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IRAN-ISRAEL: ON THE
BRINK OF WAR OR HYPE

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Bihar ravaged by drugs deluge after liquor ban

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■
PATNA/BHAGALPUR

The ban on liquor is ideally taking a toll in all aspects including social, economical on the citizens of Bihar. While the ‘banned’ alcoholic substance is made available easily by ‘peddlers’ in form of women and children, what is worrying the elderly generation of the State is the proliferation of drugs in form of ganja, cocaine, heroin and other psychotropic substances. Beggars too are involved in transportation of liquor to in the dry State of Bihar.

What the concerned people term “sukha nasha” has penetrated deeply in villages, rural areas, towns and cities and youths particularly teenagers, college students, daily wagers are hooked to these illegal intoxicating agents taking a toll on the future of Bihar once known as land of Buddha and Mahavira. The liquor ban which came into force almost seven years ago is ruining the health of youths and economy since all kinds of brands are “smuggled” from neighbouring Nepal, Assam, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand.

Lallan Mahota, a resident of Bihiya in Patna, when asked about what is the major concern in the ensuing general elections, expressed dismay over the precarious situation bothering majority of the household in the State. “Sukha Nasha ghus chuka hai Sir. Sharab bund ho gaya lekin youth tarah tarah ke drugs le rahe hain. Yahan har varg ke log ko inka naam bhi pata ho gaya jo Bihar mein jaanta bhi nahi tha. Sarkarein soyi hai,” Mahto said. He meant to say drugs which the people of Bihar never knew are conveniently available while the Government is in

deep slumber. As far as liquor ban is concerned, Faraz, from Nathnagar in Bhagalpur, said the ban is only on paper and administration while anyone desires to consume liquor they get it delivered. The modus operandi is more vulnerable. “Alcohol is supplied by using kids in their school bags or women folks worth ₹100-₹200 as delivery charge as there can be no needle of suspicion on them. People from poor background are more into this and what will shock you is that those involved in this illegal supply



chain of liquor have become lakhapatis (millionaires). Any kind of brand is available twice its original price and hence the ‘traders’ have built homes of marble,” Faraz said and also took this journalist to show one of the duplex (though unverifiable) that was built in two years time by a person who was into manihari (cosmetic hawk). Unfortunately and interestingly, those who cannot afford such expensive liquor or drugs get intoxicated by use of tertiary forms like cough syrups, nail polish spirits, shoe lotions, thinner, diluter and many more.

In most of the cities, including Muzzafarpur, Darbhanga, Purnea, Katihar the above mentioned daily use items are difficult to find as they are considered for use of minor hallucinations. The use of shoe lotions or spirit is rampant and these are used by young people by rolling the open can of shoe lotion in a piece of cloth like handkerchief or dhoti and then inhaled for intoxicate self. The family which are prone to above mentioned issues are now talking openly about their wards involvement either in liquor peddling for

want of money or their wards being prey to use of the sukha nasha. “My 21-year-old son is on gaanja dosage. I took him to rehabilitation centre in Phulwari near Patna even. He is still into it and when taken to task he threatens to harm himself. I have no option but have urged my son to take only two times a day. I have also given him a tea stall to keep him engaged. He supports his gaanja intake by liquor peddling in a bag of a leading coaching institute in Patna city,” explained Vishnu Yadav, a hamlet near Malighat Chowk in Muzzafarpur.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma during a public meeting for Lok Sabha elections, in Jalore, on Sunday

PTI

Country punishing Congress for its sins: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
JALORE/NEW DELHI

In a veiled attack on Congress leader Sonia Gandhi for choosing the Rajya Sabha, Prime Minister Narendra Modi without naming her on Sunday said those who cannot win an election have taken the Rajya Sabha route to Parliament. Addressing a public meeting in Rajasthan’s Jalore, Modi said, “Jo log chunav nahi lad sakte, jeet sakte (those who can’t contest and win an election) fled the ground and took the Rajya Sabha route.” Jalore will go to the election in

the second phase on April 26. Modi also addressed a rally in Banswara in support of BJP’s Mahendrajeet Singh Malviya. Former Congress president Sonia is among the MPs elected to the Rajya Sabha from Rajasthan in February. In a major decision, Sonia vacated her Raebareli seat citing her health condition. The Congress is yet to announce any candidate from Raebareli, and so is the BJP for the seat that will go to the polls on May 20. Several Congress veterans have not been fielded in this Lok Sabha election, but the party has rejected suggestions

that they were shying away from contesting. Congress first sent a leader from South (KC Venugopal) to the Rajya Sabha from Rajasthan; then Rajasthan helped former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. “Manmohan was ill for a long time. But was he ever seen here in Rajasthan? Now Rajasthan has again come to Congress’s help. Another Congress leader (Sonia) has been elected from Rajasthan to the Rajya Sabha,” he said. Modi said the country is punishing the Congress for its

“sins” and the party that had once won 400 seats is unable to contest 300 seats in this Lok Sabha election. “In the first phase of voting, half of Rajasthan has punished Congress. Rajasthan, which is full of patriotism, knows that Congress can never make India strong,” Modi said. He said the country does not want the conditions which existed before 2014 to return. “The Congress has hollowed out the country by spreading termites of nepotism and corruption.

And today, the country is angry with the Congress and is punishing it for these sins. The youths are so angry that they do not want to see the Congress’ face again.” Modi was addressing the public meeting in Bhinnmal in support of BJP candidate Lumbaram Choudhary. “They have formed an opportunistic INDI Alliance, (it is like) a kite whose string has been cut before it could fly,” he said. Modi said it was an alliance only in name as its constituents were fighting against each other in many States.



Kerala poll campaign reaches crescendo

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Election campaign for the Lok Sabha poll to be held in Kerala reached a crescendo by Sunday, the last Sunday before the April 26 polling. Unemployment, poverty, farmers and fall in standards of education are out of e narratives as secularism, pluralism and safety of minorities are the hotly discussed topics in public rallies as well as street side meetings across the state. The three glamour stars of the CPI(M), Sitaram Yechury, Prakash Karat and Brinda Karat (popularly known as the “available polit bureau”) are rocking the State with their claims that their political outfit is the most secular one in the world.



“Secularism which is better than our secularism could be seen only in dreams,” the trio speak in unison while blaming the Narendra Modi Government for destroying the secular fabric as well as pluralism of India. “No force in this world could raise their fingers at Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan or his family members. Vijayan is the best chief minister and administrator India has ever seen. His life is dedicated to serve the poor and downtrodden in the country. His name is synonymous with secularism of the highest order,” thundered Yechury while addressing rallies at Thiruvananthapuram and Kochi. The CPI(M) general secretary also dared Modi, the BJP and the ED to arrest Pinarayi Vijayan against whom they have foisted many fake cases. “No scams have taken place in the cooperative banks of the State and no financial irregularities have come to the notice of the State government. What business the ED has got to do in Kerala?” asked Yechury.



INDIA Bloc leaders throng Ranchi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ RANCHI

The leaders of INDIA Bloc, including the wives of jailed Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and former Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren allege that the BJP-led Centre is ruling the nation with the sole agenda to topple non-BJP State Governments and put them behind bars by faking charges. While Kejriwal’s wife Sunita accused the Central Government of denying insulin to her husband alleging that it wants to kill him, Hemants wife Kalpana alleged the BJP was trying to topple Governments in Opposition-ruled States. Both spoke at the INDIA Bloc ‘Ulgulan Nyay’ rally, which was attended by leaders of 28 parties. Addressing the joint rally in Ranchi as part of campaign for the Lok Sabha polls, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on hit out at the BJP for trying to “terrorise” Hemant Soren, and asserted that the JMM leader preferred going to jail rather than parting ways with the INDIA bloc. He was addressing the Opposition INDIA Bloc’s ‘Ulgulan Nyay’ rally at Prabhat Tara ground in Ranchi, which was attended by leaders of the anti-BJP alliance. Kharge also attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi, alleging that he insulted President Droupadi Murmu and the tribal community by not inviting her to Ram temple consecration and



Leaders of Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) during ‘Ulgulan Nyay’ rally, in Ranchi, on Sunday

PTI

inauguration of the Parliament building. Addressing the rally, Sunita asserted that the opposition INDIA bloc will fight against the “dictatorship” of the BJP and win. “They want to kill my husband Arvind Kejriwal. His food is under camera observation; he is denied insulin. My husband is a sugar patient who has been on insulin for 12 years; he needs 50 units of insulin daily,” Sunita said at the Ulgulan Nyay Rally in Ranchi. “We will fight against dictatorship and win. The gates of jail will break and Arvind Kejriwal and Hemant Soren will come out,” she said. Kejriwal was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on March 21 in a money laundering case linked to the now-scrapped Delhi excise policy. He is lodged in Tihar jail. The ED also arrested



Soren on the night of January 31 in a money laundering case linked to an alleged land fraud. Kalpana also read out a message from jail by her husband Hemant Soren. “Arvind Kejriwal and my husband Hemant Soren were jailed just before the elections by forces that were hatching conspiracies against their governments,” she alleged. Reading out her husband’s message, she said, “Central agencies such as the ED and CBI are being misused to suppress the opposition’s voice but BJP and such forces will be driven out from Jharkhand.” Urging the people to show the “exit doors” to the BJP, she claimed that if the party wins the ongoing elections it would be a “big threat” to tribals. Kalpana Soren is likely to contest the bypoll to the Gandey Assembly seat, which is slated for May 20.

BJP, AAP political showdown over insulin for Kejriwal

STAFF REPORTER ■
NEW DELHI

Amidst politics over surrounding Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal’s diabetes treatment in Tihar jail, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader and Delhi Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj on Sunday alleged that the Tihar authorities have requested a diabetologist from AIIMS, contradicting their earlier claim of adequate medical facilities for diabetics in the prison. After the AAP shared a letter written by the Director General of Prisons requesting a senior AIIMS doctor for Kejriwal, countering the prison authorities claim of adequate medical facilities in Tihar jail, Samajwadi party president Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday said high-level cognisance should be taken of the news that he is being denied insulin. Yadav in a post on X said, “Kejriwal has a fundamental right to good health. This news is unbelievable that he is being denied insulin to control his rising sugar level in jail. Immediate high level cognisance of this news should be taken and it should be found out whose instructions are behind this conspiracy.” He



also used the hashtag ‘Give_Insulin_to_Kejriwal’ and ‘Nahi_Chahiye_BJP’ in his post. Reacting to this, South Delhi BJP candidate and leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri said the AAP is trying to make Kejriwal’s issue alive to get sympathy vote in the upcoming Lok Sabha. “AAP leaders are playing a victim card but they are silent on corruption in their eight years rule. Team Kejriwal is the biggest liar in the country. Their politics depends on fake narratives. Look how they conduct four to five press conferences on the same issue, just to spread lies,” he added.

Carrying insulin, the workers and leaders of the AAP protested outside the Tihar jail in west Delhi on Sunday and demanded that insulin be given to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal who is suffering from diabetes. Delhi Cabinet Minister Atishi and AAP MLA Sanjeev Jha were present at the protest site. Scores of party workers carrying placards saying ‘Kejriwal ko insulin do’ sang ‘Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram’ outside the jail. Earlier, AAP Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj hit out at the jail administration — alleging a flip-flop — and reiterated the party’s claim that a conspiracy was being hatched for Arvind Kejriwal’s “slow death” in the prison. The Delhi Minister alleged manipulation in Kejriwal’s treatment, claiming that a normal doctor’s recommendations were being used to deny the CM insulin. Meanwhile sources said doctors from AIIMS Delhi provided a 40-minute consultation to jailed Kejriwal in Tihar Jail via video conferencing on Saturday, during which he was assured of no serious health concerns and was advised to continue taking the prescribed medicines.

India grapples with erratic weather

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

With the India Meteorological Department (IMD) predicting light rain on Monday in the national Capital, Delhiites might get respite from the relentless hot weather they experienced in the last two days. Overall, India currently finds itself divided between two relentless and erratic weather patterns, providing no relief to residents. If Odisha and a few other States are experiencing unabated scorching heat, with temperatures soaring to as high as 42 degree centigrade and prompting the issuance of an orange alert, Himachal Pradesh is grappling with heavy rain and snowfall, resulting in infrastructure damage and road

closures. Unfortunately, the situation is not expected to improve in the next few days. The IMD has issued an orange alert for Odisha and West Bengal for the next two days, signaling a severe heat wave. Additionally, a yellow alert has been issued for Jharkhand, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu for the next five days due to scorching temperatures prevailing across several states. These alerts highlight the severity of the weather conditions and emphasize the need for caution and preparedness among residents. In response to the intense heat wave, the Odisha government has declared summer vacation for school students from April 25, following a three-day closure of all schools from April 18 to 20



File Photo

due to temperatures exceeding 45 degrees Celsius in some areas. On Saturday Odisha reported its first death due to heatstroke in Balasore district while 71 people have been admitted in various hospitals due to heat related illness, as per the reports.

Conversely, for Himachal Pradesh which is grappling with heavy rain and snowfall, the IMD has issued a yellow alert for the next two days, warning of thunderstorms with lightning at isolated places on April 22 and 23.

