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BSE SHARES TANK NEARLY 19 PER CENT

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

Late City Vol.20 Issue 117  
\*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

BHUBANESWAR, TUESDAY APRIL 30, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹4

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## Telangana CM summoned in Shah fake video case

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

A day after registering a case on doctored videos of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Delhi Police on Monday asked Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy to join the probe on May 1 and record his statement. Meanwhile, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma wrote on X, informing the arrest of Reetom Singh by the Assam police. Singh is reportedly the War Room Coordinator of the Assam Congress. Flagging the issue in a public rally at Bagalkote (Karnataka), Prime Minister Narendra Modi said there is a habit among people to forward certain information that comes on various platforms without verifying. "Those who have lost elections or have lost (while being in) the fray are using technology to make fake videos. Misusing artificial intelligence they put out wrong things in my voice in social media — this is creating a big threat." Appealing to people to inform police or the BJP about such fake videos and legal action will follow, the PM said the law of this country will not allow people to play such games with anyone," the PM alleged. The BJP on Monday lodged a complaint with the Election Commission against the Congress, alleging that it circulated a "deep fake and morphed" video of Shah to derail the poll process, and demanded strict action against



Prime Minister Narendra Modi being felicitated during a public meeting for Lok Sabha elections, in Bagalkote, Karnataka, on Monday. PTI

the party. A BJP delegation comprising Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and the party's national media department in-charge Anil Baluni also complained against the Trinamool Congress (TMC), alleging that Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee-led party has been using violence as a weapon, and demanded that the poll panel ensure a free and fair election in the state. The Special Cell of Delhi Police had registered a case under various sections of the Indian Penal Code and Information Technology Act following a complaint that doctored videos of Shah were being circulated on social media platforms. According to sources, a team of Delhi Police is expected to visit

the Congress office in Telangana by Monday evening. Sources said the police have served notices to five people, including Reddy, who posted the video on X. Reddy has been asked to appear with his mobile phone allegedly used for posting the fake video on X. According to sources, top MHA officials held a high-level meeting with top cops of the Delhi Police regarding Home Minister's doctored video. Sources said that Reddy had shared the video on 'X' (formerly known as Twitter). He has been asked to bring his electronic devices, including his phone, from which the video was posted. Around half-a-

dozen people, including Congress leaders, who shared the doctored videos are also being summoned by Delhi Police. The Special Cell had on Sunday registered an FIR after the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), which is under the Ministry of Home Affairs, filed a complaint about the doctored video of Shah where he is seen giving a commitment to abolish quota for Muslim community on religious ground in Telangana were changed to make it seem that he was advocating scrapping of all reservations. The complaint filed by Sinku Sharan Singh, DC, Indian

Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) claimed that some doctored videos are being circulated on social media with "the intent of creating disharmony among communities which is likely to affect public tranquility and public order." Singh also shared links of videos with the police. The Intelligence Fusion and Strategic Operations (IFSO) unit of the Special Cell has now approached social media platforms to identify the source of the video and those who have spread it. "We have formed many different teams to investigate the matter properly and arrest the main culprits. We have written to X, formerly known as Twitter, and other social media regarding the video. We are investigating both the source of the video and those responsible for its widespread circulation," said the sources. The Police has asked Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy to join the probe on May 1 and is headed to the state, according to sources. The authorities have served notices to five people, including Reddy, who posted the video on X. Telangana CM, who also happens to be Congress Telangana Chief, has been asked to appear with his mobile phone allegedly used for posting the fake video on X. The police will also likely go to the grand old party's office in Telangana. The case was registered under various sections of the IPC and the IT Act.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi being felicitated during a public meeting for Lok Sabha elections, in Bagalkote, Karnataka, on Monday. PTI

## Congress planning religion based quota, says Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BAGALKOTE (KARNATAKA)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday accused the Congress of planning religion-based reservation in the country for the sake of vote bank politics, but asserted that he will not let it happen. He said this Congress proposal is to appease minorities as the SC/ST and OBC community is now with the BJP. "In Karnataka, Congress has started a campaign to change the Constitution and to snatch away the rights of SC/ST and OBCs. Our Constitution does not accept religion-based reservation. But the Karnataka Government has given part of OBC reservation to Muslims," Modi said. Addressing a mega election rally the PM said, "They (Congress) will not settle with this. They had earlier too in their manifesto said about coming out with a law to provide religion-based

reservation. There is a similar signal in their manifesto this time." "I want to make my Dalit, SC/ST and OBC brothers and sisters aware about Congress' intentions. These people on the basis of religion, to keep their vote bank safe, are planning to loot your right which was given by Babasaheb Ambedkar and the Constitution," he added. Veteran BJP leader B S Yediyurappa, BJP candidates and MPs from Bagalkote (Bagalkot) and Vijayapura (Bijapur) — P C Gaddigoudar and Ramesh Jigajinagi, respectively — were among those present at the rally. Noting that most of SC, ST and OBC MPs in the Parliament are from BJP, Modi said, "So they feel that as SC, ST and OBC are with BJP. To gain the trust of minorities, they want to loot from SC, ST and OBC and give it to minorities. Will you let this happen."



## Rajnath, Smriti file nominations for LS polls

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Union Ministers Rajnath Singh and Smriti Irani on Monday filed their nomination papers for Lok Sabha elections. Rajnath filed his nomination papers from the Lucknow seat, seeking a third consecutive term from the prestigious Lok Sabha constituency. Accompanied by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and his Uttarakhand counterpart Pushkar Singh Dhami, the Union Defence Minister reached the collectorate for filing the nomination paper. Union Minister and prominent BJP leader Irani filed her nomination papers from the Amethi Lok Sabha constituency. Accompanied by Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav and several other leaders, Irani led a spirited roadshow from the BJP office in Gauriganj before formally submitting her papers. Before filing his nomination, Singh offered prayers at the Dakshin Mukhi Hanuman Temple and at the Hanuman Setu Temple here. Former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had in the past represented the prestigious Lucknow constituency. Irani's decision to contest from Amethi, considered the stronghold of the Gandhi family, comes on the heels of her historic victory over Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in the 2019 elections. "After filing my nomination today, I am committed to serving the people of Amethi," Irani told reporters. "Over the past five years, significant strides have been made in Amethi, including the construction of 1,14,000 houses under the PM Awas Yojana, the provision of electricity connections to 1.5 lakh families, and assistance to over 4 lakh farmers through the PM-Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme. I am confident that the people will once again bless Modi and the BJP." While the Congress has yet to announce its candidate from the seat, speculations abound that Rahul Gandhi will opt to contest from Amethi once more.

## Congress jolted with Surat replay in Indore

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ INDORE/NEW DELHI

In a major blow to the Congress in Madhya Pradesh, its Indore Lok Sabha seat candidate Akshay Kanti Bam withdrew his nomination on Monday, a fortnight before polling in the constituency. After withdrawing his nomination, Bam reached BJP office to join the party and later in a photo released on social media, Bam was seen along with MP Deputy Chief Minister Jagdish Devda, State Cabinet Minister Kailash Vijayvargiya and other party leaders. Monday was the last day for withdrawal of nomination in the Indore Lok Sabha seat, where polling will be held on May 13. Indore Collector Ashish Singh confirmed that Bam has withdrawn his nomination. Bam, accompanied by local BJP MLA Ramesh Mendola, reached the collector's office and withdrew his papers. "Congress Lok Sabha candidate from Bam is welcome to the BJP under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, party national president JP Nadda, Chief Minister Mohan Yadav and State president VD Sharma," Vijayvargiya said. Police have been deployed outside the house of Bam in Patrakar Colony. Congress had fielded Bam (45), against sitting BJP MP Shankar Lalwani (62) from the Indore Lok Sabha seat, which is a stronghold of the saffron party. Bam has not contested a single election in his political career so far.



The Congress offered him the opportunity to contest from Indore at a time when several party workers, including three former MLAs of the party, have switched sides and joined the BJP ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. Indore, the largest constituency in the state in terms of number of voters, has 25.13 lakh electors. The BJP has expressed confidence of winning the seat by a margin of eight lakh votes this time. Asked about the development, Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinat said, "The gentleman in question has multiple universities and colleges in the state that we spoke about. One of the charges slapped against him was of murder. It is not natural, normal or ordinary that somebody just withdraws their candidature and joins the BJP." She said those who question the party on where is the threat to democracy, signifies that there is a "threat to democracy."

## Baripada hottest in State at 44.8 degree

1 more sunstroke death in Dhenkanal

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

As the heat wave continued to throw normal life out of gear, the maximum temperature soared up to 40 degree Celsius of more in as many as 32 stations in the State on Monday. As per the Regional Office of the India Meteorological Department (IMD here, Baripada in Mayurbhanj district turned out to be the hottest place recording a maximum temperature of 44.8 degree.



The mercury touched 44 degree or more in at least four places and a minimum of 12 places recorded 43 degrees or more. Baripada was followed by Angul at 44.3 degree, Boudh 44.1 degree and Talcher 44 degree. Capital city Bhubaneswar recorded 41.2 degree and Cuttack 42.5 degree. The weather agency has

predicted that the intense heat wave would continue to singe the State till May 3, during which the day temperature is likely to remain 3 to 6 degree above normal in some districts. Meanwhile, as per the Health Department, a sunstroke death was reported from Dhenkanal district. With this, the death toll in

sunstroke rose to two in the State. Earlier, the first sunstroke death was reported in Baleswar district. Health officials said that as many as 257 persons have been hospitalised due to sunstroke or heat-related illness in different parts of the State. The highest 60 health-related cases have been reported from Sundargarh district followed by 40 in Mayurbhanj and 36 from Khordha. Of the total 36 cases reported from Khordha district, 18 persons are undergoing treatment at the Capital Hospital in Bhubaneswar.

## Gowda grandson's scandal sparks outcry

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BENGALURU/NEW DELHI

The alleged sex scandal involving the grandson of JD(S) supremo and former Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda has led to a massive political uproar across the country with Opposition parties seeking explanation from Prime Minister Narendra Modi who was in Karnataka on Monday and the BJP which has an alliance with JD(S) in the ensuing Lok Sabha polls.

While there was no headway in the matter involving alleged accused Prajwal Revanna, demand has been made for his immediate arrest and bringing him back to India. The BJP is yet to react on this issue and Congress sought to know who helped Revanna escape to Germany. The Opposition sharpened their attack as Modi was in his election campaign schedule in Karnataka and hence



asked why the BJP went ahead with its alliance with the JD(S) when a BJP leader had written to

the party's Karnataka unit president, exposing the presence of a pen drive full of "sleaze videos of Revanna". A case of sexual harassment and stalking has been registered against Revanna. The case was registered on a complaint by their cook, who alleged that four months after she started working for them, Revanna used to sexually harass her and used to make video calls to her daughter and have "vulgar conversations" with her.

## Measures mooted to help zoo animals beat heatwave

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

As temperatures soar and heatwaves become increasingly common and unbearable in various pockets of the country, the Central Zoo Authority (CZA) has issued urgent advisories to State zoos nationwide to help the resident animals beat the heat and stay calm. These measures encompass a range of preventive and emergency actions, from providing electrolyte-rich fluids to installing cool shades, misters, and sprinklers, and offering frozen treats with fruits or vegetables in ice to captive animals. With extreme summer heat expected to intensify across

various regions in the coming days, the CZA, an autonomous body under the Union Environment Ministry, has already raised alarms, warning that the current heat wave conditions pose a significant threat to zoo inhabitants, putting them at risk of heat stress, dehydration, and other heat-related illnesses. They cited the latest advisory from the India Meteorological Department stating that severe heat wave conditions are forecasted to affect extensive areas of eastern India and the Gangetic plain of West Bengal in the upcoming days, potentially surpassing temperature records set in 2023 and making this year the warmest on record. Ditto is with Bihar, Jharkhand and



Telangana among few other States. "It's crucial to prioritise the well-being of zoo inmates during extreme weather conditions like heat waves," emphasized officials. The proactive steps

being taken to ensure the safety and comfort of captive animals aim to mitigate any potential harm caused by the heat wave. Heat stress in animals is considered to be a violation of animal welfare and rights.

An official from Sepahijala Zoological Park in Tripura's Sepahijala district mentioned that they have already initiated several measures to ensure the well-being of their animal residents while an official from the Delhi Zoo said that depending on the species, extreme heat can cause significant stress on animals, from tiny reptiles to large livestock like elephants. "So, we look at all the individual animals, at their natural behavior, their history, and even if they are very old or young to determine how they'll handle the heat. And then we make adjustments to make it cooler for them," he said. The CZA has emphasized the importance of providing

multiple water sources with fresh, cool water in shaded areas and ensuring frequent refills to maintain constant availability. "Handling or manipulation of animals should be restricted to the cooler part of the day. Nocturnal animals should not be disturbed during the daytime. Electrolytes should be added to drinking water, especially for vulnerable animals or those on restricted diets," stated CZA Member Secretary Sanjay Kumar Shukla in the advisory issued to all zoos in the country. Authorities have been advised to improve enclosures with shade cloths, tarps, or trees for natural shade and provide shallow pools for animals to wade and splash in, ensuring safe depths.









# They studied abroad, have little understanding of country: Dhama slams Rahul, Akhilesh

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Uttarakhand Chief Minister and BJP leader Pushkar Singh Dhami on Monday attacked INDIA Bloc leaders Rahul Gandhi and Akhilesh Yadav, claiming that they have little understanding of the country as they have studied abroad.

In an interview with PTI-Bhaskara here, Dhami also alleged that the Congress wants give reservations to a "particular community" from the quota meant for Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC).

On Congress leader Gandhi and Samajwadi Party (SP) chief Yadav alleging "misuse" of central probe agencies such as the ED, the CBI and the Income Tax Department to target leaders of opposition parties, the BJP leader said, "These agencies are of the Congress era."

Dhami was in the Uttar Pradesh capital for the filing of nomination papers of Defence Minister Rajant Singh who is contesting the Lok Sabha polls from Lucknow.

Asked about the alleged sex scandal in Karnataka involving JD(S) supremo H D Deve Gowda's grandson and Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna, he said the law will take its course against anyone who violates it.

Dhami also targeted the INDIA bloc, formed by opposition parties to take on the ruling BJP in the Lok Sabha polls, saying, "This is an alliance of people promoting family causes, corruption and appeasement..."

This alliance of opposition parties is to safeguard their existence and that



is why the country does not believe them, he said.

To a question on Gandhi and Yadav alleging that the BJP is seeking more than 400 seats in the Lok Sabha to change the Constitution and end reservations, Dhami said, "They have studied abroad. Hence, they have no proper understanding of the country."

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP are supporters of reservations for SC, ST and OBC. The two have studied abroad. They have little understanding of the country," he said.

The Uttarakhand chief minister exuded confidence that the BJP will win all the five Lok Sabha seats in the state.

"We don't have to fight with anybody for five Lok Sabha seats in Uttarakhand. Our fight is with

former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren, Dhami said that Prime Minister Modi has said "na khaunga na khana doonga". The law is taking its course, he said, referring to the BJP-led Centre's zero-tolerance towards corruption policy.

The AAP and the JMM are also members of the INDIA bloc.

On forest fires in Uttarakhand, Dhami said, "We are moving towards controlling the fires". These have been controlled to a great extent, he said and added that in some districts, "we have controlled the fires".

Holidays of forest department personnel have been cancelled and responsibility fixed to control the fires, the chief minister said and added that the help of the army is also being taken.

