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AID TO TAIWAN

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LOK SABHA ELECTION PHASE 2 SEATS

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Congress taxed on inheritance as Modi rips into Sam Pitroda remark

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

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 BIP-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"

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. Congress also marshalled a counteroffensive as its functionaries shared past comments of BJP leaders, including former Union Minister and MP in the outgoing Lok Sabha Jayant Sinha, in "favour" of such an tax.

In his poll rallies, Modi framed Pitroda's comments in his wider onslaught against the Congress, asserting that they have exposed its hidden agenda and that the party has become so removed from the country's social and family values that it wants to legally rob people of their assets and lifelong savings they want to bequeath to their children. had spoken about inheritance tax in the US while delving into the issue of



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

introduce such a

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 lies," Congress chief spokesman president of party's overseas wing and asserting that it has no plan to

"Sensationalising 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 divisor to the shehzada's father, said

Jairam Ramesh said on a statement. 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 the middle class and those who earn by toiling hard," Modi said, apparently referring to Rahul Gandhi and Pitroda.

that more tax should be imposed on

"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

2024 LS voting concludes for States marked in red CONSTITUENCY Kasaragod, Kannur, Vatakara, Wayanad, Kozhikode, Malappuram, Ponnani, Palakkad, Alathur, Thrissur, Chalakudy, Ernakulam, Idukki, Kottayam, Alappuzha, Mavelikkara, Pathanamthitta, Kollam, Attingal Thiruvananthapuram Udupi Chikamagalur, Hassan, Karnataka Dakshina Kannada, Chitradurga, Tumkur, Mandya, Mysore, Chamarajanagar, Bangalore Rural, Bangalore North, Bangalore Central, Bangalore South, Chikballapur, Kolar Tonk-Sawai Madhopur, Ajmer, Pali **RAJASTHAN** Jodhpur, Barmer, Jalore, Udaipur, Banswara, Chittorgarh, Rajsamand, Bhilwara, Kota, Jhalawar-Baran Maharashtra Buldhana, Akola, Amravati (SC), Wardha, Yavatmal-Washim, Hingoli, Nanded, Parbhani Uttar Pradesh Amroha, Meerut, Baghpat, Ghaziabad, Gautam Budh Nagar, Aligarh, Mathura, Bulandshahar Tikamgarh, Damoh, Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh Satna, Rewa, Hoshangabad, Betul Karimganj, Silchar, Mangaldoi, Assam Nawgong, Kaliabor Kishanganj, Katihar, Purnia, Bhagalpur, Banka West Bengal Darjeeling, Raiganj, Balurghat Rajnandgaon, Mahasamund, Kanker Chhattisgarh Jammu & Kashmir Manipur Outer Manipur Tripura East

Campaign for Phase II LS poll ends

RAJESH KUMAR NEW DELHI

fter whirlwind roadshows, political After whiliwhild roadshold, 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

such as Wayanad (Kerala), from where Congress leader Rahul Gandhi is seeking re-election 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,



The upcoming second phase polls will Mathura where Hema Malini is seeking cover several important constituencies 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

Amid heat wave conditions, the poll body on Wednesday extended the poll timings by two hours in some Assembly segments — Banka, Madhepura, agaria and Munger Lok 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,



Noida readies for triangular contest

SAUMYA SHUKLA II NEW DELHI

Despite being associated with the 'jinx', which many considered to have ended the careers of Chief Ministers in Uttar Pradesh, including Mayawati, Yogi Adityanath has held his fort despite having made visits to Noida, soon after he assumed the CM's chair in 2017.

He became the first CM of the to return after completing a five years term and breaking the 'Noida jinx' in the 2022 Assembly polls. The popular NCR city, which falls under the Gautam Buddha Nagar seat, will go to elections on Friday in the second phase of Lok Sabha elections 2024.

Previously under Khurja Lok Sabha, the Gautam Buddha Lok constituency was established in 2008 on the on recommendation of the Delimitation Commission of India, is set to witness a three way contest between BJP, SP and BSP for the upcoming

elections on April 26.

In the upcoming 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the electoral contest will primarily feature BIP-led 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.

constituency covers Bulandshahar and Gautam Buddha Nagar districts and comprises five Vidhan Sabha constituencies: Noida, Iewar, Dadri, Sikandrabad and Khurja.

The SP, which is part of the Opposition INDIA Bloc, has fielded Mahendra Singh Nagar, a seasoned politician who served as the Congress district president from 1999 to 2016 before joining the SP in 2022. On the other hand, representing the BSP is Rajendra Singh Solanki, who recently joined the party.

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 constituency, considered as one of the most VIP constituencies and a 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 with the BIP candidates consistently bv winning significant the three margins in elections held constituency, and the BJP's vote share increasing with each successive election,

further solidifying their position constituency. The Ghaziabad Lok Sabha seat will witness a triangular

contest in 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 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 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. leaders said their list of grievances against the ruling party was a long one.

Moquim's daughter



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

BBSR temp 43.2

degree

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 Metrological Department (IMD) Regional Office here, besides ange Warning for severe heat

Bhubaneswar, Jharsuguda recorded maximum temperature of 42.9 degree, Chandbali 42.2 degree and Baleswar 41.4 de-

view as the IMD has predicted a further rise in the maximum temperature in different parts of Odisha.

No respite seems to be in

"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 Or-

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

■ Slams Opp for 'opposing development' vouth budget in coming days. people of Odisha know their of Odisha. The BJD is number

Says Odisha to be No. 1 State by 2036

PNS BHUBANESWAR

 $B_{
m JD}$ supremo and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Wednesday started his election campaign for the upcoming twin polls in the State from his traditional Hinjili Assembly constituency in his home turf Ganjam district.

Addressing a gathering, Patnaik criticised the opposition parties for 'opposing' developmental works in the

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

true nature. No one has become successful by opposing development," Patnaik said. Speaking about the trans-

formational initiatives of his government, Patnaik in the State. Farmers are getting loan at zero-per

said, "Around 70 lakh women have become the drivers of transformation cent interest in the State. Likewise, Misson Shakti members have so far received Rs 18,000crore interest-free loan. This

is a milestone in development

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 gov-

"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 ernment would introduce a concluded.

Naveen to use custo

BHUBANESWAR

he 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

Naveen, 5T and Nabin Odisha

Chairman VK Pandian and

ernment as the BJD supremo's guarantee for transformation symbol, the vehicle displays the images of Biju Patnaik,

Notably, Naveen had also campaigned for the party by riding a customised bus during the 2019 Lok Sabha and Assembly polls.

party general secretary

(organisation) Pranab Prakash

5T initiative of the State Gov-

The vehicle also displays the

Das prominently.

BHUBANESWAR | THURSDAY | APRIL 25 2024

Odisha Wonder Women's Convention held

By ILO, **OASME**

Odisha Wonder Women's Convention was jointly organised by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Odisha Assembly of Small and Medium Enterprises (OASME) here.

Chairwoman, OASME Women Wing, Jyotirmayee Mohanty extended a warm welcome to all guests and dignitaries. The keynote address was delivered by chief technical advisor at PSEI, ILO Sudipta Bhadra.

The convention provided a platform to empower women entrepreneurs in Odisha, offering valuable insights, resources, and networking opportunities to thrive in the competitive business landscape. Focusing on sustainable enterprise and economic empowerment, the workshop ad-



president Rama Devi, Pro-

gram Officer at Kudumbashree

(representing the State Gov-

ernment of Kerala virtually)

Sreekanth Koonayil and

OASME Women Wing,

Cuttack Chapter president

Lopamudra Mishra, actively

participated and shared their

Attendees engaged in ses-

sions, panel discussions, and

interactive workshops featur-

ing esteemed speakers and ex-

perts from diverse sectors. Top-

ics covered included public

procurement policy, digital

dressed key challenges and opportunities for women-led businesses in the region.

The women entrepreneurs highlighted the issues faced by them in participating in the Government tender and demanded for a separate policy for the women and other reservation for women in all procurement policies of the State and Central Government.

During the panel discussion on 'Perspective and Success Mantra in Select States,' Associate of Lady Entrepreneurs of India, Andhra Pradesh technology in business growth.

Furthermore, sessions on "ONDC" by Pooja Bagaria, Network Extension representative from ONDC, and "Digital Marketing in the Age of AI" facilitated by Ishita Gupta were conducted. Additionally, a session dedicated to "Gem" provided insights into Government e-Marketplace initia-

Participation certificates

were distributed to MSMEs in Odisha who had undergone training under the ILO SCORE programme, marking a significant milestone in their entrepreneurial journey. Deepak Bajaj, Life & Business Transformation Coach, had a spectacular session at the end where he gave many success mantras and techniques to the audience on running a successful enterprise. The event was participated in by over 200 women entrepreneurs from 25 districts of Odisha.



▲ he Congress is determined to implement its guarantees. The victory of the party in the Paralakhemundi Assembly seat in this election is a must, said All Indian Congress Committee (AICC) spokesperson Prabhat Kumar at a Press meet here on Wednesday.

Congress candidate Bijay Kumar Pattnaik would win from Paralakehmundi with a huge margin and set a record. The BJP government at the Centre and the BJD government in Odisha are only busy in hoodwinking the people. The two parties' special qual-

ity is that both are very good liars. So, they have a very good relationship. The people of the country and Odisha have ascertained this. So, they have this time decided to bring back the Congress. The results on June 4 would prove this, said

If the Congress returns to

power, it would fulfil its guarantees. The other parties are giving guarantees which they can't fulfil, said Kumar.