The Himalayan State Government has reported closure of approximately 104 roads, with Lahaul and Spiti bearing the brunt with 99 closures. The heavy rainfall has also caused a bridge to wash away in Kangra, as reported by the Himachal Pradesh State Disaster Management Authority. The yellow alert signifies severely bad weather lasting for several days and suggests that the weather conditions could worsen, leading to disruptions in daily activities. The temperature in Delhi is expected to hover around 38 degrees Celsius in the next two-three days. After this, the temperature may increase slowly by 1-2 degrees. “In Delhi, our estimate is that the temperature is expected to remain around 38

degrees Celcius in the coming 2-3 days. After this, it may increase slowly by 1-2 degrees and with it, there is a possibility of light rain on Monday,” Senior scientist of IMD Delhi, Naresh Kumar said. In addition to immediate weather concerns, the IMD has forecasted an above-normal rainfall season across the country during the southwest monsoon. This forecast, indicating rainfall reaching 106 per cent of the Long Period Average (LPA), comes amid moderate El Nino conditions over the equatorial Pacific region. However, projections suggest that the El Nino condition may weaken to neutral El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO) conditions in the early part of the monsoon season.

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Cong Struggling with Defections Ahead of June 1 polls in Punjab

Congress-loyalist families — Capt Amarinder, Chaudhary, Jakhar, Beant Singh — ending decades-long associations

MONIKA MALIK ■ CHANDIGARH

As the state is bracing for the June 1 Lok Sabha elections, the Congress party is finding itself ensnared in a web of internal dissent and a flurry of high-profile defections in Punjab. With the battleground set and political alliances crystallizing, the Congress is grappling with a crisis of unity that threatens to undermine its electoral prospects.

The political landscape of Punjab is witnessing a seismic shift as families, deeply entrenched in the Congress fold for decades, are now bidding adieu to the grand old party, and that too in the run up to Lok Sabha elections. The departure of traditional Congress families — including Patiala royal family, the Jakhars, the Chaudharys, and the kin of the slain chief minister Beant Singh — marked a watershed moment in the state's political history.

These families, whose names were synonymous with Congress allegiance, are now charting a new course, aligning with rival political outfits like the BJP. The family of Capt Amarinder Singh, his wife and former Union Minister Preneet Kaur, along with their son Jai Inder Kaur and daughter Raninder Singh — known for their three-generation association with the Congress — have joined the BJP. Sunil Jakhar, who is the son of stalwart Congress leader Balram Jakhar, is currently the state BJP chief. His nephew, Sandeep Jakhar, is the third generation Congress leader and currently MLA from family bastion Abohar.

The Chaudhary family's legacy in Dalit politics of Doaba spans three generations, showcasing their enduring influence in the state's political landscape. Since 1936, the family has been a formidable presence in every Punjab assembly election. Rooted in a tradition of public service, the late Master Gurbanta Singh, a seven-time Congress MLA and former Punjab agriculture minister, laid the foundation for the family's political journey. His son, Chaudhary Jagjit Singh, followed in his footsteps, serving as a former Lok Government Minister. Continuing this legacy, his brother Santokh Singh Chaudhary emerged victorious thrice in electoral battles, upholding the family's political heritage. Now his wife Karamjit Kaur Chaudhary has shifted allegiance to the BJP, with their son Vikramjit Singh Chaudhary being Congress MLA from Phillaur.

Ludhiana MP Ravneet Singh Bittu, grandson of former Chief Minister Beant Singh, also walked over to BJP ditch-

ing Congress. His family including his cousin Gurkirat Singh Kotli, and uncle Tej Parkash Singh are still with Congress.

This exodus not only underscored the growing discontent within the Congress but also signaled a broader realignment of political alliances in the region. As Punjab braces for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, the absence of these iconic Congress families is expected to leave a void for the Congress that could redefine the state's political landscape for years to come. Punjab Congress president Amrinder Singh Raja Warring had recently claimed that the party had achieved a significant milestone by establishing a robust organizational structure, extending its reach down to the grassroots level. However, his assertion now stood in stark contrast to the visible disarray within the party as the process of ticket allocation unfolds. The Congress has, as of now, announced the names of six candidates for Punjab, out of a total 13, with remaining seven to be declared anytime now.

Soon after, the fissures within the Congress ranks became increasingly apparent as prominent leaders opt to defect to other political outfits, citing growing disillusionment and discontent. The exodus of leaders not only reflected individual grievances but also underscored broader systemic challenges that the party faced in maintaining cohesion and unity.

In the politically-pivotal state of Punjab, the departure of stalwarts such as two-time Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh and former MP Sunil Jakhar had dealt a severe blow to the Congress. These defections, occurring amidst the fervour of the Lok Sabha elections, have further eroded the party's stronghold in the region. Moreover, the decision of families with deep-rooted ties to Congress — such as the late Beant Singh's family and the Chaudhary family of former Minister Master Gurbanta Singh — to align with the BJP added to the party's woes.

The ongoing exodus of leaders during the critical phase of ticket distribution has exacerbated the existing challenges confronting the Congress. While defections are not uncommon across political spectrums, the Congress, it seemed, particularly susceptible to internal discord, particularly in Punjab's political landscape. The inability to address mounting discontent has rendered the Congress vulnerable, with its leadership struggling to contain the fallout from successive defections. Unlike leaders of yore, such as Capt Amarinder or Sunil Jakhar, the incumbent state party chief Warring lacked the same gravitas, charisma, and trust among senior party members. While Warring brought youthful energy to the table, his leadership

Traditional Cong Families Leaving 'Hand'	
Patiala Royal family	Maharani Mohinder Kaur, her son Capt Amarinder, his wife Preneet Kaur, their daughter Jai Inder Kaur and son Raninder Singh
Jakhars	Balram Jakhar, Son Sajjan Kumar Jakhar, His Brother Sunil Kumar Jakhar, His Nephew Sandeep Jakhar
Beant Singh	Beant Singh, son Tej Parkash and daughter Gurkanawal Kaur, grandchildren Ravneet Bittu, Gurkirat Singh Kotli, Guriqbal Kaur
Chaudharys	Master Gurbanta Singh, son Chaudhary Jagjit Singh, his brother Santokh Singh Chaudhary, his wife Karamjit Kaur Chaudhary, their son Vikramjit Singh Chaurdhary

style has yet to strike a delicate balance between appeasing both senior and younger leaders.

This predicament extended beyond him. The leader of Congress Legislative Party (CLP) and the Leader of Opposition in Vidhan Sabha Pratap Singh Bajwa and the state party affairs' in-charge Devendra Yadav are also finding themselves navigating similar challenges in fostering party unity amidst a wave of defections.

Historically, the Congress has relied on heavyweight state unit in-charges like Asha Kumari, Harish Rawat, or Harish Chaudhary to steer the ship, their towering stature providing a semblance of stability amid turbulent waters. Yet, the appointment of Devendra Yadav, whose political clout pales in comparison, has left the Congress grappling with the fallout of a fractured leadership.

In the face of mounting dissent and the steady exodus of prominent leaders, the Congress is currently standing at a crossroads. The party's ability to reconcile internal differences, restore unity, and project a cohesive front will ultimately determine its electoral fortunes in the impending Lok Sabha elections. However, with each departure of a prominent figure, the task becomes increasingly arduous, casting a shadow over the party's prospects and raising questions about its ability to weather the storm.

Cong to Declare Names of Remaining Candidates Anytime

Top Congress leaders from Punjab on Sunday met the party high command in New Delhi to discuss the party's Lok Sabha poll candidates for Punjab's remaining seven seats. Sources said that the next list of candidates will be announced "very soon". The meeting of Congress Election Committee was chaired by party president Mallikarjun Kharge and attended by former party chief Sonia Gandhi, senior leaders Salman Khurshid and Ambika Soni, among others. Sources said that several names were discussed, and the list will

be announced anytime now.

Kaypee Likely To Join SAD

Former Congress MP from Jalandhar and ex-PPCC chief Mohinder Singh Kaypee has decided to join the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), sparking speculation about his potential candidacy with the party. Kaypee's meeting with SAD president Sukhbir Badal on Friday hinted at his inclination towards joining the party and possibly contesting in the upcoming elections. Notably, Kaypee's decision could set the stage for a family rivalry as he is likely to take on his relative, Congress candidate and former Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi. Notably, Kaypee's daughter is married to Channi's nephew. Reports suggest that he had also met the central Congress leadership last week, indicating a desire for a ticket from Hoshiarpur.

Cong's Internal Rifts Give BJP Edge in Perception Game in Chandigarh

MANOJ KUMAR ■ CHANDIGARH

Internal problems are coming to the surface in the Congress party in Chandigarh as the former Union Minister and four-time Member of Parliament (MP) Pawan Kumar Bansal is yet to join the party candidate Manish Tewari's campaign in the city.

With the announcement of his name as the candidate for the Chandigarh parliamentary constituency, Tewari has launched door-to-door campaigns, public meetings in colonies, and sectors in the city. However, senior Congress leader Bansal has abstained from attending any party meetings or daily public meetings organized by the local unit in various parts of the city.

Tewari, during his campaigning across the city, has been accompanied by Chandigarh Congress president HS Lucky and other senior leaders including city's former mayors Subash Chawla, and Ravinder Pal Singh Pali. During the campaign, Tewari is indulging in detailed interactions with the people, and also inquiring about various problems being faced by the residents and businessmen in these areas.

Those watching the political developments in the city maintained that Congress party's internal rifts have given Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) the edge in the perception game in June 1 Lok Sabha election. Knowing this fact, senior BJP leaders in Delhi are unhappy with the state of affairs in Chandigarh and have asked the leaders to put up a united front and refrain from speaking against each other.

Notably, internal squabbles came to the fore in the Congress party unit after the high command, on April 13, had announced the name of party's Anandpur Sahib MP and former Union Minister M a n i s h

Tewari as the local party candidate from Chandigarh, with senior party leader Pawan Bansal and city president Harmohinder Singh Lucky also in race.

With this, two-time MP Tewari and senior BJP leader Sanjay Tandon are locked in a tight contest for the lone Chandigarh parliamentary constituency.

Furthermore, having won the Lok Sabha polls from Chandigarh four times in 1991, 1999, 2004 and 2009, Bansal was denied the ticket this time. He had also contested the polls in 2014 and 2019, but lost to BJP's Kirron Kher.

The internal rift in Chandigarh Congress further widened with the resignation by office-bearers, who are close to former MP Bansal.

Some office-bearers, including the local unit secretary Nitin Rai Chauhan, have left the party in support of Bansal. Moreover, over 100 party leaders and workers, including party vice-president Hafiz Anwar-ul-Haq and Mahila Congress president Deipa Dubey, have submitted resignations, demanding removal of local party president HS Lucky for liking an Instagram post that mocked Bansal for losing the ticket, an allegation he has vehemently denied.

According to sources, Bansal, who was a ticket con-

tender, has not been campaigning for the Congress candidate. He and his supporters also skipped the first office-bearers' meeting with Tewari. Recently, the city Congress in-charge Rajeev Shukla met the local leaders, apparently to placate him and know about the current situation in the party.

Sources further said during the meeting with Shukla, Bansal put forth several points. It lasted for about an hour. Talking to reporters, Shukla said: "Bansal ji is not angry. He is a very senior and respected leader and is committed to the party."

Moreover, rebels are seeking Congress president HS Lucky's ouster over his social media posts. The leaders are annoyed with Lucky for sharing a post on the social media that read "Bansal ke sath hua khela" after Tewari was named the Congress candidate for the city Lok Sabha seat. Lucky shared videos of a few leaders, who said they had not resigned.

However, the senior Congress leader said that there are no internal problems within the party and that all leaders are together, so there was no need to harbour suspicions. Party leaders are not angry with Manish Tewari but some had issues with Lucky only, they added.

Tewari promises regularization of colonies outside Lal Dora

Senior Congress leader and Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) candidate

for Chandigarh parliamentary constituency Manish Tewari on Sunday conducted a door-to-door campaign at Mauli Jagran area and Sector-29 in the city. At Mauli Jagran, appealing for their vote and support, Tewari also enquired about the problems people were facing and assured to resolve these. He also promised the regularization of the houses built outside the Lal Dora, which is a long pending demand of the residents. Moreover, Tewari interacted with the residents of the city in Sector 29 and focused on the matters concerning the area.

Tandon seeks vote from Punvanchali community

BJP candidate from Chandigarh Sanjay Tandon on Sunday met the people from Purvanchal living in the city, at the Grain Market or Subzi Mandi. On the occasion, they extended support to Tandon by weighing him against laddoos. The event was organized by the Purvanchal Prakosth. Pointing to the difference between BJP and Congress, Tandon said: "Don't forget who has looted the country and who has done the development of the nation. The Modi Government is pro-poor and Modi is the guarantee of development." Moreover, during the event, vegetable vendors and shop owners of the grain market raised various issues with Tandon such as a designated place for street vendors with proper facility, tinsheds to be made for the vendors, and road construction within the Sabzi Mandi. Tandon assured that their issues will be resolved with utmost priority if he is elected to power.

HP CM Slams BJP for Fielding Congress Rebels in Bypolls

Says announcement of Congress candidates for 2 parliamentary, 6 assembly seats soon

PNS ■ KANGRA

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu on Sunday did not hold back in his criticism of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for their decision to field six Congress rebels in the upcoming byelections. Sukhu vehemently expressed his disapproval of the BJP's move, labeling it as a betrayal of democratic principles and an opportunistic approach to politics.

"The BJP's decision to field Congress rebels is unacceptable and goes against the spirit of democracy. By giving tickets to those who have defected from our party, the BJP is showing a lack of respect for democratic norms and values. Despite this, we, the Congress, remain steadfast in

our commitment to democratic principles," Sukhu declared.

