JEE-2024 FROM MAY 6 TO 10
Bhubaneswar: The Odisha Joint Entrance Examination for this year will be held from May 6 to May 10. "All the examinations will be conducted during 6th May 2024 to 10th May 2024 through Computer Based Test (CBT)," an official notification said on Wednesday. Candidates can download their admit cards from April 27 onwards.

FAKE LIQUOR RACKET BUSTED IN KUJANG; 1 HELD
Paradip: The Excise Department conducted a raid at the residence of one Umakant Sahu in Gandikipur village under Kujang block in Jagatsinghpur district and seized a huge quantity of liquor manufacturing machinery. The officials also seized a large number of liquor bottles, counterfeit seals, lids and over 10 litres of illicit liquor. The house owner was arrested and subsequently forwarded to court. According to Excise Inspector Prabhas Chowdhury, the counterfeit liquor produced by Sahu was being distributed in various locations of Kendrapada and Jagatsinghpur districts, including Paradip. Preliminary investigations revealed that this illegal operation was going on for over three years, raising concerns about the extent of the counterfeit liquor trade in the region.



ADAV SCHOOL CELEBRATES ANNUAL FEST
Sunabeda: The annual cultural fest of the very old school ADAV was held in the Sunabeda HAL premises on Wednesday. Prizes were distributed in the presence of HAL GM Koraput Division Sudhansu Mohan Jena along with Sapna S Jena and old student of the school Sanjeev Mohanty and other guests. Sanjeev Mohanty gave cash awards to the students who had played at the national level.



Gopalpur BJD nominee Panda holds meet



PNS ■ BRAHMAMPUR
On Sunday evening, Gopalpur Assembly Constituency candidate Bikram Kumar Panda of BJD conducted a meeting on election preparation and a Mishran Parva at his residence. On the occasion, discussions were made on the ways and means to face the coming elections. Being inspired by the ideals, welfare and developmental projects of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik and to be associated with the New Odisha, many leaders from the Congress and BJP joined the BJD. Senior Congress leader, Pramod Kumar Das, who was with the party for more than

40 years, was among the joiners. Similarly, many BJP workers from Rangeilunda and Golonthara too joined the BJD. Most of the members opined that in the coming election, BJD will win and come to power again with a thumping majority. Block Chairman Ajit Kumar Das and Zilla Parishad No. 10 member Deepak Samanta, Bharati Nayak, Youth leader Subasish Sahu, BJD district general secretary Ramahari Patra, Siba Patra, senior leader Pratap Chandra Kothia, Bharat Patra, Prakash Samanta, Block Chairman Usharani and many members and workers were present. Panda will submit his nomination on April 25.

Ex-MLA Uma to run as Independent in Puri Assly seat

After Cong denies him ticket

SAROJ KUMAR MISHRA ■ PURI
After the party ticket for Puri legislative segment was given to youth leader Sujit Mahapatra, veteran Congress leader and former legislator Umaballav Rath is at the crossroads. Sources said that Uma has requested OPCC for reconsideration of the decision, so that he could file nomination and kick-start his campaign. However, a close confidant

of Uma denied this saying that Uma has not sent any request for reconsideration as he is capable to fight independently and win election on his own. "Request to the State Congress for reconsideration of the decision is untrue and Uma is ready to contest independently," said Uma's media in-charge Laxminarayan Mishra. Mishra clarified that their leader will fight as an independent candidate. After party ticket went to Sujit, Congress unit in Puri was found divided into two groups with one faction supporting Uma. Sources also said that Uma

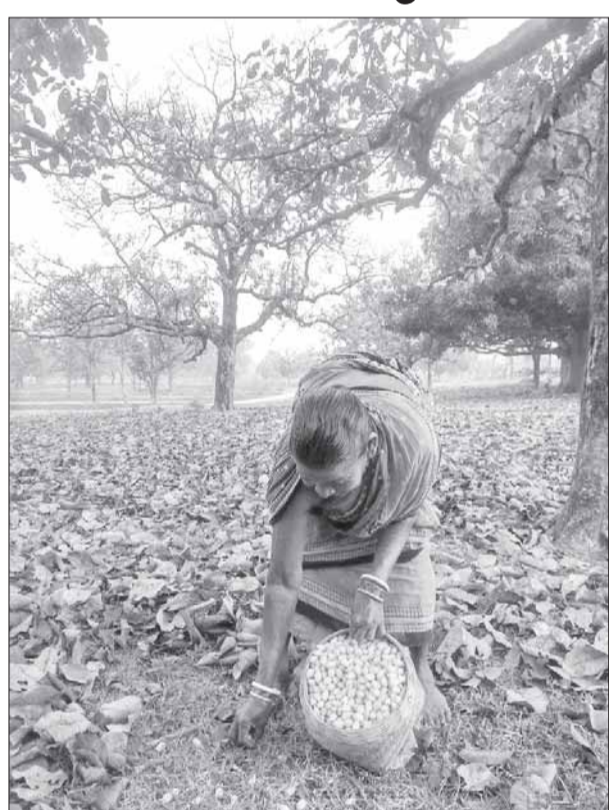
hoped for his win after the Supreme Court's verdict on Vedanta University land purchase which made it illegal. The SC directed the State Government to return land to villagers. Sources said as many as 25,000 villagers are suffering as they have sold nearly 8,000 acres of land to the university. After SC order, villagers are hopeful of getting their land back, where Uma is fighting for them. So their votes are expected to help Uma in the election. With the new development in the Congress unit, while the BJD candidate hoped for

an easy win there, the BJP found little trouble to its poll prospects. While sitting BJP MLA Jayant Kumar Sarangi is contesting again on the party ticket for his second consecutive term, BJD reposed faith on Sunil Mohanty, son of former Cabinet Minister and Assembly Speaker late Maheswar Mohanty. Sunil hopes sympathy votes for his father would help him win. From the present scenario, it seems there would be a straight fight between BJD and BJP, if Congress remains a divided house in Puri.

No storage facility Mahua flower collectors go for distress sale

Intermediaries between collectors and liquor traders make the most

PNS ■ KEONJHAR
Keonjhar district is rich in vast dense forest, which has become a source of livelihood for the forest dwellers as well as the poor people living close by. The people depend for about eight months in a year on various forest produce. And 'Mahua flower' is one whose collection and sale have become a common practice here. Mahua flower is a nature's gift for the poor tribes. Lakhs of Mahua trees in Keonjhar forest provide a source of earning to the tribals. Each Mahua tree fetches flowers worth Rs 1,000 in a year, if properly managed. However, due to lack of proper management, the tribal collectors of Mahua flower



have to go for distress sale of the produce. This leads to loss not only of the tribals, but also of the State Government

which is losing lakhs of rupees as revenue. On the contrary, the traders are taking advantage of the situation and earning a fast buck by selling the Mahua flower to the 'liquor traders.' During February to April, the Mahua flower blossoms and tribal people collect them during this time from the forest. Forest rich Banspal, Telkoi, Sadar, Jhumpura, Ghatagaon blocks of Keonjhar district harvest the Mahua flowers in large quantities. For the Mahua flower collection, a licence is required from the Gram Panchayat. Similarly, the Panchayat Samiti is the authority to decide the minimum support price (MSP). But the ground reality is different. Many traders are allegedly procuring the produce without obtaining a licence and at throw away price. Gopal Munda, a tribal of Banspal, said, "As we have no storage facility, we are forced to sell the Mahua flower collected from the forest immediately. Many times, the traders cheat us in terms of rate and weight during the procurement."

