

WORLD 5
HAMAS REVIEWING ISRAELI
PROPOSAL FOR CEASEFIRE

MONEY 6
CENTRE ALLOWS 99,500 TONS OF
ONION EXPORTS

SPORT 8
INCONSISTENT GSK FACE
BRUISED SRH IN IPL

Published From
DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL
BHUBANESWAR RANCHI
RAIPUR CHANDIGARH
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD
VIJAYWADA

BHUBANESWAR, SUNDAY APRIL 28, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹4



Established 1864 sunday pioneer

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Parties sit up, take note as voting drops

Low voter turnout sparks concern as voting on 191 LS seats concludes in first two phases

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The low voting percentage in the first two phases, particularly in the Hindi heartlands, that saw completion of 191 Lok Sabha constituencies has come as a great cause of worry and concern for political parties and more to the ruling BJP at the Centre and in States of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Bihar where it is in alliance as NDA. Interestingly, both the ruling BJP as well as the Opposition, or the INDIA Bloc have claimed that a low turnout shall be advantageous to them. The dropping trends of voter turnout have also raised concern over this trend continuing in the remaining phases.

According to EC's voter turnout App, Uttar Pradesh recorded 55.01 per cent voter turnout; Bihar 58.89 per cent; Madhya Pradesh 58.59 per cent and Rajasthan 65.03 per cent. Assam saw a reduction in voter turnout ranging from eight per cent to 13.9 per cent across constituencies.

Bihar's constituencies experienced an 8.23 per cent to 12 per cent fall. Chhattisgarh saw comparatively minor drops, with the smallest being only 0.86 per cent. Similarly, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan noted significant falls in turnout. Just like the first phase of the Lok Sabha elections, voter turnout across the 88 seats in 13 States



that went to polls dropped to 64.74 per cent in comparison to the 69.4 per cent in 2019 elections (barring the five delimitated seats in Assam), indicating a broad decline in voter participation and also signalling a shift that could influence the final election results.

The questions arise whether the low voting percentage indicates a shift in voter engagement, highlighting potential changes in the political dynamics as the nation votes. What is the impact of a high or a low turnout on

electoral results? A higher voter turnout is considered an indication of change while a low voter turnout of continuity is the general belief? However, there is no clear correlation or trend as the data shows. Top officials say it is difficult to say who will be benefiting from low voting percentage as there is no data to establish which community, caste or class did not vote. Low voting percentage is expected to considerably impact all the political parties.

Some analysts say that there is no single issue strong enough to pull

voters out this time and the BJP's core voters may not be stepping out due to complacency or overconfidence on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's popularity and 'Aayega toh Modi hi' after consecration of Ram Temple in Ayodhya, resulting in lower turnouts.

Some analysts say people are not coming out to vote as they assume that Modi is coming to power for the third time. They also argue that Muslim community has come in less number because the INDIA Bloc has failed to put up strongest

front against Modi.

Factors like impending heat waves and historical turnout trends suggest India may not surpass the 67 per cent record high seen in 2019, possibly reverting to pre-2019 levels. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has already predicted above normal temperatures in the coming days which signaling a low trend of voting percentage in the rest of the phase.

For instance, the national Capital which is going to polls on May 25 is expected for a low voters' turnout due to heat and long weekend. Given that May 23 (Thursday) is a gazetted holiday for Buddha Purnima and May 26 is a Sunday, officials are concerned that many people might take May 24 (Friday) off to create an extended long weekend. This could lead to a drop in voter turnout as residents may choose to travel out of town. Data showed less than 50 per cent of voters came to polling booths to cast their votes in six constituencies at Rewa in Madhya Pradesh, Ghaziabad and Mathura in Uttar Pradesh. Rewa recorded 49.43 per cent voter turnout; Ghaziabad 49.74 per cent and Mathura 49.41 per cent. Bhopal recorded 51.40 per cent voter turnout; Banka 53.90 per cent; Aligarh (56.62 per cent); Baghat (56.16 per cent); Bulandshahr (56.42 per cent) and Khajuraho (56.48 per cent).



Image to representation

Forest on fire: Army, Air Force pressed into service in Nainital

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

As the unabated forest fires in Uttarakhand's Nainital district threatened to encroach upon the High Court Colony in the Pines area, Indian Army and Air Force were pressed into service on Saturday to aid in firefighting efforts, necessitating urgent intervention.

According to the reports, an MI-17 helicopter equipped with a Bambi Bucket collected water from Bhimtal lake and conducted water drops over the burning forests across various areas of the district, including Pines, Bhumiadhar, Jyolikot, Narayan Nagar, Bhawali, Ramgarh, and Mukteshwar.

However, the challenges faced by authorities extend beyond Nainital, as Uttarakhand reported a total of nine forest fire incidents from across the districts on Saturday alone, resulting in a significant damage to forested areas. Nationally, the situation remains

concerning, with 140 fire cases reported in a single day, with Chhattisgarh alone accounting for at least 41 incidents. This widespread outbreak underscores the urgent need for coordinated efforts to contain and manage the fires.

In response to the crisis, Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Dhami reassured the public that all possible measures are being taken to bring the fires under control. Additionally, three individuals have been arrested in Rudrapur for attempting to ignite further fires, emphasizing the seriousness with which authorities are addressing the issue.

The insights provided by the senior Indian Forest Service (IFS) official in New Delhi shed light on the predominant role of human activities in triggering forest fires. According to the official, natural causes for forest fires are relatively rare, with most incidents being man-made.



UP: Lack of enthusiasm or disconnect, wonder parties

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

In the second phase of polling, Uttar Pradesh witnessed a dismal turnout of just 54.85 per cent, the lowest in the country, sparking concerns among senior leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Samajwadi Party (SP) regarding the lack of voters' enthusiasm.

A senior BJP leader, who extensively toured various regions including Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and western UP, expressed bewilderment over the noticeable absence of interest among voters. "The enthusiasm is missing this time among the voters, and this has made our work very difficult to ascertain which side the wind is blowing," he stated.

His sentiments were mirrored by a lawmaker from the SP, who emphasised the low polling percentages as indicative of the prevalent disinterest among voters.

Despite vigorous campaign efforts, such as the BJP's slogan "Iss baar 400 paar" (This time, beyond 400) and SP's assertions of sweeping victories by the "INDIA Bloc," both parties find themselves confronted with a stark reality - a palpable absence of enthusiasm among the electorate. Even with the Election Commission distributing 1.66 crore voter slips to households five days before the elections, there seems to be a disconnect. The number of eligible voters in the second phase of LS polls stands at 1.67 crore.

Delving deeper into the issue, the BJP leader highlighted the detrimental impact of this lack of enthusiasm on party workers, noting, "there has to be a reaction to some action.

This action is missing. Even the Muslims are silent. We know they will not vote for BJP, but there is no perceptible reaction from the members of the minority community. This has resulted in a lack of interest".

The SP has taken a cautious approach regarding Muslim and minority welfare, with one of its candidates from central UP stating a deliberate avoidance of meetings in Muslim-dominated areas. "This may give a reason to BJP to react and ultimately polarize the election," the candidate explained, echoing concerns raised by BJP lawmakers regarding the silence of Muslims.

SP chief Akhilesh Yadav held a meeting today morning showed concern over missing long lines in Muslim dominated areas. Even polling percentage witnessed a decline of around five per cent in Rampur. Statistical evidence further accentuates the gravity of the situation, with UP witnessing a decline in voter turnout compared to previous elections. In the first phase, UP registered a turnout of 61 per cent down from 66 per cent in 2019. The second phase, with a polling percentage of just 54.85 per cent, marks a significant decrease compared to 62.76 per cent in 2019. Notably, Mathura reported a mere 49 per cent polling, a substantial 12 per cent decrease from the previous election's 61.08 per cent. Jal Shakti Minister Swatantra Dev Singh attributed the low turnout to people's satisfaction with the present regime, citing a similar turnout of 50 per cent in 2009 when the Congress retained power.

We are confident that BJP will sweep the elections, but we need to improve the voting percentage," he asserted.

Maharashtra: Youth migration, farmer woes cause voting to fall

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a development that has surprised many in the State political circles, eight constituencies in Vidarbha and Marathwada that went to the second phase of Lok Sabha polls on Friday recorded 59.63 per cent polling, which reflected a significant 3.3 per cent drop in the polling percentage witnessed for the same eight seats in 2019 LS. polls.

Apart from a marked 3.33 per cent drop in the polling percentage from the voter turnout of 62.97 per cent registered in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the polling percentage recorded in Maharashtra on Friday was four percent less than the polling percentage of 64 per cent recorded at the national level. In the second phase of Lok Sabha elections, Buldhana, Akola, Amravati, Wardha, Yavatmal-Washim -- all from Vidarbha, Hingoli, Nanded, and



Parbhani - in Marathwada region went to polls on Friday. By 5 pm on Friday, the eight constituencies 53.51 per cent of the total 1.5 crore voters had exercised their franchise and one expected that the polling percentage might pick up during the last one hour. But, it did not

happen. The final polling percentage in eight constituencies showed that a relatively low 59.63 per cent of voters exercised their rights in the second phase of polling. Wardha recorded a maximum 62.65 polling, followed by 60.79 per cent in Hingoli, 60.74 per cent in Amravati and 60.09 per cent in Parbhani. The four other constituencies recorded below 60 per cent polling- Nanded (59.57 per cent), Buldhana (58.45), Akola (58.09) and Yavatmal-Washim (57 per cent). Unlike in the 2014 and 2019 where there was a Modi wave at the ground level, there was no absolutely no wave in favour or against any political party in any of the eight constituencies. All efforts by political parties of different hues - including the BJP which is struggling to regain four of the eight seats it had won in 2019 Lok Sabha.

BSSR records season's highest temp of 44.6 deg

Red warning issued for next 2 days

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

As the State continued to be gripped by a severe heat wave, Bhubaneswar on Saturday recorded the season's highest temperature of 44.6 degree Celsius by 2.30 pm.

Throwing normal life out of gear, the capital city virtually turned into a blast furnace forcing people to remain indoors between 11 am and 4 pm. The same situation was witnessed in Cuttack also.

The pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists who ventured out due to important works were seen taking mea-

sures to save themselves from the scorching heat.

After Bhubaneswar, four more cities witnessed temperatures above 42 degree Celsius.

While the second hottest city was Jharsuguda with 43.6 degree, it was followed by Rourkela 42.5 degree, Chandbali 42.4 degree and Sambalpur 42.1 degree. Other cities that recorded over 41 degree were Hirkud 41.8 degree, Baleswar 41.7 degree and Keonjhar 41.5 degree. Earlier on the day, the Regional Office of the IMD here issued a Red alert for the twin cities of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack.

According to the IMD, the heat wave is likely to continue for the next four days. During these days, some districts in north Odisha and western in-

terior Odisha may cross the 45-degree Celsius mark, prompting the IMD to issue a Red warning for some districts till May 2.

The IMD issued a Red warning for the districts of Mayurbhanj, Jajpur, Keonjhar, Angul, Dhenkanal, Boudh, Sundargarh, Jharsuguda, Khordha, Cuttack, Sambalpur, Balangir and Nuapada for Sunday and Monday.

Deogarh, Subarnapur, Kalahandi, Kandhamal, Nayagarh, Rayagada, Bhadrak, Baleswar, Jagatsinghpur, Kendrapada, Malkangiri, Ganjam, Gajapati, Nabarangpur and Bargarh have been issued Orange warning and Koraput and Puri have been issued Yellow warning for the same period.

ED arrest ploy to crush AAP, Kejriwal tells SC

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has filed his response to the Enforcement Directorate's affidavit in the Supreme Court, saying his arrest is a classic case of how the ruling party-led Central Government has misused the ED and the PMLA to crush its biggest political opponent -- the Aam Aadmi Party and its leaders.



Kejriwal said the mode, manner and timing of his arrest just before the Lok Sabha elections when the Model Code of Conduct had come into play, speaks volumes about the "arbitrariness" of the agency. In a rejoinder to the Enforcement Directorate's reply affidavit filed on his petition challenging his arrest in the case, Kejriwal has alleged that ED "illegally picked up" a sitting Chief Minister five days after the general elections were notified and the Model Code of Conduct was put in place. "During an election cycle when political activity is at its highest, the petitioner's illegal arrest has caused grave prejudice to the petitioner's political party, and will provide the ruling party at the Centre an unjust upper hand in the on-going polls," Kejriwal has said.

Lawyer Nikam replaces Mahajan on Mumbai seat



RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Saturday released its 15th list of candidates for the Lok Sabha Elections and fielded former special public prosecutor Ujjwal Deora as Nikam from Ujjwal Mumbai North Central seat, dropping the sitting MP Poonam Mahajan. Nikam, in his long and illustrious legal career, was associated with many cases including 1993 Mumbai bomb blasts, the Gulshan Kumar murder case, Pramod Mahajan murder case and the 2008 Mumbai attack. He was also the special public prosecutor in the 2013 Mumbai gang rape case. Ujjwal

Nikam was awarded the Padma Shri in 2016. Mahajan, the daughter of late BJP leader Pramod Mahajan, was elected from the constituency in 2014 and 2019. She is also a former president of the BJP's youth wing. Party leaders have claimed that the decision to drop her was based on organisational feedback. Though indications had been there for some time that Mahajan would be dropped, it was the party's search for her replacement that took time, sources said.

Nikam has represented the state in several important and high profile cases including the 1993 Mumbai blasts case, terror attack in Mumbai in 2008. He argued successfully for the state government and got death penalty or life imprisonment for the terrorists. The BJP has decided to bring him into the fray on a tough constituency in Mumbai.

Nikam has played a huge part in ensuring a death penalty for the Mumbai terror attack terrorist Ajmal Kasab and 1993 Mumbai serial blasts terrorist.

JASHN-E-MATDAN



Qutub Minar lights up in spirit of Jashn-e-matdan to celebrate Lok Sabha polls

BJP upbeat about Nadda's visit today



PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR
BJP national president JP Nadda would visit Brahmapur on Sunday and address a public meeting at Vibek Vihar near Ambapua in the city.

form the next government in the State. Nadda would appeal to the people to bring a change and bring a double-engine government into power in Odisha, said BJP leaders at a Press meet here.

the people are determined to change the government in the State, said the speakers. Brahmapur Lok Sabha candidate Pradeep Kumar Panigrahi, Brahmapur MLA candidate K Anil Kumar, Chatrapur MLA candidate Krushna Chandra Nayak, Digapahandi MLA candidate Sidhant Mohapatra, district BJP president Subash Sahu and Lok Sabha coordinator Saroj Sabat were present.

Rahul to address Salipur meet today to kick-start campaign

Congress leaders, workers, contestants excited
RAJESH BEHERA ■ KENDRAPADA

The Congress leaders and candidates contesting in the ensuing simultaneous elections in Odisha looked energised and excited as former president of AICC and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi will visit Salipur under Kendrapada Lok Sabha constituency on Sunday to kick-start the poll campaign for the party with a "Nyay Samabesh".



Satyabhamapur in Salipur to pay tribute to him and later go in a rally to Kulia field to attend the poll meeting for the Congress candidates of four districts. Rahul will reach the meeting place at 12 to 12.30 pm. "More than 5,000 activists from Kendrapada district will participate in Rahul Gandhi's rally and attend the election campaign meeting. In this regard, preparation has been made and it is in its final stage," stated former Congress MLA

and the vice president of OPCC Chinmay Behura. Rahul will be the first national leader, who is coming for a poll campaign to Salipur. The mantra that Rahul Gandhi will give in the meeting will not only boost the morale of the party leaders but also encourage the candidates in the fray to cross the poll hurdles, said former Congress MLA of Aul Debendra Sharma. Meanwhile, a high-level committee of Odisha Pradesh Congress visited Salipur to take stock of the preparation at the meeting place. On Friday, Deputy CM of Telangana Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka visited Rahul's scheduled meeting place and discussed with the OPCC members.

BJP 4th list of Assly candidates

Arindam to contest from Salipur
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Saturday announced a fourth list of its eight candidates for the upcoming Odisha Assembly polls. Ollywood actor Arindam Roy will contest from the Salipur seat in Cuttack district. Prasanta Jagadev will contest

from Khordha, Geetanjali Sethi from Kendrapada and Seemarani Nayak from Hindol. The full list: Telkoi (ST)-Dr Fakir Mohan Naik, Champua-Murali Manohar Sharma, Basta-Rabindra Andia, Basudevpur-Banikalyan Mohanty, Hindol (SC)-Seemarani Nayak, Salipur-Arindam Roy, Kendrapada (SC)-Geetanjali Sethi and Khordha-Prasanta Kumar Jagadev.

In city 3 held for submitting fake bail bonds

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
The Commissionerate police have arrested three persons for allegedly producing fake bail bond in the JMFC court here. Reports said one Samir Pattnaik was arrested in connection with a property offence case of Rs 6 crore filed at the Nandankanan police station and forwarded to court. On hearing his bail petition, the JMFC Court asked Pattnaik to produce property surety bail bond of Rs 3 crore. After he produced the bail bond, the court suspected its

authenticity and directed the Badagada police to investigate the documents. During probe, it was revealed that Pattnaik had produced the properties worth Rs 57 lakh as bail bond. Besides, the properties were registered in the name of a deceased person, but their documents were produced in the name of a living person in the court. On the basis of the probe report, police arrested three persons involved in the forgery of property document used for bail bond and forwarded them to court, said police.

IIM S'pur launches MBA in Fintech, Int'l Finance

PNS ■ SAMBALPUR
The IIM, Sambalpur has unveiled two new MBA programmes aimed at preparing professionals for the rapidly growing fields of Fintech and International Finance. In partnership with the NSE Academy and Sorbonne Business School, Paris, these programmes offer unique opportunities for aspiring business leaders. The MBA in Fintech Management marks a significant milestone as the first of its kind to be introduced by an IIM. With India emerging as

a global Fintech hub, driven by innovations like UPI, the programme aims to equip students with specialized skills in areas such as Blockchain, AI, and cryptography. Director of IIM Sambalpur, Prof Mahadeo Jaiswal said, "The Fintech sector has immense potential and it is expected to quadruple its current size by 2030, generating substantial employment and entrepreneurial prospects." Meanwhile, the dual degree programme offers students the chance to earn an MBA in International Finance from Sorbonne Business School,

enhancing their global perspective and competitiveness in the finance industry. Prof Diwahar Nadar, Programme Chairperson, said, "It's a blended learning approach of the Fintech Management programme, which combines online lectures with in-person sessions, including dedicated incubator training for launching Fintech startups." Both programmes cater to working professionals, with a comprehensive curriculum comprising specialized courses tailored to industry needs. The deadline for application is May

24, 2024, with eligibility criteria including a bachelor's degree and a minimum of two years of managerial, entrepreneurial, or professional experience. Furthermore, the programs offer unique immersion opportunities at IIM Sambalpur, the NSE Academy in Mumbai, and Sorbonne Business School in Paris, fostering collaborative relationships with industry stakeholders. To facilitate dialogue and networking within the Fintech community, IIM Sambalpur will host a roundtable discussion on May 5 at the National Stock Exchange in Mumbai.

BJP, BJD equally responsible for workers' plight

Vote for Cong: INTUC
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The BJP Government in the Center and BJD Government in Odisha are equally responsible for the misery of workers, rising unemployment, petrol, diesel and cooking gas price rise and inflation, said INTUC national vice president and State unit president Dr Ramchandra Khuntia. Khuntia alleged that the BJP Government demolished the tripartite consultation on industries and labour matters, repealed 44 labour legislations and passed four labour codes at the time of Corona without discussion and BJD blindly supported the draconian labour codes.

Pro-labour legislations were passed at the time of Congress Government while BJP Government did not release the DA in time, did not revive the OPS, and did not increase the amount of EPF pension. The EPF pension scheme was also started in 1995 in the Congress Government, said Khuntia. "Rahul ji has committed to fight for the labourers and the Bharat Jodo Yatra includes fight for labourers. On the contrary, the BJP's manifesto lacks any commitment for labourers. Hence, on behalf of the INTUC, I appeal to all INTUC affiliated office bearers and members to vote for Congress in the general and Assembly elections in Odisha," Dr Khuntia added.