Among others, AIIC observer Rabindra Pratap Singh, Congress MLA candidate Bijay Patnaik and Brahmapur MP candidate Rashmi Patnaik

Cong candidate will Youth Cong opposes win in Parlakhemundi' Naveen's campaigning



he Odisha Youth Congress on Wednesday lashed out at Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik as he kicked off his election campaigning. The Youth Congress said Prime Minister Narendra Modi and CM Naveen Patnaik are competing to stay ahead in a false

Congress media cell chairman Sudip Samal said Patnaik should clarify to the people of the State what he has contributed in his tenure of 25 years and what he has "looted". He

challenged the Chief Minister for an open debate. He alleged that during the BJD rule the youths have been cheated the most. The State has lagged behind in agriculture, health, education, law and order and transportation.

He further said the Chief Minister should clarify on the treasures of Lord Jagannath and what is the condition of technical education in the State. He urged people to put these questions to Patnaik wherever he goes for campaigning and not to accept his "false promises".

Samanta gets doctorate from JV Women's Univ



BHUBANESWAR

Educationist and social reformer Dr Achyuta Samanta on Wednesday was conferred the honorary Doctorate of Science degree by the JV Women's University, Jaipur at its 14th convocation cer-

This marked Dr Samanta's 57th honorary doctorate, acknowledging his significant contributions to education, social service and women's empowerment.

While Dr Samanta attended the event virtually, his repre-

sentative received the honour on his behalf from the university. Retired IPS officer and former Lieutenant Governor Puducherry Dr Kiran Bedi was the chief guest on the occa-

This was the first time that Samanta received such an honour from a women's uni-

Expressing his gratitude to the university, Dr Samanta dedicated the award to his mother Nilimarani and all the women faculties and women administrative staffs of KISS

BJP brings out charge-sheet against BJD



Portrays Naveen as 'mum' NALINI SAHU BHUBANESWAR

 ${
m T}_{
m he~BJP}$ on Wednesday brought out a 'charge-sheet' against Odisha's ruling BJD. The 60-page pictorial document is replete with allegations of corruption and nepotism by the Naveen Patnaik govern-

State president Manmohan Samal and other senior leaders were present during the release of the charge-sheet.

The charge-sheet titled "Pachis Barsar Papapedi" (Storehouse of 25 years of BJD sins) also carries a tagline 'Kete Dina Au Sahiba, Parivartan Aniba (How long do we tolerate; it's time to bring a change). Most of the pages carry photographs of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, his close aide VK Pandian, BJD organising secretary Pranab Prakash Das and some other top leaders of the party. These leaders have been portrayed as "bad guys" and accused of large-scale "corruption," "loot of resources," "murde" and

The charge-sheet describes Naveen as "Maun" (mum).

Releasing the charge-sheet, Union Minister Bhupender Yaday said, "In Odisha, there have been a lot of irregularities in the 25 years of BJD rule. We have witnessed a declining graph of BJD as far as the upliftment of farmers, infrastructure and other aspects are concerned. The Odisha government had promised to provide irrigation facilities to 35% cultivable lands and set up cold storages in all the 314 blocks, but it has failed to achieve the

Yadav also said the BJD claimed that the KALIA scheme would bring a massive change in the lives of farmers, but the government later admitted that the number of beneficiaries under the scheme dropped.

"It shows that the BJD is working with an anti-farmer mindset," he said. "Besides, National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) data show that Odisha is a place where crimes against women have increased. The rise in the number of missing children is also another area of concern along with the suicide of women here," Yadav said.

He further said the labourers from Odisha are migrating to other parts of the country. In the last one year, over 40,000 labourers have moved out of Odisha which has been highlighted by the media.

'Apart from this, 4300 Lecturer posts are vacant in the State. The total teachers in colleges and universities dropped to 40,000 in 2019 from 43000 in 2015-16,"

"Tamil Nadu is buying ower at 2.53 paisa per unit from Odisha while the consumers of Odisha are being charged 2.83 paisa per unit. Those in government in Odisha need to answer this," said he.

In city

Man sets shop afire as shopkeeper demands Rs 130 pending bill

The Commissionerate Police here on Wednesday arrested a person on the charge of setting a grocery shop on fire in the Chandaka area of the city on Tuesday night.

The accused was identified as Sadasiba Swain (35), son of Krushna Chandra Swain, of Madhupur under the Chandaka police limits in the city.

As per the complaint, Sadasiba had purchased grocery items worth around Rs 130 on credit from the shop of Ranjit Kumar Sahoo a few days ago.

Sadasiba allegedly threatened

Ranjit of dire consequences when the latter asked the former to pay the money on Tuesday

Sadasiba allegedly set Ranjit's grocery shop on fire while the latter was inside it at around 11.30 pm.

Ranjit managed to escape the fire, but his shop along with grocery items worth above Rs 1 lakh were gutted in the inci-

Ranjit lodged a complaint in this regard with the Chandaka police. The police arrested Sadasiba after registering a case under Sections 436, 307 and 506 of the IPC.

dead, 2 hurt as cars collide in Banki

 $oldsymbol{\mathcal{H}}$ person was killed and two others sustained grievous injuries when two speeding cars collided head on near Kuspungi Chhak under the Banki police station in Cuttack district on Wednes-

The deceased was identified as Naria Sahoo and the injured were identified Sujit Das and his son of Athagarh town in the district.

The mishap occurred in the

afternoon when Sujit Das and his son along with other members of the family were on their way back home in a car from Cuttack to Athagarh and Naria was on his way to Banki.

Some locals rescued the injured and shifted them to the SCB Medical College Hospital in Cuttack. However, doc tors declared Naria dead.

On being informed, the Banki police reached the spot, seized the two cars and initiated a probe into the inci-

HITTING THE BULL'S EYE

Party cadres to determine Sambalpur Lok Sabha outcome

Pranab Prakash Das is a front line BJD leader. His organisational skills have been proven as highly-impressive. He is dashing and adventurous, who has enormous appetite for risk-taking. Naveen Patnaik chose him to put people, party leaders and ground-level workers in tandem so as to ensure no confusion ever occurs with regard to keeping masses in good humour as that only would matter in picking votes. Naturally for all this, Naveen never gave Pranab any ministerial burden that forces incumbents to lose focus on the critical vote-garnering job.

No matter how much political parties deny, their foot soldiers, having been indoctrinated as cadres with special skills to persuade people to agree with them, ensure at all times votes come their way. The longer a party remains in power, the bigger is the number of available front-liners at the ground levels who reach out to the last available voter through specifically-identified key persons in any given



BISWARAJ PATNAIK

community. In Odisha, the BJD cadres have emerged without much effort as two and a half decades of enviable rule without a significant Opposition has led the BJD to numerous advantageous conditions, for which winning elections with-

out much effort has been the rule. All the same, for the first time in the BJD history, there is some fear of losing supremacy as was before. The BJP, meanwhile, steadily though slowly, has made substan-

tial improvement on the popularity front in Odisha where more people believe the Centre should have Modi in the absence of any comparable face from any other outfit in the country. The I.N.D.I.A front lately has turned out to be a gang of badly heterogeneous members constantly differing with each other on the fronts of basic principles and unanimously-agreed battle strategies. So, the truly big parties have begun looking away in the recent months. The BJP, on the other hand, too

has taken some beating from the Supreme Court and the ordinary masses, who have consciously discarded the political body, particularly in the southern region. It is also rumoured that the BJP has amassed much more money in ten years than the Congress did in fifty. The nepotism that the saffron gang resorts to has ensured fantastic harvest of wealth and resources for a few unscrupulous corporate entities. The 'Lotus' band has lost much of its glory and steam it enjoyed in 2014 and 2019 except in a few States like Odisha, where the enigmatically invincible Naveen has been ruling like Amoghavarsha Nrupatunga I of the Rashtrakuta dynasty, which reigned between 814 and 878 CE. Amoghavarsha's reign of 64 years is an all-time record. His empire existed in the region now known as 'Malkhed' in Karnataka. Later, Akbar too ruled for 49 years. Naveen is nearly in the same genre. The monarchs had ascended thrones in teens. But Naveen took over the reins of power only in his 50s. Despite age disadvantages, he is on way to break the record of Sikkim's Chamling for

Coming back to the 2014 election predictions, it can be safely said that the focus of public attention will remain on Sambalpur. The western Odisha constituency will attract people the most as Pranab has been pitted against a heavyweight, twoterm Union Minister like Dharmendra Pradhan. However Pradhan has remained away from tough electoral battles for long and

he has kind of lost the connect with the people ever since 2014 when the BJP made a dramatic comeback after struggling for nearly a decade. The Modi factor has gained enormous momentum since then and the 'Hindutva'-pursuing political outfit has not looked back as yet except suffering a few recent setbacks.

Around the same time, Naveen hasn't lost anything at all except the potency of age. On all other fronts, he is still a messiah as perceived by the masses. He has, meanwhile, handed over most of the administrative responsibilities to a younger bureaucrat-turned political associate who has displayed skills and acumen by keeping a huge number of difficult party creatures tied together by the proverbial carrot-n-the stick technique. Though some Odias do not consider him as one of home State, the majority extends support to him for the incredible delivery he has been making for quite some

In 2019, the Sambalpur Lok Sabha

seat was picked by the BJP. This time around, it is very difficult to predict the outcome. Pranab Prakash, as observer of the Sambalpur region, has used best of skills to embolden the BJD cadres well. Across the four Sambalpur Lok Sabha Asembly segments, only three were won by BJP - Sambalpur, Rengali and Deogarh. Kuchinda, Athamallik, Chhendipada and Rairakhol had gone to the BJD. But interestingly, the BJP had snatched the Lok Sabha seat as people had cleverly resorted to split voting. The people clearly opted for Modi at the Centre and Naveen back home.

