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MILITANTS KILL 11 IN
PAKISTAN'S BALOCHISTAN

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FOREIGN FUNDS SHY
AWAY FROM REAL ESTATE

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DHONI IN SPOTLIGHT AS
CSK, MI RESUME RIVALRY

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INDIA CAUGHT IN IRAN ISRAEL CROSSFIRE

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India on Saturday said it is in touch with Iran after it seized a cargo ship MSC Aries with 17 Indians nationals onboard. The Israel-linked ship was seized by Iran's commandos near the Strait of Hormuz. "Iran will bear the consequences for choosing to escalate the situation any further," Israel military spokesman Daniel Hagari said in a statement. As for Indians, official sources said India is in touch with Iranian authorities through diplomatic channels, both in Tehran and in Delhi, to ensure the welfare and early release of the Indian nationals. The Iranian action came amid increasing fears that Tehran may launch an attack on Israeli soil in retaliation to a strike on the Iranian consulate in Syria 12 days ago. "We are aware that a cargo ship 'MSC Aries' has been taken control by Iran. We have learnt that there are 17 Indian nationals onboard," said a source. "We are in touch with the Iranian authorities through diplomatic channels, both in Tehran and in Delhi, to ensure security, welfare and early release of Indian nationals," it said. Reports said Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards seized MSC Aries on Saturday morning when it was sailing through the Strait of Hormuz. Reports indicated MSC Aries is



a Portuguese-flagged container ship. According to news agency AP, commandos from Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard rappelled down from a helicopter onto an Israeli-affiliated container ship near the Strait of Hormuz and seized the vessel, the latest in a series of attacks between the two countries. West Asia had braced for

potential Iranian retaliation over a suspected Israeli strike earlier this month on an Iranian consular building in Syria that killed 12 people, including a senior Guard general who once commanded its expeditionary Quds Force there. Iran's State-run IRNA said a special forces unit of the Guard's navy carried out the attack on the vessel, which other media in the country widely identified as

the Portuguese-flagged MSC Aries, a container ship associated with London-based Zodiac Maritime. Zodiac Maritime is part of Israeli billionaire Eyal Ofer's Zodiac Group. Zodiac declined to comment and referred questions to MSC, which did not immediately respond. Earlier, a West Asia defense official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss

intelligence matters, shared a video of the attack with AP. In it, the Iranian commandos are seen rappelling down onto a stack of containers sitting on the deck of the vessel. A crew member on the ship can be heard saying, "Don't come out." He then tells his colleagues to go to the ship's bridge as more commandos come down on the deck.

Air India flights avoid Iranian air space

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Amid soaring tensions in West Asia due to the Iran and Israel conflict, Air India flights have started taking a detour as they are now avoiding operations in the Iranian airspace. According to sources, now, all Air India flights bound for Europe could take up to two hours longer to reach the destinations. This comes a day after the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) "advised" Indian nationals to not travel till further notice to Iran and Israel - the two countries teetering on the brink of a major military escalation. According to Flightradar24 website, Air India flight that took off from Delhi at 4.30 am on Saturday did not overfly Iran and took an alternate route to London. Instead of the usual India-Pakistan-Iran-Turkey-Black Sea route to Europe, Air India took a northern route. Air India flights to the Middle East, however, will not be impacted as they fly South of Iranian airspace. Besides, Air India, Germany's Lufthansa have already started avoiding Iranian air space since Thursday while Australian airline Qantas said on Saturday it would redirect its long-haul flights between Perth and London to avoid Iran's airspace amid soaring Middle East tensions. On Friday, Lufthansa flight to Mumbai took the Greece-



Mediterranean Sea-Saudi Arabia-Persian Gulf-Arabian Sea route to Mumbai. Earlier it used to take the Black Sea-Iran-Pakistan route to Mumbai. Lufthansa on Thursday said it had suspended flights to and from Tehran until probably April 13, extending its suspension by two days. Notably, the increased geopolitical tensions have added more routes to the no fly zones for airlines. Commercial airliners avoid Afghanistan ever since the country was taken over by the Taliban; Russia's war in Ukraine has made both the countries no overflying zones for most western airlines; US carriers have been avoiding Iran for some time now. Now, airlines would have to avoid the airspace of Iran.



Chaos at Sydney mall as six people stabbed to death

AP ■ SYDNEY

A man stabbed six people to death at a busy Sydney shopping centre Saturday before he was fatally shot, police said, with hundreds fleeing the chaotic scene, many weeping as they carried their children. Eight people, including a 9-month-old, were injured. New South Wales police said they believed a 40-year-old man was responsible for the Saturday afternoon attack at the Westfield Shopping Centre in Bondi Junction, in the city's eastern suburbs. They said they were not able to name him until a formal identification had taken place but that they weren't currently treating the attack as terrorism-related. The man was shot dead by a female police inspector after he turned and raised a knife, New South Wales Assistant Police Commissioner Anthony Cooke told reporters.

LG refutes AAP's claim of Kejriwal being tortured in Tihar

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

AP leader and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh claimed on Saturday that Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is being tortured inside the Tihar jail at the behest of the Central Government and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. However, Delhi Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena rejected Singh's claim and said a false narrative is being created by a person occupying Membership of Parliament. Singh alleged the jail administration, which

officially falls under the purview of the Delhi Government, has refused to allow Kejriwal's wife Sunita to meet him in person. The AAP leader said, according to jail rules 602 and 605, jail administration has the right to let an implicated person conduct any meeting face-to-face. Reacting on his remark, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said Singh should "have knowledge about the jail manual as he came out recently after spending months there".



AAP leader Sanjay Singh addresses a Press conference in New Delhi on Saturday PTI

Sachdeva said the Kejriwal Government had made the Delhi Jail Manual in 2018, which clearly states in Rule 602 that meetings with inmates will be conducted

by not only members of a particular political party, but also Ministers sworn to the constitutional oath of office. "Inside the jail, Kejriwal is being tortured at the behest of the Government of India and Modi. "Action is being taken to break his morale. As per the rule and as mentioned in the jail manual, the jail administration has been granted the right to let the people in jail meet the visitors face-to-face. In the case of Kejriwal, his wife is not allowed to meet him face-to-face," Singh said, addressing a Press conference.

BJP to unveil its Sankalp Patra today

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP is set to unveil its 'Sankalp Patra' (manifesto) for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections on Sunday at its party headquarters in Delhi. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other senior party leaders will be present at the event, coinciding with the birth anniversary of Baba Saheb Ambedkar, a towering leader from the Dalit community and an architect of the Indian Constitution. The manifesto will focus on 'Garib' (poor), 'Kisan' (farmer), 'Yuva' (youth), and 'Nari Shakti' (women power) under a politically



acronym of 'GAYN'; in addition to 'Swasthya' (health), 'Shiksha' (education), and 'Sashaktikaran' (empowerment) as the 3S, are among the prominent resolutions likely to feature in the BJP's manifesto.

The theme of the manifesto will be "Modi's Guarantee: Developed India 2047," with a focus on cultural nationalism. According to party sources, the party pledges to fulfil only those promises that are achievable. As the BJP Government has fulfilled most of its core ideological promises, including the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya and the repeal of Article 370, all eyes will be on how the ruling party's larger cultural and Hindutva agenda figures in the manifesto. Sources hinted that the BJP may include

some special resolutions on 'Garib Kalyan' (poor welfare) and 'Bharashtachar-mukt' (corruption-free), citing what Modi had outlined in the 2019 manifesto. The BJP had appointed a manifesto committee headed by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh that met twice to deliberate on its contents after the party had launched multiple exercises, including vans sent across the country and social media campaigns, to seek people's suggestions.



Rahul Gandhi not to use Congress flag in Wayanad

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The Indian National Congress on Saturday made a public genuflection in front of the Muslim League by openly declaring that the grand old party would not use its flag during the election campaign in Wayanad from where Rahul Gandhi is seeking reelection in the Lok Sabha poll. This has been one of the preconditions set by the Muslim League for its support to the Nehru-Gandhi scion. The announcement that the Congress would not be using the party flag at Wayanad was made by M M Hassan, the president-in-charge of the KPCC on Saturday. "We will not use the party flag during election campaigning at Wayanad but we will use the emblem of the party. I am not able to explain more than this," said Hassan. When Rahul visited Wayanad to file his nomination papers, the absence of Congress flags was conspicuous during both the roadshow and the

campaign rally. Wayanad is a Muslim-dominated area where the influence of the Islamist party permeates throughout the constituency. When Jawaharlal Nehru, the great-grandfather of Rahul, visited Kerala during the early 1950s, he described the Muslim League as a dead horse. By preventing the Congress from waving its flags at election rallies, the Muslim League is chucking at the embarrassment it has caused the Congress. Political commentators are of the view that this is a major setback to the Congress party. "During the 2011-2016 tenure of the UDF Government, the Muslim League had made the Congress to dance to its tunes and made the then Chief Minister Oommen Chandi to appoint a League nominee as fifth Minister though the initial agreement was to give four Ministries to the party," said the commentator who did not want his name to be quoted.



CAA, Modi emerge as a beacon of hope for mini Bengal in Pilibhit

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ PILIBHIT

In the rural expanse of Pilibhit, where the tranquility of village life intermingles with the echoes of a tumultuous past, a vibrant community has carved out its own enclave, fondly referred to as 'mini Bengal' which seamlessly mingles with the rural plains of Uttar Pradesh. Here, amidst the verdant landscapes and rustic charm of Ramnagri village, the identity struggle of its residents, mostly migrants

from Bangladesh, finds expression in a profound question that cuts through the air: "Aapni ki Bangali (Are you Bengali)?" This question encapsulates the identity struggle of the majority of residents. For the approximately 1 lakh migrants who sought refuge in India during the tumultuous 1970s, fleeing religious persecution and strife, Pilibhit became a sanctuary. There are 10 gram panchayats — Kundannagar, Bidhipur, Najaulia Natka, Gabia, Maharajpur, Nagoria Lalpur,

Ramnagra, Sela, and Dhuria — where they all reside, transforming these villages into 'mini Bengal', where their lifestyle matches that of any village in Bengal. They communicate with each other in Bangla and even dress like the villagers of rural Bengal. Subal Das, 82, a patriarch of the community, encapsulates their journey, stating, "We have left our land... but not our culture. Our culture is our strength, no matter where we are." This sentiment reverberates through the alleys of Ramnagri, where Bengali traditions intertwine



with the rhythms of rural life. Sripal Biswas, a custodian of community history, recounts the trials of their parents' migration, highlighting the precariousness of their status amidst uncertainty. He says most of the natives here came from Jessore, Khulna, Faridpur, Dhaka, and Barishal districts of erstwhile East Pakistan during the 1971 war. The majority of the residents of these villages belong to Namasudra and Poudra communities — a group that historically faced untouchability in Bengal —

but are treated as a general category. "Our children were born here and grew up here only, but still they were denied voting rights," said Biswas. Amidst this backdrop of uncertainty, the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) emerges as a beacon of hope. Deepanker Mistri, 24, a tech-savvy entrepreneur, explains its significance, stating, "The CAA has come as a breath of fresh air for us. It provides a pathway to citizenship for many who have lived in limbo for decades."

Congress finalises candidates for Punjab, Haryana and Himachal in CEC meeting

Party's first list likely to be declared in a day or two

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

A meeting of the Central Election Committee of the Congress on Saturday finalized the names of several Lok Sabha candidates from Haryana, Punjab and Himachal Pradesh. The list would be declared in a day or two.

The CEC meeting for Himachal Pradesh was attended by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, former Congress chief Sonia Gandhi, and AICC general secretary K C Venugopal. Himachal Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, deputy chief minister Mukesh Agnihotri, Pradesh Congress Chief Pratibha Singh, and AICC in-charge Rajeev Shukla, were the others present in the meeting.

The Haryana CEC was attended, besides the top party leaders, by PCC chief Uday Bhan, ex-CM Bhupinder Singh Hooda, Randeep Surjewala, and Kumari Selja. Deepinder Singh Hooda could be the Congress candidate from Rohtak Lok Sabha seat. He lost the last election marginally and is presently a member of the Rajya Sabha.

The party apparently finalised two candidates from Himachal, one of whom was Vikramaditya Singh, whose name was mooted for Mandi Lok Sabha constituency to contest against BJP's Kangana Ranaut.

"All senior leaders believe that this time a young leader should be fielded from Mandi Lok Sabha seat and there is consensus on the name of

Vikramaditya Singh," Himachal Congress President Pratibha Singh said. She is the sitting MP from Mandi who was elected in a bye-election in 2021.

Deputy CM of Himachal Mukesh Agnihotri said it has been decided to announce two candidates first, and the remaining two later. "We have decided that we will field our MLAs too," he told reporters. Shukla said, during the meeting, they discussed the strategy of the party on how to win all four seats in Himachal Pradesh. "We have decided on two candidates, while for the remaining two seats, discussions are on," he said.

Congress Punjab president Amrinder Raja Warring said the party has finalised names for seven to eight seats and they will be announced soon.

"Today's CEC meeting at @INCIndia HQ was very productive. Our candidates for about 7-8 seats have been finalised & will be announced soon. Each & Every punjabi is mentally prepared to eradicate @narendramodi hate politics & will vote for INC in #ParliamentaryElection2024," he wrote in a post on X.

There has been a churning in Punjab Congress ahead of the polls. Party leader Gurpreet Singh GP quit Congress, joined AAP and was declared as AAP candidate from Fatehgarh Sahib. Deputy leader of the opposition Dr Raj Kumar, a two-time legislator from Chabbawal too quit the party to join AAP and was declared AAP candidate from Hoshiarpur. Though Congress and AAP are part of the INDIA alliance, they are fighting sep-

arately in Punjab.

What took Congress completely off guard in the state in the run-up to the Lok Sabha polls was that sitting Congress MP from Ludhiana Ravneet Singh Bittu quit Congress to join the BJP. He is now BJP candidate from Ludhiana. He comes from a family having deep roots in the Congress and his grandfather was the chief minister of Punjab who was assassinated by the militants in 1995. Due to a series of desertions and claims and counter claims on several seats, Congress high command has held up the names for now. Elections in Punjab are scheduled in the last phase on June 1.

Among the probables, in Ludhiana, two-time MLA and former cabinet minister Bharat Bhushan Ashu is seeking party ticket after Bittu joined BJP. In Hoshiarpur, sitting MLA Sukhwinder Kothi and former MLA Pawan Kumar Adia are hopeful of party tickets.

In Gurdaspur, Barindermeet Singh Pahra and former deputy chief minister Sukhjinder Singh Randhawa are claimants. In Gurdaspur, where Dinesh Babbu has been named BJP candidate replacing film star Sunny Deol, another BJP leader turned rebel Swaran Salaria has apparently reached out to the Congress leadership for a ticket. Congress MLA from Bholath, Sukphal Singh Khaira is seeking party ticket from the Sangrur parliamentary constituency along with former MP Vijay Inder Singh.

Former AAP MP, Dr Dharamvira Gandhi who joined Congress recently could be the party candidate from Patiala. He is likely to take on

BJP's Preneet Kaur, the sitting MP, who won from a Congress ticket in the 2019 polls but later shifted to BJP along with her husband and former chief minister Capt Amarinder Singh.

In Anandpur Sahib, sitting Member of Parliament Manish Tewari could be the candidate again even though he is also trying his luck from Chandigarh. In Amritsar, sitting MP Gurjeet Singh Aujla could be the party nominee even though former deputy chief minister O P Soni, sitting MLA Inderbir Singh Bolaria and former MLA Sukhbinder Singh Sarkaria too have put their hat in the ring.

In Bathinda PPCC chief Amrinder Singh Raja Warring's wife Amrita Warring could be the front runner to bag the party ticket. Similarly, from Fatehgarh Sahib, sitting MP Dr Amar Singh could be the party's choice. In Faridkot too, sitting MP and folk singer Mohammad Sadique could be the candidate again. In Khadoor Sahib, sitting MP Jasbir Singh Gill is among the frontrunners for the ticket.

From Ferozepur, the names of former Congress MLA Kulbir Singh Zira and former MP Sher Singh Ghubaya are doing the rounds. Ghubaya had defected from SAD to Congress.

In the last Lok Sabha elections in 2019, Congress had done well in Punjab, winning eight of the 13 seats. While the Shiromani Akali Dal and BJP won two seats each, Aam Aadmi Party won one seat. After Bhagwant Mann became the chief minister, he vacated his Sangrur Lok Sabha seat which was then won by Simranjit Singh Mann of the SAD (Amritsar) in a bye-election.

BSP announces candidates for Patiala and Jalandhar

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

The Bahujan Samaj Party on Saturday announced its candidates for two Lok Sabha seats in Punjab, fielding Jagjit Chharbarh from Patiala and Balwinder Kumar from Jalandhar.

Both Jagjit Chharbarh and Balwinder Kumar are the party's Punjab unit general secretaries.

The BSP's in charge of Punjab, Haryana and Chandigarh Randhir Singh Beniwal said candidates for the remaining seats in Punjab will be announced soon. The Mayawati-led outfit has already announced its candidates for Hoshiarpur, Ferozepur and Sangrur Lok Sabha seats.

Chharbarh had contested Punjab assembly elections in 2012 and 2017 from Rajpura and Ghanaur segments respectively. Balwinder Kumar had unsuccessfully contested the 2019 Lok Sabha polls from Jalandhar. The BSP has already announced to go solo in the parliamentary polls.

SAD announces first list of 7 candidates for Punjab

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) on Saturday announced its first list of seven Lok Sabha candidates for Punjab, fielding senior party leaders Prem Singh Chandumajra from Anandpur Sahib and Daljit Singh Cheema from Gurdaspur.

The SAD also fielded former minister Anil Joshi from Amritsar, former MLAs N K Sharma and Iqbal Singh Jhunda from Patiala and Sangrur seats respectively, Bikramjit Singh Khalsa from Fatehgarh Sahib and Rajwinder Singh from Faridkot.

In a post on X, Cheema said, "SAD President S Sukhbir Singh Badal announced a list of 7 senior leaders of the party as candidates for the Parliament Elections 2024. Choosing the historic & pious occasion of 'Khalsa Sirjana Divas' as the most suited day to sound the poll bugle, he released the first list of candidates."

The SAD will be contesting

the Lok Sabha polls on its own for the first time since 1996 when it joined hands with the BJP. The Sukhbir Singh Badal-led party walked out of the NDA in 2020 over the now-

Ballot Battle

repealed farm laws. The BJP had announced on March 26 that it would go solo in the general elections in Punjab.