XIM University UG convocation

Rekindle curiosity for good life: Sonam Wangchuk

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
The XIM University, Bhubaneswar organised its eighth convocation on Saturday in which 421 undergraduate students were conferred with degrees in their respective disciplines. The XIM University, Bhubaneswar has emerged as a leading institution dedicated to fostering academic excellence, ethical leadership and social responsibility and this convocation represents another triumph in the journey of shaping yet another cohort of young minds. This year, the university hosted Sonam Wangchuk, the visionary Indian figure renowned for his innovative solutions and dedication to



social change, as the Convocation Speaker. Trained as a mechanical engineer, Wangchuk has dedicated his past three decades to pioneering education reform. He is the founders of Himalayan Institute of Alternatives,

Ladakh (HIAL), which aims to encourage learning via practical application of knowledge. In 1988, he along with his peers established The Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh (SECMOL) with a

mission of providing support to Ladakhi children and youths by offering training and educational opportunities. In his Convocation Address, Wangchuk emphasised that one needs to be a 'Prob-

lem Solver'. The world is full of problems; and if you are able to solve them, you are a true leader. The three pillars of a successful and purposeful life are Curiosity, Empathy and Spirit of Initiative. He ended the speech on a

motivating note: Take initiative, gain experience; this leads to more confidence and ultimately leads to success. Gitanjali JB who is the co-founder, CEO and Dean of HIAL was present. She is an alumna of the Xavier Institute of Management, Bhubaneswar, Batch of 1996. Among the dignitaries present were Fr Antony R Uvari, SJ, Vice-Chancellor, XIM University, Fr S Antony Raj, SJ, Registrar, Fr V Rockia Das, SJ, Chief Finance Officer, XIM University, Prof Andrew Dutta, Acting Controller of Examination. Prof Sutapa Pati, Dean, School of Sustainability, welcomed the students, parents, dignitaries and guests.

In Kendrapada Ward Member, mom killed by lightning

PNS ■ KENDRAPADA
In a tragic incident, a woman and her son in Janhimula village under Khamalo panchayat of Derabish police station died on Saturday evening as they were struck by lightning while returning home after completing work in their farm land.

The deceased were identified as Sashirekha Barik (55) and her 28-year-old son Rabindra. Rabindra was the Ward Member of Janhimula village. Locals rushed the duo to the District Headquarters Hospital at Kendrapada, but they were declared brought dead there. Police later seized the bodies and sent them for autopsy.

Climate change, migration, displacement

Parties urged to include policies for youths in manifestoes

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
The Youth4Water India campaign has prepared a youth manifesto on climate change, migration and displacement covering water, sanitation, hygiene, jobs, livelihoods, gender, inclusive rehabilitation policy support, and related aspects for drawing urgent attention of political parties contesting the general elections 2024. "The Odisha coasts are among the most vulnerable coastal areas of the world so far as climate change impacts are concerned. As a result, an enormous amount of landmass is becoming uninhabitable with each passing year. Geographical changes in-

flicted by sea-level rise and other disasters are forcing thousands of people to migrate to places with compromised rights and amenities near and far off," the manifesto says, further adding, "About 40% of coastline is prone to erosion. Many areas may face permanent inundation. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report has incorporated a Sea-Level Projection Tool by NASA, which has found Paradip to be highly vulnerable to sea level rise among 12 Indian cities. Paradip, as the tool predicts, may go under the sea by the end of the century. 318 villages in six districts are vulnerable to coastal erosion.



16 villages under sea, 247 villages face displacement due to sea-level rise (SLR). The Government has been trying to rehabilitate these people and

provide other support systems. However, these measures must be strategized with stronger political will and focused policy interventions."

"The #Youth4WaterIndia volunteers travelled to a few villages on the Odisha coasts, facing the wrath of an invading sea. They talked to about

100 youths to gather their views on the kind of intervention they want from the political parties contesting the forthcoming general elections. The youth manifesto with 23 points is an outcome of discussions and suggestions drawn from the youths that have been sharpened with expert inputs. The manifesto has been sent to all leading political parties of the state for incorporation in their manifestoes and/or consideration to take up during their campaigns and plans once they get elected" stated convener of Water Initiative Ranjan Panda, a co-partner of the campaign. The manifesto appeals to the political parties to recognise displacement by climate

change, especially SLR as forceful and formulate policy measures accordingly. Forced displacement propels further migration, most often under distressed conditions and these migrants are more vulnerable to challenges associated with migration than the other migrants, mainly because they have no resources to fall back upon if they wish to come back home. Existing policies and plans to support migrant workers should consider these aspects and provide adequate support to the climate-displaced/migrant people. The manifesto further states that the youths are the first migrants from a climate hotspot, and they should be provided with designated plans

to protect their human rights, wages, dignified basic amenities and other support systems. Other points the manifesto talks about are a policy for promulgating 'living wages' that should be more than the minimum wages and include other amenities such as housing, healthcare and recreation, health insurance cards to each youth and those migrating; a compensatory 'direct income allowance' scheme to support youths who are jobless due to climate change's impact. Each migrant worker should be registered at the source and destination. Housing, water, sanitation and hygiene facilities for migrant workers should be dignified and regularly monitored by relevant authorities.

Samir hints at fighting polls as Independent

PNS ■ PURI
After the BJD denied a ticket to Nimapara MLA Samir Ranjan Dash, his supporters have been vehemently opposing the move and set April 30 as the deadline for the party to reconsider his case.
The BJD has fielded Dillip Nayak this time instead of Dash in Nimapara.
Dash's supporters have warned to resign from the party en masse if the party does not announce him as the candidate by April 30.
As per reports, Dash and his supporters are re-grouping



themselves and brainstorming over an alternate course of action even as election is coming closer.
They held a meeting in Nimapara on Friday and it was attended by the BJD president of Nimapara block Ashok Sahu, frontline party leaders

like Jibnananda Mohapatra, party's panchayat presidents of 46 panchayats from Nimapara and Gop blocks and 11 ward unit presidents of Nimapara NAC.
Ashok Sahu observed that if the party does not reconsider their demand, Dash should fight the poll as an Independent.
Ashok said, "He (Dash) started his career as a student leader and has never seen defeat. He has worked hard. If the party doesn't reconsider your (Dash) candidature, you should fight as an Independent."

In Keonjhar MP candidate Mohan Hembram quits Cong

PNS ■ KEONJHAR
Mohan Hembram, who was first nominated by the Congress as its Lok Sabha candidate for Keonjhar and was later withdrawn, resigned from the party on Saturday.
Hembram along with his wife Jhuna Patnaik resigned after the party nominated Binod Bihari Nayak as its new candidate for the Keonjhar LS seat.
A fuming Hembram asked the party to return Rs 7,50,000 to him within 48 hours or else he would take legal action. He said he had given Rs 50,000 to the PCC and spent Rs



7,00,000 after getting the ticket.
"I have spent Rs 7 lakh for making posters, banners and recording songs. I have paid Rs 3.5 lakhs to them. Now, they are asking for the rest Rs 3.5 lakhs. From where will I pay them?" asked Hembram.
"The decisions of the AICC and PCC have brought us to such a situation that we are being humiliated at every level. My friends and well-wishers are still clueless as to why my candidature has been cancelled. Don't have I talent to contest as an MP candidate," said Hembram.

3 killed as truck hits bike in Angul

PNS ■ ANGUL
Three persons were killed when a truck hit the motorcycle by which they were travelling at Panchamahala on National Highway-55 in Angul district on Saturday.
The mishap occurred when the deceased, identified as Krupa Dehury (48), Rajendra Pradhan (21) and Subrat Pradhan (17), were on their way to Angul from their village Derjanga in the morning.
The speeding truck hit their motorbike from the rear near Panchamahala and dragged

them for some distance, killing them on the spot.
Sources said Krupa and Rajendra were fish traders and Subrat travelled with them on the motorcycle to attend a coaching class in Angul.
Later, a large number of irate locals staged a blockade on the NH demanding compensation to the families of the deceased.
On receiving information, police reached the spot and pacified the agitators and sent the bodies for postmortem. The cops also seized the truck and began an investigation.

In Dhenkanal Mentally-ill woman beats mother to death

PNS ■ DHENKANAL
A mentally-unstable woman allegedly beat her old mother to death in Brahman Khanakhol village under the Bhuban police station in Dhenkanal district on Saturday.
According to sources, the victim 85-year-old Durgabati Das was staying with her 55-year-old daughter Ashalata, who had got married 30 years back. But Ashalata came back from her husband's house six months after marriage and was staying with her mother.
Durgabati's son Alok, who works in Talcher when called his mother, the latter did not

respond. Concerned about it, he called up another sister living in nearby village and told her to inquire about their mother.
On arriving at their house, Alok's sister found the front door closed from inside and there was no response despite repeated knocking at the door. Alarmed, she informed villagers who broke open the door.
They found Durgabati lying dead in a pool of blood and a wooden plank near her body. Suspecting Ashalata's role in her mother's murder, the police detained her and began questioning her. The Police registered a case and sent the body for postmortem.

Pandian woos voters for BJD in Lanjigarh

PNS ■ BHAWANIPATNA
Woos the voters in Kalahandi district's Jaipatna on Saturday, VK Pandian, after seeing a huge gathering, smiled and said opposition parties must be feeling jealous.
He was addressing the public in the Lanjigarh constituency where the BJD has re-nominated Pradeep Disari, who had won the last Assembly polls. Pandian also asked the people to vote for BJD's MP candidate Lambodhar Nial.



Pandian said the Naveen Patnaik government sanctioned Rs 110 crore for all-round development of the Lanjigarh constituency where seven bridges were completed for connecting

remote pockets. Besides, health, education, hospital and temple renovation were focused.
He took a jibe at Kalahandi MP Basant Panda and told the voters, "You people couldn't see him after he won the LS polls. Neither he could do any development works nor did he meet the voters."
Pandian said once a village application goes to CM Naveen Patnaik, it is sanctioned within a month.
In the tribals-dominated Lanjigarh constituency, Balabhadra Majhi is contesting from the Congress and Ramesh Majhi from the BJP. Balabhadra Majhi was elected MLA four times. He recently resigned from the BJD and joined the Congress.

Woman sits near DM's car, protests delay for dad's death cert



PNS ■ JAJPUR
In a scene that unfolded at the office of the Jajpur CDMO, a woman reportedly tired of running pillar to post for a death certificate of her father sat near the district Collector's vehicle on Friday to protest the delay.
As per reports, Deeptimayee Padhee, a resident of the Madhuban area, has reportedly been doing rounds of the Madhuban health centre to get her father's death certificate. However, she is yet to receive the certificate.
With no option left, she came to the CDMO's office to lodge a complaint. Reaching there, she came to know that Collector Nikhil Pawan Kalyan was in a meeting in the same office. To get her com-

plaint heard, she decided to sit near the Collector's vehicle.
"My father Raj Kishore Kar, a freedom fighter, passed away in 2004. Now, they are asking me to produce his AADHAAR card to get his death certificate. From where I can get his AADHAAR card?" rued Deeptimayee.
When contacted, the Additional District Medical Officer (ADMO) said that after coming to know about the complainant's plight, the Collector has issued directions to address her issue. "Today we received her complaint. We will solve her problem within seven days. This apart, we will initiate a probe; and if anyone is found guilty of harassing her, necessary action will be taken," said Jajpur ADMO Suddhanshu Bal.

Mixed reactions over BJD Balikuda-Erasama nominee

KAHNU NANDA ■ JAGATSINGHPUR
For a section, Jena's selection a surprise, for another, he's fittest among aspirants
The BJD has announced Sarada Jena as the party candidate for the Balikuda-Erasama Assembly constituency for the 2024 polls, dismissing sitting MLA-cum-former Minister Raghunandan Das.
The nomination of Jena, however, came as a surprise among the BJD supporters, mainly the followers of MLA Das who were optimistic that Das would be repeated as party candidate for the ensuing

polls. They expressed displeasure over the development.
On the other hand, MLA Das described the denial of ticket to him as a conspiracy hatched by a few senior BJD leaders of the district by presenting biased information against him to party higher-ups. It is evident from fact that though there were several ticket aspirants in the BJD in the Balikuda-Erasama Assembly segment, mostly from the Balikuda block and they were working for the party for last many years, the BJD sprung a surprise by naming Jena as a replacement of sitting MLA Das.
Jena started his political career as a student leader before joining the Congress. He was elected thrice as Zilla Parishad members from Erasama block consecutively and became an



aspirant for the MLA ticket in the year 2014 elections but Congress denied him a ticket. As a result, he contested as an independent candidate and scored more than 24,000 votes.
Jena politically thrived after he joined BJD in the year 2019. His cooperation helped BJD candidate Das to register a massive victory in the Balikuda Erasama seat in 2019 polls. After the elections, he was awarded several organisational posts which he

served diligently. He was in the race for a ticket from BJD for the 2024 elections.
Political observers feel that Jena has obtained the party ticket owing to his merit and performance in the constituency in the last five years. Besides, he belongs to Erasama block and is identified as a popular youth leader of the locality.
Sources informed that the people of Erasama have expressed happiness that after the late Damodar Rout, a lad from the Erasama area got the ticket. Earlier in 2009, 2014, and 2019 elections, the candidates used to be from the Balikuda block. While BJP and Congress have fielded low-profile candidates for the 2024 elections, Jena's nomination as BJD candidate is the right selection, many opined.

Woman FB friend dupes contractor of Rs 5L

PNS ■ SUNDARGARH
The Sundargarh police arrested a woman and her three family members for allegedly duping a contractor of Rs 15 lakh in the district by posing as a jewellery shop owner.
The victim was identified as Sumit Mishra, a resident of Birmitrapur in the district. The main accused Jharana Badi and her associates were arrested after Mishra lodged a complaint.
As per the allegation of Mishra, Jharana developed friendship with him through Facebook. Later, winning his trust, she called him to a hotel in Sundargarh to show a business plan by luring him of huge profits. She also asked

the victim to bring Rs 15 lakh with him.
While discussing the plan with Mishra, the woman allegedly fled away from the hotel by replacing the money bag with another bag.
After Mishra lodged a complaint, the Sundargarh police started an investigation and arrested Jharana from the Hirakud area in Sambalpur district. Jharana's husband Subas Tanti, her sister Rajkumari and brother Jubaraj were also arrested in this connection.
Police also seized cash of Rs 8.5 lakh, more than 15 fake Aadhaar cards, PAN cards, bank passbooks, duplicate gold rings and necklaces from their possession. As per police sources, Jharana was running a racket with the help of her family members to dupe people.

Pregnant woman taken on sling cot in B'swar

PNS ■ BALESWAR
As ambulance fails to reach village due to bad road conditions
A pregnant woman was carried on a sling cot to reach the Janani Express. The pitiable report was received from Anantapur gram panchayat under Soro block.
Reports said the family members called an ambulance after Survai Nath of village



Nathi Sahi experienced delivery pain. The ambulance, however, couldn't reach the hamlet due to bad road conditions. Consequently, the family members and neighbours

carried Survai on a sling cot up to 2 km.
Notably, the residents, having a population of around 400 people, had recently threatened to boycott the ensuing polls expressing their strong resentment for not having a motorable road even after 77 years of Independence. They had also apprised their concern to the district administration stating that in the want of a road they were facing tough situation to avail emergency services and children suffer while going to schools.

In Kalahandi 3 poachers caught lighting up fire

PNS ■ BHAWANIPATNA
Guns seized
Three poachers were arrested on Friday night after being caught red-handed by forest officials while trying to light up fire in the Karlapat Sanctuary in Kalahandi district.
Sharing the information on X, Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (PCCF) Wildlife (WL) and Chief Wildlife Warden (CWLW)

Susanta Nanda said that two country-made rifles were also seized from the three poachers.
"Three poachers trying to lit up fire in Karlapat sanctuary were arrested and two country rifles were seized yesterday night in Kalahandi district," Nanda wrote.
Notably, more than 4,000 fire points have been detected in the last seven days in various forests of the State by the Forest Survey of India (FSI).

In Kendrapada Minor girl drowns in river

PNS ■ KENDRAPADA
A 14-year-old girl drowned in the Luna river at Bandhapada village under the Mahakalapada police station in Kendrapada district on Saturday while taking bath.
But some locals managed to rescue her friend after a frantic search operation.
Reports said Abhilipsa Behera and her friend

Rajalaxmi Sethy were dragged into deep water by strong currents while taking bath in the river.
Getting information, locals started a rescue and search operation with the help of Mahakalapada and Garadapur Fire Service personnel. With the Fire Service staffs' help, they managed to rescue Rajalaxmi but Abhilipsa was yet to be traced.

Robbers' gang kingpin arrested in K'jhar

PNS ■ KEONJHAR
Weapons, stolen items including jewellery seized
Police here on Saturday arrested the mastermind of a notorious gang operating in the district. The miscreant, identified as Dasarathi Dhibara (30), a resident of Dhanurjapur village under Bamebari PS, is known for his extensive criminal history not only in Keonjhar but also in four other districts.
During the operation, authorities seized a substantial cache of stolen goods, including 14 gold pendants, silver



jewellery, a pistol, and a Bolo vehicle, along with various weapons used in their criminal activities.
The arrest came in connection with a robbery at Swapneswar filling station near Phuljhar under Nayakote police limits on October 18, 2023, where six individuals, led by Dasarathi, allegedly looted around Rs 4 lakh in cash and a laptop. Prompted by a complaint, a specialized police team was formed, leading to the apprehension of five suspects initially. However, Dasarathi

April 19 boat tragedy in Mahanadi NHRC issues notice to Odisha, C'garh Govts

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on April 25 issued notices to the Chief Secretaries of Odisha and Chhattisgarh on the failure and negligent attitude of the State administrations in acting over the issue of frequent tragedies in the States.
The NHRC also sought for Action Taken Reports within 6 weeks from the Superintendents of Police of Jharsuguda district and Raigarh district of Chhattisgarh on a particular incident of boat capsizing that

took place on April 10 in the Mahanadi river in Jharsuguda district in which 50 passengers were on board and 8 were killed, including 4 belonging to the State of Chhattisgarh.
Petitioner and rights activist Radhakanta Tripathy drew the attention of the Commission to the April 19 boat tragedy in which about eight people died. The boat was ferrying passengers from Bandhipali area of Bargarh district, which encountered turbulent waters and capsized near Saradha Ghat in Jharsuguda district.

Tripathy alleged that the boat, which was overcrowded, operated without a valid licence and fitness certificate. The two minor boys and two women of Chhattisgarh who died in the incident were identified as Pikeswar Rathia, Naveen Rathia, Radhika Rathia and Terasabai Rathia, residents of Kharsani area of Raigarh district. They were going to Patharseni in the Ambabhona block of Bargarh district.
Tripathy requested the NHRC to ensure free, fair and impartial investigation

of the fatal incident and action against the errant officials who could not carry out their duties. He further requested to direct the Governments of Odisha and Chhattisgarh to submit reports on the incident with recommendations on implementation status of laws, rules, norms and parameters in this regard, payment of adequate amount of compensation to the next of kin (NOK) of the deceased, and to construct the bridges where there are no alternative transportation facilities.

TMC Government protecting terrorists, rapists in Bengal: BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Saturday accused the Trinamool Congress (TMC) government in West Bengal of "protecting" terrorists and rapists and claimed the state appears to be on the brink of anarchy. BJP's national spokesperson Prem Shukla hit out at Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee at a press conference, a day after the CBI seized weapons, including a police service revolver and foreign-made firearms, during searches at two premises of an associate of now-suspended TMC leader Shajahan Sheikh, a key accused in the Sandeshkhali case.

While goons in Sandeshkhali robbed women of their 'mangalsutra', "rapists" like Sheikh were given protection and the seizure of such arms, including a police weapon, shows that the state police were nursing such criminals, he alleged. Sheikh, a former TMC strongman, has been accused of running a ring of local thugs who molested women and grabbed land.

Noting that the state government has moved the Supreme Court against the Kolkata High Court's order to transfer the probe to the CBI, Shukla claimed West Bengal appears to be on the brink of anarchy as the ruling dispensation has sided with those accused of



rape and terrorism. Banerjee questions raids by the probe agency and allegedly justified those who attacked the Enforcement Directorate (ED) officials but she offered no word of support to the CBI, he told reporters. The TMC claims to stand in support of "Ma, Mati, Manush" but has instead provided safety to criminals like Sheikh, he said. Does Banerjee now have any moral right to appeal in the apex court after the seizure of weapons, Shukla asked, slamming the opposition INDIA bloc parties for their silence on the Sandeshkhali issue. At the press conference, another BJP national spokesperson

Shehzad Poonawalla targeted the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) following the Delhi High Court's critical remarks on the continuation of Arvind Kejriwal as the chief minister despite being in jail. The High Court on Friday pulled up the city government over the issue of non-supply of books to the children studying in the MCD schools, saying the continuation of Kejriwal even after his arrest puts political interest over national interest. The court said the Delhi government was "interested in appropriation of power". The court's observations came after the Delhi government's counsel said the matter requires certain approvals from

Kejriwal, who is in custody in the alleged money laundering case in connection with the 2021 excise policy. Poonawalla said mockingly that Kejriwal has travelled a long journey from advocating 'swaraj' (self-rule) to being arrested in a scam involving 'sharab' (liquor) and standing with opposition leaders like Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and Lalu Prasad Yadav after once advocating for their arrest. He asked when Kejriwal will resign and stop playing with people's future, as he took a swipe at him over promoting his wife Sunita Kejriwal in politics after speaking against family politics all these years.

