

OPINION 6 ROLE OF AI IN LOK SABHA ELECTIONS

WORLD 8 US EFFORT TO BRING AID TO GAZA BY SEA

MONEY 10 MARKETS SNAP FIVE DAYS RALLY; SENSEX TUMBLES

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DELHI CAPITALS TAKE ON MI 12 SPORTS



Supreme Court rejects 100 per cent VVPAT verification plea

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

A tight slap to Congress led Opposition: Modi

In a landmark judgement, the Supreme Court on Friday rejected all petitions seeking 100 per cent cross-verification of votes cast using Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) with Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT).

The order came on a day during the second phase of polling for 88 parliamentary seats in 13 States. The Supreme Court's long anticipated verdict quickly found echo in the political landscape with Prime Minister Narendra Modi saying at a rally in Araria in Bihar that it is a "tight slap" on the Congress-led Opposition which now must "apologise" for committing the "sin of creating distrust"



Supreme Court on EVM-VVPAT Verification Case Photo: PTI

against electronic voting machines. Hours after the Supreme Court verdict, Modi said the decision shattered dreams of the INDIA Bloc that "sought to mislead the nation". "Every politician in the INDIA coalition sinned by trying to create doubts in the hearts of the nation's citizens," Modi said at an election rally in Araria Lok Sabha constituency in Bihar. "When the Congress, the RJD and other INDIA Bloc parties

were in power, the poor, backwards and Dalits used to be deprived of their votes through booth capture. With the introduction of Electronic Voting Machines, they are no longer able to play their old game. Hence, they committed the sin of creating distrust against EVMs," he said. Union Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal described the decision as "fabulous". He said the Supreme Court's ruling has exposed Opposition parties, including the Congress, which had left no opportunity to "defame" the Election Commission.

Opposition vows to continue VVPAT campaign

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

While most Opposition parties did not express their view after the Supreme Court's verdict on VVPAT, the Congress and a couple of parties like Samajwadi Party (SP) said it will continue with its campaign on greater use of VVPATs to increase the public trust in the electoral

process. Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh said the Opposition is not a party, directly or indirectly, to the petition on VVPATs. "We have taken note of the verdict of the two-judge bench and our political campaign on the greater use of VVPATs to increase public trust in the electoral process will continue," Ramesh said in a statement.

Estimated Poll Turnout (Phase -II) at 07:00 PM

Table with 2 columns: STATES, VOTING PER CENT. Rows include Assam (70.78), Bihar (54.91), Chhattisgarh (73.05), Jammu and Kashmir (71.63), Karnataka (67.12), Kerala (65.28), Madhya Pradesh (56.60), Maharashtra (54.34), Manipur (77.18), Rajasthan (63.82), Tripura (78.63), Uttar Pradesh (54.82), West Bengal (71.84).



Nearly 61 per cent voter turnout in Phase II of LS polls

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal to young and women voters to turn out in great numbers and Opposition leaders, including Priyanka Gandhi's message for voters to vote and 'save the Constitution,' notwithstanding, saw nearly 61 per cent voting till 7 pm on Friday in the second phase of the Lok Sabha.

The 2019 polls of the second phase recorded 66 per cent voting. At 7 pm, 61 per cent voter turnout was recorded across 13 States and Union Territories. Manipur, Chhattisgarh, Bengal, Assam and Tripura recorded over 70 per cent voter turnout while Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Maharashtra recorded

the lowest turnout at 52.6 per cent, 53 per cent and 53.5 per cent respectively. In 2019, NDA secured victory in 56 seats of the 89 seats while the UPA won 24 seats. In the ongoing second phase of Lok Sabha elections, Assam saw voting percentage of 70.97 per cent, Bihar 54.91 per cent, Chhattisgarh 73.19 per cent, Jammu and Kashmir 71.92 per cent, Karnataka 67.77 per cent, Kerala 65.45 per cent, Madhya Pradesh 57.55 per cent, Maharashtra 54.58 per cent, Manipur 77.18 per cent, Rajasthan 64.01 per cent, Tripura 78.82 per cent, Uttar Pradesh 54.83 per cent and West Bengal 71.84 per cent.

After Friday's phase, polling will be over in the States of Kerala, Rajasthan and Tripura. Barring a few confrontations and complaints of fake voting in Barmer-Jaisalmer, polling was peaceful in the second phase. The third phase of elections for 94 seats across 12 States and Union Territories will be held on May 7. Modi expressed his delight saying the phase two of the Lok Sabha polls has been "too good" for the BJP-led NDA, describing the support to the ruling alliance as unparalleled. "Phase Two has been too good! Gratitude to the people across India who have voted today. The

unparalleled support for NDA is going to disappoint the Opposition even more. Voters want NDA's good governance. Youth and women voters are powering the strong NDA support," Modi said on social media. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi took potshots at the PM over his attack on the grand old party, saying he is scared and may even shed tears on the stage. Interestingly, Modi and Opposition leaders, including Rahul raised the pitch of the campaign by focusing on hot-button issues such as religious discrimination, inheritance taxes and affirmative action's during the second phase to polarize their vote bank.

THE PIONEER REPORTS FROM GROUND ZERO

KERALA

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The ebullient fight between the BJP-led NDA, the Congress-led UDF and the CPI(M)-led LDF for the 20 Lok Sabha seats from Kerala that went to the polls on Friday is continuing even after the polling concluded by 6pm on Friday. As hundreds of voters had queued up in front of polling stations at 6 pm, polling officials issued tickets to all so that no one needed to return home without casting their votes. By 7 pm on Friday, the State had registered 70 per cent polling according to the Election Commission of India. The final figure is likely to cross the 77.8 per cent figure which was recorded in the 2019 Lok Sabha poll from the State. Law enforcement agencies heaved a sigh of relief as the polling process was by and large peaceful and no major untoward incidents were reported from anywhere in the State. But there were allegations by the BJP and the opposition Congress party that thousands of voters cast their votes with the help of fake identity cards. "There were many instances of expatriate workers from



other States managing to cast their votes with the help of officials whose loyalty lied with the CPI(M)," said Adoor Prakash, Congress candidate from Attingal in southern Kerala. Seven persons reportedly died either after casting the votes or while waiting for their turn to vote. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan who cast his vote with wife Kamala and scam tainted daughter Veena Mohammed Riyaz claimed that there was a CPI(M) wave across Kerala and the LDF would win in all the 20 constituencies. He said that the good works done by the LDF to help the poor would be reflected when results are declared on 4 June.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Sensitive States of the North East, including Manipur and Tripura, besides Assam witnessed peaceful polling on Friday in the second phase of Lok Sabha elections. Manipur, where polling was held under high presence of security personnel, the turnout was a high 77 per cent and one incident of EVM damage was reported. The State had witnessed violence in some areas during the first phase of polls on April 19. On Friday, voting was held in the remaining parts of the Outer Manipur Lok Sabha constituency at 87 polling stations, spanning 13 Assembly segments in eight districts, officials said. Over 4.84 lakh people are eligible to vote in this phase. Fifteen assembly segments of the Outer Manipur Lok Sabha constituency went to the polls in the first phase on April 19 along with the whole of the Inner Manipur seat. Four candidates are in the fray in Outer Manipur — NPF's K Timothy Zimik, Congress's Alfred Kannam Arthar, and Independents S

NORTH EAST



Kho John and Alyson Abonmai. The BJP has not fielded any candidate and is backing its ally, the NPF. Security measures were significantly enhanced across all 13 assembly segments where polling was underway, with 87 companies of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) and 4,000 state police personnel deployed to ensure free and fair elections. During the first phase of elections, parts of the Outer Manipur seat, covering 15 assembly segments, and 32 assembly segments of the Inner Manipur, went to polls on April 19. In the 2019 elections, the NPF emerged victorious, defeating the BJP by a margin of 73,782 votes.

UTTAR PRADESH

VIRENDRA NATH BHATT ■ LUCKNOW

In the second phase of Lok Sabha elections in Uttar Pradesh, 55-60 per cent voter turnout is expected to be recorded. Uttar Pradesh's Chief Electoral Officer Navdeep Rinwa said here on Friday that by 5 pm 52.74 per cent voter turnout was recorded in eight Lok Sabha constituencies where polling was held on Friday. Prominent among the 91 candidates whose fate was decided in the second phase polling are actors-turned-politician Hema Malini, who is seeking a third term from Mathura, and Arun Govil, who played the role of Lord Ram in the Ramayana TV serial. He has been fielded by the BJP from his native place Meerut. The other prominent candidates are Danish Ali of Congress from Amroha, and BJP's Atul Garg from Ghaziabad and Mahesh Sharma from Gautam Buddha Nagar. The constituencies where polling was held on Friday included Amroha, Meerut, Baghpat, Ghaziabad, Gautam Buddha Nagar, Aligarh, Mathura and Bulandshahr.



The CEO said polling was peaceful in all eight Lok Sabha constituencies and no untoward incident was reported from anywhere. He said around 150 complaints were received at the state control room and all were promptly disposed of. The CEO said complaints related to faulty electronic voting machines (EVMs), power supply breakdown, slow polling and identification documents produced by voters. He said 48 ballot units, 213 control units and 469 VVPAT machines were replaced. In one polling booth, a polling agent was asked by the police to leave the booth. Following a complaint by the political party, the agent was allowed to stay at the particular polling booth.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BENGALURU

The first phase of Lok Sabha polls in Karnataka on Friday comprising 14 constituencies witnessed an impressive 65 per cent voter turnout where the Congress and BJP locked horns on the electoral battleground in less than a year. According to poll officials, 65 per cent voter turnout was recorded. The turnout was however 49.37 per cent in Bengaluru South, and 50.04 per cent in Bengaluru North, amid indications of continued voter apathy in the city. Long queues were seen at polling booths, as people, especially senior citizens and morning walkers came out to vote during the early hours since the voting began at 7 am. Several prominent personalities like Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, IT industry veteran N R Narayana Murthy, his wife and nominated member of Rajya Sabha Sudha Murty, cricketing legends Rahul Dravid, Anil Kumble, and Javagal Srinath cast their



ballot. Former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda, Siddaramaiah, Shivakumar, Kumaraswamy, and film personalities like Upendra, Shivarajkumar and Sudeep, also exercised their franchise. Several new couples cast their votes either before or after their marriage. Many booths saw centenarians and differently-abled people actively taking part in the democratic process. Out of 14 segments that went to polls, the highest turnout of 74.87 per cent was recorded in Mandya, followed by Udupi-Chikmagalur and Hassan at an identical 72.13 per cent, and the least 48.61 per cent in Bangalore Central.

JAMMU

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

More than 70 per cent voter turnout was recorded in the Jammu-Reasi Lok Sabha constituency in the second phase of polling amid tight security arrangements on Friday. Over 67.22 per cent polling was recorded till 5.00 pm and a large number of voters were still standing in the polling booths to cast their votes. Election Commission authorities said while sharing the Assembly-wise polling percentage. Former Minister and working president of Congress in Jammu and Kashmir Raman Bhalla is challenging two-time sitting MP Jugal Kishore Sharma of BJP. Ankur Sharma of Ekam Sanatan Bharat Dal is also in the fray to test the political waters ahead of the maiden Assembly polls in the Union Territory. Of 17,80,835 eligible voters, 11,97,127 had exercised their right to vote till 5.00 p.m. sealing the fate of 22 candidates in the fray across 2416 polling stations spread across 4 districts of Jammu, Samba, Reasi, and Rajouri (83- Kalakote-Sunderbani).



Severe heat wave warning till Apr 30

Jharsuguda hottest at 43.5, BBSR 40.5 deg PMS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Regional Office of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) here on Friday predicted a gradual rise in the maximum temperature by 2 to 3 degree Celsius in several parts of the State during the next three days. The rise in maximum temperature is mainly due to the northwesterly-westerly dry air and high solar insolation. Similarly, the maximum temperature is likely to be above nor-

mal by 4 to 6 degree in some districts of the State during the next four to five days. The IMD has also issued Red warnings for heat wave to severe heat wave in several parts of the State. Jharsuguda recorded Friday's highest temperature of 43.5 degree by 2:30 pm. Hirakud and Sambalpur recorded 43 degree each. However, the mercury slipped to 40.5 degrees in Bhubaneswar. Heat wave to severe heat wave is very likely to prevail in the districts of Kendrapada, Bhadrak, Baleswar, Mayurbhanj, Jharsuguda, Sundargarh, Keonjhar, Dhenkanal, Boudh, Nuapada, and Angul on Saturday, said the IMD issuing a Red warning.

Rourkela couple performs death rituals for pet dog

MALAY RAY ■ ROURKELA

A man and his wife here performed last rites of their beloved pet dog like a family member. The dog died 10 days ago. The man invited around 250 people, including his relatives and friends, on Wednesday to pray for the dog's soul and also arranged varieties of food items for the invitees on the 10th day of the animal's death. Bhagwan Rout (69), a retired employee of Rourkela Steel Plant, resides with his wife Sandhya Rani at Basanti Colony here. His son Tathagat, while working in



Mumbai, had brought home a Labrador dog named 'Moffi' 12 years ago. Bhagwan and his wife took care of Moffi as their own child. When Moffi fell ill, a worried Bhagwan took him to a doctor, but the dog died on April 15. The Rout couple cried a lot for the loss. Bhagwan called a dead body

carrier and took Moffi's carcass to the banks of Vedvyas river and along with 12 other persons close to him buried it there. He thereafter consulted a priest and performed the rituals for seven days in his home for Moffi. Havan was also performed by the priest in front of a portrait of Moffi. Bhagwan thereafter sent invitation cards to around 250 persons to attend the 10th day of the rituals which was held in Dhamara Sangh at Chhend here. "Moffi was like my son and his death has shattered my entire family," said Bhagwan, adding, "Moffi will always be in our heart."

Notifications for 2nd-phase elections issued

■ 5 LS and 35 Assembly constituencies to go to polls on May 20
■ For 1st phase, 39 candidates file nominations for 4 LS & 266 for 28 Assembly seats

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
With the issuance of notifications by the Election Commission of India and Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) of Odisha, the process for filing of nominations for the second-phase simultaneous

elections to the Odisha Assembly and the Lok Sabha began on Friday. The notifications were issued for elections to five Lok Sabha constituencies and 35 Assembly segments. In this phase, Bargharh, Sundargarh (ST), Balangir,

Kandhamal and Aska Lok Sabha constituencies along with 35 MLA seats under the LS segments will go for poll on May 20. As per the notifications, May 3 is the last date for filing nominations while scrutiny of nominations will be done the next day. Candidates can withdraw their nominations on or before May 6. The usual voting timing is 7 am to 6 pm. However, it has been revised for some areas keeping security and other points in view.

For the first phase of elections, 39 candidates have filed nomination papers for four Lok Sabha seats and 266 candidates have submitted nominations for 28 Assembly seats in the State which will go for the polls on May 13. CEO office sources said the maximum of 13 candidates have filed nomination papers for the Koraput (ST) Lok Sabha seat followed by eleven each in Kalahandi and Brahmapur and four for the Nabarangpur Lok Sabha seat. Similarly, 266 candidates have filed nomination

papers for 28 Assembly seats falling under the four Parliamentary constituencies going for polling on May 13. The maximum number of 20 candidates have filed nomination papers for the Brahmapur Assembly seat followed by 14 each in Digapahandi and Nuapada Assembly seats, more than 10 candidates have filed nomination papers in 15 Assembly seats while the remaining 13 Assembly seats have less than 10 candidates who filed the papers.

In the Jhargram and Dabugam Assembly seats, only three candidates have filed the nomination papers for both the seats each. The scrutiny of the nomination papers will be taken up on Friday while April 29 is slated for the last date for withdrawal of nominations. CEO office sources said that while 39 candidates have filed 75 sets of nomination papers for the four Lok Sabha seats, 266 candidates have submitted 483 nomination papers for 28 Assembly seats.

IN BRIEF

SORO MLA DHADA JOINS BJP AFTER QUITTING BJD
Bhubaneswar: Soro MLA Parshuram Dhada joined the BJP on Friday several days after resigning from the BJD. Dhada joined the saffron party along with his supporters at an event organised at the party headquarters here. BJP State president



Manmohan Samal, former president Samir Mohanty and other leaders were present on the occasion. Dhada had quit the BJD after being denied party ticket to contest the upcoming polls. He had successfully contested the polls in 2014 and 2019 from the Soro constituency on BJD ticket.

MAN GETS DEATH SENTENCE FOR KILLING 2 PERSONS IN NAYAGARH

Nayagarh: The Court of Additional District & Sessions Judge here on Friday sentenced a murder accused to death for killing two persons in the district in 2019. The convict is Niranjan Mallik of Kushdhipi village under the Odagaon police limits in the district. Niranjan had murdered two persons and injured three others in January of 2019. He killed a security guard and a woman in the Odagaon area. As many as 27 witnesses were examined during the trial.

38 GIRLS RESCUED FROM BALESWAR RAILWAY STATION

Baleswar: As many as 38 girls were rescued from the Baleswar railway station following a raid by the labour and police departments on Friday afternoon. The girls were allegedly being trafficked outside Odisha under the pretext of providing them jobs, said reports.

'Naveen to quit one seat to make Pandian successor'

Alleges BJP
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
VK Pandian's name is there in the BJD star campaigners' list. This proves that he is the number two leader in the BJD. After Naveen Patnaik, he is the new supremo of the BJD, said the BJP here on Friday. The reason behind Naveen contesting from two seats is he would vacate one seat for Pandian later. By voting for the BJD this time means sending Pandian to the State Assembly and giving the reign

of the State in his hands. This is hurting the self-pride of Odias. In the past days, in the guise of 5T, democracy was murdered. The MPs and MLAs were humiliated, said former BJP State president Samir Mohanty. In the name of 5T transformation, there has been a scam of Rs 40,000 crore. The Chief Minister is conspiring to make Pandian his successor and push the State into grave danger. The people would give a befitting reply to this, said Mohanty.

In Nabarangpur Pandian's chopper searched by poll officials



MONOHAR MOHANTY
■ NABARANGPUR
Election officials on Friday checked the helicopter ferrying BJD leader VK Pandian at Umakote in Nabarangpur district. The search was conducted for around 45 minutes by a team of five officials led by the local magistrate in the presence of police personnel. Pandian had arrived at

Umakote to address a rally. "The exercise was carried out as per the direction of the Election Commission of India. No suspect items were found during the search operation," said official sources. Later, addressing a large gathering, Pandian targeted Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan and said Pradhan is angry that why Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik is giving so many facilities to common

people. He said the Centre is planning to stop the programmes like Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana, Mission Shakti and other welfare schemes of the State Government. He said Pradhan is making tall claims. But after five years of being the Union Education Minister, he could not set up a Central School or other such an educational institute in Nabarangpur.

On the other hand, Pandian said, the Odisha Government has included more than 8,000 high schools under the 5-T transformation initiative. Among others Nabarangpur BJD MP candidate Pradeep Majhi, Jhargam MLA candidate Ramesh Majhi, Umakote MLA candidate Nabina Nayak and many other senior BJD leaders of the region were present.

Nadda to address meeting in B'pur on Apr 28



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
BJP national president JP Nadda is scheduled to visit Odisha on April 28 and address a public gathering in Brahmapur, informed BJP leader Samir Mohanty on Friday. After the event in Brahmapur, Nadda would attend a meeting of party leaders in Nabarangpur, said Mohanty. Both Brahmapur and Nabarangpur Lok Sabha seats are poised for interesting fights

in the upcoming polls. The BJP has nominated Gopalpur MLA Pradeep Panigrahi, an ex-BJD leader, for the Brahmapur constituency while the BJD has fielded former BJP leader Bhrugu Baxipatra in the seat. In Nabarangpur, the BJD has nominated Pradeep Majhi, who had won the 2009 polls from the constituency on a Congress ticket. The BJP had fielded Balabhadra Majhi, who had defeated Pradeep Majhi in the constituency in the 2014 elections.

Metro project: Survey conducted from Vani Vihar to Sishu Bhawan

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
The survey work for the proposed metro railway in Bhubaneswar was started on Friday by the Bhubaneswar Metro Rail Corporation from Vani Vihar to Sishu Bhawan Square. A joint team from the Bhubaneswar Metro Rail Corporation, Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC), Bhubaneswar Development

Authority (BDA), Bhubaneswar Smart City Limited, TPCODL, GAIL, BSNL, WATCO and Commissionerate Traffic Police carried out the survey. The team inspected public roads to prepare for the ambitious metro railway project by checking electricity poles, water pipes, telephone lines, gas pipelines and more around the proposed metro station sites. The metro railway project will

be a 26-km line connecting the Bhubaneswar airport to Trisulia in Cuttack. The tracks will be elevated ones. The project will be carried out with an expenditure of Rs 6,255 crore by the State Government. It will cover 26 km with 20 stations -- Biju Patnaik International Airport, Capital Hospital, Sishu Bhawan, Bapuji Nagar, Bhubaneswar railway station, Ram Mandir Square, Vani Vihar, Acharya Vihar

Square, Jayadev Vihar Square, Xavier Square, Rail Sadan, District Centre, Damana Square, Patia Square, KIIT Square, Nandan Vihar, Raghunathpur, Nanadankanan Zoological Park, Phulapokhari and Trisulia Square. The Bhubaneswar Metro Rail Corporation has signed an MoU with the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation for the project, which is targeted to be completed in four years.

AIIMS BBS opens Heat Stroke Unit



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
In response to the prevailing scorching heat wave in the State, the AIIMS Bhubaneswar has taken measures to address the potential rise in heatstroke cases by establishing a dedicated Heat Stroke Unit. Executive Director Dr Ashutosh Biswas emphasised the necessity of this unit in light of the intense heat wave conditions. The unit, equipped with necessary medical facilities and staffed by doctors from various departments, aims to provide prompt and effective treatment to individuals suffering from sunstroke. Dr Biswas advised the public to avoid exposure to direct sunlight whenever possible and take precautionary measures such as carrying an umbrella, a wet towel and a water bottle when outdoors. The Heat Stroke Unit, located within the Ayush department, comprises six beds. Medical Superintendent Dr Dillip Kumar Parida reported that the unit has already treated over fifteen patients. Assistant Professor of General Medicine Dr Srikanta Behera has been appointed as the nodal officer of the Heat Stroke Unit.