The SAD has fielded its senior leader and former MP Prem Singh Chandumajra from Anandpur Sahib seat, which is currently represented by Congress MP Manish Tewari. Chandumajra was the MP from Patiala in 1996 and 1998, and Anandpur Sahib in 2014. While the AAP has fielded its state unit chief spokesperson Malvinder Singh Kang from Anandpur Sahib, the Congress and the BJP are yet to announce their candidates.

The SAD has fielded former education minister Cheema from Gurdaspur seat, currently held by BJP's Sunny

Deol. He is pitted against BJP candidate Dinesh Babbu.

From Amritsar, the SAD has fielded former BJP MLA and former minister Anil Joshi. He was Amritsar North MLA in 2007 and 2012. He quit the BJP in 2021 and joined the Akali Dal. He will be facing BJP nominee and former diplomat Taranjit Singh Sandhu, and AAP's Kuldeep Singh Dhalwal. Amritsar seat is presently represented by Congress MP Gurjeet Singh Aujla.

From Patiala, the SAD has fielded former MLA, N K Sharma. He will be facing BJP's Preneet Kaur and AAP's Dr Balbir Singh. The SAD has fielded senior party leader Iqbal Singh Jhundan from Sangrur seat, currently held by Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar) MP Simranjit Singh Mann.

From Faridkot, the SAD has fielded Rajwinder Singh, the grandson of the late Punjab minister Gurdev Singh Badal. Faridkot seat is currently represented by Congress MP Mohammad Sadique.

BRIEFS

BANWARI LAL PUROHIT GREETES PEOPLE ON AMBEDKAR JAYANTI

CHANDIGARH: Punjab Governor and Administrator, Union Territory, Chandigarh, Banwari Lal Purohit extended greetings to the people of Punjab and Chandigarh on the eve of Ambedkar Jayanti. In his message, the Governor said that Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was a visionary leader whose tireless efforts paved the way for social justice, equality, and empowerment. His contribution in drafting the Constitution of the world's biggest democracy is unique. His teachings continue to inspire millions worldwide, reminding us of the power of education, compassion and inclusivity. On this auspicious day, let us reaffirm our commitment to building a society where every individual is respected, valued and given equal opportunities to thrive. Let's honour Baba Saheb's vision by striving for a world free from discrimination, casteism and prejudice. May his ideals guide us towards creating a more just and harmonious society for generations to come, he added.

DRUG SMUGGLER ARRESTED IN PUNJAB'S FAZILKA

Chandigarh: A suspected drug smuggler was arrested in a joint operation of the Border Security Force and the Punjab Police in a village in Fazilka district, an official said on Saturday. The BSF and CIA recovered Rs 3 lakh cash and 30 grams of gold from his residence in Muhar Jamsheer village in Fazilka on Friday, the BSF spokesperson said. "The coordinated efforts culminated in the apprehension of the suspected individual, having a history of involvement in narcotics smuggling, from his residence in Village Muhar Jamsheer, Fazilka district," they said, adding that further investigation is underway.

DEPARTMENT OF TELEMEDICINE AT PGIMER CELEBRATES 19TH FOUNDATION DAY

Chandigarh: The Department of Telemedicine at PGIMER Chandigarh celebrated its 19th Foundation Day on Saturday at the Kairon Administrative Block. The program was hosted by the Head of the Department of Telemedicine, Prof. Biman Saikia, along with his team of project leaders. Prof. G D Puri, Executive Director of AIIMS, Jodhpur, and Prof. Meenu Singh, the pioneer behind the establishment of Telemedicine, were also present. The keynote speaker for the event was Prof. G D Puri, who spoke about the latest advancements in telemedicine. Dr. Amit Agarwal, Project Lead of the Department of Telemedicine, welcomed all guests while Dr. Saikia discussed the department's progress since its inception in 2005. He highlighted academic activities such as 'Tele-CME' and 'Tele-CPC' held at PGIMER, technological innovations like 'Tele-ECG' and 'Tele-spirometer', and the department's success as a Centre of Excellence for Artificial Intelligence in healthcare and Tele-pathology.

HIMACHAL POLICE GETS THREE WOMEN BUGLERS

Shimla: Three women personnel of Himachal Pradesh Police have broken gender stereotypes and made their way into the male-dominant arena of bugle players. In a first for the state, these women personnel have been trained to become 'lady buglers' in the guard of honour and other ceremonies, according to a statement issued here on Saturday. Buglers play a vital role in the police force as their bugle calls serve as important signals during ceremonies, parades and other official events. The three lady constables -- Shivani, Shweta, and Neeshu -- have completed the 'basic bugler' course of four months duration from the Himachal Pradesh Police Training College in Daroh. The trio is now serving at the Indian Reserve Battalion. This initiative to train women personnel as buglers not only highlights the police department's dedication to diversity, but also serves as an inspiration for aspiring women in law enforcement, the statement said. The initiative was undertaken during the incumbency of Inspector General of Police (IGP) Bimal Gupta as Principal of Himachal Pradesh Police Training College.

'Silk Route Ultra Trail 2024' launched from Narkanda

PNS ■ SHIMLA

The Himalayan Expeditions (THE) is organizing 'Silk Route Ultra Trail 2024' from Narkanda to Sarahan from 12th to 14th April in which trail runners of national and international repute are participating. SVEEP activity for Lok Sabha Elections-2024 has also been associated with this event, in which runners will make people aware to vote.

The trail was jointly flagged off from Narkanda by Additional Deputy Commissioner Shimla Abhishek Verma and District and Sessions Judge Rampur Birendra Thakur. Verma said that this event was very important as it combines adventure activity as well as tourism, old Indo-Tibet route and SVEEP activity. While this activity will promote adventure sports and tourism on one hand, the

old traditional Silk Route (old India-Tibet route) will be rejuvenated on the other hand. Similarly, under the SVEEP, the runners will motivate people to vote in 30 panchayats falling under the trail. Apart from this, school going children were also participating in this trail which will be a source of inspiration for the youth and others.

This trail will provide runners with challenging and interesting opportunities on the old India-Tibet trade route. This trail run, its fourth edition so far, will pass through the pristine and wild terrains of the Himalayas, giving an exciting experience to the participants and spectators. The event will have four challenging categories, including tracks of 100 km, 55 km, 33 km and 15 km. All categories started from Narkanda with the 15 km trail concluding at Bagi and the 33

km trail concluding at Lafughati. Similarly, 55 km trail will be completed in Naren and 100 km trail will be completed in Sarahan. Around 190 participants are taking part in this competition, which includes participation from the Indian Armed Forces as well as trail runners of national and international repute and around 80 school children (who will be participating in the under 18 age category). The flagship race in the Silk Route Ultra Trail 2024 is the one-day 100km Ultra Trail Marathon.

This ultra trail race will pass through the ancient Indo-Tibet road, which was full of difficult and rough rocky roads and provides a challenge to the runners. During this competition, the participants will test their mental strength along with their physical abilities. Participants will travel

through the paths followed by ancient traders and explorers, which was once the oldest and most mysterious trade route in the Himalayas.

For the safety of the participants, the organizers of The Himalayan Expedition have painstakingly identified and marked this trail, which will start from Narkanda, Shimla at 5.30 am on 13th April. The competition will conclude with a prize distribution ceremony on 14th April.

People throng Sikh shrines in Punjab, Haryana to celebrate Baisakhi

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Thousands of devotees on Saturday thronged gurdwaras across Punjab and Haryana to celebrate Baisakhi,

one of the biggest festivals that marks the foundation day of the Khalsa Panth (Sikh order) by the tenth Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh. It also marks the start of harvest season.

As per the directive of the Akal Takht, the highest temporal seat of the Sikhs, to hoist Khalsa flag atop houses to mark the 325th Khalsa Sajna Divas (Baisakhi), the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has been providing flags to the devotees. The SGPC, which manages gurdwaras in Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Chandigarh, has deployed task force staff to manage crowds at the Golden Temple.

A sea of devotees was also witnessed at the Takht Kesgarh Sahib in the holy city of Anandpur Sahib, where the Khalsa Panth was founded in 1699. A jatha of pilgrims has left for Gurdwara Sri Panja Sahib in Pakistan to participate in the religious congregation to be

held to mark Khalsa Sajna Divas.

Punjab Governor Banwarilal Purohit and Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann extended greetings on Baisakhi and on Sajna Divas of Khalsa Panth. In a message, Purohit said Baisakhi has multi-faceted importance. "It marks the beginning of the harvest season heralding happiness and prosperity. It is also an occasion to remember with gratitude about the contribution of our farmers to the progress of the nation." The Governor added that this auspicious occasion has a special significance in the glorious history of Sikhism, as on this day in 1699, the tenth Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh, founded the 'Order of Khalsa' to fight against the tyranny of the Mughals.

This day also marked a watershed in our freedom movement in 1919. Many known and unknown martyrs sacrificed their lives on this day in the Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar.

12 companies of Himachal Police deployed in other states for poll duty

PNS ■ SHIMLA

The Himachal Pradesh police have deployed 12 companies in other states for duties related to Lok Sabha Elections-2024, as per the orders of the Election Commission of India, according to an official statement. Eight companies led by Superintendent of Police (SP) Arvind Chaudhary have been deployed in Rajasthan and four companies led by SP Khushal Chand Sharma in Uttarakhand, the statement issued here on Saturday said. After the first phase of polling in Rajasthan on April 19, the eight companies from there will be sent for deployment in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, it said.



Mann holds a roadshow in favour of AAP candidate of Sonitpur Lok Sabha constituency of Assam

Chandigarh: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Friday held a roadshow in support of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) candidate Rishi Raj from Assam's Sonitpur Lok Sabha constituency and appealed to the people of Assam to press the button of 'jharoo' (broom) to bring change.

LOP BAJWA LASHES AT AAP

Chandigarh: The Leader of the Opposition (LoP), Partap Singh Bajwa on Saturday rebuked the Aam Aadmi Party-led Punjab Government for its step-motherly treatment towards the government employees. Citing a news report Bajwa said that the AAP government has not been giv-

BJP plotting to crush democracy: Congress leader Deepender Hooda

Bahadurgarh: Congress Rajya Sabha MP Deepender Singh Hooda on Saturday hit out at the BJP, accusing it of moving with a "conspiracy to crush the Constitution and strangle democracy." Hooda,

who was addressing an 'Ashirvaad' ceremony in Bahadurgarh, alleged that the BJP is contesting the Lok Sabha elections on the back of "power and money." "They have neither any work to show, nor any achievement to talk about. However, the Congress is going to the people, still talking about its development works," he said. The Rajya Sabha MP claimed that during his tenure he brought metro to Bahadurgarh, built a college, a nuclear research institute, a cancer institute, and an ITI. "Not only this, approval for bringing the metro to Sankhual village, underpass, and bypass on the other side was also given during the Congress government," said a party statement. "After that the government changed, BJP discriminated against the entire Rohtak Lok Sabha including Bahadurgarh to such an extent that the development work which Congress had left behind is still stuck there even after 10 years.

Former chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar never took cognizance of Bahadurgarh," he said. Hooda said that this time, the Rohtak Lok Sabha seat will decide the outcome of the assembly elections. "Congress government will once again be formed in the state and the work of taking metro to Rohtak, underpass, bypass on the other side and building ring road of Bahadurgarh will be implemented," he said.

It is Vikramaditya versus Kangana in Mandi



The Central Election Committee of the Congress on Saturday declared Vikramaditya Singh as its candidate who will contest against film star Kangana Ranaut from the Mandi Parliamentary Constituency. Singh is presently the PWD Minister in the Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu government in the state and the sitting MLA from the Shimla (Rural) Assembly constituency.

NHRC flags human rights violations in Sandeshkhali

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has flagged, "numerous instances of atrocities," suggesting a clear "violation of human rights" in Sandeshkhali in West Bengal due to "neglect" in preventing such occurrences. The NHRC report following a spot inquiry into the incident also noted that the "widespread fear of retaliation, compounded by existing power dynamics, acted as a significant obstacle," hindering individuals from expressing their grievances. The rights panel has put forward several recommendations and has requested an action taken report (ATR) within eight weeks on each recommendation from the West Bengal government, as stated in a statement released by the NHRC on Saturday.

"The Commission's spot inquiry has revealed several instances of atrocities inflicted upon the victims, which clearly demonstrate, prima facie, that there was a violation of human rights due to negligence in the prevention of such violation or abatement thereof by the public servant," it said. The Commission has sent its spot inquiry report to the chief secretary and DGP, West Bengal for submitting the ATR. The NHRC report made an observation that the "atmosphere due to the atrocities by the alleged accused persons rendered the victims silent", and intimidation, and terror made them "reluctant to seek justice". This "climate of terror" not only "perpetuates the cycle of abuse" but also underscores the urgent need to create a safe and supportive environment for victims to "break free from the shackles of silence", it has



observed. The rights panel has also made an observation that the "atmosphere of fear" not only affects the victims but also has a "negative impact" on the growth and health of the children who constantly witness the ordeals of their parents at the hands of these alleged accused. On February 21, the NHRC had taken suo motu cognisance of print and electronic media reports that in Sandeshkhali, North 24th Paragana, "innocent and impoverished women have been harassed and sexually assaulted by a group of local gang of a political person". As a result, for the last few days, local villagers had started protesting, seeking appropriate legal action against the "perpetrators of horrific crimes indulged by various goons and anti-social elements, when the local administration failed to take appropriate legal action against the perpetrators of

crime," it added. In addition to seeking reports from the state government, the Commission, considering the gravity of the situation, had deputed an investigation team for a spot inquiry, headed by one of its members. "In response, thereto, the DG and IGP, West Bengal vide communication dated 29.02.2024, revealed that a total of 25 cases were registered among which seven cases were on alleged complaints of a sexual offence against women and 24 accused persons were arrested," it said. Efforts were also being made to arrest the absconding perpetrators of the crime. The overall situation of the entire Sandeshkhali police station area and Nazat police station area was described to be "well under control". The NHRC investigation team found that there is a need to "uproot the fear" of these persons from the hearts of the vic-

tims to enable them to live their normal lives with their families and gain the confidence to live in society with dignity and pride. It is the duty of the district authorities, being arms of a welfare state, to take consistent measures to instil confidence in the residents of the area in general, and victims in particular, so that others who have been victims of crimes may come forward and file their complaints, the statement said. The NHRC, in its statement, said its team also interacted with the police and administration at Sandeshkhali and requested for further information, "but despite reminders, no reply has been given to date". The recommendations given by the NHRC team include "reinstating trust in the rule of law and confidence in authorities" and ensuring witness protection and redressal of grievances.

Indian Army celebrates 40 years of Operation Meghdoot on Siachen Glacier

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Army and IAF have significantly enhanced their combat capabilities to guard the Siachen glacier, world's highest battlefield located at a height of more than 20,000 feet. India secured the strategically important heights on the glacier on April 13, 1984 as part of Operation Meghdoot thereby gaining edge over Pakistan. Highlighting some crucial improvements undertaken to further improve operational readiness, officials said here on the 40th year of Operation Meghdoot, measures include induction of heavy-lift helicopters and logistic drones, deployment of all-terrain vehicles and laying of an extensive network of tracks. The Siachen glacier at the height of around 20,000 feet in the Karakoram mountain range is known as the highest militarised zone in the world where soldiers have to battle frostbite and high winds. It is 78 kms in length. Under its "Operation Meghdoot", the Indian Army established its full control over the glacier on April 13, 1984. "The Indian Army's control over the Siachen glacier has not only been a story of unparalleled valour and determination but also an incredible journey of technological advancements and logistical improvements that transformed it from one of the most formidable terrains into a symbol of indomitable spirit and innovation," said an official.



The initiatives, especially laid out in the last five years, have made significant strides in improving the living conditions and operational capabilities of the personnel deployed in Siachen, he said. There has been a noteworthy improvement in the aspect of mobility in Siachen with the development of an extensive network of tracks and the introduction of all-terrain vehicles (ATV), have significantly improved mobility across the glacier," he said. Another official said innovations like the DRDO-developed ATV bridges have enabled the Army to overcome natural obstacles, while high-quality "Dyneema" ropes in aerial cableways ensure seamless supply lines to even the most-remote outposts. The induction of heavy-lift helicopters and logistic drones

has vastly improved the supply of essentials to the personnel deployed in posts that are cut off, especially in winters, he said. The availability of special clothing, mountaineering equipment and advanced rations has enhanced the ability of the soldiers to withstand the harsh conditions of the world's coldest battlefield, the official added. He said gadgets, such as pocket weather trackers, with each soldier provides timely weather updates and warn them about possible avalanches. There has been a focus on improvement in mobile and data connectivity in the region as well and introduction of the VSAT technology has revolutionised communication on the glacier, providing the troops with data and internet connectivity.

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has established telemedicine nodes that provide critical medical support not only to the troops but also to the local populace and tourists in the Nubra valley. Operation Meghdoot was launched when the Indian Army and IAF advanced to the Siachen glacier to secure the heights dominating the Northern Ladakh region. The operation involved the airlifting of Indian Army soldiers by the IAF and dropping them on the glacial peaks. Although the operation began in 1984, IAF helicopters were already operating in the Siachen Glacier since 1978, flying the Chetak helicopters which was the first IAF helicopter to land in the Glacier in October 1978. By 1984, Pakistan's cartographic aggression in the

uncharted territory of Ladakh, allowing foreign mountaineering expeditions in Siachen, was becoming a cause of concern. Having received intelligence inputs about an impending Pakistani military action in the area, India decided to thwart Pakistan's efforts to legitimize its claim on Siachen. The Indian Army launched Operation Meghdoot, to secure strategic heights on Siachen with the deployment of troops. Playing an irreplaceable role in this effort, IAF's tactical and strategic airlifters, An-12s, An-32s and IL-76s transported stores and troops and air-dropped supplies to high altitude airfields, from where Mi-17, Mi-8, Chetak and Cheetah helicopters ferried men and material to dizzying heights on the glacier, far above the limits set by the helicopter manufacturers. Soon, about 300-odd troops were positioned on the strategically important peaks and passes of the glacier. By the time the Pakistan army reacted by advancing its own troops, the Indian Army was occupying strategically crucial mountain peaks and passes, thereby gaining a tactical advantage. Nearly all the aircraft of the IAF including Rafale, Su-30MKI, Chinook, Apache, Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH) Mk III & Mk IV, Light Combat Helicopter (LCH) Prachand, MiG-29, Mirage-2000, C-17, C-130J, IL-76 and An-32 operate in support of Operation Meghdoot.