Asserting the Congress' right to determine its own candidates, Sukhu emphasized that the party would soon announce the names of its candidates for the remaining parliamentary constituencies and assembly by-elections. "The BJP has no right to talk about the ticket distribution of the Congress. BJP has given tickets to Congress rebels. We have 40 days left until the elections, and we are actively preparing to contest. Our Ministers and leaders are tirelessly campaigning in various constituencies, connecting with voters, and highlighting our vision for the state... Voters will give a befitting reply to how the BJP has tried to topple the government," he added.

Sukhu's remarks underscored the Congress's historical role in upholding democracy and national security. "Throughout history, the Congress party has been at the forefront of defending democratic principles and safeguarding the security of our nation. The sacrifices made by

two Prime Ministers from our party for the unity and integrity of our country are a testament to our commitment to democratic values," he emphasized.

Highlighting the Congress' contribution to strengthening democratic institutions, Sukhu pointed out landmark initiatives such as providing 33 per cent reservations to women in the Panchayati Raj system. "The Congress has laid a strong foundation for democracy through progressive policies aimed at empowering marginalized communities and ensuring equal representation for all," he remarked.

The political arena in Himachal Pradesh is gearing up for crucial elections, with voting scheduled for June 1 for the state's four Lok Sabha seats and six assembly constituencies. These assembly seats were left vacant following the disqualification of rebel Congress MLAs who defied party directives during crucial legislative votes.

Facing dissent on allocating tickets to Cong rebels, BJP

may change candidates: Dy CM

Una: Senior Congress leader and Deputy Chief Minister Mukesh Agnihotri on Sunday launched a scathing attack on BJP's ticket distribution strategy, expressing his dismay over saffron party's decision to allocate tickets to Congress' former MLAs, who switched sides to the saffron party after facing disqualification from the state assembly.

Agnihotri, addressing the media, highlighted the discontent within the BJP ranks, stating that the party cadre felt suffocated by the nomination of these six rebels. These individuals had previously voted in favour of the BJP's candidate, Harsh Mahajan, during the Rajya Sabha elections.

Deputy Chief Minister suggested that the BJP might face internal dissent due to its ticket allocation, hinting at the possibility of candidate changes for the upcoming assembly bypolls.

No possibility of candidate changes for bypolls: BJP

hits back

Shimla: Swiftly retaliating against Deputy Chief Minister Mukesh Agnihotri's claims, BJP leader Sat Pal Satti on Sunday refuted any possibility of candidate changes for the bypolls and accused the Congress of internal strife and incompetence. Satti alleged that the Congress' inability to finalize candidates for two Lok Sabha seats and six assembly constituencies showcased the party's dwindling influence and organizational inefficiency.

Further lambasting the Congress, Satti criticized the alleged prevalence of corruption in the state and highlighted the purported lack of coordination between the party and the government. He asserted that Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu and Deputy Chief Minister Agnihotri were struggling to find suitable candidates for their respective constituencies due to this disarray. Satti contended that internal discord plagued the Congress, with the party's high command rejecting candidates proposed by the state leadership.

Poll Buzz

Cong does not even have candidates: Vij

Ambala: Haryana's former Home and Health Minister Anil Vij on Sunday said that the Congress is struggling to find candidates in the state, and in the past 10 years, Congress has not had any organization. "In contrast, BJP has formed teams at national, state, district, constituency, ward, and booth levels, and BJP is a democratic party," he said. Responding to the delay in announcing Congress candidates, BJP MLA from Ambala Cantonment told the reporters that Congress will field candidates when they have them. "They are just searching desperately," he quipped, adding that he would "campaign with full force in my constituency. That's my responsibility".

Cong's fight is only to cross 40: Thakur slams INDIA bloc

Hamirpur: Claiming that the "corrupt coalition" of the opposition's INDIA bloc will be wiped out in the Lok Sabha polls, the Union Minister Anurag Thakur on Sunday said that Congress' fight is only to "cross 40 seats". He said: "INDI alliance partners and these princes (Rahul Gandhi and Akhilesh Yadav) want this (BJP to be reduced to 150 seats) but their intentions will

never be fulfilled. They had come together before as well but the public had wiped them out. This time again, this coalition of corrupt people will be wiped out in Lok Sabha polls...I want to tell Rahul Gandhi that neither in 2014 nor in 2019, the public made you win. This time too, Congress' fight is only to cross 40, the public will bless BJP with absolute majority and to cross 400."

Forget "murgi and bakri", AAP yet to give compensation for crops as well: Warring

Chandigarh: Punjab Congress president Amrinder Singh Raja Warring on Sunday underscored the plight of state's farmers under the governance of both the BJP-led Central Government and the AAP-led State Government. Emphasizing Congress party's steadfast commitment to agricultural prosperity, PPCC chief outlined the comprehensive guarantees aimed at securing the future of farming. Elaborating on AAP-led Punjab Government's inadequacies, Warring said: "Despite pledging to ensure MSP for Moong dal, AAP Government has faltered, procuring a mere 11 per cent of the produce, thus backtracking on their

commitments. This paltry procurement extends to other crops as well, exacerbating the plight of farmers who find their produce languishing in grain markets, susceptible to weather conditions such as rains and hailstorms." Also highlighting the dearth of compensation for farmers amidst natural calamities, he asserted, "The floods witnessed in Punjab prompted lofty assurances from AAP Government, promising compensations for livestock losses alongside crop damages. However, these pledges remain unfulfilled, with disbursements falling significantly short of the promised amounts. It is lamentable that a party which boasted of facilitating MSP within minutes now feigns ignorance regarding the procedural intricacies of MSP implementation."

BSP announces 4 candidates for HP Lok Sabha polls

Shimla: Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) on Sunday announced its candidates for all four Lok Sabha seats in Himachal Pradesh. The state BSP president Narayan Azad said that his party would expose the "anti-Scheduled Caste stance" of both the BJP and the Congress and would contest the election on the

plank of justice to the poor and scheduled castes and tribes. He said that Anil Kumar will contest from the Shimla (reserve) seat, Hem Raj will be the party candidate from Hamirpur seat, while Prakash Chand Bhardwaj and Rekha Rani will contest from Mandi and Kangra seats respectively.

BJP Govt's all claims and promises turning out to be hollow, alleges Selja

Chandigarh: Senior Congress leader and All India Congress Committee's general secretary Kumari Selja on Sunday alleged that the governments formed by the BJP in the Centre have failed once again to increase MSP of crops compared to the Congress. Neither the Vajpayee Government nor the Modi government, which has been in power for 10 years, addressed the concerns of farmers, she said. "Under the leadership of Dr Manmohan Singh, the Central Government presented evidence of being farmer-friendly by increasing the MSP of crops every year," said Selja, adding that from 1999 to 2004 under BJP Government, there was a 14 per cent increase in the price of rice, as compared to 143 per cent under Congress Government. From 2014 to the present, the Modi Government has only increased the price of

rice by 54.1 per cent, she pointed adding that the present BJP Government's all claims regarding purchase and payment of mustard and wheat are turning out to be hollow.

People fed up from AAP Govt's false promises, anti-people policies: BJP's Sidhu

Bathinda: BJP's candidate for Bathinda Lok Sabha constituency retired IAS Parampal Kaur Sidhu on Sunday asserted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is delivering food grains to every needy person in the country, while other parties are just making BJP's schemes their own and taking the photographs. Sidhu, during her election campaign, said that Punjab's AAP Government is wasting people's tax money by spending crores of rupees on advertisements. "Till date, people of Bathinda have neither got anything from the Congress nor from Akali Dal...In just two years, people have become upset with the false promises and anti-people policies of the Aam Aadmi Party also. People now only has expectations from Narendra Modi and the BJP government," she said. Stating that BJP believes in development at grassroots, whereas other parties rely on false propaganda of develop-

ment, Sidhu said that every citizen of Bathinda knew that AIMS and Central University have been established here by the Modi led Central Government...but some parties are trying to take credit for it.

SAD gears up to introduce key candidate in Khadoor Sahib: Brahmputra

Tarn Taran: SAD's vice president and Khadoor Sahib constituency in-charge Ravinder Singh Brahmputra, during his visit to Fatehabad village in Khadoor Sahib on Sunday, stated that a significant, bold, and key candidate would soon be fielded by the party. "As the panthic seat, Khadoor Sahib holds immense importance, and the people have placed their trust in the Akalis for decades," added Brahmputra. Taking on the AAP Government, he said that critics have raised concerns about governance issues, economic management, infrastructural development, law and order situation, agricultural sector, health, and education under the AAP Government led by Arvind Kejriwal and Bhagwant Mann in Punjab. He highlighted need for greater transparency, efficiency, and accountability in governance to fulfill promises made to the people.

CAPF's 15 companies deployed in Hry: CEO Agarwal

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

To ensure fear-free and a peaceful voting in Haryana, the state Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Anurag Agarwal on Sunday said that besides State Police, companies of Central Armed Police Forces are also being deployed with readiness. So far, 15 companies of CAPF have arrived. The Union Home Ministry has earlier been requested to deploy 200 more companies of CAPF in the run-up to Lok Sabha election in the State.

Agarwal, who is also the chairman of the State Committee formed on the deployment of CAPF during the Lok Sabha elections, said that conducting impartial and transparent elections is the priority of the Election Commission. Holding a review meeting with department officers regarding election management, he said that two companies each of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) will be deployed for Ambala, Hisar, Sirsa, and Rohtak Lok Sabha constituencies. Similarly, for the Sonapat Lok Sabha constituency, two companies of Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) will be deployed, and one company each of ITBP will be deployed for Kurukshetra, Karnal, Bhiwani-Mahendragarh, Gurgaon, and Faridabad Lok

Sabha constituencies. In the meeting, it was also apprised during the meeting that the companies of Central Armed Police Forces will be stationed at the district headquarters.

CEO said that a total of 19,812 polling stations have been set up at 10,363 locations across the state, including 13,588 in rural areas and 6,224 in urban areas. There are polling booths at 2,400 locations in cities and 7,963 locations in villages. State has 1,99,35,770 registered voters, so far. The citizens should make their voter IDs at the earliest, so everyone can participate in the upcoming elections. The deadline for voter registration is April 26, 2024. The final list of voters in Haryana is expected to be declared on May 10. The number of voters in the 18 to 19 age group is 3,65,504, who will vote for the first time, he added.

"About 70 per cent voter turnout was recorded in the state, which was higher than the national average. This time our target is to achieve a more than 80 per cent voter turnout in the State," he added. Agarwal said that the notification will be issued on April 29, and May 6 is the last date for filing nominations. Nomination scrutiny will be done by May 7 and Candidates can withdraw their nominations by May 9, he added.

Tirthankaras teachings on non violence gained new relevance: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said here teachings of Indian Tirthankaras have gained a new relevance at a time when “many countries are getting into wars” and , asserted that India is making a place for itself as “Vishwa Bandhu in a divided world.” Addressing the 2,550th Bhagwan Mahaveer Nirvan Mahotsav, he also said India is now projecting the principles of truth and non-violence on the global fora as a solution to the problems in the world, and its cultural image is playing a big role in it as well. The Prime Minister also released a commemorative stamp and a coin on the occasion and thanked the Jain community for their blessings. He said his Government put emphasis on promoting her-

itage as well as material development when it came to power in 2014 at a time when the country was engulfed in despair, a swipe at the previous UPA dispensation. He cited his Government's promotion of Indian heritage like yoga and Ayurveda, asserting that the country's new generation now believes that self-pride is its identity. Modi praised the dance drama ‘Vartaman Mein Vardhaman’ that was showcased on the occasion and said the dedication of the youth towards the values of Bhagwan Mahaveer is a sign of the nation moving forward in the right direction. Modi also bowed before the Jain saints present at the event and conveyed his best wishes to all on the auspicious occasion of Mahaveer Jayanti on Sunday. In his address, he said the “teachings of our Tirthankaras have gained a new relevance in the time when, globally, many



countries are getting into wars”. Tirthankaras are gurus or preachers of Jainism. Modi recalled the philosophies

such as Anekantavada and Syadvada that teach people to look at all the aspects and embrace the views of others

too. Today, humanity is expecting peace from India in these times of conflict, he said. The “new role” of this “New India”

is being credited to India's growing capabilities and foreign policy. “But, I want to tell you that the our cultural image has a big role in it,” he said. “Today we put forward the principles of truth and non-violence with full confidence on the global fora. We tell the world that the solution to global problems is found in the ancient Indian culture and tradition. This is why India is making a place for itself as ‘Vishwa Bandhu’ in a divided world”, the prime minister added. He mentioned India's initiatives such as Mission LiFE for combating climate change and the vision of ‘One Earth One Family and One Future’ along with a roadmap of One World-One Sun-One Grid and International Solar Alliance. During his address, Modi also paid tributes to Acharya Shri Vidyasagar Maharaj who passed away in February and

recalled his recent meeting with him, saying “his blessings are still guiding us”. Referring to the Lok Sabha polls, he said a big festival of democracy is happening “and, the country believes from here a new journey into future will also begin”. The prime minister also suggested to the audience that they should use their franchise early in the day and saints in a lighter vein that added have links to lotus, a flower often used in holy events which also is the BJP's poll symbol. “We are celebrating Bhagwan Mahaveer's Nirvan Diwas even after 2500 years and I'm sure that the nation will continue to celebrate his values for thousands of years to come”, the he said. He asked people to follow the teachings of Bhagwan Mahaveer as revival of those values is the demand of the time. The prime minister said

that Jainism is the path of ‘jain’ or the victorious. The event is a rare occasion and is happening at the beginning of ‘Amrit Kaal’, Modi said, adding the country is working to make centenary year of freedom a “golden centenary”. The Prime Minister underlined that the idea of ‘Amrit Kaal’ is not merely a resolution but India's spiritual inspiration. “For India, modernity is its body, spirituality is its soul. If spirituality is removed from modernity, anarchy is born,” he said. Modi said India is emerging from the period of corruption and despair as more than 25 crore Indians have come out of poverty. Union ministers of state for Culture Arjun Ram Meghwal and Meenakashi Lekhi were also present on the occasion among other dignitaries and saints from the Jain community.