Heat wave Rama Devi students demand exams deferred



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
A large number of students of the Rama Devi Women's University here on Friday staged a demonstration demanding postponement of Plus Three second year examination. The students said that normal life across State has been seriously affected by the intense heat wave for the past

several days; and in this situation, the examination is scheduled to be held at the university from April 30 to May 18. As the State Government has announced early summer vacation in schools across the State in view of the torrid heat, the students questioned how they would appear for the examination under such adverse weather conditions. Be it Utkal University or Sambalpur Uni-

versity, the concerned educational institutions have already postponed their scheduled examinations, they pointed out. "We want the examination to be postponed. There are problems in transportation and there is no proper ventilation in hostels. We are not mentally prepared to appear for the examination due to intense heat wave," said an agitating student.

In Puri IPL betting racket busted; 5 held

PNS ■ PURI
Five persons were arrested by police here for allegedly running a betting racket during Indian Premier League (IPL) matches. Acting on reliable information, a police team conducted a raid on a house at Baliapanda of the town on Wednesday night. Police managed to catch nab five persons while they were trying to flee from the spot. The accused were stated to be from Chhatisgarh. Police seized a LED TV, a sound system, four mobile phones, a register, other electronic gadgets and some cash from the accused, city DSP Prashant Kumar Sahu said. Further investigation was on to ascertain the involvement of others, if any, in the racket.

'Use water judiciously in social functions'



CAO holds seminar on water management
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Water conservation is vital to safeguard future water availability when natural resources like water are becoming scarce, opined speakers at a seminar organised by the Catering Association of

Odisha (CAO) about preservation and management of water during social functions at its 7th AGM here on Wednesday. "When the world is facing the impact of global warming and water scarcity has hit several States of the country and there is a crisis of drinking water, we must take utmost care while using water preparing food during the social

functions," said CAO president Binaya Bhusan Patnaik. CAO secretary Debi Prasad Rath appealed to the members to create awareness among the customers to use water judiciously during social functions. West Zone chairman Sunil Sunkhiya, FAIC president Narendra Somania, general secretary Kirit Budhdev, South Zone chairman Atul Meheta were present. CAO

chairman Anup Bagai, treasurer M Jay Prasad Rao, patron Naba Ranjan Patnaik, Prabodha Das, Guru Charan Das, Satyajit Mohanty, Kishore Chandra Dehury, Dharendra Kumar Kar and Sabaysachi Swain also participated in the discussion. More than 500 members from different districts of the State actively participated in the day-long programme.

In Sambalpur Man kills sister-in-law, 2-yr-old nephew

PNS ■ SAMBALPUR
A man allegedly murdered his sister-in-law and nephew over family dispute at Dalkibahal village under the Gobindpur police limits in Sambalpur district late on Thursday night.

The deceased were identified as Purnima Ping and her two-year-old son. Lochan Ping, the accused, was arrested by police.

According to reports, Purnima and her son were asleep in their house when Lochan entered the room by breaking the door. He used a

sharp weapon to attack and kill Purnima, following which he targeted the sleeping toddler. After committing the heinous act, Lochan fled the spot.

On being informed about the incident, police reached the village, recovered the bodies for postmortem and apprehended the accused.

The motive behind Lochan's brutal action remained unclear at this stage. However, investigators were looking into the possibility of a family dispute leading to this tragic incident.

Notably, Purnima's husband was not present at home during the incident.

In Sundargarh Truck crushes 3 men to death

PNS ■ SUNDARGARH
A truck ran over three men killing them on the spot near the NTPC power plant under the Bhasma police limits in Sundargarh district late on Thursday night.

The deceased were identified as Ranjan Pradhan, Asish Bhoi and Rupak Dhua. The three were residents of the area.

As per reports, the accident took place as the speeding truck carrying fly ash hit a motor-

cycle by which the trio was travelling. The truck driver fled the scene after the incident. The deaths sparked tension as locals blocked road demanding compensation for the families of the deceased. They also demanded stricter measures against illegal roadside parking.

The road blockade disrupted vehicular movement. On being informed, police reached the place and pacified the agitators. Efforts were on by the cops to trace the truck driver.

In Keonjhar 2 Jharkhand robbers held; weapons seized

PNS ■ KEONJHAR
Police on Thursday arrested two persons, who allegedly robbed a man's house by terrorising the family by brandishing a gun and a knife at Bhanja Colony under the Barbil police station in Keonjhar district.

The arrested were identified as Inul Ansari and Rajpal Singh, residents of the Jodapokhari police station area of Jharkhand's Dhanbad district.

Police seized a country-made pistol, three rounds of bullets and a knife from the possession of the accused.



The police nab the miscreants while they were trying to escape to Jharkhand through the Champua border.

Sources said that three

miscreants jumped the wall of Anup Biswakarma's house in broad daylight in Bhanja Colony. They attacked Biswakarma and demanded money at gunpoint and also

stabbed him with a knife. Getting information, police reached the spot and shifted Biswakarma to a hospital. Later, they launched a hunt and nabbed the robbers.

CPS B'pur holds annual fest 'MILEU-2K24'



PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR
The College of Pharmaceutical Sciences (CPS), Mohuda, Brahmapur, celebrated its Annual Day Function "MILEU-2K24" on April 23 in a grand manner.

Chief District Medical Officer (CDMO), Ganjam, Prof (Dr) Umasankar Misra graced the occasion as chief guest. The function was also attended and addressed by chairman of the college V Jagannadh Rao, president, UCDA P Satyanarayana and secretary, GPCDA, Bishnu Prasad Panda, president, GPCDA Pradeep Kumar Panda, apart from EC members.

Principal Dr Subrat Sen presided. Vice Principal Prof Ramesh Chandra Das presented a brief report of the imminent challenges experienced by pharmacy education.

Chief guest Mishra expressed his satisfaction that the college is progressing well and he stressed the need for discipline in every sphere of life. Prizes were distributed among the winners in various sports competitions. PhD awarded to faculties such as Dr Kaushik Sarkar, Dr Abhijit Saha, Dr Madhulita Panda while GATE qualified students were also felicitated. A grand cultural programme was held on the occasion.

Odias in Singapore celebrate Utkal Divas with pomp

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
The Odias in Singapore celebrated the 89th Utkal Divas with much pomp and splendour recently. Hosted by the Odia Society of Singapore (OSS) with the support of Indian High Commission at Singapore, the gala festival witnessed the showcasing of essence, excellence and fragrance of Odisha.

The ceremony venue at Grassroots Club Auditorium was decorated aesthetically and elegantly to mark the grand occasion. Wearing the glitzy and glittering look of a Mini Odisha, the entire ambience was agog with festive fervour. More than three hundred Odias and Odisha lovers attended the event along with their family members. The sole purpose of the massive celebration was to project, promote, propagate and popularise Odisha's rich art, vibrant culture, lofty tradition, lavish cuisine, enchanting tourism and incredible craftsmanship



among the non Indians. The programme commenced with the recital of Odisha's State anthem, 'Bande Utkal Janani'. The festival was inaugurated by High Commission of India to Singapore Dr Shilpak Ambule.

The highlight of the much acclaimed celebration was presentation of a spectacular cultural extravaganza by upcoming and established artistes.

Recital of Odissi Dance, staging of Ramayana play by small kids and performance of Sambalpuri and Ollywood contemporary numbers were quite entertaining and highly appreciated by the audiences.

The peak point of the super-sonic show was the melody session presented by star singers from Odisha Pradip Palai and Pragyan Hota. The celebration also included a

colourful exhibition of Odisha's famous handlooms and handicrafts materials at the venue and was a major attraction point of the visitors.

The prizes were distributed among the winners of various events. The show concluded with the presentations of Odisha's Patta chitra paintings and jute bags embroidered with Pipili's applique works to all the participants as door gifts.

State's 1st Haploidentical Hematopoietic Stem Transplantation

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Conducted at SUM Hospital

For the first time in Odisha, the Department of Clinical Hematology at the Institute of Medical Sciences and SUM Hospital here has successfully conducted a Haploidentical Hematopoietic Stem Cell Transplantation (HSCT) on a female patient suffering from Acute Myeloid Leukemia (AML).

The Haploidentical transplant is a type of allogeneic transplant in which healthy, blood-forming cells are taken from a half-matched donor to replace the unhealthy ones in the patient, said Dr Priyanka Samal, Professor and Head of the department of Clinical Hematology, Hemato Oncology and Hematopoietic Stem Cell Transplant in the hospital, on Wednesday.



"The donor was the daughter of the 51-year-old patient whose Human Leukocyte Antigens (HLA) matched half of her mother. The patient did display signs of complications after the transplantation but the same were managed aptly and aggressively," Dr Samal

told newsmen, adding that it is the first successful Haplo transplant in the State which was done at a very reasonable cost.

Dr Samal said she had undergone training on this particular transplant at the Princess Margaret Cancer Center

in Toronto a few months ago with the objective of reducing mortality and ensuring a better outcome. "This case presented an opportunity to attempt Haplo transplant which also was a learning curve for the entire team in the department," she said.

In Baleswar Man gets 20-yr RI for raping minor girl

PNS ■ BALESWAR
Special Judge, POCSO, Ranjan Kumar Sutar on Thursday convicted a person in a rape case in Baleswar district and sentenced him to 20 years' rigorous imprisonment (RI).

Besides, the court slapped a penalty of Rs 5,000 on convict Tanmay Dhomal of village Bishnupur under Gopalpur police station in the district. In default of the fine, the convict has to undergo another two years' RI.

Tanmay had sexually assaulted a 14-year-old girl of the same village alluring her with different means. The victim became pregnant and her parents, after ascertaining that Tanmay was the culprit, lodged an FIR against the accused in November 2023. The accused was tried under different sections of IPC and POCSO Act and the court after examining 13 witnesses and 18 exhibits pronounced the verdict, said Special Public Prosecutor Pranab Kumar Panda.

Bus goes up in flames in Dhenkanal



PNS ■ DHENKANAL
Passengers safe

Over 40 passengers had a narrow escape after the bus they were travelling in caught fire in Dhenkanal district on Friday. The incident took place on NH-55 at Kanteolia in Dhenkanal tehsil at around 12.30 pm.

As per reports, the bus bearing registration number OD19L2169 was coming from Talcher to Bhubaneswar via Dhenkanal when it caught fire near the college bypass on

main road. As soon as they got to know, all passengers alighted before the bus went up in flames.

Though the exact reason behind the blaze was not established yet, it was suspected that a short circuit from battery-end or overheating due to tyre could have led to the fire.

On getting information, two units of Dhenkanal Fire Service personnel arrived at the spot and doused the flames. While the passengers were safe, loss of property was being assessed, official sources informed.

Stop Mukteswar temple Marichikunda Pani sale practice

B RAMCHANDRA CST VOLTAIRE
It's sheer blind belief to cure infertility

The sale of Marichikunda Pani of the Mukteswar Temple of 10th Century of Old Bhubaneswar at the mid-night of Saptmi Suklapakshya in the month of Chaitra to issueless couples for attaining motherhood is a dark practice going on in the very heart of the city of Bhubaneswar.

All political parties have their headquarters here in the city. Ironically, the BJP and BJD leadership are not show-

ing any interest to stamp out the tradition. The Badu Nijog, a group of servitors, must not be allowed to carry on the non-scientific practice in the 21st century.

This tradition stems from the blind belief that the sacred water from Marichikunda holds the potential to bless the barren woman with the gift of conception if she consumes and gets bathed on the eve of Ashokshami. This year, the Marichikunda Pani was sold to a Jagatsinghpur couple who secured the first pitcher of water by paying Rs 24,500. As the report says, in 2013 the first pitcher of Marichikunda water was auctioned at Rs 2.5



lakh. In 2022 it was priced at Rs 1.30 lakh.

It is a matter of common sense that Dr Harekrushna

Mahtab and wife Subhadra Mahtab were residents of Old Town, Bhubaneswar. They had no children. Subhadra

Mahtab could have taken the Marichikunda Pani to become a mother. She did not do that. That speaks categorically that the Marichikunda Pani and its sale in the night of Saptami, Chaitra Suklapakshya is a business run on blind belief. Chief Minister RK Hegde of Karnataka had stamped out the naked Naga Baba procession in his State.

There is no scientific proof till date regarding the efficacy of the Marichikunda water curing infertility in case of issueless women. The Government of Odisha has a Department of Health and Family Welfare. It also has the De-

partment of Science and Technology. What are they doing till date? Should the Government of Odisha and Government of India close their eyes to the Fundamental Duties of the Indian citizens, one of which says to promote scientific temper as provided under Art 51(A)h of the Constitution of India? For political benefit, or to garner the votes of the Badu Nijog, a group of servitors associated with various rituals of Lord Lingaraj, nobody questions the veracity of the practice which has been going on for years.

(Voltaire is general secretary, Freethought Party of India)

Spl Puri-Delhi weekly train via K'jhar from Apr 30

PNS ■ KEONJHAR
Keonjhar on Friday late night 1.30 am and lastly reach Puri at 7.30 am.

This is the 2nd weekly train from Puri to New Delhi via Keonjhar for which Keonjhar Citizens Forum has expressed thanks to Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw. A team led by forum secretary Ajay Kumar Sahu had given memorandum to the Minister some days back, requesting to run the train keeping in view the excess demand of passengers on the route.

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SC terms apprehensions of petitioners on EVM misplaced

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court cannot allow the entire process of the ongoing general elections to be called into question and upended on mere apprehension and speculation of the petitioners regarding the efficacy of EVMs, apex court judge Justice Dipankar Datta said on Friday. Justice Datta was part of the apex court bench which rejected pleas seeking complete cross-verification of votes cast using electronic voting machines (EVMs) with a Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT).

EVMs in elections violates the principle of free and fair elections nor have they been able to establish a fundamental right to 100 per cent VVPAT slips tallying with the votes cast. Terming the petitioners' apprehensions as "misplaced", he said reverting to the paper ballot system, rejecting inevitable march of technological advancement, and burdening the EC with the onerous task of 100 per cent VVPAT slips tallying would be a folly when the challenges faced in conducting the polls are of such gargantuan scale. The top court delivered its verdict on a batch of petitions, including the one filed by the NGO, Association for Democratic Reforms, which

also sought a direction to return to the paper ballot system in elections. Justice Datta noted the petitioning association has also attempted to highlight a public trust deficit with respect to the current voting system by relying on a survey conducted by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies - Lokniti, which concluded that a majority of the Indian population did not trust the EVMs. "It is a private report and I find little reason to trust such a report. Over the years, more and more voters have participated in the election process. Had the voters any doubt regarding the efficacy of the EVMs, I wonder whether the voting percentage would have



seen such increase," he said. "EVMs have stood the test of time and the increased voting percentage is sufficient reason for us to hold that the voters have reposed faith in the current system and that the report to the contrary, which has been relied on, merits outright rejection," Justice Datta said. He noted the petitioners' had

submitted that the right to be informed under Article 19(1)(a) vis-a-vis the electoral process have two facets -- first, a voter has a right to know that the vote is recorded as cast and secondly, that the vote as cast is counted. He said a citizen's right to 'freedom of speech and expression' under Article 19(1) of the Constitution is not absolute and the State by virtue of Article 19(2) can place reasonable restrictions on these rights. "There can be no doubt that the electorate has a right to be informed if the votes, as cast, are accurately recorded. The dispute, in the present writ proceedings, centres around the modality of delivering the information," he said.

Justice Datta noted the petitioners have characterised the present procedure, wherein the voter after pressing the 'blue button' and casting the vote can see his VVPAT slip for seven seconds through an illuminated glass window, as inadequate for the voter to verify if the vote as cast is recorded. "Recording of the vote cast signifying the choice of the voter and its projection on the VVPAT slip, albeit for 7 (seven) seconds, is fulfilment of the voter's right of being informed that his/her vote has been duly recorded," he noted. He said as long as there is no allegation of statutory breach, there can be no substitution of the court's view for the view of the EC that the light in VVPAT

would be on for seven seconds and not more. Justice Datta also addressed the second facet of the argument based on the right guaranteed by Article 19(1)(a) - the voter's right to know that his or her vote, as recorded, has been counted. "To deal with this contention, a question comes to my mind - did this right not exist when the 'paper ballot system', which the petitioning association wishes to be reverted to, was in vogue?" he said. Justice Datta observed there is in place a stringent system of checks and balances to prevent any possibility of a miscount of votes and for the voter to know that his or her vote has been counted.

SC seeks EC response on plea seeking re election if NOTA gets majority

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

In a significant development amid the ongoing general elections, the Supreme Court on Friday asked for a response from the poll panel on a PIL seeking framing of rules to nullify an election and order fresh one if NOTA (none of the above) option gets majority over other candidates. The top court issued notice to the Election Commission on the PIL filed by author, activist and motivational speaker Shiv Khera.



The NOTA option is provided to the voters in the elections in pursuance of the 2013 apex court verdict. A bench comprising Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra took note of the submissions of senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan, appearing for Khera, and issued the notice. Initially, the bench was reluctant to consider the PIL, saying it was for the "executive to decide". "We will issue a notice. This is about the electoral process also. Let us see what the Election Commission has to say..." the CJ said. The senior advocate said that present plea was important keeping in mind the development at Surat in Gujarat where a BJP nominee was declared

Petitions challenging EVM reliability junked on forty occasions by courts: EC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

On a day the Supreme Court rejected pleas seeking a return to the ballot paper system, Election Commission officials pointed out that constitutional courts on at least 40 occasions have rejected petitions challenging the reliability of the electronic voting machines. The functionaries also referred to the recent remarks of Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar that EVMs are "100 per cent safe" and political parties know in the "heart of their hearts" that the machines are fair.

Court and the high courts -- have rejected pleas challenging EVMs," CEC Kumar had said addressing a press conference here on March 16 while announcing the schedule for the ongoing Lok Sabha elections. Citing a publication of the EC, he said it shows on how many occasions ruling parties have been voted out in elections where EVMs were used. "Political parties have come into existence due to EVMs. There are many smaller parties, which in the age of ballot paper, might not have come into existence," he had said. He said the EVMs are fair and political parties recognise it in the "heart of their hearts". He also described them as "100 per cent safe, 100 per cent sure".

The apex court bench also issued two directives. Pronouncing his verdict, Justice Khanna directed the Election Commission to seal and store units used to load symbols for 45 days after the symbols have been loaded into electronic voting machines in strong rooms. The apex court also allowed engineers of the EVM manufacturers to verify the micro-controller of the machines after the declaration of the results on the request of candidates who stood second and third.

The top court on Friday rejected pleas seeking complete cross-verification of votes cast using EVMs with a Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) and said "blindly distrusting" any aspect of the system can breed unwarranted scepticism. Maintaining that "democracy is all about striving to build harmony and trust between all institutions", a bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta delivered two concurring verdicts and dismissed all the pleas in the matter, including those seeking to go back to ballot papers in elections. "Almost 40 times constitutional courts -- the Supreme

Ministry asks CBSE to work out logistics for holding Board exams twice a year from 2025-26 session

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Education has asked the CBSE to work out logistics for conducting board exams twice a year from the 2025-26 academic session while the plan for introducing a semester system has been ruled out. Sources said the MoE and the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) will hold consultations with school principals next month for conducting board exams twice a year. The CBSE is currently in the process of working out the modalities of how will the academic calendar be structured to accommodate another set of board exams without impacting the undergraduate admission schedule. "The ministry has asked the CBSE to work on the logistics of how will board exams be conducted twice a year. The board is working out the modalities and a consultation will be organised next month with school principals," a source said. "The idea being explored is to conduct two editions of the board exams at the end of the year from the 2025-26 academic session but the modalities still need to be worked out. However, there is no plan to implement the semester system," the source added. The ministry's initial plan was to introduce biannual board

exams from the 2024-25 academic session, however, it has been pushed back by a year. The new national curriculum framework (NCF), prepared by the Union government-appointed national steering committee which was led by former ISRO chairman K Kasturirangan in line with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, proposed a semester system for students of classes 11 and 12. The framework, which was released by the ministry in August last year, also proposed that the students be given the option to write their board exams twice a year. "The CBSE right now is brainstorming on the schedule so students can get maximum benefit and the goal of making board exams stress-free can be achieved. However, logistics is a challenge which needs to be addressed, conducting exams is tiresome so the plan has to be flawless," the source said. However, this is not the first attempt at reforming board exams. The Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) was introduced for Class 10 in 2009 but was revoked in 2017 and the board reverted to the old model of year-end exams. The board exams for classes 10 and 12 were also split into two terms during the Covid pandemic as a one-time measure, but the old format of year-end exams resumed this year.

Zero tolerance of terrorism must for prosperity of SCO nations: Aramane

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane on Friday emphasised the need to adopt a zero-tolerance approach towards terrorism in all its forms for prosperity and development of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) member states. Making this assertion at the SCO Defence Ministers' meeting in Astana, Kazakhstan, he reiterated India's steadfast commitment towards maintaining peace, stability and security in the SCO region, defence ministry said here.

Aramane mentioned about India's long-standing proposal of Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism at the United Nations. He also highlighted the concept of 'Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR)', proposed by India for the Indo-Pacific. During the meeting, a protocol was signed by the Defence Ministers of all SCO Member States. A Joint Communiqué was issued after the meeting, in which the SCO Defence Ministers agreed, amongst other initiatives, to developing the idea of 'One Earth, One Family, One Future' which is rooted in the ancient Indian philosophy of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam."