Modi tries his hand at gaming during meet with top gamers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Not often would one see a Prime Minister indulging in video games but, during an interaction with some of the country's top gamers, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday not only addressed issues facing the e-sports and gaming industry but also played VR (virtual reality) and other mobile games. He also remarked in jest "Bhagwaan kare mujhe iski aadat na lage(I pray to god I do not get addicted to this)" after a few rounds of gaming. Impressed by his humour, the gamers called him the "coolest PM" and "country's biggest influencer." Incidentally, his comments on word 'noob' turned into a slug fest between political parties. During the interaction with the gamers, Prime Minister Modi burst out laughing and took a dig at the Opposition when one of the participants mentioned the word 'noob'. Noob is a slang word that refers to someone who is new to a game, concept, or idea, implying a lack of experience in that field. In a video posted by the Prime Minister on X, the gamers are seen telling him some gaming terminologies like "grind" and "noob". Upon hearing the word "noob", Modi is seen bursting into laughter. "If I use this word during elections, people will wonder who am I referring to. If I say it, you will assume it for a particular person," Modi says without naming any leader.



The remark led to a sort of war of words between Congress and BJP. "These are just political tactics of the BJP around the elections. This will backfire," veteran Congress leader Pramod Tiwari told a TV channel. BJP leader Shehzad Poonawalla took to X to slam Congress. "PM Modi did not name anybody, but why are Congress leaders reacting and confirming who the noob of politics is?" Poonawalla said. Kangana Ranaut also responded, asking, "Who is the noob?" Meanwhile, in the free-wheeling interaction regarding the future as well as the challenges before the e-gaming industry, the prime minister posed curious questions to the gamers while also trying his hands at some of the games. "People have offered different solutions. I have an alternative solution called Mission LIFE, which advocates for changing our daily lifestyle to benefit the environment. Now, envi-

sion a game aimed at addressing global climate issues, where the gamer must explore various methods and solutions to identify the most sustainable approach," Modi told the gamers during the interaction. "What are these steps? How do we navigate through it and choose the best approach for success? Take swachhata as an example, the game theme could revolve around cleanliness and every child should play this game. Youngsters should embrace Indian values and understand their true significance," he said. The gamers discussed new developments in the gaming industry with the prime minister, who stressed how the government has recognised the creativity of the gamers, promoting the gaming industry in India. They also engaged on issues concerning gambling versus gaming while discussing the participation of women in the gaming industry.

BJP Government has legalised corruption through electoral bonds, alleges Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Countering Prime Minister Narendra Modi's attack on the Opposition on the issue of corruption, the Congress on Saturday alleged that the BJP has consistently hampered anti-corruption efforts across the country. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh alleged that the BJP Government has "legalised" corruption through electoral bonds, politicised anti-corruption efforts by unleashing probe agencies against political opponents and slowed down the legal process against politicians who join the BJP. "It takes a special kind of hypocrisy for PM Modi to parade himself around the country screaming 'Bhramstachar Hatao'. No one has done more to legalise and normalise corruption than Prime Minister Modi," he alleged. In his election speeches, Modi has made a strong pitch on the issue of corruption, claiming that while he wants to finish the menace, the Congress and other opposition parties were targeting him for it and have come together to protect the corrupt. Ramesh claimed that in July 2018, the Modi government amended the Prevention of Corruption Act, rendering



anti-graft bodies ineffective. "Six years later, 65 per cent of anti-corruption probes in Maharashtra are still pending approval. "How the BJP rendered anti-corruption bodies ineffective: In July 2018, the Modi Sarkar introduced Section 17(A) to the Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA) to supposedly protect government servants from frivolous complaints. The legal process is an inquiry to FIR to the chargesheet. "Before this new 'safeguard' was added, Section 19(A) of the PCA required anti-corruption bodies to seek approval from the government/department before filing a charge sheet, the last step in the legal process," the Congress leader claimed. He said the Modi government's amendment requires anti-corruption bodies, including the CBI, to seek approval even before launching an investigation, the first step in the legal process. "It's a tremendous

weakening of the powers of anti-corruption agencies," he alleged. Ramesh said the amendment required the government to make their decision within a maximum of four months, but it does not mention what action can be taken if the time limit is not followed. "This, unsurprisingly, has been widely misused. Out of 354 Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) cases currently pending approval before the state of Maharashtra, only two were addressed within the time limit. "In the remaining 352, the ACB has not heard from the concerned government or department for more than four months," he claimed. The Congress general secretary also claimed that Maharashtra has the lowest conviction rate in the country under the PCA - just 11 per cent in 2021, and just nine per cent in 2022 according to National Crime Records Bureau data.

Congress slams Government over issue of Chinese transgressions

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Saturday hit out at the Narendra Modi government on the issue of Chinese transgressions and said External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's reported remark that "China has not occupied any of our land" is akin to giving another free pass to the neighbouring country. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said the EAM's statement is a "copy-paste" of Modi's clean chit to China after the Galwan skirmish in 2020, when 20 Indian soldiers were killed. Kharge responded to the remark in a post on X, "Wearing '56-inch' long Chinese Blinks, on the 'Laal Aankh', Modi Government has given a free pass to the Chinese, twice in a week's time." He added, "First, @narendramodi ji's interview in foreign press where he failed to put forth India's case strongly at the global stage. Now, his Foreign Minister, handing over another Clean Chit to expansionist China." Kharge hit out at the Modi government alleging it was yet to come out clean on the Chinese transgressions at borders and asked him if the bilateral talks between the two countries were to open Indian markets to imported Chinese goods. "@narendramodi ji, Since 4 years, the people of India, and

the Opposition is asking you take them in confidence, in the Parliament and in public discourse on repeated Chinese transgressions, illegal occupation and building of military infrastructure, near our borders, but you have not bothered to take us in confidence," Kharge said in his post. "What were the 19 rounds of bilateral talks with your Chinese counterpart for? Was it to increase Chinese imports of India? Or take PM CARE funds from 3000 companies having Chinese directors," he asked. "Why has the status quo ante, pre 2020, not returned? Why is India still denied access to areas in Depsang Plains, Demchok Nalla and several patrolling points in Hot Springs and Gogra Post? Mr. Modi's Policy towards China is 'M' for 'Meek'." "Modi Ki Chinese Guarantee 2.0. A sordid saga of endangering National Security and India's Territorial Integrity by giving a 'double clean chit' to China for stealing our land," the Congress chief said. Congress general secretary (Communications) Jairam Ramesh in a statement said the Modi government has been letting off China for its aggression against India. He claimed that after the prime minister's public "clean chit" on June 19, 2020 and the Union Home Minister's "clean chit" on

April 9, 2024, comes a third "clean chit" from Jaishankar. "Clearly this is all orchestrated by the Super Sutradhar himself," Ramesh said. Ramesh said that EAM's recent statement that "China has not occupied any of our land" represents a "renewed setback" to India's position on its northern border, rivalled only by the prime minister's statement that "No one has entered Indian territory and no one is in our territory." "Not only are all these statements a profound insult to our fallen soldiers in Galwan, but they also represent the legitimisation of Chinese claims over thousands of square kilometres of land to which Indian troops had access until May 2020. "In particular, the EAM's remarks represent an acceptance of Chinese control over Demchok and the strategic Depsang Plains where Chinese troops continue to block our soldiers' at the critical Y-Junction, preventing them from accessing Patrol Points 10, 11, 11A, 12 and 13," Ramesh alleged. Ramesh claimed that Chinese troops remain in place despite 21 rounds of military talks over four years. Where withdrawals have been negotiated, the Modi government has accepted buffer zones that lie predominantly in areas that Indian troops once freely accessed, he said.

President Droupadi Murmu greets citizens on eve of Ambedkar birth anniversary



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu on Saturday greeted citizens on the eve of the birth anniversary of Dr B R Ambedkar, the architect of India's Constitution, and asked all to adopt his ideals to work collectively for the inclusive development of the country. Babasaheb Ambedkar, a pioneer of social change and a versatile personality, made exceptional contributions to our country and society as a jurist, educationist, economist, social reformer and political leader, she said. Even today, his strong belief in the constitutional system is the foundation of our democracy and good governance, the president said. She said, Dr Ambedkar devoted his entire life to the estab-

lishment of an egalitarian society and struggled for the upliftment of the downtrodden. "On this occasion, let us adopt the ideals of Dr Ambedkar and work collectively for the inclusive development of our country," President Murmu said. Born on April 14, 1891, in a Dalit family in Maharashtra, Ambedkar rose from a humble background to become a leading voice of the marginalised people during the freedom struggle and is credited with introducing several social reforms. In a message, the President said, "On the occasion of the birth anniversary of Babasaheb Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, the architect of our Constitution and one of the most eminent nation builders, I extend my warm greetings and best wishes to all fellow citizens."

Gopi Thotakura to become 1st Indian space tourist

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Gopi Thotakura, an entrepreneur and a pilot, is set to become the first Indian to venture into space as a tourist on Amazon founder Jeff Bezos's Blue Origin's NS-25 mission. Thotakura was selected as one of the six crew members for the mission, making him the first Indian space tourist and the second Indian to venture into space after the Indian Army's Wing Commander Rakesh Sharma in 1984. The flight date is yet to be announced, the aerospace company said. This mission will be the seventh human flight for the New Shepard programme and the 25th in its history. To date, the programme

has flown 31 humans above the Karman line, the proposed conventional boundary between Earth's atmosphere and outer space. New Shepard is a fully reusable sub-orbital launch vehicle developed for space tourism by Blue Origin. According to Blue Origin, "Gopi is a pilot and aviator who learned how to fly before he could drive." He is the co-founder of Preserve Life Corp, a global centre for holistic wellness and applied health located near Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport. In addition to flying jets commercially, he pilots bush, aerobatic, and seaplanes, as well as gliders and hot air balloons, and has served as an international medical jet pilot.



A lifelong traveller, his most recent adventure took him to the summit of Mt Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. Andhra Pradesh-born Thotakura is a graduate of Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. Other crew members of the flight include Mason Angel, Sylvain Chiron, Kenneth L. Hess, Carol Schaller, and former Air Force Captain Ed Dwight, who was selected by President John F Kennedy in 1961 as the nation's first Black astronaut candidate but was never granted the opportunity to fly to space. During the flight, each astronaut will carry a postcard to space on behalf of Blue Origin's foundation, Club for the Future.

This programme gives students access to space on Blue Origin's rockets, including an all-digital method to create and send post-cards. The Club's mission is to inspire and mobilise future generations to pursue careers in STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics) for the benefit of Earth. From an environmental standpoint, nearly 99 per cent of New Shepard's dry mass is reused, including the booster, capsule, engine, landing gear, and parachutes. New Shepard's engine is fuelled by highly efficient liquid oxygen and hydrogen. During the flight, the only byproduct is water vapour with no carbon emissions, the company said.

Chaos at a Sydney mall as 6 people stabbed to death

Suspect fatally shot by police

AP ■ SYDNEY

A man stabbed six people to death at a busy Sydney shopping centre Saturday before he was fatally shot, police said, with hundreds fleeing the chaotic scene, many weeping as they carried their children. Eight people, including a 9-month-old, were injured. New South Wales police said they believed a 40-year-old man was responsible for the Saturday afternoon attack at the Westfield Shopping Centre in Bondi Junction, in the city's eastern suburbs. They said they were not able to name him until a formal identification had taken place but that they weren't currently treating the attack as terrorism-related. The man was shot dead by a female police inspector after he turned and raised a knife, New South Wales Assistant Police Commissioner Anthony Cooke told reporters. "This all happened very, very quickly — the officer that was in the vicinity attended on her own, was guided to the location of the offender by people who were in the centre," he said. "She took the actions that she did saving a range of people's lives." The stabbing at the shopping centre, which was a hub of activity on a particularly warm

fall afternoon, began around 3:10 p.m. and police were called soon after. "They just said run, run, run — someone's been stabbed," one witness told ABC TV in Australia. "(The attacker) was walking really calmly like he was having an ice cream in a park. And then he went up the escalators ... and probably within about a minute we heard three gunshots." Six of the victims — five women and a man — and the suspect died. Commissioner Karen Webb said the eight injured people were being treated at hospitals. The baby was in surgery, but it was too early to know the condition, she said. "We are confident that there is no ongoing risk, and we are dealing with one person who is now deceased," Webb said in a later briefing. She added: "It's not a terrorism incident." Witnesses were shocked at the rare outburst of violence. Australia enacted strict gun laws after a man killed 35 and wounded another 23 in 1996, in Tasmania. "I saw all the people running and I didn't know what was happening," said Ayush Singh. "I thought it was some people playing a prank or something and after some time I saw a guy with a knife running from the footpath to the cafe where I work."

He said police arrived quickly and told everyone to stay put. Singh said he saw the man running just metres away as he wielded a knife. "I didn't hear him say anything," he added. "Just a random guy stabbing people. Mad guy." Roi Huberman, a sound engineer at ABC TV in Australia, told the network that he sheltered in a store during the incident. "And suddenly we heard a shot or maybe two shots and we didn't know what to do," he said. "Then the very capable person in the store took us to the back where it can be locked. She then locked the store and then she then let us through the back and now we are out." As the attack unfolded, panicked individuals streamed out of the shopping centre, many with children in their arms. Paramedics treated injured people at the scene. The shopping centre and the surrounding area remains in lockdown as police piece together what went on. "It's been an incredibly distressing day for so many people in our community, people who went to the shops today, a packed shopping centre, and then got caught up in something we could never imagine here, something so disturbing and terrifying for many," Kellie Sloane, a local lawmaker, said.

Israel finds body of missing teen

AP ■ AL-MUGHAYYIR (WEST BANK)

Israel's army said on Saturday the body of a missing Israeli teen was found in the West Bank after he was killed in a "terrorist attack," as violence escalated across the Israeli-occupied territory where tensions have simmered for months. The disappearance of 14-year-old Binyamin Achimair sparked attacks by Israeli settlers on Palestinian villages on Friday and Saturday. Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant in a statement on social media urged people not to take the law into their own hands. On Friday, Palestinian Jihad Abu Alia was killed and 25 others

were wounded in the attack on al-Mughayyir village, Palestinian health officials said. On Saturday, Israeli troops delayed for several hours the ambulance carrying the 26-year-old man's body for burial, witnesses said. Dozens of Israeli settlers returned to the village's outskirts on Saturday, burning 12 homes and several cars. The Palestinian Health Ministry said three people from the village were injured, one critically. Border police fired tear gas toward villagers who gathered, trying to disperse them. In the nearby village of Douma, Israeli settlers set fire to around 15 homes and 10 farms, the head of the local village council, Slieman Dawabsheh, told

The Associated Press, saying he had been there. "The army came but unfortunately, the army were protecting the settlers," he said, asserting that it fired tear gas and rubber bullets at Palestinians trying to confront and expel them. The Israeli military did not immediately comment. The Palestinian Red Crescent said six people were injured by gunfire but did not say who fired. Tensions in the West Bank have been especially high since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war in nearby Gaza on October 7, sparked by the Hamas attack on southern Israel that killed about 1,200 people and took 250 hostages. More than 33,000 Palestinians in Gaza have been killed in

Israel's offensive, according to Gaza health officials. Hamas since then has been trying to ignite other fronts, including in the West Bank, in hopes of exerting more pressure on Israel. Such efforts have largely failed, though more than 460 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire in the West Bank since October 7, most in clashes sparked by army raids but some by vigilante settlers. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the killing of the Israeli teen. According to Israeli media, the teen was last seen leaving the settler outpost of Malachei Shalom early Friday to tend to livestock nearby. The sheep returned to the outpost hours later without him, reports said.

Militants kill 11 in Pakistan's Balochistan

PTI ■ KARACHI

At least 11 people, nine of them from Punjab province, were shot dead by militants in Pakistan's restive Balochistan in two separate incidents, authorities said on Saturday, as the region witnessed a surge in terror attacks in recent days. Nine of the deceased were travelling in a bus on the National Highway from Quetta to Taftan when they were stopped by unknown militants, who pulled them out of the bus and killed them later, an official said. "The bodies of these nine men were later found with bullet wounds in the nearby mountainous areas near a bridge," he said. "The bus was going from Quetta to Taftan when armed men stopped it and after identifying passengers took the nine men to the mountainous areas," he added. The victims were from Wazirabad, Mandi Bahauddin, and Gujranwala in Punjab province. In a separate incident, a car was fired upon on the same highway in which two passengers were killed and two others injured. Condemning the attacks, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif sought a report of the incident from authorities.

FBI hikes reward for info on Indian wanted for killing wife

PTI ■ NEW YORK

The FBI is now offering a reward of up to USD 250,000 for information leading to the arrest of a 33-year-old "extremely dangerous" Indian national who is wanted in the US for allegedly killing his wife in 2015. Bhadreshkumar Chetanbhai Patel, who was last known to be in the Newark area of New Jersey, is wanted for allegedly killing his wife Palak Patel by striking her multiple times with an object when they worked at a doughnut shop in Hanover, Maryland. Patel is on the FBI's list of "Ten Most Wanted Fugitives" and the

federal agency announced a reward of up to USD 250,000 for information leading to his arrest. Initially, the FBI had offered a USD 100,000 reward for information about Patel. Patel has been charged with first-degree murder, second-degree murder, first-degree assault, second-degree assault, and dangerous weapons with intent to injure, the FBI said in a statement. A federal arrest warrant was issued in the Maryland district court on April 20, 2015, after Patel was charged with unlawful flight to avoid prosecution. According to a 2017 FBI press release, Patel and his wife

worked the night shift at the doughnut shop of one of his relatives. Investigators believe Patel killed his wife, who was 21 at the time, in a back room of the shop just before midnight on April 12, 2015. Patel allegedly stabbed his wife multiple times and fled by a rear door. The statement warned that Patel should be considered "armed and extremely dangerous". According to the FBI, investigators theorise that Palak Patel wanted to return to India — their visas had expired the month before — and her husband was against the idea. "The best guess is that he did-

n't want her to leave," said Special Agent Jonathan Shaffer, who was investigating the case from the FBI's Baltimore Division. "It's possible he thought he would be disgraced by her leaving and returning to India." Although the motive remains unclear, Shaffer noted that after the crime, Patel's "actions show a very cool and calculated mentality about escaping the scene and fleeing the area". After the murder, a customer who entered the shop realised something was wrong when no one came to take his order. He alerted a Police Department officer who discovered Palak Patel's body. "It was horrific

what had been done to this young woman," Shaffer said. Realising that Patel was an international flight risk, local police requested FBI assistance, and several days after the murder, a federal arrest warrant was issued charging him with unlawful flight to avoid prosecution. Investigators believe that Patel could be with distant relatives in the US or that he could have fled to Canada. "Or he could have travelled through Canada back to India," Shaffer said. "Those are among the plausible options we are exploring," according to the press release issued in 2017.