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Jellyfish carcasses found along Gopalpur beach



PNS ■ BRAHMAMPUR
The carcasses of jellyfishes were spotted in large numbers on an area spanning around 500 meters and away from the Gopalpur main beach towards Haripur sea mouth in Ganjam district on Wednesday. This has disturbed environmentalists and nature lovers. The actual cause behind the deaths has not been ascertained yet. According to a source, the carcasses of the aquatic animal were swept away and got stuck on the shore. There is a probability that some carcasses might have been carried into the sea by tide. Due to the southern wind and tide in the sea, the jellyfishes come ashore but fail to return because of their slow pace. Hence, they die gradu-

ally. Such occurrences are often seen in a year. "Usually, jellyfishes do not come ashore for any specific reason. The aquatic animals reproduce during this season and their number multiplies in large numbers," Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) scientist Dr. Anil Mohapatra said when contacted. "Temperature variation could be a factor responsible for jellyfish bloom and warmer temperatures also contribute to it," the scientist added. "Jellyfishes get stuck to our fishing nets and later die when we venture into the deep sea at night," some local fishermen said. Worth mentioning, jellyfishes had previously been found dead on the Gopalpur beach on March 28 this year.

Major fire in Excise Office in Barbil

Valuable assets gutted

PNS ■ KEONJHAR
A major incident of fire occurred at the Excise Office located near Kiriburu Chhak under the Barbil police limits in Keonjhar district in the wee hours of Wednesday. The exact reason behind the inferno as to how it took place was not ascertained yet, a senior excise official said. According to a source, locals spotted thick smoke billowing from the office building dead at night. Immediately, they informed about it to the Fire Service office in the town. The blaze spread to other parts of the office building and several valuable assets of the office were engulfed in flames. Several important



documents, seized vehicles and other assets were reduced to ashes within half an hour. On being informed, a team of Fire Service personnel reached the spot and doused the flames. The team had to strive for more than an hour to bring the inferno under control. The total valuation of gutted properties was not known so far. Meanwhile, the Barbil police have initiated a probe into the incident of fire.

Kalahandi LS poll Throw away corrupt BJD Govt: Ex-MP Basant



'BJP manifesto meant to help poor'

BIKASH KHEMKA ■ BHAWANIPATNA
At a Press conference held at Bhawanipatna former BJP MP, Basant Panda accused the BJD Government in Odisha of being corrupt out and out and said it needs to be thrown away by the voters. He said the Modi Government fulfilled its promises of the last election and the people of Kalahandi will vote for BJP after seeing the local developments of the last five years.

BJP Lok Sabha candidate, Malabika Deo told the reporters that the manifesto of the BJP is meant to help the poor people. She said one of the promises is that those seeking loans for small businesses can get it without any hurdles. Apart from that, the pending works of the railway project in Kalahandi will be taken up. Focus is on farmers' livelihood as well, she said. She also said the Prime Minister has articulated the BJP's ambition to elevate India to one of the top three global economies in the next five years. Additionally, the party pledges to launch a comprehensive assault on poverty and

intensify its fight against corruption. Meanwhile, the Congress, BJP and BJD MP candidates have intensified their campaigning for the ensuing elections in Kalahandi Lok Sabha seat which will witness a close contest among the trio. The dissidence factor is also there as those aspirants who could not get tickets will play the spoilsports. While some of them have joined the rival camp, some are contesting as independent candidates. From Congress, Droupadi Majhi is contesting the election for the LS seat, while Lambodhar Nial is contesting from the BJD.

In Sonepur Ind candidate resorts to crowdfunding for expenses

Focuses on 2 issues such as farmers, Kosal State formation

SRIKUMAR MAHANTA ■ SONEPUR
Though candidates backed by political parties are spending recklessly for canvassing to garner votes, an Independent candidate from Naba Nirman Krushak Sangathan is resorting to crowd sourcing of a different kind for her election campaigns and other poll-related expenditure. For 26-year-old Sonali Bishi, an Independent Assembly candidate for Sonepur constituency in Subarnapur district, money contributed by voters is the only means to intensify her campaign. A native of Sadeipali village of Balangir district, Sonali completed her BA and Master's degree in Social Work in her



hometown. It was during her college days, she started working with the Naba Nirman Krushak Sangathan and joined the fight for the rights of farmers. She also participated in several agitations for liquor ban and child rights. Eventually, after her marriage, she shifted to Bishipada in Subarnapur district. Since she neither had support of any political party nor enough funds for campaign-

ing, she asked for money from voters, sources said. She and her supporters are now going door-to-door raising funds. Sonali is determined to fight with two major issues including agriculture and farmers related issues besides demand for a separate Koshal State. She feels that neither the ruling party in the State nor any other national party has ever given importance to the farmers' issues. "As agriculture

is a major local livelihood activity here, it needs a better representation. I wish to voice the unheard concerns of farmers and give them hope to fight for their rights," she said. The villagers too have come out in support of Sonali. "Most elected representatives spend lakhs towards campaigns, arranging meat and liquor for votes. We have decided to select an MLA who

will be free from corruption. Sonali is from a humble background and seems to be the ideal candidate. If she wins from our contribution, the district as well as the whole farmer community will benefit," said Paramananda Sahu, a local. "It is not mandatory for the people to contribute. I am appealing to them. I am also motivating farmers to take pledge to ensure the win of their farmer daughter," Sonali told The Pioneer. "This is the first time in the State that a farmer community Independent candidate has resorted to crowd funding to contest elections. I don't have a huge demand or monetary expectation from the people. I want each family to contribute at least something, which will help me to take care of the workers during campaigning. The funding will also help create a bonding between the villagers and my workers," she added.



Nations must invest in resilient infrastructure for better tomorrow: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said natural disasters are becoming more frequent and more severe, and their true impact on people, families and communities is beyond just numbers.

communities is beyond just numbers. "Earthquakes destroy houses, making thousands of people homeless. Natural disasters can disrupt water and sewage systems, putting the health of people at risk. Some disasters can impact energy plants, leading to potentially dangerous situations. These things have a human impact," Modi said.



most vulnerable to achieve shared resilience. "CDRI has a programme which is funding projects across 13 such places. Resilient housing in Dominica, resilient transport networks in Papua New Guinea and enhanced

Modi added that the growth of the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure has been impressive in the last few years. Launched in 2019, CDRI is now a global coalition of 39 countries and seven organisations.

We must ask ourselves why?" he said. Mishra said research by CDRI has shown that the annual investment required to address the infrastructure deficit, achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), reach net zero and strengthen resilience by 2050 amounts to USD 9.2 trillion.

particularly in the context of uncertainties posed by a changing climate, is a shared global challenge," he said. Mishra said India recognises that closing the infrastructure deficit and doing so in a manner that all new infrastructure is resilient go hand in hand.

Congress manifesto influenced by foreign forces, claims BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Wednesday launched an all-out attack on the Congress over Sam Pitroda's "inheritance tax" remarks, alleging he has exposed the party's "nefarious design" of taking away common people's wealth and property.



as their savings and even those who are poor say there should be gold. And you want to impose 45 per cent tax on them (gold)," Trivedi added. The Congress distanced itself from Pitroda's remarks, alleging that sensationalising them are attempts at diverting attention from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "malicious" poll campaign.

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



Modi greets people on Panchayati Raj Day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday greeted people on the Panchayati Raj Day, asserting that his government will continue to work to strengthen local body institutions.