Steel cutting ceremony of Cadet Training Ship held at TN shipyard

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Steel Cutting ceremony of the third Cadet Training Ship (Yard-18005) was held at L&T Shipyard, Kattupalli, Tamil Nadu on Saturday. The ceremony was presided by Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane in the presence of Arun Ramchandani, Executive Vice President, L&T Precision Engineering & System, navy said here. Giving details, officials said the contract for indigenous design and construction of three Cadet Training Ships was concluded between MoD and M/s L&T in March 2023. These Cadet Training Ships will be utilised for training officer cadets at sea after their basic training ashore. These ships



will also extend training facility to cadets from friendly foreign countries. These ships are likely to be delivered to the Indian Navy commencing Sep 2026. This is yet another significant

milestone in Indian Navy's pursuit towards indigenous shipbuilding and is in consonance with Government of India's vision of 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' and 'Make in India' initiative.

Connecting Sikkim to railway network gets major boost

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Sivok-Rangpo Rail Project(SRRP), which will connect Sikkim to the railway network for the first time, has got a major boost with the completion of an 855-metre-long emergency exit tunnel. A 20-metre section of the tunnel runs under National Highway(NH)-10, along the Teesta river, and according to officials, mining through its soft and loose soil was the most challenging part of the whole project as there was a high risk that it might cave in, snapping Sikkim's road connectivity with the rest of the country. “NH-10 is the only road network that connects Sikkim with other parts of the country. It was a huge challenge for us to mine a tunnel 18 metres below the highway, because the soil is very soft and loose, just like the river sand bed (fine to coarse-grained), with



alternate bands of pebble, cobble and boulders,” an official from Ircon International, which is constructing the project, said. “Mining for only that 20-metre distance, which is the width of NH-10 including

the impact areas on both sides along the highway, has been the most challenging moment of the project so far. We completed it successfully, without causing a single millimetre of deformation to the highway,” he added.

Railway officials said they used the secant-piling method, rarely used in tunnel mining. After getting it proof-checked by the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Ircon officials prepared a case study, explaining the ingenu-

ity of the mining work. The study says, “To provide fool-proof safety to NH-10, it was suggested to prepare a secant pile wall. Secant piles are designed by constructing reinforced concrete piles that interlock with each other and are reinforced with steel rebar. Typically, primary piles are cast in situ, leaving space in between them, and this is followed by secondary piles cut into the primary piles to form a continuous wall of piles.” The Sivok-Rangpo Rail Project (SRRP), covering a total length of 44.96 km between Sivok in West Bengal and Rangpo in Sikkim), has 14 tunnels, 22 bridges (13 major, nine minor) and five railway stations — Sivok, Riyang, Teesta Bazar, Melli and Rangpo. The Indian Railway has set a new deadline of August 2025 to finish the SRRP that will connect Sikkim with the rest of the country through the rail network for the first time.

Researchers identify abnormal accumulation of proteins in cells that cause Alzheimer's



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Researchers from Tokyo Metropolitan University have identified how proteins collect abnormally in neurons, a feature of neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's. They used fruit flies to show that depletion of mitochondria in axons can directly lead to protein accumulation. At the same time, significantly high amounts of a protein called eIF2β were found. Restoring the levels to normal led to a recovery in protein recycling. Such findings promise new treatments for neurodegenerative diseases. Every cell in our bodies is a busy factory, where proteins are constantly being produced and disassembled. Any changes or lapses in either the production or recycling phases can lead to serious illnesses. Neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's and Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), for example, are known to be accompanied by an abnormal build-up of proteins in neurons. However, the trigger behind this accumulation remains unknown. A team led by Associate Professor Kanae Ando of Tokyo Metropolitan University have been trying to determine the causes of abnormal protein build-up by studying Drosophila fruit flies, a commonly studied model organism that has many key similarities with human physiology. They focused on the presence of mitochondria in axons, the long tendril-like appendages that stretch out of neurons and form the neces-

sary connections that allow signals to be transmitted inside our brains. It is known that the levels of mitochondria in axons can drop with age, and during the progress of neurodegenerative diseases. Now, the team have discovered that the depletion of mitochondria in axons has a direct bearing on protein build-up. They used genetic modification to suppress the production of miltion, a key protein in the transport of mitochondria along axons. It was found that this led to abnormal levels of protein building up in fruit fly neurons, a result of the breakdown of autophagy, the recycling of proteins in cells. Through proteomic analysis, they were able to identify a significant upregulation in eIF2β, a key subunit of the eIF2 protein complex responsible for the initiation of protein production (or translation). The eIF2a subunit was also found to be chemically modified. Both of these issues hamper the healthy action of eIF2. Importantly, by artificially suppressing levels of eIF2β, the team discovered that they could restore the autophagy that was lost and regain some of the neuron function that was impaired due to axonal mitochondria loss. This not only shows that depletion of mitochondria in axons can cause abnormal protein accumulation, but that this happens via upregulation of eIF2β. As populations age and the prevalence of neurodegenerative conditions continues to increase, the team's findings present a vital step in developing therapies to combat these serious illnesses.

Take action against hospitals involved in illegal organ transplants: Health Ministry

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Alarmed at the kidney transplant racket which was busted in Jaipur, where a Bangladeshi national was found to have undergone a kidney removal procedure under suspicious financial arrangements, the Union health ministry has directed all states and Union Territories (UTs) to investigate violations and take necessary action against hospitals involved in illegal organ transplants. The recent case of the organ trafficking racket, involving Bangladeshi nationals, in Haryana and Rajasthan, seemed like a warning bell for the authorities, calling for urgency to address illegal

organ trafficking and ensuring ethical transplant practices across the country. Dr Atul Goel, Director General of Health Services (DGHS), Union Health Ministry in a letter to the States and authorities emphasized the need for regular collection and sharing of transplant data, including cases involving foreign nationals, with the National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation (NOTTO) on a monthly basis. He highlighted a surge in organ transplants involving foreigners and stressed the importance of monitoring such cases. The letter, issued on April 10, instructed the appropriate state authorities to investigate transplant cases involving foreign nationals and take action in



case of any violations of the Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act (THOTA), 1994.

This includes suspension of registration for hospitals engaged in illegal activities. “Investigate any violation of the

THOTA, 1994 and rules thereunder and take appropriate action including suspension of registration for performing Organ Transplant, of the hospitals involved in illegal activities,” the letter said. Furthermore, the ministry mandated the generation of a unique NOTTO-ID for both donors and recipients in all transplant cases, ensuring compliance with allocation protocols and timely identification. Regular inspections of registered transplant hospitals were also recommended to monitor activities and ensure quality transplantation. “It should be ensured that a unique NOTTO-ID for both donor and recipient is generated by the hospital from

website (Notto.Mohfw.Gov.In), in all cases of organ transplant, whether from a living donor or deceased donor,” the letter said. Despite previous requests, complete transplant data, especially regarding foreign cases, has not been consistently shared with NOTTO. The health ministry urged states and UTs to submit an action-taken report on these instructions within 15 days. A senior official from the Ministry said “the involvement of foreign nationals in these cases adds another layer of complexity, necessitating enhanced monitoring and regulation to prevent exploitation and uphold ethical standards in organ transplantation.”

INDIA coalition Government will return country to higher growth trajectory, claims Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has caused an “unprecedented decline” in worker wages adjusted for price rise and said that an INDIA coalition Government will return the country to a higher growth trajectory. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said multiple data sources, including the Modi government's own official statistics, are unanimous in showing the simple fact that workers can buy less today than they could 10 years ago. A combination of slow wage growth and back-breaking inflation has caused an unprecedented decline in real wages, he said in a statement. “Labour Bureau's Wage Rate Index (Government Data): Between 2014 and 2023, real wages for labourers have stagnated, with clear declines in real wages in Modi-II,” he said. Ramesh also pointed out that the Ministry of Agriculture's Agricultural Statistics said that under former prime minister Manmohan Singh, real



wages for agricultural labourers grew at 6.8 per cent each year. “Under PM Modi, real wages for agricultural labourers declined by -1.3 per cent each year,” he said. “Periodic Labour Force Survey Series (Government Data): Average real earnings over time have stagnated between 2017 and 2022 across all employment types - salaried workers, casual workers, and self-employed workers,” he said in a statement. Citing Center for Labour Research and Action data, Ramesh said real wages of brick kiln workers have stagnated or declined between 2014 and 2022. Brick kilns involve intensive labour and are a low-paying work of last resort for India's

poorest, he pointed out. “Stagnant wages underpin the economy's poor performance under PM Modi: Real wages for India's people have stagnated since the PM came to office,” the Congress leader said in the statement. “Stagnant real wages have dragged down consumption growth as revealed by the NSSO's Consumption Expenditure Survey which showed a decline in rural consumption for the first time in almost 50 years (and which the Modi Sarkar tried to suppress),” he said. With slowing consumption growth and deepening fear, the private sector no longer has an incentive to invest in the economy, Ramesh argued. “Investment in India has dropped to historic low levels,

threatening our long-term growth: Investment as % of GDP (10-year average) was 33.4% under the UPA but just 28.7% under Modi. FDI as % of GDP rose from 0.8% in 2004 to 1.7% in 2014 under Manmohan Singh's stewardship. It has fallen to just 1.5% of GDP as of 2022,” the statement read. He further pointed out that manufacturing as a percentage of GDP (10-year average) fell from 16.5 per cent in UPA to 14.5 per cent under Modi and the gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) in India, or the total investment in fixed assets, averaged 32 per cent for the 10 years of Manmohan Singh, while the GFCF under Modi has been below 29 per cent for 10 years. “Together, all these factors are dragging down economic growth and causing an unemployment crisis,” Ramesh said. “In the economy, all good things go together. The UPA performed strongly on real wages for workers, private-sector investment, and consumption growth, enabling 7.5% real GDP growth rates, compared to the Modi Sarkar's 5.8% average,” he said in the statement.

Jaro Education announces collaboration with CEC IIT Roorkee

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Leading higher Edtech firm, Jaro Education, has announced a transformative collaboration with the Continuing Education Centre at IIT Roorkee (CEC IITR), underscoring a shared commitment to inspiring excellence in a technology-driven world. “This collaboration signifies a significant moment in technical education, combining Jaro Education's expertise in business intelligence, marketing, and technology infrastructure with IIT Roorkee's unparalleled academic excellence,” the company said in a statement. Renowned for its excellence in higher technological education, engineering, and research, IIT Roorkee has long been regarded as a beacon of innovation and academic prowess. Consistently ranked among the world's top technological institutions, IIT Roorkee boasts a rich history of shaping the country's technical landscape. Through this strategic alliance, Jaro Education aims to leverage IIT Roorkee's esteemed faculty and cutting-

edge curriculum to offer new-age and holistic technical courses. “CEC IIT Roorkee is proud and excited to announce a collaborative effort with Jaro Education,” said Coordinator of Continuing Education Centre at IIT Roorkee. “This exciting new program leverages the strengths of both institutions to equip learners with the skills they need to flourish in today's technology-driven world. It aligns perfectly with CEC's commitment to providing learners with the knowledge and tools needed to navigate the ever-evolving landscape of our professions,” the institute said in a statement. “We are excited to begin on this journey with top Institute like IIT Roorkee. This partnership presents an extraordinary opportunity to equip working professionals with cutting-edge skills tailored to the dynamic demands of today's rapidly evolving technological landscape. We empower individuals to not just survive, but thrive in the face of relentless disruption,” said CEO at Jaro Education, Ranjita Raman.