Congress seeking to snatch rights of SCs, STs, OBCs to benefit Muslims, says Nadda

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI



BJP president J P Nadda on Friday accused the Congress of seeking to snatch the rights of SCs, STs and OBCs to benefit Muslims, alleging that it is the hidden agenda of the opposition party. Continuing with the BJP's attempts to project the Congress as a party championing interests of Muslims at the cost of traditionally deprived Hindu groups, Nadda said the Opposition party has long been making the grounds for the minority community to be declared as SCs and give them reservation. He issued a video statement as the second phase of the Lok Sabha polls got underway. Nadda cited the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's 2006 statement of minorities, especially Muslims, having the first rights on the country's resources and added that he made similar comments in April 2009. The Congress has accused the BJP of selectively quoting Singh and claimed that the ruling party has resorted to spreading falsehoods and communal division for polarisation during the elections due to a lack of public support to it in the ongoing polls. Nadda, however, noted that the Congress has in some states tried to provide reservation to Muslims, including in Karnataka where the BJP government, he said, had ended the quota but it was brought back by the Siddaramaiah government. It had attempted to give reservations to Muslims in Andhra Pradesh too but could not due to the Supreme Court's orders, he said. He said the Congress in its 2009 election manifesto had promised reservation for

Muslims in educational institutions and jobs through a sub-quota in the Other Backward Classes category. The BJP president claimed that the Congress' stand against majoritarianism in its 2024 poll manifesto underscores its "hate" for the SCs, STs and the OBCs as they make up for a majority in the society. "False claims were made through the Sachar committee report and it was said that Muslims are worse off than Dalits. It means that the Congress had been making the ground for Muslims to be declared as SCs so that they can give the reservation due to Dalits," Nadda said. The party has this old habit of robbing the SCs, STs and OBCs of their rights, he said, citing B R Ambedkar's criticism of Jawahar Lal Nehru for not speaking about the welfare of Dalits in speeches. Nehru was always in support of Muslims, he claimed. Nadda said he never wanted that Muslims to be neglected but that they should not get undue benefits at the cost of other communities. Those who need more protection should get these benefits, he said, accusing the opposition party of giving the impression that there are

will finish majoritarianism (in the country). The OBCs (Other Backward Classes), SCs (Scheduled Castes) and STs (Scheduled Tribes) are the majority in the country," the Uttar Pradesh deputy chief minister said. The Congress has committed the "sin of doing social injustice" with the country's Dalits, backwards and adivasis by "depriving" them of their rights for 70 years, he alleged and asserted that the grand-old party will be punished in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections for this. Maurya said the Congress has "conspired to snatch the rights of OBCs, SCs and STs, and give these to Muslims". The Congress and the INDIA bloc are "robbing" SCs, STs, OBCs of their rights, he said. This will not be tolerated at any cost, the BJP leader said. "(Congress leader) Rahul Gandhi has said that a caste census will be conducted. You are talking about doing an X-ray while the country's OBCs, SCs and STs are doing an MRI of your conspiracy," he said. Maurya alleged that the Congress' history is filled with "petty and disgusting" politics of appeasement. The Congress' "hidden agenda" of the Lok Sabha polls is to grab power "anyhow" and handover the rights of OBCs, SCs and STs to Muslims so that its vote-bank becomes strong "forever", he alleged on day when voting is underway in 88 constituencies spread across 13 states and Union Territories, including Uttar Pradesh, in the second phase of the elections. Maurya also said Congress leaders are abusing Prime Minister Narendra Modi and using derogatory words for him as he comes from a poor family, belongs to an OBC community and has worked for the welfare and upliftment of every section of society.

Children from hills in India more likely to have stunted growth: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Children living in India's hills and mountains, especially at higher altitudes, are more likely to experience stunted growth, according to a recent research analyzing data from over 165,000 children under five years old in the country. The study found that stunting was more common among third-born children and those with smaller sizes at birth. The prevalence of stunting was 36 per cent, with higher rates among older children. Living at altitudes above 2000 meters increased the risk by 40 per cent, as per research published in the open access journal BMJ Nutrition Prevention & Health. GPS data were used to categorise altitude level while the World Health Organization (WHO) standard was used to define stunting. Most, i.e. 98 per cent (164,874) of the children lived less than 1000 m above sea level while 1.4 per cent (2346) lived between 1000 and 1999 m above sea level; and 0.2 per cent (335) lived at or above 2000m. Seven out of 10 lived in rural areas. The overall prevalence of stunting among these children was 36 per cent, with a higher prevalence among children aged 18-59 months (41 per cent) than among those under 18 months of age (27 per cent). Stunting was more common among children of third or higher birth order (44 per cent) than it was among first-borns (30 per cent). And stunting rates were even higher among those children who had been small or very small (45 per cent) at birth. Mother's education emerged as an influential factor: stunting



prevalence fell as maternal educational attainment rose. The proportion of children whose mothers had had no schooling was more than double that of children whose mothers had had a higher education. Other protective factors included elements of antenatal care, such as clinic visits, tetanus vaccination, and iron and folic acid supplements; proximity to health facilities; and not belonging to a particular caste or indigenous tribe. This is an observational study that captured a snapshot of the population at a specific point in time, making it difficult to confirm altitude as a cause of stunting, acknowledged the researchers. But there are plausible explanations for their findings, they suggested. For example, chronic exposure to high altitude can reduce appetite, restrict oxygen delivery to tissues, and limit nutrient absorption. Food insecurity also tends to be greater at higher elevations where crop yields are lower and the climate is harsher. Similarly, healthcare provision, including implementing nutritional programmes, and healthcare access are also more challenging, they suggest. "In summary, concerted efforts are needed across health and nutrition sectors to address stunting, tailored to focus on higher-risk children in vulnerable areas," said the researchers.

More Indian youths are enrolling to learn Korean language, Taekwondo

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Extending beyond the world of K-Drama and K-Beauty, Indian youth interest towards Korean culture is expanding to also include learning the Korean language and Taekwondo, a great tradition of Korean martial arts. In the domain of martial arts, the demand for learning Taekwondo has experienced a remarkable surge. Drawing a comparison with the previous year, the statistics paint a compelling picture: in 2023, a total of 1,530 students were enrolled in Taekwondo classes across 31 schools. This figure has more than doubled in the current year, with an impressive 3,536 students now enrolled across 47 local schools in Delhi alone. This surge in interest has been facilitated through strategic partnerships between the KCCI and local associations such as the Delhi Taekwondo Association, underscoring the collaborative efforts to meet the growing demand for Taekwondo instruction, said an official from the KCCI. Likewise, the appeal of learning the Korean language has experienced a meteoric rise. The numbers speak volumes: from 1,535 students enrolled in Korean language classes across 20 schools last year, the figure has surged to 2,572 students across 32 schools this year. This exponential increase underscores the growing fascination with Korean culture and the eagerness of Indian youth to delve deeper into its linguistic nuances. Hwang Il Yong, Director of KCCI said, "Korean is one of the fastest-growing foreign languages in India, and the



demand to study the language has constantly been on the rise. Both Taekwondo and Korean language classes in Indian schools will further expand opportunities for students to experience Korean culture and will become a starting point for achieving their dreams. In line with this trend, the KCCI has taken measures to support and nurture this growing interest. For instance, the Centre has spearheaded initiatives to distribute 2,000 newly designed Korean language textbooks, meticulously crafted in collaboration with the National Institute of Korean Language. These textbooks, adorned with illustrations featuring quintessential Indian elements such as 'Naan', 'Samosa', and 'Mojarri', serve as a testament to the harmonious fusion of cultures and the inclusive nature of language learning. In fact, learning language demand surprised everyone when the 93rd Korean Language Proficiency Test was organised. KCCI simultaneously organised the test in threefold pg 2 regions in India - Delhi, Chennai and Imphal, Manipur and the centre had to announce that the Korean Language Proficiency Test will be conducted one more time this year in October.



People tasted real democracy under Modi: Jitendra Singh

PTI ■ JAMMU

The people of the country, especially those in Jammu and Kashmir, tasted "real democracy" under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Minister Jitendra Singh said on Friday.

On a day when voting is underway in 88 constituencies spread across 13 states and Union Territories in the second phase of the Lok Sabha elections, Singh said the BJP will register a "landslide" victory and form a "stable and strong" government for the third consecutive term.

"After Modi took over in 2014, the people got a feel of real democracy, especially in Jammu and Kashmir where the grassroots level democracy was strengthened



with the holding of panchayat and urban local bodies elections and implementation of the 72nd and 73rd constitutional amendments after the Congress deprived the people of these benefits," Singh told reporters here after casting his vote in Jammu Lok Sabha constituency.

The minister and his wife and children cast their ballots at a polling station in Trikuta Nagar.

"There is enthusiasm among the voters, especially the first-timers. The country has witnessed revolutionary transformation in the past 10 years under the leadership of Modi.

"In 2014, the youth of the country was disappointed and looking for opportunities to leave the country but today the situation is such that the youth working outside the

country wants to return," Singh, who is contesting the elections from Udhampur parliamentary constituency, said.

Udhampur went to polls in the first phase on April 19 and registered 68.27 per cent polling, sealing the fate of the Union minister and 11 other candidates.

He said the self-esteem of the people living outside the country has increased with startup initiatives increasing from 150 in 2014 to 1.50 lakh.

"Today, the world is looking up to India because they know that they are dealing with a prime minister who has a stable government and is going to be there for the next term and can do business with any country. They are comfortable with a strong prime minister rather than having a new prime minister

every year," he said.

Singh said the people are "enthusiastic" about giving a third term to Modi as they know that India has gained global stature under the prime minister's leadership and acknowledge his efforts to achieve a better future for the youth.

Referring to the abrogation of Article 370, he said Jammu and Kashmir has joined the mainstream and became part of the development endeavour after the Modi government's decision.

"Every section of the society, irrespective of religion and region, is going to vote for the BJP because Modi united the people of the country in a single thread post-independence," he added.

Asked about the possibility of assembly elections after the completion of Lok Sabha polls

in Jammu and Kashmir, he said the prime minister has already assured the people about it along with the restoration of statehood and "there is nothing more to add to his statement."

He also took a dig at the Congress over the controversial statement by one of its leaders on inheritance tax, saying "Inheritance tax is alien to democratic values, Indian culture and Indian civilisation. We have a family system in place which has a legacy so it is quite incompatible with our system."

"What is being said is with a certain political design to appease certain sections of the society and so it is a part of appeasement policy which congress has been following since decades," he said.

70.6 per cent turnout recorded in five LS seats in Assam till 5 pm

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

An estimated 70.6 per cent of 77.26 lakh voters exercised their franchise in five Lok Sabha seats in Assam till 5 pm on Friday, election officials said.

The turnout was expected to increase as those in queue before 5 pm would be allowed to vote, they said.

Polling began at 7 am and no untoward incident was reported so far.

Darrang-Udalguri Lok Sabha seat recorded the highest turnout of 72.9 per cent, followed by Nagaon (71.84), Karimganj (71.12), Diphu (69.62) and Silchar (53.06).

A total of 61 candidates are in the fray in the second phase. Assam Transport Minister Parimal Suklabaidya is pitted against Surya Kanta Sarkar of Congress in Silchar, while



BJP's Amarsing Tisso is contesting against Congress's Joyram Engeng in Diphu. Nagaon's sitting Congress MP Pradyut Bordoloi is contesting against BJP's Suresh Bora, while Karimganj's BJP MP Kripanath Malla is pitted against Congress's Hafiz Ahmed Rashid Choudhury.

In Darrang-Udalguri, the main contest is between BJP MP Dilip Saikia and former Congress MP Madhab Rajbongshi.

Altogether 77,26,668 voters, including 38,61,559 women and 179 persons of third gender, are eligible to exercise their franchise at 9,133 polling stations.

53.03 per cent voter turnout recorded in five seats of Bihar till 5 pm

PTI ■ PATNA

A voter turnout of 53.03 per cent was recorded till 5 pm in the five Lok Sabha constituencies in Bihar where polling was underway in the second phase on Friday, officials said.

The polling started at 7 am in Kishanganj, Katihar, Purnia, Bhagalpur and Banka constituencies, and would continue till 6 pm, they said.

Fifty candidates are in the fray in these five seats, and over 93 lakh people are eligible to decide their fate, they added.

Kishanganj recorded a voter turnout of 56.12 per cent, Katihar registered 55.54 per cent, Purnea recorded 55.14 per cent, Bhagalpur registered 47.26 per cent and Banka recorded 49.50 per cent till 5 pm, officials said.

Earlier in the day, speaking to reporters in Lakhisarai,



Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Kumar Sinha said, "I urge people to exercise their franchise in large numbers. People must vote for the overall growth of the country as well as Bihar."

Meanwhile, Congress's Kishanganj MP Mohd Javed,

who is seeking re-election, filed a police complaint, alleging that his opponents issued a fake statement in his name asking voters to vote in favour of another candidate.

"It was an attempt by my opponents to mislead voters of Kishanganj. I filed a complaint against the suspects last night," he told reporters.

More than 150 companies of paramilitary forces are assisting the state police in ensuring free and fair elections in this phase, officials said.

The polling was underway amid intense heatwave conditions with the mercury shooting past the 40-degree Celsius mark in most parts of the state.

Arrangements for tents and drinking water have been made at the polling stations, officials said.

Another BJD MLA joins BJP ahead of polls in Odisha

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Weeks after resigning from the ruling BJD, Soro MLA Parshuram Dhada on Friday returned to the BJP ahead of the Lok Sabha and assembly polls in Odisha. Dhada joined the saffron party at an event organised at the BJP's headquarters here in the presence of its state president Manmohan Samal, former president Samir Mohanty and other leaders.

The legislator quit the BJD on April 3 after being denied a ticket to contest the upcoming polls.

He had successfully contested the assembly polls in 2014 and 2019 from Soro constituency on a BJD ticket.

The BJP has already fielded Raju Das as its candidate from the Soro assembly segment, but the party has yet to announce candidates from Nilagiri, Balasore Sadar, Jaleswar and Basta under the Balasore Lok Sabha seat.

Earlier, BJD MLAs Arabinda Dhali, Premanda Nayak, Ramesh Chandra Sai, Simarani Nayak and two MPs Bhartruhari Mahtab and Anubhav Mohanty have resigned from the regional outfit and joined the BJP.

Dhada said, "I am happy that senior BJP leaders gave me an opportunity to return to the party after 10 years. I will take up whatever responsibility is assigned to me."

Nearly 60 per cent voter turnout recorded in Rajasthan till 5 pm

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Nearly 60 per cent voter turnout was recorded till 5 pm in 13 Lok Sabha seats of Rajasthan where polling is underway under the second phase on Friday.

Barring a few incidents of confrontation and complaints of fake voting in Barmer-Jaisalmer, the voting is being held peacefully.

According to the official data, 59.19 per cent voter turnout was recorded in 13 constituencies of Barmer-Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Jalore, Chittorgarh, Banswara, Kota-Bundi, Tonk-Sawai Madhopur, Ajmer, Pali, Udaipur, Rajsamand, Kota and Jhalawar-Baran.

At the same time, 73.25 per cent voting took place in the byelection for Bagidora assembly constituency of Banswara district.

The voting in the second phase of Lok Sabha elections is higher than the first phase which 12 seats went to poll on April 19. Voter turnout was 50.27 per cent by 5 pm in the first phase.



Around 2.8 crore voters are eligible to vote in the second phase of the polls.

Voting began at 7 am and was set to continue till 6 pm.

Those who reached the polling booths and standing in queue by 6 pm will be allowed to vote.

Highest voter turnout by 5 pm was recorded in Barmer-Jaisalmer, where 69.79 per cent votes were polled and in Udaipur.

Enthusiasm was seen among the people who lined up at the polling booths to cast votes.

However, in Banswara, no voter reached the Adibheet polling booth during the initial hours. The locals have certain demands regarding compensation against land acquired for a power plant and have declared to boycott the elections.

The officials said they are trying to convince the voters to exercise their franchise.

In the first two hours of the voting, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, who is contesting from Kota-Bundi, BJP state president C P Joshi contesting from Chittorgarh and Union minister and BJP candidate from Jodhpur Gajendra Singh Shekhawat cast their votes.

Assembly speaker Vasudev Devnani cast his vote in Ajmer while former chief ministers Vasundhara Raje and Ashok Gehlot exercised their franchise in Jhalawar and Jodhpur respectively.

A 108-year-old woman, Bhuri Bai, cast her vote at the Gunjara polling booth in the Kota-Bundi constituency. She was brought to the polling booth in a wheelchair by her family members.

Smooth sailing for BJP's Vishnu Sharma in MP

GIRISH SHARMA ■ BHOPAL

In absence of strong opposition in Khajuraho Parliamentary constituency, there is smooth sailing for Vishnu Dutt Sharma, the State president of Bharatiya Janata party (BJP).

He is sitting MP from this constituency. He won this constituency in 2019 with a huge margin of over 4.92 lakh votes by defeating Congress's Maharani Kavita Singh Natiraja.

In this election, Samajwadi Party (SP) had fielded its candidate Meera Deepak Yadav, as a joint candidate for INDI Alliance. However, at the last minute, during the scrutiny of the nomination papers, the District Returning officer found her nomination papers as invalid.

Being former MLA, Meera was a strong candidate in Khajuraho, but after her nomination was rejected, there has been no strong opposition to BJP's VD Sharma. After Meera Yadav's nomination was cancelled, The Congress and the Samajwadi Party extended their support to RB Prajapati, the All India Forward Bloc



candidate.

Both the parties did extend their supports to Prajapati, but factually in the field, both the parties were not witnessed making genuine efforts toward Prajapati's victory. On the contrary, BJP did not leave any stone unturned.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, National BJP leader JP Nadda and other prominent leaders addressed election meetings in Khajuraho.

After the nomination of Meera Yadav was rejected, Congress and SP had conducted a joint press conference in Bhopal. SP's State president Manoj Yadav had alleged that a well-planned conspiracy was

behind the rejecting of party candidate Meera Yadav's nomination.

The only reason behind rejection of Yadav's nomination was that her signature was absent at a required spot on the form and non-submission of the official voter list as per the 2023 State Assembly Elections.

Madhya Pradesh BJP media in-charge Ashish Agrawal told *The Pioneer* that his party president is winning the election with huge margin. Congress and Samajwadi party (SP) were nowhere in the contest.

Even when there was no strong opposition in the constituency, the BJP fought the election like elections are contested," Agrawal added.

Man damages EVM at polling booth; detained

PTI ■ CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR

A 26-year-old man allegedly damaged an Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) by hitting it with an iron object when he came to cast his vote at a polling booth at Rampuri in Maharashtra's Nanded district on Friday, a police official said.

The police detained the man, who told them that he wanted a pro-farmer and pro-labourer government, he said.

"The man, Bhaiyyasaheb Edke, is a local resident and a registered voter of Rampuri booth. He came to the polling booth to cast his vote, but damaged an EVM with an iron object."

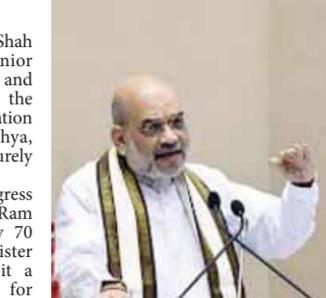
"He was immediately detained and the voting process continued soon afterwards as the broken machine was replaced with a new one," Nanded Superintendent of Police (SP) Shrikrushna Kokate told PTI. Police have launched an investigation to know the motive behind his act of damaging the EVM, he said.

Shah attacks Congress over Ram Temple

PTI ■ RAJGARH (MP)

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday slammed senior Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Digvijaya Singh for declining the invitation to attend the consecration of Ram Lalla's idol in Ayodhya, saying their move was guided purely by vote-bank politics.

The BJP leader said the Congress neglected the construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya for nearly 70 years and it was Prime Minister Narendra Modi who made it a reality and paved the way for consecration of Ram Lalla's idol on January 22. Campaigning in Khilchipur, which is part of Rajgarh Lok Sabha seat, Shah also mocked Congress candidate and former MP chief Digvijaya Singh and asked the gathering to give the latter's political career a "grand farewell".



Shah recited the Urdu couplet "aashiq ka janaaza hai, zara dhoom se nikle" (it is a lover's funeral procession, let it move ahead grandly) to take a swipe at Singh, who is up against BJP's sitting MP Rodmal Nagar.

"Do you know why shehzada Rahul Gandhi and Diggi Raja (Digvijaya Singh) did not attend the consecration of Ram Lalla's idol at Ayodhya? Because they are afraid of their vote-bank and therefore, they should never be pardoned," he noted.

Shah lashed out at the Congress for continuing with the Article 370, that granted special status to Jammu and Kashmir, for a long time because of which, he said, terrorism flourished in the erstwhile state and people were unable to even hoist the national tricolour.

The Home Minister pointed out that the Modi government not only abrogated the contentious constitutional provision on August 5, 2019, but also ensured the tricolour flew high on the country's head (J&K).

Shah maintained the Modi

government ended terrorism and Nationalism by entering their den ('ghar me ghuskar') and conducting a surgical strike inside Pakistan post-Pulwama terror attack. Rahul Gandhi, on advice of Singh, included in the Congress manifesto a promise that if a party-led government came to power at the Centre, it will "introduce personal law in the country," the BJP's star campaigner claimed.

Shah asked people whether controversial practices like instant triple talaq, banned by the Modi government in 2019, should be reintroduced, and criticised Singh for linking "bhagwa" (saffron) colour with terrorism.

Hitting out at Digvijaya Singh, the Union Home Minister said, "Tell Bantadhar, we won't allow you to turn Rajgarh into a BIMARU (term used to describe socially and

economically unwell areas) district."

"Bantadhar" is a term the BJP uses for Singh to allege that his 10-year rule as CM between 1993 and 2003 was all about development works getting stalled and wrecked. "The time has come to give him a permanent farewell from politics. But I have a request. Aashiq ka janaaza hai, zara dhoom se nikle. Defeat him with a massive margin and make him sit at home," Shah told the gathering.

Shah said Singh coined terms like "bhagwa atankwaad" (saffron terror), used 'saheb' while referring to Pakistani terrorist Hafiz Saeed. Hugged Zakik Naik (Islamic television evangelist accused of brainwashing youths), opposed the hanging of Parliament attack convict Afzal Guru as well as ban on PFL Rajgarh along with eight other Lok Sabha seats will vote on May 7 in the third phase of Lok Sabha elections.