Navy official freed from Qatar prison; father thanks Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



Captain Saurabh Vashisht, one of the eight imprisoned former Indian Navy personnel released by Qatar following India's diplomatic efforts, and his father have written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to convey their heartfelt thanks and laud his leadership.

the capital punishment by Qatar on reportedly espionage charges which was later committed. However, India's persistent intervention ensured their release in February and they returned home.

our freedom, for the unwavering advocacy you extended to our plight, and for safeguarding the welfare of our families during our protracted separation." Modi's resolute commitment to the well-being of every Indian, irrespective of circumstance, evokes profound admiration and reverence, he said, praising him for exemplifying the true essence of leadership and empathy.



DRDO builds lightest bullet proof jacket

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Research and Development Organisation's (DRDO) Defence Materials and Stores Research and Development Establishment (DMSRDE), Kanpur has successfully developed the lightest bullet proof jacket in the country for protection against 7.62 x 54 R API (Level 6 of BIS 17051) ammunition, Defence Ministry has said.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Army Chief General Manoj Pandey said here on Wednesday evolution of technology has impacted warfare but technological advantage may just be reduced to a tactical level when it is taken away from the larger strategic context and regarded as the "sole driver" of success in a war.

Technologies emerge as strategic arena of competition: Army Chief

perspective, has undergone significant evolution over the centuries, and has "impacted warfare in a profound manner," he said. General Pandey cited the examples of rifles, railroads, telegraphs and ironclad ships in the 19th-century wars; the machine gun, tank, aeroplane, aircraft carriers and atomic weapons in the 20th-century wars; to the niche technologies that have today permeated into the military domain.



in securing victory for them, while in the early years of the War, it was Germany and Japan which leveraged their industrial and technological capacities to "accrue advantages of scale, over the Allies, the Army chief added.

The military-technological landscape today is witness to a "manifold increase in the lethality and accuracy of kinetic instruments and increased proliferation of technologies" such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, robotics, 3D printing and nanotechnology, the Army chief said.

The scope of grey zone warfare too, has "enhanced" due to technological advancements. Consequent to these developments, the battle space has become "more complex, contested and lethal, and shall remain so in the future," the Army chief said.



India, Japan discuss developments in nuclear non proliferation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Top officials of India and Japan on Wednesday exchanged views on developments in the areas of disarmament and non-proliferation relating to nuclear, chemical and biological domains, outer space security, non-proliferation issues, conventional weapons and export control," the ministry said in a statement.

WHO for doubling efforts to beat challenges posed by malaria

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

On the eve of the World Malaria Day, the World Health Organisation (WHO) on Wednesday emphasised on the need for heightened focus on addressing the obstacles to health equity, gender equality and human rights in malaria responses.

by malaria and ensure all individuals, irrespective of their socio-economic status or geographical location, have access to prevention, diagnosis and treatment services for the disease.

interventions and innovation in service delivery," Wazed said. "On World Malaria Day 2024, we unite under the theme 'Accelerating the fight against malaria for a more equitable world'," she said.



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

Campaigning ends for Friday Lok Sabha polls in Kerala

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

Akhilesh maintains suspense over his candidature from Kannauj seat

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



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

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

BJP veteran Yediyurappa challenges Congress to name PM candidate



PTI ■ TUMAKURU (KARNATAKA)

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

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

Sampla will continue to support BJP, says Rupani

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

Deve Gowda slams Rahul over wealth redistribution promise

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

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



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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

Campaign ends for five Bihar Lok Sabha seats

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



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Turncoats

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

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



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

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PICTALK



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

Graft dominates election discourse

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



SHIVAJI SARKAR

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

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

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

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



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

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



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

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

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

of the executive and administration add to the woes of the people and the breakdown of the law-and-order machinery. The judiciary is uncovering corrupt practices that impact economic and administrative systems, consequently rising cost of living.

Dainik Bhaskar has done a study on prices in Rajasthan. It finds that compared to 2019, prices of petrol, diesel and cooking gas increased by 42 per cent; food items cost 34 per cent more; medicine prices for diabetes and heart diseases rose by 54 per cent and people's dining outside has been reduced by 40 per cent. Pulses have become costlier by 20 per cent, vegetables by 233 per cent; taxi fares by 67 per cent, edible oil 100 per cent, and FMCG rose by 60 per cent. Salaries during the period for different classes have risen by 11 per cent to 26 per cent.

Price concerns persist, with numerous unnecessary infra, road airport and metro projects shocking even political workers. However, this doesn't diminish the significance of religious fervour surrounding the Ram temple and Modi's assurances, which remain potent issues in certain regions, albeit overshadowed by economic factors and caste considerations. Amethi and Raebareilly, however, remain in focus, more than Varanasi.

(The author is a senior journalist; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

EMBRACING NANO INFLUENCE

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

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

Meera Iyer | Bhopal

PHULE'S PROGRESSIVE LEGACY

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

Unveiling historical wounds



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

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

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

Divya Menon | Chennai

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

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

Kavita Mehra | Jaipur

ETERNAL QUEST FOR LIBERATION

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

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

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

Naina Kapoor | Chandigarh

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Nurture workplace safety and inclusivity

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



SMITA SHETTY KAPOOR

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



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

dedicated committees should address issues promptly while proactively working on prevention initiatives.

Diversity and Inclusion: To remain relevant, organisations must adopt equal employment policies, refine communication practices, foster employee resource groups and establish Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) councils. Failure to prioritise these initiatives could deter potential candidates and partners, underscoring their importance in today's landscape.

Flexibility: Sensitivity toward employees' diverse needs is paramount. Accommodations for special circumstances, accessibility for differently-abled individuals, gender-neutral facilities and amenities such as nursing spaces are essential. **Appreciation:** Cultivating a culture of appreciation is pivotal for fostering a sense of belonging among employees. Initiatives such as team bonding activities and addressing unconscious biases contribute significantly to creating supportive environments. This culture of appreciation propels individuals

toward self-actualisation, the pinnacle of Maslow's theory, counteracting toxicity and promoting inclusivity.

Training and Development: Prioritising continuous training and development programs is essential to cultivate a culture of growth and inclusivity within organisations. By equipping employees with the necessary tools and resources to excel, companies demonstrate their unwavering commitment to fostering a supportive and inclusive workplace environment.

Accessibility and Accommodation: Guaranteeing accessibility for all employees, irrespective of their physical capabilities, is imperative to foster inclusivity. This involves implementing measures such as installing wheelchair ramps, providing ergonomic workstations and offering assistive technologies to facilitate equal participation in the workplace. Additionally, organisations need to establish policies that address accommodation requests promptly and with utmost respect for employees' needs and preferences.

(The writer is founder Kelp; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN NAVIGATING WORKPLACE ANXIETY

The pressure to consistently perform and deliver causes stress and anxiety



SAKSHI SETHI

In today's fast-paced and competitive work environments, it is not uncommon for employees to experience feelings of stress, worry and anxiety. While it is commonly associated with professional settings, at the same time it is important to recognise that similar dynamics even occur in educational environments, particularly at the school level. One of the primary contributors to workplace anxiety is the pressure to perform at a high level consistently. Employees often face demanding deadlines, complex projects and performance expectations that can create a sense of overwhelm and inadequacy.

Workplace anxiety can manifest in various forms, ranging from mild nervousness before a presentation to debilitating panic attacks triggered by overwhelming workloads or toxic office dynamics. Left unaddressed, it can have detrimental effects on both individual well-being as well as organisational productivity. Various studies and researchers have found a negative correlation between workplace anxiety and job performance that indicates that higher levels of anxiety are associated with lower performance ratings across various job tasks and responsibilities which brings in a dire need for employers to understand the root causes of workplace anxiety and implement strategies to mitigate its impact. By understanding the root causes of anxiety and implementing strategies to address them, not only the schools but also the organisations can create supportive environments where all members of the community can thrive. The recent concept of 'Unhappy leaves' which isn't even a standard term in employment or HR terminology, could soon refer to situations where employees take leave from work due to dissatisfaction, stress or burnout caused by their job or work environment. Employees might take such leave to address their mental health, seek new opportunities or simply take a break from the stresses of their current job.