Why Congress did not conduct caste census when in power: BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/HYDERABAD

BJP Rajya Sabha member K Laxman on Saturday asked why the Congress did not think of conducting a caste census when it was in power for over five decades and said that it was the Nehru-Gandhi family which was in power for a long and sought to know why the Congress did not think of conducting a caste census then. "Why they (Congress) are making this demand now, it is to provoke (people). We are not against any caste census. But, it needs scientific and thorough study on it," Laxman, national president of BJP's OBC Morcha, said in a media interaction. Observing that there is diversity vis-a-vis various communities in the country, he said the Reddys of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh are BCs in Karnataka. Similarly, Kammas of AP and Telangana are a backward class in Karnataka, he said. The Reddys and Kammas come under Other Castes (OCs) in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.



Why did the Congress government in Karnataka not publish the census held in the state, he asked. Laxman, former president of Telangana BJP, also asked why the previous BRS government in Telangana did not publish the details of the 'intensive household survey' conducted in the state. Is it an attempt of opposition parties to show the BJP in a bad light? Laxman, a BJP Rajya Sabha member from Uttar Pradesh, accused Congress and other opposition parties of resorting to divisive and appeasement politics in the run-up to the Lok Sabha polls.

At a time when the BJP is working with the resolve of making the country a developed nation by 2047 with the slogan of 'sab ka sath, sab ka vikas', "the opposition is talking about caste census, Muslim appeasement and creating animosities and bringing a division," he said. Laxman also alleged that "Muslim appeasement is not a new thought, but it is in the DNA of Congress from the beginning". Elections to the 17 Lok Sabha seats in Telangana will be held on May 13. The BJP is fighting the parliamentary elections in Telangana without any alliance.

BJP's hypocrisy knows no bounds: Congress

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress on Saturday said the BJP's "hypocrisy knows no bounds" and alleged that while it called the administrative allocation of 2G spectrum under the UPA a "scam", the Narendra Modi government was now seeking permission from the Supreme Court to "give away spectrum" without an auction. The opposition party's attack came after the Centre on Monday moved the Supreme Court seeking modification of its verdict in the 2G spectrum case which said the State was duty bound to adopt the auction route while transferring or alienating the country's natural resources. A top source, however, later said the government is not seeking to change the 2012 Supreme Court judgement that backed auction as the preferred mode of allocating telecom spectrum except for narrowly defined sectors such as satellite communication and defence where auction is not feasible. Attacking the BJP, Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh said the hypocrisy of



the 'Modi Sarkar' and 'Bhrasht Janata Party' knows no bounds. "During Dr Manmohan Singh's tenure, they cried to all who would listen that the administrative allocation of 2G spectrum was 'scam'. Now, they are arguing the opposite - they have gone to the Supreme Court for permission to give away spectrum to whoever they want, without an auction," he alleged. In its judgement delivered on February 2, 2012, the apex court had quashed 2G spec-

trum licences given to various firms during the tenure of A Raja as the telecom minister in January 2008. On Monday, Attorney General R Venkataramani, appearing for the Centre, mentioned an interim application before a bench of Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and Justice J B Pardiwala. While seeking urgent listing of the application, the top law officer told the bench that the plea seeks modification of the 2012 verdict as the Centre wanted to grant 2G spectrum licences in some cases.

NCB, ATS bust three drug manufacturing labs in Rajasthan, Gujarat

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Narcotics Control Board (NCB) and Gujarat Police ATS Saturday busted three "clandestine" drug manufacturing labs in Rajasthan and Gujarat leading to the seizure of 300 kgs of narcotics and arrest of seven persons. Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) Deputy Director General (Operations) Gyaneshwar Singh in a statement said the labs were unearthed after about three months of "intensive" technical and ground surveillance that was mounted by the two agencies to identify the people involved in the network as well as the locations of the labs. A total of 149 kgs of mephedrone or 'meow meow' (both in powder and liquid form), 50 kg ephedrine, and 200 litres of acetone was recovered from the three labs located in Bhimnagar of Jalore district and Osian in Jodhpur district of Rajasthan and Gandhinagar in Gujarat, the officer said. Seven people have been arrested till now in



the crackdown, he said. The teams of the two agencies were also raiding a similar lab in Amreli district of Gujarat and more recoveries are expected, Singh said. "The kingpin of this network has been identified and will be arrested soon. Efforts are being made to track and identify the source of precursor chemicals as well as the distribution network, national as well as any international linkages," he said. Mephedrone, also known as 4-methylmethcathinone, 4-MMC and 4-methylphenedrone, is a synthetic stimulant and is also identified by its slang names -- drone, M-CAT, white magic, meow meow, and bubble.

Congress attacks Modi over snatching quotas remarks

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Saturday slammed as "false propaganda" Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'snatching quotas' remarks and alleged that it was the BJP that was against reservation for SCs, STs and OBCs. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said the reality is that since 1950, reservation in education and employment has been possible when there have been Congress prime ministers and Congress governments at the helm. In a video statement, Ramesh said, "The prime minister is repeatedly indulging in the false propaganda that the Congress is against the reservation for SCs, STs and OBCs and wants to snatch it away. This is absolutely false." "The reality is that the provi-



sions in the Constitution for reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes were made because of B R Ambedkar, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and other Congress leaders. So, this was the contribution of the Congress," Ramesh said. He said in 1994 when P V Narasimha Rao was the prime minister, for the first time, 27 per cent reservation for OBCs was given in employment in central government and in 2006 when Manmohan Singh was the prime minister, 27 per cent reservation was made in higher education institutions

for OBCs. "So, the reality is that since 1950, reservation in education and employment for SCs, STs and OBCs, has been possible when there have been Congress prime ministers and Congress governments," he said. A few months ago, when the women's reservation bill was being debated, the Congress demanded that OBC women should also be given that reservation but the central government did not accept it and the PM did not say anything about it, Ramesh said. "A new law came into being in which there is no provision for OBC women. So the reality is that the BJP is against the reservation for SCs, STs and OBCs. It has been due to the guarantee of the Congress that the reservation for SCs, STs and OBCs in education and employment is still available," the Congress leader said.

Adults with adverse childhood experiences more likely to feel depressed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Adults with four or more adverse childhood experiences are four times more likely to experience depression and low life satisfaction, three times more likely to experience anxiety and are 30 times more likely to attempt suicide than people with no adverse childhood experiences, according to a study that explored the role of modifiable community- and societal-level factors in youth mental health and well-being. The study led by Hasina Samji, a professor in the Faculty of Health Sciences collected data from January to March 2022 during the fifth wave of the pandemic, a time that included the highest number of daily COVID-19 case counts. Students were asked to note their number of positive and adverse experiences (up to age 18), the degree to which they experienced depression



and anxiety symptoms, and to rank their mental wellbeing and life satisfaction. According to Samji, having more positive childhood experiences was associated with lower levels of depression and anxiety, and better life satisfaction and mental health. Conversely, people with a higher number of adverse childhood experiences had

more symptoms of depression and anxiety, and poorer life satisfaction and mental health. "We can't prevent adversity for all young people," says Samji. "We know adversity leads to so many poor outcomes across a whole host of domains, whether it's infectious diseases, or substance use, or obesity, or cardiac disease. When

you look at people who have been exposed to four or more adverse childhood experiences, versus fewer or zero adverse experiences - they are at higher risk for almost every poor health outcome." Adverse childhood experiences include verbal, physical and sexual abuse, emotional and physical neglect, domestic violence, caregiver mental illness, incarceration, substance use and divorce. Additional adverse experiences are also found at the societal-level (food-insecurity, homelessness); at the community-level (feeling unsafe at school or in the community); and at the family-level (caregiver separation or divorce). "As a health-care system, we're often very reactive," Samji says. "Young people tell us that we wait for them to be in crisis before we provide the support that they need. I really wanted to go upstream and think about what kind of individual level supports, but also

structural and systemic supports we can provide earlier." Mental illness, Samji explains, is not randomly distributed in the populations, but follows a socio-economic gradient. The study therefore recommends systemic changes to provide extra support to families, by institutions, (justice, health, schools), to increase positive childhood experiences and reduce adverse experiences. "We have to change the paradigm," Samji says. "When people think about mental health, they only think of mental illness, but mental health is so much more. "Just like physical health, there is the illness aspect, but we know we can do more to support our physical health: We can work out, we can eat well. Similarly for mental health. Mental illness is not a done deal. You can delay it; you can prevent it in certain cases. There is, of course, a genetic component, just like there is in physical illness."

Antibiotics rampant use during pandemic worsened AMR: WHO

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The indiscriminate use of antibiotics during the Covid-19 pandemic majorly given as a precautionary measure has exacerbated the silent spread of antimicrobial resistance (AMR), according to a recent report by the World Health Organization (WHO). The report indicates that approximately 75 percent of patients received antibiotics as a precautionary measure, despite only 8 percent of hospitalized Covid patients requiring antibiotics to combat bacterial co-infections. AMR represents a significant global public health concern and was directly responsible for approximately 1.27 million deaths in 2019, with an additional 4.95 million deaths attributed to its contribution. Antibiotic usage surged during the pandemic, with an 83 percent increase in the Eastern Mediterranean and African Regions and a 33 percent rise



in the Western Pacific Region between 2020 and 2022, according to the WHO. "The highest rate of antibiotic use was seen among patients with severe or critical Covid-19, with a global average of 81 per cent. In mild or moderate cases, there was a considerable variation across regions, with the highest use in the African Region (79 per cent)," the WHO report said. The findings are based on data

from 450,000 patients admitted to hospitals for Covid in 65 countries between January 2020 and March 2023, as recorded in the WHO Global Clinical Platform for Covid-19. Often dubbed the "Silent Pandemic", AMR necessitates immediate and efficacious intervention rather than being relegated to a future scenario. In the absence of preventive measures, projections indi-

cate that by 2050, AMR could potentially supersede all other causes of mortality worldwide. Globally, estimates indicate that the direct fatalities linked to AMR surpassed 1.2 million in 2019, with a foreseen escalation to approximately 10 million deaths annually by 2050 if inadequate measures are implemented to curb AMR. "When a patient requires antibiotics, the benefits often outweigh the risks associated with side effects or antibiotic resistance. However, when they are unnecessary, they offer no benefit while posing risks, and their use contributes to the emergence and spread of antimicrobial resistance," said Dr Silvia Bertagnolio, WHO Unit Head for Surveillance, Evidence, and Laboratory Strengthening Division for AMR. "These data call for improvements in the rational use of antibiotics to minimise unnecessary negative conse-

quences for patients and populations." The report will be presented in a WHO scientific poster at the ongoing ESCMID Global Congress, in Barcelona, Spain being held from April 27-30. Dr Sangeeta Sharma, Professor & Head, Department of Neuro psychopharmacology, Institute of Human Behaviour & Allied Sciences (IHBAS), Delhi called the report a wakeup call. "Antibiotics work against bacteria only, not viruses like the common cold or flu as many believe. By not demanding antibiotics at the OTC or when visiting doctors, a patient can play a pivotal role in advocating for responsible antibiotic use and help combat one of the most pressing global challenges i.e. AMR." The WHO data underscores the urgent need for more prudent and targeted use of antibiotics to curb the spread of AMR and preserve the effectiveness of these crucial medications.

G7 nations set their sights on doubling renewable energy capacity by 2030

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The G7 economies comprising the world's richest countries have set their sights on doubling renewable energy capacity by 2030, an analysis conducted by the global energy think-tank Ember has said. However, this falls short of the more ambitious target agreed upon at the UN climate conference in Dubai the previous year, which aimed to triple global renewable energy capacity by the same deadline. At the UN's COP28 climate change conference in December, leaders from around the world, including all G7 members, forged a historic agreement to triple global renewable energy capacity by 2030. However, Ember's analysis suggests that the G7 nations need to realign their targets to meet this commitment. Katye Altieri, an electricity analyst at Ember, emphasized



the need for the G7 to update their targets in light of the COP28 agreement. She stated, "Last year, the G7 agreed targets for solar and offshore wind. Given the COP28 agreement, these goals are now outdated and need to be aligned with a tripling of global renewables." Altieri also pointed out that the rapid acceleration of solar energy installations demonstrates that the goal of tripling renewable energy capacity is increasingly attainable. The International Energy

Agency underscores the importance of tripling global renewable energy capacity and doubling energy efficiency to mitigate climate change effectively and limit the average temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius. This highlights the urgency for G7 nations and the global community as a whole to accelerate efforts in transitioning towards renewable energy sources and enhancing energy efficiency measures. A tripling of renewable capacity would require the G7 to reach 2.7 TW by 2030, leaving a 0.7 TW gap between current targets and a tripling-aligned goal. Italy, this year's host of the G7, along with Germany and the UK, are leading the way with 2030 targets that are more than doubling of the 2022 capacity. However, France and Japan are lagging behind their G7 partners with targets well below a tripling.

Hamas reviewing Israeli proposal for cease-fire in Gaza

AP ■ HAVANA

Hamas said on Saturday it was reviewing a new Israeli proposal for a cease-fire in Gaza, as Egypt intensified efforts to broker a deal to end the months-long war and stave off a possible Israeli ground offensive into the southern Gaza city of Rafah. Senior Hamas official Khalil al-Hayya said the Palestinian militant group was evaluating Israel's proposal, and "upon completion of its study, it will submit its response." He gave no details of Israel's offer but said it was in response to a proposal from Hamas two weeks ago. Negotiations earlier this month centered on a six-week cease-fire proposal and the release of 40 civilian and sick hostages in exchange for freeing hundreds of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. Hamas' statement came hours after a high-level Egyptian delegation wrapped up a visit to Israel where it discussed a "new vision" for a prolonged cease-fire in Gaza, according to an Egyptian official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to freely discuss the developments. It was not immediately clear whether Israel's latest response to Hamas on a cease-fire was directly related to Friday's visit to Tel Aviv by Egyptian medi-

ators. The discussions between Egyptian and Israeli officials focused on the first stage of a multi-phase plan that would include a limited exchange of hostages held by Hamas for Palestinian prisoners, and the return of a significant number of displaced Palestinians to their homes in northern Gaza "with minimum restrictions," the Egyptian official said. The mediators are working on a compromise that will answer most of both parties' main demands, which could pave the way to continued negotiations with the goal of a larger deal to end the war, the official said. As the war drags on and casualties mount, there has been growing international pressure for Hamas and Israel to reach an agreement on a cease-fire and avert a possible Israeli attack on Rafah, where more than half of Gaza's 2.3 million people have sought refuge after fleeing fighting elsewhere in the territory. Israel has been insisting for months it plans a ground offensive into Rafah, on the border with Egypt, where it says many remaining Hamas militants are holed up, despite calls for restraint from the international community including Israel's staunchest ally, the United States. Egypt has cautioned an offen-

sive into Rafah could have "catastrophic consequences" on the humanitarian situation in Gaza, as well as on regional peace and security. The Israeli military has massed dozens of tanks and armoured vehicles in southern Israel close to Rafah and hit targets in the city in near-daily airstrikes. Early Saturday, an Israeli airstrike hit a house in Rafah's Tel Sultan neighbourhood, killing six people, including four children, according to officials at a local hospital. The strike killed a man, his wife and their three sons, aged 12, 10 and 8, according to records of the Abu Yousef al-Najjar hospital's morgue. A neighbour's four-month-old girl was also killed, the records showed. Hamas said Friday it is open to any "ideas or suggestions" that take into consideration the needs of the Palestinian people such as an end to Israel's attacks on Gaza, the return of displaced people to their homes and an Israeli withdrawal. The Palestinian group has said it will not back down from its demands for a permanent cease-fire and full withdrawal of Israeli troops, both of which Israel has rejected. Israel says it will continue military operations until Hamas is defeated and that it will retain a security presence in Gaza afterward.

Hamas sparked the war with its attack into southern Israel on October 7, in which militants killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took some 250 people as hostages. Israel says the militants are still holding around 100 hostages and the remains of more than 30 others. Since then, 34,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's air and ground offensive, according to the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza, around two-thirds of them children and women. Israel has reported at least 260 of its soldiers killed since the start of ground operations in Gaza.

China launches submarine built for Pak

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD/BEIJING

China has launched the first of the eight Hangor-class submarines to be built for its all-weather ally Pakistan to provide it with state-of-the-art warships, adding a new dimension to their growing bilateral military cooperation. The launch ceremony, held at Wuchang Shipbuilding Industry Groups (WSIG) Shuangliu Base on Friday, was attended by Pakistan Navy chief Admiral Naveed Ashraf, Geo News reported. The development comes as part of the agreement between Islamabad and Beijing under which the latter had agreed to provide the former with eight state-of-the-art advanced submarines. Out of the total eight vessels, four are to be built by WSIG, while the remaining four are being built at KS&EW (Karachi Shipyard & Engineering Works) under the Transfer of Technology (ToT) agreement. The submarines, having advanced stealth features, are to be fitted with state-of-the-art weapons and sensors to operate under a multi-threat environment and can engage targets at stand-off ranges. Speaking at the occasion, Admiral Ashraf emphasised the importance of maritime security under the prevailing geo-strategic environment and the Navy's resolve to ensure regional peace and stability. The Navy chief also underscored that the Hangor-class S/M Project will "add a new dimension to the all-weather Pak-China friendship and shows strong military cooperation between two countries." Friday's launch ceremony comes after Pakistan commenced the manufacturing of the 6th Hangor-class submarine by KS&EW in February earlier this year. Pakistan enjoys close military ties with China with their bilateral relations provisioning various arms imports by Islamabad from Beijing.

Student anti-war protesters dig in as faculties condemn police intervention

AP ■ NEW YORK

Students protesting the Israel-Hamas war at universities across US, some of whom have clashed with police in riot gear, dug in Saturday and vowed to keep their demonstrations going, while several school faculties condemned university presidents who have called in law enforcement to remove protesters. As Columbia University continues negotiations with those at a pro-Palestinian student encampment on the New York school's campus, the university's senate passed a resolution Friday that created a task force to examine the administration's leadership, which last week called in police in an attempt to clear the protest, resulting in scuffles and more than 100 arrests. Though the university has repeatedly set and then pushed back deadlines for the removal of the encampment, the school sent an email to students Friday night saying that bringing back police "at this time" would be counterproductive, adding that they hope the negotiations show "concrete signs of progress tonight." As the death toll mounts in the war in Gaza, protesters nationwide are demanding that 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. The decisions to call in law enforcement, leading to hundreds of arrests nationwide, have prompted school faculty members at universities in California, Georgia and Texas to initiate or pass votes of no confidence in their leadership. They are largely symbolic rebukes, without the power to remove their presidents. But the tensions pile pressure on school officials, who are already scrambling to resolve the protests as May graduation ceremonies near. California State Polytechnic University, Humboldt, gave protesters who have barricaded themselves inside a building since Monday until 5 pm Friday to leave and "not be immediately arrested." The deadline came and went. Only some of the protesters left, others doubled down. After protesters rebuffed police earlier in the week, the campus was closed for the rest of the semester. In Colorado, police swept through an encampment Friday at Denver's Auraria Campus, which hosts three universities and colleges, arresting around 40 protesters on trespassing charges. Students representing the Columbia encampment, which inspired the wave of protests across the country, said Friday that they reached an impasse with administrators and intend to continue their protest. After meetings Thursday and Friday, student negotiators said the university had not met their primary demand for divestment, although there was progress on a push for more transparent financial disclosures. "We will not rest until Columbia

divests," said Jonathan Ben-Menachem, a fourth-year doctoral student. In the letter sent to Columbia students Friday night, the university's leadership said "we support the conversations that are ongoing with student leaders of the encampment." Columbia's president, Minouche Shafik, faced significant criticism from faculty Friday, but retained the support of trustees. A report by the university senate's executive committee, which represents faculty, found Shafik and her administration took "many actions and decisions that have harmed Columbia University." Those included calling in police and allowing students to be arrested without consulting faculty, misrepresenting and suspending student protest groups and hiring private investigators. "The faculty have completely lost confidence in President Shafik's ability to lead this organization," said Ege Yumusak, a philosophy lecturer who is part of a faculty team protecting the encampment.