Filing of nomination for 5 Odisha LS seats, 35 Assembly segments begins

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

The process of filing nomination papers for five Lok Sabha constituencies and 35 Odisha Assembly segments will be held on May 20 started on Friday with the Election Commission of India and Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) issuing the notification in this regard.

The five Lok Sabha constituencies are Bargarh, Sundergarh (ST), Bolangir, Kandhamal and Aska Lok Sabha constituencies along with 35 assembly segments under the Lok Sabha constituencies.

"As recommended by the Election Commission of India, in pursuance of sub-section (2) of Section 15 of the

Representation of the People Act, 1951 (43 of 1951), the Governor of the State of Odisha is, hereby, pleased to call upon..." the chief secretary said in a notification. As per the notifications, May 3 is the last date for making nominations while scrutiny of nominations will be done on the next day. Candidates can withdraw their nominations on or before May 6.

The Election Commission has made different schedule for voting in the 35 Assembly constituencies that come under the five Lok Sabha constituencies. The usual voting timing is 7 am to 6 pm. However, it has been revised for some areas keeping security and other points in view, sources said.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

All is well

India shows the mirror to the US, rejects its report on rights violations in Manipur as 'deeply biased'

Soon after the US pointed the finger at India for alleged incidents of human rights violations, particularly in Manipur, India has vehemently criticised the State Department report. The Indian Government has denounced the report as "deeply biased" and asserted that it reflects a "significant misunderstanding of the ground realities". Seeking to show the mirror to the US instead, it questioned the US administration's response to the recent killing of Indian students on its soil. The MEA emphasised the "deeply biased" nature of the report, saying the report misrepresents the situation in Manipur and demonstrates a "lack of comprehension" regarding India's efforts to address human rights issues within its borders. The report, which is not limited only to Manipur, talks about other issues too that have apparently undermined Indian democracy in the recent past. One of the key points raised in the State Department's report pertains to the raids conducted by the Indian Income Tax authorities on the offices

of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), alleging that the raids extended to journalists not involved in the organisation's financial affairs. Furthermore, the US report claims that the Indian Government used emergency powers to ban the screening of a BBC-produced documentary. The report highlights the concerns of local human rights organisations, minority political parties and affected communities regarding the Government's alleged "delayed response" to violence and its failure to provide adequate humanitarian assistance in Manipur.

It also cites instances of disinformation tactics being employed against civil society organisations, religious minorities such as Sikhs and Muslims, and political opposition groups. The Indian reaction to the US report is laudable as it defends and protects the boundaries of Indian sovereignty and sends across the message that no country has any business to meddle in India's domestic affairs. The Government must also ensure that foreign powers do not get a chance to sermonise India on human rights. It is an established maxim that human rights issues transcend political boundaries. Besides, the Government should be mindful of criticism by the Indian civil society, which has been airing similar sentiments. They should not be summarily rejected and branded as anti-national and harassed, a routine thing in autocratic systems. Indeed, India's reaction to the State Department's report underscores its commitment to safeguarding its sovereignty and ensuring that international assessments accurately reflect the country's efforts to uphold human rights. India has consistently maintained that it is committed to addressing any legitimate concerns regarding human rights violations through its robust legal framework and democratic processes. In light of these developments, it is imperative for the international stakeholders to engage with India in a constructive dialogue based on mutual respect and understanding.



PHOTO: ANAND K. SHARMA

PICTALK



A man bathes an elephant at the Veermata Jijabai Bhosale Botanical Udyan and Zoo, in Mumbai

Role of AI in Lok Sabha elections

From personalised voter outreach to the menacing potential of deepfake videos, Artificial Intelligence's influence is palpable, promising both innovation and ethical dilemmas



KALYANI SHANKAR

Artificial Intelligence, a game-changer in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, has revolutionised traditional campaign strategies. The era of candidates personally visiting voters' homes and engaging in conversations over tea, even after a five-year hiatus, has given way to a more technologically advanced approach. Social media played a pivotal role in the 2014 election. However, the advent of AI and the potential use of deepfake videos in India's 2024 elections could be game-changers. These videos, capable of blurring the lines between truth and falsehood, have the potential to significantly impact the trust and integrity of the electoral process.

Political parties and candidates have understood the power of AI in the run-up to the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. They use AI to analyse voter data, enabling them to develop effective campaign strategies. Additionally, AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants have been deployed to engage with voters on social media, providing real-time responses to their queries and concerns.

The use of AI technology can help with election processes in several ways:

AI can predict election outcomes. AI chatbots and virtual assistants can communicate with virtual media.

AI can prevent election fraud and regulate political advertising campaign finance violations.

Political parties can now customise their calls to individual voters, potentially harming their opponents' reputations. In India, more than 50% of the population uses the internet, which may increase to 900 million by 2025. The upcoming election in India is expected to generate a market worth Rs 500 crore.

Political parties are using AI to reach voters via social media. Congress and BJP used AI in last year's State elections, the first time false videos and parodies were used in political campaigning. Parties like BJP, Congress, AAP, DMK and AIADMK use AI technology to engage with their supporters. For example, the BJP used AI to translate PM Modi's speech-



es into eight regional languages. However, some campaigners misuse AI-generated videos, including deepfakes, to spread misinformation. These videos are targeted at the 18-25 age group and are being shared on platforms like WhatsApp.

Parties in India use various tools to influence voters. They share fake images and videos on social media platforms. For example, the Congress party shared a phoney photo of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. At the same time, the BJP posted a false video of Rahul Gandhi on Instagram. In Tamil Nadu, the DMK and AIADMK parties used recordings of their deceased leaders for voter support in this election. The Communist parties have also employed AI technology in their campaigns. One video shows Asaduddin Owaisi, the leader of the AIMIM party, singing Hindu devotional songs. Regional leaders like Akhilesh Yadav, Naveen Patnaik and Mamata Banerjee also applied similar tools to influence voters.

The use of AI for malicious purposes is a significant concern. With advanced AI, it has become possible to impersonate anyone, including voters or candidates, which can lead to identity theft and manipulation of the electoral process. This underscores the



POLITICAL PARTIES ARE USING AI TO REACH VOTERS VIA SOCIAL MEDIA. THE CONGRESS AND THE BJP USED AI IN LAST YEAR'S STATE ELECTIONS

need for clear regulations to ensure a fair and transparent electoral process, making the audience more aware of the potential risks and the importance of addressing them, fostering a sense of vigilance.

The use of AI in political campaigns raises valid concerns about privacy and the potential for unfair competition and misinformation. Therefore, it's imperative that clear regulations are implemented to ensure a transparent electoral process. Governments must take the lead in regulating AI use to promote fairness.

The IT Minister has already issued warnings to social media companies, instilling confidence in the audience about the security and integrity of the electoral process. The Election Commission must issue clear guidelines to regulate AI-generated information for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. These guidelines should address ethical AI use in campaigns and voter data analysis. Strict rules are necessary to maintain the integrity of the electoral process, protect voters' rights and ensure fairness and transparency. Without these regulations, there could be doubts about the legitimacy of the election results.

While there are valid concerns about AI, it's crucial to recog-

nise its potential for positive change. Certain AI-generated technologies have the power to revolutionise how we conduct free and fair elections. As these technologies gain wider acceptance, they could pave the way for e-elections, a future where elections are conducted online, ensuring a more transparent and accountable electoral process. This potential for positive change should inspire optimism and hope, reassuring the audience about the future of elections.

During the Bihar elections, the Election Commission used an AI-powered system to ensure transparency and prevent manipulation. The system detected and flagged misinformation and hate speech cases, expediting the counting process and curbing hate speech during the election. This demonstrates how AI can be used effectively and instils confidence in the electorate.

Presidents, prime ministers, or legislators could win or lose based mainly on the success or failure of their AI campaign. Gullible voters can be fooled easily. Technological advancements can bring about significant changes and AI is no exception.

(The writer is a popular columnist; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

REVIVAL OF EDUCATION IN BIHAR

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Bihar's educational reforms cock a snook at private players", published on April 26, this is my response. The narrative underscores Bihar's struggle with governance failures, notably in areas like liquor laws and rural migration. However, amidst this backdrop of challenges, the Government's focus on education emerges as a beacon of hope. In a landscape where education is increasingly commodified, Bihar's commitment to public education stands out as a bold counterforce to market forces.

By prioritising education, the Government aims to address deep-rooted social and economic inequalities. The recruitment of teachers and infrastructural improvements demonstrate tangible progress. Yet, sustaining these reforms remains a concern, particularly regarding the absence of a robust mechanism. Additionally, while efforts to combat corruption and enhance accountability are commendable, ensuring the continuity of initiatives like the Mid-Day Meal program is crucial. Ultimately, Bihar's journey towards educational reform signifies a vital step towards empowering marginalised communities and challenging the dominance of private institutions driven by profit motives.

Rajiv Mishra | Lucknow

PERSPECTIVES ON CONSCIOUSNESS

Madam — Apropos the news article, "The Essence of Consciousness", published on April 26, this is my response. The journey of understanding consciousness is a profound one, intricately woven with the fabric of human existence. In the hustle of modern life, terms like consciousness often float around without genuine comprehension. Yet, beneath this veneer lies a profound truth: consciousness is the essence of our being, the awareness that shapes our reality. In a world bombarded with information, it's easy to overlook the depth of our existence. From the wisdom of Buddha to the revelations of quantum physics, consciousness permeates every aspect of our lives. Like Arjuna on the bat-

Ensure representation of the disabled



Apropos the news article, "The marginalisation of disabled in politics", published on April 26, this is my response. The stark absence of political representation for persons with disabilities in India's democratic landscape is a glaring issue. Despite a substantial population, their needs are sidelined, reflecting a systemic failure. Political parties overlook their demands, perpetuating exclusion and reinforcing stereotypes.

Physical barriers at polling stations compound their challenges, stripping away dignity and agency. Anitha's experience exemplifies this neglect. Moreover, those with lesser-known disabilities face additional hurdles, such as a lack of sign language interpreters during campaigns. The dearth of accurate data further complicates policy formulation and budget allocations.

However, amidst these challenges lies an opportunity for transformation. A shift towards a rights-based approach is imperative, with persons with disabilities actively involved in policy development. Integration across governance facets is essential for true inclusivity. Respecting their fundamental rights and ensuring their participation in civil and political systems is crucial as India celebrates 75 years of independence. Only then can the nation progress towards its economic aspirations while truly embracing diversity in a democracy.

Aarav Patel | Mumbai

tlefield or King Janaka in his kingdom, we grapple with doubts and fears until a moment of awakening shifts our perception.

True consciousness is not merely being awake but being truly alive, attuned to both internal thoughts and external surroundings. It's the clarity that arises when we shed the layers of ignorance and embrace the purity of our being. In this journey towards enlightenment, let us not merely skim the surface but dive deep into the ocean of consciousness, where every wave carries the promise of a profound revelation.

Vikram Singh | Delhi

THE INDIAN PARADOX

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Why do Indians excel abroad and fail back home?", published on April 26, this is my response. India's global footprint shines brightly across diverse fields, yet a puzzling paradox persists: why do Indians thrive abroad while facing challenges at home? This conundrum demands urgent attention and a deep dive into the complexities

at play. The link between India's international success and domestic hurdles lies largely in the shortcomings of the public education system. Insightful analyses pinpoint the dire State of education as the root cause, a truth echoed by credible sources. Education stands as the linchpin connecting governance, socio-economic stability and prosperity. The nation's future hinges on the quality of primary and secondary education, a reality starkly revealed by surveys.

Moreover, the disconnect between higher education and employability exacerbates the brain drain dilemma. To reverse this trend, India must foster an environment that retains talent and promotes innovation. Embracing change is paramount. Reimagining education to nurture creativity and entrepreneurship can steer India towards global competitiveness. It's time to forge a path towards a brighter, more inclusive future.

Nandini Rao | Bengaluru

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Robotics: Predictable and optimal surgical success

Today, India is leading globally with advancements in robotic surgery and making a difference in critical surgical procedures

Robotic surgery, also known as robot-assisted surgery, has revolutionised the field of surgical procedures by offering increased precision, flexibility and control compared to conventional techniques. Typically associated with minimally invasive surgery, robotic surgery utilises a system consisting of a camera arm and mechanical arms with surgical instruments attached, all controlled by the surgeon seated at a computer console. This setup provides high-definition, magnified, 3D views of the surgical site, enhancing the surgeon's ability to perform delicate and complex procedures. Minimally invasive surgery is now the standard of care across various surgical specialties. Introduced four decades ago, Laparoscopy changed our approach and outcome in surgical patients. Robotic surgery introduced two decades ago, was the next step in the evolution of minimally invasive surgery. Now, the time has come when a surgeon avoids leaving anything on chance. Advanced, stable and predictable robotic surgery can ensure success



in each case. The primary motivation for opting for robotic surgery is the enhanced precision, flexibility and control it offers to surgeons during operations. The precision and minimally invasive nature of robotic procedures contribute to a lower risk of infection and other complications. In India, the Da Vinci system is commonly used for robotic surgery across various specialties, including urology, gynaecology, cardiothoracic and general surgery. In urology, robotic surgery has emerged as a significant advancement, offering several advantages over open or laparoscopic procedures. These advantages include reduced blood loss, decreased patient discomfort, minimised use of painkillers, shorter hospital stays and faster healing times. Urological surgeries com-

monly performed using robotic technology include robotic prostatectomy, robotic cystectomy, robotic partial nephrectomy, robotic pyeloplasty and other procedures such as nephroureterectomy, adrenalectomy, uterine reimplantation and kidney transplantation. Even in the case of frequently performed non-cancerous gastrointestinal surgery like cholecystectomy gall bladder removal or hernia, innumerable challenges can be countered including some very serious injuries, which may result in longer hospital stays or life-threatening situations. Robotic surgery filters out the struggle happening at the surgeon's end while ensuring smooth outcomes with ultimate safety for the patients. Our understanding of robotic surgery benefits originated from cancer patients in urology and onco-surgery. Today non-cancerous surgeries deserve and demand equal precision and safety. Prevention of complications and quick recovery are the new points. Due to the sheer number, improvement of outcome in benign surgeries would translate into a large

number of healthier and happier patients. While technology remains premium, the health insurance companies do understand and approve of such advanced technology. For instance, Narayana Health offers robotic-assisted procedures for various gastrointestinal conditions. The robotic surgery program has an experienced team specialising in using the da Vinci surgical system for minimally invasive general surgeries. With the surgeon controlling robotic arms from a console while watching the operative field through a video camera, patients experience shorter recovery times, with most returning to normal activities within two to three weeks instead of the six to eight weeks typically associated with standard open surgery. Indeed, constant innovation and development in the field of robotic surgery will result in lowering the cost with wider applications.

(The writer is a consultant-general, Robotic and Renal Transplant Surgery at Narayana Hospital - RN Tagore Hospital, Mukundapur, Kolkata; views are personal)



FORQAN BABU SHAIKH



FIRST COLUMN

WORK WITH ALLIES FOR SEMICONDUCTORS

It is time to let go of the regulatory bottlenecks to make a mark



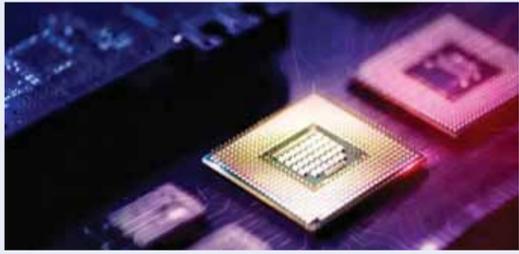
KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

One of the most common reasons cited by foreign investors, against investing in India is too complex regulatory processes and multiplicity of overlapping compliances. The latest to join the bandwagon is Taiwanese Foreign Minister Joseph Wu. The minister was responding to questions from a journalist on the reason for Taiwanese companies not warming up to India's constant welcome mat for attracting investments in the new age technology, building block and semiconductors space.

To be sure Taiwan is home to the largest chip manufacturing facilities in the world, a key component of the digital economy, ranging from mobile phones to satellites. Wu during his interaction with the journalist quoted "India is cumbersome in its administrative structure and it would require for Indian Government to look at that too, to streamline all kinds of laws and regulations to help semiconductor investors coming to the country". He has further in the same interview talked about the lack of skilled engineers to work in the chip-making factories, even though India doesn't fall short of chip-designing talent.

What Mr Wu highlighted, isn't something new, as it is a similar caution from many other potential investors interested in India. This author spoke with several high-ranking officials in several new and emerging technology manufacturing companies, who complained about complex time-consuming administrative processes in India and echoed that, when compared to competing economies such as Singapore, Vietnam etc.

A new department called Invest India (a public-private joint venture) was created, early on in the current Government's regime, to assist potential investors through the difficult, regulatory regime. Even for semiconductors, where, India is the preferred potential partner, a dedicated business division has been created in the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology, in the form of India Semiconductor Mission (ISM).



The recent trade policy agenda 2024 released by the Biden administration highlighted "Since announcing the negotiating mandate in August 2022, the two sides have pursued an ambitious schedule of meetings to make progress as quickly as possible. In June 2023, AIT and TECRO signed the first agreement under the Initiative. This agreement includes high-standard commitments and economically meaningful outcomes in a number of trade areas, including customs administration and trade facilitation, good regulatory practices, services domestic regulation, anticorruption and small and medium-sized enterprises", underscoring the importance of the partnership between the two countries.

The US supports India's ambitions to develop into a significant player in semiconductor design and manufacturing space, as an alternative to China. India US trade relationship, which has been in limbo has been energised in the last two years after a formal Trade policy forum came into existence, which has had regular meetings on several bilateral issues. In the 2024 trade policy agenda document, US mentions, "We committed to pursue enhanced engagement leading to mutually beneficial outcomes in several areas, with a view to deepening the trade relationship for the benefit of working people. We identified certain areas, including critical minerals, customs and trade facilitation, supply chains and trade in high technology products, in which our Governments intend to develop an ambitious and forward-looking roadmap for enhanced cooperation in order to achieve economically meaningful outcomes."

Given the convergence of interests and the willingness of like-minded partners and allies to invest and support India in the race of semiconductors, the next Government could do well to include removing regulatory bottlenecks in its 100-day agenda. It would be a good start towards a Stated Vikist Bharat target.

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

Sri Lanka's Easter attack revisited



NILANTHA LANGAMUWA

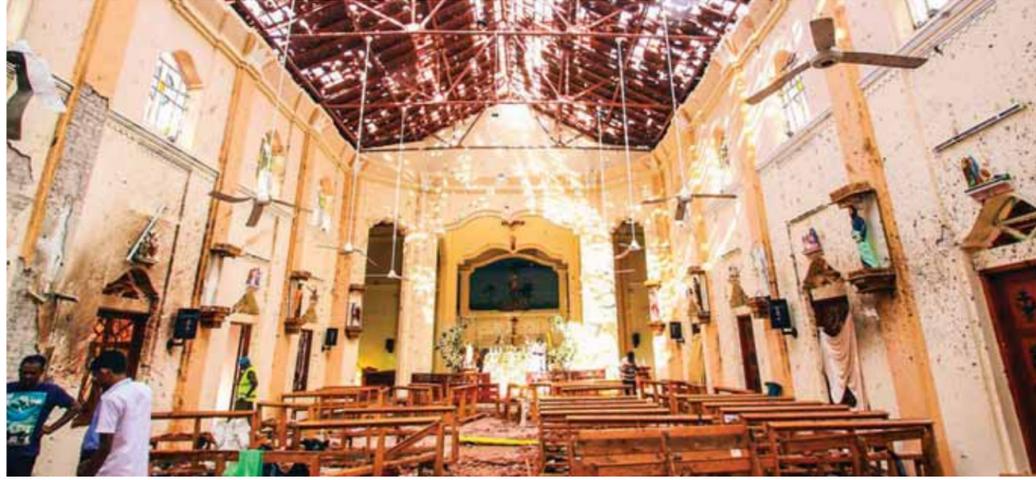
As the island nation grapples with the aftermath of the attack, the intricate web of extremism and intelligence failures continues to haunt it even five years later

When conspiracy theories gain traction and permeate the public consciousness, they inevitably taint the discourse surrounding the event in question. This phenomenon is especially pronounced in politically charged contexts. Five years ago, amidst the Easter attack on tourist hotels, two Catholic churches and a Zion church in Western and Eastern provinces, a plethora of conspiracy theories surfaced. Initially, speculation swirled suggesting the involvement of a powerful Western nation, followed by theories positing the attack as a ploy to consolidate political power. More recently, local politicians and various social groups have propagated the notion that India orchestrated the attack. Yet, none of these claims have been substantiated with credible evidence. Meanwhile, the culpability of the investigating officers' negligence, which played a role in the tragedy, has been overshadowed by these baseless allegations. Instead of being held accountable, those partially responsible have reshaped the narrative to deflect blame onto others.

However, in the aftermath of the attack, public media reports surfaced alleging that prominent politicians and Government officials were aware of the impending threat. Some even openly discussed this matter. Additionally, a leaked classified document from the police indicated forewarning of an imminent attack. What followed was not just the proliferation of various interpretations but also the dissemination of misconceptions. For instance, blame was swiftly pinned on the State Intelligence Service, the country's premier intelligence agency, extending to judicial indictments. However, a more rational examination, grounded in verifiable data, reveals a different societal reality. It uncovers a systemic failure across institutions tasked with national security and a disregard for prior warnings. Furthermore, it exposes concerted efforts to downplay this negligence for political gain. In a nation scarred by nearly four decades of internal conflict and widespread devastation, such institutional negligence sadly becomes almost unsurprising. It's crucial to highlight overlooked facts concerning the attack in question.

Leading up to the incident in question, there was a noticeable proliferation of extremist factions advocating violence across Sri Lanka. This surge wasn't limited to Muslim extremist groups but encompassed various ideological factions, each pursuing distinct political agendas. The emergence of the Islamic State in West Asia particularly bolstered the prospects of extremists across different nations, with Sri Lanka serving as a pivotal transit hub.