This year, the voting psyche has become even more intriguing. Dharmendra is a big figure without substantial cadre behind him by way of foot soldiers that can reach out to the last insignificant voter anyhow to snatch his vote. On the other side, the BJD honchos, as masters of cadre-building, have gone quite deep into the pockets where the 'Naveen anthem' has become the popular audio of the day. For all this, the choice of Modi to head the Centre

and some routine respect for a standing Union Minister are clearly indicative of a favourable wind for Pradhan in Sambalpur. Some political analysts say Pranab may face a bigger 'outsider' tag as Pradhan too is not a western local though his native place is closer to the Sambalpur constituency. It will be purely the choice of the conscious voter who will certainly vote on the split mode; and the magnificentlyorganised BJD foot soldiers from within the cadre that will influence choice of the people at the last moment if, by any chance, votesnatching techniques are used by bribing the gullible ones whose number is huge by any count.

Dharmendra may be victor only for the people's love for Modi. But Pranab's victory will happen only if the BJD cadres do not betray at the critical times by losing spirit. The west-east parochial factor has not completely died down yet. So, predicting the outcome precisely is difficult even though the people there are inclined towards Modi.

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

Brother also awarded 5 yrs in

BHUBANESWAR

he Baleswar OPID Court on Tuesday hearing an Economic Offences Wing (EOW) case convicted two fraudsters for cheating Rr 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

The EOW had registered the case on a written report of V Kishore Kumar, territory manger 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 ap-

proval from the credit author-

ity 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 mount 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



hoped for his win after the an easy win there, the BJP

MALKANGIRI

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.

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 re-

posed faith on Sunil

Mohanty, son of former Cabi-

net Minister and Assembly

Speaker late Maheswar

Mohanty. Sunil hopes sym-

pathy votes for his father

From the present scenario,

it seems there would be a

straight fight between BJD and

would help him win.

fication said on Wednesday. Candidates can download their admit cards from April 27 onwards.

Bhubaneswar: The Odisha Joint Entrance Examination for this year will be held from May 6 to May 10. "All the exami-

nations will be conducted during 6th May 2024 to 10th May

2024 through Computer Based Test (CBT)," an official noti-

ODISHA JEE-2024 FROM MAY 6 TO 10

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 for-

INBRIEF



warded 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.

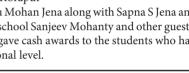
ADAV SCHOOL CELEBRATES ANNUAL FEST

tural 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

Sunabeda: The annual cul-



played at the national level.

Jellyfish carcasses found along Gopalpur beach



BRAHMAPUR

he carcasses of jellyfishes

This has disturbed environ-

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 gradually. Such occurrences are often seen in a vear.

mentalists and nature lovers. The actual cause behind the

According to a source, the

"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.

added.

fishes had previously been found dead on the Gopalpur beach on March 28 this year.

Gopalpur BJD nominee Panda holds meet



BRAHMAPUR

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

Senior Congress leader, Pramod Kumar Das, who was

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 nomi-

with the party for more than

ing majority.

SAROJ KUMAR MISHRA

joinees. 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 thump-

nation on April 25.

Major fire in Excise Office in Barbil

Valuable assets gutted

■ KEONJHAR

 $oldsymbol{A}$ 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.

Ex-MLA Uma to run as Independent in Puri Assly seat After Cong denies him ticket

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 cam-

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 incharge 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

chase which made it illegal. The SC directed the State Government to return land to villagers. Sources said as many as 25,000 villagers are sufferer 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

Supreme Court's verdict on

Vedanta University land pur-

With the new development in the Congress unit, while the BJD candidate hoped for

BJP, if Congress remains a divided house in Puri.

Mahua flower collectors go for distress sale

Intermediaries between collectors and liquor traders make the most KEONJHAR

 $K_{
m eonjhar\ district\ is\ rich\ in}$ 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 produces. And 'Mahua flower' is one become a common practice

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



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 earn-

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 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.'

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.

"Temperature variation

for jellyfish bloom and warmer temperatures also contribute to it," the scientist "Jellyfishes get stuck to our

fishing nets and later die when we venture into the deep sea at night," some local fishermen Worth mentioning, jelly-



'BJP manifesto meant to help poor³ BIKASH KHEMKA

BHAWANIPATNA

 $A_{
m t\,a\,Press\,conference\,held}$ 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 cor-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.

Indicandidate 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 pollrelated 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



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

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 de-

cided to select an MLA who

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

will be free from corruption.

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.

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

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.

In a recorded message played at the 6th edition of the International Conference on Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), the

Minister Prime said, "Countries must invest in resilient infrastructure today for a better tomorrow. Resilience needs to be factored into new infrastructure creation and it also needs to be part of post-disaster rebuilding after disasters."

"As we all have witnessed, natural disasters are becoming more frequent and more severe. The damage they cause is usually reported in dollars, but their true impact on

"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.

He said nature and disasters have no borders and disasters disruption widespread impact in a highly interconnected world.

"The world can be resilient collectively only when each resilient individually. Shared resilience is important because of the shared risks. CDRI and this conference help us come together for this collective mission," the prime minister

Citing the high risk of disasters in small island developing States, Modi said countries must support the





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

early burning systems in the Dominican Republic and Fiji are some examples," Modi said. It is heartening that CDRI also has a focus on the

global south, he said. The prime minister said that during India's G20 presidency, a new disaster risk reduction working group was formed with financing at the heart of the discussions.

Along with the growth of CDRI, such steps will take the world to a resilient future, he

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

suffered setbacks during the COVID-19 pandemic years, and the recent rebound has been highly unequal, with developing countries falling behind, P K Mishra, the principal secretary to the Prime Minister at the conference.

He said disaster and climate risks are increasing and countries will be forced to divert more funding to recovery and rebuilding if they do not build resilience in the infrastructure systems.

During the pandemic years, investment in infrastructure suffered setbacks, and lately, we observe sustained revival. However, this rebound is highly unequal, with developing countries lagging.

Minister Narendra Modi to

convey their heartfelt thanks

Vashisht said his heart is

brimming with appreciation

and reverence, as he praised

Modi for his unwavering

support and tireless efforts

during one of the most

challenging phases of his life,

officials noted on Wednesday.

He said in the letter to the

prime minister that, "In the

insurmountable odds, you

emerged as a steadfast beacon

of hope and resilience,

transcending the realms of

politics to embody a guiding

He added, "Your solemn vow

that no Indian would be left

behind resonated deeply

within our spirits, and time

demonstrated the profound

sincerity of that commitment."

All eight officials were given

of

face

force

significance."

and again,

seemingly

unparalleled

you have

and laud his leadership.

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.

"If we do not design resilience into our project pipelines, it will be increasingly difficult to achieve the high levels of funding needed to close the infrastructure deficit. particularly in the global south," he said.

Mishra said the prime minister has given a clarion call to make India a developed country, and many other countries in the global south are also aiming at becoming developed countries developing faster.

"In all these cases, a lot of infrastructure is going to be built. Therefore, ensuring disaster and climate resilience

Navy official freed from Qatar

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. He said the investment made in infrastructure in the country over the past two decades has created better livelihood opportunities for millions of citizens, and this progress needs to be sustained. The infrastructure we build today needs to be resilient to

present and future disaster

risks for decades," he said. Mishra urged the participants of the conference to focus on creating opportunities for better articulation infrastructure challenges faced by the global south. He sought the conference to find new ways to mobilize finance and incentivize investments in resilient infrastructure in the

Congress manifesto influenced by foreign forces, claims BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

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. The BJP's accusation came after Pitroda, the president of the Indian Overseas Congress, talked about "inheritance tax in the States" on the Congress' "redistribution of wealth" issue.

Latching on to his remarks, BJP national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi said, "Sam Pitroda has elaborated the nefarious design of the Congress. We are a saving based economy. In India, one generation (of a family) earns by doing hard work. The second generation builds on that and then the third gets generation comfort."

"And, the Congress wants to snatch away that happiness and peace from the people with Sam Pitroda talking about imposing tax on gold," he charged.

"People in India purchase gold



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.
"By doing an X-ray of the Congress' manifesto, their high tech guru Pitroda has made it clear that both the lives and wealth of the people of the country are in danger. You want to take away the wealth of people from them," the BJP spokesperson hit back, saying the Congress can hide its "nefarious intentions" now. He also alleged that the

manifesto was influenced by foreign forces. "Understand how big the danger is. The Communist party, a prominent constituent of INDI alliance, says it will

dismantle India's nuclear

weapons and Congress says it

will stanch away from you the

little 'dhan and anna (wealth

and food) that you have at

home, Trivedi charged,

exhorting people to seriously

ponder over the issue. With his remarks triggering a row, Pitroda said on X that "It is unfortunate that what I said as an individual inheritance tax in the US is twisted by Godi media to divert attention from what lies the PM is spreading about the Congress manifesto. PM's 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. "Who said 55 percent will be taken away? Who said something like this should be done in India? Why is BJP and media in panic," Pitroda asked.

Attacking the Congress over Pitroda's remarks, Modi said

at a rally in Chhattisgarh, "The Congress party's dangerous intentions have come to fore yet again. Now these people are saying they will impose inheritance tax on properties bequeathed to children by their parents." Home Minister Amit Shah also flayed Pitroda's remarks, saying "The appeasement politics of the Congress stand exposed today with Sam Pitroda's statement on wealth redistribution. He reaffirmed the party's intention to seize the property of the majority and distribute it among the comments on Mangal Sutra minority."