"Such incidents happen every year. This time it is more. We have taken action... Taking strict action by filing cases (against the guilty). The environment should be preserved," Dhami said while responding to a question.

On Sunday, forest officials in Uttarakhand capital Dehradun said efforts have been intensified to extinguish the raging forest fires in the state, especially in the worst-affected areas of Nainital, Haldwani and Ramnagar forest divisions.

The forest fires are gradually being controlled with flames already doused in many areas. The fires in Marora and Khanana civil areas in the Maniknath range of the Narendranagar forest division have been completely extinguished, the officials had said.

# LDF convener Jayarajan gets a reprieve

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI



The State Committee of the CPI(M) which met on Monday to discuss the ramifications caused by the meeting between LDF Convener EP Jayarajan and the BJP's Prakash Jawadekar gave a clean chit to the former and said that there was nothing unusual in it.

Briefing the media after the State Committee meeting, M V Govindan, Kerala secretary of the CPI(M) said that Jayarajan explained the situation that led to the meeting and clarified all issues raised in the meeting.

"It has been found that the hype about this meeting was created by a certain section of the media which is not friendly with the CPI(M) and they had some intention to put the party in a dilemma. Based on the explanation given by Jayarajan, we have asked him to take legal action against those media which spread falsehoods about the meeting," said Govindan.

The party secretary also said that there was nothing unusual in two leaders belonging to different political parties and pursuing different ideologies meeting each other. "Such meetings are not uncommon so long as the agenda is confined to personal relations," said Govindan.

He also alleged that the opposition led by the

is a meeting which was held to save certain leaders in the CPI(M) facing probe by central agencies like ED and CBI. If any action is taken against Jayarajan at this juncture, chances are that he would spill more beans and that will hurt the VVIPs in the party in an embarrassing situation. This is the same CPI(M) which campaigned in Kollam alleging that the RSP member N K Premachandran is shifting his loyalty to the BJP following the lunch he shared with Prime Minister Modi at the Parliament House canteen," said Jayashankar.

Jayarajan also said that if the CPI(M) is serious about taking action against Jayarajan for meeting Jawadekar, the only body capable of doing the same is the polit bureau of the party because Jayarajan is a member of the high power central committee, a body of intellectuals and intelligentsia like Sitaram Yechury, Prakash and Brinda Karats. Govindan charged the BJP's national spokesperson Sanju Verma for spreading "blatant lies" about Kerala.

"This lady was heard alleging in a media that the CPI(M) was distributing 98 per cent of the income generated by temples in Kerala to the Muslim community. The truth is that temples in the State survive because of the generous fund released by the Government," said Govindan.

# Top leaders of INDIA Bloc will scramble for PM post if it comes to power: Shah

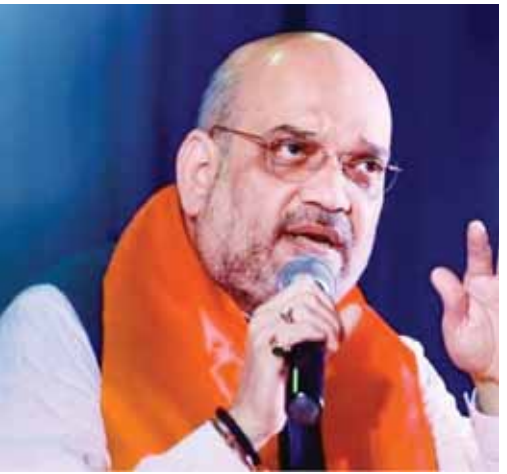
PTI ■ JHANHARPUR (BIHAR)

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday warned that a victory of the opposition INDIA bloc, "even by mistake", will lead to a scramble among top leaders of the alliance for the prime minister's post.

Addressing a rally in Jhanharpur Lok Sabha constituency of Bihar, Shah claimed that leaders like M K Stalin, Sharad Pawar, Lalu Prasad and Mamata Banerjee may agree to a year each of premiership, by turns, and "Rahul baba (Rahul Gandhi) will have to settle for whatever is left of the tenure".

In contrast, he said, "a third term for Prime Minister Narendra Modi will lead to elimination of corruption from the entire country, including Bihar, and eradication of casteism in the state".

"Modi's return to power is certain. But, suppose, even by mistake, if the INDIA alliance comes to power, what will happen? Who will be the prime minister? Will it be Stalin, Sharad Pawar, Mamata Banerjee or Rahul Gandhi? They will all settle for sharing the top post for a year each. Is it how the country can be run?" Shah said.



India wants a "mazboot" (strong) PM, not a "majboor" (weak) prime minister, the senior BJP leader asserted.

Slamming Gandhi for his "new-found concern for OBCs", the home minister said "the Congress party

has always been against the Other Backward Classes. It had opposed the Mandal Commission. Modi has emerged from among the OBCs and the community has been empowered during his tenure as never before."

He also showered encomiums on Modi for abrogation of Article 370 and strong counter-terrorism steps like surgical strikes in contrast with the previous Congress-led UPA regime, "when for 10 years, terrorists struck at will".

Attacking the opposition for alleging misuse of central agencies, Shah said, "Should there be no action against the corrupt? Whoever is found guilty of swindling money meant for the poor people of the country, must be in jail".

He also said the opposition camp had neither leaders nor resolve, alleging "Sonia Gandhi's sole concern is making her son the prime minister, while Lalu Prasad wants to make his son the chief minister of Bihar".

Shah alleged that the Congress and the RJD supremo did not give due respect to former Bihar CM Karpoori Thakur, but the BJP recognised his contribution and conferred the Bharat Ratna on him.

# Lok Sabha polls are churning of Constitution: Akhilesh Yadav

PTI ■ ETAH (UP)

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav Monday termed the ongoing Lok Sabha elections as "samvidhan manthan" (churning of the Constitution) between the protectors and destroyers of democracy and said the Constitution and democracy will be saved only if INDIA bloc wins.

Yadav alleged that the BJP will not only take away reservation by abolishing the Constitution but will also take away the right to vote from the people if it comes to power for the third time.

Everyone knows that every promise of the BJP has turned out to be false, he said while addressing an election rally in Etah.

"These are the same people who had once said they will double the income of the farmers, give the right price to the farmers for their produce and make them happy. But none of these things were done," he said. About a thousand farmers were martyred in the farmers' movement against the three "black laws", he said.

Without taking names, Yadav referred to the RSS as "the most dangerous family in the world" and alleged that the family which intended to end reservation is now talking against it for getting votes in the polls. The SP president alleged that the BJP wanted to end reservation as part of a major conspiracy by putting everything in the private hands but, he said, the "samajwadis" (socialists) will not let them succeed.

# Rahul: If voted to power, Congress will conduct caste, economic survey

PTI ■ PATAN (GUJARAT)

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday said if his party is voted to power, it would conduct a nation-wide caste and economic survey on priority to enhance participation of Dalits, tribals, poor for the general category and OBCs.

Gandhi, who was addressing a poll rally in Patan town of north Gujarat in support of the party's Lok Sabha candidate Chandanji Thakor, also said the BJP and RSS planned to change the Constitution after retaining power.

"Ninety per cent of the country's population comprises SCs, STs and OBCs, but you will not find their representation in the corporate, media (sectors), private hospitals, private universities or as bureaucrats in government. We will first do a caste survey and economic survey after coming to power," he said.

These communities are working as farmers, labourers, small traders or are simply unemployed, he said, adding that only three of the 90 IAS officers at the helm of affairs at the Centre are from the backward classes, and they too have been given insignificant posts.

Accusing the BJP of bringing about wealth inequality in the country during its 10-year rule, Gandhi said just 22 individuals possess as much wealth as 70 per cent of the population.

"Our solution is that the Congress will first conduct a caste census and economic survey after coming to power to find out the exact population of Dalits, OBCs, tribals as well as the poor from general category. Then a survey will be held to find out their participation in media, government sectors, private colleges and universities etc and also financial status," he said.

After this exercise, India will have a fair idea of everyone's proportion in population, their participation details, money in their hands and institutions they are working in, Gandhi claimed. Hitting out at the RSS and BJP, he said the ruling dispensation is against the system of reservations and it also wants to change the Constitution, which is the basis on which people received their rights, facilities like education, health care, water, as well as rights.

"BJP leaders are saying they will change the Constitution,



which protects the poor and the downtrodden. Prime Minister Narendra Modi wants only 22-25 people to control all wealth, power and natural resources. That is what happened in their 10-year rule," Gandhi said.

"They waived Rs 16 lakh crore of those 22-25 persons but refused to write off loans taken by farmers. Just 1 per cent population in India controls 40 per cent wealth. The BJP wants to shut schemes which are beneficial to farmers, the poor and downtrodden," he added.

The Congress believes in distributing wealth and power without any injustice, he said, adding that reservation guarantees participation of Dalits, poor, tribals and the backward classes. Privatisation and the Agniveer scheme are two tools of this Government to end reservation, and the Congress will ensure the Agniveer scheme is scrapped when it comes to power, Gandhi asserted.

"Agniveer scheme is an insult to our soldiers. It was brought in by the PM. The Army never wanted it. We will scrap it, protect each soldier and give them pension," he asserted.

The situation of farmers is desperate, inflation and unemployment are at record levels but the media will only show Modi, billionaires and their wedding ceremonies and Bollywood stars and celebrities, Gandhi claimed.

"After the Congress comes to power, we will waive farm loans, give legal status to MSP, give Rs 1 lakh per year to poor women under the Mahalakshmi scheme and a yearly stipend of Rs 1 lakh to graduates and diploma holders enrolled for apprenticeship in private and government sectors," Gandhi announced.

On the occasion, Gandhi hailed Maharaja Krishnakumarsinhji Gohil, the last ruler of Bhavnagar princely state, who as per the official records, was the first to merge his state with the Union of India on the request of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.

# Jabalpur BJP leader, anti drug crusader injured in stabbing

PTI ■ BHOPAL

The ruling BJP and the opposition Congress in Madhya Pradesh on Monday indulged in a war of words over quota for Other Backward Classes ahead of the third phase of Lok Sabha polls on May 7.

While the BJP claimed the Congress wants to give some part of the quota meant for SCs, STs and OBCs to Muslims, the opposition party hit back saying the ruling dispensation will change the Constitution and scrap reservations after retaining power.

"The character of BJP has always been anti-reservation. During my tenure as Chief Minister in Madhya Pradesh, 27 per cent reservation was

# Congress, BJP spar in MP over quotas, Muslim appeasement

given to OBCs. But the BJP government, which was formed after toppling the democratically elected government, conspiratorially abolished the 27 per cent reservation given to OBCs in MP," senior Congress leader Kamal Nath said on X on Monday.

The BJP was making baseless allegations on the issue against the Congress, which, after Independence, implemented the quota system and from time to time expanded its scope for the deprived communities, Nath asserted.

MP Congress chief Jitu Patwari also released a video in which he charged the BJP of wanting to change the Constitution and scrap quotas.

On Sunday, Madhya Pradesh BJP minister Prahlad Patel

claimed the hidden agenda of the Congress-led INDIA Bloc was to snatch the rights of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and OBCs and to give them to "their favourites". "The Congress wants to give the share of reservation for Dalits, tribals and backward classes to Muslims.

The Congress' intention is Muslim appeasement and its opposition to the majority community has become evident to the public. This conspiracy of the opposition party will weaken the country and shatter constitutional values," Patel had said.

The National Commission for Backward Classes was formed in 1993 but it got constitutional status only in 2018 under the Modi government and it was the Congress' ploy (to not give

constitutional status) to ensure such commissions could be formed at the state level and to allow them to work arbitrarily, Patel had alleged.

State BJP secretary Rajnesh Agrawal told PTI the Congress has attacked the social justice system by including Muslims under the other OBC list to provide them religion-based quota, adding the party wanted to implement its "Karnataka model" in the entire country and curtail the existing quota for the OBCs, SCs and STs. Earlier on Sunday, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat, while addressing a function in Hyderabad, had asserted the organisation has always been supportive of reservation, and advocated for its implementation as long as "discrimination exists".

# LS poll: 36 out of 266 candidates in Gujarat face criminal cases, says ADR data

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Thirty six out of the 266 candidates for the Lok Sabha polls in Gujarat have criminal cases against them, with some also facing attempt to murder and dacoity charges, as per an analysis of their affidavits by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR).

Elections to 25 out of the 26 Lok Sabha seats in Gujarat will be held on May 7. The BJP candidate from Surat seat has already been declared elected unopposed.

"Out of the 266 candidates, 36, or 14 per cent, have criminal charges against them, as per details provided by them in the affidavits. Out of them, 21, or 8 per cent,



have serious criminal cases against them," ADR's Gujarat coordinator Pankti Jog told reporters here on Monday.

Serious criminal cases are those which attract a maximum punishment of 5 years or more, are non-bailable, related to murder,

rape, kidnapping, bribery, assault, causing loss to the exchequer, crimes against women, hate speech, and offences under the Prevention of Corruption Act, she said.

Among the major parties, out of the 25 BJP candidates, four, or 15 per cent, have criminal

cases against them, with two facing serious charges, as per the data of ADR, which is an electoral reform advocacy group.

Out of the 23 Congress candidates, six, or 26 per cent, are named in criminal cases, with three facing serious charges, showed the ADR analysis of the Election Commission data.

Tribal leaders Anant Patel and Dilip Vasava, contesting from Valsad and Bharuch seats respectively, are facing cases on charges of attempt to murder.

Patel is the Congress candidate, while Vasava is the Bharat Adivasi Party nominee.

Aam Aadmi Party candidate Chaitar Vasava and

independent nominee Ismail Patel, both contesting from Bharuch seat, have the highest number of 13 criminal cases each against them.

The cases against Chaitar Vasava include of dacoity, sexual harassment, abetment of suicide and hate speech, as per the ADR data.

Ismail Patel is facing various charges including dacoity, forgery and voluntarily causing hurt.

Out of the total 118 independent candidates, 18 have criminal cases against them, with 11 facing serious charges, the ADR said showed.

Anant Patel is also accused in cases of attempt to murder, dacoity and voluntarily causing hurt. In one case, he

was also convicted and fined Rs 99.

Dilip Vasava, who is facing the charge of attempt to murder, was sentenced to three years imprisonment in 2016. He has filed an appeal against the court order which is currently pending, the data showed.

Chaitar Vasava was sentenced to 6-month imprisonment and fined Rs 1,000 in one of the cases.

Independent candidate from Kheda seat, Hitesh Parmar, is facing charges of stalking and criminal intimidation, according to the data.

Congress Banaskantha seat candidate Geniben Thakor has a case pending related to abetment of suicide, said the data.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## North by Northeast

Internal strife, insurgency and a sense of alienation plague the Seven Sisters, much like the Kashmir of yore

India's Northeastern region has for long experienced insurgency, internal conflict and unrest and the challenges have often been exacerbated by its complex history, geographical isolation and perceived neglect by the Central Government. One of the most prominent facets of the restive Northeast is the internecine wars within its borders, fuelled by a variety of factors ranging from ethnic tensions to resource disputes, leading to cycles of violence and displacement. The region's strategic importance, owing to its proximity to China and Southeast Asia, has made it a battleground for competing geopolitical interests, thus complicating the situation. Traditionally, the conflict in the Northeast has been fuelled by a lack of identity with the Indian mainland, the role of external powers like China, Myanmar and Bangladesh, tribal/communal differences among its inhabitants and fault lines in the subdivision of Assam which led to the creation of other Northeastern states. Indeed, the region's woes stem from several factors, which are reflected in its turmoil. Economic underdevelopment and lack of infrastructure exacerbate feelings of marginalisation and deprivation, providing fertile ground for insurgent movements to recruit disaffected youth. Moreover, the region's porous borders, particularly with Myanmar and Bangladesh, help insurgent groups set up base and launch attacks on our security personnel. Cross-border infiltration and support to insurgent groups by external actors have been persistent challenges for India's security establishment.