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

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

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

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

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

The democratic status of India under scanner



UTTAM CHAKRABORTY

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Determining the limits of corruption, the Indian way

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

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



SIDDHARTH MISHRA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Blinken begins key China visit

Tensions rise over new US foreign aid bill

AP ■ SHANGHAI

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

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

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

The bill also allots \$26 billion

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

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

China and the United States are the major players in the Indo-

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

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

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

and the world."

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

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

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

N Korea sends delegation to Iran

AP ■ SEOUL

A high-level North Korean economic delegation was on its way to Iran, the North's state media said Wednesday, for what would be the two countries' first known talks since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Embracing the idea of a "new Cold War," North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is pushing to build up cooperation with countries confronting the United States, as his intensified weapons tests prompted the US and South Korea to expand their military drills.

Pyongyang's delegation led by Yun Jung Ho, North Korea's minister of external economic relations, flew out Tuesday for the trip to Iran, official Korean Central News Agency said Wednesday. State media did not immediately provide further details.

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

ment. The last known time North Korea sent senior officials to Iran was in August 2019, when a group led by Pak Chol Min, vice chair of Pyongyang's rubber-stamp parliament, made a weeklong visit. The two countries had active diplomatic exchanges until North Korea sealed its borders in an effort to stave off the pandemic, before a cautious reopening in 2023. South Korea's Unification Ministry, which handles affairs with the North, did not immediately comment Yun's visit to Iran.

North Korea has made efforts for months to boost the visibility of its ties with Russia and China as Kim attempts to break out of diplomatic isolation and join a united front against the US.

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

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

"We are concerned about ... the Iranians providing weapons to the Russians and the Russians also supporting efforts to help (North Korea) expand their own research into developing weapons."

Ukrainian officials thank US for its latest military aid

AP ■ KYIV

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

Ukrainian troops have faced acute shortages of shells and air defense systems as political quarrels in Washington held up the aid for months, allowing the Kremlin's forces to edge forward in some parts of eastern Ukraine by sheer weight of troop numbers and firepower in what has largely become a war of attrition.

The US decision came as the Kremlin's army extended its bombardment of the Kharkiv region and Ukrainian long-range

drones struck more fuel and energy facilities inside Russia.

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

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

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

AP ■ KATHMANDU

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

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

On the occasion, President Poudel requested the emir to help secure the release of Bipin Joshi, who was taken hostage by Hamas during an attack against Israel in October last year, said Kiran Pokharel, press advisor to the president.

"Sheikh Tamim assured the president that he would take necessary initiative for the release of the Nepali student," Pokharel told PTI. The emir of Qatar said that he had earlier also taken the initiative for the same.

Joshi was among 17 Nepali stu-

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

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

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

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

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



eral cooperation as the two sides inked eight agreements. Sheikh Tamim, who arrived here on a two-day visit to Nepal on Tuesday, met Prachanda at the Soaltee Hotel where the two leaders discussed the whole gamut of bilateral relationships to expand and deepen their cooperation for mutual benefit, according to the prime minister's office.

Prime Minister Prachanda welcomed the emir and the accompanying delegation, highlighting that the emir is the first Arab leader to visit Nepal, which reflects the depth of

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

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

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

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

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

"The signing of these documents has paved the way for further enhancing cooperation and collaboration between the two countries on important areas," according to the Foreign Ministry.

The deals include a MoU for cooperation in the field of education, higher education and scientific research, an MoU for cooperation between the Public Prosecution in Qatar and the Office of the Attorney General in Nepal, and an MoU for cooperation in the field of youth and sports.

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

The emir left Nepal in the evening after successfully concluding the two-day visit.

Nepal government conferred the highest honour to the Qatar Emir during his less than 24-hour stay in Kathmandu amidst tight security.

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

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

Islamabad (PTI): A three-member medical team from a top institute has advised incarcerated former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan's wife Bushra Bibi to get a "gastroenterology review" done to assess any underlying medical conditions related to her health issues, according to a media report.

The advice from the doctors of the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) came following their visit to the former first lady's home for a medical examination after she complained of acidity and chest pain, Geo News reported on Wednesday.

Bushra Bibi's medical check-up was conducted by the doctors at her Bani Gala residence. The residence has been converted into a sub-jail for the former prime minister's wife. Bushra Bibi, convicted in two different cases, is being held at the Bani Gala home since the couple was sentenced in the 'un-Islamic nikah' case in February.

Dr Bushra Liaquat, Dr Hira and Dr Sidra - a cardiologist - examined Khan's spouse, suggesting she make changes in her diet and lifestyle, the report quoted sources as saying.

The team of doctors, the sources said, visited Bani Gala Monday night at 11 pm to examine Khan's wife following her health concerns.

They also advised her "gastroenterology review." The team remained at Bani Gala for at least 75 minutes to conduct the medical examination.

Last week, a comprehensive medical evaluation of Bushra Bibi was performed under the observation of Khan's family physician, while the doctors at a private hospital declared Bushra Bibi, the former first lady, to be in good health.

The former first lady stayed at a private hospital in Islamabad for six hours for diagnostic tests, including endoscopy, but refused to undergo a blood test and did not provide a blood sample, sources told Geo News.



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

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

AP ■ JAKARTA

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

Subianto, who is currently defense minister, won the election with 58.6 per cent of the votes, or more than 96 million ballots, more than twice the amount received by either of the other two candidates. But his rivals alleged that his victory had depended on large-scale fraud and widespread state interference.

Authorities blocked streets leading to the General Election Commission compound, where more than 4,200 police and soldiers were deployed.

Wearing matching long-sleeved



white shirts, Subianto and vice president elect Gibran Rakabuming Raka waved to their supporters as they arrived at the building.

"The race has finished ... the tough contest, with sometimes heated debates, is over," Subianto said during the ceremony, attended by the country's political elite, including rival candidate Anies Baswedan and his running mate Muhaimin

Iskandar. "And now our people demand that political leaders must work together and collaborate for the people's welfare and to eliminate poverty and corruption in Indonesia," Subianto said.

Subianto will take office in October, succeeding the popular Joko Widodo, the country's first president from outside the Jakarta elite.

The General Election Commission certified the election results on March 20, but the formal declaration ceremony was put on hold following legal challenges from rival candidates, former Jakarta Gov Anies Baswedan and former Central Java Gov Ganjar Pranowo, who sought to annul the result and demand a revote.

They also alleged nepotism, challenging the candidacy of outgoing President Joko Widodo's eldest son, Raka, as Subianto's running mate.

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

Usman was later forced to resign as chief justice for failing to recuse himself.

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

Muizzu further consolidates position after six independents join his party

PTI ■ MALE

President Mohamed Muizzu and his People's National Congress on Wednesday further consolidated their position in Parliament with six independent candidates, elected in Sunday's polls, joining the ruling party.

The pro-China Maldivian president led the People's National Congress (PNC) to win a landslide 66 out of 93 seats in parliament and its coalition partners Maldives National Party (MNP) and Maldives Development Alliance (MDA) won one and two seats, respectively.