Modi greets people on Panchayati Raj Day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

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. The Ministry of Panchayati

Raj observes April 24 as National Panchayati Raj Day, marking the enactment of the Constitution Amendment) Act, 1992, which came into force on this day in 1993 and paved the way for empowering of local

Modi said on X, "On Panchayati Raj Day, greetings to all those working at grassroots to transform rural India and ensure a better quality of life for the people. Government continue to work to strengthen Panchayati Raj institutions and give wings to people's



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.

Vashisht said in his solitary confinement in a Qatar prison, he was sustained by the hope that no stone will be left unturned to ensure his release as he observed the prime minister's major diplomatic engagements such as being the State guest of the United States government, Chief Guest of Honour at Bastille's Day parade in France and hosting the G20 summit, in India.

He said, "Witnessing your auspicious inauguration of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, I felt that our Lord Ram was also blessing us to attain our freedom. I remain eternally indebted to you for restoring

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. Officials said Captain father Vashisht's Commander Rajinder Kumar Vashisht (Retired) also praised and thanked Prime Minister Modi for the return of his son.

"In this agonising saga spanning over 18 months, you emerged as our rock, our unwavering pillar of hope. At 86 years of age, I find myself extremely overwhelmed with gratitude for your relentless efforts in bringing my son back from the brink of despair," he He said in his decades of life,

he has traversed through changing times and eras, witnessed myriad leaders, yet none have radiated the "unwavering compassion, foresightedness, and devotion to our nation and its citizens, as you have".



DRDO builds lightest bullet proof jacket

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE **NEW DELHI**

Defence Research and Development Organisations'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

Recently, this bullet proof jacket was successfully tested at TBRL, Chandigarh as per BIS 17051-2018. This jacket is based upon new design approach, where novel material along with new processes has been used.

The front Hard Armour Panel (HAP) of this jacket defeats multiple hits (06 shots) of 7.62 x 54 R API (Sniper rounds) in both ICW (In-conjunction with) and Standalone design. The ergonomically designed front HAP is made up of monolithic ceramic plate with polymer backing which enhances the wearability and comfort during

operation. The areal density of ICW Hard Armour Panel (HAP) and standalone HAP is less than 40 kg/m2 and 43 kg/m2 respectively.

NEW DELHI

rmy Chief General Manoj Army Chief General American Wednesday evolution of technology has impacted warfare but technological 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. In his address at a seminar here, he also said technologies are emerging in new unchartered domains, and "revolutionising and

establishing a 'new normal' in different fields". General Pande further said technology has also emerged as the "new strategic arena of competition, driving geo-political power plays and is being leveraged for weaponisation of many domains, ranging from information to supply chains". The Army chief was addressing a gathering during a seminar on "Year of Technology Absorption: Empowering the Soldier" organised by a defence think-

tank at Manekshaw Centre at Delhi Cantonment. Technology from a warfighting

arena of competition: Army Chief advantage may just be reduced perspective, has undergone significant evolution over the centuries, and has "impacted warfare in a profound manner," he said.

General Pande 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. They "all highlight examples of how technologies change the face of wars and influence their outcomes", he said.

History shows that armies that have managed to adopt and integrate new technologies have gained advantage on the battlefield and achieved success, he underlined.

Infusion of technologies such as computers, radars, codebreaking and aircraft production by the Allies in World War II was instrumental



l'echnologies emerge as strategic

in securing victory for them, while in the early years of the War, it was Germany and Japan leveraged industrial and technological capacities to "accrue advantages of scale, over the Allies, the Army chief added. On the other hand, technological advantage may just be reduced to a tactical

sole driver of success in war. Vietnam and Afghanistan are examples of the same," he asserted.

"Therefore, understanding of new technologies, harnessing their potential and accruing strategic superiority -- is the essence of leveraging technology from a warfighting perspective," the Army chief level, when it is taken away The Indian Army is from the larger strategic observing 2024 as the 'Year of Technology Absorption.

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.

He reiterated that emerging technologies are no longer superpower-centric and even non-state actors are gaining access to modern technology, for military use and employing it for "asymmetric leverage in conflict". He cited how recent conflicts have brought to the fore significant insights on how disruptive and dual-use technologies and their proliferation at unprecedented scale — are transforming the character of modern wars. Warfare has transcended into

new domains, such as space, electromagnetic spectrum and information.

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

The impact of dependency on critical components, supply chain disruptions and "weaponisation of denial regimes" came to the fore, during the pandemic and also from the lessons of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, he said. "We need to recognise that, even if we were to import some warfighting systems, no country will share the latest, advanced and critical technology. Being importdependent for technologies hence entails the risk of remaining one technological cycle behind, in niche areas," the Army chief said.

Therefore, the need to be selfreliant in warfighting platforms and systems and achieving self-sufficiency in critical technologies through indigenous research development, "imperative", he added.



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 chemical nuclear, biological domains. The Ministry of External

Affairs (MEA) said the 10th Round of India-Japan Consultations Disarmament, Proliferation and Export Control was held in Tokyo.

The two sides exchanged views on developments in the areas of disarmament and nonproliferation relating to nuclear, chemical biological domains, outer security, space proliferation issues, conventional weapons and export control," the ministry said in a statement.

The Indian delegation was led by Muanpuii Saiawi, Joint Secretary (Disarmament and International Security Affairs), Ministry of External Affairs, while the Japanese delegation was led by Katsuro Kitagawa, Director General Disarmament, proliferation and Science Department, it added.

WHO for doubling efforts to beat challenges posed by malaria PIONEER NEWS SERVICE by malaria and ensure all

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

Saima Wazed, WHO Regional Director for South-East Asia, stressed on redoubling efforts to overcome challenges posed

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

"Moreover, by leveraging digital technology, we can better understand the diverse health needs of populations, collect and analyse data and monitor progress in real-time, enabling us to identify and address health inequities proven through both

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. This theme, which is in sync

with this year's World Health
Day theme — "My Health,
My Right" — underscores the urgent need to address the stark inequities that persist in access to malaria prevention, detection and treatment



Madhavi Lok Sabha on Wednesday

Campaigning ends for Friday Lok Sabha polls in Kerala

 $P_{\text{a}}^{\text{eople}}$ across Kerala heaved 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

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 discrimination to Kerala in measures implemented by them during the last five years development projects," said P



and the BJP's State leadership had a hearty laugh. "There was no allegation that the Centre was showing allocation of funds for Suiathan, 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

(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 in four to five constituencies. Harikiran Muraleedharan, a young claim is to be believed, the lawyer and keen follower of

Muslim League stronghold of the State's politics is of the Malappuram and Ponnani view that the 19 April disruption of Thrissur Pooram at the instance of a CPI(M) MLA, a powerful minister in the Pinarayi Vijavan Government have played havoc with the prospectus of both the Congress and the

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 constituencies which witnessing tough between the three fronts. earlier elections, the BJP competed as also rans but not anymore. Don't be surprised

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 repky to queries by reporters that who were the rivals of the Congress. "Better you ask the KPCC leaders," retorted the

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 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 Congress has expressed such an intention in its manifesto.

Sampla will

continue to

support BJP,

says Rupani

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

It was the second visit of a

senior party leader days after Punjab BJP chief Sunil Jakhar

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,

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.

such information.

from the constituency.

Sabha constituency.

met Sampla.

PTI HOSHIARPUR

"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 Muslim implementing 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 recommendations of Justice Ranganath Misra commission during the Congress government had

rights of Scheduled Castes. Scheduled Tribes and other backward classes which were given to members of a specific community.

commission had The 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

Adityanath also claimed that malicious attempts were made even in the Sachar Committee report 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 allround development on every front with full accountability "Under this, efforts began to and today the country was take away the reservation getting its benefits.

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

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 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

Àddressing 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 other states will also be deployed for security at these polling stations, he said. "All the 2,829 polling stations

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

of companies 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-Hassan, Chikmagalur, Dakshina Kannada, Tumkur, Chitradurga, Mandya, Mysore, Chamarajanagar, Bangalore Rural, Bangalore North, Bangalore Central, Bangalore South, Chikkballapur and Kolar.

There are a total of 2,88,19,342 electors 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 stoked Wednesday 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 reporters, "See, when there



to know. Maybe you will get to know before nominations

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 ave made are nominations, you will get bloc. People are going to vote in 2019.

(picchde, Dalit, alpsankhyak) will defeat the NDA this 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 become history in this unopposed. Later, Dimple rom the seat i up their mind for INDIA she lost to BJP's Subrat Pathak

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

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

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

"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

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 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 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 Sumalatha 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

Deve Gowda slams Rahul over wealth redistribution promise

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Former Prime Minister H
D Deve Gowda on
Wednesday slammed Rahul "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

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 Congress Ministers who brought market reforms increased the wealth of the nation," he added, recalling the contribution of P V Narasimha Rao Manmohan Singh liberalisation. economic Accusing Gandhi of indirectly trying to say that

and

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

(which sought to overturn the rule that disqualifies convicted MPs and MLAs) issued by Manmohan

lift operators in Government offices in four shifts.
"Only someone with no practical knowledge can like this. speak Chidambaram was the committee manifesto 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 On the farmers opposing the Sabha polls on its own for the first time since 1996. The Shiromani Akali Dal had BJP candidates in villages, Rupani stated that he has no walked out of the NDA in remaining seats — Ferozepur,



2020 over the now-repealed farm laws.

Addressing the media here, Punjab BJP leader Sharma said the party leadership will announce the candidates for

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 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 electors 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 Purnea, 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

•he 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 antidefection 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 politi-

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.