BJP banks on Modi magic, development to tide over Rajput ire in Chittorgarh

PTI ■ CHITTORGARH

Facing protests from a section of the Rajput community over Union Minister Parshottam Rupala's remarks, the BJP in Rajasthan's Chittorgarh — a Rajput-dominated seat — is hoping that the 'Modi factor' and the development work undertaken by his Government will help it retain the Lok Sabha constituency. Meanwhile, the Congress is raising the issues of farmer welfare and inflation to seek votes from the people of constituency, which goes to the polls in the second phase of the ongoing general elections on April 26. The BJP has fielded its State president C P Joshi from the seat while the Congress has placed its bet on former state minister Udailal Anjana. Joshi, who won the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha polls from Chittorgarh, is aiming for a hat-trick of wins — an unprecedented feat — and cited the "increased rail connectivity, running of new trains and construction of new highways" in his constituency to highlight the development done by the BJP. "Due to the development work, this region is about to change. I am confident that people of Chittorgarh constituency will choose development," Joshi told PTI. Joshi, who is contesting the Lok Sabha elections for a third time, is hoping that the 'Modi factor' and the development work undertaken in the constituency will shield the



BJP from the negativity created against the party in the Rajput community. Members of the Kshatriya community, also called Rajputs, have demanded that the BJP remove Rupala as the party candidate for the Rajkot Lok Sabha seat in Gujarat, following his remarks a few days back. Addressing a gathering in Rajkot on March 22, Rupala had remarked that erstwhile 'maharajas' succumbed to the persecution of foreign rulers as well as the Britishers. Rupala further said these maharajas broke bread with them and also married their daughters to them. Though Rupala tendered an apology for his comments, the Rajputs refused to accept it. Amid intensifying election campaigning, Anjana is presenting himself as 'Kisan Ka Beta' (son of a farmer) and is

seeking votes on the issue of farmers' welfare while cautioning people that the BJP is likely to end reservation for SCs, STs and OBCs if it gets more than 400 seats. "Today, the Constitution is under threat. The BJP has made a joke of the Constitution. If they get more than 400 seats, then reservation to STs, SCs, OBCs will be abolished," he said. While Joshi refuted the claim, saying the BJP was not against reservation and accused the Congress of being anti-Dalit, the Congress' narrative appeared to influence some people from the reserved categories. "Reservation is our right and whether it is BJP or Congress, no government can withdraw this," Ramkishore Meena, a tribal in Gangrar town of Chittorgarh, said. Anjana also

promised Chittorgarh's opium cultivators to raise their issues in parliament, if he wins. "I will not allow corruption in opium cultivation. I will work to get policies made in the interest of the farmers. Today injustice is being done to the farmers and there is no one to speak to them," he said. Anjana said that inflation and unemployment were rising in the country under the BJP rule and the "distressed" people want a change. Famous for its tales of bravery, heroism and patriotism, Chittorgarh's economy runs primarily on the cement industry while the marble and granite industries are booming, said Aanchal Bohra, an entrepreneur from the city. Also, a lot of people are employed in ancillary activities like the transportation of cement and stones, he told PTI in Chittorgarh. "Connectivity to Chittorgarh has significantly increased by road and by rail, which has positioned Chittorgarh on the economic corridor. Marble and granite industry is booming and chances of new cement factories coming up are increasing that will create more employment opportunities," Bohra said. "The locals here understand the trickle-down impact of infrastructure development in the region and therefore, they would go with development and future growth," he added. Sunil Ojha, a local resident, said people have benefitted from the increased rail connectivity in the constituency.

Intense battle in Kannur as Congress, CPM and BJP vie for dominance

PTI ■ KANNUR (KERALA)

The Northern Kerala constituency of Kannur is witnessing an intense battle between the Congress and the CPI(M), while the BJP is focusing on the newly registered young voters to make an impact in the seat. With 39 percent minorities, including Muslims and Christians, the voters often support the CPI(M)-LDF in most of the assembly seats falling under this Parliament constituency in the polls to the legislature, but the Lok Sabha constituency has often swayed towards the Congress-led UDF, hoping to replace the BJP at the Centre. The strong minority vote base is what helped the UDF win the seat as the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) is its major partner. The rubber farmers in areas like Irikkur and Peravoor, predominantly Christians, have also been a strong vote bank for the Congress. Hoping to retain the seat this time as well, the Congress has fielded Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee chief K Sudhakaran here. Considering his candidature in the seat, Sudhakaran had recently temporarily handed over his organisational responsibility to his party colleague M M Hassan. Sudhakaran did not want to contest the elections this time, but he entered the fray as the party leadership felt that there was nobody who could ensure a win in Kannur for Congress other than him, the party's local strongman. "I am confident about the win and am only bothered about



bettering my majority," Sudhakaran, the sitting MP, told PTI during his campaign at Kandakassery near Payyavoor. Sudhakaran, who has landed in controversies several times by his remarks supporting the BJP during the fight between the saffron party and the CPI(M) in the district, reiterated that the main enemy of Congress in Kerala is the Left party. "They are the enemy number 1 in Kerala, and the BJP comes only second. The BJP has no strength in Kerala, and our main fight is against the LDF, against their politics of violence," Sudhakaran said. The Congress, in their campaigns in Kerala, mainly focuses on criticizing the Pinarayi Vijayan-led government because of this, he added. The 75-year-old Sudhakaran is the topmost leader who helped Congress sustain its presence in the CPI(M)-dominated Kannur politics and hopes that people will support him once again to get to the Parliament. CPI(M), however, is not ready to let

history bother them and has fielded M V Jayarajan, the Kannur district secretary of the party. Campaigning at Aichery in Irikkur, Jayarajan was received by enthusiastic party workers with drum beatings and paper flower spray. Without much of an introduction, he addressed the gathering, telling them to be aware of "the danger the country is in." "The Congress has no politics to speak about and is now engaged in a defamation campaign against the LDF candidates," Jayarajan told the gathering, referring to allegations of cyberbullying against the party's candidate in the Vadakara Lok Sabha seat, K K Shailaja, allegedly by the workers of the Congress-led UDF. "The LDF is going to win back Kannur this time. Congress has been taking a stand to support the BJP. They do not want to speak about the key issues and are only involved in a defamation campaign against LDF candidates due to a fear of losing," Jayarajan alleged, while talking to PTI.

KCR to undertake roadshows ahead of Lok Sabha elections

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

BRS president and former Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao will undertake roadshows for 17 days beginning April 24 as part of his campaign for the Lok Sabha polls. The roadshow programme will begin at Miryalguda, about 140 kms from Hyderabad, on April 24 and it will end at the district headquarters town of Siddipet on May 10. Polling for the 17 Lok Sabha seats in Telangana will be held on May 13. The roadshows will be held in various Lok Sabha constituencies, including Bhuvanagiri, Mahabubnagar, Nagarkurnool, Warangal, Khammam, Mahabubabad, Nizamabad, Medak and Karimnagar, according to the route plan for roadshows released by BRS on Sunday. Rao, also known as KCR, has already kicked off his campaign for the Lok Sabha polls with rallies at Chevella near here and in Andole assembly constituency. BRS had won nine of the 17 Lok Sabha seats in 2019. Following its shock defeat in the Telangana Legislative Assembly polls held in November last year, the regional party is now making efforts to bounce back with a decent performance in the parliament elections. The BRS has seen a number of party leaders switching over to either the ruling Congress or the BJP recently.

Shobha Karandlaje under pressure to win in her party stronghold

PTI ■ BENGALURU

After she was shifted to Bangalore North segment for the coming Lok Sabha elections, Union Minister Shobha Karandlaje is determined to prove a point or two and wants to ensure that BJP continues its winning streak here. Bangalore North has remained a BJP stronghold since 2004 and the 57-year-old is banking on the 'Modi factor'. She is facing Congress candidate and former Rajya Sabha member M V Rajeev Gowda, who is putting up a

spirited fight. Both belong to the Vokkaliga community. Karandlaje is a two-time MP from Udipi-Chikmagalur but was moved out after she faced a "Go back Shobha" campaign there from a section of her party. Karandlaje has been telling people how India is on the development path in the past 10 years under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership. "This is an election to save India's culture and 'Sanatan' traditions," the Union Minister of State for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, who hails from



coastal Karnataka, said. According to BJP sources, she has a strong backing of former Chief Minister and

BJP stalwart B S Yediyurappa. Since 2004, BJP is holding this seat, which was a

Congress fortress from 1952 to 2004 barring the 1996-1998 period when the then Janata Dal's C Narayanaswamy was the MP. Former Railway Minister late C K Jaffer Sharief was the longest serving MP of this constituency who represented it seven times, including for five terms uninterruptedly from 1977 to 1996. Since 2004, BJP had three MPs from here-- former Karnataka Director General of Police H T Sangliana, late D B Chandre Gowda and former Union Minister D V Sadananda Gowda, who

were all considered "outsiders". Of the eight Assembly segments under Bangalore North, five are represented by the BJP and the rest by the Congress. Karandlaje is known for indulging in "communally divisive" speech and polarisation which people don't want here, alleges Rajeev Gowda, who is making his debut in the Lok Sabha elections. People want to enjoy a good quality of life and grow and prosper, and don't want this area to become communally charged and divided, says

the former Professor of Indian Institute of Management Bangalore where he taught economics and policy. The Chairman of the AICC Research Department appeared upbeat about his electoral prospects. There is no Modi wave in Karnataka in this Lok Sabha election, the 60-year-old claimed. It's the five guarantee schemes of the Siddaramaiah-led Congress government delivered within 10 months of coming to power that are helping people who are in trouble, he said. Also, the "sense of

injustice" to Karnataka (in terms of devolution of funds by Centre) and the (dismal) record of the previous BJP government here are what will work in favour of the Congress, he added. "We did not get proper candidates", a voter said referring to BJP fielding "outsiders" here in the last few elections. "People who were rejected elsewhere have been dumped here on us. We are not happy," the voter added. Nearly 12,000 voters opted for 'None Of The Above' in the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha polls here.

BJP Chandigarh candidate pins hope on Modi wave, local roots for landslide win

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

Local roots and a "strong Modi wave" will help him score a "landslide" victory in the Chandigarh Lok Sabha election, feels BJP candidate Sanjay Tandon. Tandon took a dig at Congress candidate Manish Tewari, who fought the 2009 and 2019 Lok Sabha polls from Ludhiana and Anandpur Sahib in Punjab, saying, "Chandigarh needs a person who is one of them and who has been with them through thick and thin." The BJP has been calling Tewari an "outsider" in Chandigarh while the Congress leader has hit back, saying he has local roots. The 2024 Lok Sabha elections in Chandigarh will be held in a single phase on June 1. The votes will be counted on June 4. Sixty-year-old Tandon, the son of former Chhattisgarh governor and one of the founding members of the Jan Sangh late Balamji Das Tandon, has replaced incumbent MP Kirron Kher while the Congress has named senior party leader Tewari (58), for the electoral fight in Chandigarh. Kher won the lone Chandigarh seat in the 2014 and 2019 general elections, defeating Congress' Pawan Kumar Bansal. Bansal was elected MP from Chandigarh in 1991, 1999, 2004 and 2009. This time, the Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party, which are part of the INDIA bloc, are fighting the polls from Chandigarh in an alliance. "There is a strong Modi wave," Tandon asserted. When BJP workers visit

people's houses while campaigning, they are told, 'Saada vote Modi nu (our vote is for Modi)', Tandon said, adding, "We are heading for a landslide victory." He claimed that the people of Chandigarh are enthusiastic over his nomination as he is a local resident and has a connection with them. A poll campaign named — 'Hamara Sanjay Tandon' —has been initiated, he said. "I will be going door-to-door and there will be a heart-to-heart connect," said Tandon, a chartered accountant by profession. He said he had been working for the people of the city for the last several years and was available for them whenever they faced any problem. Replying to a question on Tewari's statement that he was born and raised in Chandigarh, the BJP leader said it is for the people of Chandigarh to decide who is a local resident and who is not. "Chandigarh needs a person who is one of them. Chandigarh needs a person who has been available for them," he told PTI here. "Let the people decide who has been available for them and let the people decide who understands the issues of Chandigarh and let the people decide 'Chandigarh ka beta kaun hai' (who is the son of Chandigarh)," he added. Tewari had to tell people that he was born in Chandigarh whereas, "people here know me. If 50 people come to meet me, I know the names of 40 of them," Tandon, who served as the president of the Chandigarh BJP for nearly a decade, said.

Congress synonym for scams, terrorism, Naxalism: Yogi

PTI ■ RAIPUR

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday hit out at the Congress, claiming the grand old party is a synonym for scams, terrorism and Naxalism. Addressing an election rally in Chhattisgarh's Kabirdham district, he said the wait of 500 years for Ram Lalla (installation of his idol) in Ayodhya ended because of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.



Kabirdham district comes under the Rajnandgaon Lok Sabha constituency.

"Congress is a synonym for scams, terrorism and Naxalism. At the age when a

tablet and a good book should be in the hands of youth and they should have the spirit to take the world ahead, the Congress handed over pistols in the hands of those youth. The Congress instigated them to fight against the country in the name of Naxalism and terrorism," Adityanath claimed. Under the leadership of PM Modi, people have seen the country changing in the last 10 years, the senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader said. "Modi ji has said that this

country has to be made a big power in the world. A developed India has to be made...To create a self-reliant India, where every citizen feels safe. Be it a daughter or a businessman, only the BJP can provide complete guarantee of security to all of them. Only the Bharatiya Janata Party can respect your faith," he said. Adityanath asked the gathering whether the Congress could have given free ration to the people, built the Ram temple, reduced the problem of Naxalism and

given security to the daughters and businessmen. "Congress is the synonym for problem, it gives the problem while the BJP is the name of solution," he said. Adityanath appealed to the people to vote for the BJP candidate from Rajnandgaon Lok Sabha seat—Santosh Pandey. He further targeted the Congress, saying it has fielded former CM Bhupesh Baghel who was allegedly involved in multiple scams during the previous government in the State.

Kerala nonagenarian dies soon after casting vote at home

PTI ■ KOTTAYAM (KERALA)

A 99-year-old man died soon after casting his vote in Lok Sabha polls at home in Kerala's Kottayam district, family members said on Sunday. The deceased man, A K Raman Nair, was a native of Manakkunnu in Pala here. He had been suffering from age-related ailments for some time and died within minutes after exercising his franchise on Saturday as part of the vote-from-home facility launched by the Election Commission, they said. Nair, who had been living with his grandson, was discharged from the hospital two days ago. The polling officials went with the ballot paper when the nonagenarian man was having lunch. Despite health issues, he was excited to cast his vote and breathed his last soon after the process, the family added.