The Army's long presence in the region Delhi's apathy has been a recurring theme in the Northeast. The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), enacted in 1958 amidst the Naga Hills 'uprising', is a constant irritant that the locals feel reflects New Delhi's deliberate attempt to strip them of their rights and dignity. It is one of the most despised Acts in the region and stands between the Centre's goodwill and the Northeastern people. Currently, the AFSPA is enforced fully in 31 districts across four Northeastern states and partially in 12 districts. The alienation has manifested in various forms, including widespread boycott of elections, as communities express their disillusionment with the political process. The latest manifestation has been in Manipur, bordering Myanmar, where violence began on May 3 last year when hill tribal groups clashed with the ethnic majority Meitei over economic benefits and job and education quotas. Regrettably, since Independence, this area has not been fully integrated into the mainstream. Not only have many insurgent groups representing various communities been waging war against the Indian Union, internal strife and communal differences have also not been reconciled. The lack of inclusive approach to addressing the root causes of the unrest, coupled with sporadic attempts at peace talks and development initiatives, has led to instability that shows little sign of abating. Only through sustained efforts and genuine political will can the region hope to achieve peace and stability.

### PICTALK



Members of a dance group perform on a road on International Dance Day, in Nadia

## Why are the young not joining politics?



PRAFULL GORADIA

A large number of voters belongs to the younger generation; their apathy towards the electoral process is a cause of concern

The country belongs more and more to its younger citizens. It is, therefore, all the more disturbing that the youth who have lately crossed the age of 18 and have registered themselves as voters in fewer numbers. The country belongs more to the younger ones who're 18, on an average, the country for say, sixty years more, or probably twelve general elections. To a fifty-year-old, in terms of time, he might get to see five, possibly six more general elections.

In Uttar Pradesh, our largest state only 25 per cent of the eligible youth have registered themselves as voters. What could be the reasons for this lack of desire to have a say in the running of their country? Do most young people expect Government representatives to approach them in the old maibaap fashion? Or do they feel that there isn't likely to be much competition among the political parties for their votes? Could it also be that the younger generation has come to nurse an indifference towards the entire political process and the institution of democracy itself? Over the years, a large body of the youth of the country has come to believe that whoever comes to power, won't make any difference to their lives, as the country's politicians are perceived to be a class that acts only in its interest. However, in this cynicism, the youth forget that by their indifference, they abdicate their right to have a say in the running of their nation.

At the other of the age spectrum, the necessary interest in entering the political arena and playing a meaningful role in the life of the country has not been there to the extent required. Public life of a political nature had existed for some fifty years before independence. It began with the founding of the Congress by a retired British bureaucrat, Allan Octavian Hume, in 1885. The Muslim League was founded in the year 1906, the Hindu Mahasabha in 1916 and the Communist Party in 1925. Indians, therefore had the opportunity to have a feel of political



public life. The motivation wasn't power, but an idealism-driven desire for the country's freedom. Soon thereafter, there might have been disillusion; the earlier idealism began declining rapidly. With the decline was seen a fall in ethical and social values in the country.

Could the disillusionment have been due to disappointment with the quality of politicians? Not all parties indeed have members hailing from the most educated or knowledgeable sections of society. Although the current central Government is not a rough and tumble of the hitherto political dispensations that have ruled the country, it has still not been able to overcome the cynicism about politicians and politics in general, which continues to hold sway in the minds of a large section of the people. This is not to say that good people are disinterested in politics.

We have in recent years, seen many academically and professionally qualified people enter politics; some of them have even become ministers. But clearly, there is a long way to go in this regard.



ANOTHER REASON WHY WEALTHY CANDIDATES ARE ATTRACTED TO POLITICS IS THE TRADITIONAL BELIEF THAT ONCE ELECTED, THE CANDIDATE WOULD BE ABLE TO EARN BACK THE MONEY SPENT ON ELECTIONEERING AND THEREAFTER GENERATE MUCH MONEY

One great discouragement is the number of people in a constituency, as well as the high cost of electioneering. Hopefully, some answer to this problem should emerge from the delimitation of electoral constituencies, which would be set to increase, by (approximately) 50 per cent. No ordinary entrant can afford to spend astronomical sums of money to cultivate nearly two million voters per seat. Delimitation and increased seats alone will not solve the problem of election expenses. Another reason why wealthy candidates are attracted to politics is the traditional belief that once elected, the candidate would be able to earn back the money spent on electioneering and thereafter generate much money. Once the doors are closed to corruption, the attraction for opportunists to become candidates would be much diminished. This also applies equally to any new avenue for making money. Compulsory voting is a way of not only upgrading the system but also reducing the cost of electioneering. It would also eliminate the perpetuation of

vote-bank politics. For example, there was a time when the total voting used to be 50 per cent or less. Therefore, if the candidate had a secure vote bank, it wasn't difficult for him to win.

With the rise in the percentage of voting, the power and effect of a committed vote-bank is reduced. For instance, in an electorate of a lakh people, a committed vote-bank of a particular candidate is say, 25 per cent, i.e., 25,000 voters out of a population of one lakh. If the normal voting is no more than 50 to 55 per cent for that seat, this captive vote bank is assured victory for that candidate. However, if the voting percentage is 100 per cent, such a vote-bank will be of no decisive advantage. The role of freebies has to be curbed for any meaningful participation in the political process. Freebies reduce the exercise of elections in a democracy to nothing more than bribing voters. It is then futile to talk of democracy, or why the young don't participate in it in greater numbers. (The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha; views are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### PAKISTAN'S AFGHAN DEBACLE

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Pakistan buying for its misplaced priorities," published on April 29, this is my response. Ambassador Asif Durrani's acknowledgement of Pakistan's failures in Afghanistan reveals a stark reality: the cost of tensions along the Durand Line surpasses all wars with India combined. The fixation on India as the primary adversary stems from historical wounds and institutional agendas. However, the Afghan debacle exposes the fallacy of such fixations and challenges the 'two-nation theory'. The resurgence of Taliban attacks and Afghan nationals participating in strikes against Pakistan signal a seismic shift in regional dynamics. Pakistan's strategic ambitions in Afghanistan have backfired, eroding trust and isolating it on the global stage. Despite efforts to rewrite the narrative, Pakistan remains entangled in its past missteps, with Afghanistan looming as a permanent fixture in its regional calculus.

As the world watches with scepticism, Pakistan's plight underscores a fundamental truth: religion alone cannot sustain a nation. Bangladesh and Afghanistan stand as testaments to the folly of such notions. It's a sobering lesson for Pakistan to reassess its identity and recalibrate its foreign policy away from religious rhetoric towards pragmatic diplomacy.

Rohit Kapoor | Kolkata

#### ENVIRONMENTAL MANIFESTO

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Political parties must prioritise environmental preservation," published on April 29, this is my response. As an avid reader of daily news, it's disheartening to witness India's political landscape during election time fail to address pressing environmental concerns. Despite lip service in manifestos, concrete actions are conspicuously absent. The proliferation of plastic waste during political campaigns exacerbates the crisis. Plastic pollution poses a grave threat to ecosystems and human health, with marine life suffering the brunt.

#### Bihar on progress path



Apropos the news article, "Chronicle of Bihar, Beyond Elections," published on April 28, this is my response. Deepak Kumar Jha's narrative in The Pioneer paints a vivid picture of Bihar's rural landscape, where traditional thatched homes have given way to brick dwellings amidst agricultural abundance. Yet, glaring issues persist: healthcare and education

lag, despite decades of political promises. The narrative exposes the complexity of Bihar's socio-political fabric.

While leaders tout progress, caste-driven politics remain entrenched. Migration continues, disillusioning locals with governance. Jha's storytelling captures the essence of Bihar's electoral fervour, where political discourse blends with everyday life. Amidst discussions over leaders, the grassroots yearns for tangible change. The article's depth extends beyond politics, delving into healthcare woes. The anecdote of the patient's struggle highlights systemic failures, contrasting with Bihar's rich cultural tapestry. Ultimately, Jha's piece is a poignant portrayal of Bihar's struggles and resilience. It underscores the urgent need for holistic development and the preservation of its cultural heritage amidst the political clamour.

Vishal Kumar | Delhi

Political parties wield considerable influence and should champion sustainable practices to combat plastic pollution. Yet the lack of urgency is alarming. With the planet reaching critical thresholds, we can't afford complacency. The need for immediate action to safeguard our only home, Earth, is paramount. It's high time political will transcended rhetoric to enact meaningful change. We must remember that there's no Plan B for our planet.

Aditya Mehta | Mumbai

#### CULINARY ESCAPADES

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Feast of hot summer menus," published on April 27, this is my response. Reading through these descriptions feels like leafing through a gourmet guidebook. Each venue promises not just a meal but an experience, a journey through flavours and cultures. Olly offers a tranquil haven from urban chaos, serving up classics with a twist amidst a serene ambience. The China Kitchen tantalizes with its immersive dining experience, bringing Chinese culinary traditions to life. Viet: nom adds

a modern flair to Vietnamese classics, while L'Opera delights with French finesse, especially with its seasonal mango collection. Café Delhi Heights, ever-evolving, captures the essence of Delhi's vibrancy through its diverse offerings. The must-try dishes read like poetry, each a symphony of flavours designed to tantalize taste buds. From crispy sweet potato skins to succulent Peking duck, from vibrant summer rolls to creamy Alfredo pasta, there's something to suit every palate. Akanksha Dean's culinary journey adds a personal touch, showcasing a deep passion for food and an impressive resume. Her influence undoubtedly enhances the richness of each dining experience. As a regular newspaper reader, these culinary adventures beckon, promising not just a meal but a story to savour, making the dining experience more than just a necessity but a delightful escape.

Sneha Patel | Ahmedabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## Reflections on rituals from around the world

From the tranquil Nyepi Day in Bali to the vibrant street celebrations in Japan, rituals surrounding life's milestones offer glimpses into cultures



SANJAY CHANDRA

We had lunch in the resort restaurant during a vacation to Thailand a few months back. There was a slight drizzle as we walked along a narrow walkway hemmed in by walls and tastefully planted beds of flowers, vines and shrubs. I remember a late evening in our beach resort in Bali a few years back. The day after our arrival was Nyepi Day, a public holiday. It is a day of silence, fasting and meditation. No lights are lit in the evening. It is believed that spirits roam in the evening on this day. Any loud sound or bright light may attract them to come down to explore and some of them may cause harm. We had walked to the resort restaurant along walkways at the back, which were lit up with muted lamps placed along the path to guide the guests. Even the lighting in the restaurant was subdued. We were also caught up in the spirit of the local folklore and walked silently along the dimly lit narrow path, surrounded by flowers, vines and shrubs,



ancestors. Prayers are offered, followed by meals specially prepared. What surprises me, though, is the fact that these 15 days, in honour of our ancestors are considered inauspicious for any new purchases, or any other auspicious work, even though we are because they were. A very close Parsi friend passed away a few years back. The family invited us for a celebration of her life a few days later. There was laughter all around as we all recounted the happy times that we had spent with the lady over drinks and food.

The gracious hostess, her daughter, had prepared a special Parsi-style chicken dish, which had been both a speciality and a favourite of the departed soul. We also have the thirteenth-day ceremony in our Hindu religion which is formally the close of the mourning period. Guests are intimate to join prayers and then partake of our special food prepared for the occasion. Though sometimes teary-eyed, everyone remembers the time spent with the person who has joined the supreme being.

Why mourn death, which is only the passing away to another life? When my time comes, I hope my near and dear ones remember me, not for my beliefs, but for the happiness that I gave them. A life led to spreading happiness all around is to be celebrated. Thomas Campbell rightly said, "To live in hearts we leave behind is not to die!" (The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)



## FIRST COLUMN THE POWER OF THE HUMAN MIND

Settle your mind and clear accumulated dust, only then it gets purged



RAVI VALLURI

Ageons ago lived, Suddhodana, chieftain of the Sakyan republics. He was captivated with the thought of perpetuating the dynasty. However, his battle fatigued son Siddhartha, was not ensnared by the Mara of trappings of power, carnal pleasures and a family life. Siddhartha eschewed violence, cast away royal clothing and adorned ochre robes in search of the quintessential truth and was to become Buddha after intense tapas. Upon attaining enlightenment, the Compassionate One dissected the bewildering characteristics of the human mind. He was soon to quantify in a plain sailing manner, "We are what we think and our thoughts shape our lives."

The human mind is not resplendent with ennobling thoughts if the prana levels are low. The prana level increases (through yoga, pranayama, meditation and Sudarshan Kriya) and at that moment an individual realises the magnetic potential of the human mind.

Once there was a Good Samaritan, Sudhakar. He happened to read the maiden effort of a civil servant called the Magic of the Mind. This gentleman, with trepidation, became a 'Facebook friend' of the mandarin and persuaded him to be interviewed by a few T.V. channels. However, the thought process of the public functionary- who was a recovered alcoholic- doubted the sincerity of the Facebook friend. In disgust, he 'blocked' and then 'unblocked' the gentleman, perhaps more to quell the pangs of his own conscience. Finally in sheer vexation he gave in to the entreaties of the 'Facebook friend'. Soon an amazing pattern emerged and the administrator was invited by several media houses and estimable institutions to deliver lectures as to how he combated and conquered the battle against the bottle. Only much later did he realise that Sudhakar had lost some close relatives to the perils of alcoholism.



The autarchic mind of the bureaucrat was ossified and looking at life through the prism of tunnel vision. One day, after a series of interviews, the functionary received a distress call from a lady, who had happened to listen to one of his interviews and was also reading the book penned by the bureaucrat, which captured his triumph over alcoholism. On receiving the call, he could empathise with the woman's husband who was fighting a grim battle against alcoholism. There was a sudden transmutation in the mind of the public servant and went on to guide the husband on how to attain sobriety.

Realisation and awareness are two iconic qualities that shine the light on the amazing power of the human mind. Several centuries ago, Gautama Buddha was travelling with a group of disciples. The Compassionate One felt thirsty and desired some water to quench his thirst. He asked a disciple to fetch some water from a nearby lake. The enthusiastic disciple rushed to the lake but was horrified to find the water turbid as a farmer had just crossed the lake on his bullock cart. He returned back remorsefully as he could not fulfil the wish of the holy Master. Buddha sent the disciple a couple of times to fetch water to quench his thirst. But to the dismay of the tutee on each occasion the water remained dirty and turbid. While the devotees were fidgety and distraught, Buddha remained patient. Eventually, the devotee animatedly brought fresh water from the lake and offered it. Buddha smiled and drank the water. He was to say, "You did nothing. The mud settled down and the water was purged of the impurities. Let your mind settle all the dust accumulated over a period of time." This is the amazing power of the human mind. Just let it settle down.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

# Challenges loom ahead of July Union Budget



SHIVAJI SARKAR

The incoming Government would face the uphill task of navigating through a myriad of fiscal hurdles to foster sustainable growth



Despite it being too early to discuss the union budget to be presented in July, it is certain whichever combination comes back to power it would have to majorly review the February interim budget given the debates generated during elections. The election is veering around more on economic issues than the religion or Ram temple, though in certain regions these remain a potent issue and so the brands Narendra Modi and Yogi Adityanath. A larger section is concerned with the core economy, unemployment, farmers' issues, irrationally high prices, medical and health care costs, school and university fees, shooting costs of houses, high toll-jacked inflation and similar other issues.