Pak has highest living cost in all of Asia with a 25 per cent inflation rate: ADB

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Pakistan has the highest living cost in all of Asia with a 25 per cent inflation rate and its economy may grow at the fourth lowest pace of 1.9 per cent in the region, according to a new Asian Development Bank (ADB) report. The report was released on Thursday in Manila. The Express Tribune reported that the Asian Development Outlook also painted a gloomy picture for the next fiscal year as well, projecting a 15 per cent inflation rate for the next fiscal year — again the highest among 46 countries and a 2.8 per cent growth rate — the fifth lowest for FY 2024-25. The Manila-based lending agency stated that the inflation

rate in Pakistan is expected to be 25 per cent in the current fiscal year — the highest in all of Asia. This makes Pakistan the most expensive nation in Asia. Earlier, the cost of living in Pakistan used to be the highest in South Asia. The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) and federal government had set the inflation target at 21 per cent for this fiscal year but they are going to miss it despite inflicting huge losses in the shape of a 22 per cent interest rate. The ADB said during the current fiscal year, the country's economic growth rate might remain at 1.9 per cent — the fourth lowest after Myanmar, Azerbaijan and Nauru. Pakistan is in a stagflation phase for a prolonged period and the World Bank too said

last week that another 10 million more people might fall into the poverty trap because of any adverse shocks. About 98 million people are already living a poor life in Pakistan. In the past, the ADB gave a rather optimistic economic scenario close to Pakistan's official forecasts. However, the latest ADB report stated that Pakistan would continue to face challenges from substantial new external financing requirements and the rollover of old debt, exacerbated by tight global monetary conditions. The Manila-based lender said political uncertainty that affected macroeconomic policy-making would remain a key risk to the sustainability of stabilisation and reform efforts.

It said with Pakistan's large external financing requirements and weak external buffers, disbursement from multilateral and bilateral partners remained crucial. "Further IMF support for a medium-term reform agenda would considerably improve market sentiment and catalyse affordable external financing from other sources," the report added. Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb is set to meet the IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva next week in Washington to request a new bailout package. The IMF MD said this week that Pakistan was in discussions for a potential follow-up programme. However, she said that there are "very important issues" to be

solved in Pakistan: the tax base, how the richer part of the society contributed to the economy, the way public spending is being directed, and creating a more transparent environment. The ADB said low confidence, a surge in living costs, and the implementation of tighter macroeconomic policies under the IMF programme would restrain domestic demand in Pakistan. It said the government's goal was to achieve a primary surplus of 0.4 per cent and an overall deficit of 7.5 per cent of GDP in FY2024, with both declining gradually in subsequent years. However, the World Bank said last week that Pakistan would miss both these budget targets, reported The Express Tribune.

Shelling in Russian-occupied Ukraine claims 10 lives

AP ■ KYIV

At least 10 people, including children, died after shelling late on Friday struck a Russian-occupied town in Ukraine's southern Zaporizhzhia region, a local Kremlin-installed official said, blaming Ukraine for the attack. Meanwhile, Ukrainian officials reported at least three civilian deaths elsewhere in the country that they said resulted from Russian attacks. Russian emergency services on Saturday were working in the rubble in hopes of saving civilians trapped underneath the debris of their homes in Tokmak, in a part of southern Ukraine that Moscow has illegally annexed from Kyiv, according to the Kremlin-installed regional head Yevhen

Balitsky. The Tokmak municipal administration reported on Telegram that the shelling struck three apartment blocks on Friday evening. Five people were pulled alive from the rubble, Balitsky said, and a total of 13 people were hospitalised. As of early afternoon on Saturday, Ukraine had not commented on the allegations. Elsewhere in Ukraine, at least two civilians died as a result of Russian shelling on Friday and overnight, according to officials. Both deaths occurred in the front-line Donetsk region in the east, according to Telegram posts by local Gov. Vadym Filashkin. On Saturday, Russian forces also shelled a car making food

deliveries in the northern Chernihiv region, killing its civilian driver, regional Gov. Vyacheslav Chaus said. In the Kharkiv region in the northeast, overnight Russian shelling left a man trapped under rubble and also wounded a second man, according to local Gov. Oleh Syniehubov and Ukrainian emergency services. Both have been hospitalised, according to a Telegram update by the state emergency service. Local Ukrainian officials reported over a dozen civilians were wounded by Russian shelling on Friday and overnight in the country's north, south and east. It was not immediately possible to verify the claims by Balitsky or the Ukrainian authorities.

Trump to host rally on Biden's home turf in northeast Pennsylvania

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Donald Trump plans to hold a rally Saturday in northeast Pennsylvania, venturing into an area President Joe Biden considers his home turf in what will be the Republican's last rally before his criminal hush money trial begins Monday. The presumptive GOP nominee and former president is scheduled to speak at the Schnecksville Fire Hall in Lehigh County. It will be Trump's third visit this year to the vital swing state, one that could decide who wins this year's presidential race. He also plans to attend a fundraiser in nearby Bucks County before the event. Pennsylvania is a critical battleground in the rematch between Trump and Biden, with both candidates expected to visit the state frequently through November. Trump flipped the state to the Republican column in 2016 but lost it four years after to Biden, who was born in the northeast

city of Scranton and has long talked about his roots in the city. Biden plans to deliver a major address Tuesday in Scranton on tax fairness. Trump is navigating four separate criminal prosecutions while running to avenge his loss to Biden, creating an unprecedented swirl of legal and political chaos. Jury selection starts Monday in New York in his trial where he is charged with seeking during his 2016 campaign to bury stories about extramarital affairs by arranging hush money payments. It will be the first criminal trial ever of a former US president. And it will limit Trump's availability on the campaign trail, though he is expected to speak to the media after court often and has for months fundraised and campaigned on the felony charges he faces, arguing political opponents are pursuing them to stop him from winning the White House again. Biden has argued Trump's lies about losing the 2020 election



are dangerous for the country. He has said Trump poses a fundamental threat to democracy and U.S. alliances abroad — rhetoric that Trump has argued applies to Biden.

In recent weeks, both candidates have tried to stir up their voting bases and tear apart their opponent's coalitions, a strategy that will be tested over the coming months.

Trump recently said that any Democratic-leaning voters who support Israel should back him instead, as Biden has criticized Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's actions

in his war against Hamas. The Republican said Wednesday that "any Jewish person who votes for a Democrat or votes for Biden should have their head examined." He also has new ammunition to criticize Biden's handling of the economy, as the government said Wednesday that inflation jumped 0.4% in March to 3.5% annually. But Biden has also put Trump on the defensive over the issue of abortion, a key weakness for the GOP as many voters have opposed new restrictions that some states have placed on the procedure after justices that Trump appointed to the Supreme Court helped overturn Roe v Wade in 2022. Trump tried to defuse the controversy and appease women voters by saying the matter should be settled by the states, instead of the federal government. But that argument became problematic this past week as Arizona's top court ruled that the state could enforce an 1864

law criminalizing abortion, prompting Trump on Wednesday to suggest the 19th century law was too restrictive for his taste. Trump has instead tried to make immigration the central issue of the campaign. The Republican has sought to portray Biden as feckless on border security, given the record-high numbers of individuals who have crossed the southern border illegally during his administration. He also attacked the president for not doing more to ramp up oil drilling, even though domestic production is at an all-time high. The area around Lehigh County has enjoyed job growth under Biden. The Bureau of Labor Statistics said it contains 445,200 jobs, up from a prepandemic total of 429,900 jobs during the Trump administration. The area's unemployment rate is a healthy 3.9%, meaningfully better than the 4.6% achieved before the coronavirus pandemic struck during Trump's presidency.

Pak opp alliance to launch drive against govt

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan's party under the umbrella of a "grand opposition alliance" on Saturday announced a countrywide movement against the alleged rigging in the February 8 election and the government established by tampering of the mandate. The launch of the movement indicates that the dream of post-election peace and political stability will be wilting sooner than expected. The six-party alliance that includes Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, in a late-night meeting that continued till the early hours of Saturday decided to come together under the banner of Tehreek Tahafuz Ayeen-i-Pakistan (TTAP), a movement to protect the Constitution of Pakistan.

Foreign funds shy away from real estate

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Institutional investments in real estate declined 55 per cent annually in January-March this year to USD 552 million as cautious foreign investors stayed away, pumping in only USD 11 mn, according to Vestian. The real estate sector had attracted USD 1,238.3 million (USD 1.23 billion) in the January-March period of 2023 calendar year, as per the report, which was released on Saturday. The latest data by global property consultant Vestian showed that the institutional inflow from foreign funds in the country's real estate plunged 99 per cent to just USD 11 million in the first quarter of 2024 from USD 791.4 million in the year-ago



period. Domestic investors pumped in USD 541.1 million in the Indian real

estate in January-March 2025, up 21 per cent from 446.9 million in the year-ago

period. Vestian CEO Shrinivas Rao, said, "Domestic investors are

bullish about India's growth story, and continue to pour in investments in the real estate sector. On the other hand, foreign investors are cautious due to global macroeconomic uncertainty and geopolitical tensions." Commercial assets (office, retail, co-working, and hospitality projects) garnered the highest investments of USD 231.6 million in the March quarter, as against USD 484.8 million in the year-ago period. Institutional investments in residential assets fell 33 per cent to USD 225 million from USD 337.7 million. Investments significantly decreased 73 per cent in the industrial and warehousing sector to USD 58.9 million in the January-March period from USD 215.8 million a

year ago. Bengaluru dominated the institutional investments during the quarter with USD 299 million, followed by Delhi-NCR at USD 110 million. Both cities together accounted for around 74 per cent of the total investments received in the current quarter. Edelweiss Capital turned out to be the most active investor during the quarter with over USD 300 million worth of investments across the asset classes and geographies, Vestian said. "The Indian real estate sector is expected to garner increased investments in the coming months on the back of a strengthened economic scenario and robust demand," Rao said on the investments outlook.



Gas based plants told to be operational from May 1 as power demand surges

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has directed all gas-based power generating stations to operationalise their plants from May 1 to June 30 in view of rise in electricity demand due to a likely prolonged heat wave this summer. A significant portion of Gas-Based Generating Stations (GBSs) is currently unutilized, primarily due to commercial considerations. The ministry has projected 260 GW peak power demand this summer (April to June 2024). Peak power demand had touched an all-time high of 243 GW in September last year. The decision to operationalise GBSs is part of a series of measures taken to a power ministry statement, the order shall remain valid for generation and supply of electricity from May 1, 2024 to June 30, 2024. "To ensure maximum power generation from Gas-Based Generating Stations, the government has issued directions to all Gas-Based Generating Stations under Section 11 of the Electricity Act, 2003, under which the appropriate government may specify that a generating company shall, in extraordinary circumstances operate and maintain any generating station in accordance with the directions of that government," the statement said. The order under

Section 11, which is on similar lines as done for imported coal-based power plants, aims to optimise the availability of power from GBSs during the ensuing high demand period. As per the arrangement, GRID-INDIA will inform GBSs in advance, of the number of days for which gas-based power is required. GBSs holding Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) with distribution licensees shall first offer their power to PPA holders. If the power offered is not utilised by any PPA holder, then it shall be offered in the power market. GBSs not tied to PPAs must offer their generation in the power market. A high-level committee headed by Chairperson, Central Electricity Authority has been constituted to facilitate the implementation of this direction. Other measures taken by the government to meet the summer demand include planned maintenance of power plants to be shifted to monsoon season; new capacity additions to be fast-tracked and partial outages of thermal power plants being brought down. India's electricity demand has been rising rapidly, driven by economic growth, particularly during hot-weather and high-demand periods. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has predicted above-normal maximum temperatures over most parts of the country during the 2024 summer.



Petregaz India commissions its LPG import, storage terminal

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Petregaz India, a subsidiary of Petredec Group has commissioned its new state-of-the-art LPG Import and Storage Terminal that has been set up at an outlay of Rs 600 crore, the company said on Saturday. The new facility located within the Adani Krishnapatnam Private Port at Krishnapatnam in neighbouring Andhra Pradesh would benefit private marketers as well as residential, commercial, industrial, and automotive consumers. The newly commissioned facility, with an investment of Rs 600 crore, enables Petregaz to deliver cost-effective, and dependable solutions to LPG marketers, the company said in a statement. With an annual capacity of over 1.5 million metric tonnes, the facility has excellent road connectivity to the hinterland of Tamil

Nadu, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh. The terminal also has two refrigerated storage tanks, a modern jetty with no congestion and capable of berthing all types of LPG vessels, 16 truck loading bays among others. "Government-run oil companies can utilise our terminal's capacity to improve LPG supplies in the hinterland, optimising logistics and strengthening India's LPG landscape," said Petregaz India CEO Susheel Raina. This new facility would benefit private marketers and bottlers by improving access to LPG infrastructure, Raina said. Petredec Group is an integrated LPG company that owns and operates a modern fleet of 35 LPG carriers. It has a presence in the LPG downstream sector with three LPG import terminals in the Indian Ocean, the statement added.

HMPL board approves ₹486 crore fundraising plan

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Infrastructure company Hazoor Multi Projects Ltd (HMPL) on Saturday said its board has approved a proposal to raise Rs 486 crore through the issuance of warrants. The plan was approved by the board of the company at a meeting on Friday, HMPL said in a regulatory filing. The board has approved fundraising of Rs 4,860 million through issuing and allotting up to 1.62 crore fully convertible warrants to the persons belonging to the 'non-promoter' and 'public' category on a preferential basis at an issue price of Rs 300 per warrant, the company said. The proposal is subject to the approval of shareholders and other regulatory authorities, HMPL added. "Upon issue of Warrants in accordance herewith, an amount equivalent to 25 per cent of the total issue size shall be called upfront from the proposed allottees," it noted. The company said it looked to utilise the proceeds to enhance financial resources to fund its growth. Besides, the constitution of a fundraising raising committee was among the several proposals approved by the board. HMPL is into building road projects on an engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) basis. Anita Goel

224 flats in Gurugram project sold in 15 minutes for ₹440 crore: Ashiana Housing

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Realty firm Ashiana Housing on Saturday said it sold 224 luxury flats in Gurugram for Rs 440 crore within 15 minutes of its launch. The project is located at Sector 93 in Gurugram, Haryana. In a statement, the company said it has "sold out the entire phase 3 of its prestigious project, Ashiana Amarah within 15 minutes of launch." "We are very happy with the incredible response to Ashiana Amarah phase 3 launch. We started registration at 11 am and we had received 800 cheques for 224 units by 11.15. In 15 minutes it was oversubscribed four times," Ashiana Housing Joint Managing Director Ankur Gupta said. He attributed the oversubscription to the



company's brand value and execution track record. "Our novel kid-centric concept is also working. People want their children to be brought up in better places, with better amenities and quality of life and that is what Amarah is promising. "So there is a lot of excitement in the market. Ashiana is also planning to launch phase 4 in the coming quarter," Gupta said. Ashiana Housing is one of

India's leading real estate firms, listed on the stock exchanges. Present in nine cities in India, Ashiana Housing has constructed and delivered over 23 million (230 lakh) sq ft to over 17,000 buyers. According to PropTiger, sales of residential properties in Delhi-NCR jumped more than three times during the January-March period to Rs 12,120 crore from Rs 3,476 crore in the year-ago period.

CBI FIR against second biggest electoral bond buyer Megha Engineering in alleged bribery case

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI has registered an FIR against Hyderabad-based Megha Engineering and Infrastructure Ltd, which was the second-biggest buyer of electoral bonds worth Rs 966 crore, in an alleged bribery case. Eight officials of the NISP and NMDC and two officials of MECON were also named in the FIR for receiving alleged bribe of around Rs 78 lakh in clearing bills of Rs 174 crore of Megha Engineering in connection with works related to Jagdalpur integrated steel plant, officials said Saturday. Megha Engineering had emerged as the second-biggest buyer of electoral bonds and donated the highest amount of about Rs 586 crore to the BJP, according to the data released by the Election Commission on March 21. The company also donated

Rs 195 crore to BRS, Rs 85 crore to DMK, and Rs 37 crore to YSRCP. The TDP got about Rs 25 crore from the company, while the Congress got Rs 17 crore. The JD-S, Jana Sena Party and the JD-U got smaller sums ranging from Rs 5 crore to Rs 10 crore. According to the FIR made public on Saturday, the CBI had registered a preliminary enquiry on August 10, 2023 about the alleged bribery in Rs 315 crore project related to works of intake well and pump house and cross-country pipeline at the integrated steel plant Jagdalpur which was awarded to the company. Based on the findings of the preliminary enquiry, a recommendation was made on March 18 to register a regular case into the alleged bribery which was filed on March 31. The CBI has named eight

officials of NISP and NMDC Ltd — retired executive director Prashant Dash, director (production) DK Mohanty, DGM PK Bhuyan, DM Naresh Babu, senior manager Subro Banerjee, retired CGM (finance) L Krishna Mohan, GM (finance) K Rajshekhar, manager (finance) Somnath Ghosh, who allegedly received Rs 73.85 lakh bribe. The agency has also named two officials of MECON Ltd - AGM (contracts) Sanjeev Sahay and DGM (contracts) K Illavarsu — who allegedly received payment of Rs 5.01 lakh against the payment of Rs 174.41 crore by NMDC Ltd to MEIL against 73 invoices from Subhash Chandra Sangras, general manager, MEIL and Megha Engineering and unknown others. Chandra and Megha Engineering have also been named as accused in the case.