Bengal political landscape witnesses rise of dynasties this LS elections

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Dynastic politics has been a prominent feature of Indian democracy, but its increased presence in Bengal this Lok Sabha election marks a significant departure from the state's tradition of cultivating leaders from grassroots politics. Out of the 42 Lok Sabha seats, 13 have candidates from political dynasties. This represents a significant increase compared to previous elections, where political dynasts were limited to just three seats. Traditionally known for its vibrant student politics, Bengal is experiencing a notable shift as influential political families are gaining prominence. "This is a new trend or an evolution of Bengal politics from class-based politics to dynasty politics. Never in the polls have so many candidates come from political families," political scientist at Centre for

Studies in Social Sciences, Maidul Islam, told PTI. He said in Bengal where politics is dictated by the charisma of mass leaders, party symbols and issues, "it remains to be seen how people accept these political dynasties." The TMC has fielded five, the Congress four, and the two parties, the BJP and the CPI (M), which used to decry dynasty politics, also have two candidates each. According to TMC, BJP, and Congress leaders, several factors contribute to the rise of political dynasties in Bengal. According to them, family members are valued for their loyalty and trustworthiness, making them reliable allies. "The success of established family names in politics is attributed to two main factors - name recognition and networking, which make it easier for them to garner electoral support," a senior TMC leader said.

TMC national general secretary and two-time MP from Diamond Harbour, Abhishek Banerjee, the nephew of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, tops the chart of political dynasty contesting the polls. He is seeking re-election from the seat. BJP's candidate from Kanthi Lok Sabha seat, Soumendu Adhikari, comes from the powerful Adhikari family of East Midnapore, with his father Sisir Adhikari being a three-term MP from the seat, and his brother Suvendu Adhikari is the Leader of the Opposition in the West Bengal assembly. In Malda South seat, the Congress has passed on the representation mantle from an indisposed Abu Hasem Khan Choudhury, Congress patriarch ABA Ghani Khan Choudhury's brother who won the seat without a break from the 2006 bypolls, to his son Isha Khan Choudhury, a former Congress MLA.

Independent Pappu Yadav overshadows NDA vs INDIA contest

PTI ■ PURNEA

A surefooted NDA challenged by a determined INDIA bloc may be the big story of the ongoing Lok Sabha polls, but in a Bihar seat, the narrative has come to be centred around an Independent candidate. Situated in the state's northeastern corner, Purnea, named after the eponymous district, has been known to literature aficionados as the land where Phanishwar Nath Renu lived and breathed life into famous characters like Hiranam, played on the big screen by Raj Kapoor in 'Teesri Kasam'. In the battle for 2024, the place is hogging the limelight, primarily because of Rajesh Ranjan alias Pappu Yadav, who according to some opinion polls, may turn out to be the dark horse when votes are counted on June 4. This is despite the fact that the



NDA candidate is JD(U) MP who is aiming at a hat-trick while the INDIA bloc has thrown its weight behind Bima Bharti, who recently quit Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's party and was promptly rewarded by arch-rival Lalu Prasad with the RJD ticket. Yadav has represented the seat thrice, in the 1990s, winning by huge margins, twice as an Independent and once on the ticket of Samajwadi Party, which is a major force in Uttar Pradesh but has never been a serious player in Bihar.

FIRST COLUMN

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF FOMO

In the age of social media, the Fear Of Missing Out has become rampant



SHAINY SHARMA

Ever found individuals befuddling when they see photos or updates from parties, gatherings, or events they were not invited to or witness their colleagues or peers receiving accolades, promotions or career advancements... Well such situations may evoke FOMO in individuals who feel stagnant or unproductive in comparison. "FOMO," or the Fear of Missing Out, arises from a perceived discrepancy between one's own experiences and the experiences of others. Whether online or offline, the fear of missing out can exert a powerful influence on individuals emotions, behaviours and decision-making processes, thereby highlighting the need for self-awareness and coping mechanisms to navigate the pressures of modern life. Now a days it is a prevalent phenomenon among Generation Z (Gen Z) and other demographics. It can be a double-edged sword, driving ambition while fostering anxiety. There is no denying the fact that Gen Z have grown up in a digital age which is characterized by constant connectivity and instant access to information promoting products, experiences and lifestyles that appear glamorous and desirable. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, X and Facebook have become integral part of their daily lives, shaping their perceptions, behaviours and social interactions in profound ways. Various studies and research too have consistently shown a strong association between social media usage and FOMO among this generation, the consequences of which extends beyond mere discomfort and impact mental health, self-esteem and interpersonal relationships. Individuals plagued by FOMO due to the constant exposure to curated content and the pressure to maintain a certain online image may experience increased stress, anxiety, depression and feeling of loneliness as they constantly compare their lives to others' highlight reels.



To mitigate the negative effects of FOMO on Gen Z, it becomes utmost important to promote digital literacy, encourage healthy social media habits and foster offline connections and experiences. Now this can include multiple practices such as practicing mindfulness or journaling that promote gratitude and positive thinking. Setting boundaries for screen time and cultivating meaningful relationships and activities that are not dependent on social media validation. Additionally, fostering a supportive and inclusive online community can help alleviate feelings of FOMO by emphasizing authenticity, empathy and acceptance. Not only this but practicing the art of Digital Detox will allow individuals to reconnect with themselves and prioritize meaningful offline interactions and relationships. This will result in emphasizing the importance of quality over quantity when it comes to social connections and encourage face-to-face communication, genuine conversations and shared experiences with their friends and loved ones. Also, encouraging them to engage in activities such as sports, art, music or dance will not only provide opportunities for personal growth and development but also reduces dependence on social media for validation and self-worth. Practicing such activities will encourage the Generation Z to seek support from trusted friends, family members or mental health professionals if they're struggling with feelings of FOMO or its effects on their well-being. Remember, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) raises stress hormones, inflammation and dysregulates an individual's nervous system. One needs to learn to self-love and be protective of their time and energy. In the hyper connected world, it does take courage to be with own thoughts so, try to be one...

(The write is an educator; views are personal)

With power freebies, debt comes calling



UTTAM GUPTA

The core dilemma persists: How to prevent debt while ensuring universal electricity access? This issue entails policy intricacies and power sector reforms



In an interview, Union Power Minister RK Singh revealed he has been telling States that electricity is not free. "If any State wants to give free power to any category of people, they can go ahead and do so, but you have to pay for it". Singh's exhortation to the States assumes significance in the backdrop of a spate of announcements by the latter to give free electricity to certain consumers which affect the viability of power distribution companies or discoms (they buy power from generating companies or genscos and supply to the consumers). He argues "like any other commodity, generation and distribution of electricity involves cost and if a State is to provide it for free to a section of consumers, it also needs to have finances to pay the genco. If the genco isn't paid, electricity will not be produced in the first place". But, there can't be any compromise on the generation of electricity as any shortfall could lead to a stoppage of economic activity. To meet the surge in demand (due to the impending summer), the Union Government has invoked the provisions of the Electricity Act (2003) under Section 11asking gas-based genscos and thermal plants based on imported coal to increase generation even if it entails extra cost. That is the reaction to meeting incremental demand. How could it tolerate massive cuts in generation inevitable when genscos are not paid? So, States must ensure that they are paid. When pressurized, the concerned States borrow money to pay the genscos resulting in a debt trap. For instance, in the first two years of the AAP Government, Punjab borrowed as much as Rs 47,000 crore adding to the already high debt of the State. How can the States avoid debt trap? The Electricity Act (2003) and the Guidelines issued by the Ministry of Power require the discoms to fix the charge (or tariff) on electricity supplied to consumers in a manner such that the average revenue realization (ARR) from its sale is equal to the average cost of supply (it includes the cost of purchase, transmission and distribution), or ACS. The discoms are



CURRENTLY, ALMOST 95 PER CENT OF POWER CONSUMERS IN PUNJAB AVAIL OF SUBSIDIES, A MAJOR PORTION OF WHICH ISN'T EVEN REIMBURSED TO DISCOMS

free to decide the modalities of how this is to be ensured subject to approval by the concerned State Electricity Regulatory Commissions (SERCs). Ideally, the discoms should charge from 'all' consumers a tariff equal to the total cost of supply say Rs 'X' crore divided by the number of units. But, they don't follow this principle. They charge less from certain consumers especially households (HHs) and farmers. For instance, in Delhi, the tariff applicable to HHs consuming 200 units a month is Rs 3 per unit which is about half of the ACS. Including a plethora of levies adding to 44.6 per cent, the shortfall comes to Rs 4.3 per unit. For HHs consuming between 201 and 400 units, the tariff is Rs 4.5 per unit implying an under-recovery of Rs 1.5 per unit. Including the levies, this comes to Rs 2.2 per unit. These under-recoveries are cross-subsidized by charging more from industries and business establishments for which the tariff can go up to a high of Rs 16 per unit. The low tariff charged from the target consumers (read: HHs consuming up to 400 units a month) is nothing but a freebie given by political parties. But, it goes unnoticed as the State exchequer doesn't have to pay for these under-recoveries. The industries that are made to foot the bill can't even murmur as discom being the sole supplier of electricity, they have no other option. But, political parties don't want the target HHs to even pay this small tariff. In Delhi, the AAP Government tells discoms not to raise any bill on HHs consuming up to 200 units. Likewise, in Punjab, consumption of up to 300 units a month by an HH is free. This extra under-recovery of Rs 4.3 per unit in Delhi (applicable tariff Rs 3 per unit plus 44.6 per cent levies) has to be reimbursed by the State to the dis-

com. But, most States don't reimburse or do it partially and after considerable delay. This leads to losses of discoms. The availability of free power also drives people to manipulate their reported consumption. For instance, in Punjab, an HH consuming 900 units a month, gets three meters installed to keep consumption of each under 300 units thereby ensuring zero bills. Reportedly, more than 100,000 meters have been bifurcated or trifurcated enabling even high-end consumers to avail of the free bonanza. As for farmers who are eligible for free power in the State, they report even consumption for running multiple ACs in their homes under farming head thereby avoiding any payment. As a consequence, currently, almost over 95 per cent of power consumers in Punjab avail of subsidies, a major portion of which isn't even reimbursed to discoms. Discoms' losses also increase due to AT&C (aggregate technical and commercial) losses - a sophisticated nomenclature for power theft. According to Singh, AT&C's losses used to be high at 27 per cent. In Punjab, reportedly, an overwhelming share of electricity that leaves the generating stations/power dispatch centres remains unaccounted for. The discoms have funded these losses by borrowings from banks and other financial institutions (FIs) apart from keeping bills pending. At the end of FY 2021-22, their total debt was Rs 620,000 crore. In June 2022, they owed about Rs 1,40,000 crore to Genscos and transmission companies (transcos). The Center has taken several measures to force discoms to clear their dues. The late payment surcharge (LPS) Rules, implemented in 2022 made it mandatory for discoms to clear their legacy dues as existing on June 3, 2022, in a time-bound manner in 12 EMIs with the benefit of non-applicability of the LPS after its implementation date. The rules are also provided for time-bound clearance of current dues failing, which will attract a power supply cut. This has resulted in legacy dues decreasing from Rs 1,40,000 crore in June 2022 to around Rs 70,000 crore in July 2023 and further down to Rs 40,000 crore currently. Under the 'Reforms-Linked, Result-Based Scheme for Distribution' (RLRBSD) launched in July 2021, the Centre has undertaken a massive investment of Rs 300,000 crore to improve the reliability and quality of the power supply and enhance the efficiency of discoms. It has compulsory pre-paid and smart metering components to be implemented across the power supply chain, including in about 250 million households. As a result, AT&C losses decreased from 22.32 per cent during 2020-21 to 13.5 per cent during 2022-23. However, according to the Minister, today power pilferage is 15 per cent. On this much electricity, discoms get 'nil' revenue. On a much larger percentage of power used by target HHs and farmers, the States promise to pay on their behalf. But, they don't pay in full and whatever payment comes, it is delayed. Even for making payments, the States borrow money. And, the vicious cycle continues. It won't end unless discoms are unshackled from State controls and given the freedom to decide their pricing and distribution policies. If, States want certain HHs and farmers to get power free, let them give the money directly to them. This reform will also pave the way for the deregulation of electricity distribution, more options for consumers to source their needs and a reduction in tariffs.

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

Govt schemes are transforming lives in rural Rajasthan

Loyara village serves as a microcosm of resilience and progress, fuelled by education and community empowerment

W

our ration between the 1st and 3rd of each month. If it's ever delayed, my grandchildren inquire why we haven't received it from the ration dealer. The younger generation in my household is quite aware. They've made sure that all the necessary ration-related documents are in order, ensuring a seamless supply. Also, my pension now arrives punctually. Thanks to various Government schemes, these youngsters are reaping benefits. They educate themselves about these schemes and then proactively apply for them at the Panchayat office," shares 76-year-old Amba Bai, residing in Loyara village within



MOHAN LAL GAMETI

Udaipur district, Rajasthan. Situated just 8 km from Udaipur, this village falls within the Badgaon tehsil. With a population of approximately 2500, the majority belong to the Scheduled Tribe community. Alongside the OBC Dangi community, there are various other castes. The village reflects the influence of its proximity to Udaipur city,

evident in the transition of most houses to concrete structures. However, economically, the village still grapples with challenges. While individuals from OBC and general castes are involved in agriculture, trade, and animal husbandry, the majority of male members from the Scheduled Tribes work as labourers in marble factories surrounding Udaipur city. Some also engage in daily wage labour. Meanwhile, women in these households contribute to the family's income by working as domestic helpers in affluent homes within the city. Economically, Loyara village may face challenges, but socially and educationally, it has seen significant



Government schemes benefiting his family and the village. He recalls, "In the past, the ration dealer would often deny us ration with flimsy excuses. But now, thanks to education and awareness, such actions are no longer tolerated. Whenever we face ration shortages, we raise our concerns and seek information from the Panchayat office. Even in my absence,

my children handle these matters diligently, ensuring the timely arrival of our ration." Taru Bai, a respected elder at 70, sheds light on the changing face of education and Government support in Loyara village. "Back in my day, girls rarely pursued education," she recalls. "But now, over half of the girls in our community are completing high school, and they're bringing back valuable information about Government programs. Their schooling has even helped smooth out the process for my pension, as they handle all the paperwork." Looking back, Taru Bai remembers, "We used to hear about Government schemes, but getting clear

information was a challenge, even after asking around at the Panchayat. But things are different now; the younger generation knows exactly how to navigate these programs and fill out the necessary forms." However, amidst these educational strides, economic challenges persist. "The majority of the Scheduled Tribe families in the village are economically very weak. Most families do not have enough money to start a business, nor do they have enough land to do farming or vegetable production. Although the new generation has started studying, only a few people from this community are in Government jobs. But I think as the trend of educa-

tion and awareness has increased among children, they will also soon start getting recruited in Government jobs." In the same village, there is also the family of Mangi Lal and Tulsiram, who are deprived of the benefits of the PDS. Last year, the ration status of Mangi Lal's family which consists of seven members, was changed from BPL to APL. As a result, they stopped receiving ration. Similarly, Tulsiram mentions that due to missing documents, their family is unable to access ration benefits. For this, they've been in constant communication with the e-Mitra.