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

nnocuous developments are unfolding amidst the growing fervour of the impending elections. Despite con-cerns 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 contemnors 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 Kamilia 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 'unde-served 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 con-

focus, more than Varanasi. (The author is a senior journalist; views are personal)

siderations. Amethi and

Raebareli, however, remain in

Nurture workplace safety and inclusivity



KAPOOR

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

n 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?

Pay Parity: To relate job descriptions with actual roles or potential appointments calls for careful attention to detail. This audit goes beyond mere policy making; it requires discussions around salary negotiations and retention strategies in different scenarios.

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.

Respectful Workplaces: Establishing psychologically safe environments mandates clear policies, including Codes of Business Conduct, Grievance Redressal protocols and Workplace Harassment (including guidelines Prevention of Sexual Harassment). Additionally, ciation propels individuals

dedicated committees should address issues promptly while proactively working on pre-

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 land-

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 appretoward 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 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)

EMBRACING NANO INFLUENCE

"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 colleagueseschewing the polished facades of traditional influencer marketing. This authenticity fosters genuine rapport and trust, essential commodities in an era inundated with impersonal ads.

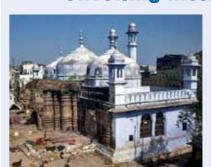
Madam — Apropos the news article,

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



propos the news article, "Historic legal A 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 shad-

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 soci-

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 Jpanishads, 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

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

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FIRST COLUMN NAVIGATING WORKPLACE ANXIETY

The pressure to consistently perform and deliver causes stress and anxiety



n 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

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

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



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

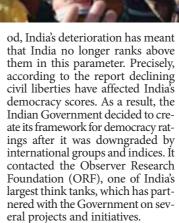
he Gothenburg-based V-Dem Institute's report on Democracy Report 2024 claims that India has been reduced to the status of an "electoral autocracy" in 2018 and has further downgraded to "one of the worst autocracies". The report categorically found that almost all elements of democracy have worsened in 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

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 lib erties. 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-



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 methodol-

ogy 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 pandemic. 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 Cooperation and Development (OECD) approach to measuring subjective well-being and other international and national initia-

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) publishes a World Press Freedom Îndex 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 wĥo were targeted in immigrationrelated 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 weii-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

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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

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

hether 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



be some others who may justify corruption and vet 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

vate 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 whether it is the public or pri- 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 corrup-

tion 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

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 highbecome a way of life in this ranked IT officer, who was once involved in the anticorruption 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)

package for Ukraine, Israel

The US Senate has voted over-I whelmingly to provide a USD 95.3 billion aid package to Ukraine and Israel and to strengthen the security of America and its allies in the Indo-Pacific, including Taiwan.

The final approval on Tuesday night by the Senate ends months of uncertainty and delays about whether the US would continue to back Kyiv in its fight against Russian aggres-

sion.

The bill was passed in a bipartisan vote of 79-18.

The bill passed on Tuesday by the House of Representatives earlier now heads to the White House for President Joe Biden to sign it into law.

"I will sign this bill into law and address the American people as soon as it reaches my desk tomorrow so we can begin sending weapons and equipment to Ukraine this week," Biden said in

'The need is urgent: for Ukraine, facing unrelenting bombardment from Russia; for Israel, which just faced unprecedented attacks from Iran; for refugees and those impacted by conflicts and natural disasters around the world, including in Gaza, Sudan, and Haiti; and for our partners seeking security and stability in the Indo-Pacific," he said.

The bill broadly has four parts: First, a USD 60.8 billion Ukraine aid measure, a USD 26.4 billion bill for Israel and humanitarian relief, a USD 8.1 billion package for Taiwan and other Indo-Pacific region allies and a "sidecar" bill dealing with issues ranging from TikTok to frozen Russian assets.

The bill gives USD 23.2 billion to replenish stocks of US weapons and equipment sent to Ukraine through presidential drawdown authority and to

expand defence industrial base and it allocates USD 13.8 billion

in direct support for the Ukrainian military. It directs the president to transfer long-range tactical missiles, known as ATACMS, to the Ukrainian Army, unless the president determines that doing so would be detrimental to US security interests. The bill gives USD 5.4 billion to replenish stocks of US weapons and equipment delivered to Israel and to expand the defence industrial base, USD 5.2 billion for Iron Dome, David's Sling and Iron Beam defence systems and USD2.4 billion for US

the Middle East. It also allocates USD 9.2 billion for humanitarian assistance in Gaza, Haiti, Sudan, Ethiopia, Congo and other conflict zones. However, no funds can be transferred to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency; certification is required that no fund-

Central Command operations in

On the Indo-Pacific the bill allocates USD 3.3 billion to develop US submarine infrastructure, including dry dock construction; USD2 billion in assistance for Taiwan, the Philippines and other regional allies to purchase US weapons and equipment. To replenish US stocks of

weapons and equipment sent to the region and expand the defence industrial base USD 2 billion was allocated; USD 542 million for US Indo-Pacific Command operations and USD 250 million for World Bank International Development Association loans and grants. Among other things, the bill requires Chinese-owned ByteDance Ltd. to divest its stake in TikTok within one year of enactment or US app stores and internet hosting services would be barred from carrying the

US Senate passes \$95.3 bn Pakistan & Iran agree to focus on ways to combat terrorism

Pakistan and Iran have recognised the need to focus on combating terrorism and the need to develop a "united front" against the menace, the two countries said on Wednesday as Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi wrapped up his three-day maiden trip to the neighbouring nation.

Raisi's visit to Pakistan was the first by any head of state to Islamabad after the February 8 general election.

"Recognising that terrorism posed a common threat to regional peace and stability and presented a major impediment to the development of the region," the two neighbours agreed to "adopt a collaborative approach to confront this menace ... while fully upholding the principles of the UN Charter," a joint statement issued by the two countries The Pakistan government has complained regularly to Iran and Afghanistan, with which it shares a border, to rein in the militants belonging to the outlawed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and other splinter groups who cross the border and carry out strikes in Pakistan.

The joint statement said, both sides "reaffirmed their commitment to the development of Afghanistan as a peaceful, united, sovereign and independent state, free from the threats of terrorism and drug trafficking." It further added that the two countries reaffirmed their willingness to "enhance cooperation on counter-terrorism and security and to develop a united front against terrorism." Noting the relevance of coordinating regional and international efforts to ensure security and stability in the region, both Pakistan and Iran "recognised that increasing participation of all strata of

Afghans in basic decision-making will lead to the strengthening of peace and stability in this country. The statement further said

that both sides "stressed the importance of peaceful settlement of disputes through dialogue and diplomacy.'

Tehran and Islamabad also agreed to "expeditiously finalise" a Free Trade Agreement (FTA as the two sides signed eight MoUs while vowing to increase trade to USD 10 billion in the coming vears. Raisi said Tehran was ready to exchange its prowess in industry, science, and technology with Pakistan while showing his resolve to remove trade barriers between the two neighbours.

According to the Foreign Office, the two sides held productive talks during the visit. 'The two sides held productive discussions and agreement to advance bilateral cooperation in multiple domains including in trade, connectivity, energy and people-to-people contacts," the FO said in a statement. Raisi arrived on Monday with

a large delegation to promote ties about three months after the relationship suffered a set-

back due to tit-for-tat air strikes

against each other, apparently to hit terrorists. In Islamabad, he held detailed talks with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, President Asif Ali Zardari and Chief of Army Staff General Asim Munir focussing on key security and economic issues. The two sides agreed to eradicate the threat of terrorism which caused a fissure in ties in January when they resorted to air strikes against alleged militant hideouts on each other's soil. The two countries voiced their support for the people of Palestine as they demanded Israel to halt attacking Gaza. On Tuesday in Lahore, Raisi was received by

Punjab chief minister Maryam

Aus police arrest 7 teens for extremism, linked to recent stabbing of bishop

AP SYDNEY

Australian police arrested seven teenagers accused of following a violent extremist ideology in raids across Sydney on Wednesday to protect the community from a potential attack, officials said. The seven, aged 15 to 17, were part of a network that included a 16-year-old boy accused of the stabbing of a bishop in a Sydney church on April 15, police said.

Five other teenagers were still questioned late Wednesday by the Joint Counter-Terrorism Team, which includes federal and state police as well as the Australian Security Intelligence Organization, the nation's main domestic spy agency, and the New South Wales Crime Commission, which specialises in extremists and organised crime. More than 400 police officers executed 13 search warrants at properties across southwest Sydney because the suspects were considered an immediate threat, New South Commissioner David Hudson

"We will allege that these individuals adhered to a religiously motivated, violent extremist ideology," Hudson told reporters.

"It was considered that the group ... posed an unacceptable risk and threat to the people of New South Wales, and our current purely investigative strategies could not adequately ensure public safety," Hudson added. Australian Federal Police Deputy Commissioner Krissy Barrett said investigators found no evidence of specific targets or timing of an intended "violent act"

She said the police operation was not linked to Anzac Day on Thursday, a public holiday when Australians remember

their war dead. It has been a potential target of

extremists in the past. A 16-year-old was charged on Friday with committing a ter-

rorist act, a crime that carries a maximum penalty of life in prison, following the knife attack in which an Assyrian Orthodox bishop and priest were injured.

An Australian Federal Court judge on Wednesday extended an order banning social media platform X from showing videos of Bishop Mar Mari Emmanuel being repeatedly stabbed. Justice Geoffrey Kennett extended the ban which the court put in place on Monday, until May 10.

X, formerly called Twitter, announced last week it would fight in court Australian orders to take down posts relating to the attack. Australia's eSafety Commission, which describes itself as the world's first government agency dedicated to keep ing people safer online, applied to the court for the temporary global ban.