Even showcasing of Indian economy as the fifth largest economy is not being accepted by a large section as reality. The farmers and citizens wonder while cars and tractors are allowed to run for 40 years like aircraft across the world, why a pro-people Government should be in a hurry to send these to junkyards in India, particularly when household debts are skyrocketing. The rural wisdom calls it weird and tries to locate the linkages of Government functionaries with the car makers.

Questions are also raised on the Rs 16.87 lakh crore debt repayment in the 2024-25 budget. This effectively cuts the actual budget of Rs 47.65 lakh crore to about Rs 31 lakh crore. The repayment burden in 2025 is slated to be higher. The opposition's sharp angling on core economic issues is being rebutted by the ruling combine by charging that if the opposition gets to power it would sell "mangalsutras" and delve into divisive politics. The Election Commission has issued warnings to the ruling party for its wry comments.

Low voting in 190 constituencies in major States like UP, Bihar and Maharashtra raises concern among all parties. The voter is apathetic despite



THE NEW GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE TO TAKE DRASTIC STEPS TO BRING DOWN THE PRICES OF EDIBLE OIL, FOOD GRAINS, VEGETABLES, POTATOES AND ONIONS, AS WELL AS SCHOOL FEES AND EXPENSIVE HEALTH CARE, MILK AND OTHER COMMODITIES

many moves by the Election Commission. Is that a reflection on governance? This has not put the issues on the back burner. According to RBI, inflation rises at 5.5 per cent a year and has shot beyond 55 per cent in compounded terms causing a huge rise in prices. Nobody has got such a raise in their salaries, not even Government employees.

The new Government would have to take drastic steps to bring down the prices of edible oil, food grains, vegetables, potatoes and onions as well as school fees and expensive health care, milk and other commodities. People are unwilling to buy the argument that inflation is built into the system. They rather equate it with corporate electoral bond doles to parties. The Government accepts the petrol prices are high, cut it by Rs 2 just before the polls. It has no impact on the voters' psyche.

The voter is not happy with the so-called demonstrative developments like demolition and construction of large office buildings, rail stations and rampant construction of roads or metro. Constructions devastate the hills of Himachal, Kashmir, Uttarakhand and the North East. Kisans who became millionaires overnight with the acquisition of their land for roads are not happy about losing their livelihood. Most villagers rue the roads that divide their habitats and relationships for a road they can't use without paying a toll. It is a serious issue because the Kisan also pays Rs 30 per litre petrol cess toll introduced with the promise of ending the toll. All these benefit bulk profiteers and the least of jobs.

A new Government has to initiate drastic changes and reorient policies. The major reason for joblessness is attributed to ad hoc decisions. Such constructions erode Government finance and build little assets. Southeast Asia tried it in the late 1990s and got into trouble in 1997. It would be wise on the part of the new Government to revive PSUs and ask the private sector to compete with them. It would create jobs, add to the national economy and create a fair playground.

People question the rationale of parting a part of Indian Oil to a private giant or giving out ports to private players. At least one such port has become notorious for being a smugglers' den. The universities, IITs and Government institutions have been given a mandate to raise tuition fees every year. The private ones hike far more. Schools and universities need financing from the Government and education costs must be cut down. Congress promises apprenticeship to every graduate. Looks good but it is not practical. The scheme has failed several times. India's overall exports fell by 8.1 per cent and exports to its free trade partners shrank by 18 per cent in the first half of 2023. The country's trade deficit ballooned to \$78.2 billion in the last financial year. India's export values across all commodities declined to \$351 billion during April-January from \$366 billion a year ago, underlining the impact of the global economic slowdown and tightening of interest rates in Western countries. These numbers have emerged amid India's push to sign free trade deals with the UK and the European Union. The International Monetary Fund

says that the global slowdown is on. However India projects its march to a \$5 trillion economy and it is not easy. The West has become more protectionist and keen on imposing a carbon tax. The West needs to protect its bread.

Lower productivity can result in reduced job creation within the manufacturing sector, leading to unemployment or underemployment. The International Labour Organisation finds low pay and wages as serious challenges. When productivity declines, the incentives for firms to invest in research and development or adopt new technologies diminish, leading to a slower pace in the manufacturing sector. However, the challenge of rising household debt and falling savings could weigh on long-term growth sustainability.

The FDI flow is low at \$17.96 billion. Despite a supposed buzzing market, it has not risen much. The new Government also has the challenge to cut personal income-tax rates from 39 per cent to 22 per cent in tune with the corporate tax. High taxation hits the purchasing capacity and concomitant market problems.

In short, the new Government has to stress issues regarding taxes, education, health, livelihood, low tolls and better deal with farmers. Both manifestos of the BJP and Congress speak of too many doles and caste-related benefits. If the Government can address the basic issues and make it one of the most affordable economies, India's journey will be smooth. It is a dream, if comes true it will be the most liveable country.

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

# Celebrating the universal language of dance

From traditional Indian classical dance forms to contemporary global dance phenomena, dance continues to inspire, heal and unite communities

On April 14 last year, history was made in Assam, India, as a Guinness World Record was set for the largest gathering of Bihu dancers. Over 11,000 dancers from different communities and backgrounds came together to perform the traditional dance of Assam, watched live by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It was a spectacular display of cultural diversity and unity. This event was a shining example of how cultural diversity can bring people together and foster a sense of emotional bonding and appreciation of one another's culture and traditions.

More recently as part of the 'Raag Seva' in a breathtaking display of timeless grace and unwavering passion, the 90-year-old actor-dancer and



RAJDEEP PATHAK

Padma Vibhushan awardee Vyjayanthimala Bali, enchanted spectators with her ethereal Bharatanatyam performance in Ayodhya. In this rich mosaic of human expression, dance emerges as a timeless gem, casting its spell across generations and captivating hearts through the ages. Beyond mere movement, it embodies a symphony of creativity, infusing the soul with unbridled joy. A graceful interplay of rhythm

and emotion, it offers solace from the burdens of modern life, intertwining threads of happiness into the fabric of existence.

Welcome to the rhythm of life, as we celebrate the 'International Dance Day' on April 29th every year, since 1982. Dance helps to change lives. The 'Navras', which is used to express joy, sadness, love, anger and many other emotions, is a way of celebrating life and creating a sense of community.

This Day serves as a platform aimed at fostering awareness regarding the intrinsic value of dance and facilitating the widespread promotion of the dance community's endeavours. Central to its mission is the aspiration that Governments and influential figures will

recognize the significance of dance and extend support towards its cultivation. We are all aware of Yo-Yo Ma's 'Silk Road Ensemble', a musical group founded by the cellist Yo-Yo Ma, where musicians from China, Iran, India and Spain come together and use their music to create a bridge between cultures and promote understanding between people from different backgrounds. Through cultural collaboration, this is a forum for the exchange of ideas, tradition and innovation across borders.

Also, the 'OneBeat' initiative, which brings together musicians from around the world to collaborate and create new music - was funded by the U.S. Department of State - aims to promote cultural exchange

and create a global community of musicians. 'OneBeat' has brought together musicians from countries such as Syria, Russia and Cuba, to name a few, not only providing a platform for musicians to share their music but also creating new collaborations that transcend cultural and linguistic barriers.

Dance also helps in promoting intercultural dialogue. Dance companies worldwide come together to create new works that reflect their cultural traditions and explore common themes. One such example is the 'Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater', which has been promoting diversity and inclusion through dance for over 60 years. The company's performances celebrate the African-American cultural

experience and explore universal themes such as love, loss and identity.

Not only this, the 'National Ballet of Cuba' is a dance company that promotes intercultural dialogue through its performances. Founded in 1948 by Alicia Alonso, one of the most famous ballerinas of the 20th century, it is known for its unique style that combines elements of classical ballet with Afro-Cuban and Spanish dance traditions.

Back in India, 'The Kalakshetra Foundation', - of the many foundations and institutions that exist to popularize Indian classical dance forms - Chennai-based dance school, founded by Rukmini Devi Arundale in 1936, sought to revive and promote Indian classical dance forms and is

today a leading institution that trains students in various forms of Indian classical dance, including Bharatanatyam, Kathakali and Kuchipudi. Similarly, the 'Nrityagram Dance Village', near Bangalore, which was founded in 1990 by Protima Gauri, a renowned Indian classical dancer, is a unique institution that offers a holistic approach to dance training, focusing not only on dance techniques, but also on aspects such as yoga, meditation and Indian mythology. The institute has gained global recognition and has collaborated with many international dance companies to create new works that blend Indian classical dance with contemporary dance forms. We cannot miss Bollywood dance, which has become a

global phenomenon and has created a platform for people from different backgrounds to come together and celebrate India's vibrant culture. Using different dance styles from Indian classical forms to ballet; to cabaret; to hip-hop, break dance and so on - each step encompasses a unique rhythm and style involving different generations tap to the beats.

As we celebrate the universal language of dance and its ability to unite people, it is also important to acknowledge the Guru-Shishya Parampara and celebrate the beauty of dance and its ability to create a better world for all.

(The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views are personal)

# 'Israel must boost more humanitarian aid for Gaza'

**AP ■ WARSA**

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Monday that Israel must still do more to increase the flow of humanitarian aid into the besieged Gaza Strip and that he would use his current Middle East trip — his seventh to the region since the Israel-Hamas war started in October — to press that case with Israeli leaders.

Speaking to Gulf Cooperation Council foreign ministers in Riyadh, Blinken said best way to ease the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza would be to conclude an elusive cease-fire agreement that would release hostages held by Hamas. But, in the meantime, he said it was critical to improve conditions now. "The most effective way to address the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, to alleviate the suffering of children, women and men, and to create space for a more just and durable solu-

tion is to get a cease-fire and the hostages out," he said. "But we're also not waiting on a cease-fire to take the necessary steps to meet the needs of civilians in Gaza," Blinken said. He said that because President Joe Biden has been insisting that Israel do more, including in his phone call with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday, there had been improvements, although not nearly enough. "We have seen measurable progress in the last few weeks, including the opening of new crossings and increased volume of aid delivery to Gaza and within Gaza, and the building of the US maritime corridor, which will open in the coming weeks. But it is not enough. We still need to get more aid in and around Gaza," he said. "We need to improve deconfliction with humanitarian assistance workers. And we have to find greater efficiency and greater safety and



U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken is welcomed by Saudi Foreign Ministry Director of Protocol Affairs Mohammed Al-Ghamdi as he arrives in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia Monday. **AP/PTI**

deconfliction is at the heart of that. And, finally we have to make sure that we're focusing not just on inputs, but on impact."

Scores of relief workers have been killed since the conflict began, and a deadly Israeli attack on a World Central Kitchen aid convoy in Gaza this month only highlighted the dangers and difficulties of protecting them. Israel has said the strike was a mistake and has disciplined officials involved.

World Central Kitchen says it would resume operations in Gaza on Monday after a four-week suspension.

The war has ground on since Hamas' deadly Oct 7 attacks on Israel with little end in sight: more than 34,000 Palestinians have been killed, hundreds of thousands more are displaced and a humanitarian crisis in Gaza is worsening.

The conflict has fuelled mass protests around the world that have spread to American

college campuses. US support for Israel, particularly arms transfers, has come under particular criticism, something the administration is keenly aware poses potential problems for Biden in an election year.

Blinken's trip comes amid renewed concerns about the conflict spreading in the Middle East and with once-promising prospects for Israeli-Saudi rapprochement effectively on hold as Israel refuses to consider one of the Saudis' main conditions for normalised relations: the creation of a Palestinian state.

Meanwhile, the Biden administration has been warning Israel against a major military operation on the southern Gaza city of Rafah, where more than a million Palestinians have fled to escape fighting further north. Israel has not yet launched such an offensive, but Netanyahu has repeatedly said that one will take place, asserting that it is the

only way to wipe out Hamas. Both topics were discussed during the Biden-Netanyahu phone call on Sunday, according to the White House and US officials.

During his trip, Blinken said he would also underscore the absolute importance of not allowing the Israel-Hamas conflict to engulf the region.

The danger of conflagration was underscored this month when a suspected Israeli attack on an Iranian consular building in Syria prompted an unprecedented direct missile and drone response by Iran against Israel. An apparent retaliatory Israeli strike on Iran followed.

Although the tit-for-tat cycle appears to have ended for now, deep concerns remain that Iran or its proxies in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria or Yemen could act in such a way as to provoke a greater response from Israel or that Israel might take action that Iran feels it must retaliate for.

## UK's new laws to keep smart devices secure over internet

**PTI ■ LONDON**

All internet connected smart devices will be required to meet minimum security standards under what the UK government has dubbed as "world first" laws, effective from Monday to protect consumers and businesses from hacking and cyber-attacks.

Under the new regime, manufacturers will be banned from having weak, easily guessable default passwords like "admin" or "12345" and if there is a common password, the user will be prompted to change it on start-up.

An investigation conducted by the Which? consumer group found that a UK home filled with smart devices could be exposed to more than 12,000 hacking attempts from across the world in a single week, with a total of 2,684 attempts to guess weak default passwords on just five devices.

"From today, consumers will have greater peace of mind that

their smart devices are protected from cyber criminals, as we introduce world first laws that will make sure their personal privacy, data and finances are safe," said UK Minister for Cyber Viscount Camrose, Jonathan Berry. The UK's Department for Science, Innovation and Technology said under the new legal requirement, manufacturers must protect consumers from hackers and cyber criminals from accessing devices with internet or network connectivity — from smartphones to games consoles and connected fridges.

It said the new laws are part of the British government's GBP 2.6-billion National Cyber Strategy to protect and promote Britain online. "Our pledge to establish the UK as the global standard for online safety takes a big step forward with these regulations, moving us closer to our goal of a digitally secure future," said UK Data and Digital Infrastructure Minister Julia Lopez.

## Yousaf resigns as Scottish First Minister

**PTI ■ LONDON**

Humza Yousaf, the Pakistani-origin Scottish National Party leader who heads the devolved government in Scotland, announced his resignation on Monday, after days of political turmoil for the devolved SNP-led government.

Yousaf, 39, took over as Scotland's first Muslim and also the region's youngest First Minister in March last year.

Last week, he ended a power-sharing agreement with the Scottish Green Party amid growing policy differences and plunged his leadership of a minority government into crisis. His former Green Party allies then teamed up with the Opposition Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties to back two non-confidence motions — one in Yousaf's leadership of Scotland and the second regarding the Scottish government as a whole.

"While a route through this week's motion of no confi-



denance was absolutely possible, I am not willing to trade my values and principles or do deals with whomever simply for retaining power," said Yousaf.

"Therefore, after spending the weekend reflecting on what is best for my party, for the government and for the country I lead I have concluded

that repairing our relationship across the political divide can only be done with someone else at the helm," he said.

In his speech delivered at Bute House in Edinburgh, he noted on an emotional note: "I am sad that my time as First Minister is ending, but I am so grateful, I am so blessed, for having the opportunity that are afforded to so few to lead my country and who could ask for a better country to lead than Scotland." Yousaf, of Pakistani and Kenyan heritage, paid tribute to the UK's diversity and also referenced Rishi Sunak as Britain's first Hindu prime minister in his resignation speech.