(The author is a social worker from Rajasthan; views are personal)

Ukrainian and Western leaders laud US aid package

AP ■ KYIV

Ukrainian and Western leaders welcomed a desperately needed aid package passed by the US House of Representatives, as the Kremlin warned the passage of the bill would “further ruin” Ukraine and cause more deaths. The House swiftly approved \$95 billion in foreign aid for Ukraine, Israel and other US allies in a rare Saturday session as Democrats and Republicans banded together after months of hard-right resistance over

renewed American support for repelling Russia’s invasion. Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who had warned that his country would lose the war without US funding, said that he was grateful for the decision of US lawmakers. “We appreciate every sign of support for our country and its independence, people and way of life, which Russia is attempting to bury under the rubble,” he wrote on social media site X. “America has demonstrated its leadership since the first days of this war. Exactly this type of

leadership is required to maintain a rules-based international order and predictability for all nations,” he said. The Ukrainian president noted that his country’s “warriors on the front lines” would feel the benefit of the aid package. One such “warrior” is infantry soldier Oleksandr, fighting around Avdiivka, the city in the Donetsk region that Ukraine lost to Russia in February after months of intense combat. “For us it’s so important to have this support from the US and our partners,” Oleksandr told The Associated Press. He did

not give his full name for security reasons. “With this we can stop them and reduce our losses. It’s the first step to have the possibility to liberate our territory.” Ammunition shortages linked to the aid holdup over the past six months have led Ukrainian military commanders to ration shells, a disadvantage that Russia seized on this year — taking the city of Avdiivka and currently inching towards the town of Chasiv Yar, also in the Donetsk region. “The Russians come at us in waves — we become exhaust-

ed, we have to leave our positions. This is repeated many times,” Oleksandr said. “Not having enough ammunition means we can’t cover the area that is our responsibility to hold when they are assaulting us.” In Kyiv, civilians shared their views on the US aid package. “I heard our president officially say that we can lose the war without this help. Thanks very much and yesterday was a great event,” said Kateryna Ruda, 43. Tatyana Ryavchenuk, the wife of a Ukrainian soldier, noted the need for more weapons,

lamenting that soldiers “have nothing to protect us.” “They need weapons, they need gear, they need it. We always need help. Because without help, our enemy can advance further and can be in the center of our city,” the 26-year-old said. Other Western leaders also lauded the aid package. “Ukraine is using the weapons provided by NATO Allies to destroy Russian combat capabilities. This makes us all safer, in Europe & North America,” NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg wrote on X.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said that “Ukraine deserves all the support it can get against Russia”. Her statement was echoed by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who called it “a strong signal in these times.” “We stand with the Ukrainians fighting for their free, democratic and independent country,” Scholz posted on X. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk thanked House Speaker Mike Johnson, while also noting the holdup in Congress. “Better late than too late. And I hope it is not too late for

Ukraine,” he wrote on X. In Russia, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov called the approval of aid to Ukraine “expected and predictable.” The decision “will make the United States of America richer, further ruin Ukraine and result in the deaths of even more Ukrainians, the fault of the Kyiv regime,” Peskov was quoted as saying by Russian news agency Ria Novosti. Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova also took to social media to speak against the aid package.

Israeli strikes on southern Gaza city of Rafah kill 22, mostly children

AP ■ RAFAH (GAZA STRIP)

Israeli strikes on the southern Gaza city of Rafah overnight killed 22 people, including 18 children, health officials said Sunday, as the United States was on track to approve billions of dollars of additional military aid to its close ally. Israel has carried out near-daily air raids on Rafah, where more than half of Gaza’s population of 2.3 million has sought refuge from fighting elsewhere. It has also vowed to expand its ground offensive to the city on the border with Egypt despite international calls for restraint, including from the US. The House of Representatives approved a \$26 billion aid package on Saturday that includes around \$9 billion in humanitarian assistance for Gaza. The first strike killed a man, his wife and their 3-year-old child, according to the nearby Kuwaiti Hospital, which received the bodies. The woman was pregnant and the doctors managed to save the baby, the hospital said. The second strike killed 17 children and two women, all from the same extended family, according to hospital records. First responders were still searching the rubble. An airstrike in Rafah the night

before killed nine people, including six children. Mohammed al-Beheiri said his daughter, Rasha, and her six children, ranging in age from 18 months to 16 years, were among those killed overnight and into Sunday. Her husband’s second wife and their three children were still under the rubble, al-Beheiri said. The Israel-Hamas war has killed over 34,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, devastated Gaza’s two largest cities and left a swath of destruction across the territory. Around 80% of the population have fled their homes to other parts of the besieged coastal enclave, which experts say is on the brink of famine. The conflict, now in its seventh month, has sparked regional unrest pitting Israel and the US against Iran and allied militant groups across the Middle East. Israel and Iran traded fire directly earlier this month, raising fears of all-out war between the longtime foes. Tensions have also spiked in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Israeli troops killed two Palestinians who the military says attacked a checkpoint with a knife and a gun near the southern West Bank town of Hebron early Sunday. The Palestinian Health Ministry said the two killed were 18 and

19 years old, from the same family. No Israeli forces were wounded, the army said. The Palestinian Red Crescent rescue service meanwhile said it has recovered a total of 14 bodies from an Israeli raid in the Nur Shams urban refugee camp in the West Bank that began late Thursday. Those killed include three militants from the Islamic Jihad group and a 15-year-old boy. The military says it killed 10 militants in the camp and arrested eight suspects. Nine Israeli soldiers and officers were wounded. In a separate incident in the West Bank, an Israeli man was wounded in an explosion Sunday, the Magen David Adom rescue service said. A video circulating online shows a man approaching a Palestinian flag that had been planted in a field. When he kicks it, it appears to trigger an explosive device. At least 469 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli soldiers and settlers in the West Bank since the start of the war in Gaza, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry. Most have been killed during Israeli military arrest raids, which often trigger gunbattles, or in violent protests. The war in Gaza was sparked by an unprecedented Oct 7 raid into southern Israel in which

Hamas and other militants killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted around 250 hostages. Israel says militants are still holding around 100 hostages and the remains of more than 30 others. Thousands of Israelis have taken to the streets to call for new elections to replace Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and a deal with Hamas to release the hostages. Netanyahu has vowed to continue the war until Hamas is destroyed and all the hostages are returned. The war has killed at least 34,097 Palestinians and wounded another 76,980, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. The ministry does not differentiate between combatants and civilians in its count but says at least two-thirds have been children and women. It also says the real toll is likely higher as many bodies are stuck beneath the rubble left by airstrikes or are in areas that are unreachable for medics. Israel blames Hamas for civilian casualties because the militants fight in dense, residential neighbourhoods, but the military rarely comments on individual strikes, which often kill women and children. The military says it has killed over 13,000 Hamas fighters, without providing evidence.



People gather around a component from an intercepted ballistic missile that fell near the Dead Sea in Israel on Saturday. Open fighting between Israel and Iran began April 1 with the suspected Israeli killing of Iranian generals at an Iranian diplomatic compound in Syria. That prompted Iran’s retaliatory barrage last weekend of more than 300 missiles and drones that the US, Israel and regional and international partners helped bat down without significant damage in Israel. And then came Friday’s strikes that hit near military and nuclear targets in Iran.

AP/PTI

Vehicle crashes into birthday party; two dead, 15 injured

AP ■ BERLIN TOWN (US)

A young brother and sister died and 15 people were injured, several seriously, when vehicle driven by a suspected drunken driver crashed into a birthday party Saturday at a boat club, a Michigan sheriff said. Monroe County Sheriff Troy Goodnough said an 8-year-old girl and her 5-year-old brother died in the crash when a 66-year-old woman crashed 25 feet into the building at about 3 p.m. at the Swan Creek Boat Club in Berlin Township, about 30 miles south of Detroit. He did not identify the woman driving the vehicle but said she was taken into custody suspected of operating a motor vehicle while intoxicated causing death. He said she was cooperating with authorities.

Khamenei acknowledges Tehran hit little in attack on Israel

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Iran’s supreme leader on Sunday dismissed any discussion of whether Tehran’s unprecedented drone-and-missile attack on Israel hit anything there, a tacit acknowledgment that despite launching a massive assault, few projectiles actually made through to their targets. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei’s comments before senior military leaders didn’t not touch on the apparent Israeli retaliatory strike Friday on the central city of Isfahan, even though air defences opened fire and Iran grounded commercial flights across much of the country. Analysts believe both Iran and Israel, regional archrivals locked in a shadow war for years, are trying to dial back tensions following a series of escalatory attacks between them as Israel’s war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip rages on and inflames the wider region.

Khamenei, 85, made the comments in a meeting attended by the top ranks of Iran’s regular military, police and paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, a powerful force within its Shiite theocracy. “Debates by the other party about how many missiles were fired, how many of them hit the target and how many didn’t, these are of secondary importance,” Khamenei said in remarks aired by state television. “The main issue is the emergence of the Iranian nation and Iranian military’s will in an important international arena. This is what matters.” Iran launched hundreds of drones, ballistic missiles and cruise missiles that sought to overwhelm Israel’s air defences in the April 13 attack — the first on Israel by a foreign power since Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein launched Scud missiles at Israel in the 1991 Gulf War. However, Israeli air defences

and fighter jets, backed by the US, the United Kingdom and neighbouring Jordan, shot down the vast majority of the incoming fire. Satellite images analysed Saturday by The Associated Press showed the Iranian attack caused only minor damage at the Nevatim air base in southern Israel, including taking a chunk out of a taxiway that Israel quickly repaired. Iran’s attack came in response to a suspected Israeli strike on April 1 targeting a consular building next to the Iranian Embassy in Damascus, Syria, which killed two Guard generals and others. “Today, thanks to the work done by our armed forces, the Revolutionary Guard, the army, the police, each in its own way, praise be to Allah the image of the country around the world has become commendable,” added Khamenei, despite Iran facing public anger over its economy and crackdowns on dissent.

Litmus test for President Muizzu as Maldives goes to polls amidst regional power dynamics

PTI ■ MALE

Maldivians on Sunday cast their ballots in a crucial parliamentary election, seen as a litmus test for President Mohamed Muizzu, whose policies are being closely monitored by both India and China amidst regional power dynamics. According to information released by the Elections Commission (EC), 181,406 people cast their ballots as of 4:00 pm local time, making for a voter turnout of 63.73 per cent. This includes 88,230 women and 93,176 men. About 284,000 people were eligible to vote. A total of 602 ballot boxes have been set up in the Maldives and three other countries for the parliamentary election. Polling stations are also open in 34 resorts, prisons, and other industrial islands. The countries in which ballot boxes are placed for voting are Thiruvananthapuram in India, Colombo in Sri Lanka and



Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, psmnews.mv reported. Parliamentarians will be elected to a total of 93 constituencies, with 368 candidates contesting from six parties, including Muizzu’s People’s National

Congress (PNC) and the main opposition the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), and as independents. Muizzu cast his vote at the polling station in Thaaajuddin School at 8:40 am. Speaking to

reporters after casting the ballot, he urged every citizen to exercise their right to vote as soon as possible, newportal edition.mv reported. “Voting is a constitutional right and responsibility afforded to every citizen. All citizens should come out and exercise their right to vote as soon as possible. It is the responsibility of eligible voters to not wait until evening and quickly attend their respective polling stations to cast ballots,” he said. No major issues or complaints were noted during the voting, the EC said. “Nothing major has been noted as a complaint up until now. There have been complaints about showing ballot papers. That is, complaints about ballots put in the box without being folded,” Hassan Zakariyya, EC member and spokesperson, was quoted as saying by Adhathu news portal. Such complaints have also been few, he said.