Varun Beverages starts commercial production of carbonated drinks

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Varun Beverages, leading bottler of beverage major PepsiCo, on Saturday said it has started commercial production of soft drinks and energy drinks from its production facility at Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh. The Jaipuria family-promoted

firm will also start juices and value-added dairy products from the Gorakhpur facility, Varun Beverages Ltd (VBL) said in a regulatory filing. "Our company has today started commercial production of carbonated soft drinks & energy drinks (juices and value added dairy products to be started) at its production

facility at Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh," it said. VBL said it is investing about Rs 1,100 crore for the greenfield project. In its latest annual report statement, VBL said it is expanding production capacities in the juices and value-added dairy products segments in 2024.

Payment mechanism for traders importing pulses from Myanmar simplified: Government

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Saturday said the payment mechanism for traders importing pulses from Myanmar has been eased and simplified. The importers have been asked to utilize Rupee/ Kyat direct payment system using Special Rupee Vostro Account (SRVA) through Punjab National Bank, the consumer affairs ministry said in a statement. India depends on imports of pulses to meet the domestic shortage. The country imports tur and urad dals from Myanmar. Consumer Affairs Secretary Nidhi Khare discussed with Indian Mission in Yangon issues relating to pulses



imports from Myanmar such as import prices in the wake of revised exchange rates and stocks held by importers in Myanmar, it said.

The ministry said that the Indian Mission informed the secretary that the Rupee/Kyat Settlement Mechanism has been operationalised from

January 25 this year to simplify trade transactions and to make them more efficient. The Central Bank of Myanmar released guidelines for payment procedures under SRVA on January 26, 2024. The Indian Mission also informed the secretary that the new mechanism will apply for both sea and border trade and for trade in goods as well as services. "Adoption of the mechanism by traders will reduce costs associated with currency conversions and eliminate complexities related to exchange rates by eliminating the need for multiple currency conversations," the ministry statement said. It said "dissemination about

the operationalization of this mechanism among trading communities especially pulses importers is being separately done wherein they are being requested to utilize Rupee/ Kyat direct payment system using SRVA through Punjab National Bank." Meanwhile, the government has asked importers and other industry players like millers, stockists, retailers etc to honestly declare their stock of pulses, including imported yellow peas, on a weekly basis on portal <https://fcainfoweb.Nic.In/psp/> from April 15. The ministry has also warned that anyone found to be indulging in forward trade of pulses would be dealt with firmly as per various

provisions of Essential Commodities Act. States and Union Territories have also been asked to enforce weekly stock disclosure by all stockholding entities and verify the stocks declared by them. Stocks in warehouses located in major ports and in pulses industry hubs should be verified from time to time and strict action should be taken on stockholding entities found to be reporting false information on stock disclosure portal, the statement said. The feedback from the industry and inputs from market intelligence relating to the stock position with various market players have been collated for further verification, it added.



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The country needs a "new breed of financial planning professionals" who can act as consultants for customers, Financial Planning Standards Board (FPSB) India CEO Krishan Mishra said. India currently has 2,731 certified financial planners (CFPs) who are currently working in the industry as well as practising individually, FPSB said in a statement. "Most people who are in the industry might be navigating their organisations very well but when it comes to their personal finances they also struggle, be it CEOs, CFOs, CHROs. "This is why we need to create a new breed of financial planning professionals who can be consultants for customers," Mishra said. Mishra was speaking to PTI on the sidelines of the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between FPSB India and Indian Institute of Foreign Trade (IIFT), Delhi on Friday to launch the Executive and Regular PG programs, integrated with Certified

Financial Planner (CFP) certification. "The collaboration underscores our shared commitment to excellence in education and our dedication to nurturing the next generation of financial planners equipped with a globally recognised CFP certification," Mishra said. "The beauty of the industry is that it not only helps you with employability but also with your entrepreneurship practice," said Mishra. The programme is designed to equip working professionals and students with the essential knowledge and skills required to excel in the field of financial planning, FPSB said. The course delves into investment planning in the first module, insurance, retirement and tax planning in the second module and estate planning and risk management in the third module, it said. FPSB India is a leading financial planning body in India and is dedicated to establishing, upholding, and promoting professional standards in financial planning throughout India.

India suffer 0-5 whitewash in Australia

PTI ■ PERTH

The Indian men's hockey team failed to avoid a 0-5 series whitewash after going down 2-3 in the fifth Test against Australia, completing a nightmare of a tour here on Saturday. The Indians entered the final game of the series after losing their previous four matches 1-5, 2-4, 1-2 and 1-3. The rubber was significant as far as preparation is concerned ahead of the upcoming Paris Olympics. Skipper Harmanpreet Singh (4th) and Bobby Singh Dhami (53rd) were the goal scorers for India, while Australia sounded the board through Jeremy Hayward (20th), Ky Willott (38th) and Tim Brand (39th). The Indians started the game with an attacking mindset. Jugraj Singh lobbed the ball up to Jarmanpreet Singh in the Aussie half but failed to connect with the forward line. India took the lead in the fourth minute through Harmanpreet from a penalty corner as he registered his third goal of the series.



Australia equalised in the 20th minute through Hayward, who scored his seventh goal of the series from a set piece.

India's reserve custodian Suraj Karkera made a fine save to deny Nathan Ephraums. Seconds from the half time,

Australia secured a penalty corner but Suraj Karkera kept India in the hunt by making an excellent save with his right

leg to deny Hayward. India started brightly after the change of ends and secured a penalty in the 37th minute but

Harmanpreet's flick missed the target. The Kookaburras stunned the visitors once again by taking the lead a minute later through Willott, who deflected the ball in front of the Indian goalkeeper Krishan Bahadur Pathak from Nathan Ephraums's inch-perfect pass. Australia added salt to India's wounds by extending the lead through an unmarked Brand who shot home from Eddie Ockenden's assist. The Indians had chances and secured another penalty corner in the 42nd minute but Amit Rohidas shot wide. The hosts too got two more penalty corners but the Indians defended well. India meant business and looked to put pressure on the Australian defence in the final quarter. Their efforts bore fruit when Dhami scored his first international goal with a reverse hit past Andrew Charter seven minutes from the hooter. But that was all India could manage as the Australian defence didn't commit any more mistakes, even though the visitors pressed hard.



Gaurav finishes Day 1 of Otago Rally in top three

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's fastest rally driver Gaurav Gill of JK Tyre put himself in contention for a podium finish after grabbing a top-three place at the end of the opening day of the Otago Rally in New Zealand. Gill and his New-Zealand-based co-driver Jared Hudson were third on the timesheets, a little over 30 seconds behind overall leader Jack Hawkeswood and 11 seconds adrift of second-placed Robbie Stokes. Gill and Hudson were piloting 2022 APRC champion and 10-time Otago Rally winner Haydon Paddon's Hyundai i20 N Rally2 machine. On day one, the drivers navigated through eight special stages. Gill lost fifteen seconds on stage 5 due to an error, but the triple-APRC champion offered proof of his outright speed by winning stages 4, 7 and 8. "It has been a very unique experience; the super-fast stages are so distinct and varied from one another that I would describe them as extremely fast. I have never

driven this fast before," said Gill, an Arjuna awardee. "We had a pretty good start in the morning stages, and now we're trying to become better at maintaining our rhythm on the trickier parts. We are up against cars more powerful than ours. That makes a difference, and the settings are ideal for them. "We are happy with our performance today and will try to replicate the same tomorrow, ensuring a podium finish," he added. The Otago Rally is amongst the most historic racing events in the world and has been held every year since 1976. This year, the rally has drawn a field of 117 cars, the largest in four years. A customary mix of challenging sections in the rally comprise 16 special stages. Over 144 km of competitive stages, the contestants demonstrated their driving prowess on Saturday. On Sunday, another 130 kilometres will be driven. Gill is competing at the Otago Rally for the first time. He is a three-time winner of the Rally of Whangarei, which also takes place in New Zealand.



Lazio booed by own fans

AP ■ ROME

Lazio players were booed by their own fans but they restored some pride after a recent poor run to beat bottom club Salernitana 4-1 and climb to seventh place in the Italian league. The capital club came into the match on the back of losses to rivals Juventus and Roma and fans displayed a banner reading "You Are Not Worthy Of Wearing Our Shirt" before the game. Recently appointed coach Igor Tudor was without a number of top players, Ciro Immobile and Matteo Guendouzi among them, but the home side showed character and was 2-0 up within 14 minutes against a team that has not won a game since December last year. Felipe Anderson opened the scoring with a solo goal on Friday after just six minutes and then Matias Vecino doubled Lazio's lead eight minutes later. Loum Tchaouna pulled one back for the visitors two minutes later with a powerful header but Anderson restored the two-goal cushion when he finished off an intricate passing move 10 minutes before the break. Danish winger Gustav Isaksen completed the rout three minutes from the final whistle just seconds after coming on as a substitute. The win did little to appease the angry home crowd but it moves Lazio a point above Napoli and one behind Atalanta, both of whom have games in hand. The result was another unhappy night for Salernitana in an already grim season. The club sits bottom of the table with just 15 points from a possible 96 and relegation is almost assured.

Dominant Radhika reaches women 68 kg final

PTI ■ BISHKEK (KYRGYZSTAN)

Radhika was the lone Indian woman wrestler who assured herself of a medal, her second at the senior Asian Championships, by reaching the 68kg final here on Saturday. Radhika, who won a silver at the U23 Asian Championships last year and also finished second at the senior Asian Championships



in 2022, put up a dominant show in her weight category. She won the first bout by technical superiority against Kazakhstan's Albina Kaigeldinova and then pinned Kyrgyzstan's Gulnura Tashtanbekova. She will now face Japan's Nonoka Ozaki in the gold medal bout. Shivani Pawar (50kg) lost her quarterfinal 'by fall' to Ziqi Feng but made it to the bronze medal round after

the Chinese entered the final. In 55kg, Tamanna lost her qualification round by a comprehensive 0-9 margin to Moe Kiyooka but since the Japanese reached the final, the Indian bounced back into medal contention. Pushpa Yadav (59kg) and Priya (76kg) also have a chance to end on the podium as their vanquishers also reached the finals to open the doors for them.

Amit returns to Indian squad for last boxing Olympic qualifiers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

World Championships silver medallist Amit Panghal has returned to the Indian squad, which saw wholesale changes for the final Olympic qualifying event, set to be held in Bangkok from May 25 to June 2. After Indian boxers' horrid run at the Olympic qualifiers in Italy last month, when not even one boxer could secure a quota, as many as five pugilists have lost their spot in the team for the second World Qualification Tournament. The dismal show also led India's High Performanc Director Bernard Dunne to

step down from his post. In the latest assessment, 2023 World Championships bronze medallist duo of Deepak Bhorla (51kg) and Mohammad Hussamudin (57kg), the six-time Asian Championships medallist Shiva Thapa (63.5kg), reigning national champion Lakshya Chahar (80kg) and 2022 Commonwealth games bronze medallist Jaismine Lamboria (60kg) have lost their spot in the Indian team. The country's lone men's world championships silver medallist (2019) Panghal, who won gold at the 2022 Commonwealth Games and the 2024 Strandja Memorial tournament, will get his first

and final chance to seal his passage to his second Olympic Games, having competed in the Tokyo edition. He had lost out to Bhorla repeatedly in the assessment, hence missing out on the two qualifying events for the Paris Olympics -- the Asian Games and the first World Olympic Qualifiers. Another Strandja gold medallist and national champion Sachin Siwach (57kg) has also returned to the squad, replacing two-time CWG medallist Hussamudin. Sachin had also competed at the Asian Games last year. Himachal Pradesh's Abhinash Jamwal, who has dropped



down from 67kg, scored more than the seasoned Shiva to earn a chance to compete in the light welterweight (63.5kg) category, while Abhimanyu Loura replaced

Lakshya in 80kg. Worlds bronze medallist Nishan Dev (71Kg), the lone boxer to go beyond his opening round in Italy, Sanjeet (92kg), and

Hangzhou Asian Games bronze medallist Narender Berwal (+92kg) have retained their spots. No male boxers from India has won a quota till now. In the women's category, Ankushita Boro, who failed to win a quota in the 66kg weight class in Itay has dropped to the 60kg category. She replaces Jaismine, whose performance has been disappointing at the international level. Reigning national champion and two-time world junior medallist Arundhati Choudhary emerged as the top performer in the 66kg weight class. India have secured four 2024

Olympic quota places so far with Nikhat Zareen (50kg), Preeti Pawar (54kg), Parveen Hooda (57kg) and Lovlina Borgohain (75kg) clinching their places at the Asian Games last year. India had nine boxers competing in the Tokyo Olympics. Squad: Men: Amit Panghal (51kg), Sachin Siwach Jr. (57kg), Abhinash Jamwal (63.5kg), Nishant Dev (71kg), Abhimanyu Loura (80kg), Sanjeet (92kg), Narender Berwal (+92kg) Women: Ankushita Boro (60kg), Arundhati Choudhary (66kg).

Indians still in hunt at Candidates Chess

PTI ■ TORONTO

Indian Grandmasters R Praggnanandhaa and D Gukesh would look to bridge the gap with leader Ian Nepomniachtchi of Russia when they restart their campaigns in the eighth round of the Candidates chess tournament here. Teen sensation Praggnanandhaa will be up against Frenchman Firouza Alireza, while Gukesh will take on compatriot Vidit Gujarathi when the tournament resumes on Saturday. While all three Indians have had a decent outing in the open section so far, it is defending champion Nepomniachtchi who is in prime position to complete a hat-trick of titles at the halfway stage. With 4.5 points to his credit, Nepomniachtchi would be happy with his performance



and stands as the favourite with half point more than nearest rivals Praggnanandhaa, Gukesh and top seed Fabiano Caruana of United States. Gujarathi on 3.5 points is known to rise towards the end of tournaments and one can expect him to come firing in the second half along with Hikaru Nakamura, who shares the fifth spot with him. Alireza comes next in standings on the seventh spot with 2.5 points, a half point clear of Nijat Abasov of Azerbaijan.

It has been a story of less hits and more misses for the Indian trio. Earlier in the event, Gujrathi had clearly outplayed Caruana and in the previous round too his position looked commanding against Abasov before settling for draws. Gukesh also enjoyed a great position against Alireza in the previous round and the Frenchman was under tremendous pressure with the clock ticking away too. However, luck did not seem to be on Gukesh's side and it took some serious mistakes on his part to hand the point to Alireza. Praggnanandhaa has been very solid and has shown tremendous preparation here. His black-piece draw with Caruana in a French defense was a case in point showing his tremendous confidence and his victory over Gujrathi earlier had already shown the risk-taking ability.

Theegala ensure weekend action, Woods sets cuts record at Augusta

PTI ■ AUGUSTA

Indian-Americans Akshay Bhatia and Sahith Theegala handled the tough and windy conditions on the second day to make the 36-hole cut at the 88th Augusta Masters here. Bhatia, 22, who won the Valero Texas Open last week, shot (72-75) to be T-30, while Theegala (74-74) was T-35, despite a triple bogey after the second round. "The wind, the swirling winds was tough. Certainly, there's not a lot of options to hit it close. It's a pretty tough stretch from 10, 11, 12, and I haven't taken advantage of the par-5s really," said Bhatia, who is playing his first Masters. World No. 1 Scottie Scheffler held on in strong winds for an even par 72 that included three birdies and three bogeys. Scheffler, who won the Masters in 2022, shared the lead with overnight leader



Bryson DeChambeau (65-73) and Max Homa (67-71) at 6-under 138. Tiger Woods, meanwhile, made more Masters history by making the cut for a record 24th consecutive time after carding a 72 to sit on 1-over. He is just seven shot behind the leaders on T-22. Before the tournament, Woods jointly held the record for most consecutive cuts at tournaments played with Fred Couples and Gary Player on 23.

"I'm here. I have a chance to win the golf tournament," said the 82-time PGA TOUR winner and five-time Masters champion. "I don't think anyone is going to run off and hide right now, but it's really bunched. The way the ball is moving on the greens, chip shots are being blown, it's all you want in a golf course today." On the physical challenge, he added, "Yeah, I'm tired. I've been out for a while, competing, grinding. It's been 23 holes, a long day. But I really did some good fighting today, and we've got a chance." Nicolai Hojgaard (67-73) was fourth at 4-under, while Cam Davis (69-72) and Collin Morikawa (71-70) after a long time came into contention in a Major, and they were T-5th. Ludvig Aberg was the only one to shoot under 70 with a 69 and he was 2-under after two rounds in seventh spot.



Japan advances to Billie Jean King Cup finals

PTI ■ LONDON

Japan has advanced to the Billie Jean King Cup finals without Naomi Osaka needing to play a second singles match. With Japan leading 2-0 after the opening day of singles play on Friday at Tokyo, Nao Hibino beat Kazakhstan's Yulia Putintseva 6-4, 3-6, 7-6 (7) to clinch the match for the home side on Saturday and advance Japan to the Cup finals in November in Seville, Spain. On Friday, Osaka hit 15 aces with a 6-2, 7-6 (5) win over Putintseva. It was the four-time Grand Slam champion's first match in the team competition since February 2020. Osaka's later singles match against Anna Danilina, who Hibino beat on Friday, was not played. Australia also advanced to the Seville finals earlier Saturday with a 3-0 win over Mexico. A total of 16 nations are involved in the qualifiers. Eight teams will join defending champion Canada, 2023 runner-up Italy, host Spain and wild-card selection Czech Republic in the 12-country Finals field.