Investigations have revealed a significant influx of extremists from regions like Kerala, as well as countries such as the Maldives, into Sri Lanka. It's evident that intelligence agencies within the region, including those of Sri Lanka and Western nations, amassed substantial intelligence on these activities and collaborated in information sharing. Testimony from the wife of Zahran Hashim, a ringleader of the carnage, attests to the financial backing he received from a Singaporean national to establish his initial mosque. She further detailed Zahran's extensive involvement in extremist endeavours, including recruiting adherents and garnering financial and logistical support throughout the country. This revelation sheds light on the proliferation of extremism in Sri Lanka, culminating



in the Easter attack and subsequent incidents like the suicidal blast at the Sainthamaruthu house, where Zahran's family last resided. Zahran and his cohorts have exhibited affiliations with extremist ideologies and have been inspired by the Islamic State. Moreover, Sri Lankan nationals who joined the organisation's ranks in Syria have been observed exerting influence on local activities. Between 2014 and 2018, a staggering 41,490 individuals from 91 nations travelled to Syria to support the Islamic State, including 32 Sri Lankans.

Exploiting this influx, organisations espousing extremist ideologies, under various guises, began proliferating throughout Sri Lanka. Additionally, individuals of Sri Lankan origin who attempted to travel to Syria via Turkey but were unsuccessful have returned home and aligned themselves with figures like Zahran. Simultaneously, the ideological backing of Mohamed Naufar, known as the "second emir" and a close relative—specifically, the husband of Zahran's maternal aunt—played a pivotal role. Naufar, identified by the FBI as the mastermind behind the attack, exerted significant influence on the events.

Since March 2017, there have been eleven significant incidents leading up to the Easter attack, yet none have undergone thorough investigation

One of the most significant incidents out of these eleven took place in August 2018, involving Rilwan, who mishandled explosives, resulting in an accident. After the explosions in the Arayampathy area, Rilwan was taken to Colombo National Hospital and admitted under the name Zaheed on 26 August 2018. Investigations have confirmed that Zahran, conducting a training camp in the Hambantota area at the time, visited his brother in Colombo. The following day, 27 August 2018, Rilwan was admitted to the National Eye Hospital. Subsequently, he visited the clinics of the National Hospital on 27.09.2018, 04.10.2018, 11.18.26 and 15.03.2019. This incident occurred eight months prior to the attack, yet neither the training camps nor the incident itself were reported to any police or intelligence agencies.

the NFGG Kattankudy office on February 12, 2018.

Further escalations occurred with the shooting of Palani Bawa in Kattankudy on June 08, 2018 and the detonation of a bomb by Zahran's brother Rilwan in Arayampathy on August 26, 2018, resulting in injuries and fatalities at Wavnathiv police post on November 30, 2018. The incidents continued with the vandalism of religious statues in Mawanella on December 23, 2018 and further vandalism on January 16, 2019, related to providing information about the destruction of statues and concealment of explosive materials in Vanathavilluwa of Puttalam District. The situation intensified with the discovery of material and the shooting of informant Raziq Mohammad Taslim on March 08, 2019, resulting in permanent disability. Finally, a motorcycle explosion in Thalankudah on April 16, 2019, just five days before the Easter attack, marked the culmination of these incidents. Numerous intelligence reports concerning these events have been received by the commissions tasked with investigating them, shedding light on the negligence of the officers responsible for the criminal investigation.

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Remarkably, the individual managed to conceal his identity from the National Hospital and Eye Hospital for several days. The doctor suspected of aiding in this matter has later fled the country.

Later, there was another incident identified as a dry run, which the State Intelligence Service formally reported to the Inspector General of Police as well as the head of CID, stating that the incident on 2019.04.18 was an explosive test. However, due to the lack of proper investigation into the incident until the Easter Sunday attack, a key opportunity to apprehend the perpetrators was missed.

Upon examination of the intelligence reports submitted to the investigative commissions regarding the attack, it becomes evident that not only did the local intelligence agency provide information, but also the Indian Intelligence Bureau (IB), India's internal security and counter-intelligence agency under the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs, accurately foresaw the impending attacks. This information was disseminated not only to the then Inspector General of Police and the Secretary of the Ministry of Defense but also to the officers responsible for crime and investigation.

Their acknowledgement of receiving this crucial information is documented. Despite being forewarned, no preventive measures were taken to thwart the attack. This apparent failure to act raises serious questions about accountability and highlights a disturbing trend of negligence. That was a collective failure.

The balance sheet of five years since this tragedy is that there has been a concerted effort to obscure the truth by proliferating conspiracy theories, thereby masking this dereliction of duty. This deliberate attempt to deflect attention from institutional failures through the propagation of unfounded narratives not only undermines public trust but also obstructs the implementation of preventive mechanisms to ensure non-recurrence.

(The writer is a Sri Lankan journalist. Views are personal)



SINCE MARCH 2017, THERE HAVE BEEN 11 SIGNIFICANT INCIDENTS LEADING UP TO THE EASTER ATTACK, YET NONE HAS UNDERGONE THOROUGH INVESTIGATION

The U-turns and contradictions in Antony's political journey

From advocating communal harmony to his stance on Hindu-Muslim relations, Antony's journey reflects his love for courting controversies

The year was 1993. The Kerala Press Academy (since renamed as Kerala Media Academy) under the ownership of the Kerala Government was having the Mathai Manjooran Memorial Day. Mathai Manjooran was a socialist party leader and was a member of the EMS Namboodiripad-led coalition Government during the 1967-69. He was also a trade union leader who never hesitated to speak his mind. It is unfortunate that he passed away in 1970 at the age of 58.

A K Antony, the quintessential Congress leader was the speaker who delivered the Manjooran Memorial speech and as a journalist, I was there to cover the event. The country was yet to come out of the impact of the demolition of the



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

disputed structure at Ayodhya and the entire secularist forces were up in arms against the Hindus for the "barbaric" act. Not a single day passed in Kerala without communal harmony meetings and all speakers were vying with one another in blaming the Sanatanis for the heinous act and praising Islam as the religion of peace. But Antony chose a different approach in his 45 minutes. He warned the minority com-

munities (read Christians and Muslims) from attacking the Hindus and reminded the two communities that they should be grateful to the Sanatanis for their magnanimity in offering the minorities more than what the Hindus themselves enjoyed. "The minorities have been given more rights and privileges to run their own educational institutions and hospitals while the Hindus were denied the same. We should always bear in mind the truth that the minorities in India enjoy unique rights and privileges that the Hindus do not have and we should be grateful to them for their broad-mindedness," said Antony, which made the next day's headlines. Antony became the chief minister of Kerala for the third

time in 2001 but he quit in 2004 for reasons best known to him, the then Congress president Sonia Gandhi and the then Muslim League boss Mohammed Shihab Ali Thangal. Eight Hindu fishermen were butchered by members of a Muslim extremist organisation at Maradu in Kozhikode district in May 2003 and there was a demand for a CBI probe into the massacre. A prominent Muslim League leader, who later on became a Union Minister in the Manmohan Singh Government played a significant role in offering shelter in a mosque to the assassins. When the issue of the CBI probe came for consideration in the liaison committee meeting of the UDF, the Muslim League leaders warned Antony



who was the then Chief Minister against an investigation by the Central agency. The UDF had won 99 out of the 140 seats at stake and was in a comfortable position. The Muslim League ultimatum against the CBI probe angered Antony and he announced in a public meeting the next day

that political parties, especially the caste and community-based outfits, should not make the Government dance to their tunes with organised bargaining power. That turned out to be the nemesis for Antony as the Gods in Malappuram asked Sonia Gandhi to remove him from the post of chief minister. Despite Antony tendering an apology, the chieftains of the Muslim League, controlling Kerala politics from the Kudappanakkal castle in Panakkad, were not humoured and they insisted on the former's ouster. That was how Antony resigned as the Chief Minister and shifted camp to Delhi. The Sulthans of Malappuram had the last laugh. Antony knows very well that his shirt and dhoti should be

more secular than that of the CPI(M) and other outfits to stay in the reckoning. That is why the person who wanted the minority communities to be grateful to the Hindus wants the Sanatan Dharma to be demolished. There is nothing surprising in Antony's stance as he was always against the Hindus even as the president of Kerala Students Union, the feeder organisation of the Congress. The group in the Congress party in Kerala has its roots in Antony's grievances over the status enjoyed by Hindu leaders like K Karunakaran and their clout in the High Command. The group in Congress has nothing to do with ideology and Antony's hatred towards Hindus is reflected in his cursing his son Anil Antony join-

ing the BJP. What Antony should have done is to give freedom to 38-year-old Anil to select the party of his choice and wish him all success. Instead of that what Antony has done is to demand the Nehru-Gandhi clan to field candidates for the Lok Saba election from Amethi and Rae Bareilly. He also declared that the Congress party cannot exist without the Nehru-Gandhi family. Isn't this another way of telling that India is India and India is India? Remember, this is the same Antony who ridiculed Indira Gandhi cast his lot with the CPI(M) in 1980 and formed a Government with the Marxists during 1980-1982.

(The writer is special correspondent with The Pioneer; views are personal)

University responses vary: Dialogue or police for pro-Palestinian protests

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The students at Columbia University who inspired pro-Palestinian demonstrations across the country dug in at their encampment for the 10th day on Friday as administrators and police at campuses from California to Massachusetts wrestled with how to address protests that have seen scuffles with police and hundreds of arrests. Officials at Columbia and some other schools have been negotiating with student protesters who have rebuffed police and doubled down. Other schools have quickly turned to law enforcement to douse demonstrations before they can take hold. As the death toll mounts in the war in Gaza and the humanitarian crisis worsens, protesters at universities across the country are demanding schools cut financial ties to Israel and divest from companies they say are enabling the conflict. Some Jewish students say the protests have veered into antisemitism and made them afraid to set foot on campus, partly prompting the calls for police

intervention. After a tent encampment popped up Thursday at Indiana University Bloomington, police with shields and batons shoved into protesters and arrested 33. Hours later at the University of Connecticut, police tore down tents and arrested one person. And at Ohio State University, police clashed with protesters just hours after they gathered Thursday evening. Those who refused to leave after warnings were arrested and charged with criminal trespass, said university spokesperson Benjamin Johnson, citing rules barring overnight events. The clock is ticking as May commencement ceremonies near, putting added pressure on schools to clear demonstrations. At Columbia, protesters defiantly erected a tent encampment where many are set to graduate in front of families in just a few weeks. Columbia officials said that negotiations were showing progress as they neared the school's deadline of early Friday to reach an agreement on dismantling the encampment.



An Israeli police officer searches an activist before she is taken away by police car after she was blocking a road along with a delegation of American and Israeli rabbis from Rabbis for Ceasefire marching towards the Erez crossing to the Gaza Strip with food aid for Gaza civilians and to call for a ceasefire, in southern Israel, on Friday. AP/PTI

US effort to bring aid to Gaza by sea moving forward but concerns remain

AP ■ JERUSALEM

The construction of a new port in Gaza and an accompanying US military-built pier offshore are underway, but the complex plan to bring more desperately-needed food to Palestinian civilians is still mired in fears over security and how the humanitarian aid will be delivered. The Israeli-developed port, for example, has already been attacked by mortar fire, sending high-ranking UN officials scrambling for shelter this week, and there is still no solid decision on when the aid deliveries will actually begin. While satellite photos show major port construction along the shore near Gaza City, aid groups are making it clear that they have broad concerns about their safety and reservations about how Israeli forces

will handle security. Sonali Korde, an official with the US Agency for International Development, said key agreements for security and handling the aid deliveries are still being negotiated. Those include how Israeli forces will operate in Gaza to ensure that aid workers are not harmed. "We need to see steps implemented. And the humanitarian community and IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) continue to talk and engage and iterate and improve the system so that everyone feels safe and secure in this very difficult operating environment," Korde said. A senior US military official said on Thursday the US is on track to begin delivering aid using the new port and pier by early May. The official, who spoke to reporters on condition of anonymity to discuss

details not yet made public, said deliveries through the sea route initially will total about 90 trucks a day and could quickly increase to about 150 trucks daily. The senior official acknowledged, however, that the final installation of the US-built causeway onto the beach at the port will be governed by the security situation, which is assessed daily. The Israeli Defense Forces has a brigade — thousands of soldiers — as well as ships and aircraft dedicated to protecting the deliveries, the official said. Asked about the recent mortar attack, the military official said the US assesses that it had nothing to do with the humanitarian mission, adding that security around the port will be "far more robust" when the deliveries start.

Scottish leader cancels major speech as confidence vote in his govt looms

AP ■ LONDON

Scotland's leader cancelled a speech on Friday as he fought for his political life in the wake of his decision to pull the plug on a three-year power-sharing agreement, a move that has exposed the government to peril. First Minister Humza Yousaf of the Scottish National Party was due to deliver a major speech on Scotland's independence from the UK, but that has been cancelled following the furor surrounding his decision to tear up the power-sharing deal with the much smaller Greens on Thursday. Without the support of the Greens, the SNP is two seats shy of a majority of lawmakers in the Scottish Parliament, meaning it can only get legislation and its budget through with the support of other parties. Although Scotland is part of the UK, its government has widespread powers, including

over health and education, as well as some limited powers over the raising of revenues. On Friday, Scottish Labour, which is connected to the UK's main opposition Labour Party, said it wants to lodge a vote of no confidence in the Scottish government next week. If all opposition legislators, which now include the Greens, vote against the government, it could set off a chain of events that leads to early elections in Scotland, which are not due until 2026. Ministers in the government would be required to resign immediately and the legislature in Edinburgh would then have 28 days to see if it can create a new government with majority support. If that isn't possible, then early elections would be triggered. "It's a matter now of when, not if, Humza Yousaf will step down as first minister," said Scottish Labour's leader Anas Sarwar. "It would be untenable for the SNP to assume it can impose another unelected first

minister on Scotland." Yousaf, who replaced long-time leader Nicola Sturgeon in March 2023, may need the vote of a former SNP lawmaker, Ash Regan, to survive. She has indicated that she would seek to extract a price from Yousaf in order to back him and the government in the no-confidence votes. Of Parliament's 129 seats, the SNP holds 63. Regan's backing would result in the government having 64 votes at least. In the event of a tie, the chamber's presiding officer — Scotland's equivalent to the speaker — would be expected to vote in favour of the status quo. It could well be that tight. The Greens, furious at their ejection from government, have already said they will vote against Yousaf himself, along with the other main opposition parties, including the Conservatives and Labour. It's not clear yet whether they will vote against the government as a whole or whether they will abstain.

Tate's trial on charges of rape, human trafficking might start

Bucharest (AP) — A court in Romania's capital on Friday ruled that a trial can start in the case of influencer Andrew Tate, who is charged with human trafficking, rape and forming a criminal gang to sexually exploit women. The Bucharest Tribunal ruled that prosecutors' case file against Tate met the legal criteria but did not set a date for the trial to begin. Tate's spokesperson, Mateea Petrescu, said the ruling will be appealed. Tate, 37, was arrested in December 2022 near Bucharest along with his brother Tristan Tate and two Romanian women. Romanian prosecutors formally indicted all four in June last year. They have denied the allegations.

'United Team Pak could defeat negative forces'

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's Army chief General Syed Asim Munir said on Friday that a "united team Pakistan" could defeat "negative forces", as he asserted that negative propaganda and social media trolls could not distract the nation from marching towards its development and prosperity. Addressing the Green Pakistan Initiative conference, Gen. Munir said that the country's armed forces, with the nation's support, would defeat all the inimical forces bent on impeding Pakistan's development and prosperity, Geo News reported. He asserted that negative propaganda and social media trolls could not distract the nation from marching towards its development and prosperity. "Let us all reject negative forces together and focus on Pakistan's journey of development and stability," he was quoted as saying.



"We are all a united team Pakistan - InshaAllah (God willing), with the cooperation and support of the people, all efforts of those who distract and obstruct Pakistan's development journey will fail," he said. Stressing the need for over-pursuing economic challenges, Gen. Munir said that complete independence without economic stability is not possible. "In today's era, complete independence is not possible with-

out economic stability," he said, warning that "no instability will be tolerated" in the country's journey towards prosperity and development. Last month, the Army chief assured the unwavering resolve of the Army to support the new Pakistan government's initiatives aimed at the cash-strapped country's economic recovery. He made the remarks during a high-level meeting chaired by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

London resident arrested by NIA in Indian mission attack case

London (PTI) — A man who was arrested for unlawful activities by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) as part of its investigations into the attack on the High Commission of India here in March 2023 had previously been detained at the Attari border while entering India from Pakistan last year. Indrapal Singh Gaba, a resident of Hounslow in west London, was arrested in India on Thursday for committing offences under Section 13(1) of the Prevention of Insult to National Honour Act and Section 34 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), official sources here said. There were two major violent protests in front of India House in London on March 19 and 22, 2023. On March 19, a large group of protesters were found to have attacked Indian officials, damaged the High Commission building and insulted the Indian National Flag. On March 22, they chanted anti-India slogans, insulted the Indian National Flag again and indulged in unlawful and threatening behaviour, according to the reports logged by the NIA following the incidents. As part of the investigation, several suspects were examined, and seizures were made after conducting searches at 31 locations in Punjab and Rajasthan. An investigation team of the NIA had also visited London, sources said. L[ook Out Circular] was opened against several suspects, including Indrapal Singh Gaba. Singh was detained at the Attari border on 09.12.2023 when he entered India from Pakistan. As part of the investigation, his mobile phone was seized and data was extracted and analysed. Investigation revealed that protests on 19.03.2023 and 22.03.2023 were part of the larger conspiracy to attack Indian missions and its officials, they said. The violent protests in March last year were repeatedly raised in the British Parliament and there has since been a very visible Metropolitan Police security presence outside the High Commission of India in London.

Trump's lawyers to grill ex-tabloid publisher

AP ■ NEW YORK

After prosecutors' lead witness painted a tawdry portrait of "catch-and-kill" tabloid schemes, defence lawyers in Donald Trump's hush money trial are poised on Friday to dig into an account of the former publisher of the National Enquirer and his efforts to protect Trump from negative stories during the 2016 election. David Pecker will return to the witness stand for the fourth day as defence attorneys try to poke holes in his testimony after he described helping bury embarrassing stories that Trump feared could hurt his campaign. It will cap a consequential week in the criminal cases the former president is facing as he vies to reclaim the White House in November. At the same time jurors listened to testimony in Manhattan, the Supreme Court on Thursday signalled it was likely to reject Trump's sweeping claims that he is immune from prosecution in his 2020 election inter-



ference case in Washington. But the conservative-majority high court seemed inclined to limit when former presidents could be prosecuted — a ruling that could benefit Trump by delaying that trial, potentially until after the November election. In New York — the first of Trump's four criminal cases to go to trial — the presumptive Republican presi-

dential nominee faces 34 felony counts of falsifying business records in connection with hush money payments meant to stifle negative stories from surfacing in the final days of the 2016 campaign. Trump denies any wrongdoing. Before entering the courtroom on Friday, he told reporters he believes Thursday's proceedings went

"very well" for the defense, adding that "the case should be over". Prosecutors allege that Trump sought to illegally influence the 2016 race through a tabloid industry practice that involves catching a potentially damaging story by buying the rights to it and then killing it through agreements that prevent the paid person from telling the story to anyone else. Over several days on the witness stand, Pecker has described how he and the tabloid parlayed rumour-mongering into splashy stories that smeared Trump's opponents and, just as crucially, leveraged his connections to suppress seamy stories about Trump. The charges centre on USD 130,000 in payments that Trump's company made to his then-lawyer, Michael Cohen. He paid that sum on Trump's behalf to keep porn actor Stormy Daniels from going public with her claims of a sexual encounter with Trump a decade earlier. Trump has denied the encounter ever happened.

During the cross-examination that began Thursday, defence attorney Emil Bove grilled Pecker on his recollection of specific dates and meanings. He appeared to be laying further groundwork for the defense's argument that any dealings Trump had Pecker were intended to protect himself, his reputation and his family — not his campaign. Pecker recalled how an editor told him that Daniels' representative was trying to sell her story and that the tabloid could acquire it for USD 120,000. Pecker said he put his foot down, noting that the tabloid was already USD 180,000 in the hole for Trump-related catch-and-kill transactions. But, Pecker said, he told Cohen to buy the story himself to prevent Daniels from going public with her claim. "I said to Michael, my suggestion to you is that you should buy the story, and you should take it off the market because if you don't and it gets out, I believe the boss will be very angry with you."

Claims of double standards in Sydney stabbing incidents

Newcastle (Australia) (AP) — Muslim groups in Australia on Friday criticized the disparity in the police response to two stabbing attacks in Sydney this month, saying it had created a perception of a double standard and further alienated the country's minority Muslim community. The Australian National Imams Council said an attack at a Bondi Junction shopping center was "quickly deemed a mental health issue" while the stabbing of a Christian bishop at a Sydney church two days later was "classified as a terrorist act almost immediately." "The differing treatments of two recent violent incidents are stark," the council's spokesperson, Ramia Abdo Sultan, said in a statement with the Alliance of Australian Muslims and the Australian

Muslim Advocacy Network. "Such disparities in response create a perception of a double standard in law enforcement and judicial processes," she said. A 16-year-old boy is accused of repeatedly stabbing Bishop Mar Mari Emmanuel and a priest at the Christ the Good Shepherd Church on April 15, two days after the Bondi Junction attack, in which six people were killed and a dozen others seriously wounded by a lone assailant with a history of mental illness. The boy was charged last week with committing a terrorist act, a crime that carries a maximum penalty of life in prison. Five teenage boys aged from 14 to 17 have also been charged with terrorism offenses in connection with the church stabbings.