The six independent members joined the PNC at a function attended by President Muizzu, who is also the President of the party. With the addition of the



strong endorsement of his pro-Beijing foreign policy, as both India and China closely watched the outcome of the polls in the strategically-located archipelago nation in the Indian Ocean.

According to the news portal Sun.mv, a spokesperson from the PNC confirmed on Wednesday that six independent candidates joined the PNC on Tuesday.

The MP-elects, who signed with PNC on Tuesday include former party members who lost the PNC primaries held in January. They later ran in the elections as independent candidates, with the government backing their candidacy over that of the ruling party's own candidates, the report said.

Meanwhile, Hassan Zareer, the

incumbent Mathiveri MP, won the 2019 elections on a ticket from the main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP). But he, along with 13 other lawmakers from MDP, defected to PNC after MDP's Ibrahim Mohamed Solih lost re-election, the portal said.

In this year's polls, Zareer ran for re-election as an independent candidate, but with the government's backing.

The move by the six independent MP-elects to join PNC comes after the MDP-majority Parliament passed an anti-defection bill on April 1. The bill, which stipulates that parliamentarians will lose their seat for floor crossing, was signed into law by President Dr Mohamed Muizzu last week, it added.

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

AP ■ MOSCOW

A priest who oversaw a memorial for late Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny has been suspended for three years by the head of the country's Orthodox Church. Dmitry Sazonov held a memorial service by Navalny's grave in Moscow on March 26 to mark 40 days since the politician's death, an important ritual within Russian Orthodox tradition.

An order published Tuesday on the Moscow diocese website publicly demoted Sazonov from his position as priest to that of a psalm-reader and stripped him of the right to give blessings or to wear a cassock for the next three years. He was also transferred to another church within the capital. No reason was given for the decision, which was

signed by Patriarch Kirill, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church and a key ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin. Navalny died suddenly on Feb 16 in the remote Arctic penal colony where he had been serving a 19-year sentence on extremism charges widely seen as politically motivated.

The cause of Navalny's death remains unexplained, although the politician's allies have blamed the Kremlin for his demise.

Russian authorities initially refused to release Navalny's body, citing the need for further investigations. The politician's team later said that they had struggled to find a hearse to transport Navalny's body after funeral directors had received threats from unknown individuals. Sazonov was among the clergymen who previously

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

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India pharma exports rise 10 per cent in FY24

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The country's drugs and pharmaceuticals exports increased 9.67 per cent year-on-year to USD 27.9 billion in 2023-24, even as the total exports dipped by 3 per cent in the last fiscal. According to the commerce ministry data, pharma exports in March grew by 12.73 per cent to USD 2.8 billion. In 2022-23, the exports stood at USD 25.4 billion. The top five export markets, for the sector during the last fiscal, are the US, the UK, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, South Africa and Brazil. The US accounts for over 31 per cent of India's total pharma exports, followed by the UK and Netherlands (about 3 per cent each). In 2023-24, the outbound shipments also entered new geographies like Montenegro, South Sudan, Chad, Comoros, Brunei, Latvia, Ireland, Chad, Sweden, Haiti and Ethiopia. An industry expert said that



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

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

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Indian IT services sector is staring at a second consecutive year of muted revenue growth due to modest increase in tech spends in Europe and the US, a domestic rating agency said on Wednesday. Crisil Ratings said it expects the sector to grow at 5-7 per cent in FY25, after a growth of 6 per cent estimated to have been achieved in FY24. The overall industry size is pegged at USD 250 billion and it creates over 50 lakh direct jobs. "The slowdown in technology spend will continue this fiscal, weighing on the revenue growth of IT service providers," said Aditya Jhaver, director at Crisil. The industry is, however, expected to sustain in the key metric of profitability, as the operating profit margins will be stable at 22-23 per cent, the agency said, attributing it to prudent management of employee costs. Crisil said the sectoral revenues achieved a compounded annual growth rate of 12 per cent for the decade through FY24. High interest rates and



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

addition of fresh talent, resulting in headcount reductions by 4 per cent in 2023 by top 12 companies. This, along with the decline in attrition to 13 per cent as of December 2023 from the high of 20 per cent in FY23 provided a breather by limiting higher-cost replacement hiring during FY24, it said. Associate director Joanne Gonsalves said the ratings company expects IT service providers to remain "cautious" on fresh hiring in FY25 too, which will maintain employee utilisation at a healthy level of ~85 per cent. Continued healthy cash generation, strong balance sheets and sizeable cash surplus will keep the credit quality of IT service providers stable, the rating agency said. Players will continue to eye acquisitions, especially small and mid-sized opportunities that could enhance their product baskets and increase digital capabilities, it said. An appreciation in the rupee value or sustained delay in economic revival in key markets amid ongoing geopolitical conflicts could pose downside risks, it added.

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Merger and acquisition (M&A) deal value soared by 60 per cent to USD 19.6 billion in January-March 2024, while that of private equity (PE) experienced a slight dip, according to a PwC India report. With 455 deals amounting to USD 25.6 billion disclosed value, the first quarter of 2024 showcases a 24 per cent rise in deal volume compared to the fourth quarter of calendar year 2023 - marking a notable resurgence, as per PwC India report 'Deals at a glance'. "This signals a shift from the declining trend observed throughout 2023," it added. As per the report, there were 143 domestic M&A deals, with the largest one touching USD 4.5 billion. The overall deal value for the first quarter of 2024 stands at USD 25.6 billion, a significant increase from the previous quarter and the corresponding period last year. Sector-wise, traditional sectors took the lead, drawing significant investments in the changing deal-making scenario.

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Investment vehicles for realty and infrastructure sectors - REITs and InvTs - have garnered Rs 1.3 lakh crore in the past four years till March-end, and are expected to facilitate more pooled funds, Reserve Bank said in a report. Experts and stakeholders are of the view that with India growing at a fast pace, REITs and InvTs are emerging as alternative investment instruments, especially for high net-worth individuals. "India has been a late adopter of real estate investment trusts (REITs) and infrastructure investment trusts (InvTs). However, the market is flourishing - REITs and InvTs have mobilised Rs 1.3 lakh

crore since 2019-20 (up to March 2024)," said an article on 'State of Economy' published in the RBI's April Bulletin. March witnessed the listing of an InvIT, which raised Rs 2,500 crore through a public issue, attracting substantial interest from foreign investors. The article noted that market regulator SEBI has progressively reduced the minimum investment size and trading lot, enabling greater retail participation in these hybrid instruments. To further develop this space, the market regulator notified regulations for small and medium REITs on March 8, 2024. "This is expected to facilitate pooled investment in a wider

range of real estate assets as a regulated financial product, thereby facilitating further growth of REITs in India," said the article authored by a team led by RBI deputy governor Michael Debabrata Patra. Rajeshwar Burla, Senior Vice President and Group Head - Corporate Ratings, ICRA, said the RBI allowed banks to lend to InvITs, which along with security enforcement for lenders under the SARFAESI Act, are some promising steps taken in recent times. "Thanks to a conducive regulatory framework, and a strong pipeline of good operational assets, the industry was able to mobilise over Rs 1.3 lakh crore since FY20. InvTs and REITs helped unwind capital blocked

in already operational infrastructure assets - which can be re-invested into under-construction projects and support infrastructure development in India," said Burla. Indian REITs Association said SEBI's progressive regulations, particularly the reduction in lot size to bringing it on par with other listed companies to buy even single units has transformed REITs into an attractive asset class for retail investors. "This has not only enhanced accessibility but also ensured liquidity, allowing reach to a broader investor base... We are also actively collaborating with SEBI on multiple fronts, including global benchmarking of best REIT practices, standardising financial reporting and disclosures, and addressing other regulatory requirements, amongst others," the Association said in a statement. A REIT is made up of a portfolio of commercial real estate assets, the majority of which are already leased out, and InvTs consist of a portfolio of infrastructure assets like highways. Co-Founder and CEO of YOURS, a platform for fractional ownership of luxury second homes, Sudeep Chandran said it is true that India was a bit late in allowing REITs, yet in the last couple of years it has gathered momentum particularly from HNIs.