Hoyne, a lawyer for X, told the judge on Wednesday that the bishop didn't want the video banned. Emmanuel recently signed an affidavit "stating that he is strongly of the view that should able," Hoyne said.

Hoyne said the eSafety Commission was attempting to exercise "exorbitant jurisdiction" with "injunctions that effectively operate throughout the whole world".

Hoyne also said a court ordered ban on the video "might be

"It appears that this material is now appearing in lots of different places" IT ent places," Hoyne added.

The commission's lawyer Christoher Tran said X had not complied with Monday's order. Hoyne said he did not "have instructions about that one way or the other".

X has not responded to The Associated Press's questions on Tuesday about the company's compliance with the order. X's owner, Elon Musk, has accused Australia of stifling free speech, while Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has labeled Musk an "arrogant billionaire".

Columbia University progresses post-Gaza protester arrests

Columbia University said was making "important progress" with pro-Palestinian student protesters who set up a tent encampment and that it was extending a deadline to clear out, yet standoffs remained tense on the Ivy League campus in upper Manhattan. Student protesters "have com-

mitted to dismantling and

removing a significant number

of tents," the university said in

a statement. A smaller encampment remained on campus Wednesday morning.Across the country, protesters at California State Polytechnic University, Humboldt, some 480 kilometers north of San Francisco, started using furniture, tents, chains and zip ties to block the building's entrances Monday evening. Both campuses are part of intensifying demonstrations over Israel's war with Hamas by university students demanding that schools cut financial ties to Israel and divest from compa-

nies that are enabling its



have been arrested on charges of trespassing or disorderly

Columbia President Minouche Shafik in a statement Tuesday set a midnight deadline to reach an agreement with students to clear the encampment, or "we will have to consider alternative options." By around 3 a.m., the university said that there was "conwill continue conversations for 48 hours

The statement said student protesters "will ensure that those not affiliated with Columbia will leave. Only Columbia University students will be participating in the

Student protesters also will comply with city fire department requirements and "have

taken steps to make the encampment welcome to all and have prohibited discriminatory or harassing language, the statement said.

The university's statement was released hours before US House Speaker Mike Johnson's trip to Columbia to visit with Jewish students and address antisemitism on college cam-

Earlier on Tuesday night, police arrested more than 200 protesters blocking traffic during a non-college demonstration demanding a permanent ceasefire in Gaza at Grand Army Plaza in Brooklyn, near the home of Sen. Chuck Schumer. The protest was organized by Jewish Voice for Peace on the second night of Passover, and protesters lay down a large circular banner depicting the food on a Seder plate.

At Cal Poly Humboldt, protesters chanted, "We are not afraid of you!" before officers in riot gear pushed into them at the building's entrance, video shows. Student Peyton McKinzie said she was walking on campus Monday when she saw police grabbing one woman by the hair, and another student having their head bandaged for an injury. 'I think a lot of students are in

shock about it," she said. Three students have been arrested, according to a statement from the school, which down the campus until

Wednesday. Students had occupied a second campus building Гuesdav. Another encampment was set up Tuesday at the University of Rochester in upstate New York. Omar Darwesh, a Palestinian senior, said he has lost relatives to the war. "We're not calling for the destruction of Israel, we're never talking about threatening Jews - the focus is on us and what we need, and

to coexist," he told TV station WHEC. University of Rochester officials said in a statement that the protesters must follow ground rules, including presenting university identification if asked. The upwelling of demonstrations has left universities struggling to balance campus safe-

ty with free speech rights.

that's being treated like a human. We have to find a way

Many long tolerated the protests, which largely demanded that schools condemn Israel's assault on Gaza and divest from companies that sell weapons to Israel.

Now, universities are doling out more heavy-handed discipline, citing safety concerns as some Jewish students say criticism of Israel has veered into antisemitism. Protests had been bubbling for

months but kicked into a higher gear after more than 100 pro-Palestinian demonstrators who had camped out at Columbia were arrested Thursday. By late Monday at New York

University, police said 133 protesters were taken into custody and all had been released with summonses to appear in court on disorderly conduct charges. In Connecticut, police arrested 60 protesters, including 47 students, at Yale after they refused to leave an encampment on a plaza at the center of campus. Yale President Peter Salovey said protesters had declined an offer to end the demonstration and meet with

China blasts US military aid to Taiwan

hina on Wednesday blasted the latest package of US military assistance to Taiwan on funding was pushing the selfgoverning island republic into a "dangerous situation." The US Senate late Tuesday passed USD 95 billion in war aid to Ukraine. Israel and Taiwan after months of delays and contentious debate over how involved the United States should be in foreign wars. China claims the entire island of Taiwan as its own territory and has threatened to take it by force if necessary.

The mainland's Taiwan Affairs Office said the aid "seriously violates" US commitments to China and "sends a wrong signal to the Taiwan independence separatist forces." Office spokesperson Zhu Fenglian added that Taiwan's ruling pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party, which won a third four-year presidential term in January, is willing to "become a pawn for external forces to use Taiwan to contain China, bringing Taiwan into a dangerous situation." On Tuesday, Taiwan's President-elect

Lai Ching-te told a visiting US and trainer jets. Next month, it Congressional delegation that the plans to commission its third aid package would "strengthen the deterrence against authoritarianism in the West Pacific ally and stability across the Taiwan Strait and also boost confidence in the region."

The package has had broad congressional support since Biden first requested the money last summer. But congressional leaders had to navigate strong opposition from a growing number of conservatives who question US involvement in foreign wars and argue that Congress should be focused instead on the surge of migration at the US-Mexico border. The package covers a wide range of parts and services aimed at maintaining and and upgrading Taiwan's military hardware. Separately, Taiwan has signed billions in contracts with the US for latest-generation F-16V fighter jets, M1 Abrams main battle tanks and the HIMARS rocket system, which the US has also supplied to Ukraine. Taiwan has also been expanding its own defense industry, building submarines

plans to commission its third and fourth domestically designed and built stealth corvettes to counter the Chinese asymmetrical warfare, in which a smaller force counters its larger opponent by using cutting edge or nonconventional tactics and weaponry. China launches daily incursions into waters and airspace around Taiwan by navy ships and warplanes. It has also sought to pick away Taiwan's few remaining formal diplomatic partners. However, only two People's Liberation Army Air Force planes and seven navy vessels were found operating in areas around Taiwan between Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday morning, possibly as a result of heavy rainstorms and low visibility overnight along the island's

west coast facing China. At times of heightened tensions, China has launched dozens of such missions over a 24 hour period, many of them crossing the center line in the Taiwan Strait dividing the sides or entering Taiwan's air defense identification zone.

Blast near ship off Yemen may mark new attack by Houthi rebels Gulf of Aden "The master of

explosion in the distance Wednesday, marking what may be a new attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels through the crucial waterway for international trade. The explosion, reported by the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations centre, comes after a relative lull from the Houthis after they launched dozens of attacks on shipping in the region over Israel's ongoing war on Hamas in the Gaza

The Houthis did not immediately claim responsibility for the blast, but suspicion fell on the group as they've repeatedly targeted ships in the same area. It typically takes the Houthis several hours before acknowledging their assaults. The explosion happened some 130 km (80 miles) southeast of Djibouti in the

a merchant vessel reports an explosion in the water a distance form the vessel," the UKMTO said. "Veseel and crew reported safe. Authorities are investigating." The private maritime security firm Ambrey separately reported the apparent attack.

The Houthis have launched more than 50 attacks on shipping, seized one vessel and sank another since November, according to the US Maritime Administration. Houthi attacks have

dropped in recent weeks as the rebels have been targeted by a US-led airstrike campaign in Yemen and shipping through the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden has declined because of the threat. American officials have speculated that the rebels may be running out of weapons as a result of the US-led campaign against them and firing off drones and missiles steadily in the last months.

would continue their attacks until Israel ends its war in Gaza which has killed more than 34.000 Palestinians there. The war began after Hamas-led militants attacked Israel on Oct 7, killing 1,200 people and taking some 250 others

hostage.

The ships targeted by the Houthis largely have had little or no direct connection to Israel, the US or other nations involved in the war. The rebels have also fired missiles toward Israel, though they have largely fallen short or been inter-

The assaults on shipping have raised the profile of the Houthis, who are members of Islam's minority Shiite Zaydi sect, which ruled Yemen for 1,000 years until 1962. The group seized Sanaa, Yemen's capital, in late 2014. A Saudiled coalition has been battling the group in a stalemated conflict since 2015.

Microsoft, Amazon face scrutiny from UK competition watchdog

AP ■ LONDON

 $B^{\text{ritish competition regulators}}_{\text{said Wednesday they'll scru-}}$ tinise recent artificial intelligence deals by Microsoft and Amazon over concerns that the moves could thwart competition in the AI industry

The Competition and Markets Authority said it's looking into Microsoft's partnership with France's Mistral AI and the company's hiring of key staff from another startup, Inflection AI. The watchdog also separately announced that it's investigating Amazon's \$4 billion investment in San Francisco-based

Anthropic. Big Tech companies have been pouring money into generative AI startups amid growing public and business interest in the technology, but the investments have also drawn attention from antitrust authorities.

The UK watchdog said it was seeking comments from "interested third parties," before deciding whether to carry out an in-depth antitrust investiga-

"We will assess, objectively and impartially, whether each of these three deals fall within UK merger rules and, if they do, whether they have any impact on competition in the UK," the watchdog's executive director of mergers, Joel Bamford, said in a statement.

Microsoft said it will provide the watchdog with the information it needs to carry out its inquiries. 'We remain confident that com-

mon business practices such as the hiring of talent or making a fractional investment in an AI start-up promote competition and are not the same as a merger," the company said.