UK cancer patient joins trial for world's first skin cancer vaccine

PTI ■ LONDON

An international clinical trial testing a novel cancer immunotherapy, which may prevent skin cancer from recurring, has recruited its first patient in Britain this week. The mRNA-based technology, the vaccine tech used for some COVID vaccinations, is aimed at people who have already had high-risk melanomas — the most serious form of cancer — removed. For the trial, University College London Hospitals (UCLH) doctors are giving it alongside another drug, pembrolizumab or Keytruda, that also helps the immune system kill cancer cells. One of the first patients to sign up for the trial is British musician Steve Young, 52, from Hertfordshire, east England,

who was diagnosed with stage II melanoma, which was removed. "I feel lucky to be part of this clinical trial. Of course, I did not feel so lucky when I was diagnosed with skin cancer, in fact, it came as quite a shock, but now that I've had treatment, I'm keen to ensure it does not recur. This is my best chance at stopping the cancer in its tracks," Young said. The personalised treatment works by instructing the body to make up to 34 proteins, each targeting "neoantigens" identified by gene sequencing and thought to be driving the cancer in that particular patient. The neoantigens are proteins found only on the cancer cells, and the individualised neoantigen therapy is designed to prime the immune system to attack the tumour cells in each patient, while Keytruda

blocks an immunological "brake" that protects the cancer. "The idea behind this immunotherapy is that, by prompting the body to make these proteins, it can prepare the immune system to quickly identify and attack any cancer cells bearing them, with the aim of preventing recurrence of melanoma," said University College London medical oncologist Heather Shaw, the national coordinating investigator of the new trial. The new Phase 3 clinical trial, being led by UCLH, is evaluating the combination of mRNA-4157 (V940) and Keytruda (pembrolizumab) versus a current standard of care (pembrolizumab) as a risk-reducing treatment option for patients with resected high-risk, stage IIB to IV melanoma.

US probes Tesla autopilot recall on attention

AP ■ DETROIT

The US government's auto safety agency is investigating whether last year's recall of Tesla's Autopilot driving system did enough to make sure drivers pay attention to the road. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says in documents posted on its website on Friday that it has concerns about the December recall of more than 2 million vehicles, nearly all the vehicles that Tesla had sold at the time. The agency pushed the company to do the recall after a two-year investigation into Autopilot's driver monitoring system, which measures torque on the steering wheel from a driver's hands. The fix involves an online software update to increase warnings to drivers. But the agency said in documents



that it has found evidence of crashes after the fix, and that Tesla added updates that weren't part of the recall. "This investigation will consider why these updates were not part of the recall or otherwise determined to remedy a defect that poses an unreasonable safety risk," the agency wrote. A message was left early Friday seeking comment from Tesla.

NHTSA said that Tesla reported 20 crashes that apparently happened after the recall remedy was sent out. The agency has required Tesla and other automakers to report crashes involving partially and fully automated driving systems. NHTSA said it will evaluate the recall, including the "prominence and scope" of Autopilot's controls to address misuse, confusion and use in environments that the system

is not designed to handle. It also said that Tesla has stated that owners can decide whether they want to opt in to parts of the recall remedy, and that it allows drivers to reverse parts of it. Safety advocates have long expressed concern that Autopilot, which can keep a vehicle in its lane and a distance from objects in front of it, was not designed to operate on roads other than limited access highways. The Associated Press reported shortly after the recall that experts said it relied on technology that may not work. Tesla, the leading manufacturer of EVs, reluctantly agreed to the recall last year after NHTSA found that the driver monitoring system was defective and required a fix. The system sends alerts to drivers if it fails to detect torque from hands on the steering wheel, a system that experts

describe as ineffective. Government documents filed by Tesla say the online software change will increase warnings and alerts to drivers to keep their hands on the steering wheel. It also may limit the areas where the most commonly used versions of Autopilot can be used, though that isn't entirely clear in Tesla's documents. NHTSA began its investigation in 2021, after receiving 11 reports that Teslas that were using the partially automated system crashed into parked emergency vehicles. Since 2016, the agency has sent investigators to at least 35 crashes in which Teslas that were suspected of operating on a partially automated driving system hit parked emergency vehicles, motorcyclists or tractor trailers that crossed in the vehicles' paths, causing a total of 17 deaths.

Blinken meets Xi as US, China spar over bilateral and global issues

AP ■ BEIJING

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met Friday with Chinese President Xi Jinping and senior Chinese officials, stressing the importance of “responsibly managing” the differences between the United States and China as the two sides butted heads over a number of contentious bilateral, regional and global issues.

Talks between the two sides have increased in recent months, even as differences have grown.

Blinken said he raised concerns with Xi about China’s support for Russia and its invasion of Ukraine, as well as other issues including Taiwan and the South China Sea, human rights and the production and export of synthetic opioid precursors. Blinken sounded a positive note on recent progress made in bilateral cooperation, including in military communications, counternarcotics and artificial intelligence.

“We are committed to maintaining and strengthening lines of communication to advance that agenda, and again deal responsibly with our differences so we avoid any miscommunications, any misperceptions, any miscalculations,” he said.

But he said he made clear to Xi ongoing concerns about Beijing’s supply of materials, including machine tools and micro electronics, to Moscow that President Vladimir Putin is using to boost Russia’s defences and its war on Ukraine. “Russia would struggle to sustain its assault on Ukraine without China’s support,” Blinken told reporters after his meeting with Xi.

“Fueling Russia’s defense industrial base not only threatens Ukrainian security, it threatens European security,” he added. “As we’ve told China for some time, ensuring transatlantic security is a core US interest. In our discussions today, I made clear that China does not address this problem.”

Blinken also said he urged China to use its influence “to discourage Iran and its proxies from expanding the conflict in the Middle East” and convince North Korea “to end its dangerous behaviour and engage in



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken with Chinese President Xi Jinping at the Great Hall of the People, on Friday AP/PTI

dialogue.” Blinken also discussed with Xi China’s maritime maneuvers in the disputed South China Sea, and reiterated “ironclad” American support for the Philippines, its oldest treaty ally in Asia. Xi stressed that China and the US must seek common ground “rather than engage in vicious competition.”

“China is happy to see a confident, open, prosperous and thriving United States,” the Chinese leader said. “We hope the US can also look at China’s development in a positive light. This is a fundamental issue that must be addressed.”

Earlier, Blinken held lengthy talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Public Security Minister Wang Xiaohong. He and Wang underscored the importance of keeping lines of communication open as they lamented persistent and deepening divisions that threaten global security. Those divisions were highlighted earlier this week when US President Joe Biden signed a massive foreign aid bill that contains several elements that the Chinese see as problematic. “Overall, the China-US relationship is beginning to stabilise,” Wang told Blinken at the start of about 5 1/2 hours of talks. “But at the same time, the negative factors in the relationship are still increasing and building and the relationship is

facing all kinds of disruptions.” “Should China and the United States keep to the right direction of moving forward with stability or return to a downward spiral?” he asked. “This is a major question before our two countries and tests our sincerity and ability.”

Wang also outlined, without being specific, well-known Chinese complaints about US policies and positions on the South China Sea, Taiwan, human rights and China’s right to conduct relations with countries it deems fit. “China’s legitimate development rights have been unreasonably suppressed and our core interests are facing challenges,” he said. “China’s concerns are consistent. We have always called for respect of each other’s core interests and urge the United States not to interfere in China’s internal affairs, not to hold China’s development back, and not to step on China’s red lines on China’s sovereignty, security, and development interests.”

Blinken responded by saying that the Biden administration places a premium on US-China dialogue even on issues of dispute. He noted there had been some progress in the past year but suggested that talks would continue to be difficult. The State Department said later that Blinken and Wang had “in-depth, substantive, and

constructive discussions about areas of difference as well as areas of cooperation” and made clear that Blinken had stood his ground on US concerns.

Blinken “emphasised that the US will continue to stand up for our interests and values and those of our allies and partners, including on human rights and economic issues,” State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a statement. Blinken arrived in China on Wednesday, visiting Shanghai shortly before Biden signed the USD 95 billion foreign aid package that has several elements likely to anger Beijing, including USD 8 billion to counter China’s growing aggressiveness toward Taiwan and in the South China Sea. It also seeks to force TikTok’s China-based parent company to sell the social media platform. China and the United States are the major players in the Indo-Pacific. Washington has become increasingly alarmed by Beijing’s growing aggressiveness in recent years toward Taiwan and its smaller Southeast Asian neighbours with which it has significant territorial and maritime disputes in the South China Sea. China has railed against US assistance to Taiwan and immediately condemned the aid as a dangerous provocation. It also strongly opposes efforts to force TikTok’s sale.

Chinese marine research ship back in Maldives’ waters

PTI ■ MALE

A 4,500-tonne high-tech Chinese research ship is back in the Maldivian waters, two months after it spent a week docked at different ports in this archipelago nation.

Xiang Yang Hong 03 was docked at the Thilafushi industrial island’s harbour on Thursday morning, news portal Adhathu.com reported on Friday. However, “the government has not disclosed the reason for its return. But the government previously confirmed permission for the ship to dock before its first visit,” it said, days after President Mohamed Muizzu, a pro-China leader-led People’s National Congress won the general election, securing 66 out of the 93-member People’s Majlis. Muizzu rode to power last year on an ‘India Out’ promise and with a super majority win in parliamentary polls on April 21, he has further consolidated his position.

“The ship has now come back after skirting the Exclusive

Economic Zone (EEZ). Therefore, Xiang Yang Hong 03 has been active inside or near Maldives territory since January,” it said. The ship had earlier docked on February 23 at the same Thilafushi port, about 7.5 km to the west of Male. The hi-tech ship reached Maldivian waters on February 22 after spending about a month near the boundary of the Maldives’ EEZ. About six days later, the ship went back to the EEZ boundary.

In February, the Maldivian Foreign Ministry had said the Xiang Yang Hong 3 was here to “make a port call, for the rotation of its personnel and replenishment” after a diplomatic request was made by the government of China to the government of Maldives.

“The vessel would not be conducting any research while in the Maldivian waters,” the Foreign Ministry said on January 23. The Maldives’ proximity to India, barely 70 nautical miles from the island of Minicoy in Lakshadweep and 300 nautical miles from the

mainland’s western coast, and its location at the hub of commercial sea lanes running through the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) gives it significant strategic importance. Meanwhile, local media reports in February provided details about the type of vessel Xiang Yang Hong 03: The 100-metre-long vessel was added to the fleet of China’s State Oceanic Administration (SOA) in 2016. This is the only 4,500-tonne vessel currently in China. Since 2019, China has also been using the vessel to conduct ‘distant water’ and ‘deep sea’ surveys at China’s Pilot Ocean Laboratory.

The vessel can also be used for studies on salinity, microbial genetic studies, underwater mineral exploration, and underwater life and environmental studies, it said. It has data buoys that can measure ocean currents, waves, and important environmental information. These buoys will provide real-time satellite information to the Chinese government, the report then said.

Head of Vietnam parl resigns amid corruption probe

Hanoi (AP): Vietnamese state media outlet VN Express reports that the head of Vietnam’s Parliament, Vuong Dinh Hue, has resigned. He is the latest member of senior government to leave office amid an ongoing anti-corruption campaign. Hue’s resignation takes place four days after his assistant Pham Thai Ha was arrested on charges of abusing his position and power for personal gain, according to state media.

Vietnam’s Communist Party accepted what called Hue’s voluntary resignation, according to VN Express, while noting that investigators found that Hue had “violated Party regulations, and his violations have affected the reputation of the Party, the State and himself.” Hue, 67, had been the chairman of Vietnam’s national assembly for over three years. The chairman of the national assembly is the fourth most important politician in Vietnam, along with the President, the Prime Minister and the head of the Communist Party.

South Korean police raid office of incoming doctors’ group head

AP ■ SEOUL

South Korean police said on Friday they searched the office of the hard-line incoming leader of an association of doctors and confiscated his mobile phone as he faces accusations that he incited the protracted walkouts by thousands of medical interns and residents. The development could further dim prospects for an early end to the strikes.

The office of Lim Hyun-taek, who is to be inaugurated as head of the Korean Medical Association next week, called the raid politically motivated and questioned whether the government is sincere about its offer for dialogue to end the strikes.

Police said they sent officers to Lim’s office in Seoul and residence in the southern city of Asan on Friday to confiscate his mobile phone and other unspecified materials. Lim is

one of five former or incumbent Korean Medical Association officials who have been under police investigation for allegedly inciting and abetting the strikes. In mid-April, two of them had their medical licenses suspended by health authorities. Lim’s office said in a statement that the police raid was “a clear retaliation and political suppression” of Lim. It said the government should have not orchestrated the raid if it truly wants talks.

More than 10,000 interns and residents at major university hospitals walked off the job in February in protest at the government’s plan to increase the country’s medical school enrollment quota by 2,000 starting next year, from the current cap of 3,058. Their walkouts have caused numerous cancellations and delays of surgeries and other medical treatment at their hospitals.

In the face of growing pub-

lic calls to find a compromise to end the strikes, the government said last week it could adjust its plan by allowing universities to determine whether to lower planned admissions by up to 50 per cent next year.

This means the number of newly recruited medical students next year could be as low as 1,000. But Lim said doctors want the government to completely scrap the enrollment hike plan, saying they won’t allow any increase in the number of students. He also urged the government to fire top officials involved in the formulation of the admissions plan.

Officials say the plan is aimed at adding more doctors because South Korea has one of the world’s fastest aging populations and its doctor-to-population ratio is one of the lowest in the developed world.

Doctors say schools aren’t ready to handle an abrupt increase in students and that it

would ultimately undermine the country’s medical services. They say the government plan would also result in doctors in greater competition performing unnecessary treatments. But critics say those aren’t the real reasons behind their protests and that they simply worry the supply of more doctors would lead to lower income for them in the future. South Korea’s current medical student enrollment cap has been unchanged since 2006, with doctors thwarting previous government attempts with vehement protests. Deepening worries about the medical impasse, senior doctors at the striking junior doctors worked have threatened to resign in support of the strikes. Their associations recently decided to let senior doctors take a day off every week, citing the overwork caused by the departures of their junior partners.

Ukraine pulls Abrams tanks from front lines

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Ukraine has sidelined US-provided Abrams M1A1 battle tanks for now in its fight against Russia, in part because Russian drone warfare has made it too difficult for them to operate without detection or coming under attack, two US military officials told The Associated Press.

The US agreed to send 31 Abrams to Ukraine in January 2023 after an aggressive month-long campaign by Kyiv arguing that the tanks, which cost about USD 10 million apiece, were vital to its ability to breach Russian lines.

But the battlefield has changed substantially since then, notably by the ubiquitous use of Russian surveillance drones and hunter-killer drones. Those weapons have made it more difficult for Ukraine to protect the tanks when they are quickly detected and hunted by Russian drones or rounds.

Five of the 31 tanks have already been lost to Russian attacks. The proliferation of drones on the Ukrainian battle-

field means “there is not open ground that you can just drive across without fear of detection”, a senior defence official told reporters on Thursday. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity to provide an update on US weapons support for Ukraine before Friday’s Ukraine Defence Contact Group meeting.

For now, the tanks have been moved from the front lines, and the US will work with the Ukrainians to reset tactics, said Joint Chiefs of Staff Vice Chairman Admiral Christopher Grady and a third defence official who confirmed the move on the condition of anonymity.

“When you think about the way the fight has evolved, massed armour in an environment where unmanned aerial systems are ubiquitous can be at risk,” Grady told the AP in an interview this week, adding that tanks are still important. “Now, there is a way to do it,” he said. “We will work with our Ukrainian partners, and other partners on the ground, to help them think through how

they might use that, in that kind of changed environment now, where everything is seen immediately.”

News of the sidelined tanks comes as the US marks the two-year anniversary of the Ukraine Defence Contact Group, a coalition of about 50 countries that meets monthly to assess Ukraine’s battlefield needs and identify where to find needed ammunition, weapons or maintenance to keep Ukraine’s troops equipped. Recent aid packages, including the USD 1 billion military assistance package signed by US President Joe Biden on Wednesday, also reflect a wider reset for Ukrainian forces in the evolving fight. The US is expected to announce on Friday that it also will provide about USD 6 billion in long-term military aid to Ukraine, officials said, adding that it will include much sought after munitions for Patriot air defence systems. The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss details not yet made public. The USD 1 billion package

emphasised counter-drone capabilities, including 50-calibre rounds specifically modified to counter drone systems, additional air defences and ammunition, and a host of alternative, and cheaper, vehicles, including Humvees, Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicles and Mine Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicles. The US also confirmed for the first time that it is providing long-range ballistic missiles known as ATACMs, which allow Ukraine to strike deep into Russian-occupied areas without having to advance and be further exposed to either drone detection or fortified Russian defences.

While drones are a significant threat, the Ukrainians also have not adopted tactics that could have made the tanks more effective, one of the US defence officials said. After announcing it would provide Ukraine the Abrams tanks in January 2023, the US began training Ukrainians at the Grafenwoehr Army base in Germany that spring on how to maintain and operate them.

They also taught the Ukrainians how to use them in combined arms warfare — where the tanks operate as part of a system of advancing armoured forces, coordinating movements with overhead offensive fires, infantry troops and air assets. As the spring progressed and Ukraine’s highly-anticipated counteroffensive stalled, shifting from tank training in Germany to getting Abrams on the battlefield was seen as an imperative to breach fortified Russian lines. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced on his Telegram channel in September that the Abrams had arrived in Ukraine. Since then, however, Ukraine has only employed them in a limited fashion and has not made combined arms warfare part of its operations, the defence official said. During its recent withdrawal from Avdiivka, a city in eastern Ukraine that was the focus of intense fighting for months, several tanks were lost to Russian attacks, the official said.

Ukraine’s farm minister is latest corruption suspect

AP ■ KYIV

A Ukrainian court on Friday ordered the detention of the country’s farm minister in the latest high-profile corruption investigation, while Kyiv security officials assessed how they can recover lost battlefield momentum in the war against Russia.

Ukraine’s High Anti-Corruption Court ruled that Agriculture Minister Oleksandr Solskiy should be held in custody for 60 days, but he was released after paying bail of 75 million Hryvnias (USD 1.77 million), a statement said. Ukraine’s National Anti-Corruption Bureau suspects Solskiy headed an organized crime group that between 2017 and 2021 unlawfully obtained land worth 291 million Hryvnias (USD 6.85 million) and attempted to obtain other land worth 190 million Hryvnias (USD 4.47 million). Ukraine is trying to root out

corruption that has long dogged the country. A dragnet over the past two years has seen Ukraine’s defense minister, top prosecutor, intelligence chief and other senior officials lose their jobs. That has caused embarrassment and unease as Ukraine receives tens of billions of dollars in foreign aid to help fight Russia’s army, and the European Union and NATO have demanded widespread anti-graft measures before Kyiv can realize its ambition of joining the blocs.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was due to hold online talks Friday with the Ukraine Defence Contact Group, which has been the key international organization coordinating the delivery of weapons and other aid to Ukraine. Zelenskyy said late Thursday that the meeting would discuss how to turn around Ukraine’s fortunes on the battlefield. The Kremlin’s forces have gained an edge

over Kyiv’s army in recent months as Ukraine grappled with a shortage of ammunition and troops. Russia, despite sustaining high losses, has been taking control of small settlements as part of its effort to drive deeper into eastern Ukraine after capturing the city of Avdiivka in February, the defense ministry said Friday. It’s been slow going for the Kremlin’s troops in eastern Ukraine and is likely to stay that way, according to the Institute for the Study of War. However, the key hilltop town of Chasiv Yar is vulnerable to the Russian onslaught, which is using glide bombs — powerful Soviet-era weapons that were originally unguided but have been retrofitted with a navigational targeting system — that obliterate targets. “Russian forces do pose a credible threat of seizing Chasiv Yar, although they may not be able to do so rapidly,” the Washington-based think tank said late Thursday.

Indian-origin man shot in US as police attempt to arrest him

New York (PTI): A 42-year-old Indian-origin man was shot and killed by police in San Antonio after he struck two officers with his vehicle as they were trying to apprehend him in connection with an aggravated assault case. Sachin Sahoo was pronounced deceased at the scene after police officer Tyler Turner shot at him on April 21. Sahoo originally hailed from Uttar Pradesh. Sources said he could have been a naturalised US citizen. According to a preliminary investigation, just before 6:30 pm on April 21, officers were dispatched to a home in Cheviot Heights in San Antonio for a report about Aggravated Assault with a Deadly Weapon, the San Antonio Police Department

said in a statement to PTI. Upon arrival, officers found a 51-year-old female who had been intentionally struck by a vehicle. The suspect, Sahoo, had fled the location. The victim was transported to a local hospital in critical condition. San Antonio Police Detectives issued a felony arrest warrant for Sahoo in that incident. Several hours later, neighbours called the police to inform them that Sahoo had returned to the original location. Officers arrived and attempted to contact him when he struck two officers with his vehicle. One officer fired his weapon, striking Sahoo, who was “pronounced deceased on scene.” One officer was transported to a local hospital for treatment of his injuries and the other offi-

cer was treated for his injuries on scene. Nobody else was injured during the incident. This investigation remains ongoing, police said. Police Chief Bill McManus said that Sahoo had run over the woman, who was his roommate, with his vehicle. The woman was undergoing several surgeries and was in critical condition. The police had issued an arrest warrant for Sahoo and a couple of officers had gone to his known location on April 21 to see if they could find him and arrest him. “They did find him and he jumped in his car. He pulled out of his driveway” where the police officers blocked him with their vehicles but he was able to squeeze through them.

Two men charged in UK with spying for China granted bail

London (AP): A former researcher working in the UK Parliament and another man charged with spying for China were granted bail Friday after an initial court appearance in London. Christopher Cash, 29, and Christopher Berry, 32, were charged with violating the Official Secrets Act by providing information or documents that could be “useful to an enemy” — China — and “prejudicial to the safety or interests” of the UK between late 2021 and February 2023. Cash, a parliamentary researcher who worked with senior lawmakers from the governing Conservatives, was ordered not to enter Parliament

or contact members of the House of Commons. Cash’s colleagues included Alicia Kearns, who now heads the powerful Foreign Affairs Committee, and her predecessor in that role, Tom Tugendhat, who is now security minister. Berry is reportedly an academic based in Oxfordshire. The two didn’t enter pleas during a short hearing in Westminster Magistrates’ Court. The defendants were also ordered not to travel outside the UK or contact each other. They were ordered to appear May 10 at the Central Criminal Court known as the Old Bailey for a preliminary hearing.