British troops may be asked to deliver Gaza aid: UK officials decline comment

AP ■ LONDON

British troops may be tasked with delivering aid to Gaza from an offshore pier now under construction by the US military, the BBC reported Saturday. UK government officials declined to comment on the report. According to the BBC, the British government is considering deploying troops to drive the trucks that will carry aid from the pier along a floating causeway to the shore. No decision has been made and the proposal hasn't yet reached Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, the BBC reported, citing unidentified government sources. The report comes after a senior US military official said on Thursday that there would be no American "boots on the ground" and another nation would provide the personnel to drive the delivery trucks to the shore. The official, who spoke to reporters on condition of anonymity to discuss details not yet made public, declined to identify the third party. Britain is already providing logistical support for construction of the pier, including a Royal Navy ship that will house hundreds of US soldiers and sailors working on the project. In addition, British military planners have been embedded at US Central Command in Florida and in Cyprus, where aid will be screened before shipment to Gaza, for several weeks, the UK Ministry of Defense said on Friday. The UK Hydrographic Office has also shared analysis of the Gaza shoreline with the US to aid in construction of the pier. "It is critical we establish more routes for vital humanitarian aid to reach the people of Gaza, and the UK continues to take a leading role in the delivery of support in coordination with the US

and our international allies and partners," Defense Secretary Grant Shapps said in a statement. Development of the port and pier in Gaza comes as Israel faces widespread international criticism over the slow trickle of aid into the Palestinian territory, where the United Nations says at least a quarter of the population sits on the brink of starvation. The Israel-Hamas conflict began with a Hamas-led attack into southern Israel on October 7, in which militants killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took some 250 people as hostages. Israel says the militants are still holding around 100 hostages and the remains of more than 30 others. Since then, more than 34,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's air and ground offensive, according to the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza, around two-thirds of them children and women.

Ballistic missile fired by Yemen's Houthi rebels damages oil tanker in Red Sea

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Ballistic missiles fired by Yemen's Houthi rebels caused "minor damage" to a Panama-flagged oil tanker travelling through the Red Sea on Friday, authorities said. The attack follows an uptick in assaults launched by the Houthis in recent days after a relative lull in their months-long campaign over Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The rebels fired three missiles in the attack, one of which damaged the Panama-flagged, Seychelles-registered

Andromeda Star, the US military's Central Command said. The private security firm Ambrey described the tanker as being "engaged in Russia-linked trade." The vessel was travelling from Primorsk, Russia, to Vadinar, India, Ambrey said. Houthi military spokesman Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree later claimed the attack early Saturday in a prerecorded statement aired by the rebels. He described the tanker as being "directly hit." Another vessel, the Antiqua-Barbados-flagged, Liberia-operated Maisha, was also nearby at the time of the

Russia targets Ukrainian energy sector again

AP ■ KYIV

Russia launched a barrage of missiles against Ukraine overnight, in attacks that appeared to target the country's energy infrastructure. Meanwhile, Russia said its air defence systems had intercepted more than 60 Ukrainian drones over the southern Krasnodar region. Ukraine's air force said Saturday that Russia had launched 34 missiles against Ukraine overnight, of which 21 had been shot down by Ukrainian air defences. In a post on Telegram, Minister of Energy Herman Halushchenko said energy facilities in Dnipropetrovsk in the south of the country and

Ivano-Frankivsk and Lviv in the west had been attacked and that an engineer was injured. Private energy operator DTEK said four of its thermal power plants were damaged and that there were "casualties," without going into detail. Earlier this month Russia destroyed one of Ukraine's largest power plants and damaged others in a massive missile and drone attack as it renewed its push to target Ukraine's energy facilities. Ukraine has appealed to its Western allies for more air defense systems to ward off such attacks. At a meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group on Friday, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin announced the U.S. will provide Ukraine with additional munitions and gear for its air defense launchers. Further east, a psychiatric hospital was damaged and one person was wounded after Russia launched a missile attack overnight on Ukraine's second-largest city, Kharkiv. Photos from the scene showed a huge crater on the grounds of the facility and patients taking shelter in corridors. Regional governor Oleh Syniehubov said a 53-year-old woman was hurt. In Russia, the Defence Ministry said Russian air defense systems had intercepted 66 drones over the country's southern Krasnodar region. Two more drones were

Imran prefers jail than striking deal with govt

PTI ■ LAHORE

Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan has ruled out an agreement with those who have "enslaved" the country, saying he is ready to serve for nine more years in prison but will never strike a deal with them. In a message released on Friday for the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party's 28th Foundation Day, Khan said that the "worst dictatorship" was imposed on the country which was becoming the basis for the "destruction" of the economy, government rule, democracy and judiciary." He called on every individual to play their role in stopping this descent towards the country's ruin. "It is my message for the nation that I will give any sacrifice required for actual freedom but will never compromise on my or my nation's freedom." Khan said he was kept behind bars for the past nine months due to "fake [and] concocted cases." "I will remain in jail if I have to for nine more years, or more, but I will never strike a deal with those who have enslaved my nation." Since his removal from power in a no-confidence motion in April 2022, the 71-year-old former cricketer-turned-politician has been convicted in at least four cases. Khan has been lodged at Adiala Jail at

Rawalpindi after conviction in multiple cases. Since falling out with the powerful military, Khan's party has been facing a crackdown. The party faced pressure in the form of arrests and detentions in the wake of the May 9 violence that broke out after Khan's arrest last year. Khan's message came shortly after PTI leader Shehryar Afridi claimed that the party would have talks but not with the Bilwal Bhutto-Zardai-led Pakistan Peoples Party or the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz after their recent overtures. "We will talk with the Army chief, the DG [ISI] and the army because the need of the hour is to [prioritise] the country's security," Afridi said. Termining the two parties a "rejected lot", Afridi reiterated that the party would talk with the army chief for Pakistan's freedom and future because the country "needs" Khan. He said the two parties only had one option to abandon their mandate and then the PTI would decide whether to move forward with them or not. Afridi claimed that it was Khan's wish "since the first day for us to engage [with the military leadership] but there was no response forthcoming". He said if any "response" had come then it would have been brought before the public. Earlier this week, PTI leader

Barrister Gohar Ali Khan had claimed that Khan was being pressured to accept a "deal". Rejecting speculation about secret talks with the establishment, Barrister Gohar had made it clear that the party was neither interested in nor holding talks with anyone. Independent candidates backed by Khan's PTI won more than 90 seats in the National Assembly in the February 8 general election. However, the PMN-L led by former prime minister Nawaz Sharif and the PPP formed a post-poll alliance and sidelined the jailed former prime minister's party from forming a federal government which assumed power last month.

Nawaz Sharif set to retake helm of PML-N amidst internal strife

PTI ■ LAHORE

Pakistan's three-time former prime minister Nawaz Sharif is all set to retake the helm of the ruling PML-N next month to guide the party amid internal strife, seven years after he relinquished the post after being disqualified by the apex court. Nawaz, 74, will be elected president of the ruling party on May 11 in a meeting of the party leadership, a senior Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader told PTI. In 2017, the Supreme Court of Pakistan disqualified Nawaz as premier and party president for his alleged corruption in cases related to the Panama Papers revelations about his illegal wealth stashed abroad. He relinquished his position within the party following his disqualification, which also led to his departure from the prime minister's office. PML-N Punjab president Rana Sanaullah told a press conference that a decision to make Nawaz the president of the party again was taken at a party meeting on Friday. "A resolution was passed at the party meeting today to make the elder Sharif PML-N presi-

Long lines form and frustration grows as Cuba runs short of cash

AP ■ HAVANA

Alejandro Fonseca stood in line for several hours outside a bank in Havana hoping to withdraw Cuban pesos from an ATM, but when it was almost his turn, the cash ran out. He angrily hopped on his electric tricycle and travelled several kilometers to another branch where he finally managed to withdraw some money after wasting the entire morning. "It shouldn't be so difficult to get the money you earn by working," the 23-year-old told

deep economic crisis, one of the worst in decades. Fonseca is one of an increasing number of frustrated Cubans who have to grapple with yet another hurdle while navigating the island's already complicated monetary system — a shortage of cash. Long queues outside banks and ATMs in the capital, Havana, and beyond start forming early in the day as people seek cash for routine transactions like buying food and other essentials. Experts say there are several reasons behind the shortage, all somehow related to Cuba's

medium-size business who are more likely to collect cash from commercial transactions but are reluctant to return the money to the banks. This, Pérez says, is either because they don't trust the local banks or simply because they need the Cuban pesos to convert into foreign currency. Most entrepreneurs and small business owners in Cuba have to import almost everything they sell or pay in foreign currency for the supplies needed to run their businesses. As a consequence, many end up hoarding Cuban pesos to later change into foreign currency on the informal market. Converting those Cuban pesos to other currencies poses yet another challenge, as there are several, highly fluctuating exchange rates in the island. For example, the official rate used by government industries and agencies is 24 pesos to the US dollar, while for individuals, the rate is 120 pesos to the dollar. However, the dollar can fetch up to 350 Cuban pesos on the informal market. Pérez notes that in 2018, 50 per cent of the cash in circulation was in the hands of the Cuban population and the

credit cards mandatory to pay for some transactions — including purchases of food, fuel and other basic goods — but many businesses simply refuse to accept them. Making things worse is stubbornly high inflation, meaning more and more physical bills are needed to buy products. According to official figures, inflation stood at 77 per cent in 2021, then dropped to 31 per cent in 2023. But for the average Cuban, the official figures barely reflect the reality of their lives, since market inflation can reach up to three digits on the informal market. For example, a carton of eggs, which sold for 300 Cuban pesos in 2019, these days sells for about 3,100 pesos. All while the monthly salary for Cuban state workers ranges between 5,000 and 7,000 Cuban pesos (between USD 14 and USD 20 in the parallel market). "To live in an economy that, in addition to having several currencies, has several exchange rates and a three-digit inflation is quite complicated," said Pavel Vidal, a Cuba expert and professor at Colombia's Javeriana University of Cali.

Centre allows 99,500 tons of onion exports to six neighbouring nations

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Saturday said it has allowed exports of 99,500 tonnes of onions, mainly sourced from Maharashtra, to six neighbouring countries despite the ban on shipments.

The Centre has also allowed exports of 2,000 tonnes of white onion cultivated, especially, for export markets in the Middle East and some European countries.

On December 8, 2023, the government banned export of onions.

In an official statement, the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution said the government has "allowed export of 99,150 tonnes of onion to six neighbouring countries of Bangladesh, UAE, Bhutan, Bahrain, Mauritius and Sri Lanka".

The export prohibition has been imposed to ensure adequate domestic availability against the backdrop of estimated lower Kharif and Rabi crops in 2023-24 compared to the previous year. The ban was imposed amid an increase in demand in the



international market, it added. The National Cooperative Exports Limited (NCEL), the agency for the export of onion to these countries, sourced the domestic onions to be exported through e-platform at LI prices. NCEL has supplied to the agency or agencies nominated by the government of the

destination country at the negotiated rate on a 100 per cent advance payment basis. The offer rate of NCEL to the buyers takes into account the prevailing prices in the destination market and also international and domestic markets. The quota allocated for export to the six countries is being

supplied as per requisition made by the destination country. "As the largest producer of onion in the country, Maharashtra is the major supplier of onions sourced by NCEL for export," the statement said. The government had also allowed the export of 2,000

tonnes of white onion cultivated, especially for export markets in the Middle East and some European countries.

"Being purely export-oriented, the production cost of the white onion is higher than other onions due to higher seed cost, adoption of good agricultural practice (GAP) and compliance to strict maximum residue limits (MRL) requirements," the statement said.

The procurement target for onion buffer out of Rabi crop 2024 under the Price Stabilisation Fund (PSF) of the Department of Consumer Affairs has been fixed at 5 lakh tonnes this year.

The Central agencies, like NCCF and NAFED are tying up local agencies like FPOs/PPCs/PACs to support the procurement, storage and farmers registration to begin the procurement of any store-worthy onion.

A high-level team of the Department of Consumer Affairs, NCCF and NAFED visited Nashik and Ahmednagar districts of Maharashtra from April 11-13, 2024, to create awareness

among the farmers, FPOs/PPCs and PACs about the procurement of 5 lakh tonnes of onion for buffer stock.

To reduce the storage loss of onions, the department has decided to enhance the quantum of stocks to be irradiated and cold stored from 1,200 tonnes last year to over 5,000 tonnes this year, with technical support from BARC, Mumbai.

The pilot of onion irradiation and cold storage taken up last year has been found to have resulted in the reduction of storage loss to less than 10 per cent, the statement said.

In March, the Union Agriculture Ministry released the data for onion production. As per the data, onion production in 2023-24 (First Advance Estimates) is expected to be around 254.73 lakh tonnes compared to around 302.08 lakh tonnes last year.

This is due to a decrease of 34.31 lakh tonne output in Maharashtra, 9.95 lakh tonne in Karnataka, 3.54 lakh tonne in Andhra Pradesh and 3.12 lakh tonne in Rajasthan, the data showed.



WTO body asked to delay ruling on ICT import duties dispute till July 26

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India and Chinese Taipei have asked the WTO's dispute settlement body not to adopt any ruling against New Delhi's import duties on certain information and technology products till July 26 as both sides are engaged in resolving the matter, an official said.

The issue came up during a meeting of the dispute settlement body (DSB) in Geneva on April 26.

In the meeting, the two countries asked DSB to delay consideration of a dispute panel's reports until July 26, 2024 in order to help facilitate resolution of the disputes, the Geneva-based official said, adding that the body agreed to that.

Earlier also, DSB had agreed to three previous requests from India and Chinese Taipei to delay consideration of the reports.

As per rules of the WTO, the panel's ruling will have to be adopted by DSB for implementation within 60 days of the release of the order. However, countries can mutually request DSB for delay in adoption of the ruling.

In its report, a dispute panel of WTO on April 17, 2023 said import duties imposed by India on certain information and technology products violate global trading norms.

The ruling followed a case filed by the EU, Japan and Taiwan against these duties in WTO. In May 2019, Chinese Taipei had filed a case against India in the WTO over the import

duties imposed on certain electronic goods, including telephones for cellular networks; machines for reception, conversion and transmission or regeneration of voice, images or other data; and parts of telephone sets.

India has stated that these ICT products are part of WTO's Information Technology Products (ITA-2) agreement, and New Delhi is not part of this pact. India is a part of ITA-1, signed in 1997, which did not have any obligation to eliminate customs duties on these products.

Besides formulating norms for global exports and imports, the Geneva-based 164-member multilateral body adjudicates trade disputes among the member countries.

According to WTO rules, a member country can file a case in WTO if they feel that a particular trade measure is against the norms of WTO.

Bilateral consultation is the first step to resolving a dispute. If both sides are not able to resolve the matter through consultation, either of them can approach the establishment of a dispute settlement panel.

The panel's ruling or report can be challenged at WTO's appellate body. Interestingly, the appellate body is not functioning because of differences among member countries to appoint its members. Several disputes are already pending with this body. The US has been blocking the appointment of the members.

Indiabulls Real Estate loss widens to ₹1,038 crore in FY24

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indiabulls Real Estate Ltd (IBREL) has posted widening of consolidated net loss at Rs 1,038.65 crore for the last fiscal year.

Its net loss stood at Rs 608.38 crore in 2022-23.

Total income also fell to Rs 648.75 crore during 2023-24 from Rs 648.47 crore in the preceding year, according to a regulatory filing on Friday.

IBREL's net loss in March quarter FY24 narrowed to Rs 302 crore from Rs 375.99 crore



in the year-ago period. Total income fell to Rs 39.54 crore in the quarter from Rs 132.91 crore in the year-ago period. Mumbai-based IBREL is one of the leading real estate developers in the country.

Mahindra Lifespace FY24 profit falls marginally to ₹98 crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Mahindra Lifespace Developers Ltd has reported a marginal decline in consolidated net profit to Rs 97.89 crore during the last fiscal year on lower income. Its net profit stood at Rs 101.43 crore in the preceding year.

According to a regulatory filing on Friday, the company's total income fell to Rs 279.12 crore last fiscal from Rs 659.56 crore in 2022-23.

Mahindra Lifespace is the real estate and infrastructure development business of Mahindra Group.

During the fourth quarter of last fiscal, the company's consolidated net profit surged to Rs 71.15 crore from just Rs 55 lakh in the year-ago period.

Total income declined to Rs 54.60 crore in



the quarter as against Rs 270.26 crore in the year-ago period.

Amit Sinha, Managing Director & CEO, Mahindra Lifespace Developers, said, "We closed FY24 with our highest ever annual sales driven by successful launches throughout the year."

Additionally, he said the company closed

2023-24 fiscal year with over Rs 4,400 crore of GDV (gross development value) in its business development.

On operational front, Mahindra Lifespace achieved its highest ever pre-sales of Rs 2,328 crore (saleable area - 2.47 million square feet, RERA carpet area 1.84 million square feet) in residential business during the last fiscal year. The company also achieved land leasing of 119.4 acres in the industrial business for Rs 370 crore.

Established in 1994, Mahindra Lifespace's development footprint spans 37.33 million square feet of completed, ongoing and forthcoming residential projects across seven Indian cities. It also has over 5,000 acre of ongoing and forthcoming projects under development / management at its integrated developments / industrial clusters across four locations.



ICICI Bank reports 18.5 per cent growth in Q4

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Private sector lender ICICI Bank on Saturday said its March 2024 quarter consolidated net grew 18.5 per cent to Rs 11,672 crore.

It had reported a net profit of Rs 9,853 crore in the year-ago period.

On a standalone basis, the second largest private sector lender showed a 17.4 per cent growth in its profit after tax at Rs 10,708 crore for the reporting quarter against Rs 9,122 crore in the year-ago period.

The core net interest income increased 8.1 per cent to Rs 19,093 crore on a 16.8 per cent growth in loans and a marginal compression in net interest margin to 4.40 per cent.

The non-interest income, excluding the performance of the treasury, came at Rs 5,930 crore, 15.7 per cent higher than the year-ago period.

The provisions more than halved to Rs 718 crore for the reporting quarter, as per the exchange filing by the lender.

Vestian: Office space leasing in Delhi-NCR drops 25 per cent annually in January-March

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The office space leasing in Delhi-NCR fell 25 per cent annually to 18.1 lakh square feet in January-March this year on lower demand from corporates, according to real estate consultant Vestian.

The office space absorption stood at 24 lakh square feet in the year-ago period.

The leasing of office space in Delhi-NCR dropped 40 per cent from 30 lakh square feet in the October-December quarter. The real estate consultant on Saturday released the data for office leasing across the top seven major cities.

Office absorption increased 13 per cent to 134 lakh sq ft in January-March 2024 from 118.5 lakh square feet in the year-ago period.

However, the absorption declined by 31 per cent during the first quarter of this year after peaking in the fourth quarter of 2023.

Vestian CEO Shrinivas Rao said, "2024 started on a positive note, as major office markets of India witnessed sustained absorption activities."

"Return to office mandates are likely to renew demand for office spaces across the country and may drive the next wave of growth amid global headwinds," Rao added.

Southern cities (Bengaluru, Chennai, and Hyderabad) accounted for 61 per cent of the Pan-India absorption in Q1 2024.

Their combined share increased from 54 per cent a year earlier. Moreover, the IT-ITes sector dominated absorption with 47 per cent share, followed by the BFSI sector with 11 per cent share.

Flexible spaces garnered interest from large conglomerates post-pandemic, accounting for 8 per cent of the pan-India absorption in Q1 2024.

In Bengaluru, office leasing declined to 26.2 lakh square feet in January-March this year from 33 lakh square feet in the year-ago period.

In Chennai, the leasing of office demand doubled to 33.5 lakh square feet from 16 lakh square feet.

Office leasing in Hyderabad rose to 22.7 lakh square feet from 15 lakh square feet.

In Mumbai, the office space absorption doubled to 24.9 lakh square feet from 12 lakh square feet.

Kolkata saw a decline in leasing to 1.6 lakh square feet from 3.5 lakh square feet.

The office leasing in Pune declined to 7.1 lakh square feet during January-March 2024 from 15 lakh square feet in the year-ago period.

JPMorgan's Dimon hopes for soft landing for US economy but says stagflation possible scenario

AP ■ NEW YORK

JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon says he's hopeful the Federal Reserve can bring down inflation without causing a recession but wouldn't rule out more troubling possibilities, such as stagflation.

In an interview with The Associated Press at a Chase branch opening in The Bronx, Dimon said he remained "cautious" about the US economy and said inflation may be stickier for longer and that "stagflation is on the list of possible things" that could happen to the US economy. "You should be worried about (the possibility of stagflation)," Dimon said.