Naomi, Iga and Emma earn wins in Billie Jean King Cup

AP ■ LONDON

Grand Slam title winners Naomi Osaka, Iga Swiatek and Emma Raducanu all won in Billie Jean King Cup qualifying. Osaka hit 15 aces and put Japan a step away from reaching the BJK Cup Finals with a 6-2 7-6(5) win over Kazakhstan's Yulia Putintseva on Friday. It was the four-time Grand Slam champion's first match in the team competition since February 2020. Osaka, back on tour after becoming a mother last July,

saved all three break points she faced and compiled a 31-16 edge in winners. Her win on an indoor hard court in Tokyo followed Nao Hibino's 6-1, 6-0 victory over Anna Danilina and gave Japan a 2-0 lead in the best-of-five-match qualifying round. Two other singles matches and one in doubles are scheduled for Saturday. A total of 16 nations are involved in qualifiers Friday and Saturday, with the winners advancing to the Billie Jean King Cup Finals in Seville,



Spain, in November. Those eight teams will join defending champion Canada, 2023 runner-up Italy, host Spain and wild-card selection Czech

Republic in the 12-country Finals field. The first team to move out of the qualifying round was Australia, which eliminated Mexico in Brisbane early Saturday, when Taylah Preston easily won 6-1 6-1 over Marcela Zacarias to make the overall score 3-0. With 2011 US Open champion Sam Stosur serving as Australia's captain for the first time, Arina Rodionova beat Mexico's Giuliana Olmos 3-6 6-3 6-1, and Daria Saville defeated Zacarias 6-1 6-0 for

the hosts on an outdoor hard court Friday. Australia, the runner-up twice in the last five years, is seeking its first title since 1974. In other action, No. 1-ranked Swiatek and Poland went ahead 2-0 at Switzerland, 2021 US Open champion Raducanu helped Britain finish Day 1 tied 1-1 at France, the United States led Belgium 2-0, Ukraine won both matches against Romania, Germany was ahead of host Brazil 2-0, host Australia took a 2-0 lead over Mexico, and Slovakia was up 2-

0 against visiting Slovenia. In Orlando, on an outdoor hard court, Jessica Pegula and Emma Navarro both turned around deficits to beat 19-year-old Belgian opponents as the Americans got off to a 2-0 start in Lindsay Davenport's debut as the U.S. Captain. Pegula escaped with a 4-6 6-2 6-3 victory against Sofia Costoulas, before Navarro topped Hanne Vandewinkel 4-6 6-4 6-3. In Amelia Island, Florida — where Ukraine chose to play these matches because of its

war with Russia back home - Elina Svitolina was a 6-3, 7-5 winner over Romania's Jaqueline Adina Cristian on an outdoor clay court, and Lesia Tsurenko beat Ana Bogdan 3-6 6-2 6-0. In Biel, Switzerland, Swiatek - who has won three championships at the French Open and one at the U.S. Open — broke Simona Waltert five times on an indoor hard court to win 6-3, 6-1, before Magdalena Frech came back to beat Celine Naef 6-7(8) 7-5 6-3.

Dhoni in spotlight as CSK, MI resume rivalry in new era

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The legendary Mahendra Singh Dhoni will be in the spotlight in what could be his final game at the iconic Wankhede Stadium when defending champions Chennai Super Kings take on Mumbai Indians in the Indian Premier League here on Sunday.

Dhoni returns to the hallowed turf of Wankhede for the first time ever as a non-captain of the CSK, potentially in his last IPL season. It will also be his first appearance as just a player for any team since November 2005.

Even at 42, Dhoni's glove-work remains impeccable and so does his assessment of the game like always. But CSK will hope that his tactical acumen also helps them improve a dismal away record this season, having suffered two defeats on the road.

CSK would also hope their recent record against MI — four wins in last five matches including their seven-wicket win here last season — holds them in good stead.

Two of IPL's most successful teams with five titles each, both sides are witnessing a tectonic shift of leadership change with Hardik Pandya taking over the mantle from Rohit Sharma at MI and Ruturaj Gaikwad succeeding Dhoni at CSK, but there is nothing that



suggests their intense rivalry would expect any such shift. If anything, CSK's bowlers could be put to sword by the rampaging MI batters who have gone hammer and tongs at the flat pitches here, scoring in excess of 230 against Delhi Capitals and chasing down nearly 200 against Royal Challengers Bengaluru with more than four overs to spare. Pandya's MI have found their footing after a jittery start. Their batters have done well in the last two outings and Suryakumar Yadav's 17-ball fifty against RCB provides an ominous sign to CSK bowlers, who have shown mastery on slow, turning pitches at the Chepauk but remain untested on flat, batting-friendly surfaces.

Ishan Kishan (161 runs) and Rohit's opening stand would thus be crucial in the scheme of things but CSK would also have a lot of assurance with

their own batting. Skipper Gaikwad may not be a marauder with the bat but he can be the silent enforcer in the CSK line-up, which has the exuberance of Rachin Ravindra at the top, sturdiness of Daryl Mitchell in the middle and explosiveness of Shivam Dube (176 runs), Ravindra Jadeja and Dhoni in the death overs. CSK would also be aware that seeing off the dexterous Jasprit Bumrah (10 wickets) and going after the rest of the MI bowling would be the key, since the others have given away runs at alarming rate while struggling with their line and lengths on placid surfaces.

Despite Bumrah's five-wicket haul, MI leaked runs at a high rate to allow RCB get closer to the 200-run mark here a few nights ago. A lot will be riding on Shardul Thakur and Tushar Deshpande for CSK, who both return to their home ground, but

Mustafizur Rahman (9 wickets) and the wily Jadeja would be the ones to watch out for given their recent exploits. On their part, teams say "we want to get as many runs as possible" but by the look of it, scores around 220-230 while batting first could be the best way possible to ensure an upperhand at this venue.

TEAMS (FROM): 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, Shivalik Sharma, Romario Shepherd, Arjun Tendulkar, Nuwan Thushara, Tilak Varma, Harvik Desai, Nehal Wadhwa, Luke Wood.

Chennai Super Kings: MS Dhoni (wk), Aravelly Avanish (wk), Devon Conway, Ruturaj Gaikwad (c), Ajinkya Rahane, Shaik Rasheed, Moeen Ali, Shivam Dube, RS Hangargekar, Ravindra Jadeja, Ajay Jadav Mandal, Daryl Mitchell, Rachin Ravindra, Mitchell Santner, Nishant Sindhu, Deepak Chahar, Tushar Deshpande, Mukesh Choudhary, Mustafizur Rahman, Matheesha Pathirana, Simarjeet Singh, Prashant Solanki, Shardul Thakur, Maheesh Theekshana, Sameer Rizvi.

KKR seek home comfort against Mayank less LSG



PTI ■ KOLKATA

Two-time champions Kolkata Knight Riders will seek home comfort in their bid to return to winning ways when they face a depleted Lucknow Super Giants in an Indian Premier League match here on Sunday.

The match will be KKR's first of the five matches at home on the trot and the Gautam Gambhir-mentored side will be fully aware this can prove decisive to clinch the play-off spot for the first time since 2021.

In the points tally, nothing separates the two teams, both of whom have secured three wins each, and lost their respective last-round matches. KKR's over-reliance on their Caribbean ageing duo of Sunil Narine and Andre Russell was exposed by defending champions Chennai Super Kings when they lost by seven wickets in their previous outing.

Narine (27) and Russell (10) failed with the bat and the team, who had posted two 200-plus scores from three matches on the back of the Caribbean duo's blazing form, could manage an under par 137/9 at Chennai.

That sums up KKR's batting that has relied on some odd fire-works and missed an anchor in the absence of Nitish Rana (finger injury), who is slated to sit out of another match.

In the spotlight since the beginning of the season, KKR captain Shreyas Iyer has failed to impress and his scores give an abysmal picture -- 0, 39 not out, 18 and 34.

Their another designated batter Venkatesh Iyer has three single digit scores this season to go with one odd fifty against Royal Challengers Bengaluru and the team, it seems, doesn't have a clear role for him.

From batting at No. 3 in their IPL opener against Sunrisers Hyderabad, Iyer was seen in the finisher's role at No. 7 and No. 5 in their last two matches. Ramandeep Singh also had a lean run after an impressive 35 against SRH.

The 2022 U-19 World Cup winning Angkrish Raghuvanshi has impressed the most following his 54 against Delhi Capitals. And

he will like to return among runs after failing to convert his start against CSK. The most-talked about signing Mitchell Starc's poor form with the ball has been the talk of the town.

The Aussie speed gun has an economy of 11.00 and took his first wicket of this IPL against DC after giving away 100 runs in the first two matches. Having come as Impact Subs, left-arm orthodox spinner Anukul Roy has been impressive and he would like to forge formidable partnership with Narine.

While KKR will be overwhelming favourites at Eden, LSG with their unassuming approach will not give up easily, even as they will miss their pace sensation Mayank Yadav for a second successive match.

Recovering from a side strain that ruled him out of their match against Gujarat Titans, Mayank is doing "good" but skipper KL Rahul has said that he may take "a couple of more games before coming back".

Mayank's replacement Arshad Khan failed to impress, conceding at 10.73 runs over as they failed to defend 167 at home against DC last evening.

Mohsin Khan, who claimed 2/34 against Punjab Kings, could be a perfect replacement but it remains to be seen if he's fully recovered from his hamstring injury that had sidelined the left-arm pacer. The team owned by Kolkata-based industrialist Sanjeev Goenka will hope for a much better show after mustering an average 167/7 against DC on Friday.

The likes of Quinton De Kock and Rahul will look to return among runs, while they also boast of a powerful line-up down the order with the likes of Marcus Stoinis and Nicholas Pooran.

That they also have a formidable slow bowling lineup in Ravi Bishnoi and Krunal Pandya will pose some tough questions for KKR batters.

TEAMS (FROM): Kolkata Knight Riders: Shreyas Iyer (c), KS Bharat, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Rinku Singh, Angkrish Raghuvanshi, Sherfane Rutherford, Manish Pandey, Andre Russell, Nitish Rana, Venkatesh Iyer, Anukul Roy, Ramandeep Singh, Varun Chakravarty, Sunil Narine, Vaibhav Arora, Chetan Sakariya, Harshit Rana, Suyash Sharma, Mitchell Starc, Dushmantha Chameera, Sakib Hussain and Mujeeb Ur Rahman.

Lucknow Super Giants: KL Rahul (c), Quinton de Kock, Nicholas Pooran, Ayush Badoni, Kyle Mayers, Marcus Stoinis,

Deepak Hooda, Devdutt Padikkal, Ravi Bishnoi, Naveen-ul-Haq, Krunal Pandya, Yudhvir Singh, Prerak Mankad, Yash Thakur, Amit Mishra, Shamari Joseph, Mayank Yadav, Mohsin Khan, K. Gowtham, Arshin Kulkarni, M. Siddharth, Ashton Turner, Matt Henry and Mohd Arshad Khan.



Bank of Maharashtra opened its 48th branch in Haryana at Taraori.

Bank of Maharashtra inaugurated its new branch at Taraori Haryana by the presence of Shri Mukesh Upadhyay, Chief Manager, Bank of Maharashtra. This new branch will provide smooth and timely high level customer service in the area, disbursing loans of retail, agriculture and MSME and all other types of loans, government schemes in the shortest possible time. Bank of Maharashtra, leading public sector bank, today inaugurated its new branch with state-of-the-art services at Taraori Haryana. With the opening of this branch, Bank of Maharashtra now has 48 branches in Haryana. The branch will cater to all basic banking transactions as well as specific banking needs of customers and provide a full spectrum of financial services and banking products to the retail, agriculture and MSME sectors.



PNB Mohali Board has Bank 130th of Establishment day celebrated

The 130th Foundation Day of Punjab National Bank was celebrated with great enthusiasm by the Divisional Office of Phase - 2 Mohali under the leadership of Divisional Head Mr. Pankaj Anand. The program was started by offering flowers to the statue of the bank's founder Shri Lala Lajpat Rai .

On the occasion of Foundation Day , Langar was organized in Phase 2 Mohali in which around 400 people took Prasad . Apart from this , health check-up camps and customer meetings were also organized in the branches . On this occasion, Sub Divisional Head Mr. Sanjeet Kaundal , MCC Head Sanjay Verma , Vijay Kumar Nagpal (Chief Manager), LDM M. Of . Bhardwaj , Ravi Kumar (Chief Manager), Sastra Chief Ramesh Kumar etc. were present.

Ponting advised me to focus on timing the ball: Fraser

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Delhi Capitals young batting sensation Jake Fraser-McGurk says if he could handle the nerves on his IPL debut, the credit goes to coach Ricky Ponting, who advised him to time the ball instead of swinging his bat wildly.

Fraser-McGurk, who turned 22 on Thursday, was handed debut on Friday against Lucknow Super Giants.


Fraser-McGurk, who holds the record for the fastest List A century in 29 balls, seized the opportunity with both hands, smashing a 35-ball 55 to set up their six-wicket win, that helped move up from the bottom of the standings. "My instincts are aggressive, but before I went out to bat, Ricky said just focus on the timing, middle the ball, don't try to hit it too hard," said the Victorian.

"That sort of helped me ease my nerves, went out there and had

a great innings, and hopefully continue doing it." He began by hitting six off Yash Thakur in the very second ball he faced, then he hammered Arshad Khan for a 96-metre six. But his biggest assault came against India spin bowling all-rounder Krunal Pandya when he spanked him for three sixes in a row to virtually kill the contest. "It's just the same thing I've been doing in every other game for the last eight months -- watch the ball, react to it and play to

your instinct," Fraser-McGurk, who struck five sixes and two fours during his innings, spoke about his approach. Having gone unsold at the auction, the young Aussie top-order batter, who has two ODI appearances, was signed at his base price of Rs 50 lakh as a replacement for Lungi Ngidi. Before IPL, the youngster played three matches for Dubai Capitals in the ILT20 this season where he scored 109 runs in his three innings at a strike rate of 213.72.

IDFC FIRST Bank Limited
(Formerly IDFC Bank Limited)
CIN : L65110TN2014PLC097792
Registered Office: KRM Towers, 8th Floor, Harrington Road, Chetpet, Chennai - 600031. TEL: +91 44 4564 4000 | FAX: +91 44 4564 4022.
AUTHORIZED OFFICER – Satyajay Kumar CONTACT NUMBER – 8340714030
AUTHORIZED OFFICER – Vaasu Bhasin CONTACT NUMBER – 8006555503




APPENDIX- IV-A
[See proviso to rule 8 (6)& 9(1)]
SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES
E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002
read with proviso to Rule 8 (6) & 9 (1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002
Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower (s) and Co-Borrower (s) as per column (ii) that the below described immovable properties as per column (iii) mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of Formerly known as IDFC Bank Ltd, will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is" On 30-04-2024 as described hereunder, for the recovery of amount due from Borrower (s) and Co-Borrower (s) as per column (i), due to IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (Formerly known as IDFC Bank Ltd). For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided in IDFC FIRST Bank website i.e. www.idfcfirstbank.com.

S. NO	(i) Demand Notice Amount	(ii) Name Borrower (s) and Co-Borrower (s)	(iii) PROPERTY ADDRESS	(iv) Reserve Price Amount	(v) EMD Amount	(vi) Date and Time of Auction	(vii) Date and Time of EMD Auction	(viii) Date of Inspection of Property
1	INR 3435764.87/- Demand Notice dated: 30-06-2021	1. PRADEEP KUMAR PVT. 2. AKASH ARORA & 3. JYOTI ARORA	PLOT PRIVATE NO. 2/1 MIN (MCANO. M-8/2578 (AS PER PROPERTY TAX RECEIPT) TOTAL AREA MEASURING 86.6 SQ.YD. KHASRA NO. 808 MIN AMRITASAR URBAN NO. 108, ABADI MEHARPURA GURBUX NAGAR, GALI NO. 23, CHHABHAL ROAD, AMRITSAR, PUNJAB-143001 AND, BOUNDED AS:-EAST: GALI 10 FT. WIDE, WEST: REMAINING AREA OF HOUSE, NORTH: PROPERTY OF CHAJJU & SOUTH: PROPERTY OF OTHERS	INR 1680750/-	INR 168075/-	30-04-2024 11.00 AM to 1.00 PM	29-04-2024 10.00 AM to 5.00 PM	24-04-2024 1.00 PM TO 4.00 PM
2	INR 1586069.94/- Demand Notice dated: 18-11-2020	1.JOGENDRA SINGH, 2.AMARJIT KAUR & 3.PIYARA SINGH	PROPERTY MEASURING TOTAL AREA OF 6 MARLA KHASRA NO 3853 MIN. AREA OF SULTANWIND URBAN ABADI KOT MIT SINGH AMRITSAR, PUNJAB – 143001.BOUNDED AS: NORTH: PASSAGE, SOUTH: TARLOK SINGH, EAST: SOHAN SINGH & WEST: OWNERSHIP OF TARLOK SINGH	INR 1101154.5/-	INR 110115.45/-	30-04-2024 11.00 AM to 1.00 PM	29-04-2024 10.00 AM to 5.00 PM	24-04-2024 1.00 PM TO 4.00 PM
3	INR 2353848.30/- Demand Notice dated: 23-01-2020	1.VARINDER SINGH, 2. JATINDER SINGH & 3. RANJEET KAUR	ALL THE PIECE AND PARCEL OF THE PROPERTY CONSISTING OF PLOT MEASURING TOTAL AREA 600 SQ YDS, MIN JUMLA KILA NO 66/23/2, 66/23/1, REVENUE ESTATE OF AREA VALLA TEH & DIST. AMRITSAR, 143001 ,EAST : HOUSE OF NIRANJAN SINGH, WEST : GALI 15 FEET WIDE,NORTH : PLOT OF RANJIT KAUR & SOUTH : REMAIN AREA OF LAND	INR 2846070/-	INR 284607/-	30-04-2024 11.00 AM to 1.00 PM	29-04-2024 10.00 AM to 5.00 PM	24-04-2024 1.00 PM TO 4.00 PM
4	INR 812701.60/- Demand Notice dated: 27-07-2022	1. BHARAT THAKUR & 2. ANITA DEVI	ALL THAT PIECE AND PARCEL OF H NO 514 MEASURING 2 MARLA 76 SQ. FT. (1 MARLA= 272 SQ. FT) NEW HARGOBIND NAGAR, VILLAGE NURPUR IN KHASRA NO.19/1/12(8-0), JALANDHAR, TESHIL & DISTRICT JALANDHAR, PUNJAB,144001 AND, BOUNDED AS: EAST: JOGRAJ/40'-0", WEST: CHAMAN LAL/ 40'-0", NORTH: OTHER/ 15'-6" & SOUTH: ROAD/ 15'-6"	INR 387423/-	INR 38742.3/-	30-04-2024 11.00 AM to 1.00 PM	29-04-2024 10.00 AM to 5.00 PM	24-04-2024 1.00 PM TO 4.00 PM

Disclaimer: Please note that the said notice is issued for sale of immovable property only and IDFC FIRST Bank Limited has no right to sale the movable assets, if any, present at the immovable property.