He added: "People who looked like me were not in positions of political influence, let alone leading governments, when I was younger. We now live in a UK that has a British Hindu Prime Minister (Sunak), a Muslim Mayor of London (Sadiq Khan), a black Welsh First Minister (Vaughan Gething), and for a little while longer a Scottish Asian First Minister

of this country." "So for those who decry that multiculturalism has failed across the UK, I would suggest that the evidence is quite to the contrary and that is something we should all celebrate." Yousaf will remain in his post until a replacement First Minister is chosen in the Scottish Parliament, Holyrood. It marks a time of upheaval for the pro-independence SNP even though the outgoing leader claimed Scottish independence "feels frustratingly close."

The last few miles of the marathon are always the hardest and we have run this race as a team and will now prepare to pass the baton to a successor who I am absolutely certain will lead us over the finish line," he said.

The Opposition parties welcomed his resignation, with the Scottish Tories saying Yousaf had averted a "humiliating defeat" at a vote of no confidence later this week and the Labour Party demanding a UK-wide general election soon for a "fresh start" across the country.

## Israeli officials concerned over ICC arrest warrants

**AP ■ JERUSALEM**

Israeli officials on Monday appeared to be increasingly concerned that the International Criminal Court may issue arrest warrants against the country's leaders, as international pressure mounts over its war with Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

Meanwhile, Israeli airstrikes on the southern Gaza city of Rafah overnight and into Monday killed at least 22 people, including six women and five children, one of whom was just 5 days old, according to hospital records and an Associated Press reporter.

The ICC launched a probe three years ago into possible war crimes committed by Israel and Palestinian militants going back to the 2014 Israel-Hamas war, but it has given no indication such warrants are imminent. There was no comment from the court on Monday.

Israel's Foreign Ministry said late Sunday that it had informed Israeli missions of "rumours" that warrants might be issued against senior political and military officials. It was not clear what sparked the Israeli concerns.

"We expect the court to prevent the issuance of arrest warrants against senior Israeli officials," Foreign Minister Israel Katz said, adding that such warrants would "provide a morale boost" to Hamas and other militant groups.

A series of Israeli announcements in recent days about allowing more humanitarian aid into Gaza meanwhile appears to be aimed in part at heading off possible ICC action.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Friday that Israel "will never accept any attempt by the ICC to undermine its inherent right of self-defence." "The threat to seize the soldiers and officials of the Middle East's only democracy and the world's only Jewish state is outrageous. We will not bow to it," he posted on X, formerly known as Twitter. It was not clear what prompted the post.

The ICC investigation covers allegations going back to the 2014 war in Gaza as well as Israel's construction of Jewish settlements in occupied territory that the Palestinians want for a future state.

## Truce: Biden, Netanyahu hold talks

**Tel Aviv (AP):** The White House on Sunday said US President Joe Biden had again spoken with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as pressure builds on Israel and Hamas to reach a deal that would free some Israeli hostages and bring a cease-fire in the nearly seven-month-long war in Gaza.

The White House said that Biden reiterated his "clear position" as Israel plans to invade Gaza's southernmost city of Rafah despite global concern for more than 1 million Palestinians sheltering there.

The US opposes the invasion on humanitarian grounds, straining relations between the allies. Israel is among the countries U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken will visit as he returns to the Middle East on Monday.

Biden also stressed that progress in delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza be "sustained and enhanced," according to the statement.

The call lasted just under an hour, and they agreed the onus remains on Hamas to accept the latest offer in negotiations, according to a U.S. official who spoke on condition of anonymity because the official wasn't authorized to comment publicly.

There was no comment from Netanyahu's office. A senior official from key intermediary Qatar, meanwhile, urged Israel and Hamas to show "more commitment and more seriousness" in negotiations.

Qatar, which hosts Hamas' headquarters in Doha, was instrumental along with the US and Egypt in helping negotiate a brief halt to the fighting in November that led to the release of dozens of hostages.

But in a sign of frustration, Qatar this month said that it was reassessing its role.

## Spain's PM Sánchez to continue in office

**AP ■ MADRID**

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez on Monday ended days of speculation about his future by saying he will continue in office "with even more strength."

Sánchez shocked his country last Wednesday by taking five days off to think about his future, following the decision by a court to open preliminary proceedings against his wife on corruption allegations. "I have decided to continue on with even more strength at the helm of the government of Spain," he said in a televised speech after informing King Felipe VI of the decision earlier Monday.

His resignation would have deprived Europe of a prominent Socialist prime minister ahead of European elections in June and at a time when the center right increasingly holds sway.

"It is a decision that does not mean a return to the status quo,

this will mark a before and after, I promise you that," Sánchez said, without detailing what steps he could take to curtail "the smear campaign" he says he and his family is facing.

The eurozone's fourth-largest economy had been in suspense since Sánchez, prime minister since 2018, posted an emotional letter on X on Wednesday before he holed up in his Moncloa Palace, the prime minister's residence in Madrid.

In it he said the moves against wife were too personal an attack on his family and he needed time to decide on his priorities.

In that letter, where he declared himself "deeply in love" with wife Begoña Gómez, he said that he could no longer just stand aside and watch her being targeted by a legal probe brought by allegations by a right-wing platform that accused her of using her position to influence business deals.

The group, Manos Limpias, or "Clean Hands," acknowledged that the complaint was based on newspaper articles. Spanish prosecutors say it should be thrown out.

The expectation Monday was such that Spain's state broadcaster had put up a 10-minute countdown clock before his announcement on the screen during their morning news talk show.

Speaking from the steps of Moncloa Palace, Sánchez said that he and his wife "know that this campaign to discredit them won't stop" but that he has decided that he couldn't give his adversaries the satisfaction of giving up.

Rallies by his supporters over the past few days played a part in his decision, he said.

Essentially Sánchez had four options: resign, seek a parliamentary vote of confidence, call a new election or remain in office.

## At least 40 die in Kenya after dam collapses

**AP ■ NAIROBI**

A dam collapsed in western Kenya early Monday, killing at least 40 people after a wall of water swept through houses and cut off a major road, police said.

The Old Kijabe Dam, located in the Mai Mahiu area of the Great Rift Valley region that is prone to flash floods, collapsed and water spilled downstream, carrying with it mud, rocks and uprooted trees, police official Stephen Kirui told The Associated Press.

Vehicles were entangled in the debris on one of Kenya's busiest highways and paramedics treated the injured as waters submerged large areas. Ongoing rains in Kenya have caused flooding that has already killed nearly 100 people and postponed the opening of schools. Heavy rains have been pounding the country since mid-March and the Meteorology Department has



warned of more rainfall.

Kenya's Interior Minister Kithure Kindiki ordered the inspection of all public and private dams and water reservoirs within 24 hours starting Monday afternoon to avert future incidents. The ministry said recommendations for evacuations and resettlement would be done after the inspection.

The Kenya National Highways

Authority issued an alert warning motorists to brace for heavy traffic and debris that blocked the roads around Naivasha and Narok, west of the capital, Nairobi.

The wider East African region is experiencing flooding due to the heavy rains, and 155 people have reportedly died in Tanzania while more than 200,000 people affected in neighbouring Burundi.



Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, right, reacts after receiving a ceremonial talwar as a special gift from the Ontario Sikhs and Gurudwara Council after speaking during Khalsa day celebrations at City Hall in Toronto, Sunday. **AP/PTI**

## Top Chinese scientist expelled over corruption allegations

**AP ■ BEIJING**

China's top scientist, who developed the first inactivated COVID-19 vaccine at the height of the pandemic in the country in 2020, has been dismissed from Parliament for alleged corruption.

Yang Xiaoming, the chairman of China National Pharmaceutical Group's vaccine subsidiary China National Biotec Group (CNBG), has been stripped of his membership in the National People's Congress (NPC) due to serious discipline and law violations, official media reported here on Monday.

The charge of serious discipline and law violations is a common euphemism for corruption under the ruling Communist Party of China

(CPC) disciplinary practice.

Yang, 62, is a veteran researcher who headed the CNBG - a vaccine subsidiary of state-owned Sinopharm - and led a team that developed Sinopharm's BBIBP-CorV vaccine, China's first coronavirus shot approved for general use.

Coronavirus first surfaced in the Chinese city of Wuhan in March 2020 and later spread to the world, becoming the pandemic of the century and claiming millions of lives.

According to a statement by NPC, Yang is already being investigated by the party disciplinary body — the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection.

The Sinopharm shot and Sinovac Biotech's CoronaVac were the most widely used in China and the leading

COVID-19 vaccines exported by the country.

Yang's dismissal comes amid the biggest crackdown on China's healthcare system, expanding a sweeping anti-corruption drive launched by President Xi Jinping in the last few years.

The crackdown aims to root out widespread corruption in a system plagued by kickbacks.

It targets hospitals, drug companies and insurance funds, with dozens of hospital chiefs detained since last year, Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported.

Another former Sinopharm senior executive, Zhou Bin, who once served as the company's deputy general manager, was placed under investigation by the CCDI in January.

## Solomon Islands pro-Beijing PM won't keep his job following polls

**AP ■ MELBOURNE**

Solomon Islands pro-Beijing Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare on Monday withdrew from the contest to remain head of the strategically important South Pacific island nation's government following general elections two weeks ago that are central to the US-China rivalry in the region.

Sogavare has been re-elected to the parliament. But he told a press conference in the capital Honiara on Monday he would not be nominated as a candidate when the 50 newly elected lawmakers vote on Thursday for the prime minister, Australian Broadcasting Corp reported. Sogavare had hoped to become the first

Solomons prime minister to maintain power in consecutive four-year terms following the April 17 election.

During his previous term, China's influence increased more in the Solomons than anywhere else in the South Pacific. Sogavare switched diplomatic allegiances from Taiwan to Beijing and struck a secret security pact that has raised fears of the Chinese navy gaining a foothold in the region.

Sogavare said in his press conference he had been "vilified by media" and his family had been subjected to "unprecedented abuse," the ABC reported. Sogavare's Ownership, Unity and Responsibility Party, known as the Our Party, won 15 seats in the election, more than any other party. The

party's candidate to become prime minister will be Foreign Minister Jeremiah Manele.

A prime minister needs the support of at least 26 lawmakers in the 50-seat chamber. Observers expect China to have secretly backed more candidates than Sogavare at the election in a bid to ensure the government change does not diminish Beijing's influence. Sogavare could again return to power during the current four-year term. He was elected prime minister after the last election in 2019.

But he has served as prime minister three times before 2019 because his predecessors had quit or were ousted by fellow lawmakers in a precarious political system.



# S Korea's opp leader urges prez to accept probe against wife, officials

AP ■ SEOUL

**E**mboldened by his party's recent election win, South Korea's opposition leader pressured President Yoon Suk Yeol to accept special investigations into allegations involving top officials and his wife, as they met Monday for talks on bipartisan cooperation.



South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, right, shakes hands with main opposition Democratic Party leader Lee Jae-myung during a meeting at the presidential office in Seoul South Korea, Monday. AP

The meeting was their first since Yoon took office in 2022 after defeating Lee Jae-myung in the country's closest presidential election race. During their 2022 campaigns, Yoon, Lee and their supporters demonised each other and filed dozens of lawsuits against one another.

but didn't elaborate. In a briefing after the meeting, senior presidential adviser Lee Do-woon said that Yoon told Lee that he won't oppose a special law to investigate the Halloween deaths but noted Yoon of ignoring public demands and retaining top officials and military commanders responsible for the deadly incidents.

results though the start of direct communication with Yoon would still be meaningful. No agreement was reached, but Yoon's office said the president and Lee agreed to meet frequently without setting a date for their next meeting.

can't deal with a too steep increase in students, but critics say they simply worry the supply of more doctors would eventually result in lowering their income.

# Indonesian, Singaporean leaders hold annual talks, joined by successors

AP ■ BOGOR

**S**ingaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Indonesian President Joko Widodo on Monday celebrated the countries' continued cooperation at their seventh and final Leaders' Retreat in Jakarta, an annual meeting between the two Southeast Asian leaders that was also attended this year by their successors.

separate treaties on extradition and airspace. The agreements were signed during the 2022 leaders' retreat and came into effect this year. At this year's retreat, the leaders oversaw the signing of several agreements, including an update on defence cooperation which Lee said reflects the two countries' robust defence ties.

# Attack in Russia's North Caucasus leaves 2 cops, 5 gunmen dead

AP ■ MOSCOW

**Moscow (AP):** A group of militants attacked a police checkpoint in Russia's North Caucasus region, killing two officers, officials said on Monday. Four other officers were wounded and all five attackers were killed in the shootout in the Karachay-Cherkessia region late Sunday, according to the regional branch of Russia's Interior Ministry.

# NATO's chief chides alliance countries for not being quicker to help Ukraine

AP ■ KYIV

**N**ATO countries haven't delivered what they promised to Ukraine in time, the alliance's chief said Monday, allowing Russia to press its battlefield advantage while Kyiv's depleted forces wait for Western military supplies to arrive.

Ukraine's army chief said Sunday. The Russian Defense Ministry claimed Monday its forces had also taken the village of Semenivka.

recent weeks edged forward, especially in the Donetsk region, by sheer weight of numbers and massive firepower used to bludgeon defensive positions.

# Thailand FM resigns after being dropped as deputy prime minister

AP ■ BANGKOK

**Bangkok (AP):** Thailand's foreign minister abruptly resigned in dissatisfaction over a Cabinet reshuffle that removed him as one of the country's deputy prime ministers.

which took office less than a year ago, announced its first Cabinet shuffle. Shortly afterwards, the media circulated a document said to be a letter of resignation from Parnpree, dated Sunday, indicating his dissatisfaction that he was removed from the position of deputy prime minister and only remained foreign minister.

# China nod to Tesla cars as Musk lobbies in visit to Beijing

PTI ■ BEIJING

**I**n a big relief for Tesla, its vehicles passed the key test of compliance with China's data security rules as its billionaire CEO Elon Musk who air dished to Beijing on Sunday met Premier Li Qiang to press for all clear approval for his cars which faced stiff competition from local rivals.

Musk's Tesla, which in recent months faced entry bans in Chinese government-affiliated buildings besides military bases due to security concerns over data leaks, "passed" the security assessment by a state-owned Chinese industrial association on Monday.

The association said the test aims to help regulate auto data processing, protect the rights of car users, and build a sound environment for auto data security and the industry.

intelligent connected vehicles that meet the country's auto data security requirements, including those from Tesla.

tarily, according to the association. The association said the test aims to help regulate auto data processing, protect the rights of car users, and build a sound environment for auto data security and the industry.

increased. Chinese electric vehicles and its popular social media app TikTok faced restrictions and bans in the US over security and data breach concerns.

Tesla said in a statement that the endorsement of its Model 3 and Model Y vehicles assembled at the Shanghai Giga factory would lead to an easing of restrictions on its cars' access to certain state-backed entities, airports and motorways.

ware, in China for which Musk reportedly is lobbying. In his meeting with Musk, Premier Li said Tesla's operations in China represented a successful example of an economic tie-up between China and the US as he encouraged more cooperation between the two countries.

# Dar's surprise elevation as deputy PM a 'pre-planned' move: Report

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

**T**he surprise elevation of Pakistan Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar — a close confidant of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif — as the deputy prime minister was in reality "pre-planned" and is reportedly a move to "compensate" the PML-N supremo for the loss of the finance portfolio, it emerged on Monday.

the "rarely filled" slot of deputy prime minister has raised many questions, the report said. The main talking point is that PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif wants to have his "confidant" in a key position in the federal cabinet to "compensate him for the loss of the finance portfolio", it said.