Dimon did emphasise that he's still "hopeful" for the US economy to experience a soft landing, where growth slows but the economy avoids a recession even if inflation remains a little high, but he's not certain that is the most likely outcome.

"I'm just a little more dubious than others that a (soft landing) is a given," he said.

The Fed rapidly raised interest rates in 2022 and 2023 after inflation reached the highest level in four decades. Fed officials have indicated they expect to begin lowering rates at some point, but the timeline has been pushed back as inflation remains well above the central bank's target rate of



2 per cent.

Dimon spoke to the AP on a range of issues, including the independence of the Federal Reserve, the health of the US consumer, the need for banks to open branches and the pressing geopolitical issues of the day.

Inflation has been stubbornly elevated so far this year, and a report on Thursday showing growth slowed in the first three months of this year fanned fears of "stagflation," which occurs when the economy is weak, or in recession, yet prices keep moving higher.

It's a particularly miserable combination of economic circumstances, with high unemployment occurring along with rising costs. Typically, a sluggish economy brings down inflation. Stagflation last occurred in the 1970s, when conditions were far worse than today. In 1975,

for example, inflation topped 10 per cent while the unemployment rate peaked at 9 per cent.

Inflation is now 3.5 per cent and unemployment just 3.8 per cent, near a half-century low. If stagflation did occur, Dimon said he believes it would not be as bad as it was in the 1970s.

Fears of stagflation eased on Friday after a government report showed consumer spending stayed strong in March, suggesting the economy will keep expanding at a solid pace in the coming months.

Dimon also emphasised the need for the Federal Reserve to remain independent, following a report by The Wall Street Journal this week that said advisors for former President Trump were considering ways to curb the independence of the Fed should again be elected. The steps could

include making the Fed's chairman removable by the president or requiring the president to be consulted on any changes to interest rates.

"I don't know what these people are thinking, or how they think they are going to go about this," Dimon said, saying that any changes would likely require legislation.

Chase was opening its 17th "community center" branch on Friday. These are larger branches that are designed for low-to-moderate income areas. They are designed with multipurpose areas that do workshops and financial literacy work for communities in need.

Glennys Arias, 43, lives in the Bronx and works as an Uber driver. She's been banking with Chase for six months and said she typically comes to use the ATM, for check cashing, and to check on her credit.

She said the branch has met her needs and she hadn't heard about the expansion or upcoming classes or events. "I didn't know about any of that, but I'd come for that," she said, of the programming.

In off-the-cuff remarks, Dimon noted the steady stream of customers. "I love the fact that so many people are walking in here. So many people are nervous about how they'll be treated when they walk into a bank branch.

Pumps maker KSB Ltd March qtr profit grows 8 per cent

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Pumps and valves maker KSB Ltd has reported a 7.75 per cent growth in net profit to Rs 43.1 crore for the quarter ended March 31, 2024.

It had clocked a net profit of Rs 40 crore in the year-ago period, the company said in a statement on Saturday.

The company follows January to December as financial year. During the quarter under review, the company's expenses rose to Rs 483.3 crore from Rs 432.4 crore a year ago.

Sales revenues rose to Rs 544.2 crore from Rs 489.6 crore. "This quarter we have registered a steady growth in sales revenue, which is 11.2 per cent higher than that of the corresponding Q1 2023 quarter. Our recent venture into the light water application of nuclear plant segment highlights our ongoing expansion efforts," Prashant Kumar, Vice President of Sales and Marketing, KSB said.

The company has received a letter of award for a project worth Rs 63 crore under PM-Kusum scheme from Maharashtra Energy Development Agency for installation of 2,500 solar water pumping systems. Part of Germany-based KSB Group, KSB Ltd is a leading manufacturer of pumps and valves.

BUSINESS BRIEF

NTPC TRIUMPHS AT SCOPE BUSINESS QUIZ BONANZA 2024
NTPC proudly announces its resounding victory at the prestigious SCOPE Business Quiz Bonanza (SBQB) held recently at SCOPE Convention Centre, New Delhi as part of the Public Sector Day celebrations. The NTPC team comprising of K M Prashanth, GM (CC) and Anshuman Srivastava, DGM (CP) emerged as the winner in the grand finale, surpassing stiff competition from other esteemed public sector units. The prizes were distributed by Amarendu Prakash, CMD (SAIL), Atul Sobti, DG, SCOPE, Shri Uttam Lal, Director (HR), NHPC and others senior dignitaries from SCOPE. Shri D. K. Patel, Director (HR), NTPC congratulated the team members for their excellent performance. More than 100 teams from various Maharashtra, Navaratna and Miniratna PSUs participated in the quiz from across the country. After an initial screening round, followed by two semi-final rounds, the grand finale had four teams - one team from NTPC and three teams from SAIL. After four rounds of quizzing, NTPC team emerged as the winner.

Sai Swami Metals & Alloys SME IPO to open on April 30

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

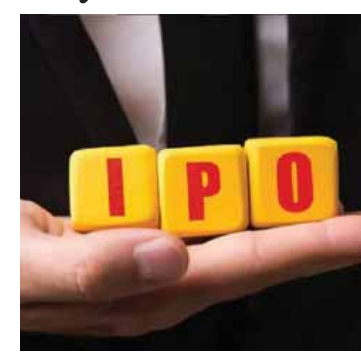
Stainless steel products maker Sai Swami Metals & Alloys Ltd will hit the capital market on April 30 to raise around Rs 15 crore from public investors.

The initial public offering of the company will open for subscription on the SME platform of BSE on Tuesday and will close on May 3, the company said in a statement on Saturday. The Ahmedabad-based company,

which manufactures stainless steel cookware and appliances under brand DOLPHIN, has fixed the price at Rs 60 per equity share.

The IPO comprises a fresh issue of 25 lakh equity shares of Rs 10 each. The company has fixed the retail individual investors' quota for the IPO at 50 per cent of the net offer and the rest 50 per cent for other investors.

"The proceeds of the public issue will be utilised to fund the company's expansion plans including purchase



of machineries, investment in subsidiary company, meeting working capital requirements and for general corporate purposes," the statement said.

The company plans to utilise Rs 6 crore towards working capital requirements, Rs 4 crore for investing in a subsidiary, Rs 2 crore for purchasing machineries and Rs 2 crore towards general corporate purpose. Shares of the company will be listed on BSE SME platform.

Swastika Investmart Ltd is the lead manager, while Bigshare Services is the registrar of the issue.

Sai Swami Metals & Alloys is involved in the trading and marketing of a comprehensive array of stainless steel products.

For nine months ended December 2023, the company reported a net profit of Rs 1.79 crore and revenue of Rs 33.33 crore. In 2022-23 fiscal year, the company logged a net profit of Rs 3.83 lakh and a revenue of Rs 6.27 crore.

JYOTHI SHOOTS HAT-TRICK OF GOLD AT ARCHERY WORLD CUP

PTI ■ SHANGHAI

Asian Games champion Jyothi Surekha Vennam spearheaded India's dominance with a rare hat-trick of gold as compound archers lapped up five medals at the ongoing Archery World Cup Stage 1 here on Saturday. The world No. 3 Jyothi fought past tournament top seed Andrea Becerra of Mexico in a tight shoot-off finish 146-146 (9⁺-9) to become the second Indian after Deepika Kumari to secure triple gold medals in a World Cup. Three-time Olympian and former world No. 1 Deepika had achieved the incredible feat at Paris World Cup Stage 3 in June 2021. For Jyothi, it also matched her feat at the last year's Hangzhou Asian Games where the 27-year-old Vijayawada archer returned with three gold medals, winning individual, women's team and mixed team events. Youngster Priyansh capped India's spectacular outing in the compound section, by bagging his maiden World Cup medal in the form of a silver in the men's individual section. In his second Cup appearance, the 21-year-old found himself up against a formidable

opponent in 2021 world champion Nico Wiener, who delivered a flawless performance, scoring a perfect 150 out of a maximum 150. The 27-year-old Austrian shot all 10s from 15 arrows to edge out the spirited Indian by three points. In the morning session, India underlined their supremacy in the non-Olympic compound category to make a clean sweep of team events, winning men's team, women's team and mixed team events with Jyothi featuring in two of them. Jyothi, Aditi Swami and Parneet Kaur dropped just four points to trounce Italy 236-225 in the women's compound team event to open their account with a gold medal. The men's team of Abhishek Verma, Priyansh and Prathamesh Fuge then went one step better as they missed just two points en route to defeating Netherlands' Mike Schloesser, Sil Pater and Stef Willems 238-231. The mixed team completed the sweep when the second-seeded Jyothi and Verma warded off a late resurgence from their Estonian rivals -- Lisell Jaatma and Robin Jaatma -- to win 158-157 in a thrilling finish. The top seeded women's compound team dropped just



four points from 24 arrows to down sixth seeded Italy in the first match of the day. In the first three ends of six arrows each, Jyothi, Aditi and Parneet missed the perfect 10 only twice to take a handsome 178-171 lead over Marcella Tonioli, Irene Franchini and Elisa Roner. In the fourth end, the Indians dropped two points but it did not matter much as they nailed the gold with an 11-point margin. The men's team, who qualified as the fourth seed, put up a near flawless show to defeat their Dutch opponents. They began with a perfect round of 60 and dropped just two points in the next two ends, before sealing the win with another perfect 60 in the final set of six arrows. In the compound mixed team event, Jyothi and Abhishek took a three-point lead, starting off with a perfect round of 40. The three-point drop in the first end proved decisive for Estonian archers who went on to shoot three perfect rounds of 40 each but the Indians held their nerves to seal the issue. Leading 119-117, the Indian duo needed a minimum score of 39 points out of a maximum 40 in the final end. They did

just that to bag the country's third gold. Jyothi then returned in the afternoon session to become the individual champion as well. The Indian struggled to get a perfect round in the first three ends as Andrea raced to an 88-87 lead. Jyothi finally managed a perfect round in the fourth end when she drilled in three 10s with two X (closer to the centre), while Andrea also matched the Indian to retain her one-point lead. In the fifth round, Andrea faltered under pressure to drop two points, while Jyothi scored a 29 to level it 146-all to force a shoot-off. Both shot nine-all in the shoot-off but Jyothi's arrow was closer to the inner-ring to seal her third gold. Medal rounds in the recurve section will be played on Sunday and India are eyeing two gold from the Olympic discipline. The Indian men's team will take on Olympic champions South Korea in the gold medal clash. Deepika is in fray for an individual medal and will play her semifinal against South Korean rival in the women's recurve section.



Senthilkumar in Batch Open squash semis

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

National champion Velavan Senthilkumar stormed into the semifinals of the Batch Open squash tournament, defeating Jakub Solnicky of the Czech Republic in Paris. Top seed Senthilkumar, ranked 58 in the world, beat fifth-seeded Czech 11-5, 11-6, 11-2 in 37 minutes in the quarterfinals of the USD 12,000 PSA Challenger Tour event on Friday night. He will face Hong Kong's Andes Ling in the semifinals. Elsewhere, fourth seeded Indian Akanksha Salunkhe lost to fifth seed Alina Bushma of Ukraine 7-11, 7-11, 8-11 in 29 minutes in the quarterfinals of the Expression St James Open, a USD 20,000 PSA Challenger Tour event in Springfield, US.

Arne Slot step closer to Liverpool job

AP ■ LIVERPOOL (ENGLAND)

Arne Slot took a big step closer to becoming Liverpool's manager after the Premier League club reportedly agreed to pay Feyenoord about 11 million euros (USD 11.7 million) in compensation. British and Dutch media reported that the clubs reached a verbal agreement on the compensation package, clearing the way for the 45-year-old Slot to succeed Jurgen Klopp after this season.

While British media pegged the compensation around 11 million euros, Dutch newspaper De Telegraaf said the figure could surpass 13 million euros. Slot has two years left on his contract with the Rotterdam club. Klopp is leaving Liverpool after more than eight years in which he has won a full set of trophies including the Premier League and Champions League. Neither club has commented. With the compensation package agreed, Liverpool can



now negotiate contract terms with Slot. On Friday, Klopp described the Anfield post as the "best job in the world." He said he liked Slot's style of soccer but has not been involved in the search process. "If he's the solution I'm more than happy," Klopp said. "It's not up to me to judge these things, but it all sounds really good to me." Slot delivered the Dutch league title last season and the Dutch Cup this year at Feyenoord.



Indian women beat Canada 4-1 in Uber Cup

PTI ■ CHENGDU (CHINA)

Ashmita Chaliha produced an inspired show to stun higher-ranked Michelle Li as the Indian women's team notched up a clinical 4-1 win over Canada to make a positive start in the Uber Cup tournament here on Saturday. The left-handed Chaliha, ranked 53rd, showed great mental resolve and tenacity as she outwitted world no. 25 Li, a gold and silver medalist at the 2014 and 2022 Commonwealth Games, 26-24 in a 42-minute opening singles clash. Chaliha, who was part of India's maiden Asia Team Championships win in February, took over the leadership role in the absence of the top guns including P V Sindhu and delivered against Li, who is on a comeback trail after undergoing surgery for a meniscus tear on her right knee last August.

Young women's doubles pair of Priya Konjengbam and Shruti Mishra, who had claimed the senior national championships title last December, then beat Catherine Choi and Jeslyn Chow 21-12 21-10 to put India 2-0 ahead. Isharani Baruah defeated Wen Yu Zhang 21-13 21-12 to help India take an unassailable 3-0 lead. In the second women's doubles, Simran Singh and Ritika Thaker went down 19-21 15-21 to Canada's Jackie Dent and Crystal before national champion Anmol Kharb beat Eliana Zhang 21-15 21-11 in the fifth and final match to complete the comfortable win. Bigger clashes lie ahead for the young Indian side as it will face Singapore and China on Sunday and Tuesday respectively in Group A. In Thomas Cup, India will begin their title defence against Thailand later in the day.

Madrid take step closer to La Liga title

AP ■ SAN SEBASTIAN

Real Madrid moved another step closer to a 36th Spanish league title after beating Real Sociedad 1-0 and extending its lead in the standings to 14 points. Carlo Ancelotti's men need just five points from their last five games to ensure the title will return to the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium. "We are very close to winning La Liga," the coach acknowledged after a hard-fought win in the Basque country. On a rainy night in San Sebastian, Madrid put out a second-string team to rest Jude Bellingham, Vinicius Junior and other regulars. The new faces struggled for large parts of the game, with Sociedad having much of the play and plenty of scoring chances. But one of Madrid's new faces proved the difference between the sides. Arda Güler, the young Turkish attacker, made his first start in the league, and when the Sociedad defense failed to clear Dani



Carvajal's low cross, Güler drifted in at the back post to slot the ball home with 29 minutes gone. Ancelotti paid tribute to the 19-year-old Güler, calling him "a very important player for our future." "Güler has extraordinary quality, he has great talent. Little by little he will take center stage." Takakura Kubo equalized three minutes later for Sociedad only to see his goal disallowed after a video review. Ancelotti introduced Vinicius, Antonio Rudiger and Eduardo Camavinga in a busy second half as Madrid held on to extend its unbeaten run in La Liga to 27 games. Another satisfying note for the champion-elect was the return of Eder Militao. The Brazilian defender made his first start since tearing his cruciate ligament eight months ago, and played the entire game. "I am very happy, after eight months out," Militao said. "Very happy to return and play 90 minutes and feel like a player again."



Uzbekistan knocks out Saudi Arabia in Under-23 Asian Cup soccer

AP ■ DOHA

Defending champion Saudi Arabia lost to Uzbekistan 2-0 in the Under-23 Asian Cup quarterfinals and also saw its chance of a second successive appearance at the Olympics end. Only the top three teams from the 16-team competition qualify automatically for men's Olympic soccer in Paris. Fourth place earns a playoff against Guinea in May. In a reverse of the 2022 final, Uzbekistan was a comfortable winner. Khusain Norchaev scored on halftime and the Saudis' task became much harder after 70 minutes when

Ayman Yahya received a second yellow card. Umarali Rakhmonaliev headed home to secure the win for the 2018 champion. The Central Asian team will take on Indonesia in Monday's semifinal. Iraq defeated Vietnam 1-0 to earn a last-four clash with Japan. Ali Jasim scored in the second half from the penalty spot after goalkeeper Quan Van Chuan fouled Mohammad Nihad in the area. Vietnam's Nguyen Manh Hung was red-carded for stamping on Jasim in stoppage time. Earlier Friday, the Korea

Association apologized to fans for failing to qualify for the Olympics for the first time since 1984. The team lost to Indonesia on Thursday after a shootout "The coaching staff and players all did their best to try to qualify for our 10th consecutive Olympic Games, but unfortunately, we didn't accomplish our goal," the statement said. "We fully understand that the responsibility lies with us at the KFA, as we are in charge of developing and supporting national teams. We'd like to offer our sincere apology to all football fans for our failure to qualify."

PTI ■ BENGALURU

World champion Neeraj Chopra's historic gold medal at Tokyo Olympics has brought a 'sense of belief' that Indian athletes do not think of themselves 'any lesser than top global athletes,' says top shot putter Tajinderpal Singh Toor. Toor, a two-time Asian Games gold medalist, says that the change in mindset after Chopra's feat has made the Indian athletes believe they will participate in the Paris Olympics with the aim to win and not just participate. "Ever since Neeraj Chopra's gold at the Tokyo Olympic Games, it's brought a sense of self belief where each one of us are not just going to the games to participate but we are going there to win a medal," Toor said on Saturday during a

Indian athletes do not think of themselves any lesser than top athletes, says Toor

panel discussion on the eve of the TCS World 10K Bengaluru. He said, "I think that's the shift in mindset today. We don't think of ourselves any lesser than top global athletes we compete with. Look at the results in World Championships, we had Neeraj and Kishore Jena finish on the podium. We also had DP Manu enter the final in the same event." Also attending the discussion were 27-time IBSF world champion Pankaj Advani, ace shooter Tejas Krishna Prasad, squash star Joshna



Chinnappa, former international athlete and Arjuna awardee Ashwini Nachappa. On the inclusion of squash at the 2028 Olympics, Joshna said that it has served as a huge motivation. "I think it is very exciting that squash will be in the Olympics, to be honest it should have been there many years ago. "It is definitely a motivator for me to really look after my body, choose my tournaments wisely, and train smarter to be able to compete with the young a lot. It is going to be quite an uphill task, but it is there in my mind," she said.

Cheema, Esha, Divyansh and Elavenil win on final day of Delhi trials

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Arjun Singh Cheema, A Esha Singh, Divyansh Singh Panwar and Elavenil Valarivan won their events on the concluding day of the Olympic Selection Trials (OST) 1 and 2 in rifle/pistol here on Saturday. Cheema won the day's first final (men's 10m air pistol in OST T2), followed by Esha in women's 10m air pistol in OST T2. Divyansh claimed the men's 10m air rifle and Elavenil clinched the women's 10m



air rifle final in a cliff-hanger. None of the 37 shooters who have qualified for the OSTs are sure of their Paris Olympic tickets with the final two trials scheduled in Bhopal next month. Cheema won his final with a score of 244.6. Ravinder continued his good showing in the trials, coming in second spot with 242.4, while Varun Tomar was third. Qualification topper Sarabjot Singh was fourth while Naveen was the lowest

ranked finalist. In the women's air pistol, Esha extended her excellent run by winning the OST T2 final in convincing fashion. She was a whole point ahead of second-placed Rhythm Sangwan, after the first series of five-single shots. She kept getting stronger as the match progressed to finish with a final tally of 244.9, 3.1 ahead of Rhythm. Palak came in third to pick up the final podium place as Surbhi Rao and Manu Bhaker finished fourth and fifth respectively.



INCONSISTENT CSK FACE BRUISED SRH IN IPL

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Starting from back-to-back losses, defending champion Chennai Super Kings will be desperate to return to winning ways when they face a formidable but bruised Sunrisers Hyderabad in their IPL match here on Sunday.

CSK had a good start to the season under new skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad but they have been toppled by the Lucknow Super Giants twice in the last two games. It was an unfamiliar sight for the Yellow Brigade fans to see the Chepauk fortress being breached as LSG knocked down a target of 210 with ease, thanks to Marcus Stoinis' stunning hundred.

With four wins and as many losses in eight games, CSK are currently at fifth spot, tied with eight points with Delhi Capitals and Gujarat Titans and will be keen to find their mojo back as things can quickly go south as the race to playoffs get heated up.

Come Sunday, CSK will be up against third-ranked Sunrisers

Hyderabad, who have twice broken the record of the highest IPL total this season but are coming into the game following a failure of their ultra-aggressive batting approach against RCB.