Mustafa Suleyman, who co-founded Google's DeepMind AI research lab, to head up its consumer artificial intelligence business, along with the chief scientist and several top engineers and researchers from Inflection, his AI startup.

Microsoft last month hired

Microsoft also teamed up earlier this year with Mistral, which has become France's AI darling after being founded only last year. That followed Microsoft's previous existing partnership with ChatGPT maker OpenAI, which is also facing scrutiny from the CMA

Amazon, meanwhile, has spent billions for a minority stake in Anthropic. The two companies are collaborating to develop so-called foundation models which underpin the generative AI systems that have captured global attention.

Ex- Japanese PM Taro Aso meets Trump PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Ex-Japanese prime minister Taro Aso has met former president Donald Trump and both the leaders discussed the enduring importance of the US-Japan alliance to their physical and economic security in the strategic Indo-Pacific

Aso, vice president of Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party, met Trump on Tuesday at the Trump Tower in Manhattan. Both the leaders discussed the

enduring importance of the US-Japan alliance to both countries' physical and economic security and stability in the Indo-Pacific, according to a statement issued by the Trump Campaign on the meeting with the 83-year-old visiting Japanese leader. "They also discussed challenges posed by China and

praised Japan's increased defence spending," the press release said after the meeting. "He's a highly respected man in year-old presumptive nomi-



body that I've liked and I've known through our very dear friend Shinzo," Trump, the 77-

nee of the Republican Party in the 2024 US presidential race, told reporters in New York. The Trump-Aso meeting comes after US President Joe Biden hosted Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida earlier this month at the White House for a state visit, during which the president touted the US-Japan alliance as being "stronger than it's ever been" and announced new plans for military cooperation with the country.

The meeting between Trump and Aso took place after the former president's appearance in court for his hush money trial. Trump has in recent weeks increasingly met with foreign leaders, who have sought to bolster ties as polls continue to show a tight race to the White House between him and President Biden when the elections take place

Smoke seen as ANA flight carrying 200 lands safely

Tokyo (AP): Smoke was seen coming from an All Nippon Airways plane as it landed safely at Shin Chitose airport in northern Japan on Wednesday, public broadcast-er NHK reported. The ANA flight from Tokyo was carrying about 200 people and no injuries were reported, NHK The smoke, coming from the wing area, subsided when the engines stopped, it said. In

and a coast guard plane collided and burst into flames at Tokyo's Haneda Airport. All 379 passengers and crew

January, a Japan Airlines flight

members were evacuated from the JAL plane and survived.

Leii, who heads the ceremoni-

Blinken begins key China visit N Korea sends delegation to Iran

Tensions rise over new US foreign aid bill

TS 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. Blinken arrived in Shanghai

on Wednesday just hours after the Senate vote on the longstalled legislation and shortly before President Joe Biden is expected to sign it into law to demonstrate U.S. resolve in defending its allies and partners. Passage of the bill will add further complications to an already complex relationship that has been strained by disagreements over numerous global and

the pioneer

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 differ-

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 threemonth 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

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

Niwas where the two leaders

discussed matters related to

bilateral interests and diplomat-

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

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

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 activtities by others in the sea, notably the Philippines and Vietnam. That was a major topic of con-cern 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 largev reconstitute its defense industrial base, affecting not only the war in Ukraine but posing a threat to broader European secu-

Ahigh-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 fur-

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-

ther details.

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

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 host-ed top Chinese official Zhao

relations between the two coun-

al parliament and ranks third in the ruling Communist Party hierarchy. It was the highestlevel 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 drones struck more fuel and

Ukrainian officials on Wednesday expressed thanks for a fresh batch of US military aid that threw Kviv'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 for-ward in some parts of east-ern 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 energy facilities inside

President Ukraine 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 casual-ties. Another missile hit the southern city of Odesa, injuring one woman, Mayor Hennadii Trukhanov said.

since October by the Hamas in the Gaza Strip, an official said on Wednesday. The emir on Tuesday called on President Paudel at the Shital

ic relations, according to a statement issued by the President's Office. On the occasion, President Paudel 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 Oatar said that he had earlier also taken the initiative for the

Joshi was among 17 Nepali stu-

Nepal Pres seeks Qatar Emir's aid for student held by Hamas dents pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Agriculture at Sudur Paschim University who had gone to Israel under an 11-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 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-



al benefit of the two countries and peoples," according to a press release issued by the Foreign Ministry.
Deputy Prime Minister and

Foreign Minister Narayan Kaji Shrestha, Minister for Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation Shakti Bahadur Basnet and other officials were also present at the delegation-level meeting. On Wednesday, Sheikh Tamim met Nepal Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' and discussed the regional and international issues of common interest as well as ways to enhance bilateral 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

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 partner-

ships 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

Following the talks, both leaders witnessed the signing cere-mony of bilateral agreements and Memorandums Understanding. Six agreements are at the government level while the other two are related

"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 an 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

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 threemember medical team from a top institute has advised incarcerated former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan's wife Bushra Bibi to get a "gastroen-terology 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 res idence. 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 med ical 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.



to Central Asia, on Wednesday,

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

AP JAKARTA

Tndonesia's electoral commis-**⊥**sion formally declared Prabowo Subianto presidentelect 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.

General Election The 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 annual 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

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 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

that Raka, 37, should have been

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.

recuse himself.

Muizzu further consolidates position after six independents join his party

PTI ■ MALE

Dresident Mohamed Muizzu Pand 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



six independents, the PNC-led coalition now has the "super majority" in parliament with 78 seats, much more than twothirds (63 seats) in the People's Majlis. The PNC's "super

majority" in parliamentary elections is being seen as a

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 indepen-dent 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

Meanwhile, Hassan Zareer, the

candidates, the report said.

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 indepen-

dent 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 antidefection 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

Russian priest who held Navalny's memorial service suspended by Moscow church signed by Patriarch Kirill, the head of the Russian Orthodox

Apriest who oversaw a memorial for late Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny has been suspended for three vears by the head of the country's Orthodox Church.Dmitry Safronov 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 Safronov 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 with-

in the capital. No reason was

given for the decision, which was

Church and a key ally of Russian Vladimir President 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 individ uals. Safronov 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.

PARADIP PORT AUTHORITY
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lame of the work: "Allotment of D6 (Six) nos of Manual Iron Ore plots." License Fees Rs.1,18,10,502/-. Wharfage Fees **Rs.7,78,435/-**. Last date & time of Submission of bid : **29.04.2024 up to 15:00** hrs. Date and time of opening (technical bid) 29.04.2024 up to 15:00 hrs.

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Sd/- Traffic Manager Paradip Port Authority

India pharma exports rise 10 per cent in FY24

¬he country's drugs and I 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 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

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, Sudan, Comoros, Brunei, Latvia, Ireland, Chad, Sweden, Haiti An industry expert said that



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 markets. overseas business stood at over USD 50 billion for the 2022-23. On average, India exports

pharma products worth USD 2-3 billion every month.

pharmaceutical India's industry is the third largest by volume and the 13th largest by value in the world producing more than 60,000 generic drugs across 60 therapeutic categories.

The government has rolled out two production-linked incentive (PLI) schemes to promote domestic manufacturing of key pharmaceutical ingredients and generic medicines.

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 lable. and it creates over 50 lakh direct jobs. "The slowdown in technology spend will continue this fiscal, weighing on the revenue growth of IT providers," service 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 compounded annual growth rate of 12 per cent for the decade through FY24.

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 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

subdued growth of 4-5 per cent in FY25.

Manufacturing healthcare, which contribute a tenth of the revenue, were the only bright spots and double-digit continued growth in tech spend given the focus on process automation and research and development-based analytics, especially in healthcare. As revenue growth remained

subdued, companies pulled back on

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 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

traditional Sector-wise, sectors took the lead, drawing significant investments in the deal-making changing

the corresponding period last

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Investment vehicles for realty and infrastructure sectors — REITs and InvITs - have garnered Rs 1.3 lakh crore in the past four years till Marchend, 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 InvITs 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 (InvITs). However, the market is flourishing - REITs and InvITs have mobilised Rs 1.3 lakh

crore since 2019-20 (up to March 2024)," said an article '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 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,

"This is expected to facilitate

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, industry was able to mobilise over Rs 1.3 lakh crore since FY2020. InvITs and REITs pooled investment in a wider helped unwind capital blocked

already infrastructure assets — which can be re-invested into underprojects and construction 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

standardising financial reporting and disclosures, and addressing other regulatory requirements, amongst others," said in Association statement.

A REIT is made up of a portfolio of commercial real estate assets, the majority of which are already leased out, and InvITs consist of a portfolio of infrastructure assets like highways.

Čo-Founder and CEO of YOURS, a platform for fractional ownership of luxury Sudeep second homes, Chandran said it is true that India was a bit late in allowing REITs, yet in the last couple of it has gathered vears momentum particularly from

"The continuous rise in monthly inflows reflects this momentum. The recent SEBI guidelines on SM REITs provides another option to savvy investors. We anticipate significant investor interest in SM REITs, driving substantial growth in combined REIT and SM REIT investments over the next 3-5 years," Chandran said. Commenting investment instruments, Ritesh Kumar Shyam, Partner, M&A Tax & Regulatory Services, BDO India, said REITs and InvITs have picked up quite some traction in the domestic investment market given that these assets offer fixed income with a secured asset base and the returns are generally better than other secured asset investments.