However, according to a Geo News report, the appointment of a four-time finance minister as foreign minister suggested a ramped-up role for economics in the nation's diplomacy as the cash-strapped country tries to secure another International Monetary Fund (IMF) Deal and shore up external financing from foreign capitals.

led the finance ministry from 2013 to 2017 and then from 2022 to 2023. He has also served the country as minister for industry and investment from February 1997 to July 1997 as well as commerce from December 1997 to October 1999.

# 4 suspects involved in Chinese engineers' killings arrested

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

**Islamabad (PTI):** Pakistan authorities claimed on Monday that they have arrested four suspects involved in the killing of Chinese engineers in a deadly terrorist attack last month. Five Chinese nationals and a Pakistani driver were killed in the attack on March 26 when a vehicle-borne suicide bomber targeted a convoy escorting Chinese engineers in the remote Besham area of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province. No group has yet claimed responsibility for the attack, but officials said that the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) was involved in the attack. The Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province said that a probe by a Joint Investigation Team (JIT) exposed the network of terrorists, claiming that the "key actors" of the network involved in the attack have been identified.

# Pak Sharif discusses new loan programme with IMF chief

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

**P**akistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has met IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva and discussed a new loan programme for the cash-strapped country to put the economy back on track.

gains made in the past year were consolidated and its economic growth trajectory remained positive," according to a statement issued by the PM Office on Sunday.

News. According to the state-run PTV News post on X, this was the first meeting between the prime minister and Georgieva since his re-election last month. They last met in Paris in June 2023 on the margins of the Summit for New Global Financial Pact.

# BSE shares tank nearly 19 per cent

## After Sebi directive on regulatory fee

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of BSE tanked nearly 19 per cent on Monday as the exchange is expected to shell out more regulatory fee after markets watchdog Sebi asked it to pay the fee based on the "notional value" of its options contracts rather than on the premium value. The stock plummeted 18.63 per cent to Rs 2,612.10 on the NSE. About 103.10 lakh shares of the exchange were traded on the NSE in intra-day trade. In the broader market, the NSE Nifty traded with a gain of 205.10 points or 0.91 per cent to 22,626.65. "BSE is hereby advised to pay the regulatory fee based on annual turnover to Sebi considering the notional value in case of options contract," the exchange said in a filing to the National Stock Exchange (NSE) on Friday. Also, the exchange has been asked to pay the differential regulatory fee for the past periods along with an interest of 15 per cent per annum on the remaining unpaid amount. It has been directed to pay the amount within one month of receipt of the letter, the filing noted. Sebi's letter mentioned that



since the introduction of derivative contracts, BSE has been paying the regulatory fee on "annual turnover" to the regulator considering premium value for option contracts, instead of the notional value. Notional turnover represents the overall strike price of all contracts traded in derivatives, whereas premium turnover is the sum of premiums paid on all contracts traded. As the notional value exceeds the premium turnover, opting for notional turnover as the basis

entails a higher fee outlay. In a disclosure on Sunday, BSE said it is currently evaluating the validity of the claim as per Sebi communication. In case it is ascertained that the said amount is payable, the total differential Sebi regulatory fees for the period from FY 2006-07 to FY 2023-24 would be Rs 68.64 crore plus GST, which includes an interest of Rs 30.34 crore. Further, the differential Sebi regulatory fees for FY 2023-24, if liable, could be around Rs 96.30 crore plus GST, BSE said.

# India Inc revenue growth weakest since September 2021: Crisil Report

PTI ■ MUMBAI

India Inc is likely to log 4-6 per cent revenue growth in the January-March quarter of 2023-24, marking the slowest quarterly growth since recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic which began in September 2021, said a Crisil report. The report is based on an analysis of 350 companies which exclude financial services and oil and gas sectors firms. The moderation follows stronger growth in previous years, the report said, adding "among the 47 sectors



monitored by CRISIL, only 12 are expected to have clocked an improvement in revenue growth both sequentially and on-year for the quarter." Consumer discretionary

products and services are expected to have led the show in the January-March quarter. Among discretionary products, the automobiles sector was steered by healthy growth in passenger vehicles on the back of higher volumes and price hikes in the past year. The organised retail sector, the report said, grew for the thirteenth quarter in a row, on healthy urban demand. Discretionary services, such as airlines and hotels benefited from MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions),

weddings and rebound in corporate travel. On the other hand, it said, revenue from construction-linked sectors is expected to have grown at a tepid pace, essentially on account of a high base of the fourth quarter of fiscal 2023 that saw construction companies achieving their highest quarterly revenue. The report further said that the cement sector, despite steady demand momentum during the quarter, recorded moderate revenue growth as prices remained under pressure amid higher supply and intense competition.

# Increasing global uncertainties may impact demand, India's exports: FIEO

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The escalating geopolitical tension may have implications for the country's exports in the first quarter of 2024-25 as it is likely to impact global demand, apex exporters body FIEO said. The global uncertainties caused by continuing war between Russia and Ukraine has impacted India's outboard shipments in 2023-24, which recorded a decline of 3.11 per cent to USD 437 billion. Imports too dipped by over 8 per cent to USD 677.24 billion. "If the global situation continues to be like this, it would impact global demand. In the first quarter numbers, the demand slowdown may be visible," FIEO Director General Ajay Sahai said. He added that despite all the challenges, freight rates are softening and it is giving an indication that demand may be impacted in the times to come. He cautioned that further escalation of the current situation could have serious implications on the world trade. "Besides geopolitical uncertainties, high inflation and high interest rates are also crucial reasons for



demand slowdown," he said, adding certain advanced economies like Europe may witness more slowdown. He also said that India's domestic currency depreciated only about 1.3 per cent during 2023-24 as against Chinese Yuan's 4.8 per cent; Thai Baht 6.3 per cent and Malaysian Ringgit's 7 per cent. When asked about the impact of Israel-Iran war, he said certain exporters from engineering sector have

stated that the demand for goods that are going to the UAE and then to Iran has come down. Jewellery demand may also come down, he said. The director general suggested the government to take certain steps for exporters at the liquidity front. "Due to demand slowdown, offtake of goods will be low so foreign buyers will also take a longer period to make payments. So we require

funds for longer period. Exporters also need interest subvention support," Sahai said. He asked for continuation of interest equalisation scheme. On December 8, 2023, the Union Cabinet approved an additional allocation of Rs 2,500 crore for the continuation of the scheme up to June 30. The scheme helps exporters from identified sectors and all MSME manufacturer exporters to avail of rupee export credit at competitive rates at a time when the global economy is facing headwinds. Exporters get subsidies under the "Interest Equalisation Scheme for pre-and post-shipment rupee export credit. "The rates should be enhanced to 3 per cent and five per cent," he said. He added that technology and knowledge-based sectors like electronics, electricals, telecommunication, machinery, auto, pharma, medicine and diagnostics would help achieve USD one trillion exports by 2030. "But we have a problem in labour intensive sectors like apparel, footwear, and gems and jewellery as our market share is going down," he said.

# Indegene ₹1,842 crore IPO to open on May 6

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indegene Ltd, a healthcare tech firm focused on the global life sciences industry, on Monday said it has fixed the price band at Rs 430 to Rs 452 per share for its Rs 1,842-crore initial share-sale offer that opens for public subscription on May 6. The initial public offering (IPO) will conclude on May 8. The bidding for anchor investors will open for a day on May 3, the company announced. The company's IPO comprises a fresh issue of equity shares worth up to Rs 760 crore and an Offer For Sale (OFS) of up to 2.34 crore equity shares aggregating Rs 1,082 crore, at the higher end of the price band, by selling shareholders. This takes the total IPO size to 1,842 crore. The OFS would see sale of shares by existing investors CA Dawn Investments, a Carlyle group entity, Vida Trustees in its capacity as partner of Group Life Spring, Brighton Park Capital's entities BPC Genesis Fund I SPV Ltd, and BPC Genesis Fund I-A SPV Ltd, and individual investors Manish Gupta, Rajesh Bhaskaran Nair, and Anita Nair.

# Dish TV launches service for customers in Delhi to access TV, OTT content

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Direct-to-home service provider Dish TV on Monday said its existing as well as new customers in Delhi can now access TV and OTT content from popular apps without paying an additional cost. With the 'Dish TV Smart+' service, all Dish TV and D2H customers can access to content on popular OTT apps, along with their chosen TV subscription pack, through the 'Watcho' App on any screen from anywhere.

"We are giving a facility to customers whereby they can switch to different apps with the same subscription without paying anything extra," Dish TV India Ltd CEO Manoj Dobhal told PTI. He said the company has already launched the new service for customers in Mumbai, Kolkata, and Chennai while the Delhi edition is being launched on Monday. Sharing the company's expansion plans going ahead, he said, "We are collaborating with global giants on the

# Good growth, cloud migration, GenAI gaining traction: HCLTech CEO

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

HCL Technologies' FY25 guidance of 3-5 per cent represents a "good growth" in current environment, CEO C Vijayakumar said, adding cloud migration and GenAI projects are gaining traction but financial services vertical could face 'headwinds'. Vijayakumar told PTI in an interview that HCL Technologies (HCLTech) is keen on acquisitions in areas of semiconductor, automotive, and of platforms that drive strong annuity revenues or geographies such as Japan. He asserted that the company is poised to capitalise on generative AI opportunities, and that 50,000 people are expected to be fully trained, leveraging GenAI, this year. The top boss of India's third largest IT services company said discretionary spends

environment "continues to be under pressure" and the situation in FY25 appears "similar" to FY24. The deal pipeline looks "very good" and the company expects to convert some large opportunities soon, which will "definitely help in delivering the growth this year". The company reported nearly flat year-on-year net profit for March quarter at Rs 3,986 crore amid a global environment marred by weak client spends, geopolitical shocks, high inflation, and macroeconomic uncertainties. On a sequential basis the net profit was down 8.4 per cent. In the fourth quarter of FY24, the revenue from operations stood at Rs 28,499 crore, up 7.11 per cent from a year ago. For the full fiscal year (FY24), the company reported a 5.7 per cent rise in net profit to



Rs 15,702 crore. The company posted Rs 1,09,913 crore in revenue in FY24, up 8.3 per cent from the previous fiscal. "Across the industry there is good mix of revenue, which is coming from discretionary spending patterns of clients in this environment that is subdued, which will be visible in FY25. If things change sometime you will have a

much better outcome, if things remain similar to what it is in FY24 then you will have subdued growth in FY25," Vijayakumar said. HCLTech's projected revenue growth of 3-5 per cent for FY25 is a "good growth" in current environment and probably highest guidance among the tier-one providers, according to Vijayakumar. Areas like cyber security,

data, cloud migration to hyperscalers and building private AI stacks, all catalysed by GenAI are showing a good traction. Efficiency-driven programmes are being conducted in a timely-manner both in decision-making and timelines for execution. "But some of the transformation programmes, I think customers are either taking a slightly slower pace or they're cutting down on some, pausing them for a few quarters or a few months, and then reinitiating it," he said. Technology, telecom and media verticals will continue to do well based on the bookings done, Vijayakumar said, but called out financial services as a space that could face some headwinds, after demonstrating a stellar growth for a couple of years. "Financial services will have some headwinds now,

because we've had a stellar growth for two years in financial services, significantly ahead of industry. So there will be some headwinds like some deals will transition to an offshore model. And then some deals like State Street...We have divested the JV...So that will have an impact on the revenue. So financial services will have these dynamics, but all other verticals will grow," he said. HCLTech added 2,700-plus employees in March quarter, which the top honcho said should not come as a surprise given the company's overall growth numbers. "The headcount addition should not come as a surprise, because we had a good growth of 5.4 per cent (for FY24) in the current environment, so that obviously needs good talent to execute, and that's why our

headcount is growing. And coming to FY25, of course, a lot will depend on how the year shapes up. At this point, we've planned at least 10,000 freshers to be hired during this year," he said. The lateral hiring numbers depend on how the year pans out. The US accounts for 64 per cent of the company's revenue and the company is very positive about outlook for the market. "We've done very well. We've done 6.8 per cent growth in the US market and it continues to be a very strong geography, with good mindshare, presence in a lot of big clients. And so we are very positive about the outlook for US," he said. The company is well-equipped to capitalise on GenAI opportunities, and "expects things to scale up." "In fact, we launched a

platform called HCLTech AI Force. The platform helps end-to-end lifecycle of the software development and product engineering. So I think we're very well positioned," he said. He went on to add: "We've got good talent, we have already trained a significant number of people, more than 25,000. This year, we expect at least 50,000 people will be fully trained, leveraging generative AI. We are focused on AI developer community, and already have 2,000-plus people who are focused in this area. And there are many small projects, which are all sub-USD 10 million," he said. On acquisitions, Vijayakumar said semiconductor, automotive, or platforms that drive strong annuity revenues with clients and geographies like Japan are areas where the company continues to look for buys.

# Rupee falls 10 paise to settle at 83.48 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee declined 10 paise to close at 83.48 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, as investors remained cautious ahead of the US Federal Reserve's monetary policy decision. A robust sentiment in the domestic equity market and softening crude prices in the international market, however, cushioned the downfall in the Indian currency, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened weak at 83.39 and touched the intra-day low of 83.51 against the greenback during the session. The domestic currency finally settled at 83.48 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a loss of 10 paise compared to its previous closing level.



On Friday, the rupee had declined 10 paise to close at 83.38 against the US dollar. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, fell 0.26 per cent to 105.53. The weakness in the dollar was attributed to investors' cautious approach ahead of the US Federal Reserve's monetary policy and global as well as domestic

macroeconomic numbers to be released this week. The Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) meeting will begin on Tuesday and the interest rate decision is expected to be announced on May 1. Anuj Choudhary Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said the Indian rupee fell on Monday on positive US dollar in early trades and sustained FII outflows. However, positive domestic equities and softening crude oil prices cushioned the downside. "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on selling pressure from foreign investors and expectations of a recovery in crude oil prices. However, improved global risk sentiments and contained geopolitical tensions in the Middle East may support the rupee at lower levels,"

Choudhary said, adding, "USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 83.20 to Rs 83.70." Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, declined 0.53 per cent to USD 89.03 per barrel. "Crude oil demand is expected to face challenges from the US due to renewed inflationary fear," said Mohammed Imran, Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. On the other hand, he said, the geopolitical risks appear to have eased considerably, removing some of the risk premium priced into the market. On the domestic equity market front, Sensex jumped 941.12 points, or 1.28 per cent, to settle at 74,671.28, and Nifty soared 223.45 points, or 1.00 per cent, to close at 22,643.40.

# Urja Arpan conclave organised



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited (Tata Power-DDL), a leading power utility supplying electricity to a populace of 7 million in North Delhi, hosted the second edition of Urja Arpan Conclave on April 24, 2024, to commemorate the World Earth Day. The conclave focused on the Demand Side Management journey of Tata Power-DDL along with raising awareness about responsible and efficient electricity consumption among organisations.