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

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee consolidated in a narrow range and settled for the day higher by 1 paisa at 83.30 against the US dollar on Wednesday, as the support from positive domestic equities was negated by rising American currency. Forex traders said elevated crude oil prices and significant foreign fund outflows in the international market dented investors' sentiments. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.29 against the greenback. The unit hit an intra-day high of 83.26 and a low of 83.33 against the greenback. The domestic unit finally settled at 83.30 (provisional) against the dollar, 1 paisa higher from its previous close. On Tuesday, the rupee closed at 83.31 against the American currency. Forex traders said the rupee is expected to trade with a slight positive bias on improved global risk sentiments and easing of geopolitical tensions in the Middle East. However, any fresh aggressions in the Middle East may cap sharp upside. Traders may take cues from durable goods orders data from the US. Investors may remain cautious ahead of inflation data later this week. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 83.05 to Rs 83.50, Choudhary added. On the domestic equity market front, Sensex advanced 114.49 points, or 0.16 per cent, to settle at 73,852.94 points. The Nifty rose 34.40 points, or 0.15 per cent, to close at 22,402.40 points. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Tuesday as they offloaded shares worth Rs 3,044.54 crore, according to exchange data.

Sensex, Nifty climb on firm trend in global markets

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ticked higher for the fourth straight session on Wednesday, helped by buying in metal and commodity stocks amid a positive trend in global equities. However, intense selling pressure on telecom, IT and tech counters capped the upside, traders said. The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 114.49 points or 0.16 per cent to settle at 73,852.94. During the day, it jumped 383.16 points or 0.51 per cent to 74,121.61. The NSE Nifty advanced 34.40 points or 0.15 per cent



to 22,402.40. The indices witnessed some selling pressure towards the fag-end of the session that erased some initial gains. From the Sensex basket, JSW Steel, Tata Steel, Power Grid, Kotak Mahindra Bank, UltraTech Cement, NTPC and Bajaj Finance were the major gainers. Tata Consultancy Services, Tech Mahindra, Maruti, Reliance Industries and Titan were among the laggards. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo,

Shanghai and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory. European markets were trading mostly with gains. Wall Street ended with gains on Tuesday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.35 per cent to USD 88.11 a barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 3,044.54 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data. The BSE benchmark ended 89.83 points or 0.12 per cent higher at 73,738.45 on Tuesday. Trimming most of its early gains, the NSE Nifty ended 31.60 points or 0.14 per cent up at 22,368.

Nippon Life Q4 profit jumps to ₹343 crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Nippon Life India Asset Management Ltd on Wednesday reported its highest-ever quarterly profit after tax (PAT) at Rs 343 crore for the March quarter, marking a 73 per cent jump from the year-ago period. The company had posted a PAT of Rs 198 crore in the year-ago period, the asset management firm said in a stock exchange filing. Total income rose to Rs 560.57 crore during the fourth quarter of FY24 from Rs 388.03 crore in the year-ago period.

higher but we don't expect prices to sustain USD 85 for a short duration," said Mohammed Imran - Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was at 105.84, higher by 0.16 per cent. "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight positive bias on rise in risk appetite in global markets and easing geopolitical tensions in the Middle East. However, hawkish comments from the Fed may support the dollar at lower levels," said Anuj Choudhary Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. However, any fresh aggressions in the Middle East may cap sharp upside. Traders may take cues from durable goods orders data from the US. Investors may remain cautious ahead of inflation data later this week. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 83.05 to Rs 83.50, Choudhary added. On the domestic equity market front, Sensex advanced 114.49 points, or 0.16 per cent, to settle at 73,852.94 points. The Nifty rose 34.40 points, or 0.15 per cent, to close at 22,402.40 points. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Tuesday as they offloaded shares worth Rs 3,044.54 crore, according to exchange data.

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Close on the heels of receiving approval from the Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB), the Indian Gas Exchange (IGX) has launched contracts for small-scale liquefied natural gas (ssLNG) on its platform in a bid to address the demand for fuel in areas not connected to the national gas grid. "The introduction of ssLNG contracts on IGX aims to address the growing gas demand from industries and CGD (City Gas Distribution) companies that do not have access to pipeline networks," IGX said in a statement. Through ssLNG, they can now procure liquefied gas through LNG tankers at competitive rates under daily, fortnightly and monthly contracts. Initially, this contract is launched at Dahej and Hazira LNG terminals in Gujarat. Later, it will be launched at other terminals namely Dhamra in Odisha, Mundra in Gujarat, Ennore in Tamil



Nadu, Kochi in Kerala, and on-land ssLNG stations at Vijaipur. Natural gas is primarily supplied through pipelines in the country. As a result, industries and commercial establishments without access to the grid primarily rely on trucks for LNG transportation. The demand for road-transported LNG is projected to increase to 5 million standard cubic metre per day over the next five years. Small-scale LNG contracts present a win-win situation for both the buyers as well as sellers. It would serve as a platform for sellers, who can

Students take part in engineering entrance exam

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The SRM Joint Examinations for Engineering (SRMJEEE) 2024-Phase I for admission to B.Tech and Integrated M.Tech programmes of SRM Institute of Science and Technology - SRMIST (Kattankulathur, Ramapuram, Vadapalani, Ghaziabad, and Tiruchirappalli campuses), SRM University - Sonepat and SRM University - Andhra Pradesh was held from 20th April to 23rd April 2024. The examination was conducted in Remote Proctored Online Mode (RPOM), where students took part in the examination from their comfort of their homes through their laptop or desktop. Students from all over India and rest of the world took part in SRMJEEE. The examinations were conducted in 3 slots per day on April 20th, 21st, 22nd and 23rd. The slot booking for the same was held on April 16th, 17th and the mock test was conducted on 18th April to help students familiarise with RPOM.

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

PTI ■ MUMBAI

All India Management Association, a federation of Local Management Associations (LMAs), has witnessed a 20 per cent growth in registration for MAT (management aptitude test) in 2023 compared to the pre-Covid year. MAT has actively expanded its test centers across the country, making the examination more accessible to aspiring candidates and increasing the number of locations where the test is conducted, eliminating geographical barriers, which allowed students from diverse regions to participate. "This strategic expansion has undoubtedly contributed to the significant rise in the applicant count. MAT has seen a significant 20 per cent growth in candidate registrations post-Covid. "There has been a rise in the number of women candidates registering for MAT. With 45 per cent of



women candidates in 2023, there is a growth of approximately 3 per cent compared to 2019," AIMA Director Daljeet Singh told PTI. There has also been a 3 per cent growth in registration by women candidates for MAT last year compared to 2019. The rise in popularity of MAT has led to an increasing number of registrations in tier II and III cities. "Providing candidates from tier II and III cities an opportunity to pursue their management dream from B-Schools of choice has also played a part in increase in MAT popularity and registrations. Durg, Ernakulam, Erode, Salem among others," he said. The growth was notable in southern states like Tamil Nadu (52 per cent), Karnataka (22 per cent), and Kerala (20 per cent), as well as in states like West Bengal (15 per cent), Uttar Pradesh (8 per cent), and Bihar (4 per cent). Top B-Schools participation in MAT and acceptance of its score for MBA (Master of Business Administration) and PGDM (Post Graduate Diploma in Management) admissions has further contributed significantly for surge in candidate registrations and MAT popularity, he added.