Rupee settles on flat note, up 1 paisa at 83.30 against \$ **PTI** ■ MUMBAI higher but we don't expect

The rupee consolidated in a I 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 prices foreign crude oil significant 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. 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 gains for

the local unit. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.34 per cent to USD 88.12 per barrel. 'Geopolitical risks in the Middle East and talks of fresh energy sanctions on Iran could see some occasional hiccups in prices to move

prices to sustain USD 85 for a duration," 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 markets 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, aggressions in the Middle East may cap sharp upside. Traders may take cues from durable goods orders data from the 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, 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

LSensex 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



towards the fag-end of

the session that erased some initial gains. From the Sensex basket, JSW Steel, Tata Power Grid, Steel, Mahindra Kotak UltraTech Bank, Cement, NTPC and Bajaj Finance were the

major gainers. Tata Consultancy Services, Tech Maruti, Mahindra, Reliance Industries and Titan were among the laggards.

Asian markets,

Shanghai and Hong Kong The indices witnessed settled in the positive

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. Institutional Foreign 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 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.

AIMA sees 20 per cent growth in

"There

participation

of candidates

from smaller

including

Agra, Asansol

Aurangabad,

Balasore Bhilai

Darbhanga,

Kerala (20 per cent), as well as in states like West Bengal

(15 per cent), Uttar Pradesh (8 per cent), and Bihar (4

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.

per cent).

VIT AP University



Amaravati: 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-University's relentless commitment to academic excellence and 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.

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Plose on the heels of receiving approval from the Petroleum and Natural Regulatory Board (PNGRB), the Indian Gas Exchange (IGX) has launched contracts for small-scale Liquefied Natural Gas 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 terminals namely Dhamra in Odisha, Mundra in Gujarat, Ennore in Tamil



Nadu, Kochi in Kerala, and on-land ssLNG stations at

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.

demand for roadtransported LNG is projected 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

Transporting natural gas in liquefied form via trucks will allow larger volumes to be transported, potentially making it economically viable for buyers not connected to pipelines. Further, it will also ensure a transparent and fair procurement process with enhanced payment security. Speaking at the occasion, PNGRB member Anjan

Kumar Tiwari said, "Smallscale LNG serves as the cornerstone for our gas-based economy, enabling us to expand our reach beyond traditional pipelines. On the supply side, it can bring gas from remote and difficult fields and on the demand side, it can help an industry source gas which is not connected to the gas grid."

"With this vision, we provided approval to IGX for launching ssLNG contracts on their platform. PNGRB endeavours to be a facilitator to support the growth of ssLNG in India by providing a comprehensive regulatory framework," he

Students take part in engineering entrance exam

PNS NEW DELHI

The SRM Examinations Engineering (SRMJEEE) 2024-Phase I for admission to B.Tech and Integrated M.Tech programmes of SRM Institute of Science and Technology SRMIST (Kattankulathur Vadapalani Ramapuram, Ghaziabad, and Tiruchirapalli campuses), SRM University -Sonepat and SRM University – Andhra Pradesh was held from 20th April to 23nd April 2024.

The examination Remote conducted in 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 was 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.

registrations for MAT entrance exam

All India Management Association, a federation Management Local 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 making country, 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 participate.

This strategic expansion undoubtedly contributed to significant rise in the applicant count. MAT has seen a significant 20 per cent in candidate registrations post-Covid. 'There has been a rise in the

of

number

women candidates in 2023, Durg, Durgapur, Ernakulam, Erode, Salem there is a growth of approximately 3 per cent compared to 2019," AIMA among others," he said. The growth was notable in Director Daljeet Singh told southern states like Tamil Nadu (52 per cent) Karnataka (22 per cent), and

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 women played a part in increase in candidates registering for popularity MAT. With 45 per cent of registrations.

Indian golfers Aditi, Diksha set to participate in Paris Olympics

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

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

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.

Olympic 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.

Akshay Theegala and 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

committee recommended her

an assistant coach of the Indian team. The Manipuri

has also represented the

country in the 1998 Bangkok

and qualified for the Masters, are now ranked and No 33 respectively.

However, neither Theegala Bhatia have a possibility of making an Olympic appearance since the top 15 in the world rankings have as many as eight Americans.

been a runner-up at the season-opener the Sentry on in top 50. on in top 50. and at the RBC Heritage Diksha, who has been solid and was fifth at WM Phoenix Open and tied-

sixth at the Arnold Palmer

Bhatia, in his 12 starts, has

won once at the Texas Open and been in top 20 as

many as six times. He also

The top four Americans are

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

While only four players can be entered for the Olympic

Games, provided they in

world's top 15, only UŚ has

four or more in the list. All

other countries can send a

maximum of two players

provided both are in top 60

Meanwhile, in the women's

of the Olympic qualifiers.

Olympic

Xander

missed cut four times.

Scottie Scheffler

Wyndham Clark

Invitational

defending

champion

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 380 and Ahlawat at Karandeep Kochhar at 434.

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

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 Asian South 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 Manipur 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, Chahar, Parth Mirage, Krishiv Patel. Malandkar, Sai Lohitaksh Kd, Dev Ambokar, Raj Kumar Pawar,

Puskar Das, Vishwanath Yadav, Muralidharan Adarsh Sinimol, Ankan Bhattacharjee, Bhattacharya, Arnab Musthafa Sheick.

Women: Durvisha Pawar, Dolly Devidas Patil, Dhriti Koujalgi, Rama Sonkar, Heny Zalavadiya, Prerana Sravan Kumar, Riddhi Kadam, Sanjana Joshi, Snehal Joshi, Mansi Mohite, Nafisa Pragnya Millwala,

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

Alate 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 Atalanta Fiorentina. Fiorentina takes a 1-0 advantage into the

second leg of the other

semifinal on Wednesday.

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 Juventus has won the Italian

"After extensive deliberations the committee recommended $F^{ormer\ player\ Langam}_{\text{Chaoba Devi is set to take}}$ Ms. Langam Chaoba Devi as the head coach of the Indian senior women's national team," the All India Football over as the national women's football coach after the I M Vijayan-led AIFF technical

Devi is the only female coach name for the position on Wednesday. The 51-year-old from the north-east region to have an AFC 'A' License Devi, who captained the national side in the 1999 coaching badge. Asian Championships in The recommendation is as Philippines, has earlier been

statement.

good as an appointment given that the AIFF executive committee will approve it in its next meeting.
The technical committee

Federation (AIFF) said in a

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, Technical Director of AIFF, was also present. committee

recommended Priya PV and Ronibala Chanu as the assistant and goalkeeping coaches respectively for the team. All three coaches recommended Technical Committee did duty for the team during the Turkish Women's Cup in Alanya, Turkey, in February

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

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

ARCHERY WORLD

Indian men, women compound teams eye gold in Shanghai

PTI SHANGHAI

Asian Games.

The Indian men's and I 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 U-21 reigning 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 defeating Korea by just two



leading side in the category. The trio of reigning U-18 and senior champion Aditi Swami, Asian Games goldmedallist 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

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 semifinal nerve-wracking contest against the Koreans. "The semifinals are always prepared to shoot well and happy to make it to gold," he

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 attributed 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 tight matches. We were the team gold medals.'

Sreeshankar undergoes knee surgery in Doha

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Star Indian long jumper Murali Sreeshankar has 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," 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



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 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

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

The reigning junior world and Youth 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 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 Phalaswal (70kg), Rudrika (75kg), Khushi Pooniya (81kg), Nirjhara Bana (+81kg).

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), Women:

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

unrisers Hyderabad will Slook to unleash their brute batting power on 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

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 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. time ever in the IPL. He was a victim of a And it won't be surprising if contentious call but Virat Kohli



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 Overall, SRH's season. 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

Royal Challengers
Bengaluru: Faf du Plessis (c),
Glenn Maxwell, Virat Kohli,
Rajat Datidat Rajat Patidar, Anuj Rawat (wk), Dinesh Karthik (wk), Suyash Prabhudessai, Will Jacks, Mahipal Lomror, Karn Sharma, Manoj Bhandage, Mayank Dagar, Vijaykumar Ákash Vyshak, 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, 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 CHENNA

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 white hall 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 which contract 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

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

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

"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. Stonis, 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 toporder 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

"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

Voges lauded the hosts for keeping his team under pressure until the final

"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 inform Shivam Dube.

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

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. It 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 14time 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-yearold 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, than 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 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.

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 Mitchell, who was bought for

"It's a mixture of trying to

Rs 14 crore at the auction, has totalled 146 runs in seven 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, pick that up... We're not firing on all cylinders by any but the top three need to contribute the majority of means, but we're in each runs. "Ruturaj did that today, game asking teams to play well to beat us. We just got to so hopefully, he can continue his form, and the others can get a little bit better," he said

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

unbeaten hundred in a losing

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.

to skipper's 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 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 "What more could you ask for me to have this magical

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

experience for 16-17 years.

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

EAST COAST RAILWAY Dtd.18.04.2024 Name of Work: REPLACEMENT OF 21.6 MVA, 132/25KV ALSTOM MAKE POWER

TRANSFORMER AT BHADRAK(BHC) TSS(TR-83) BY 21.6/30.24 MVA 132/27KV ABB MAKE POWER TRANSFORMER TO BE SUPPLIED BY M/S TATA STEEL LIMITED 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 he Tender documents complete details availab at www.ireps.gov.in

Sr. Divl. Electrical Engineer (TRD) 4-25 Khurda Road

LOST

On dtd.22.04.2024 at about 3 .00PM I Gopinath Bisoi (72) S/

O- Lt. Ulla Bisoyi of Ajodhya Nagar Main Lane, Berhmapur 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 No.09AA 103001 of challenger 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, Plo No.2883/3523 of mouza, Goilundi. 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