CSK's batting has hovered around skipper Gaikwad, who pulled off only his second IPL century the other day, and the in-form Shivam Dube, who once again impressed with yet another fifty. While Ravindra Jadeja too chipped in with the bat, the inconsistent form of top-order is a problem. Both Rachin Ravindra and Daryl Mitchell's lack of runs is a concern and it has forced CSK to shuffle their batting order.

Considering their bowling, the hosts had to toil hard against LSG, given the unexpectedly huge amount of dew at Chepauk that took their spinners out of the game and the visitors made full advantage of it during their 213-run chase.

While the CSK pacers managed to capture the four LSG wickets to fell, the spinners struggled to grip the ball, whereas the constant misfields



did not help them either. A high-flying SRH, on the other hand, were brought to the ground by RCB when they suffered only their third defeat of the season at home by 35 runs on Thursday.

However, it is unlikely to deter the SRH batters who would fancy their chances against an inconsistent

CSK. Against RCB, SRH's top and middle-order failed collectively while chasing, forcing head coach Daniel Vettori to admit that the idea of going all out with the bat in the second innings might not be the right thing to do.

There is unlikely to be any shuffling in the visiting batting order, but Aiden Markram might need to step up, having been dismissed in singles figures in the last two contests.

In bowling, senior seamer Bhuvneshwar Kumar is the only one who could be at the receiving end, having managed to claim just a wicket in the last three fixtures.

With the likes of Umran Malik, Fazalhaq Farooqi and Akash Singh waiting in the wings, SRH may think of giving a chance to the Jammu pacer, who has the ability to bowl above 150 kmph.

Given that SRH won four of their last five games this season while defending, they would love to bat first but both teams will also keep an eye on the unpredictable dew factor.

SQUADS:
Chennai Super Kings: MS Dhoni (wk), Ravindra Jadeja, Devon Conway, Ruturaj Gaikwad (c), Ajinkya Rahane, Moen Ali, Shivam Dube, Rajvardhan Hangargekar, Mitchell Santner, Tushar Deshpande, Matheesha Pathirana, Simarjeet Singh, Prashant Solanki, Maheesh Theekshana, Shaik Rasheed, Nishant Sindhu, Ajay Mandal, Mukesh Choudhary, Rachin Ravindra, Shardul Thakur, Daryl Mitchell, Sameer Rizvi, Mustafizur Rahman and Avinash Rao Aravely.
Sunrisers Hyderabad: Abhishek Sharma, Travis Head, Klaasen (wk), Aiden Markram, Abdul Samad, Nitish Reddy, Shabbaz Ahmed, Pat Cummins (c), Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Jaydev Unadkat, T Natarajan, Mayank Markande, Umran Malik, Anmolpreet Singh, Glenn Phillips, Rahul Tripathi, Washington Sundar, Upendra Yadav, Subramanyan, Sanvir Singh, Vijayakanth Vijayakanth, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Marco Jansen, Akash Maharaj Singh and Mayank Agarwal.

GT eye improvement against refreshed RCB

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

In need of a total reboot, Gujarat Titans will be wary of Royal Challengers Bengaluru's newfound firepower in the middle-order when the two teams clash in the Indian Premier League here on Sunday.

The Titans are now seventh on the table with eight points from nine matches, and they require a victory to float above the growing pile, constituted by Chennai Super Kings and Delhi Capitals who are also on eight points.

To begin with, the Gujarat side needs their pacers to step up. Their pace bowling unit has been underwhelming throughout this IPL.

Mohit Sharma (10 wickets, economy: 10.35), Umesh Yadav (7 wickets, 10.55), Sandeep Warrier (5 wickets, 10.85) have leaked runs in plenty while backup quicks such as Spencer Johnson and Azmatullah Omarzai too have not inspired much confidence. Their spinners - Rashid Khan (8 wickets), R Sai Kishore and Noor Ahmad (6 wickets each) - have been steady without being spectacular.

The trio's task will be even harder now considering RCB have found a flicker of hope in their middle-order consisting of Rajat Patidar and Cameron Green.

They can take consolation from the fact that dew will not be a significant factor in a day



game, but tackling Patidar, in particular, and Green need much more than help from conditions.

After a modest beginning to the season, Patidar has shown smidgens of his batting skills, especially against the spinners. He made forceful fifties while tackling Sunil Narine and Varun Chakravarthy (KKR) and Mayank Markande (SRH) in the last two matches while batting through the middle phase.

While his 23-ball 52 carried RCB nearly home against Kolkata, Patidar's 20-ball 50 came in a winning cause against Hyderabad.

The right-hander, whose strength is his excellent eye-hand coordination rather than innovation, will be eager to make a similar impact against the GT spinners. Green too was impressive during his 20-ball 37 against the Sunrisers that took RCB past the 200-run mark.

It has also helped RCB reduce their dependency on Dinesh Karthik and Mahipal Lomror down the order for a late thrust, besides freeing opener Virat Kohli and Faf du Plessis of the burden of scoring in almost every match.

The GT batters would also like to take a cue from their RCB counterparts.

Sai Sudharsan and skipper

heavy-duty batting line-up, keeping it guessing with clever variations even on a smooth HCA Stadium surface.

Leg-spinner Karn Sharma and part-time pacer Green picked up four wickets equally among them to support their lead bowlers.

So, in a day-game they might be hoping for an even more improved show against a vacillating batting unit of GT.

TEAMS (FROM):
RCB: Faf du Plessis (c), Glenn Maxwell, Virat Kohli, Rajat Patidar, Anuj Rawat, Dinesh Karthik, Suyash Prabhudessai, Will Jacks, Mahipal Lomror, Karn Sharma, Manoj Bhandage, Mayank Dagar, Vijaykumar Vyshak, Akash Deep, Mohammed Siraj, Reece Topley, Himanshu Sharma, Rajan Kumar, Cameron Green, Alzarri Joseph, Yash Dayal, Tom Curran, Lockie Ferguson, Swapnil Singh, Saurav Chauhan.

GT: Shubman Gill (c), David Miller, Matthew Wade, Wriddhiman Saha, Kane Williamson, Abhinav Manohar, B. Sai Sudharsan, Darshan Nalkande, Vijay Shankar, Jayant Yadav, Rahul Tewatia, Noor Ahmad, Sai Kishore, Rashid Khan, Joshua Little, Mohit Sharma, Azmatullah Omarzai, Umesh Yadav, Shahrulkh Khan, Sushant Mishra, Kartik Tyagi, Manav Suthar, Spencer Johnson, Sandeep Warrier, BR Sharath.

My aim was to take game deep, pick bowlers to target: PBKS Shashank

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Shashank Singh said his ability to pick the bowlers and take the game deep helped him produce the blistering unbeaten 68 off 28 balls, which played a big role in Punjab Kings' record-breaking eight-wicket win over Kolkata Knight Riders in the IPL.

When Shashank entered the field, PBKS needed 84 runs in 7.3 overs to overhaul KKR's daunting 261 for six. Jonny Bairstow, the eventual centurion, was then batting at the other end on 93 off 39 balls.

However, Shashank did not bat an eyelid while knocking off 68 runs (2x4, 8x6) in that period as Bairstow added just 15 off nine balls during their third wicket alliance, which saw Punjab raising the bar for the highest run chase in T20s. "Before this, in the pre-camp and in the domestic matches, I was batting to make sure I could take the game as deep as possible. "I knew I'd be batting around 5-7 in the IPL, so I have been planning on how to take my innings deep," said Shashank on JioCinema.

There was a lot of cricketing with smarts too in his innings as Shashank left alone KKR spinner Sunil Narine while focussing on other bowlers to collect his runs. "I know that Sunil Narine is a world-class bowler, so I knew there was no point in over-



attacking him. He's someone to hit singles, doubles, or nudge the ball towards the boundary. "There were other bowlers to target, so my aim was to take it deep and pick my bowlers to target," he said.

In fact, Shashank faced seven balls out of 28 from Narine and scored just three runs, while putting other bowlers through the wringer, making the remaining 65 off 21 balls.

The 32-year-old said his own experience and talks with his father and coaches at PBKS helped him in his journey.

"If we talk about smartness, it's coming with experience. Secondly, I spend a lot of time discussing cricket with my father. Last time when I got out too quickly, my dad told me that I should've played further back because it was a slow wicket. I have these conversations with my father at home and the world-class coaches who are here. I enjoy asking questions and understanding what they do. I think if I take cues from them, it'll improve my cricket," he added.

Plan to take inspiration out of ODI series success against India: Nigar

PTI ■ SYLHET

A rejuvenated Bangladesh will take inspiration from last year's ODI series success against India when they host the visitors in a women's T20I series here starting Sunday, said home skipper Nigar Sultana.

Bangladesh will play a five-match T20 series against India with all the games set to be played at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium here.

India had toured Bangladesh last year for a white-ball series and although the hosts lost the T20 format (1-2), they managed to end the three-game ODI rubber 1-1.

Nigar said the team is coming from a break and expects the series to be a 'cracker'.

"We failed to fare well against Australia and it was a tough phase for us. But we went on a break then, spent time with our families and are back fresh, both physically and mentally," she replied to a PTI query during a media session on Friday.

Bangladesh had lost both the WODI and WT20I series against Australia 3-0 at home in March-April this year.

"We have prepared well so far,

including quality practice sessions and match scenario practice as well. There's a positive vibe within the team. We plan to take inspiration out of the ODI series win against India last year, and if we play our best cricket, it's going to be a cracker of a series."

Last year, Bangladesh had won the first ODI before India levelled the series after securing a win in the second game but in the third and final ODI ended in a tie as both the team shared the trophy.

A controversy had erupted in the final ODI when skipper Harmanpreet Kaur slammed the umpires for the decisions, terming them 'pathetic'. During the trophy photo session, she had also asked the umpires to join them, deeming them responsible for helping Bangladesh draw the series.

Nigar, who was the Bangladesh captain in that series, later had slammed Harmanpreet for being unprofessional.

"I believe we should let bygones be bygones. None of the sides hold any grudges against it, and we have moved on as well," the skipper said on Friday.

"All we are focused on is this opportunity ahead of the T20 World Cup. And, to prepare in the best way possible against a quality side like India will be highly beneficial for us."

Bangladesh are yet to win a T20I series against India. While there could be pressure on the hosts, Nigar said they would be taking it on a match-by-match basis in this series which will be streamed live on FanCode.

Zaheer picks Pant as sole wicketkeeper for T20 WC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former India pace spearhead Zaheer Khan has picked Rishabh Pant as the sole wicketkeeper in his team for the T20 World Cup while handing out international debut to left-arm seamer Yash Dayal to add a new dimension to the attack.

One of Zaheer's most interesting selections was the 26-year-old Dayal, who represents Uttar Pradesh in domestic cricket and Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the Indian Premier League. He has taken into account Mohammed Shami's injury layoff while picking his squad.

"When I talk about Yash Dayal, it's a talking spot when the 15 are announced because Mohammed Shami will not be available for the tournament. "He's one bowler that if you need someone to bowl up, you have Yash Dayal. If you want a back-end bowler and if Siraj's form is spotty, he can be used there as well," Zaheer told Jio Cinema.

Zaheer also selected Delhi Capitals' captain Pant as the



only wicket-keeper in his squad, overlooking others such as Sanju Samson, KL Rahul and Ishan Kishan.

"Rishabh Pant is my only wicket-keeper. I have given more importance to bringing four pace bowlers. You don't want to sacrifice a fast bowler for another wicketkeeper. You have options like KL Rahul, Sanju Samson, and many want to see Dinesh Karthik.

"At this point, we can consider Mahendra Singh Dhoni as well because of his strike rate! I think they'll focus on current players like Samson, KL Rahul,

and maybe even Jitish Sharma.

"If you're building a team for a month-long tournament, your travelling reserve can be your wicketkeeper."

Zaheer named 16 players in his squad, with the caveat that only one player between

Gujarat Titans' captain Shubman Gill and Rajasthan Royals' opener Yashasvi Jaiswal will be selected as Rohit Sharma's opening partner.

"The toughest decision the selectors will have to make will be choosing one opener out of two terrific options. Shubman Gill and Yashasvi Jaiswal, I think only one of them will make it because the think-tank will want flexibility in the team.

"A player can't be limited to just one role, they might need to move around the batting order."

Zaheer Khan's India squad for T20 World Cup:
Batters: Rohit Sharma, Shubman Gill/Yashasvi Jaiswal, Virat Kohli, Suryakumar Yadav, Rinku Singh
All-Rounders: Shivam Dube, Hardik Pandya, Ravindra Jadeja
Wicket-Keeper: Rishabh Pant
Bowlers: Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj, Arshdeep Singh, Yash Dayal, Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal.

Pakistan to tour NZ next year for 3 ODIs, 5 T20Is

PTI ■ LAHORE

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) confirmed that its national side will tour New Zealand next year to play three ODIs and five T20 Internationals. The series, sixth between the two nations since 2023, was finalised during a meeting between PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi and New Zealand Cricket

(NZC) CEO Scott Weenink in Lahore on the sidelines of the on-going five-match T20I rubber.

During the meeting it was in principle decided to conduct the tour after the 2025 Champions Trophy, which is scheduled to be hosted by Pakistan.

The meeting was also attended by PCB COO Salman Naseer and Director International Cricket Usman

Wahla.

As per the existing ICC FTP, New Zealand are also scheduled to tour Pakistan for a tri-nation series before the Champions Trophy.

New Zealand visited Pakistan twice in 2022/23 for a Test and white ball series and Pakistan went to New Zealand this January for a five-match T20 match rubber.

PCB chief Mohsin Naqvi, who is the

country's interior minister, also asked the NZC official to convey the position and the secure environment in Pakistan to stage for international cricket to other ICC members. "The PCB chief spoke in reference to Pakistan hosting the Champions Trophy early next year and the need for all participating nations to play in Pakistan without any concerns at all," the source said.

AFFIDAVIT

I, Sunil Kumar Sahoo, S/O-Late Sarat Kumar Sahoo, resident of House No-31/c, Shaktinagar, P.O--Rourkela, Pn- Sector-3, Pin-769014, Dist-Sundergarh, Odisha declare by this affidavit A/38 dated -22/4/2024 that now onwards I shall be known as Sunil Kumar Sahoo for all future purposes.

EAST COAST RAILWAY

File No. DRM/Engg/KUR/24-25/E-Tender/02, Dt. 19.04.2024

(1) Tender No. e-Tender-SPL-KUR-14-2024, Dtd.: 16.04.2024

DESCRIPTION: CONSTRUCTION OF THE PROPOSED ROAD OVER BRIDGE (ROB) OF SPAN (1x36 MTR COMPOSITE GIRDER + 1x24 MTR COMPOSITE GIRDER) AT RAILWAY KM. 462/13-15 IN LIEU OF LEVEL CROSSING NO. 203 BETWEEN KHURDA ROAD-KAIPADAR ROAD STATIONS AND (2) CONSTRUCTION OF THE PROPOSED ROAD OVER BRIDGE (ROB) OF SPAN (1x54 MTR BOB STRING STEEL GIRDER) AT RAILWAY KM. 489/9-11 IN LIEU OF LEVEL CROSSING NO. 225 BETWEEN BHUSANPUR-KALUPARA GHAT STATIONS ON KHURDA ROAD-PALASA MAIN LINE OF KHURDA ROAD DIVISION.

Approx. Cost of the Work: ₹ 3394.17 Lakhs, EMD: ₹ 18,47,100/-

(2) Tender No. e-Tender-estatekur-12-2024, Dtd.: 16.04.2024

DESCRIPTION: DEVELOPMENT OF GRASS GROUNDS AND BASIC AMENITIES FOR FOOTBALL AND HOCKEY FIELD AT CARRIAGE REPAIR WORKSHOP / MACHINES WARE BHUBANESWAR.

Approx. Cost of the Work: ₹ 24.53 Lakhs, EMD: ₹ 49,100/-

(3) Tender No. e-Tender-CENTKUR-13-2024, Dtd.: 16.04.2024

DESCRIPTION: ALL REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE OF P.WAY ZONAL WORKS FOR STAFF QUARTERS 30/9/2024 FROM KM. 421.95 TO 450.201 ON MAIN LINE BETWEEN BHUBANESWAR-NEW-KHURDAROAD UNDER THE JURISDICTION OF SENIOR SECTION ENGINEER (P.WAY)/BHUBANESWAR OF KHURDA ROAD DIVISION.

Approx. Cost of the Work: ₹ 49.76 Lakhs, EMD: ₹ 99,500/-

(4) Tender No. e-Tender-CENTKUR-14-2023, Dtd.: 16.04.2024

DESCRIPTION: PROPOSED MISCELLANEOUS REPAIR AND RENOVATION OF STAFF QUARTERS FROM RADHAKISHOREPUR TO RETANG STATIONS UNDER THE JURISDICTION OF ASSISTANT DIVISIONAL ENGINEER / BHUBANESWAR OF KHURDA ROAD DIVISION.

Approx. Cost of the Work: ₹ 292.99 Lakhs, EMD: ₹ 2,96,500/-

(5) Tender No. e-Tender-CENTKUR-15-2024, Dtd.: 16.04.2024

DESCRIPTION: MANUAL DEEP SCREENING OF TRACK, POINTS & CROSSINGS AND OTHER ENABLING WORKS UNDER THE JURISDICTION OF SENIOR SECTION ENGINEER (P.WAY)/DHENKANAL OF KHURDA ROAD DIVISION.

Approx. Cost of the Work: ₹ 129.16 Lakhs, EMD: ₹ 2,14,600/-

Completion Period: 18 (Eighteen) Months (For Sl. No. 1), 03 (Three) Months (For Sl. No. 2), 04 (Four) Months (For Sl. No. 3) & 12 (Twelve) Months (For Sl. No. 4 & 5).

Tender Closing Date and Time: [At 1500 Hrs. of 08.05.2024 (For all the Tenders). No manual offers sent by Post / Courier/ Fax or in person shall be accepted against such e-tenders even if these are submitted on firm's letter head and received in time. All such manual offers shall be considered invalid and shall be rejected summarily without any consideration.

Complete information including e-tender documents of the above e-tender is available in website: www.ireps.gov.in

Note: The prospective tenderers are advised to revisit the website 10 (Ten) days before the date of closing of tender to note any changes / corrigenda issued for this tender. The tenderers/bidders must have Class-III Digital Signature Certificate and must be registered on IREPS Portal. Only registered tenderer/bidder can participate on e-tendering.