# Infant food formulation done on global basis, racial stereotype charges unfortunate: Nestle

PTI ■ GURUGRAM

Nestle India Chairman & Managing Director Suresh Narayanan on Monday asserted that the company's infant food formulation for children below 18 months is done on a global basis and the allegation that "it is racially stereotyped is unfortunate" and untrue. Addressing reporters here, he said the amount of sugar content in infant foods is determined by the capability to meet the nutrition profile of a particular age group and that is universal. Nestle India's added sugar content in Cerelac is much lower than the upper limit prescribed by FSSAI, he added. "There is nothing in this product that makes it a product that is potentially of any risk or any kind of harm to the child," he said. As far as Nestle is concerned,



he said a majority of sugars present in the product are natural sugars. As per the Food Safety & Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), the permissible level of added sugar is 13.6 grams per 100 grams of feed. "Nestle is 7.1 grams, which is well below the standards and the maximum limits set up," Narayanan asserted. Earlier this month, Swiss FMCG major Nestle was accused of selling products with more sugar content in less developed countries. According to findings by Swiss NGO, Public Eye and

International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), Nestle sold baby products with higher sugar content in less developed South Asian countries including India, and in African and Latin American nations as compared to its markets in Europe. Countering the allegations, Narayanan said that every formulation for child food below 18 months is done on a global basis. "There is no local kind of approach to making a nutritional adequacy study...Globally, the recipes are engendered in an age where energy dense products are needed by growing children. So there is no distinction that is made between a child in Europe and a child in India or any other parts of the world," Narayanan said, adding the Codex requirement is fully followed up for Cerelac.

THOMAS CUP



# India seal quarterfinal berth with 5-0 win over England

PTI ■ CHENGDU (CHINA)

Defending champions India sailed to the knockout stage of the Thomas Cup with a 5-0 rout of England in a Group C contest here on Monday. India, who defeated Thailand 4-1 in their opening tie, notched up a second consecutive win to qualify for the quarterfinals. HS Prannoy returned to winning ways, defeating Harry Huang 21-15 21-15 to give India a 1-0 lead. "To give a start to the team is really important, it gives a good boost to the team to go ahead. It is really important to finish off the matches clinically, you saw against Thailand one match was bad

for us. So it's important to finish off the matches clinically," Prannoy said after his match. The star pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty was stretched to three games by Ben Lane and Sean Vandy in the first doubles fixtures before 2022 world champions bronze medallist picked up a 21-17 19-21 21-15 win in one hour five minutes. Former world number one Kidambi Srikanth recorded a 21-16 21-11 victory over Nadeem Dalvi to give India an unassailable 3-0 lead. "Happy with the way both the matches have gone for me (in the tournament). There is a lot of pressure on players to win games. I feel I have played little easier opponents so far. But

from now we will face better opponents and I have to be my best," Srikanth said. On his recent form, Srikanth said "I'm playing well but not able to pull off the matches. Obviously people will compare how I was playing from 2021-2022. I was in my 20s then." The second doubles pair of MR Arjun and Dhruv Kapila then brushed aside Rory Easton and Alex Green 21-17 21-19. In the final match, 24-year-old Kiran George prevailed 21-18 21-12 over Cholan Kayan to wrap up the fixture. India will take on group toppers and record 14-time champions Indonesia in their final group fixture on Wednesday.

# Arsenal and Man City both win to keep it tight at top in race for Premier League title

AP ■ LONDON

Arsenal survived a late scare at Tottenham to stay narrowly ahead in the race for the Premier League title. A 3-2 win at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium ensured Mikel Arteta's team remained at the top of the standings, ahead of defending champion Manchester City, which won 2-0 at Nottingham Forest.

But Arsenal had to endure a nervous finish despite powering to 3-0 lead in a London derby that was supposed to be one of its biggest tests in the title chase. "The last 20 minutes wasn't nice, but it was worth it," Arsenal forward Bukayo Saka said afterward. "We know it is a big derby and they don't want to lose 3-0 at home. Momentum shifted their way, but I am proud of the boys - we managed to get the three points." An own-goal from Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg and further strikes from Saka and Kai Havertz put Arsenal into a commanding position at the break. But in the face of a potential rout, Tottenham responded in the second half through Cristian Romero and a penalty from Son Heung-min in the 87th minute. Under pressure, Arsenal held on and remains one point clear at the top, having played a game more than City. The advantage is still with Pep Guardiola's team, which will clinch a fourth-straight title if it wins its remaining games this season and responded to Arsenal's win with victory of its own at relegation-fighting Forest. With Liverpool's title hopes



further diminishing after dropping five points in two games this week, it is down to Arsenal to challenge City's domestic dominance. Having collapsed late on in last season's title race, Arteta's players look more capable of going the distance this time around. An away fixture against its fiercest rival, Tottenham, was a major test of its credentials at this stage of the campaign. And while Arsenal was guilty of letting Spurs back into a game that should have been killed off much earlier, victory when tension was high was a test of character. "Maybe last season that could have ended in a draw and we showed we have the experience," Saka said. "We know City are an amazing team, but they are not perfect, we just need to do our job." **MAN CITY WINS:** Arsenal's win meant the pressure was on City to keep the heat on its title rival. It was always favorite to beat a Forest team that is desperately fighting for survival but without Phil Foden, who was

ill, and Erling Haaland on the bench, Guardiola was without two of its big match-winners in the starting 11. An injury to goalkeeper Ederson also forced City into a change at halftime. But Guardiola's team looks to be unstoppable in form and a 2-0 win extended its unbeaten record in the league to 19 games, dating back to a 1-0 loss to Aston Villa at the start of December. Back then there were questions about City's ability to win a sixth title in seven years. While Arsenal may lead the way, City's title-winning know-how could make the difference. So could Haaland, who stepped off the bench to score the goal that effectively killed off Forest's challenge. Josko Gvardiol headed City in front in the first half, but Chris Wood had two clear chances from close range to score for Forest. Haaland missed City's last two games through injury, but was quickly back on the scoresheet with a clinically taken goal just nine minutes after coming on as a substitute.

Among those in the crowd to watch were his father, Alf-Inge, and rock star Noel Gallagher. The goal saw Haaland move clear of Cole Palmer as the league's top scorer with 21 goals. "It's an important win, it does not matter how we do it, and it is good to be back," Haaland said. "We knew it was going to be a fight, and the pitch was not the easiest to play on but we cannot complain, it is about winning and that is exactly what we did." **B O U R N E M O U T H RECORD:** Without a win in its first nine league games this season, Bournemouth is now in the top half of the table and has set its own Premier League points record. A 3-0 win against Brighton moved Andoni Iraola's team up to 10th and on 48 points. Bournemouth's previous best in the top flight was 46 points in the 2016-17 season under former manager Eddie Howe. Goals from Marcos Senesi, Enes Unal and Justin Kluivert secured victory against a Brighton team that is going in the other direction after six games without a win.



# PSG wins record extending 12th French league title

AP ■ PARIS

Paris Saint-Germain has won the French league in Kylian Mbappé's last season at the club after Monaco lost 3-2 at Lyon. PSG has an unassailable 12-point lead over second-place Monaco, which has three games left. The Ligue 1 triumph is PSG's third in a row and a record-extending 12th overall. Mbappé has been involved in six of them, but comes off contract at the end of the season. He's expected to be signed by Real Madrid. PSG is on course for a potential historic treble as it will play at Borussia Dortmund in the first leg of the Champions League semifinals on Wednesday and face Lyon in the French Cup final on May 25. In coach Luis Enrique's first season at the club, PSG produced one of the most dominant seasons in league history with just one loss in 31 games so far. PSG could have secured the title a day earlier but was held 3-3 by Le Havre on Saturday. "Our fans are incredible. We were losing 1-0, 3-1, and they kept supporting us," Luis Enrique said after the draw. "We managed to draw later on and effectively win the league thanks to the supporters, thanks to their positive attitude." That was quite a contrast with the past couple of seasons. Last season, PSG supporters were booing Lionel Messi even though the soccer great was the player who helped the club clinch an 11th league title by scoring in a 1-1 draw with Strasbourg. Two years ago, there was a similar disconnect between the supporters and the club. PSG supporters kept protesting at Parc des Princes by giving their team the silent treatment.

AP ■ MADRID

Carlos Alcaraz continues to make a successful return from injury at the Madrid Open. The two-time defending champion cruised past Thiago Seyboth Wild in the third round on Sunday to earn another comfortable win. Alcaraz won 6-3, 6-3 for his second straight victory in his first tournament after skipping Monte Carlo and Barcelona because of an arm injury. "I think I played at a really good level," Alcaraz said. "Coming into this match I was nervous a little bit because I didn't know how my forearm was going to be. Thiago has big shots. He is really strong. I am really happy with the performance. It was difficult a little bit at

# Alcaraz earns another comfortable win in Madrid

the end, at 5-0 and then serving at 5-3. I am really happy to get it at the end." The second-seeded Alcaraz had made his debut at the tournament with a 6-2, 6-1 win over Alexander Shevchenko. Alcaraz had been scheduled to play at the Monte Carlo Masters and he also missed Barcelona to try to fully recover ahead of the French Open next month. "I think I'm in a good shape right now. I'm not feeling anything in the forearm, and I played good tennis," the 20-year-old Alcaraz said. "Obviously I'm not hitting my forehand on my 100% ... But I'm just focused to

hitting the forehand as much relaxed as I can. I'm really happy to be competitive without pain." No. 3-ranked Alcaraz is trying to become the first player to win three straight Madrid Open titles. He will next face Jan-Lennard Struff, his opponent in last year's final in Madrid. Andrey Rublev continued his return to form with a 7-6 (10), 6-4 win against Alejandro Davidovich Fokina. The world No. 8 arrived in Madrid coming off a four-match losing streak before defeating Facundo Bagnis in his opening match. Tallon Griekspoor got his



first top-20 win on clay on Sunday by defeating world No. 12 Holger Rune 6-4, 4-6, 6-3 to reach the fourth round at an ATP 1000 event for just the second time. American Taylor Fritz, coming off an appearance in the final in Munich, defeated Sebastian Baez 6-2, 6-3, while Francisco Cerundolo picked up his first top-20 win of the season by beating 15th-seeded Tommy Paul 6-7 (7), 6-4, 6-2. **SABALENKA ADVANCES:** Second-ranked Aryna Sabalenka survived a tough test against 19-year-old American wild card Robin Montgomery, prevailing 6-1,

6-7 (5), 6-4. Sabalenka is trying to become the second woman to win three Madrid titles after triumphing in the Spanish capital in 2021 and 2023. Petra Kvitová won the Madrid Open in 2011, 15 and '18. Sabalenka will next face American Danielle Collins, who rallied to defeat Jaqueline Cristian 3-6, 6-4, 6-1 for her 15th straight victory. Collins went into the tournament having won the Charleston Open. And Miami Open. Teenager Sara Bejlek beat Ashlyn Krueger 6-3, 6-1 while 16-year-old Mirra Andreeva made it to the last 16 for a second straight year with a 7-5, 6-1 win over seventh-seeded Marketa Vondrousova, the reigning Wimbledon champion.



# Archer Deepika Kumari reinducted into TOPS

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former world number one archer Deepika Kumari, who won a silver medal at the just-concluded World Cup in Shanghai, has been re-inducted into the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) core group ahead of the Paris Games, the Sports Ministry announced on Monday. Deepika, who missed the entire season last year after becoming a mother in December 2022, recently made a comeback and has been doing well both at the domestic and international stage. The 29-year-old recurve archer, who is a three-time Olympian, had also medalled at the Asia Cup earlier this year. So far, only Dhiraj Bommadevara has qualified for the Games in the men's individual event owing to his silver medal at the Asian Qualifying Tournament in Bangkok last year. Only one qualifying tournament is left to be held and it will take place in Antalya, Turkey on June 15 and 16.

Another archer, Mrinal Chauhan, has been added to the TOPS Development group, while Pravin Jadhav has been moved from Development to Core group and para-powerlifter Ashok has been inducted in TOPS Core group, the sports ministry said in a statement. The Mission Olympic Cell (MOC), during its 133rd meeting, also inducted squash players Anahat Singh, Abhay Singh and Velavan Senthilkumar to the TOPS Development group, to help them prepare for the Los Angeles Olympics, that will take place in the year 2028. In October 2023, the LA organising committee had included squash in the 2028 edition of the Games. "Looking at India's performance in Squash in the past two decades, especially at Commonwealth Games and Asian Games, MOC decided to induct three squash players in their TOPS Development group, with the aim to help them provide all required assistance to prepare for the global event," the ministry release stated.

# Bayern, Dortmund seek Champions League glory

AP ■ MUNICH

It's shaping up to be quite the few weeks for German soccer. The country is preparing to stage the European Championship over June and July, with Germany's national team taking a nicely timed upturn in form. Before that, Germany might yet be celebrating having a European champion once again, with Bayern Munich and Borussia Dortmund making up half of the lineup for the Champions League semifinals beginning this week. The last time Bayern and Dortmund both reached the Champions League semifinals was in 2013 and they went on to meet in the title match at Wembley Stadium, with Bayern winning 2-1. As fate would have it, Wembley will be hosting the final this year, too. Setting up a repeat of that 2013 final would mean upsetting the odds. Bayern is up against another European heavyweight in Real Madrid, the record 14-time champion and king of the competition. Dortmund faces Paris Saint-Germain, whose star striker Kylian Mbappe is looking to lead the French team to its first ever Champions League title in his last season there before a likely move to Madrid. Germany didn't have a single semifinalist in each of the last three seasons. In the 2019-20 competition, it had two - Bayern and Leipzig - and Bayern was the eventual champion. This season, Bayern and Dortmund have mounted impressive European campaigns while underperforming on the domestic front. Bayern has relinquished its Bundesliga title to Bayer Leverkusen after an 11-year hold on the biggest prize in German soccer, and needs to win the Champions League to avoid a first trophy-less season since

## BOTH CLUBS KICK OFF BIG SUMMER OF SOCCER FOR GERMANY



2012. Dortmund, meanwhile, is in fifth place in the league so its deep run in Europe has come as something of a surprise. Here's a closer look at the two games: **BAYERN MUNICH vs. REAL MADRID (TUESDAY):** Madrid should arrive well rested after the Spanish league moved its game at Real Sociedad to Friday. Madrid won 1-0. With Madrid set to win Spain's domestic title, coach Carlo Ancelotti kept Jude Bellingham, Vinicius Junior, Eduardo Camavinga, Toni Kroos, Federico Valverde, Antonio Rudiger and goalkeeper Andriy Lunin on the bench at the start of the league game in San Sebastian. Forward Rodrigo did not travel with the team because of flu. All started against Manchester City in the second leg of the quarterfinals

and are expected to be back in the starting lineup against Bayern. Bayern coach Thomas Tuchel is leaving at the end of the season, and the Champions League - which he won with Chelsea in 2021 - offers him the chance to go out on a high. Two months on from Bayern's announcement that Tuchel would depart, he seems more popular than ever among sections of the Bayern support. Part of that is down to the calm, controlled way Bayern knocked out Arsenal in the second leg of their quarterfinal. Partly it's a reaction to Bayern's failure to hire top coaching targets like Bayer Leverkusen's Xabi Alonso or Germany's Julian Nagelsmann. As Tuchel nears the end of a troubled tenure at Bayern, he's often seemed more upbeat than ever. "If people want me to stay, it is still an issue that has no priority," Tuchel

said Friday when asked about a fan petition begging the club to keep him. "Even if in this case it is a pleasant issue for me." The injuries that have plagued Bayern this season are easing off, too. Tuchel predicted Friday that Serge Gnabry would recover from his latest problem in time to play - and score - against Madrid on Tuesday, while fellow forward Leroy Sané could also return. **BORUSSIA DORTMUND vs. PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN (WEDNESDAY):** PSG won another French league title on Sunday - after second-place Monaco lost at Lyon - but the Champions League is the trophy the Qatar-backed club is desperate to finally get its hands on. And there would be no better way for Kylian Mbappe to sign off at the end of the season than by leading PSG to victory in European club

soccer's elite competition. The club is already planning for life without its superstar striker, who is set to walk away as a free agent, with players like Randal Kolo Muani, Ousmane Dembele and Goncalo Ramos expected to help fill the void in his absence. But Mbappe could still have a big say in the Champions League and he scored two goals in PSG's 4-1 comeback win against Barcelona in the quarterfinals. PSG drew 3-3 at home to Le Havre on Saturday after coming back from 3-1 down and needing an equalizer from Ramos in the fifth minute of stoppage time. It's been a strange season for Dortmund and that was underlined by Saturday's 4-1 loss against top four rival RB Leipzig. Dortmund has certainly saved its best performances for the Champions League, none better than the comeback win over Atletico Madrid in the quarterfinals. Striker Sebastian Haller scored in the first leg against Atletico but injured his ankle in Dortmund's next game and hasn't played since. Forward Donyell Malen has been struggling with pain, too. Much could depend on which version of Jadon Sancho turns up to face PSG. Sancho, who scored against Leipzig, has shown glimpses of his obvious talent since returning to Dortmund in January on loan from Manchester United. The issue is whether the former England forward can consistently play at his best. "Both I and Jadon have noticed he isn't at the peak of his performance yet, but that's totally OK. That's something we were aware of when we decided to bring him back, but we know that he's able to reach that maximum very quickly," Dortmund coach Edin Terzic said Friday. "Every training session, Jadon has a moment that shows his incredible talent and we see how hard-working he is with the team."