Date : 13.04.2024
Place: PUNJAB

Authorised Officer
IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (Formerly known as IDFC Bank Ltd)

SAPNE AAPKE, SAATH HAMARA

AAVAS FINANCERS LIMITED
(Formerly known as Au HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED) (CIN:L65922RJ2011PLC034297)
Regd. & Corp. Office: 201-202, 2nd Floor, South End Square, Mansarovar Industrial Area, Jaipur. 302020

AUCTION NOTICE
Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8(6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules, 2002
Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower (s) and Guarantor (s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of AAVAS FINANCERS LIMITED (Formerly known as "Au HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED") Secured Creditor, will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is" basis. The details of the cases are as under:

Name of Borrowers/ Co-Borrowers/ Guarantors/Mortgagors	Dues As on	Date & Amount of 13(2) Demand Notice	Date of Possession	Description of Property	Reserve Price For Property	Earnest Money For Property	Date & Time of Auction	Place of Tender Submission, Tender Open & Auction at Aavas Financiers Ltd.
MEENA RANI, Mr. JAI BHAGWAN SHARMA (Ac.No.) LNRKR02219-200108814	Rs. 2830679/- Dues as on 9 April 2024	10 May 23 Rs. 2362177/- Dues as on 8 May 23	5 Dec 23	A HOUSE COMPRISED IN KHEWAT NO.- 538/502, KHATONI NO.-694, SITUATED AT PATTI CHAUDHARY, KAITHAL, TEH. & DIST. KAITHAL, HARYANA ADMEASURING 239 Sq. Yard	Rs. 2344232/-	Rs. 234423/-	11.00 AM TO 01.00 PM 20 May 2024	2ND FLOOR, SCO-4, SECTOR-17, KURUKSHETRA-136118, HARYANA-INDIA

Terms & Conditions: 1). The person, taking part in the tender, will have to deposit his offer in the tender form provided by the AFL which is to be collected from the above branch offices during working hours of any working day, super scribing "Tender Offer for name of the property" on the sealed envelope along with the Cheque/DD/pay order of 10% of the Reserve Price as Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) in favour of AAVAS FINANCERS LIMITED payable at Jaipur on/before time of auction during office hours at the above mentioned offices. The sealed envelopes will be opened in the presence of the available interested parties at above mentioned office of AAVAS FINANCERS LIMITED (Formerly known as "Au HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED") The inter-se bidding, if necessary will also take place among the available bidders. The EMD is refundable if the bid is not successful. 2). The successful bidder will deposit 25% of the bidding amount adjusting the EMD amount as initial deposit immediately or within 24hrs after the fall of the hammer towards the purchase of the asset. The successful bidder failing to deposit the said 25% towards initial payment, the entire EMD deposited will be forfeited & balance amount of the sale price will have to be deposited within 30 days after the confirmation of the sale by the secured creditor; otherwise his initial payment deposited amount will be forfeited. 3). The Authorised officer has absolute right to accept or reject any bid or adjourn/postpone the sale process without assigning any reason therefore. If the date of tender depositing or the date of tender opening is declared as holiday by Government, then the auction will be held on next working day. 4). For inspection and interested parties who want to know about the procedure of tender may contact AAVAS FINANCERS LIMITED (Formerly known as "Au HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED") 201,202, 1Ind Floor, South End Square, Mansarovar Industrial Area, jaipur-302020 or Manoj Kumar – 8130291423 or respective branch during office hours. Note: This is also a 15/30 days notice under Rule 9(1)(8)(6) to the Borrowers/Guarantors/Mortgagor of the above said loan accounts about tender inter se bidding sale on the above mentioned date. The property will be sold, if their out standing dues are not repaid in full.

Place : Jaipur Date : 14-04-2024

Authorised Officer Aavas Financiers Limited

IDFC FIRST Bank Limited
(Formerly IDFC Bank Limited)
CIN : L65110TN2014PLC097792
Registered Office: KRM Towers, 8th Floor, Harrington Road, Chetpet, Chennai - 600031. TEL: +91 44 4564 4000 | FAX: +91 44 4564 4022.
AUTHORIZED OFFICER – Ashish Kumar CONTACT NUMBER – 7986174483
AUTHORIZED OFFICER – Vassu Bhasin CONTACT NUMBER - 8006555503



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E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002
read with proviso to Rule 8 (6) & 9 (1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002
Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower (s) and Co-Borrower (s) as per column (ii) that the below described immovable properties as per column (iii) mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of Formerly known as IDFC Bank Ltd, will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is" On 30-04-2024 as described hereunder, for the recovery of amount due from Borrower (s) and Co-Borrower (s) as per column (i), due to IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (Formerly known as IDFC Bank Ltd). For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided in IDFC FIRST Bank website i.e. www.idfcfirstbank.com.

S. NO	(i) Demand Notice Amount	(ii) Name Borrower (s) and Co-Borrower (s)	(iii) PROPERTY ADDRESS	(iv) Reserve Price Amount	(v) EMD Amount	(vi) Date and Time of Auction	(vii) Date and Time of EMD Auction	(viii) Date of Inspection of Property
1	INR 12195192.81/- Demand Notice dated: 11-04-2021	1.PAUL TENT INDUSTRIES (PROP. NARVINDER SINGH KALRA), 2. NARVINDER SINGH KALRA HUF, 3. PAUL AND SONS (PROP. JASMEET SINGH KALRA), 4. KHALSA BROS (PROP. NARVINDER SINGH KALRA), 5.JASMEET SINGH KALRA, 6.NARVINDER SINGH KALRA, 7. PREET KALRA, 8. PAUL TENT INDUSTRIES, 9. PAUL AND SONS & 10. KHALSA BROS	ALL THAT PART AND PARCEL OF HOUSE NO 615 ON PLOT MEASURING 524+190 TOATAL -714 SQ. YARDS, COMPRISED IN KHASRA NO. 568 SITUATED IN THE VILLAGE "ADHI ", TEHSIL & DIST. LUDHIANA AND BOUNDED AS: EAST: NEIGHOUR, WEST: STREET NORTH: MR. GURBACHAN SINGH & SOUTH: NEIGHOUR	INR 6301800/-	INR 630180/-	30-04-2024 11.00 AM to 1.00 PM	29-04-2024 10.00 AM to 5.00 PM	24-04-2024 1.00 PM TO 4.00 PM

Disclaimer: Please note that the said notice is issued for sale of immovable property only and IDFC FIRST Bank Limited has no right to sale the movable assets, if any, present at the immovable property.

Date : 13.04.2024
Place: LUDHIANA

Authorised Officer
IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (Formerly known as IDFC Bank Ltd)

NAVRATRI

A FESTIVAL OF TRADITION, INNOVATION, AND WELLNESS

Beyond its religious significance, Navratri embraces fasting practices that promote detoxification, improved digestion, and overall wellness. **DIVYA BHATIA** explores how this nine-day celebration intertwines spiritual devotion with a mindful approach to nourishment

Navratri, a nine-day festival celebrated in Northern India, holds immense significance, dedicated to Goddess Durga. Derived from Sanskrit, 'Navratri' signifies 'nine nights,' with each day devoted to one of Durga's nine forms. Falling twice a year, Navratri marks the onset of joyous festivities after the spring or during the harvest season. Legend surrounds Navratri, with stories of Goddess Durga's triumph over evil. Whether battling Mahishasura for nine days or seeking refuge in a cave at Vaishno Devi, fasting and feasting rituals commemorate these tales. Regardless of the narrative, Navratri heralds a season of exuberance, marked by vibrant celebrations and abundant sweets. During Navratri, adherents observe dietary restrictions, abstaining from grains and opting for satvik foods like Sabudana, kuttu, and rajgira. Fasting typically involves consuming only once or twice daily, with a focus on water, dairy, and fruits. Some prefer meals made from buckwheat or water chestnut flour, reflecting individual fasting preferences. Health experts advocate controlled fasting, citing benefits such as reduced inflammation, improved digestion, and enhanced overall well-being. Despite myths surrounding weight gain, Navratri fasting encourages a healthier lifestyle, emphasizing fruits, salads, and detoxification practices.

In recent years, the F&B industry has recognized Navratri's potential, leading to innovations in Navratri cuisine. Evolving with changing dietary trends, Navratri food offerings now cater to health-conscious consumers, featuring lighter cooking methods and nutritious ingredients. As people prioritize health during the festival, Navratri continues to inspire culinary creativity while promoting well-being. Adding to this spiritual significance, Chef Mani Mohan Pathak of Pilibhit House, Haridwar- IHCL SeleQtions, emphasizes the festival's evolution in the culinary world, stating, "Fasting is performed from ancient times, there are certain restrictions on fasting. Now fasting is getting fashioned, business, innovation and popular trends. Now the trend is towards healthier Navratri food options, with dietary preferences. The incorporation of superfoods like Makhana, quinoa and chia seeds, as well as creative twists on traditional recipes using ingredients such as sweet potato, sabudana, and buckwheat flour. Additionally, an emphasis on lighter cooking methods such as baking, or air frying, to reduce oil consumption. Overall, there's a growing awareness of nutrition and a desire to enjoy Navratri festivities without compromising on health goals." Agreeing with Chef Pathak, Chef Sreenivasan Govindarajan, Director Culinary, Radisson Blu Plaza Delhi Airport, shared, " In recent years, Navratra food trends have seen a steady focus on tradition with a subtle shift towards health consciousness and innovation. However, the fundamental choices in Navratra cuisine have remained largely unchanged. What's notable, though, is the growing emphasis on hygiene and the meticulous preparation of dishes. People today are more conscious about the cleanliness of their food, reflecting a broader trend towards prioritizing health and well-being even during cultural celebrations. This nuanced approach ensures that while the flavors remain traditional, each dish is prepared with care and attention to hygiene, meeting the evolving tastes and standards of modern times." While Navratri presents chefs with challenges, including limited ingredients, Chef Ashutosh Bisht of Crowne Plaza New Delhi Okhla remains undeterred. He explains, "Creating a menu that is both healthy and tasty within the constraints of limited ingredients poses a significant challenge. With a restricted palette of options, the key lies in maximizing flavor and variety despite the constraints." This sentiment is echoed by Chef Sreenivasan Govindarajan, who emphasizes the importance of balancing taste and nutrition in Navratri cuisine. He said, "Balancing taste and nutrition becomes paramount, requiring careful selection and preparation of ingredients to ensure that each dish is not only fulfilling but also delicious. Overcoming this challenge demands creativity and ingenuity in the kitchen, as chefs strive to craft flavorful Navratra meals that satisfy both the palate and the nutritional



Photo: Pankaj Kumar

SPIRITUAL FOOD

CHEF ADITI DIXIT, a culinary virtuoso at CYK Hospitality., is renowned for her innovative approach to gastronomy. With a passion for crafting exquisite dishes that tantalize the taste buds, Chef Dixit elevates dining experiences to new heights. Chef Aditi Dixit talked about Navratra offerings. Excerpts



What trends have you observed in Navratri food over recent years, particularly in response to increasing health consciousness and a desire for innovative dishes? In recent years, especially in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, several noteworthy trends have emerged in Navratri cuisine. These trends are predominantly driven by a growing awareness of health considerations and a desire for culinary innovation. One significant trend involves the use of healthier ingredients, where there has been a notable shift away from refined flours towards alternatives such as buckwheat flour, amaranth flour, kuttu flour, and water chestnut flour. These alternatives, being gluten-free and often considered healthier options, have gained popularity among health-conscious individuals. Moreover, there has been an increasing adoption of low-oil cooking techniques to reduce overall calorie intake and create lighter meals. Techniques such as baking, steaming, and air-frying have become preferred methods during Navratri, aligning with health-conscious dietary preferences. What benefits does Navratri food offer, and what challenges do you face when creating a menu that is both healthy and tasty within the limitations of ingredients? Navratri fasting offers several benefits when approached mindfully. It encourages the consumption of a diverse array of foods, including fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, and dairy products, promoting the absorption of essential nutrients, vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. Moreover, Navratri fasting emphasizes the intake of fluids such as water, coconut water, and herbal teas, aiding in hydration and overall well-being. For many, Navratri

fasting can also support weight control by emphasizing lighter, plant-based foods and avoiding processed and high-calorie options. However, creating a Navratri menu that is both healthy and flavorful comes with its challenges. Fasting during Navratri imposes restrictions on certain ingredients such as grains, pulses, onions, garlic, and common spices, necessitating creativity in utilizing alternative ingredients without compromising taste and nutrition. Additionally, maintaining a balanced nutritional profile, particularly in terms of protein intake, can be challenging due to limitations on traditional protein sources like lentils and beans. Hence, increasing the incorporation of dairy products, nuts, seeds, and plant proteins becomes crucial. Moreover, catering to individual allergies, intolerances, and dietary preferences adds another layer of complexity when designing a menu that caters to a diverse group of people observing Navratri fasting.

Could you share one of your most unique Navratri dishes that you've created recently, which has been particularly popular? Certainly! We recently introduced an extensive Navratri menu featuring innovative dishes such as sweet potato & amaranth kebab, vegan millet tikki, arbi tuk chaat, hasselback aloo chaat, paan rose lassi, and kesar pista lassi. Among these offerings, the sweet potato and amaranth kebab stands out for its unique and versatile flavour profile. It has garnered significant popularity among our patrons and remains a personal favourite of mine as well. Which ingredient do you find most versatile in Navratri cuisine? For me personally, sabudana, also known as tapioca pearls or sago, is an incredibly versatile ingredient commonly used during Navratri fasting. Its adaptability lends itself to a myriad of beloved dishes, including sabudana khichdi, thalipeeth, kheer, vada, salad, chivda, and papad, making it an indispensable element in Navratri cuisine.



HEALTHIER SHIFT IN NAVRATRI CUISINE

With a passion for blending traditional flavors with modern techniques, CHEF GAURAV has carved a niche for himself in the culinary world. His dedication to quality ingredients, attention to detail, and commitment to culinary excellence have earned him accolades from both diners and peers alike. Here he talks about Navratri food. Excerpts.

What trends have you observed in Navratri food over recent years, particularly in response to increasing health consciousness and a desire for innovative dishes? Over recent years, we've noticed a significant shift towards healthier ingredients in Navratri cuisine. Millets like Foxtail and Rajgira are now replacing refined sabudana in dishes like khichdi, offering a more nutritious alternative. Moreover, there's been an increased emphasis on incorporating fruits and vegetables, such as Buckwheat flour rotis stuffed with veggies and salads featuring ingredients like lotus stem and water chestnuts. Additionally, alternatives to dairy like almond milk, coconut milk, and soy milk are being used in dishes like halwa, cheela, and puddings. These changes reflect a growing desire among people to celebrate Navratri while maintaining a

healthy lifestyle. What kind of benefits does Navratri food offer? What challenges do you face when creating a menu that is both healthy and tasty with limitations of ingredients? Navratri food, despite its limitations in ingredients, offers a surprising range of health benefits. The focus on whole grains, legumes, fruits, and vegetables provides a detoxifying effect, improves digestion, and boosts immunity. However, creating a menu that is both healthy and tasty can be challenging due to restrictions such as no onions, garlic, or certain grains. The key lies in getting creative with spices, herbs, and alternative flours to craft flavorful dishes that satisfy the palate while meeting dietary requirements. Could you share one of your most unique Navratri dishes that you've

created recently, which has been super popular? Certainly! One of our most beloved Navratri dishes is our Tandoori Sweet Potato Chaat. We start with tandoor-roasted sweet potatoes, which are then tossed in a vibrant medley of mint chutney (crafted without onion and garlic), sweet and tangy dates chutney, a touch of rock salt (sendha namak), crushed black pepper, a squeeze of lemon juice, and chopped green chilies. Finally, we add a delightful crunch of roasted peanuts and crispy fried potato laccha. It's a harmonious blend of textures and flavors that has quickly become a Navratri favorite among our patrons. Which ingredient do you find most versatile in Navratri cuisine? Chef: Black pepper.



Photo: Pankaj Kumar

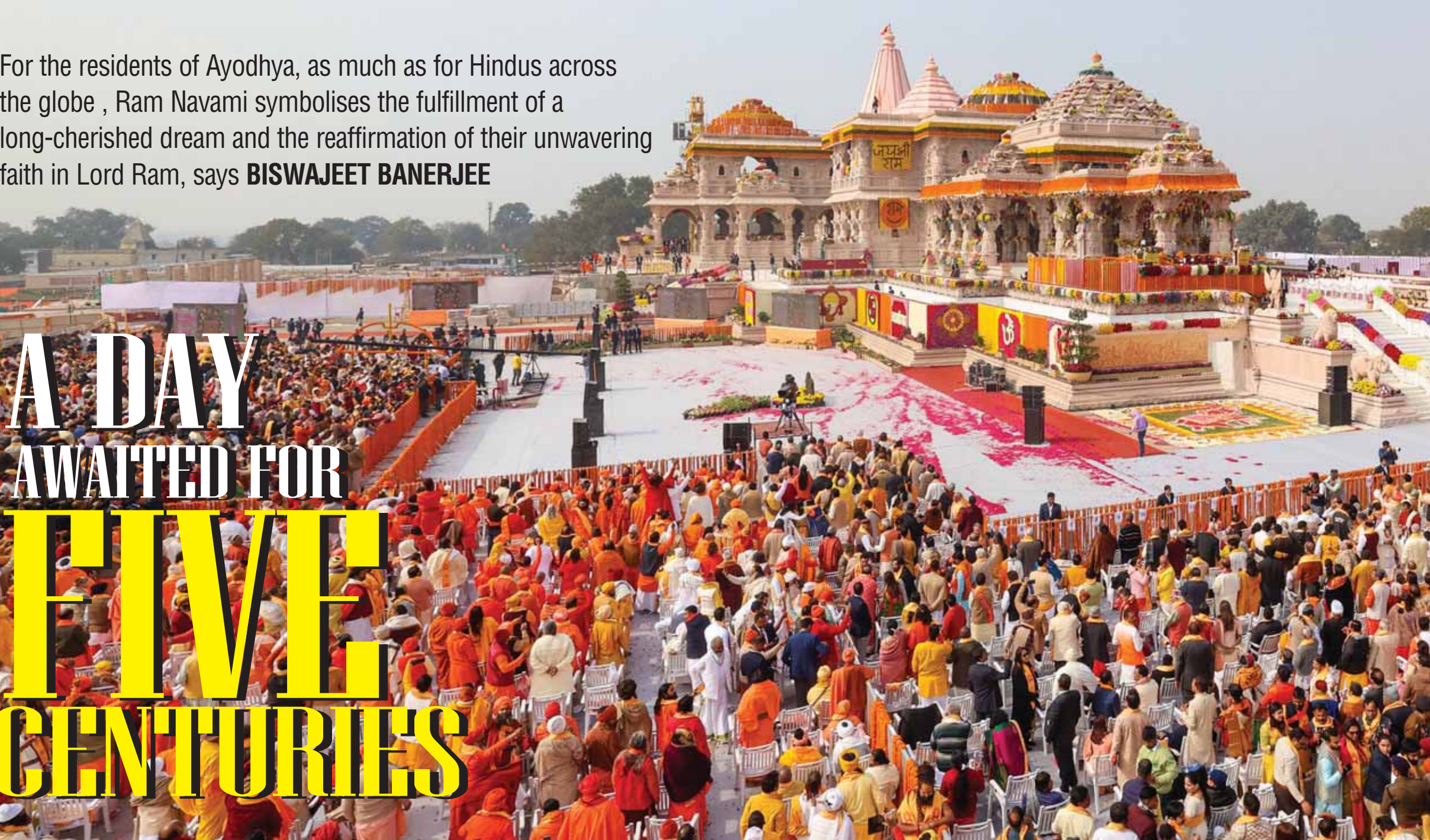
ripening. This innovative twist has yielded fantastic results, offering a healthy and delicious alternative to traditional Navratri fare," he shared. Whereas, Mr. Kamal Kanth, Executive Chef, Sambarpot, defines his 'Kashmiri dum aloo with stuffed paneer, khoya & dry fruits' as the person's favorite from Navratra thali. What surprised us were Sabudana Dumplings that are created by Chef Deshraj Punia, who shared with pride, "We give them a unique twist by

shallow frying them, which makes them look like a fusion dish. They're cooked in desi ghee, which is good for both your skin and stomach, and they taste really delicious and light. " Bringing out the best dish also depends on the ingredients used in creating the best dish. But with limitations of options, innovation is key to success. Ingredients like Potato, Sweet Potato, Buckwheat, all are there, but which ingredients are most versatile? Chef Ashutosh Bisht thinks it's curd as he rightly pointed out its benefits. It can be used to create refreshing drinks, flavorful subzi preparations, or even desserts. Additionally, it's a great source of energy that can be digested quickly, making it an ideal component for Navratri meals. According to Chef Mani Mohan Pathak, the key ingredient is potato/ sweet potatoes and sabudana. Potato is been used plain boiled/ fried and roasted. Further, potato is used in sabudana khichdi, tikkis, sabzi, and even kuttu ki puris or parathas made from potato flour. Overall, we can say that Navratri brings with it a delightful culinary experience that caters to both tradition and taste. This vibrant festival has brought out the creative side of the F&B world and continues to inspire many without compromising on health.