Divisional Railway Manager (Engg) / PR-59/P/24-25 / Khurda Road

"I've spent days in cinemas answering questions from the audience, in interviews, travelling abroad, and all they do is thank me nicely"
— George Lopez



CHRONICLE OF BIHAR, BEYOND ELECTIONS

In his travels across cities and hamlets of Bihar, DEEPAK KUMAR JHA discovers that the local populace loves to have extensive discourses on politics and engage in conversations where the rhetoric of caste is quite pronounced and audible

Still considered as some of the most backward districts of Bihar — Madhepura, Purnea, Saharsa, Supaul -- the *Dehati* (rural) thatched structures until a few years ago have all metamorphosed into brick and mortar dwellings amidst lush green mango orchards, banana plants, and corns in the backyard. However, the basic problems of health and education are galore. In every election for the past five decades, people of this region have been promised 'upliftment' by various political parties and leaders in the fray but ultimately the cast die is caste-ridden, preventing their holistic development. Migration, which started in large numbers almost three decades ago when Bihar was in the stranglehold of 'Jungle Raj', continues unabated even under the much hyped 'Sahasran Raj'. "Sitting chief minister Nitish Kumar rode over former CM Lalu Yadav's Raj and people overwhelmingly voted for him going beyond caste and religion, but things are different now. The JDU leader seems to have run out of ideas after a good two terms. His last alliance with Tejaswi Yadav's RJD kindled some hope on the employment front. But such people-oriented development seems to have taken a backseat while caste and religion-ridden politics is back if you look at the pattern of ticket distribution," says Pushpendra Kumar, former professor and chairperson of the Patna Centre of the prestigious Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) who is now working full time as a researcher of Bihar's society and polity. Partly, *Bijli*, *Sadak* and *Paani* (BSP) are visibly translating into votes but what remains invisible, not only in the *Dehati* areas but even in towns and cities, are negligible secondary, higher education facilities topped by the lack of healthcare facilities. Amidst these deficiencies the irony is that a plethora of coaching institutes of engineering, medical, and Government jobs across prominent towns and cities like Patna, Muzaffarpur and Bhagalpur have come up and there is a mushrooming of private medical clinics and diagnostics centres in the principle districts of Darbhanga, Madhubani, Purnea, Katihar, Gaya and Ara-Chapra. Come election time, there is 'Chah (not Chai) Par Charcha' across cities or hamlets where people love to have extensive discourses over Modi, Nitish, Rahul, Tejaswini or even Obama and Biden. Nonetheless, the rhetoric of caste is loud and audible in the

conversation of the locals, sitting on machans (bamboo cane cots), a fact that still dominates the entry and exit of these villages. The women folk have to volunteer to supply the motley crowd with tea doses. "Din bhar mein kum se kum 50 cup chai banta hai. Inko koi kaam nahi, din bhar sirf rajneeti ki baat karte hain. Unka bhi time katata hai," (More than 50 cups of tea are made for them every day. They have no other work so they spend their idle time talking about politics) observes Neelam Devi, a villager of Satarwar in the Saharsa district of Bihar. The elderly male folks gather as early as 5 am and hang around till 8 am and then come back by 3 pm, remain until dusk at their machans, finding some time to revive the agriculturists in them. Evening chats are conducted within the precincts of temples every 100 yards with the smoke of incense sticks — one for spiritual rites and the other from mosquito repellants — emanating, providing a mixed essence in the clean atmosphere, resplendent with the aroma of cattle and cow dung heaps. And during the wedding season and *Janeu* rituals (thread ceremony), almost every household performs functions and celebrations in its neighbourhood as everybody looks forward to welcoming either an election contestant or any of his/her representatives preferably the dominant caste of that village or town. This reporter, who was covering the Lok Sabha 2024 elections in the Supaul area, got the divine opportunity to feast on chaste *dehati* flavours sitting on a *gamcha* (cotton scarf) rolled over the raw mud field. The serve was obviously *puri*, salads, *papad*, *aloo-parwal*, tomato chutney, *dal-bhaat* (cooked rice) which has now been replaced by Pulao alongside new *Shaheri* add-ons like *paneer* based *subji* and mixed-veg. Sweet delicacies, what they call *Sukha Mitha* (*gulab jamun*) and *Gila Meetha* (*rasgulla*), Boondiya (besan cooked sweet), and lot of curd, is a must to earn the tag of best *Bhoj*. However, elderly people regret the fact that in recent times the city culture is dominating as huge decibels of tractors loaded on tractors is a must during celebrations. Further down to a visit to another village Bara in Saharsa, the author halted and then became part of the discussion over a patient, identified as Nepali Jha, being transported from Sadar Hospital to Patna in a serious condition. The patient was transported to Patna in an ambulance accompanied

by at least a dozen villagers who, en route, were simultaneously making attempts to establish 'contacts' so that the patient could be admitted at Indira Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences (IGIMS) in the State's Capital city. Despite their efforts the IGIMS turned down the patient and he was somehow 'accommodated' at Patna Medical College and Hospital (PMCH). All this while, the villagers accompanying the patient kept insisting with the hospital attendants that the patient be taken to IGIMS, but in vain. When this journalist witnessed their attempts turning futile and one of them claimed to even approach a sitting MP in Bihar, this reporter of *The Pioneer* volunteered to help using bureaucratic contacts in the administration for admission of the patient at IGIMS. The 'mission' was successful and the IGIMS agreed but by that time the patient had to be put on a ventilator back at PMCH and moving him in that critical condition was not feasible. In this grim milieu tea was offered and unfortunately the news about the patient's demise simply vanished from media attention. Although the villagers profusely thanked this reporter, they were equally troubled about their local leaders and MPs who were not of any help in their moment of crisis and used foul language to curse their apathy. "The need for better medical facilities is a must. While several elderly people have moved out of the villages to bigger cities to stay with their children, those who are fond of villages are left in the lurch. Several people have died due to lack of even basic medical facilities in backward areas like in Madhepura, Purnea, Madhepura, and here," said Gyan Mishra, a local villager. While the people in the districts of eastern Bihar struggled for a decade to get a sanction for an AIIMS at Saharsa, considered to be most backward, they are now annoyed with both the Central and State Governments as the project has been moved to neighbouring Darbhanga, considered to be prosperous. The Darbhanga AIIMS was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi last year but soon the project got mired in controversy over the tug of war between the neighbouring districts. The matter is now before the Supreme Court. Last year a group of 20 parliamentarians led by Madhepura MP Dinesh Yadav, cutting across party lines launched an intensive campaign for the construction of an AIIMS in Saharsa, and even met Union Health



minister Mansukh Mandviya and handed over a letter of their demand. The letter mentioned that the number of patients suffering from cancer, kidney, heart, liver and other such life-threatening ailments has been quite high in the north-eastern region, comprising Saharsa, Madhepura, Supaul, Khagaria, Purnia, Katihar, Araria and Kishanganj districts. The letter stated that the Saharsa district magistrate (DM) had communicated to the State Government about the availability of 217.74 acres of land for the construction of an AIIMS, but the State Government announced the allocation of land for the AIIMS in Darbhanga. MPs from Siwan, Nalanda, Karakat, Gaya, Valmikinagar, Gopalganj and Jehanabad had also signed the letter despite knowing that the people from their regions will not be visiting Saharsa for their treatment. But, when we talk about Bihar, it would be incomplete without the world famed and internationally acclaimed Madhubani paintings which have received several Padma awards. Another delight for the people of Bihar is the folklores of various languages, including charting numbers of Bhojpuri. Most of the popular artists who dominate all rituals including the mega festival of *Chhath*, is Sharda Sinha, who too has been bestowed with a Padma award. Most common regional languages spoken in Bihar include Angika, Bhojpuri, Magadhi, Maithili, Magadhi Prakrit, Hindi as well as Urdu amongst other dialects. Currently, Bhojpuri singers have carved a niche for themselves on both social and political platforms and some of them have even become Parliamentarians or are in the current fray to be one. Therefore the raw, rustic lyrics of traditional songs have now been tuned discreetly among the youth on occasions as several of them are tagged as '*fuhar*'. They have been duly banned by the State Government. In one's travels across Mithilanchal, one is struck by the public emotion when people get talking about Madhubani

paintings, *paan* (beetle), *makhana*, *maach* (fish) and *litti-chokha*. Seema Roy, Mithila Painting artist said earlier the paintings were done by women with vegetable dyes on the walls. "Now it is done on paper. The paintings normally depict village scenes, human and animal forms, gods and goddesses," Seema said. "Through your platform let me share the most significant tradition of Bihar, particularly Mithila, as you have already been apprised by its arts and crafts. An unnecessary fish-mutton issue has been derived in the ensuing political campaign by top leaders and we heard the new age media platforms, including social, discuss a lot on this subject. Let me be very clear, be it any day of the week, any festival like *Durga Puja* (we do not call it *Navratri* in Bihar), *Saraswati Puja*, *Mahashivratri*, or *Sawan* or any given Hindu auspicious day, we essentially cook and relish on (*maach*) fish. Mithilanchal is famous as we say *pug-pug* (every step) is fond of *paan*, *makahana*, *maach*, *pokhar* (pond)," opines a delighted Birender Thakur, a retired school teacher and villager in Bavangaon in Supaul. He also narrated a poem in the local language which had all the auspicious occasions where it mentioned the serving of non-vegetarian food, particularly fish. His companion, Nand Kishore Jha, who was part of the discourse, was quick to add that in Bihar non-vegetarian dishes only mean fish and mutton and not chicken or eggs. Although now eggs and chicken delicacies have made their way in the bylanes, *chowks*, and bazaars the elderly people do not appreciate the invasion. Bihar is also famous for its stone pottery, white metal statuettes, bamboo artifacts, wooden toys and leather goods. Several villages around Vaishali are into making of toys. Sikki Work is done by weaving a humble blade of grass into a beautiful basket and mats while Lac bangles are also made in Muzaffarpur. Bihar's rich traditional and culture legacy must not be drowned by the political din around.

IN EVERY ELECTION FOR THE PAST FIVE DECADES, PEOPLE OF BACKWARD REGIONS HAVE BEEN PROMISED UPLIFTMENT BY VARIOUS POLITICAL PARTIES AND LEADERS BUT ULTIMATELY THE DIE IS CAST IN FAVOUR OF CASTE, PREVENTING THE STATE'S HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT.

Photos: Deepak Kumar Jha

'Don't be afraid to commit mistakes' is Chef Massimo Bottura's mantra, that is how his iconic dish came to life, writes Gyaneshwar Dayal



The renowned Chef Massimo Bottura was in New Delhi once again with the culinary marvel, Osteria Francescana. Twice rated as The World's Best Restaurant by The World's 50 Best, Chef Bottura's culinary masterpiece returned to The Leela Palace New Delhi for a second consecutive year. This unparalleled partnership between The Leela Palace New Delhi, Culinary Culture, and the culinary virtuoso himself was an unforgettable gastronomic experience. Massimo Bottura is a renowned Italian chef and owner of Osteria Francescana, a three-Michelin-star restaurant in Modena, Italy. He is not just a culinary maestro but also a passionate philanthropist, earning international acclaim for his dedication to social and environmental causes. As a Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the founder of the non-profit organization 'Food for Soul,' Bottura advocates for sustainability and the reduction of food waste, aligning perfectly with The Leela's eco-conscious ethos. For the uninitiated, Chef Bottura is one of the top chefs in the world and people wait to eat at his restaurant Osteria Francescana for at least three months. Some say you need to be prepared because the restaurant is fully booked for four months. Osteria Francescana was ranked the #1 restaurant in the world in 2018. The menu includes dishes like Modena's borlenghi, polenta with eel and saba, Aula on tempura, and Tortellini in cream of Parmigiano Reggiano. The chef brought his restaurant to Delhi for Rs 55,555 + taxes per person. Under Chef Bottura's guidance, Osteria Francescana has captivated global palates with its innovative approach to Italian cuisine. He is known for reinventing the Italian dishes. The restaurant has consistently secured its position among the world's best, offering a sensory journey unlike any other. Iconic dishes such as 'Oops! I Dropped the Lemon Tart,' 'The Crunchy Part of the Lasagne,' and



'Psychedelic Cod Not Flame Grilled' will grace the special menu offered during the event. Bottura is a philosopher in his own right. He is passionate about making mistakes. That's right that is how his world-famous iconic dish 'Oops! I Dropped the lemon tarts and came to life. Chef Bottura's culinary philosophy, is deeply rooted in embracing mistakes and turning them into culinary masterpieces. Bottura shared a story in his interactive session in Leela, about the creation of a dish that symbolises embracing imperfections. It originated when Francescana's sous chef Taka Kondo accidentally dropped a lemon tart. Feeling distraught, Kondo's perfectionist tendencies clashed with his mistake. Bottura intervened, reframing the mishap as a metaphor for the fusion of sweet and savoury, breaking boundaries. Bottura emphasised the

importance of leaving room for poetry in daily life, allowing for imagination and creativity to flourish. "If you don't make mistakes, don't dream big, you end up nowhere, won't learn a damn thing," he quips. This ethos of embracing imperfection and transforming it into something extraordinary resonates throughout his culinary creations. Chef Bottura hosted an interactive session, engaging in a conversation with Vir Sanghvi, India's foremost food expert, offering insights into his culinary journey and philosophy. During the conversation, they had a difference of opinions but agreed on two things. Italians like Indians are mama's boys and two both love their food. Sanghvi remarked, "Massimo Bottura transcends the role of a chef; he serves as a global inspiration, leveraging his influence to bring about

positive changes worldwide. Mr. Anupam Dasgupta, General Manager of The Leela Palace New Delhi, expressed his enthusiasm for this unique culinary collaboration. He stated, "It is our privilege to host Chef Massimo once more at The Leela Palace New Delhi. We eagerly anticipate the epicurean delight that Chef Massimo will curate for the pop-up dinners." Speaking with anticipation about his return to India, Chef Massimo Bottura expressed his excitement, saying, "Namaste, India! I am delighted to return to your beautiful country. In New Delhi, we are working with Culinary Culture and The Leela Palace. I love India - the food and the people - and can't wait to be back and give you all a big Italian hug!" Indeed, chef Massimo Bottura is just not a chef he is a philosopher and a package you could talk to and take lessons for your kitchen and life. Chef is all for dreaming big and how creativity and dreaming big means a lot in life. His mantra: Dream big, it costs nothing and don't be afraid to make mistakes if you don't mistakes you will never learn anything new. Just a trivia here, any guesses what Massimo Bottura was most excited about in the evening. It was his breakfast with the underprivileged children he had invited for breakfast the next morning. So the world waits for Massimo Bottura's dinner and he for a simple breakfast with children of lesser God who give him all the inspiration he needs for his next masterpiece

'OOPS! I DROPPED THE LEMON TART'



Standing Alone, and How



MKT impressed with its high-quality ingredients, well-informed and well-attired servers, excellent preparations, and comfortable interiors. It not only stands out among standalone restaurants but also outshines many star hotels with its overall offerings, says **PAWAN SONI**

MKT at Chanakya stands out among Delhi's standalone, multi-cuisine restaurants with its delightful offerings. This spacious 144-seater, adorned with well-lit interiors, caters perfectly to both small and large groups, boasting several live kitchens that serve a variety of popular cuisines from around the globe. While this was not my first visit to MKT, it was my first experience with their new menu. The shift towards modern Indian cuisine, complemented by a diverse Asian selection, came at the expense of the Mexican live kitchen. Our culinary journey began with a tender coconut and poached lobster soup. While the lobster soup met expectations, the vegetarian tender coconut soup exceeded them. It offered a delightful tanginess, coupled with glass noodles, snow peas, broccoli, and chili-fried garlic. The sashimi platter, featuring salmon, tuna, yellowtail, scallops, and prawns, was remarkably fresh, accompanied by freshly grated wasabi. However, the standout dish of the day was the salmon belly. Though the three skewers at ₹1335 may seem pricey, this cut is a rarity in the city. Grilled on a robata-yaki with a mildly sweet miso marinade, the salmon belly was incredibly tender and flavorful, justifying its price for the exceptional preparation. Once you have experienced this, you will never look back at the dry salmon tikka available at many other restaurants. A server-recommended starter, the Kimball mushroom, was a delightful mix of enoki, shimeji, king oyster, and shiitake mushrooms tossed in Kimball sauce. This carb-free dish not only excelled in healthfulness but also in taste. While our appetizers were satisfying, we also sampled two dishes from their Indian menu — Quinoa mutton seekh and



Champan mutton for the mains. The mutton seekh was tender and flavourful, served with smoked lehsun chutney and khameeri roti, a refreshing departure from the ubiquitous mint chutney. The Champan mutton was a pleasant surprise, as this rustic Bihar preparation with onions, mustard oil, and whole garlic showcased one of the best qualities of mutton. The chef revealed that they prepare a small batch every day in a traditional handi, ensuring authenticity and quality. Our meal concluded with homemade ice cream, which was delightful and could have been enhanced further with the addition of mango chunks. Overall, MKT impressed with its high-quality ingredients, well-informed and well-attired servers, excellent preparations, and comfortable interiors. It not only stands out among standalone restaurants but also outshines many star hotels with its overall offerings.

FACT SHEET
MKT, Lower Ground Floor, The Chanakya Mall, Yashwant Place Community Centre, New Delhi
Phone: 83769 86799 | Cuisine: Global
Rating: Food: 4.5/5 | Drinks: 4.25/5 | Service: 4.5/5 | Ambience: 4.25/5 | Overall: 4.5/5

Author is a food critic and founder of the Big F Awards. He can be reached at Pawan.Soni@indianfoodfreak.com

REVIVING KASHMIRI PANDIT CUISINE

A culinary journey through Kashmir

CHEF RAHUL WALI, through his expertise and dedication brings forth a unique culinary experience that celebrates the distinct identity of Kashmiri Pandit cuisine. **DIVYA BHATIA** had the chance to taste his lip-smacking delicacies

Kashmir is known for its scenic beauty but what people often miss on a trip to Kashmir is its Kashmiri Pandit cuisine which is a rich in flavors, influenced by the cultural heritage and geographical diversity of the Kashmir Valley. Renowned for its exquisite blend of aromatic spices and traditional cooking techniques, Kashmiri Pandit cuisine is a true reflection of the region's history and culinary prowess. Staple ingredients such as rice, yogurt, and vegetables form the foundation of many dishes, which are often infused with an array of spices like fennel, cardamom, and saffron, lending a unique and complex flavor profile. Signature dishes such as Rogan Josh, Yakhni, and Dum Aloo are cherished for their rich textures and vibrant taste. Moreover, the cuisine also features a variety of delectable vegetarian options, including Nadru Yakhni (lotus stem in yogurt gravy) and Haaq Saag (collard greens cooked with spices). With its emphasis on fresh ingredients and intricate preparation methods, Kashmiri Pandit cuisine continues to captivate palates worldwide, showcasing the rich culinary heritage of the Kashmiri Pandit community. Recently, I had the opportunity to indulge in Koshur Wuri-bal, a culinary extravaganza celebrating the exquisite flavors of Kashmiri Pandit cuisine, at The Roseate House. Often overshadowed by the renowned Wazwan, Kashmiri Pandit cuisine boasts a distinct identity, tracing its origins back to 326 BCE, long before the arrival of Wazwan in the 16th century. Contrary to common perception, Kashmiri Pandit cuisine stands apart with its unique flavors and traditions. There are very few chefs who

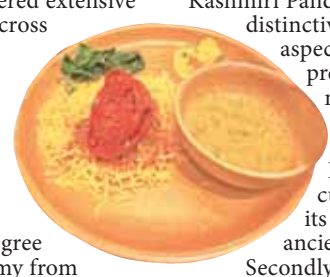


understand traditional Kashmiri Pandit cooking, but Chef Rahul Wali stands as a beacon of tradition in this culinary landscape where authenticity is often diluted by modern interpretations. With a deep understanding of Kashmiri Pandit cuisine, Chef Rahul introduced us to age-old recipes and forgotten culinary practices, offering a rare opportunity to savor the true essence of Kashmiri Pandits' gastronomy. Chef Rahul Wali talked about his journey and passion. Excerpts: **Could you share your journey as a Chef?** I was born in Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir, and spent my formative years in Mumbai and Pune. My culinary journey began after completing my Bachelor's in Hotel Management from Pune. I garnered extensive experience across various renowned brands in India and abroad, eventually pursuing an advanced Graduate Degree in Gastronomy from Le Cordon Bleu, Adelaide Australia. In recent years, I've been dedicated to reviving and promoting Kashmiri Pandit cuisine through pop-ups, festivals,



and collaborations with hotels and restaurants. **What inspired you to focus on promoting Kashmiri Pandit cuisine?** The inspiration stems from a dual purpose - preserving our culinary heritage and introducing the richness of Kashmiri Pandit cuisine to a broader audience. This cuisine, dating back to centuries, holds a distinct place in culinary history, characterized by unique flavors and techniques. Unfortunately, it has remained relatively obscure compared to the more widely known Kashmiri cuisine. I aim to change that by bringing it to the forefront and showcasing its diversity and depth. **How would you differentiate Kashmiri Pandit cuisine from other regional cuisines?** Kashmiri Pandit cuisine is distinctive in several aspects. Firstly, it predates the more commonly known Kashmiri cuisine, tracing its roots back to ancient times. Secondly, unlike many other Indian cuisines, it refrains from using onion, garlic, or tomatoes in its preparation. The focus is on a handful of traditional spices, meticulously blended

to create nuanced flavors. Additionally, the cooking method involves patience and slow cooking, preserving the authenticity of the dishes. **What challenges do you face in promoting Kashmiri Pandit cuisine outside its native region?** While the reception has been overwhelmingly positive, there are challenges, particularly in sourcing authentic ingredients. Additionally, there's a misconception that Kashmiri cuisine is solely suited for colder climates, which isn't entirely accurate. Educating people about the versatility and richness of our cuisine is an ongoing effort, requiring collaboration and support from various stakeholders. **How do you ensure an authentic culinary experience for guests during food festivals and pop-ups?** Authenticity is paramount, although it's essential to acknowledge that complete replication may not always be feasible, especially in diverse culinary landscapes. However, I strive to maintain the essence and integrity of Kashmiri Pandit cuisine while adapting to local ingredients and preferences. Each dish is crafted with care and respect for tradition, ensuring that guests experience the true flavors of Kashmir.



ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION FEDERALISM AT RISK OR UNITY FORTIFIED?