Philippine police kill Abu Sayyaf militant implicated in beheadings

Manila (AP): Philippine forces killed an Abu Sayyaf militant, who had been implicated in past beheadings, including of 10 Filipino marines and two kidnapped Vietnamese, in a clash in the south, police officials said on Friday. Philippine police, backed by military intelligence agents, killed Nawapi Abdulsaid in a brief gunbattle Wednesday night in the remote coastal town of Hadji Mohammad Ajul on Basilan island after weeks of surveillance, security officials said. Abu Sayyaf is a small but violent armed Muslim group, which has been blacklisted by the United States and the Philippines as a terrorist organisation for ransom kidnappings, beheadings, bombings and other bloody

attacks. It has been considerably weakened by battle setbacks, surrenders and fighting, but remains a security threat particularly in the southern Philippines, home to minority Muslims in the predominantly Roman Catholic nation. Abdulsaid, who used the nom de guerre Khatan, was one of several Abu Sayyaf militants who aligned themselves with the Islamic State group. A confidential police report said that Abdulsaid had been implicated in at least 15 beheadings in Basilan, including of 10 Philippine marines in Al-Barka town in 2007 and two of six kidnapped Vietnamese sailors near Sumisip town in 2016. The Vietnamese were seized from a passing cargo ship. He

was also involved in attacks against government forces in 2022 and a bombing in November that killed two pro-government militiamen and wounded two others in Basilan, the report said. Abdulsaid was placed under surveillance in February, but police forces couldn’t immediately move to make an arrest because of the “hostile nature” of the area where he was eventually gunned down, according to the report. On Monday, Philippine troops killed the leader of another Muslim rebel group and 11 of his men blamed for past bombings and extortion in a separate clash in a marshy hinterland in Datu Saudi Ampatuan town in southern Maguindanao del Sur province, the military said.

Deloitte projects India's FY25 GDP growth at 6.6 per cent

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Deloitte India on Friday said it estimates India's GDP growth at 6.6 per cent in the current fiscal helped by consumption expenditure, exports rebound and capital flows. In its India's economic outlook report, Deloitte said the rapid growth of the middle-income class has led to rising purchasing power and even created demand for premium luxury products and services. With the expectation that the number of middle-to-high-income segments will be one in two households by 2030/31, up from one in four currently, we believe this trend will likely become further amplified, driving overall private consumer expenditure growth, it said.

Deloitte has revised India's economic growth prediction for last fiscal to a range of 7.6 to 7.8 per cent. In January, the firm had projected growth for 2023-24 fiscal in the range of 6.9-7.2 per cent. The country's GDP growth is estimated to reach around 6.6 per cent in FY 2024-25 and 6.75 per cent in the year after, as markets learn to factor in geopolitical uncertainties in their investment and consumption decisions, Deloitte said in its quarterly update to its economic outlook.



"The global economy is expected to witness a synchronous rebound in 2025 as major election uncertainties get sorted out and the central banks of the West may announce a couple of rate cuts later in 2024. India will likely see improved capital flows and a rebound in exports," said Deloitte India Economist Rumki Majumdar. Strong growth numbers over the past two years have helped the economy to catch up with the pre-COVID trends. Investment, backed

by strong government spending on infrastructure, has helped India maintain a steady recovery momentum, she added. That said, there are concerns about inflation and geopolitical uncertainties feeding into higher food and fuel prices. At the same time, the prediction of above normal monsoon will likely provide some respite by positively impacting agriculture output and easing pressure on food prices.

Inflation is expected to remain above the Reserve Bank of India's target level of 4 per cent over the forecast period due to strong economic activity, Majumdar said. Deloitte's FY25 GDP growth estimate is similar to the projections made by the World Bank. It is, however, lower than the projections by the RBI and other agencies. The RBI has projected the Indian economy growth at 7 per cent in the current fiscal. While the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Fitch Ratings have estimated growth at 7 per cent, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), S&P Global Ratings and Morgan Stanley projected a 6.8 per cent growth rate for FY25. Deloitte said even as growth in consumer spending post-pandemic has been fluctuating, there is a visible shift in consumption patterns, with demand for luxury and high-end products and services growing faster than demand for basic goods. "India is seeing a prominent shift in consumer behaviour toward aspirational spending, which is inevitable in any nation that experiences growing economic prosperity. India's spending share in the luxury and premium goods and services category (such as spending on transport, communication,

recreation, etc.) has traditionally been lower than nations such as the United States, China, Japan, and Germany. So, there is, therefore, potential for this ratio to increase further as consumer income grows," Majumdar said. The report further said that to sustainably boost household spending amidst wealth concentration, declining savings, and rising debt levels, several corrective measures can be implemented. Increasing employment opportunities in rural and semi-urban areas could elevate savings, particularly as employment transitions from agriculture, which represents 44 per cent of employment but only about 18 per cent of GDP, to sectors like manufacturing, services, and construction. Government investments in infrastructure and initiatives such as Future Skills Prime 2021 for skill enhancement and Ayushman Bharat for health improvements are expected to enhance employability and productivity. Despite the necessity for credit growth to stimulate economic activity, the RBI will have to monitor rising household debt and encourage banks to leverage data analytics for smarter lending decisions, Deloitte said.

RBI action on Kotak Mahindra Bank may restrain credit growth: S&P



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

S&P Global Ratings on Friday said RBI's regulatory action on Kotak Mahindra Bank could restrain the lender's credit growth and profitability. The RBI on Wednesday barred Kotak Mahindra Bank from issuing fresh credit cards and onboarding new customers online. Credit cards are a higher-yielding target growth segment for Kotak Mahindra Bank. This portfolio grew at 52 per cent year-on-year as of December 31, 2023, compared with total loan growth of 19 per cent, the US-based rating agency said. "Action by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) this week could push the bank to rely more on physical branch network expansion to supplement growth thus entailing higher operating costs," S&P said, adding that it could be a setback for credit growth and profitability. This action will not, however, materially affect our ratings on Kotak Mahindra Bank (BBB-/Stable/A-3). This is because credit cards make up a small 4 per cent of total loans as of the end of December 2023. The bank will still be able to cross-sell its other products to existing customers. "We anticipate Kotak Mahindra Bank could potentially take a year to fully address the RBI's key concerns for the bank which encompasses systems stability, patch management, and disaster recovery," S&P said. RBI's actions on Kotak Mahindra Bank follow similar actions in recent years on

other financial institutions in India. S&P said in a similar case in 2020, when HDFC Bank was temporarily barred from sourcing new credit card customers, it took the bank more than a year to meet the RBI's requirements and have restrictions lifted. In the past 18 months, Kotak Mahindra Bank has made significant progress on technological enhancements, including the hiring of senior level executives in the chief technology officer and chief experience officer positions, S&P said. Nevertheless, it will take time for the bank to implement changes and conduct a comprehensive external audit to address the RBI's concerns. RBI's actions on Kotak Mahindra Bank follow several outages of the bank's core banking systems as well as online and digital banking channels, and deficiencies identified through the RBI's IT examinations in 2022 and 2023. This shows the regulator's commitment to strengthening the financial sector and its diminishing tolerance for operational deficiencies. Systems stability and robust disaster recovery planning have become increasingly important with the rapid scale up in digital transactions in India. "Regulators across many jurisdictions are adopting a similar playbook. The Monetary Authority of Singapore recently imposed a six-month ban on DBS Bank Ltd from making new acquisitions and closing branches or ATMs following several service disruption.

Motilal Oswal reports multi fold jump in profit

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd on Friday reported an over four-fold jump in profit after tax to Rs 724.6 crore for the March 2024 quarter, driven by strong growth in the capital market as well as wealth & asset management businesses. In comparison, the company had a profit after tax (PAT) of Rs 167 crore in the year-ago period, Motilal Oswal Financial Services said in a regulatory filing. The company's total income rose to Rs 2,158.15 crore in the January-March quarter of the financial year (FY) 2023-24 from Rs 1,033.54 crore in the same quarter preceding fiscal. Reacting to the positive development, shares of the company rose as much as 8.66

per cent to a 52-week high of Rs 2,677 apiece on the BSE. The stock finally settled at Rs 2,600.65, up 5.67 per cent from the previous close. The company's asset and wealth management businesses reported strong growth with a PAT at Rs 210 crore in Q4FY24, a jump of 79 per cent year-on-year basis. Also, the capital market business grew 66 per cent to Rs 251 crore in the three months ended March 2024. Further, the company's board approved bonus shares in a ratio of 3:1, which means 3 bonus shares for 1 fully paid-up equity share. The record date for the bonus issue of shares is yet to be determined. For the full financial year 2023-24, the company posted a PAT of Rs 2,445.62 crore and a total income of Rs 7,130.52 crore.

Rupee falls 7 paise to settle at 83.35 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee declined 7 paise to close at 83.35 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday as a strengthening American currency overseas and a selloff in domestic equities weighed on the local unit. Besides, rising crude prices in the international market and risk-averse sentiment dragged the local unit down, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened strong at 83.30 and moved in the range of 83.30-83.36 during the session. The local currency finally settled at 83.35 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a fall of 7 paise from its previous close. In the previous session, the rupee closed at 83.28 against the US dollar.



"Indian Rupee declined slightly on weak domestic markets and a surge in crude oil prices. We expect the rupee to trade slightly weak on renewed geopolitical tensions in the Middle East

and weakness in domestic equities. "Rising crude oil prices and FII outflows may further put pressure on the rupee. However, any intervention by the RBI may support the

rupee at lower levels. We expect USDINR to trade in the range of 83.10-83.60," Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.38 per cent to USD 89.35 per barrel. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, increased 0.05 per cent to 105.49. On the domestic equity market front, Sensex slumped 609.28 points, or 0.82 per cent, to settle at 73,730.16, and Nifty declined 150.40 points, or 0.67 per cent, to close at 22,419.95. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Thursday as they offloaded shares worth Rs 2,823.33 crore, according to exchange data.

Markets snap five days rally; Sensex tumbles over 600 points

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Market benchmarks Sensex and Nifty wilted under selling pressure on Friday after a five-day rally as investors pared exposure to banking, financial and consumer durable stocks amid mixed trends in global markets. Rising global crude prices, a depreciating rupee and persistent foreign fund outflows further weighed on sentiment, traders said. Profit-taking also came into

play as the 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 609.28 points or 0.82 per cent to settle at 73,730.16. During the day, it lost 722.79 points or 0.97 per cent to 73,616.65. The NSE Nifty declined 150.40 points or 0.67 per cent to 22,419.95. Bajaj Finance was the biggest drag on the Sensex chart, skidding nearly 8 per cent after the company's March quarter earnings failed to cheer investors. Bajaj Finserv also declined over 3 per cent. IndusInd Bank, Nestle, Kotak Mahindra Bank and



Mahindra & Mahindra were among the other laggards. Meanwhile, Tech Mahindra jumped over 7 per cent after the IT services company's CEO outlined an ambitious three-year roadmap to accelerate revenue growth and lift margins. Wipro, ITC, UltraTech Cement, Titan and Axis Bank were among the gainers. "The fall was on expected lines as both the benchmark indices had rallied for five straight sessions, and profit-taking has been due for some time.

"Correction is also attributed to global factors after the Japanese Yen fell to a new 34-year low and disappointing US data pushed its benchmark yields to over 4.7 per cent, thus worsening hopes of an interest rate cut in the medium term," said Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory. European markets were trading in the green. Wall Street ended lower on

Thursday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.31 per cent to USD 89.29 a barrel. The rupee declined 7 paise to close at 83.35 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 2,823.33 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data. The BSE benchmark climbed 486.50 points or 0.66 per cent to settle at 74,339.44 on Thursday. The NSE Nifty advanced 167.95 points or 0.75 per cent to 22,570.35.

Five star petal ceiling fan launched

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Surya Roshni's Consumer Durable Division takes pride in announcing the launch of another 5 Star Petal Ceiling Fan. With a commitment to delivering superior cooling solutions for homes and offices nationwide, Surya upholds its legacy of quality, excellence, and environmental responsibility. The 5 Star Petal Fan sets a new benchmark in energy efficiency, performance, and design, catering to the modern consumer's preference for eco-friendly and visually appealing products. This fan while employing the traditional Induction motor technology is able to achieve 5 star labelling, which offers not only higher energy savings by consuming only 34W but also the benefits of longer product life and ease of maintenance. The aerodynamic design, complemented by wider blades for enhanced air thrust, ensures a comfortable and breezy environment, elevating the user experience.

Seminar on American Pecans organised



With a view to educate and create awareness about the technical aspects of American Pecans, New Mexican Department of Agriculture (NMDA) conducted an engaging seminar on the benefits of American Pecans today in New Delhi. This move is a concerted effort from NMDA to popularise American Pecans in the light of the growing health-consciousness amongst Indians. Eminent speakers who were present at the Seminar included Dr Richard Heerema from New Mexico State University and Serena Schaffner, Managing Director-Global Marketing and Regulatory Affairs & American Pecan Council

Promotion Board (APPB). The session was well attended by leading chefs, and well-known nutritionist Ritika Samaddar who gave useful health tips on Pecans and its health benefits. Founded in 2016, the American Pecan Council is a group of passionate growers and shellers whose life work is dedicated to growing, harvesting and processing America's only major tree nut — American Pecans. It is solely dedicated to showcase the diverse and versatile benefits, uses and remarkable history of America's native tree nut. The purpose of APPB is to strengthen the position of American Pecans in the market place, maintain and expand markets for pecans and develop new uses for pecans.

At least USD 12 trillion needed for tripling renewable energy capacity by 2030: COP28

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

At least USD 12 trillion is required to create new infrastructure over the next six years for tripling global renewable energy capacity by 2030, COP28 President Sultan Al Jaber said on Friday. Addressing the annual Petersburg Climate Dialogue, Al Jaber said the energy transition will not happen without significant investment and a level-up in climate finance. He said the four key priorities to level up climate finance are infrastructure, technology, people and the Global South. "On infrastructure, we need to invest at least USD 6 trillion over the next six years to meet our 2030 target of 11TW of renewable energy capacity. And we need to spend a similar amount to upgrade outdated or non-existent grids," the COP28 president said. World leaders reached a historic agreement at COP28 in Dubai last year to triple global renewable energy capacity by 2030. According to the



International Energy Agency, tripling global renewable energy capacity and doubling energy efficiency is crucial to limiting the average temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius, a political target set in 2015 to prevent worsening of climate impacts. At the United Nations climate conference (COP29) in Baku, Azerbaijan, New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) or a new climate finance goal will be the key issue. NCQG is the new amount developed countries must mobilise every year from 2025 onwards to

support climate action in developing countries. Rich countries are expected to raise more than the USD 100 billion they promised to provide every year from 2020 but repeatedly failed. Al Jaber said artificial intelligence can be a game changer by multiplying efficiencies and helping solve intermittency and storage. "Every country must invest in its people, developing a new set of skills for a new green economy. And we must invest in the Global South. Right now, over 120 developing

countries attract less than 15 per cent of global clean tech investment. Public, private, and development finance must work in tandem in creative catalytic models that turn billions into trillions," he said. Al Jaber said the COP troika, a collaboration between the COP hosts of 2023, 2024, and 2025, is pushing for more ambitious nationally determined contributions (NDCs or national climate plans) ahead of the UN climate conference in Brazil. "We are encouraging all governments to set out economy-wide emission reduction plans, with explicit renewable energy targets. And we are advocating for smart policies that push industries to step up... And incentivise the private sector to invest," he said. "My message to governments is simple, think bigger... Act bolder. Send a clear message early with your next NDC that puts green infrastructure at the centre of your development plans. Be transparent about the costs and trade-offs involved.

Olectra Greentech bags order for 8,232 electric vehicles during FY 23-24

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Leading electric vehicles manufacturer Olectra Greentech Limited (OGL), announced its Q4 and full year consolidated financial results ending March 31, 2024. The Board of Directors, in its meeting held today, officially approved these remarkable achievements. Company has received total orders of 8,232 electric vehicles during FY 23-24 including 3,000 buses repeated order from BEST - Mumbai in Q4 FY 23-24. In Q4 FY23-24, the company has surpassed an order book milestone of 10,000 electric buses in the country. The company has delivered 1,746 electric vehicles till date including deliveries of 131 electric vehicles in Q4 FY23-24. Strong demand continues with the total number of bus orders on hand at 10,969 units. The revenue for FY23-24 was ₹1154.14 crore, up by 5.8 per cent, it said in a statement.

FEAST ON HOT SUMMER MENUS

Embark on a culinary journey through Delhi NCR's finest dining experiences, discovering the hottest summer menus in the vibrant city's gastronomic scene.

SEASONAL AND LOCAL AT OLLY, OLIVE'S ALL-DAY CAFE & BAR, GURGAON

Like a second home Ollly is a peaceful escape from the city's hustle and bustle. With a cafe menu featuring classics, fresh coffee, unique beverages, and homemade cold-pressed juices, on offer is a delightful everyday experience. The summer menu is influenced by seasonal and local produce, aimed at ensuring a light and refreshing dining experience during the warmer months. Abundant with fresh salads, bowl food, and light grills, the menu promises to be both satisfying and light.



stems from a desire to cater to the most discerning palates, offering a diverse selection that caters to all tastes. Ollly's offerings encompass world cuisine crafted from the finest quality ingredients. Their charming terrace provides a cool retreat, complete with live music on Monday, Tuesday, and Friday evenings.

Must Try: Baked Crispy Sweet Potato Skins, Prawn, Mango & Avocado Salad, The Forbidden Rice Salad, Asian Style Buddha Bowl & Almond Crusted Baked Sole Fish

A TANTALIZING JOURNEY AT THE CHINA KITCHEN, THE HYATT REGENCY NEW DELHI

The China Kitchen offers a unique Chinese dining experience that sets it apart. Diners get to enjoy their meals right in the kitchen, giving a fresh and authentic touch to their dining experience. With a strong emphasis on using fresh, quality ingredients and expert culinary methods, The China Kitchen serves up an immersive culinary journey through Chinese cuisine. Their famous Peking duck and specially curated menu by Chef Zhang are highlights not to

be missed. Experience a tantalizing voyage through Chinese culinary delights with the new summer lunch menu. Infusing traditional flavours with a touch of innovation, each dish reflects the rich tapestry of Chinese cuisine. Meticulously chosen ingredients and expert cooking methods elevate classics like the Beijing-style chilled cucumber salad and the fragrant Sichuan fried rice. Delve into specialties such as the Southern-style lotus root fritter and the luxurious Gong bao diced chicken, celebrating diversity and authenticity. Embark on a culinary escapade that captures the essence of summer in every flavourful bite.

Must Try: Southern Style Lotus Root Fritter, Sizzling Sliced Lamb, Gong Bao Diced Chicken Clay Pot, Braised Tofu is a Hearty vegetarian option with tofu, vegetables, and aromatic sauces. And the Wok-Fried String Beans, stir-fried with chili and garlic chip, make for a savoury and spicy side dish.

SUMMER IN MY HEART AT VIET-NOM, CYBER HUB, WOLDMARK & DLF SAKET

As the sun casts its golden rays to signal a new season, Viet:nom unveils a tantalizing array of seasonal delights, marrying traditional Vietnamese flavours



with a modern flair. With a steadfast commitment to authenticity and culinary mastery, it presents a menu that invites guests on a sensory journey through the symphony of tastes and textures embodied in their signature Banh Mi sandwiches. Combining tender proteins, crisp vegetables, and house-made spreads, these sandwiches redefine street food with sophistication. Complimenting this epicurean adventure are the meticulously crafted cocktails and mocktails, skillfully prepared with premium spirits, fresh herbs, and homemade cordials. From refreshing fruit-infused mocktails to innovative cocktail creations inspired by Vietnamese flavours, each sip offers a refined experience of taste and creativity. The menu is a celebration of the season's abundance and Vietnamese culinary art.

Must Try: From crisp salads brimming with seasonal produce to delicate summer rolls bursting with succulent fillings and fragrant herbs, each dish is a harmonious blend of tradition and innovation.

SALADS AND SAVOURY AT L'OPERA, MULTIPLE OUTLETS

At this revered French Boulangerie, Pâtisserie, and Salon de Thé, the seasonal selection

features an array of refreshing salads tailored for the summer, light and delectable meals catering to diverse palates, and a fresh assortment of summer coolers perfect for savouring on hot summer days and evenings. The new menu is artfully complemented by Lopera's renowned seasonal mango collection, presented in captivating new presentations. Adding to the culinary experience, the savoury offerings introduce enticing additions such as Alfredo Pasta in Fettuccine - a creamy fettuccine pasta bathed in a luscious Alfredo sauce and adorned with Parmesan cheese and Panzanella Salad - a lively and tangy ensemble of seasonal vegetables, fresh basil, Parmesan cheese, and crispy bread croutons, among other delightful surprises.

Must Try: Alfredo Pasta in Fettuccine, Herbed Risotto with Pesto Prawns is a harmony of flavours and textures, Panzanella Salad, a vibrant tangy salad with seasonal vegetables, fresh basil, Parmesan cheese and crunchy bread croutons.

VIBRANT ESSENCE OF SADDI DILLI AT CAFE DELHI HEIGHTS, MULTIPLE OUTLETS

Reflecting the Capital's generous spirit through its generous servings of exquisitely prepared dishes. Constantly evolving with a new outlet each month and revamped aesthetics across many locations, Café Delhi Heights has unveiled an enticing New Menu designed to tantalize the taste buds of discerning food enthusiasts.

Founder Mr. Vikrant Batra proudly champions the diverse and imaginative culinary offerings at CDH that aim to delight all five senses. Chef Ashish Singh has consistently impressed food aficionados since the brand's inception, and the latest menu is poised to continue this tradition of culinary



excellence. Featuring delectable specialties such as the healthy Italian Chicken Salad and the Miso Avocado & Tofu Bowl, the menu also showcases a range of gourmet options including savoury wraps, flavourful Mexican dishes, and tantalizing meal bowls crafted for the pleasure of the palate.