VIT AP University honoured



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

Indian golfers Aditi, Diksha set to participate in Paris Olympics

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

The top 15 players in the



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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Contingent of 33 to represent India in South Asian Triathlon Championship

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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



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



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

AP ■ ROME

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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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



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

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

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

ARCHERY WORLD CUP

Indian men, women compound teams eye gold in Shanghai

PTI ■ SHANGHAI

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



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

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

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

Sreeshankar undergoes knee surgery in Doha

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

Olympic bound boxer Preeti to spearhead India's challenge

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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



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

SQUAD

Youth

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

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

U 22

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



Rampant Sunrisers Hyderabad eye another run fest against bottom placed RCB

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Sunrisers Hyderabad will look to unleash their brute batting power on struggling Royal Challengers Bengaluru when the two teams face off in their return-leg fixture of the IPL here on Thursday. Having breached the 250-run mark thrice in this IPL edition itself, Sunrisers Hyderabad are pushing the boundaries of T20 batting with their no holds barred approach. While Mumbai Indians were the first victim of SRH's new-found batting strength this season, RCB bore the maximum brunt when the Travis Head-led batting lineup powered the 2016 winners to IPL's highest-ever total of 287/3 in Bengaluru. If this was not enough, SRH's carnage against Delhi Capitals - which included a record 125/0 being scored in the powerplay - brought forth the possibility of the 300-run mark being breached for the first time ever in the IPL. And it won't be surprising if

SRH manage to do the unthinkable and that too against a bowling attack as frail as RCB's, whose struggles with in the bowling department could be gauged with the fact that their best bowler, Yash Dayal, is at 24th spot in the overall list with seven wickets. Placed at the bottom of the pool, RCB have conceded at least 180 in their last five matches. In the last two games, the opponents have raked up totals in excess of 200. RCB batters have worked hard to make up for their severe shortcomings in bowling, but for such a lopsided squad in terms of balance, the task to produce an all-round performance looks nearly impossible. To their credit, RCB fought incredibly hard with the bat but were unfortunate to have lost to Kolkata Knight Riders by a mere one run after conceding 222/6. Moreover, a collective batting effort must have pleased the RCB management to a large extent. He was a victim of a contentious call but Virat Kohli



remains RCB's best batter in the tournament so far, having scored 379 runs to keep the Orange Cap in possession. But hot on his heels are a few others including SRH's Head, who is making most of his purple patch. Head's game is designed not only on aggressiveness and ability to cash in on every opportunity, his ability to find gaps at will makes him a compulsory watch. Abhishek Sharma has flourished in Head's company and Heinrich Klaasen too has made merry with the bat this season. Overall, SRH's compelling shows with the bat have made the job of their bowlers and skipper Pat Cummins easier. SRH are placed comfortably at the third position in the table with 10 points from seven matches. While the journey so far has been fuelled by the batters' fire, SRH would know their bowling would be tested along the way and Cummins' men could do well to watch out against a hurting RCB side.

TEAMS (FROM):
Royal Challengers Bengaluru: Faf du Plessis (c), Glenn Maxwell, Virat Kohli, Rajat Patidar, Anuj Rawat (wk), Dinesh Karthik (wk), Suyash Prabhudessai, Will Jacks, Mahipal Lomror, Karn Sharma, Manoj Bhandage, Mayank Dagar, Vijaykumar Vyshak, Akash Deep, Mohammed Siraj, Reece Topley, Himanshu Sharma, Rajan Kumar, Cameron Green, Alzarri Joseph, Yash Dayal, Tom Curran, Lockie Ferguson, Swapnil, Saurav Chauhan.
Sunrisers Hyderabad: Pat Cummins (c), Abdul Samad, Abhishek Sharma, Aiden Markram, Marco Jansen, Rahul Tripathi, Washington Sundar, Glenn Phillips, Sanvir Singh, Heinrich Klaasen (wk), Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Mayank Agarwal, T. Natarajan, Anmolpreet Singh, Mayank Markande, Upendra Singh Yadav (wk), Umran Malik, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Shahbaz Ahmed, Travis Head, Jaydev Unadkat, Akash Singh, Jhathavedh Subramanyan.

Stoinis eager to play for Australia despite missing CA central contract



PTI ■ CHENNAI

Despite missing out on Cricket Australia's central contract for the 2024-25 season, all-rounder Marcus Stoinis wants to use the impact hundred against Chennai Super Kings as a leverage to extend his white ball career beyond the upcoming T20 World Cup. Stoinis, who was not included in the 23-player central contract list, made an unbeaten 124 off 63 balls for Lucknow Super Giants here on Tuesday. However, Stoinis didn't read much into him missing the CA contract which was announced on March 28. "I've got a great relationship with the (Australia) coach (Andrew McDonald). Me not getting a contract, I knew that a while ago. I think it is great to give younger kids a crack and let them take my spot. I'm absolutely fine with that on the contract list," Stoinis said after guiding LSG to a six-wicket

win over CSK. But the 34-year-old was firm in thoughts about his career with the national team. "But on the playing front, obviously, I want to make sure that I'm there and that's also why it's so lucky for us and for me particularly to have this competition (IPL), that's why I love it so much," he said. The Perth-born player was omitted from Australia's ODIs against the West Indies in January, but he is set to be part of the country's T20I World Cup campaign in the West Indies and the USA in June. Stoinis is most likely to be slotted into No. 5 in the Australian line-up during the marquee event. Stoinis is eligible for Australian selection for the tournament because his current contract for the 2023-24 season will run its course only on June 30. However, Stoinis was clear that he wanted to play for Australia in the white ball series against England (away) in September and against Pakistan at home in November.

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

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Joining the raging debate around Impact Players in the IPL, Lucknow Super Giants consultant Adam Voges said he prefers something like the 'Power Surge' rule in the Australian Big Bash League where the batting team gets to decide a two-over phase of fielding restrictions. The Impact Player substitution rule, introduced last season, has been a heavy topic of debate this season with lot of players, including India captain Rohit Sharma calling it detrimental to the growth of all-rounders. Voges agreed and said while the rule makes for entertaining cricket, it hurts all-rounders. "The scores have been going up, and the teams have got genuine batters coming in at number seven or eight, while the batters have gone hard right from the start," the Australian said after the six-wicket win over Chennai Super Kings here on Tuesday night. "Certainly makes for entertaining cricket, but it takes the all-rounders out of the game for a little bit and

their effectiveness. The all-rounder always balances the side and perhaps it is not as important with the Impact Sub," he explained. Asked if the rule is comparable to Power Surge in Australia's Big Bash League, Voges said the latter adds to the contest, and he is a fan of it. Unlike the IPL, which has a six-over power play at the start of the innings, the BBL features a four-over power play. Power Surge is then a two-over phase of only two fielders outside the circle, sought by the batting team at any point following the 11th over of its innings. "I like the Power Surge back at home. It just adds another element to the game. While chasing, you never feel like you are out of the game. But we have also seen multiple wickets fall during that period," he said. **STOINIS GRABBED CHANCE WITH BOTH HANDS:** Marcus Stoinis' unbeaten 124 ensured that Lucknow Super Giants pulled off a double over defending champion



Chennai Super Kings in the ongoing edition. Stoinis, who has been promising with the bat, was promoted to number three in this clash. Voges said the decision was easy given his successful outing as a top-order batter for Melbourne Stars in the Big Bash League.