For the residents of Ayodhya, as much as for Hindus across the globe , Ram Navami symbolises the fulfillment of a long-cherished dream and the reaffirmation of their unwavering faith in Lord Ram, says **BISWAJEET BANERJEE**

A DAY AWAITED FOR FIVE CENTURIES



AYODHYA, the ancient city steeped in the rich tapestry of Hindu mythology and history, is poised to witness an unparalleled spectacle as it gears up to celebrate its first Ram Navami following the consecration of the majestic Ram Mandir. The air is filled with anticipation and reverence as devotees from all corners of India flock to this sacred land to partake in the festivities honoring Lord Ram, the epitome of righteousness and virtue.

Months of meticulous planning and fervent preparations have culminated in the grandeur that envelops Ayodhya today. The city, adorned with vibrant colors and resounding chants of "Jai Shri Ram," exudes an aura of spirituality and devotion that is palpable in every nook and cranny.

The consecration of the Ram Mandir, a momentous event that resonated deeply with millions of devotees across the globe, has added an extra layer of significance to this year's Ram Navami celebrations. For the residents of Ayodhya, it symbolizes the fulfillment of a long-cherished dream and the reaffirmation of their unwavering faith in Lord Ram.

Radha Sharma, a local resident, encapsulated the sentiments of many when she said, "This Ram Navami holds a special place in our hearts. It's not just about celebrating the birth of Lord Ram; it's about witnessing the fruition of our faith and devotion."

As the countdown to Ram Navami begins, devotees throng the Ram Mandir, eager to offer their prayers and seek the blessings of the divine. The atmosphere is electric with fervent devotion as chants of "Jai Shri Ram" reverberate through the streets, transcending linguistic and cultural barriers.

Ramesh Singh, a pilgrim from Bihar, echoed the sentiments of countless others as he remarked, "Ram Navami is not just a festival; it's a spiritual journey. Being here in Ayodhya, amidst the sacred surroundings, fills my heart with joy and peace."

At the heart of the celebrations lies the Ram Mandir, believed to be situated at the very spot where Lord Rama, the seventh avatar of Lord Vishnu, was born. For devotees, it is not merely a structure but a sacred sanctum that serves as a beacon of hope and divine connection.

ADMINISTRATION STRATEGY
As Ayodhya braces itself for the influx of around 50 lakh devotees in all nine days of Ram Navami, the administration has meticulously crafted a comprehensive crowd management strategy to ensure the safety and convenience of all participants. The maximum rush of 25 lakh-30 lakh devotees is expected on the Ram Navami day of April 17 – when people take a dip at river Saryu.



Ram Navam A Celebration of Faith and Virtue

Ram Navami transcends the realms of mere festivity; it embodies a profound reaffirmation of faith and the timeless virtues exemplified by Lord Rama. Though revered as a deity, Lord Rama epitomizes the human manifestation of a divine force, embodying qualities of righteousness and compassion that resonate with every individual. The celebration of Ram Navami serves as a spiritual compass, guiding devotees towards a path of benevolence and virtuosity, fostering personal growth and evolution.

As the culmination of the nine-day Chaitra Navratri celebrations, Ram Navami holds a special significance, particularly in Ayodhya, the birthplace of Lord Rama. The Hindu month of Chaitra, heralding the transition from spring to summer, sets the stage for this auspicious occasion, elevating its sanctity and joy.

The celebration unfolds with a prayer to the sun at the break of dawn, symbolizing the dawn of enlightenment and spiritual awakening. At midday, a special prayer commemorates the divine birth of Lord Ram, invoking blessings and divine grace upon all. The spirit of celebration extends beyond the temples, as Rath yatras or chariot processions of Lord Ram, accompanied by his consort Sita, brother Lakshman, and devoted Hanuman, traverse the streets, spreading joy and spiritual fervor. The devotees converge on the banks of the sacred Sarayu River, immersing themselves in its purifying waters, seeking spiritual rejuvenation and divine blessings.

BRING SATTU TO STAY COOL

As temperatures soar in anticipation of Ram Navami, the Ram Mandir Trust has issued a special plea to devotees: bring along Sattu. Recognized for its cooling properties, Sattu, a traditional flour, promises respite from the scorching heat, ensuring the well-being and comfort of pilgrims during their visit to Ayodhya.

Champat Rai, the Convener of the Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, underscored the significance of hydration and maintaining a cool



demeanor amidst the festivities. He urged devotees to embrace Sattu as a means to combat the sweltering temperatures, emphasizing its effectiveness in beating the heat.

With the welfare of devotees at the forefront, the Trust's initiative aims to ensure a pleasant and comfortable experience for all pilgrims as they partake in the sacred celebrations of Ram Navami in Ayodhya.

(Additional reporting done by BP Singh from Ayodhya).

In anticipation of the monumental crowds expected to throng the city, a strategic deployment of magistrates and police personnel has been planned. Heightened security measures will be implemented at sensitive areas and major temples, including the Ram Janmabhoomi temple, to prevent any untoward incidents. Efforts are underway to facilitate smooth entry and exit at the Ram Janmabhoomi temple, with the Trust exploring multiple entries and exits to avoid potential stampede-like situations. Additionally, arrangements have been made to provide water and mats on open floors, considering the approaching hot weather conditions, ensuring the comfort of devotees.

To address any medical emergencies, round-the-clock medical facilities with extra beds will be available in both government health institutions and private hospitals. Traffic management will be streamlined, and vigilant monitoring will be conducted to identify and segregate any criminal elements.

The administration is leaving no stone unturned to enhance safety and convenience for devotees taking a dip in the sacred Sarayu River during Ram Navami. Additional fiber motorboats have been deployed, and barricades will be set up in the river to regulate the flow of people, facilitating secure access for devotees.

Moreover, elaborate arrangements are being made for public toilets and regular cleaning, with over 2,000 sanitation workers mobilized for this purpose. Chief Secretary Durga Shankar Mishra affirmed, "We have taken all necessary precautions to ensure the safety of pilgrims and residents alike. Our priority is to facilitate a peaceful and joyous celebration of Ram Navami."

ECONOMIC STIMULUS THROUGH FESTIVITIES
The festivities have not only kindled the flames of spirituality but have also breathed new life into Ayodhya's economy. Local businesses have witnessed a surge in sales

of religious artifacts, sweets, and traditional attire, as tourists and pilgrims alike immerse themselves in the spiritual ambiance of the city.

Ram Gupta, a local businessman, remarked, "The consecration of the Ram Mandir has brought prosperity to Ayodhya. We've seen a significant increase in sales, and tourists are eager to experience the cultural heritage of our city."

Behind the scenes, skilled artisans have toiled tirelessly to craft intricate idols and decorations for the celebrations. From colorful rangolis adorning the streets to ornate idols of Lord Ram, Sita, and Lakshman, their craftsmanship adds a touch of elegance to the festivities, showcasing Ayodhya's rich cultural heritage to the world.

Ram Das, one such artisan, shared his sentiments, "For us, this Ram Navami is not just about business; it's about contributing to something larger than

ourselves. Crafting these idols is a way of expressing our devotion to Lord Ram and our love for our heritage."

Footfall in these days is tremendous bringing smiles on the faces of hoteliers. Sharad Kapoor, Director, Shaane Awadh Hotel told this reporter that not a single room is available till Ram Navami. "All the hotels, home stays and dharmashalas are booked, and the hospitality sector is doing very well since January 22," he said.

Ram Navami is not merely a commemoration; it is a transformative journey, a celebration of faith, virtue, and the eternal triumph of good over evil. As the devotees unite in reverence and devotion, Ayodhya reverberates with the timeless chants of "Jai Shri Ram," echoing the enduring legacy of Lord Rama's divine grace and benevolence.



MY WIFE NEELAM IS A NORTH INDIAN, SO SHE
WILL MAKE NORTH INDIAN FOOD, WHILE MY
MOTHER WILL MAKE BENGALI FOOD
—RONIT ROY

Chandigarh, April 14, 2024

SHUBHO NOBO BORSHO

Today is *Poila Boishakh*, a day when Bengalis across the globe usher in their new year. And what better way to celebrate than food. **SHOBORI GANGULI** joined the feast and festivities at Hyatt Gurugram with critically acclaimed **CHEF ANANYA BANERJEE** whose signature take on a traditional Bengali feast made it a special day indeed



The first day of the Bengali New Year is not just another date on the calendar to mark for rituals and ceremonies. It is all about cultural bonhomie, dance and music, a day to let your hair down, meet friends and family over a grand meal, a day when even the most humble of kitchens becomes the fulcrum of all celebrations, with everyone on the lookout for a feast to remember. Truth be told, nothing can vie with the spirit that enwraps all of Bengal this day. But for *probashi* (non-resident) Bengalis like me, scattered across the country, we crave to partake of a sumptuous spread, course by course, from a traditional kitchen this special day which, for many of us, dwells only in the realms of nostalgia.

In this context one draws immense consolation from the fact that roving itinerant chefs like Ananya Banerjee are rewriting centuries old traditional manuscripts, rich with secret spices and untold innovations, for a generation that is clawing back to find its roots today.

The Chef's Bengal Bhoj at Hyatt this weekend provided that exact opportunity. For my generation, Chef Banerjee's creations are a warm and nostalgic embrace from a distant past when our tiny lives revolved around our grandmother's or mother's kitchens, a time when festivals meant food, each meal a feast. Little did we know back then that as we grew older we would simultaneously travel far away from those kitchens, from their aromas and flavours.

It is therefore heartening to know that someone like Chef Banerjee, while keeping her much wider international clientele in mind, has carved a unique niche for herself in her quest to recover the history and philosophy that informs Bengal's exquisite culinary heritage. As



CHEF ANANYA BANERJEE



she puts it, that while going traditional, "I tend to be very progressive when I curate a Chef's table."

True to her promise, the Chef laid out a lavish *Poila Boishakh* spread, from a live Bengali street food counter of *Phuchkas* and *Churmur* to appetizers like *Chicken Kobiraji*, *Mochaar Chop* and *Bhetki Paturi* or the vegetarian alternative of *Paneer Paturi*.

The main course meandered its delectable way through *Phulko Loochi*, *Chholar Daal*, *Kosha Maangsho* and *Aloo Posto*. Accompanied by steamed rice were Chef Banerjee's innovative twists to the traditional *Prawn Malai Curry* and *Lebu Lonka Murgi*.

Bengalis are never far behind when it comes to desserts. Even after a rich and sumptuous meal, there's always space left to accommodate some *mishti* to sign off a great feast. Chef Banerjee's Baked *Roshogulla* with *Jhola Nolen Gur* (a liquid syrup of date jaggery) delicately poured on top was really an elixir from heaven. So was the *Patishapta*, crepes with a rich filling of grated coconut and *khejurer gur* (date jaggery). The *Mango Baked Yogurt* too beckoned our undivided attention.

Even as technology takes over our time and lives, and reels and Instagrams provide instant and vicarious pleasure to millions of viewers, nothing in the world can ever replace the wholesome sensory experience of enjoying a good meal real time, even as our senses come alive to the sight, aromas, textures and sounds of a live kitchen. The one attribute that sets Chef Banerjee apart from the rest of her tribe is the personal attention she devotes to every guest. She flits



around the entire dining hall, at times personally mixing the magical *phuchka* filling to the guests's satisfaction, or taking them on a guided tour through her handcrafted menu, her play with spices and herbs writ large on the fare she puts out. Chef Banerjee's energy and vivacity is truly infectious, her culinary creations "something to live for," as a friend at the table put it.

A very Happy New Year to all of you out there!

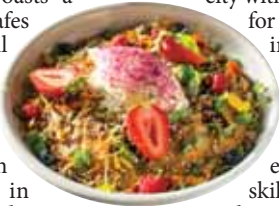
(Please reach out for the May Edition of our magazine EXOTICA for a detailed story on the above)

EXPLORING THE WORLD OF SINGLE ORIGINS, FLAT WHITES, AND BEYOND!

Melbourne boasts an abundance of café choices that can enchant even the most dedicated caffeine enthusiasts

BY RUPALI DEAN

Woven deeply into Melbourne's essence, caffeine has long coursed through the veins of this vibrant Australian city. With its cobblestone alleyways and hidden gems, Melbourne boasts a staggering array of cafes that number well above a thousand. With only two days to explore this caffeinated paradise, I decide to embark on a sensory journey in pursuit of the perfect brew. Opting for a guided excursion to delve into Melbourne's coffee tapestry, I booked a walking tour led by a knowledgeable local. The tour, starting at Tulip Coffee, introduced me to Monique Bayer, the passionate founder of W a l k Melbourne.



Savouring a meticulously crafted single origin and a robust house blend espresso, Monique gently unveiled the rich history of Melbourne's coffee culture, tracing its origins back to the 1950s with the iconic Pellegrini Espresso Bar—a legacy brought forth by Italian immigrants infusing the city with their profound love for coffee. The Italians' indelible influence catalysed a coffee revolution, paving the way for a proliferation of expert roasters and skilled baristas in the early 2000s. Today, Melbourne stands as a coffee connoisseur's haven, where the alluring aroma of freshly brewed espresso dances through laneways and spills onto bustling streets. Amidst this caffeinated symphony, as I indulged in various espresso creations, my palate gravitated towards the comforting familiarity of the house blend complemented by a hint of milk, embracing the city's love affair with coffee—one fragrant sip at a time.

A PLETHORA OF PASSION

Hailing from Tasmania, the industrious Bayer curates around three tours weekly, meticulously orchestrating bespoke experiences for small groups of no more than ten individuals. The genesis of her guided tours can be traced back to a leisurely café expedition with like-minded coffee enthusiasts in September 2012, sparking the



inception of her immersive walking adventures. Immersed in the ambrosial world of coffee, I found myself savouring a potent single origin espresso, a departure from my usual cup of joe. As Monique divulged the emerging predilection for filter coffee—a gentle brewing method that

intrigued my taste buds—she promised to introduce me to this nuanced approach during our escapade. The art of coffee filtration, she explained, unfolds like a scientific exploration, offering an array of techniques to unlock diverse flavours and aromas. Monique's insatiable quest for hidden local treasures



Monique Bayer



A local coffee maker

unearthed gems like Bean by Workshop Bros, discreetly marked by a modest overhead sign, and Industry Beans, celebrated for its trendy ambiance and revered for concocting Melbourne's velvety Aussie Flat Whites. In her relentless pursuit of culinary marvels, she unveils these well-kept secrets, enriching our expedition with tantalizing discoveries at every turn.

COFFEE LOVE

Immersed in the vibrant tapestry of Melbourne's coffee culture, I found myself navigating a world of tantalizing options tailored even to those adhering to a paleo diet. The allure of butter coffee, touted for its purported benefits of heightened vitality and

drive, beckoned from establishments like Patch Café in Richmond and Seedling in Flinders Lane, promising a unique caffeinated experience. Enlightened by Monique's insights, I learned that a true Melbournian's relationship with coffee hinges on quality, with subpar brews failing to captivate discerning palates. Amidst the lively chatter of coffee aficionados, terms like cupping, siphon, AeroPress, and pour-over resonated across the eclectic coffee shops lining our path, each method a testament to Melbourne's fervent coffee affair.

Our sojourn led us to Maker, where I indulged in the intricate

art of filter coffee, opting for the elaborate cold drip variant—a meticulous 12 to 24-hour extraction process that accentuates the bean's essence while tempering bitterness. Here, I unearthed the enchanting novelty of frozen coffee, a departure from the conventional iced coffee of my homeland, where coffee is customized, frozen, and preserved until beckoned for consumption.

In Melbourne, coffee transcends mere refreshment; it is a sacred ritual, where reverence for the brew and the bean intertwine seamlessly. As the day unfolded with myriad caffeine-infused revelations, this latest discovery stood as a crowning jewel, a testament to a city that embraces coffee with a sanctity unmatched elsewhere.

(Awarded the "Best food writer in the country" by the Indian culinary forum, WACS and the ministry of Tourism, Rupali Dean writes on food and travel.)