# FOCUS ON RAHUL DURING LSG, MI CLASH



**PTI ■ LUCKNOW**

With T20 World Cup selection round the corner, KL Rahul will have one final chance to stake claim on the second wicketkeeper's spot in the Indian team when Lucknow Super Giants host Mumbai Indians in the Indian Premier League here on Tuesday. Rahul's strike-rate in T20 cricket has always been a bone of contention. Despite the advantage of field restrictions in the Powerplay, Rahul has often started his innings on a low note in the IPL. However, the LSG captain has managed to change gears this season.

In the 2024 edition, he has scored 378 runs at a strike rate of 144.27 but it is still less than that of Rishabh Pant (160.60) and Sanju Samson (161.08). While comeback man Pant has all but sealed the first wicketkeeper's spot in the marquee event in the Caribbean islands and the USA in June by displaying some sharp work behind the stumps and sensational knocks with the bat, Samson has also made a strong case for himself by playing match-winning knocks for Rajasthan Royals at a brisk pace. In such a scenario, Rahul needs to play more fearlessly and exploit the

field restrictions not only to strengthen his Indian team selection prospects but also to help his side score in excess of 200 runs, which has become a norm in this edition. LSG were handed a seven-wicket loss by Rajasthan Royals, who chased the 197-run target with six balls to spare. The onus will also be on the team's big hitting troika of Quinton de Kock, Marcus Stoinis and Nicholas Pooran to hit those towering maximums and get

match-winning totals as the race for the playoff heats. They will fancy their chances against a struggling Mumbai bowling unit which was carted all over the park by the Delhi Capitals batters the other day. MI bowlers struggled to find answers against young Jake Fraser-McGurk, who wreaked havoc in the Powerplay. Even the world class Jasprit Bumrah conceded a 19-run over before returning to his frugal self while the likes of Luke Wood and

skipper Hardik Pandya were pummeled into submission. They would look to do better. Mumbai Indians find themselves in a precarious position sitting ninth on the points table. They need to win all their matches to stay alive in the competition. The five-time champions need to fire as a unit and the likes of Indian skipper Rohit Sharma, premier T20 batter Suryakumar Yadav would be like to get into the rhythm and churn out some

consistent performances ahead of the World Cup. All-rounder Pandya has flopped with the bat and ball this season. He did get his highest score this season the other day but more would be needed to make it to the World Cup squad.

**SQUADS:**  
**Mumbai Indians:** Hardik Pandya (c), Rohit Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav, Dewald Brevis, Jasprit Bumrah, Piyush Chawla, Gerald Coetzee, Tim David, Shreyas Gopal, Ishan Kishan (wk), Anshul Kamboj, Kumar Kartikeya, Akash Madhwal, Kwen Maphaka, Mohammad Nabi, Shams Mulani, Naman Dhir, Shivalk Sharma, Romario Shepherd, Arjun Tendulkar, Nuwan Thushara, Tilak Varma, Harvik Desai, Nehal Wadhwa, Luke Wood.  
**Lucknow Super Giants:** Quinton de Kock, KL Rahul (c & wk), Deepak Hooda, Ayush Badoni, Marcus Stoinis, Nicholas Pooran, Krunal Pandya, Ravi Bishnoi, Mohsin Khan, Shamir Joseph, Yash Thakur, Manimaran Siddharth, Prerak Mankad, Arshad Khan, Krishnappa Gowtham, Amit Mishra, Kyle Mayers, Ashton Turner, Matt Henry, Naveen-ul-Haq, Devdutt Padikkal, Yudhvir Singh Charak, Mayank Yadav and Arshin Kulkarni.



# Gaikwad is one step ahead of bowlers more often than not: Hussey

**PTI ■ CHENNAI**

The ability to remain one step ahead of the bowlers has allowed Ruturaj Gaikwad to flourish in this Indian Premier League, reckons CSK batting coach Michael Hussey. After an unbeaten 108 in the previous game, CSK skipper Gaikwad was on the cusp of another century on Sunday but fell two runs short of the milestone against Sunrisers Hyderabad. "Gaikwad is such a wonderful player. He is a brilliant timer of the cricket ball. I've been asking him what his secret is in terms of his placement since he always finds the gaps," said Hussey after the win over Sunrisers. "He is a smart batsman as well. He knows when to attack and when to soak up pressure. He plays spin and seam well. He can score all around the ground. He's almost one step ahead of the bowlers a lot of times. He is wonderful to watch. Very thankful that he is in our team."

batting averages in the T20 format but at CSK, that aspect of the game is not discussed much. "We don't talk about it (S/R) much at all. We talk about each player since they need to assess the conditions out in the middle as quickly as they can. The batter needs to take up the responsibility and the ownership in the middle," he continued. "Sometimes, as coaches, we put too much into the players' heads. I am trying to take as much out of their heads as possible, let them be as clear as they possibly can, see the ball and react accordingly. "The strike rate keeps changing, depending on the way you play and the conditions."

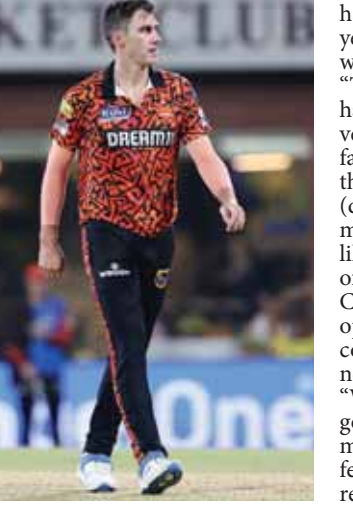
Hussey was delighted with Daryll Mitchell finally delivering for the Yellow Brigade at number three. He scored a 32-ball 52 against SRH, which also happened to be his maiden IPL half-century. "It's not easy. He's a new player who comes to the team, even Rachin Ravindra, for that matter, and we expect them to come in and fit in right away and go out and perform. But in reality, it's not that easy," he explained. "This is the IPL, the best T20 competition in the world. So sometimes, it takes time. We feel like he's been playing well. Although not getting the big score, he has been contributing down the lines well. "He has been moving up and down the batting order, which can be destabilizing for him, but he has found a nice role in number three, and he can feel comfortable at it. Hopefully, it is the start of some consistent form moving forward."

**PTI ■ CHENNAI**

T20 format has always favoured the batters and that has gone to a 'whole new level' in this Indian Premier League, feels Sunrisers Hyderabad skipper Pat Cummins. The Australian gave his thoughts following SRH's 78-run loss to defending champions Chennai Super Kings here on Sunday. IPL 2024 has witnessed six 250 plus totals already with 200 no more a safe total. Prior this edition, 250 was only breached twice in the history of IPL. "T20 is always on the batting side, and it has gone to a whole new level this season. The way we set up, we had the best chance if we got some really aggressive batters, and that's the way to win the tournament," Cummins said at the post-match press conference. "Frankly, we don't have much (bowling) options. It's not Test cricket, with the ball swinging

# T20 has always been a batters game and that has gone to a new level this IPL: Cummins

around. There's not much sideways movement, and there's not much on the wicket either. "So, a lot of times, the best way to get a wicket is to try and defend. Batters are getting better at hitting the ball out and even getting confident. It challenges you as a bowler. But, if you have a big total like 270-280 and if you can go at 9.00 as a bowler and make an impact, it could be match-winning," said the Australian. Analysing the reason for the loss to CSK, he admitted that the side has some work to do while chasing. "Hard to put a finger on it. Nothing really went (according to) to plan tonight. We're pretty well-suited to chasing, but it



hasn't really come off yet. So yeah, it is something (we need) to work on," Cummins reckoned. "There was definitely dew there; haven't seen so much at any other venue across the country. But, we failed to make the most of it, and they bowled well as well. So, it (dew) didn't really factor in this match as much as we would have liked." Of their four losses, three of them have come chasing. Cummins said while their openers have been commendable, middle-order needs to step up. "Whenever the openers have gone off (to score), it's been match-winning and crazy. In a few chases, we felt that we set up really well," he analysed.

"Different batters have stepped up throughout the tournament, and you need two or three guys to make an impact. But tonight, we never really got going, unfortunately. "I am really happy about how the boys have been going about it. Even tonight, there were not too many reckless shots." As for the struggles for the bowlers this season, Cummins felt that it could be possibly due to the wickets being drier. "Haven't really seen too much of a difference with the (new) white ball. It doesn't have as much swing as before, maybe because the wickets are drier. It's a tricky format, and I don't think there's a lot with the new ball," he said.

## OTHER SPORTS

# Video reviews have changed face of European soccer

## One country is holding out

**AP ■ STOCKHOLM**

As the Swedish league got underway this spring, yellow-and-black-clad supporters of Stockholm club AIK held up an enormous banner containing a long, vivid story about the dark forces of modern soccer conquering the world. "The whole world? No!" read the words on the giant display. "There was, in fact, a small area that successfully resisted the intruders, surrounded by modern football's smoldering ruins."

The intruder in this case is VAR — the high-tech video review system formally written into the laws of soccer in 2018 to help referees make the right calls in the biggest moments. While most leagues around the world are now using this technology, Sweden is an outlier in holding out and, in its view, retaining the game in its purest form.

The Swedish league is the only one of Europe's top-30 ranked leagues yet to have rolled out the system. It won't be happening anytime soon, either.

"VAR is a symbol of modern, commercialized-to-the-point-of-destruction football," says Ola Thews, vice-chairman of AIK's largest supporter organization, ASK. Thews is more than just a die-hard AIK fan. He played a part in mobilising anti-VAR sentiment among Sweden's top clubs and helped push through a motion at AIK opposing the introduction of the technology, before the Swedish soccer federation had the chance to bring it in. That's possible because Swedish clubs are majority-

controlled by members — essentially, supporters — under a regulation that states members should control at least 50% of their club's shares, plus one. Although the federation initially appeared to want VAR in operation — the technology is, after all, used at European and international level — it will not go against the wishes of its member-run clubs. As a result, the federation has held off on further discussions about adopting VAR and said last week it doesn't envisage any in the foreseeable future. That's a big win for Swedish match-going fans who are proud of their rebel status in European soccer. No VAR. No out-of-touch American owners or oil money from the Middle East. A culture where fans matter. Soccer as it should be, in their view. VAR "ruins the euphoria" that soccer can bring, Thews says. "The absolute happiness and passion, or grief and sadness, that comes from a goal being conceded or a goal being scored if you're not sure what has happened until it has been reviewed and decided in a VAR room."

Compared to other sports, soccer is a latecomer to video replays. In the United States, the NFL introduced instant replays in the mid-1980s but scrapped the system in 1991 after widespread discontent. They returned in 1999 and have spread to other major North American leagues and international sports, such as cricket and rugby. In soccer, pausing for video reviews can appear more disruptive. Not least because the VAR system has its

imperfections. In the English Premier League, a communications mix-up between the official running the video review and the on-field referee cost Liverpool a valid goal in a loss at Tottenham in October. Weeks later, a Tottenham-Chelsea match had a total of 21 minutes of stoppage time added on largely because of a raft of video reviews. Earlier this month, Nottingham Forest put out an inflammatory statement, questioning the integrity of a match official, after being denied what it perceived to be three clear penalty shouts overlooked by the video referee. In Spain, Barcelona threatened legal action to force a replay after a VAR-related controversy in the recent "clasico" against Real Madrid. Meanwhile, across the Swedish border in Norway, fans already unhappy at VAR being adopted by the country's federation last year before its member-run clubs could establish a unified position have become increasingly disillusioned with the technology after just one season. In one match, it took seven minutes for VAR to decide on an offside call — FIFA's original vision was that it should take no more than six seconds. "Throughout the season, after seeing VAR in full effect, opposition has grown a lot and there's been a lot of disgruntled supporters, football staff and coaches, and players as well," Anders Kjelleevold, chairman of the Norwegian supporters' alliance, told The Associated Press.

# Bayer Leverkusen late escapes are keeping Xabi Alonso team unbeaten this season



**AP ■ BERLIN**

Just call him Xabi Houdini. Bayer Leverkusen coach Xabi Alonso has seen his team pull off several scarcely believable escapes from defeat this season as it remains unbeaten across all competitions. Leverkusen, which has already secured the Bundesliga title, is on a 46-game run without a loss - a record across Europe's "big five" leagues. It has been achieved in extraordinary fashion. Robert Andrich scored with the last kick of the game for a 2-2 draw with high-flying Stuttgart on Saturday. The goal came in the sixth minute

of stoppage time when there was only supposed to be five. Stuttgart had won seven of its nine games since losing to Leverkusen in the German Cup and led 2-0 against Leverkusen, but even that wasn't enough of a cushion to prevent Alonso's team from coming back and extending its unbeaten record. The previous weekend, Josip Stanišić scored in the seventh minute of stoppage time for a 1-1 draw at Borussia Dortmund. And in Leverkusen's previous game, Amine Adli scored in the 90th minute for a 1-1 draw at West Ham in the Europa League. In all, Leverkusen has eight draws this season to go with 38 wins.

"We've scored so many goals in stoppage time this year," Adli said after the latest drama on Saturday. "But we should score earlier. It would be better for us." Andrich's equaliser against Stuttgart was the 16th goal that Leverkusen has scored in the 90th minute or later across all competitions this season, and the 21st that was scored from the 86th. "It's not easy to explain what we did again after last week - again in the last minute," Alonso said.

"There's no explanation why it happens so often, but it's good for us." Those late goals helped Leverkusen clinch the Bundesliga title ahead of 11-time defending champion Bayern Munich with five rounds to spare. "We've already reached our main target - to be champions - but we want to keep going, we don't want to stop. There are still three games (in the Bundesliga). We want to stay unbeaten for the rest of the season," Alonso said.

Leverkusen's next game is against Roma in the first leg of their Europa League semifinal on Thursday. The teams met at the same stage last season, when José Mourinho's team eliminated Alonso's thanks to a 1-0 win in Rome. They drew the second leg 0-0 in Leverkusen. "From the first Europa League game against (Swedish team) Häcken, we spoke about our experience in Rome and now we're back in the same situation, semifinal vs Roma," Alonso said.

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