PRIYOTOSH SHARMA and CHANDRIMA DUTTA address this question posed by sceptics on whether the consolidation of electoral cycles could lead to a domination of the political narrative by parties and candidates vying for power and potentially undermine the essence of democracy by overshadowing the voices and choices of individual citizens

In India's democratic landscape, elections have long stood as pillars supporting our diverse linguistic tapestry and regional pride for over seven decades now. Stating Amartya Sen, individuals can hold singular affiliations while valuing their multifaceted identities. But a pressing question arises: If one Nation, one Election were to happen, would national unity overshadow regional loyalties? Sceptics have raised concerns that the consolidation of electoral cycles as a question of national importance could lead to a domination of the political narrative by parties and candidates vying for power. The emphasis may shift away from citizen engagement and democratic participation towards partisan interests and power struggles. This could potentially undermine the essence of democracy by overshadowing the voices and choices of individual citizens.

It's noteworthy that the proposal of One Nation and One Election is not a recent development. As far back as September 1982, the Election Commission of India recommended simultaneous elections to both the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. Additionally, the Law Commission of India's Draft Report on Simultaneous Elections in August 2018 further explored this idea. Given this historical context, one might wonder why the ruling party suddenly embraced this proposal in their manifesto ahead of the 2024 general election.

The sudden appropriation of the One Nation and One Election proposal by the ruling party likely reflects a strategic move to prioritise electoral reform and streamline governance processes. However, such a significant shift in policy approach raises questions about the underlying motivations and potential implications. India's governance model hinges on representative democracy, where elections serve as the bedrock of our political system. Campaigning, a pivotal aspect of elections, comes with substantial costs. A case in point is the staggering expenditure seen between February and May 2019, where Google and Facebook collectively reported political online advertising spending amounting to ₹58.67 crore. Notably, while Google declared 12,276 advertisements worth ₹29.3 crore, Facebook's India Ad Library disclosed a significantly higher volume of individual advertisements, totaling 132,419 and valued at ₹29.28 crore. Yet,



amidst this financial discourse, we often overlook the ripple effects of reducing the frequency of elections. Such a move could inadvertently disrupt sectors that thrive on heightened electoral activity, notably advertising, hospitality, and transportation. In light of this, it becomes imperative to carefully consider the implications of "One Nation, One Election" on federalism, regional dynamics, and political stability. For instance, the recent issue in Manipur over regional disparities highlights the potential risks and challenges associated with synchronising elections across different levels of government. As such, thorough deliberation and stakeholder engagement are essential in the electoral reform process to ensure that any changes uphold democratic principles and address the diverse needs of the

respective states. The ongoing debates outside of parliament surrounding One Nation and One Election are fueled by contrasting perspectives. Proponents argue that synchronising elections would bolster national unity by aligning electoral cycles and directing political discourse towards pressing national issues. At least for a brief period of time this narrative of one nation, one election, would appeal to the imagination of the public, as it would come on a platter of "national interest". However, sceptics raise concerns that this unity could merely be a facade concealing broader political agendas. Another significant issue that may raise eyebrows among the opposition is the prospect of diminished accountability if elections are held every five years.

THE ONGOING DEBATES OUTSIDE OF PARLIAMENT SURROUNDING ONE NATION AND ONE ELECTION ARE FUELED BY CONTRASTING PERSPECTIVES. PROPONENTS ARGUE THAT SYNCHRONISING ELECTIONS WOULD BOLSTER NATIONAL UNITY BY ALIGNING ELECTORAL CYCLES AND DIRECTING POLITICAL DISCOURSE TOWARDS PRESSING NATIONAL ISSUES. AT LEAST FOR A BRIEF PERIOD OF TIME THIS NARRATIVE OF ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION, WOULD APPEAL TO THE IMAGINATION OF THE PUBLIC, AS IT WOULD COME ON A PLATTER OF "NATIONAL INTEREST"

This could spark doubts regarding the government's responsiveness to pressing concerns, such as notably fluctuations in oil prices, sharp fluctuations in food prices and hikes in gas cylinder costs paralyse citizen's every potential to remove a party from power through electoral process at least in state legislative elections. In navigating India's vibrant democratic landscape, it's crucial to recognize the unique context and complexities inherent to our nation. While other countries like Belgium or Japan may offer valuable insights, it's imperative not to blindly emulate their electoral models. Instead, decisions regarding electoral reforms must stem from a grassroots consensus, voting behaviour tailored to India's diverse socio-political fabric. The denizens of the streets and the

daily wage earners exhibit scant enthusiasm for engaging with political rhetoric; rather, their electoral participation hinges largely upon aligning themselves with the party that they could benefit financially from, thereby rendering the manipulation of their sentiments a feasible endeavour. Nevertheless, this one election holds the potential to wield considerable influence, particularly in terms of cost saving, especially where the prospect of bifurcating public sentiment during concurrent elections remains plausible.

PRIYOTOSH SHARMA
 (Faculty of Department of Political Science, Ramanuj Gupta Degree College)
CHANDRIMA DUTTA
 (Student of Calcutta University, Political Science Department)

Education a must for the Panchayati Raj System to flourish

By **Vikash Kumar**

2,39,000 Gram Panchayats all over the country, which are a State subject mentioned in the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution. The responsibility for their management, financial system, election, and arrangement of the structure rests on the State Government. The governance system of India works at three levels in which the third level is local self-government (the Panchayati system). Article 40 of the Indian Constitution contains provisions related to it, which was not an enforceable procedure. The states were not in favour of giving constitutional status to the panchayat systems, saying it violated the federal system. This is why Rajiv Gandhi's 64th Amendment (1989) and VP Singh's constitutional effort (June 1, 1990) failed. Constitutional status was accorded to Panchayats in 1992 and 1993 by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, which then Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao worked tirelessly on. The responsibility of conducting their elections rests with the State Election Commission, provided by



Article 243 (K) of the Indian Constitution. Some states have announced their election because of the Constitution; their tenure is for five years, which is provided by Article 243 (E) of the Indian Constitution, but the purpose for which the concept of Panchayati systems was implemented is today helpless in achieving its original objective. Voters and elected officials engage in conversations, yet the conversation does not begin since communication throughout an election is frequently devoid of substance.

Additionally, there are no discussions going on between the candidate and the voter. Prominent political party leaders attend these polls in order to tally their victories. The news certainly delighted the voters when Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose too had to raise local issues like loans, Commission, housing commissions, what issues do you have with the water and roads, he had asked earlier. In these elections, health and education are burning issues. The headman often remains indifferent, even as voters focus

on the state of primary schools along with other local issues. Because of lack of knowledge or education, the candidates' intentions and professional experiences are also not scrutinised during these elections. While the Panchayati system has helped local bodies, only a portion of the projects are intended to serve the villagers. Under such circumstances, every voter ought to select the candidate who best reflects the desires of the people, not the 'sole' candidate who offers casteism, religion, regionalism, and self-interest. This process

can only proceed if there is evidence of improvement at the local level. Voters ought to cast their ballots voluntarily and with diligence in order to support local institutions' credibility and enabling the competent leader's directives to be carried out over a period of five years, both of which encourage advancement. Today, the Panchayati Raj system exists in almost the whole country, but in reality, self-reliance today is far from what was envisioned at the time of its implementation. A provision for reservations was made in the Panchayati system under Article 243A. However, women have been unable to take full advantage of it, so have the lower classes, because even today, voting in rural areas is inspired by several biased undercurrents. Only when the Panchayati system becomes solid and self-reliant will India's democracy be strengthened. The process of reforms can start from the village itself. Women have become sarpanches but they do not run the administration; their husbands step in. A person belonging to the SC/ST category becomes a

sarpanch, but only a handful of wealthy people run the administration. Even today, many states need to transfer their subjects to the Panchayati system. In Panchayat elections deceit and force are openly used. The person who has access to the top of the administration is the one who occupies critical positions, a reason why the purpose for which it was created has not been fulfilled. The Government allots crores of funds to the development of villages but the benefits instead are spent on things remote from a village or its voters. To this date, the Panchayati system is entirely self-sufficient and those whose dreams could not be realised. In the present circumstances, the Government should make Panchayati Raj self-reliant for which education is the most significant step ahead. Awareness is only possible with education because that alone can make citizens and voters politically aware. (Views expressed are personal. Author is President of the Indian Research Scholars Association and can be contacted at sagarvikash829@gmail.com)



YOUR WEEK AHEAD

MADHU KOTIYA



ARIES March 21-April 19

This week is set to highlight your professional talents. Your focused dedication and innovative thinking will significantly boost your career prospects. With a clear and expansive mindset, you're poised to achieve notable success. However, your commitment to work may cause some oversight in personal relationships, possibly leading to feelings of neglect among your loved ones. Stay alert as challenges may arise; individuals driven by envy could attempt to undermine your efforts through underhanded tactics or by claiming your achievements as their own. Towards the week's end, a significant business trip awaits. You'll be tasked with conveying key strategies or ideas, a responsibility that will likely culminate in personal recognition and success. This journey not only promises professional gains but also offers a moment of triumph that acknowledges your contributions.

Lucky number 8 | **Lucky colour** Magenta
Lucky day Wednesday



LEO July 23-Aug 22

This week, you display a laid-back and relaxed demeanor. Your unique approach to life stems from doing what feels right for you, showing great confidence in your individual path, irrespective of others' opinions. While you cherish your freedom, any form of limitation tends to disrupt your peace. This can sometimes lead to a somewhat negligent attitude, especially in your professional life. Such carelessness could invite criticism from higher-ups and potentially hinder career advancements or recognition you might otherwise receive. The key focus for you this week should be on dedication and attention to detail. Success and respect come through persistence and a disciplined approach. By adopting a more considerate attitude, you set yourself up for success, gaining admiration and compliance from those around you.

Lucky number 5 | **Lucky colour** Mint
Lucky day Monday



SAGITTARIUS Nov 22-Dec 21

The start of the week might find you feeling a bit overwhelmed and uncertain, making it tough to handle significant choices. This sense of mental turmoil could lead to stress. To alleviate this, you often turn to creative expressions like art and reading, particularly enjoying stories steeped in rich traditions and ancient narratives. Relationships hold significant value for you, as your sense of balance often hinges on interpersonal connections. Your instincts and insight receive careful attention, fostering a balanced perspective. As the week progresses, you might find solace in quiet reflection, often seeking solitude to harness your inner wisdom. Personal growth and insights become central themes. Toward the week's end, expect a surge of new beginnings—be it in your professional life or personal developments.

Lucky number 20 | **Lucky colour** Bronze
Lucky day Friday



TAURUS April 20-May 20

This week may present challenges, with rising tensions either at home or at your workplace. You may encounter disagreements and unexpected confrontations that could leave you feeling shocked. Remember the principle of kindness without expectation of return. It's a good time to reassess any joint ventures or collaborations. Midweek, you might experience a dip in your vitality and self-assurance. Prioritize your well-being and maintain a structured routine. Seeking medical advice could prove beneficial during this time. As the week progresses, conditions will stabilize. Supportive influences will begin to emerge, bringing solace across various aspects of your life, from financial to personal. A renewed sense of optimism will emerge, and engaging in calming, reflective activities may provide you with the tranquility you seek.

Lucky number 12 | **Lucky colour** Beige
Lucky day Monday



VIRGO Aug 23-Sep 22

The week begins on a challenging note, as you might face rejection in a personal relationship or miss a professional opportunity. Feelings of isolation and disappointment may surface, and if you're in a committed relationship, circumstances could require you to spend time apart from your loved ones due to work commitments. As the week progresses, prospects look brighter; you may receive an enticing job proposal or notice an increase in your financial status through your career. A significant responsibility or project could be entrusted to you, requiring your dedication to see it through to completion. Over the weekend, your emotions might intensify, leading you to grapple with strong desires or impulses. Stay grounded by focusing on your aspirations, using meditation and inner wisdom as tools to maintain clarity and direction.

Lucky number 14 | **Lucky colour** Peach
Lucky day Friday



CAPRICORN Dec 22-Jan 19

This week, you'll experience an unparalleled peak in your life, enjoying fulfillment across all facets—emotional, physical, and financial. A sense of deep satisfaction will wash over you as all your desires find their way to fulfillment. It's a time for gratitude, recognizing the blessings that surround you. Health and vitality are yours; a calm tranquility permeates your surroundings, allowing you to rise above the mundane concerns that usually preoccupy your mind. The days ahead promise joy unbounded and profound peace. Achievements in your financial endeavors and harmony in your home life mark this period. Past challenges will fade, leaving room for affection and mutual support within your family circle. Recognize the immense strength found in love. Cherish those close to your heart, acknowledging their significance in your life.

Lucky number 3 | **Lucky colour** Aquamarine
Lucky day Tuesday



GEMINI May 21-June 20

Reflecting on your past experiences and future ambitions can provide valuable insight, helping to pave a smoother path forward by transforming challenges into opportunities. Instead of avoiding difficulties, consider embracing a new direction that promises enhanced joy and fulfillment. You may face periods of emotional lows or physical imbalances. Rather than suppressing these feelings, acknowledge and harness their influence constructively. Let go of past attachments and focus on the present to resolve emotional turmoil. As the week concludes, a significant decision related to either personal journeys or family concerns will likely crystallize. This period is also an opportune time for rejuvenation, promoting both mental and physical well-being. Embrace this chance to foster inner peace and holistic healing.

Lucky number 7 | **Lucky colour** Lime
Lucky day Thursday



LIBRA Sep 23-Oct 22

This week, your determination and mental strength are key to achieving your objectives. It's an ideal time to channel your efforts and savor the rewards. With a clear vision and resolve, you're well-positioned to turn your aspirations into reality and reach your highest ambitions. This period also marks a significant phase for personal growth and beginnings. Midweek, you may find yourself reflecting on the past, with childhood memories and connections drawing you back. You might feel compelled to reconnect with old friends or revisit places from your past, enjoying the warmth of familiar bonds. The week brings small tokens of affection and moments of heartfelt exchanges. As the week closes, you'll find fulfillment in dedicating time to reflective or calming practices, enhancing your inner peace and focus.

Lucky number 9 | **Lucky colour** Burgundy
Lucky day Saturday



AQUARIUS Jan 20-Feb 18

This week, embrace a grand approach to life. Your inner strength and resolve are at their peak, making you a pillar of support for many around you. Your advice is highly sought after due to your resilience and compassionate nature. Sometimes, your firm approach is necessary to manage situations and steer them in the right direction. As the week progresses, you might find yourself feeling more confrontational than usual, leading to spirited discussions rather than physical altercations. Your stoic and intrepid demeanor may yield mixed outcomes. Your sharp insight cuts through surface appearances, allowing you to understand the core of any matter. This balanced perspective could prove advantageous, particularly in enhancing your financial standing.

Lucky number 18 | **Lucky colour** Rose Pink
Lucky day Thursday



CANCER June 21-July 22

You often feel overwhelmed by fear and allow external influences to dominate your decisions, leading to a sense of confinement and overshadowing your thoughts with negativity. This can sometimes distort your creativity, causing it to work against you. However, it's important to recognize that you are in control of your own actions, not merely at the mercy of circumstances. You might find yourself engaging in conversations that could escalate into disputes. Embracing forgiveness could significantly alter your interactions. Harnessing your inherent dynamism constructively could lead to remarkable achievements. As the week progresses, you'll experience a resurgence of energy and initiative, presenting an ideal opportunity to pursue ambitions that previously seemed intimidating. This is your moment to channel this renewed vigor for maximum advantage.

Lucky number 17 | **Lucky colour** Navy
Lucky day Sunday



SCORPIO Oct 23-Nov 21

This week, you emerge as a vibrant force, radiating a brilliant energy. As the week kicks off, you'll find your wishes unexpectedly coming to fruition, surrounded by a glow of positivity and warmth. Achievements are met with rewards, ushering in joy, familial stability, and abundance. This marks the conclusion of one phase, giving way to a tranquil interlude—perfect for savoring the moment and recharging. During this prosperous period, consider the relevance of longstanding beliefs and traditions. They may no longer serve their purpose, suggesting it's time to forge new paths for advancement, whether in your personal habits or lifestyle choices. As the week wraps up, adopt a stance of fairness. In facing challenges, maintain a cool, balanced perspective to navigate issues effectively.

Lucky number 6 | **Lucky colour** Violet
Lucky day Wednesday



PISCES Feb 19-March 20

This week marks a period of deep personal fulfillment and communal connection for you. Your focus on spiritual growth is evident as you engage in collective rituals that uplift and inspire. Reflecting on your past efforts brings a profound sense of satisfaction, particularly as you celebrate the completion of significant projects, like a home renovation. Family gatherings will enhance your joy, adding layers of celebration, accomplishments, and well-earned recognition to your life. Relationships, especially close partnerships, will experience enhanced harmony and mutual understanding. This period also favors securing new assets, whether they are investments in real estate or personal property. The combination of material success and spiritual depth creates a uniquely enriching atmosphere. You receive abundant blessings and support from your elders, making this a truly auspicious time to embrace growth and happiness.

Lucky number 10 | **Lucky colour** Amber
Lucky day Sunday

Madhu Kotiya is a tarot card reader, spiritual healer, and Founder, MShezaim Institute of Tarot and Divination. Contact details: madhu@indiatarot.com, www.indiatarot.com, M: 9873283331



Mother calls for full alert against evil forces



Picking up threads from the previous issue, let us now look at the relevance of the accessories in her ten hands. First, the conch-shell in one hand. When blown, it resonates a sound note comparable to "Om" - the primal-sound. It was supposedly excited when following causal stress, the first motion happened at the Primordial-Source. That very sound note, in turn, excited the creation chain, which following a course of progressive evolution eventually manifested into a world of name and form. She thereby personifies that very primal kinetic energy, which not simply remains the source and effective cause for all creations in the world but also sustains and recycles the existential order. The conch-shell, thus, naturally symbolises the source energy, up above in the cosmos. The majestic Lotus flower in all colours made of numerous petals signifies enormity and diversity of creation, which is symptomatic of her noble creative intent. In the Indian tradition, Lotus flower is associated with almost all deities identified with one or the other strength potential

involved one way or the other in the creation process. It, therefore, finds presence with Durga, Saraswati, and Lakshmi, the Goddesses respectively personified with physical power, wisdom, and creative aspiration, vital to our dynamic existence. Such an enticing Lotus flower grows in mud underneath water body. Yet its beauty and lustre remain unspoil, regaling everybody. For, not even a trace of mud or water droplet can stay on flower leaves. The obvious implication is that it remains detached from that very earth matter out of which its form presence is made. The association of Lotus flower with the Mother is also a pointer to the fact that though being all powerful, yet, She does not carry any sense of ego. In fact, despite all oddities and hazards coming Her way, She continues to exhibit tenderness, sense of love, generosity and dotting nature, as reflected by the majestic flower. Even the killing of the demons is not done out of any sense of revenge or prejudice. Her intent is just to ensure the survival and welfare of Her well-meaning dependants. For, they are the

ones, who, understand and following the laws of nature, willfully service the existential order laid down by the divine forces. Also, the killing of demon also means that mother takes away their ego and sense of evil.

Evidently, lotus flower corresponds to productive face of the source energy, which following a long-drawn course of progressive evolution brought into place the manifest world with all its enormity and diversity.

Mother supposedly carrying different weapons provided by the devatas in her remaining 8 arms is evidently aimed at combating the onslaught of demonic forces. The question now is: Why has She been assigned with weapons in 8 hands as against accessories reflecting creative potential in only two? This is simply suggestive of the fact that forces, contrary to our productive aspirations, are far more active and no less potent than our creative initiatives. The evil forces are in evidence all around, making us vulnerable to their onslaught from all possible directions. And their killing potential would be felt much faster and relatively cover a wider range than our productive initiatives. We, therefore, need to be fully on guard and in a combative mode against the evil forces to service the overall needs of our existential order. To drive home this point, the simile of Demon is used to exemplify and forewarn us about impending danger from all around. About the demons, it is said that they are inherently conjurers. They can hoodwink us by making varied illusionary presences and charge us

from all possible directions unannounced, to their asking. Here, weird forms, in which demons are usually depicted, deserve further elaboration. We are all aware that that no such form-existence is in evidence anywhere on earth. It is so characterised just to exemplify in clear terms the danger inherent in the evil forces existing both within and beyond us. The evil forces dwelling within us are no less potent than those from beyond. It needs to be appreciated here that human minds, which is driven by a sense of relative perception, can move either way - if rightfully used may prove rewarding and fulfilling, but when used negatively could prove self-defeating. For, besides carrying humane sense, it also has in store animalistic tendencies. If by chance the animalistic influence becomes stronger, it may prove a greater danger than a carnivorous animal, which is why some of the demons are shown with animal heads. The writer is an astrologer, vastu consultant and spiritual counsellor. Connect with him at Tel: 91-11-9818037273/9871037272 Email: bharatbhushanpadmadeo@gmail.com