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

He has been hitting the ball well the whole tournament and has always been threatening." LSG's victory was heavily aided by the dew settling in at Chepauk on Tuesday, and Voges felt it was a good toss to win. "At the halfway stage, we could feel the dew on the outfield, and it played a part in the back end of the game. In the end, it was a good toss to win," he added. Voges lauded the hosts for keeping his team under pressure until the final over. "It was a tremendous game of cricket. The batting from both sides was outstanding," he continued. "CSK did put us under pressure with the ball, but it was our best night execution-wise. We needed someone to stand up, and Stoinis played an outstanding innings," he said. The CSK batters did a great job by setting a challenging total of 210 for four, thanks to skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad's unbeaten 108, which was also aided by a 27-ball 66 from the in-form Shivam Dube.

OTHER SPORTS

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

AP ■ MADRID

Rafael Nadal will play in the Madrid Open despite not being fully fit and didn't seem too optimistic about his chances of being ready for the French Open later this month. Nadal said Wednesday he would not play in Paris if he arrives there feeling the same way that he is feeling ahead of his debut in Madrid this week. "The sensations haven't been perfect this week. If it wasn't Madrid, maybe I wouldn't play. But there are a lot of emotions involved," Nadal said. "I don't know what's going to happen in the following three weeks. I'll keep fighting and doing the things that I

think I need to do to play in Paris. And if it's possible, then it's possible. If not, then not. I'm not going to play in Paris the way I'm feeling today. If it was Paris, I wouldn't be playing." The 37-year-old Nadal has said this is likely his farewell year on tour, and is hoping to be competitive one last time at Roland Garros, where he is a 14-time champion. The 22-time Grand Slam winner is a record five-time champion in Madrid, with his last title in the Spanish capital coming in 2017. He is scheduled to debut on Thursday against 16-year-old American Darwin Blanch. "Hopefully I can play without many limitations," Nadal said. "Then we'll



see what happens. If I play without limitations, even if I lose, then it will be positive." Nadal, who had hip surgery last summer, lost to Alex de Minaur in the second round in Barcelona in what was his first tournament in more than three months. "The goal is to be on court. Enjoy as long as possible," he said. "I mean, that's the thing. Try to finish the tournament alive in terms of body issues, and enjoy the fact that I will be able to compete one more time in the professional tour and here at home in Madrid, a place that give me everything, no, in terms of support." He said he is giving himself "a chance"

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

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

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Chennai Super Kings are not looking for a "quick fix" to their issues in the batting department and head coach Stephen Fleming is ready to give the likes of Daryl Mitchell time to get settled in top-three after their fourth loss in eight games. CSK have been juggling batters in the top three through the season. On Tuesday against Lucknow Super Giants, Ajinkya Rahane and Ruturaj Gaikwad came to open while Mitchell was promoted to number three from five. In the previous game, Gaikwad pushed himself down to number three to accommodate Rahane and Rachin Ravindra. Following their dramatic loss to LSG at home, Fleming said they need to get their batting combinations right.

"It's a mixture of trying to find that (combination) and also form. We're a little bit uncomfortable with some areas, so we're trying to find not a quick fix, but the right combination where players are going to contribute for the back end of this tournament," said Fleming after first loss of the season at home. Mitchell, who was bought for Rs 14 crore at the auction, has totalled 146 runs in seven innings. Fleming insisted that number three is the ideal spot for the fellow New Zealander. "There's a lot of pressure, obviously. Getting up the order is more comfortable for him. Me putting him down the order in the hitting role wasn't his best position. So, we've looked to rectify that and get him up the order where he has had his best performances internationally.



That might take a little time, but the top three need to contribute the majority of runs. "Ruturaj did that today, so hopefully, he can continue his form, and the others can pick that up... We're not firing on all cylinders by any means, but we're in each game asking teams to play well to beat us. We just got to get a little bit better," he said

referring to skipper's unbeaten hundred in a losing cause. While Mitchell's promotion did not yield the desired result, LSG sending Marcus Stoinis to number three proved to be a game changer as he singlehandedly pulled off a memorable win for his team with an unbeaten 124 off 63 balls. Fleming, who has worked alongside the Aussie all-rounder in the Big Bash League for Melbourne Stars, recalled how impactful he had been at the top, especially as an opener. "He's got power, but he's also got good batsmanship. For Stars, we got him to open the batting, and he was quite prolific," he remembered. "Today, we saw the quality of his work. His 50 came up in about mid-20 balls (26), and then he just controlled the innings. "What more could you ask

from your top three? They needed someone to answer for what Ruturaj did, and Stoinis did that beautifully." **BEEN LUCKY TO EXPERIENCE DHONI MANIA FOR PAST 16-17 YEARS** Though it has been close to four years since the great M S Dhoni retired from international cricket, the unconditional love he gets from his legion of fans remain undiminished. The World Cup winning captain is batting like the Dhoni of old this season, finding sixes and fours at will. Fleming considers himself among the lucky ones to witness fans' unparalleled admiration for Dhoni across venues. "It's an experience you like to have in the stadium every time he plays. It's been lucky for me to have this magical

experience for 16-17 years. "The love for him throughout the world is a testimony to the way he has played the game. People talk about MS as a person, but he is also a great player, and he has done some great things for India and Chennai (Super Kings). "People take time to appreciate it, and we do that every day. We are lucky to have him in our side for so long. So, it's not lost on us, and we enjoy every moment." The CSK-LSG clash witnessed a huge amount of dew coming and Fleming and his team had anticipated it. "Apart from Gaikwad) We saw another great hundred from Marcus Stoinis, and they (GT) answered pretty well. It was a good game of cricket, and we felt we played well given the conditions in the backend, but we did some little things wrong under pressure."

EAST COAST RAILWAY
Tender Notice No.: 05-KUR-TRD-OT-2024-25, Dtd.18.04.2024
Name of Work: REPLACEMENT OF 21.6 MVA, 132/25KV ALSTOM MAKE POWER TRANSFORMER AT BHADRAK(BHC)/TSS(TR-3) BY 21.6/30.24 MVA 132/27KV ABB MAKE POWER TRANSFORMER TO BE SUPPLIED BY M/S TATA STEEL LIMITED/DUBURI.
Advertised Value: ₹9,62,506/-
EMD: Rs.19,300/-
Completion Period: 90 (Ninety) Days
Tender closing Date & Time: At 1300 hrs. on 10.05.2024
The Tender documents complete details available at www.irps.gov.in
Sr. Divl. Electrical Engineer (TRD) Khurda Road

LOST
On dtd.22.04.2024 at about 3.00PM I Gopinath Bisoi (72) S/o- Lt. Ulla Bisoi of Ajodhya Nagar Main Lane, Berhampur PS-B.N Pur Dist.-Ganjam AU/ Pre.Satabdi Nagar, Unit-8, Baramunda, Bhubaneswar Dist.-Khorda appeared at PS alongwith an affidavit vide No.69AA 165661 of Chaitanya Patra Notary and presented a written report that he is the owner of the house property situated at Berhampur under Berhampur Tahasil which I purchased under vide registration Sale Deed vide document No.3589/1984 by paying full sale consideration bearing Khata No.1166/180, Plot No.2683/3523 of mouza, Gollundi, On 21.03.2024 at about 04.00 PM I lost the said Original Registered Sale Deed No.3589/1984 some where by me while I had gone to market for Xerox at Kamapalli Square. I searched the same but in vain. This fact is entered into GD for future reference.