Must Try: Health-conscious patrons can savour the Protein Bowl or Poke Bowl, while dessert lovers can indulge in the luscious Red Velvet Lava and Fruit Truffle creations, adding a sweet conclusion to the culinary journey at Café Delhi Heights.

Akanksha Dean is an independent food & travel writer, a chef and a catalyst and is the first Indian to have trained at Osteria Francescana, in Modena, Italy, rated as the world's best restaurant in the World's 50 Best Restaurants, in 2016 and 2018 and currently in the Best of The Best Category.



INTERNATIONAL STREET FOOD FETSIVAL

THE WORLD ON THE PLATE



Known for its versatility, dynamism and one of the best food ethos, the most loved café of Delhi - Café Delhi Heights is introducing the most dynamic food festival- International Street Food Festival. Scheduled from April 20th to May 10th, Café Delhi Heights is inviting patrons on an epicurean journey through the International Street Food Festival. Vikrant Batra, founder of Café Delhi Heights says, The idea of a food festival is to celebrate the diversity of food. Food festivals are those special occasions where we celebrate specially curated menus that are otherwise not part of our routine menu. We at CDH take our festivals seriously, and each menu is a serious attempt to do something new and exciting for our customers. We are bringing the International Street Food Festival for the first time, and this brings street delicacies from different countries on the gourmet front. Whether you're a seasoned epicurean or a curious adventurer, Café Delhi Heights' International Street Food Festival promises an unforgettable dining experience that will transport you to distant lands and leave you yearning for more. Come, indulge your senses and savor the flavors of the world at Multiple outlets of Pan India Brand, Café Delhi Heights. Drawing inspiration from

bustling food markets and vibrant street stalls around the world, Café Delhi Heights presents a carefully curated menu that showcases the rich tapestry of global cuisine. Each dish is a masterpiece, crafted with precision and passion by the café's talented chefs, ensuring an authentic and immersive dining experience for all. From the bustling streets of Bangkok to the sun-kissed shores of Greece, guests can embark on a culinary voyage like no other, sampling iconic street foods from Thailand, Greece, Japan, Latin America, Canada, Lebanon, Russia, and Spain-all within the cozy confines of Café Delhi Heights Dehradun. Savor the bold flavors of Thailand with the signature Pad Thai, an irresistible blend of stir-fried rice noodles, succulent shrimp or chicken, and crunchy peanuts. Transport yourself to the Mediterranean with Gyros,

tender grilled meat nestled in warm pita bread and topped with fresh vegetables and creamy tzatziki sauce. Japan's culinary artistry shines through in the comforting embrace of Ramen, a soul-warming noodle soup adorned with slices of grilled chicken breast, soft-boiled eggs, and fragrant green onions. Meanwhile, Latin America beckons with the savory indulgence of Empanadas, golden pastry parcels brimming with flavorful filling. Canada's beloved Poutine offers a hearty treat with its crispy fries, gooey cheese curds, and savory gravy. At the same time, the Middle Eastern delight of Shawarma promises a symphony of flavors with its tender grilled meat and creamy tahini sauce. From the heart of Russia come Pelmeni, delicate dumplings filled with savory delights, while Spain's Churros provide the perfect sweet finale-a crispy delight coated in cinnamon sugar and served with a decadent chocolate dipping sauce. "As we celebrate culinary diversity with our International Street Food Festival, we invite our guests to embark on a journey of flavors and discoveries," says Brand chef Aashish Singh of Café Delhi Heights.



At Café Delhi Heights
Multiple outlets
Meal for two- ₹1500
plus taxes
For reservations please contact-
8800691812
Instagram page-
@cafedelhiheights



About Chef VARUN TOTLANI

Born and brought up in Mumbai, Chef Varun Totlani moved to Hyderabad to study at the Culinary Academy of India and later graduated from the Culinary Institute of America in New York. Upon returning to Mumbai, he joined the opening team at Masque and steadily rose through the ranks, becoming Sous Chef in 2021 and Head Chef in 2022. Chef Varun is passionate about showcasing the diversity of India's produce and culinary prowess, contributing to the country's ever-evolving contemporary foodscapes. For reservations please contact +91 8586972078.



The Story Club at WESTIN

Gurgaon hosts a Pop Up by Masque Restaurant's Chef VARUN TOTLANI

Savour a 10-Course Tasting Menu: Traditional Flavours Meet Innovation

Embark on a culinary adventure at an exclusive 2-day pop-up at The Westin Gurgaon, New Delhi, featuring Chef Varun Totlani from Masque restaurant, India's Best Restaurant for the third consecutive year at Asia's 50 Best 2024. Guests can enjoy a 10-course Tasting Menu that showcases innovative twists on traditional Indian flavours, all thoughtfully paired with fine beverages. The menu promises a keen exploration of India's diversity, embodying Chef Varun's culinary style that harmonises technique and intuition. It blends the ever-evolving landscape of contemporary Indian cuisine, offering a range of tantalising dishes. Dive into a world of flavours with options like Purple Corn, Charred Baby Corn, and Corn Mousse. Veggie lovers can savour Puran Poli with Amti and Green Peas, while non-vegetarians can indulge in Mud Crab. Don't miss the must-tries: Jicama with Coconut Malai Momo and Passionfruit Thukpa. Barbecue enthusiasts can enjoy BBQ Sweet Potato or Pork paired with tangy Tamarind and crispy Rice. Tantalise your taste buds further with Jackfruit Pepperfry or Duck Pepperfry served with Malabar Paratha and Mustard, complemented by refreshing Green Mango, Aam Papad, and Apples. For the main course, vegetarians can relish Butternut Squash, and non-vegetarians can try Clams with Karandi Loncha and Goda Masala. Don't miss the enticing Mushroom Bhutwa or Lamb Bhutwa with Potato and



ABOUT MASQUE
Located in a Mumbai textile mill, Masque is an ingredient-driven restaurant founded by Aditi Dugar and Chef Varun Totlani. Since 2016, their seasonal 10-course menus have featured farm and foraged ingredients, reflecting a commitment to local produce.

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Upbeat Delhi Capitals take on struggling MI as playoff race intensifies

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Bolstered by Rishabh Pant's brilliant batting form and inspiring leadership, the resurrected Delhi Capitals will aim to continue their upward march in the IPL points table when they take on an inconsistent Mumbai Indians here on Saturday.

The Capitals have endured a rollercoaster season so far, showing flashes of brilliance while also succumbing to embarrassing defeats. But three wins in the last four matches have helped them climb to the sixth spot and a win against MI will strengthen their claim to a play off spot.

On the other hand, after a familiar poor start, MI bounced back with three wins

in their next four matches but a comprehensive nine-wicket thrashing by Rajasthan Royals put an end to their resurgence. They are tottering on the eighth place on the points table and can ill-afford to lose.

DC's biggest positive has undoubtedly been skipper Rishabh Pant's form, which appears to be improving with each game.

He has looked sharp behind the stumps and seems to be batting with freedom. He was at his belligerent best during a match-winning unbeaten knock against Gujarat Titans on Wednesday.

It would be fair to say that the southpaw is in prime position to make India's squad for the T20 World Cup despite stiff opposition from the likes of Sanju Samson, Dinesh Karthik

and Ishan Kishan. In Jack Fraser-McGurk, DC have found an able top-order batter who can exploit the powerplay but more is expected of opener Prithvi Shaw, given that his only responsibility is to bat as he is used as an Impact Substitute.

David Warner missed out for Shai Hope, who couldn't capitalise on the opportunity, and the veteran Australian might be brought back in the playing XI.

Tristan Stubbs has time and again proved he can be brutal with the bat while Axar Patel also showcased his batting prowess when he was elevated up the order in the four-run win against GT.

While the spin duo of Kuldeep Yadav and Axar have bowled



economically, DC's fast bowling unit needs to step up. Pace spearhead Anrich Nortje is having a forgettable season and has leaked runs at 13.36 which has been a major problem for Delhi.

The likes of Khaleel Ahmed, Mukesh Kumar and Ishant Sharma have been plagued by injuries leading to inconsistent runs.

They were taken to the cleaners by MI batters, who piled on 234/5 earlier in the season. And DC would be wary of a similar performance. MI's resurgence this season began with a win against DC and the five-time champions would hope for an encore in the crucial clash.

For Mumbai, Rohit Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav and Tilak Varma have got runs but all of

them have found form in patches. It's time for the likes of Tim David, Ishan Kishan and skipper Hardik Pandya to contribute a big way and take some pressure off the top trio.

While the batting department has occasionally looked good, the bowling remains a massive cause of concern.

Jasprit Bumrah has expectedly been MI's standout bowler. He has led the attack with 13 wickets at an economy rate of 6.37.

However, new addition Gerald Coetzee has been inconsistent in his maiden IPL. Though he has an economy of 10.10, the South African pacer has accounted for 12 wickets in eight games.

But barring the two seamers, Mumbai's bowling has disappointed.

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Sunrisers Hyderabad head coach Daniel Vettori feels that after mastering the art of setting totals, it's time his team brushes up on its chasing abilities as the business end of the Indian Premier League approaches.

SRH are currently third in the leaderboard with five wins from eight games. Of the five victories, four have come batting first.

"We have been successful setting totals and now we have to look at how well we are in chasing," Vettori said after the 35-run loss against Royal Challengers Bengaluru here on Thursday night.

RCB posted a challenging 206 for 7 after opting to bat and then restricted SRH to 171 for 8.

For a team that has breached the 250-run mark thrice this season, the target was easily

Now time to polish chasing abilities: SRH coach Vettori

gettable but a rare failure of the top and middle-order cost the hosts dearly.

"Obviously, disappointing one where we have come from in the last four games; we played some really good cricket and even though we lost, you could see if we had some wickets at the back end, we could have still chased it down," Vettori said at the post-match press conference.

"Those early wickets broke everything. We were confident for the scores we were being able to put up. We thought that 206 was a good score, we probably let a few runs in the field. But there was confidence in the group because of past performances. We also knew it was being set up by the openers and how good they have played, and



today they had an off day and that's cricket," he said.

The former New Zealand cricketer said there are no easy games in IPL.

"Unfortunately, we didn't get the support through the middle stages. It's a tough loss but we understand every team

in the IPL can beat every team. There are no easy games at all," Vettori said. The coach was of the view that the role of an anchor has no significance in high-scoring matches.

"I think the wicket was still pretty good. The guys who

came off said that it is a surface where you can score on. Anchor role when you are chasing 207 it is hard to come, you obviously need to be aggressive. For some to sit along and play anchor role is a little bit tricky."

RCB all-rounder Swapnil Singh, meanwhile, was relieved after his side snapped its six-match losing streak.

"Experience was good but we won the game that was more important. When you win a game, the tempo in the team changes. It feels good. Last two games we missed by small difference but still long way to go," he said.

Swapnil said they felt the target was enough on this wicket despite SRH boasting of a super-aggressive batting order.

RR look to maintain winning run

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

High-flying Rajasthan Royals will look to continue their winning momentum and consolidate their position at the top when they take on a resurgent Lucknow Super Giants, who would be gunning for revenge at home in an IPL match here on Saturday.

Former champions RR have looked in ominous form this season with seven wins from eight games, and they could be a tough nut to crack for LSG.

LSG, meanwhile, too have played some good cricket and are placed fourth with five wins from eight games.

But going into Saturday's match, RR would certainly be the favourites as they have registered a hat-trick of victories after a rare blip against Gujarat Titans.

Assam batter Rryan Parag has been the flavour of the season for RR in the batting department. The youngster reinvented himself and has been the team's highest scorer with 318 runs from eight games.

The return to form of Yashasvi Jaiswal, who was struggling a bit this season, has further strengthened RR's batting. While chasing a 180-run target in the last game against Mumbai Indians, Jaiswal smashed an unbeaten 104 off 60 balls to power his side to a comfortable nine-wicket win.

Jaiswal's return to form is something RR's opponents should really be worried about given the devastation the youngster and Jos Buttler



can wreak at the top of the order.

RR's batting typically revolves around skipper Sanju Samson, who has scored 314 runs so far, and with West Indian Shimron Hetmyer capable of hitting top gear, the 2008 IPL champions have a potent lineup.

The likes of Rovman Powell and Dhruv Jurel, though, need to contribute more.

RR also boast of a potent bowling attack comprising the experienced Trent Boult, Avesh Khan and Sandeep Sharma, whose 5 for 18 against Mumbai Indians has really fired up the side.

The team's spin department is also in the safe hands of the experienced duo of Yuzvendra Chahal and R. Ashwin, although the latter has struggled this season.

Chahal, however, is RR's best bowler with 13 wickets from eight games.

LSG, on the other hand, would be seeking revenge after having lost the first tie to RR by 20 runs this season.

Besides revenge, LSG would look to register a hat-trick of victories and scale up in the leaderboard. KL Rahul's side is also on a high after two successive wins, but the India player knows the shortcomings in the top order.

When Rahul and his opening partner Quinton de Kock are on fire, LSG's batting looks ominous. The problem arises when the opening duo has an off day.

That area was, however, covered by Marcus Stoinis in their last game against Chennai Super Kings, where the Australian scored an unbeaten century.

Despite losing Rahul and de Kock early in the chase of 210/4, Stoinis played one of the best knocks in this IPL, remaining unbeaten on 124 off 63 balls to hand LSG a six-wicket win.

Stoinis' return to form augurs well for LSG middle-order, where the likes of Devdutt Padikkal, Nicholas Pooran and Deepak Hooda need to take up more responsibility.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former India star Yuvraj Singh has identified the swashbuckling Suryakumar Yadav and pace ace Jasprit Bumrah as key to the team's prospects in the upcoming T20 World Cup owing to their ability to "change the complexion of a game" in a jiffy.

Yuvraj, who was pivotal to India's title triumph in the inaugural edition of the tournament back in 2007, said Suryakumar will need to have a good outing for the team to win the cup for the second time while also suggesting that Bumrah needs to be at his best.

"Suryakumar Yadav (is India's key player)," Yuvraj was

Yuvraj identifies Surya, Bumrah as key to India's prospects in T20 World Cup



While dissecting the options of who should be India's first-choice wicket-keeper, Yuvraj expressed satisfaction with veteran Dinesh Karthik's form in the IPL but said if he is not part of the playing XI, there is no point picking the 38-year-old in the squad as the younger Rishabh Pant and Sanju Samson have been playing extremely well.

"DK (Karthik) has been batting well, but the thing with DK is that the last time (2022) they picked him and the T20 WC was on he didn't get to play," Yuvraj noted.

"If DK is not in your XI I don't think there is any point in picking him. There is Rishabh Pant, Sanju Samson and both guys are in great form and obviously they are younger.

He added, "Because the way he plays, he can change the complexion of a game in 15 balls. And he is definitely a surety... for India to win this T20 World Cup, Surya is going to be the key."

"I think Jasprit Bumrah is also the key with the bowling and I would like to see a leg-spinner in the squad as well, like Yuzvendra Chahal as he has been bowling really well. "But being a batter, I would say Suryakumar Yadav (is the key player)."

OTHER SPORTS

Man City beats Brighton 4-0 to stay on course for another Premier League title. Phil Foden scores 2

AP ■ BRIGHTON (ENGLAND)

Manchester City chalked up another big win in its pursuit of an unprecedented fourth straight Premier League title, with Phil Foden continuing his career-best scoring season with two goals in a 4-0 thrashing of Brighton on Thursday.

Foden's first-half double came between goals by Kevin De Bruyne and Julian Alvarez as City extended its unbeaten run in the league to 18 games and trimmed the gap to leader Arsenal to one point. Liverpool is two points further back in third after its title chances were damaged by a 2-0 loss at Everton on Wednesday.

City has five games remaining - one more than Arsenal and Liverpool - and, on current form, is showing no sign of slipping up in the final stretch that still contains trips to Nottingham Forest, Fulham and Tottenham as well as home matches against Wolverhampton and West Ham.

Win all five of those games and City is the champion again. No team has ever won four successive top-flight titles in the history of English soccer.

"I trust my team," De Bruyne said. "All respect to Arsenal and Liverpool, they are amazing... But we need to do our job."

"We just need to keep going, not get ahead of ourselves, be humble and work hard."



Since a 0-0 draw with Arsenal at home on March 31, City has won four straight league games and scored 17 goals in the process.

Pep Guardiola's team kept up that hot streak without the injured Erling Haaland — the league's joint-top scorer with 20 goals — and that allowed Foden to potentially join the race for the Golden Boot.

It's 16 goals for the campaign and 24 in 48 games in all club competitions this season for Foden, who delivered another clinical display in front of England coach Gareth Southgate at Amex Stadium - seven weeks out from the start of the European Championship.

"This year I've moved inside and it's helped my game massively," Foden said of a positional tweak that sees him often play centrally rather out

on the wing. "I feel I can get a lot of goals there."

De Bruyne scored his first-ever headed goal in the Premier League when he met Kyle Walker's right-wing cross to give City the lead in the 17th and Foden made it 2-0 in the 26th when his shot from a free kick deflected in off the back of Brighton midfielder Pascal Gross.

Foden added a third in the 34th by curling home a low finish from just inside the area after Brighton lost possession attempting to play out from the back.

Alvarez, starting up front in place of Haaland, slotted in for 4-0 in the 62nd after Walker was given space to roam down the right wing and cut inside before sliding in to challenge goalkeeper Jason Steele and get the ball across to the Argentina striker.

World Cup: Deepika ousts Korean rival to make semis; archers confirm four medals



PTI ■ SHANGHAI

Continuing her spirited progress post motherhood, former world number one Deepika Kumari eliminated Korean Jeon Hunyoung to storm into the semifinal, while compound archers continued to shine to assure India a fourth medal in the World Cup Stage 1 here on Friday.

Deepika, the three-time Olympian, who has slipped to world No. 142 and qualified as 30th seed in the rankings round, overcame a 1-3 deficit to defeat Jeon 6-4 (27-28, 27-27, 29-28, 29-27, 28-28) in the women's recurve individual quarterfinal.

Having started off with an eight, Deepika lost the first set 27-28, but the 29-year-old continued to improve and levelled the second at 27-all, before taking the third (29-28) by dropping just one point.

From three-all, there was no stopping Deepika who went on to drill in four 10s including two X (closer to centre) from six arrows to make the semis.

Deepika, who embraced motherhood in December 2022 and returned to win the Asia Cup gold in Baghdad in February

this year, may have to overcome two more Korean rivals in her bid to win a first World Cup individual gold medal since the Paris Stage 3 in June 2021.

Korean teenager Nam Suhyeon, who qualified as the seventh seed, stands in Deepika's way in the semifinal.

The other half will feature top seed and 20-year-old world No. 2 Korean Lim Sihyeon taking on Li Jiaman of China.

JYOTHI, VERMA CONFIRM FOURTH MEDAL: The day began with Jyothi Surekha Vennam and Abhishek Verma advancing into the compound mixed team final.

The world No. 2 Indians dropped just five points to prevail over their Mexican opponents Andrea Becerra and Lot Maximio Mendez Ortiz 155-151.

They will face lower-ranked Estonia in the gold-medal clash on Saturday. Jyothi is also a member of the women's compound team, which had entered the final on Wednesday.

With Jyothi also securing a semi-final spot in the individual section on Thursday, the World No. 3 and Asian Games gold medallist is in the hunt for a hat-trick of top podium finishes.

Overall, Indian archers have qualified in four finals, all in the team events, and are in the hunt for two medals in compound individual events — where Jyothi and Priyansh have made the semifinals.

The four events where Indian teams have made the gold-medal round are compound men's, women's, mixed categories and men's recurve.

Having got an opening round bye, the second-seeded Indian pair of Jyothi and Verma started off by producing a flawless 160 out of 160 to knock out the lower-ranked Australian pair of Geogina Graham and Brandon Hawes by eight points.

Next up, 10th ranked Luxembourg's Mariya Shkolna and Gilles Seywert were also no match for the Indian pair, which dropped just five points from 16 arrows to storm into the semi-finals with a 155-151 win.

In the semi-final, the Indians started on a back-foot after Andrea and Mendez Ortiz capped three 10s and one nine to take the opening end 39-38.

But the Mexicans slipped in the next set of arrows as Jyothi and Verma snatched the lead by dropping one point.

The Indians then extended their lead by three points in the penultimate round after another slip-up by the Mexicans.

Jyothi and Verma sealed the issue with a perfect 40 in the fourth end.

RECURVE MIXED TEAM AIMS FOR BRONZE: The fourth-seeded Indian recurve mixed team of Ankita Bhakat and Dhiraj Bommadevara lost out to the top-seeded Korean duo of Lim and Kim Woojin in straight sets 0-6 (38-39, 35-36, 36-38) in the semifinal. They will fight for bronze against Mexico. There was heartbreak for other recurve archers as Tarundeep Rai made a quarterfinal exit, losing to Andres Temino 3-7 (29-26, 27-29, 27-27, 27-30, 27-28).



Senthilkumar, Akanksha enter quarters of PSA events

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Top-seeded Indian Velavan Senthilkumar eased past Frenchman Matteo Carrouget in straight games to move into the quarterfinals of the Batch Open squash, a USD 20,000 PSA Challenger Tour event in Paris.

National champion Senthilkumar, ranked 58th in the world, beat Carrouget 11-4 11-6 11-7 in 29 minutes in the second round on Thursday night after receiving a bye in the opening round.

He will meet fifth seed Jakub Solnický of the Czech Republic in the quarterfinals.

Elsewhere, National Games women's champion Akanksha Salunkhe advanced to the quarterfinals of the Expression St James Open, a USD 20,000 PSA Challenger Tour event in Springfield, US. Fourth seed Salunkhe, ranked 70th in the world, beat Winifer Bonilla of Guatemala 11-8 11-2 11-9 in 25 minutes in the second round following a bye in the first.

She will play fifth seed Alina Bushma of Ukraine next.