Indian-origin mayoral candidate wants to run London like a ‘seasoned CEO’

PTI ■ LONDON

Tarun Ghulati, the Indian-origin candidate in the race to challenge Sadiq Khan from winning a third term as Mayor of London, has said that the citizens of the UK capital have been let down by all the major political parties and he wants to run London like a “seasoned CEO” which delivers profits for all. The Delhi-born businessman believes his investment expertise is what London needs to revive its fortunes as the “global bank of the world” by attracting the investment it needs. The 63-year-old is standing as an Independent candidate among 13 contestants in the fray for the local elections on May 2, when Londoners will vote for their Mayor and also for members of the London Assembly. “I view London as a unique global city, akin to the ‘global bank of the world’ where diverse cultures converge to flourish,” Ghulati said in a speech this week. “As Mayor, I will build London’s balance sheet such that it is the premier choice for investment, safeguarding safety and prosperity for all its residents. I will transform and run London effectively and efficiently like a seasoned CEO. London will be a profitable corporate where profitability means the wellbeing of all. You will all be part of the journey. Let’s do it for our



Indian-origin candidate for London Mayor Tarun Ghulati addresses a gathering in London

PTI

London, our home,” he said. Safety on the streets of the city is among his other major priorities, with visible community policing and more officers patrolling on the beat on the agenda. “It is about having enough bobbies on the beat, having the resources for police officers to do their jobs; which means making the streets safe for women to walk at night, with muggers and burglars being caught and punished,” he said. Scrapping some of the Labour

Party incumbent Sadiq Khan’s unpopular policies, such as the high costs associated with Ultra Low Emissions Zone (ULEZ) charges and Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) across the city, also make up Ghulati’s key policy planks. “We did not want ULEZ, LTNs or 20mph speed limits and many other poor policies... Climate change is happening and we need to mitigate its effects but that cannot be done by making everyone live 15

minutes from home or to penalise commuters in areas with little public transport. What changes we need to make must be paced with public opinion, not imposed in an arbitrary way on wallets coping with the cost of living,” said Ghulati, who has called London his home for 20 years. He is equally scathing about the Conservative Party candidate for Mayor, Susan Hall, who he claims failed to block the Mayor’s controversial policies despite being an Assembly member for London for many years. “I would not be a candidate for Mayor if the political candidates were doing what they should be doing. They have let us down. This is all about London and Londoners,” he declared. Creating more affordable housing, minimising council tax, increasing focus on tourism to the UK capital and ensuring free school meals are among some of Ghulati’s other focus areas. He claims to have canvassed from borough to borough across London to garner his required signatures to support his mayoral candidature. Ghulati also features in the official mini manifesto booklet, which costs each candidate GBP 10,000. The winning mayoral candidate will be responsible for all local issues affecting Londoners, from transport and policing to housing and the environment.

Russia warns Pakistan of banning rice imports over phytosanitary concerns

PTI ■ KARACHI

Russia has warned Pakistan that it would ban rice imports again if Moscow’s phytosanitary concerns are not addressed in future consignments after a quarantine organism was detected in the rice consignment. The warning came after Russia’s Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Surveillance (FSVPS) issued a notification regarding violations of international and Russian phytosanitary requirements over a shipment of rice imported from Pakistan. Dated April 2, the notification highlights the presence of a quarantine organism, “Megaselia scalaris (Loew),” in the rice consignment.

Pakistan’s trade representative at its embassy in Russia was asked to carry out an immediate investigation into the matter. The Russian authorities have written to the Pakistan embassy to prevent such violations and ensure all Pakistani rice exporters follow phytosanitary standards to ensure the safety of agricultural products traded between the two countries. The trade wing of the Pakistani embassy in Moscow, while forwarding the Russian authority’s letter to the Department of Plant Protection (DPP) in the Ministry of Food Security and other relevant government offices, has warned of a possible ban on rice exports in future if more complaints were received from Russian author-

ities. Russia had previously imposed a ban on rice imports from Pakistan in 2019 because of health safety reasons. Similarly, in December 2006, Russia stopped the import of rice from Pakistan for not meeting food safety standards. Chairman of the Pakistan Rice Exporters Association, Chela Ram Kewlani, said that Pakistani rice exporters needed to be very careful in choosing and packaging all rice for export. He said that Pakistan had benefited from India banning exports of non-Basmati rice last year, given that India has a nearly 40 per cent share in the globally traded rice. Last year, India banned the export of white non-Basmati

and parboiled rice. According to a leading Pakistani rice dealer, about 700,000 tonnes of rice were exported in December 2023 alone, the highest in a month for the fiscal year. He said Pakistan exported rice with an increase in higher production and demand and elevated global prices last year. The Rice Export Corporation is projecting a 60 per cent jump in exports of Basmati rice to over a million tonnes and a 36 per cent jump for non-Basmati rice to 4.25 million tonnes from Pakistan. It is eyeing exports of above five million metric tonnes of all rice in the fiscal year of 2023/2024, which would be much higher than last fiscal year’s exports of 3.7 million tonnes.

2 Japanese navy helicopters crash, 1 dead and 7 missing

AP ■ TOKYO

Two Japanese navy helicopters carrying eight crew members crashed in the Pacific Ocean south of Tokyo during nighttime training in a possible collision, leaving one dead while rescuers on Sunday searched for seven others missing, the defence minister said. The two SH-60K choppers from the Maritime Self-Defence Force were carrying four crew each and lost contact late Saturday near Torishima island, about 600 kilometres south of Tokyo, Defense Minister Minoru Kihara told reporters. The cause of the crash was not immediately known, but officials believe the two helicopters “highly likely” collided before crashing into the water, Kihara said. The navy chief of staff, Adm. Ryo Sakai, said training involving the SH-60s will be suspended until the cause of the crash is determined and preventive measures are adopted. Rescuers recovered a flight data recorder, a blade from each helicopter, and fragments believed to be from both choppers in the same area, signs that the two SH-60Ks were flying

close to each other, Kihara said. Search and rescue efforts for the missing crew were expanded Sunday with the deployment of 12 warships and seven aircraft. Japan coast guard patrol boats and planes also joined the operation. US Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel offered his country’s to help with the search and rescue. “We will stand together, side by side, with our friend and ally, Japan. My thoughts are with the crew members, and their families and friends during this challenging time,” he wrote on the social platform X. The twin-engine, multi-mission helicopters developed by Sikorsky and known as Seahawks were modified and produced in Japan by Mitsubishi Heavy Industries. They were on nighttime anti-submarine training, Kihara said. One lost contact at 10:38 p.m. and sent an automatic emergency signal a minute later. Only one distress signal, called an emergency locator transmitter, was heard — another sign the helicopters were near the same place, because their signals use the same frequency and could not be differentiat-

ed, Kihara said. One helicopter belonged to an air base in Nagasaki, and the other to a base in Tokushima prefecture. Officials were interviewing the pilot of a third aircraft that also participated in Saturday’s training, Kihara said. The SH-60K aircraft is usually deployed on destroyers for anti-submarine warfare, but is also used for search and rescue and other missions. Japan has about 70 of the modified helicopters. Saturday’s training only involved the Japanese navy and was not part of a multinational exercise, defense officials said. Japan, under its 2022 security strategy, has been accelerating its military buildup and fortifying deterrence in the southwestern Japanese islands in the Pacific and East China Sea to counter threats from China’s increasingly assertive military activities. Japan in recent years has conducted its own extensive naval exercises as well as joint drills with its ally the United States and other partners. Saturday’s training was part of routine drills involving warships, submarines and Seahawk helicopters, the Japanese navy

chief of staff said. During training, a number of helicopters hover together as they lower sonars into the water to detect submarines. In 2017, a Japanese navy SH-60J, an earlier generation Seahawk, crashed during nighttime training due to human error, killing three crew. In July 2021, two SH-60s had a minor collision off the southern island of Amamioshima, both suffering blade damage, but causing no injuries. Following the 2021 collision, the navy introduced a set of preventive measures to ensure enough distance between aircraft. Sakai said Saturday’s crash could have been prevented if all safety measures were adequately followed. In the US, the fatal crash of a MH-60S Seahawk during training off California in 2021 was attributed to mechanical failure from unsuspected damage during maintenance, according to the Navy. The crash in Japan also comes a year after a Ground Self-Defense Force UH-60 Blackhawk crashed off the southwestern island of Miyako due to an engine output problem known as “rollback,” leaving all 10 crew members dead.

Polling ends in 21 national and provincial seats in by-elections in Pakistan

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD/LAHORE

Polling ended on Sunday for 21 national and provincial seats in the by-elections in Pakistan, which took place amidst tight security and suspension of cellular and internet services in some districts of Punjab and Balochistan to maintain law and order. According to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), voting began at 8 am and continued without any break until 5 pm with the provision that voters present within the premises of polling stations would be allowed to cast votes even after the expiry of official timing. It will be followed by counting, while results are expected later tonight. Despite elaborate security measures taken by authorities to maintain the law and order situation, at least one person was killed and several others injured in clashes during the polling in Punjab province, according to the police. “Violent clashes took place in Narowal, Sheikhupura and Rahim Yar Khan in which one person was killed and several injured,” the Punjab police said. In Narowal, some 120 km from

Lahore, a clash took place between the supporters of former prime ministers Imran Khan and Nawaz Sharif outside a polling station. Punjab Information Minister Azma Bokhari said the victim was a member of Sharif’s Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) who was killed by workers of Khan’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party. In the Sheikhupura and Rahim Yar Khan districts of Punjab, at least five workers of the two rival parties suffered bullet injuries during clashes. Similarly in Lahore, the PTI and PML-N workers scuffled on setting up polling camps. Police arrested four persons, including PTI leader Shabbir Gujjar. The general elections were held across the country on February 8 to elect representatives for the national assembly and four provincial assemblies. Polls were, however, cancelled for one National Assembly seat, two Punjab Assembly seats and one seat of the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Assembly. Apart from these, candidates who won more than one seat opted for only one after the elections, leaving the ECP to

organise by-elections on 21 seats, including five national and 16 provincial assembly seats. A day earlier, the federal government announced that cellular services would remain temporarily suspended in specific districts of Punjab and Balochistan during the by-elections. The suspension request was made by the electoral watchdog. In a statement, the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) said the decision was taken to safeguard the integrity and security of the electoral process. Social media platform X (formerly Twitter) has also been shut down in Pakistan since February 17, after a top bureaucrat accused the Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja and Chief Justice of Pakistan Qazi Faez Isa of being involved in rigging at the behest of the military establishment to install the Shehbaz Sharif government. By-elections were held on two seats of the National Assembly each in Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and one seat in Sindh, while polling began on 12 seats of the Punjab Assembly and two each of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and

Balochistan assemblies. In Punjab, NA-132 (Kasur) and NA-119 (Lahore) were vacated by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz, while Shehbaz also gave up two of his provincial assembly seats in Lahore. The prime minister retained his NA-123 seat in the National Assembly. Elaborate security measures were taken by authorities to control the law and order situation with the deployment of regular army troops to maintain peace during the day-long process of by-elections. The ECP had asked the federal government to approve the deployment of Pakistan Army and Civil Armed Forces (CAF) troops to keep peace. The federal government endorsed the move and announced the use of armed forces units as a quick response force. The Ministry of Interior, in its notification issued on Friday, said the CAF and Pakistan Army units would be used as second and third tiers of security, and they would be available with immediate effect till April 22 in all 21 constituencies.

Scotland Yard chief under pressure over antisemitism row at London protest

PTI ■ LONDON

The Scotland Yard chief is under growing pressure on Sunday amid an antisemitism row during a pro-Palestinian protest march in London, with former UK home secretary Suella Braverman among those calling for his resignation. Sir Mark Rowley, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, is in the firing line after Britain’s largest police force rendered two apologies to an antisemitism campaigner for calling him “openly Jewish”. Rowley “personally” reiterated the force’s apologies as London Mayor Sadiq Khan and UK Home Office, in charge of the city’s policing, said the force was right to apologise. “I personally reiterate our apology from earlier this week. Today, as with every other day, our officers will continue to police with courage, empathy and impartiality,” said Rowley. But he has now been summoned to a meeting with UK

Policing Minister Chris Philp, who has said he was “deeply concerned” by the force’s handling of counter-protesters at pro-Palestinian rallies. “No one should be told their religion is provocative, nor an innocent person threatened with arrest solely because of someone else’s anticipated unreasonable reaction,” said Philp. In a video on social media, Campaign Against Antisemitism chief executive Gideon Falter – wearing his Jewish yarmulke cap – is seen being told by a Met Police officer that he is worried about the reaction to his presence at the march. “The video posted by the Campaign Against Antisemitism will further dent the confidence of many Jewish Londoners, which is the opposite of what any of us want,” said Met Police Assistant Commissioner Matt Twist in a statement following the incident last weekend. “The use of the term ‘openly Jewish’ by one of our officers is hugely regrettable. It’s

absolutely not the basis on which we make decisions, it was a poor choice of words and while not intended, we know it will have caused offence to many. We apologise,” he said. Twist went on to highlight a trend at the demonstrations in London, in protest against the Israel-Hamas conflict, where those opposed to the main protests appear along the route to express their views. He added: “The fact that those who do this often film themselves while doing so suggests they must know that their presence is provocative, that they’re inviting a response and that they’re increasing the likelihood of an altercation. “They’re also making it much more likely officers will intervene. They don’t do so to stifle free speech or to limit the right to protest, but to keep opposing groups apart, to prevent disorder and keep the public – including those taking part in or opposing the protest – safe.”

Polish voters choose mayors in runoff polls

AP ■ WARSAW (POLAND)

Polish voters are casting ballots on Sunday to chose mayors in hundreds of cities and towns where no candidate won outright in the first round of the country’s local elections two weeks ago. Mayors will be chosen in a total of 748 places, including in the cities of Krakow, Poznan, Rzeszow and Wroclaw. Those are places where no single candidate won at least 50 per cent of the vote during the first round of elections on April 7. The local and regional elections are being viewed as a test for the pro-European Union government of Prime Minister Donald Tusk four months after it took power at the national level. Tusk’s party did well in big cities including Warsaw, where his party’s candidate, Rafal Trzaskowski, easily won re-election as mayor two weeks ago. The main opposition party, Law and Justice, which held power at the national level from 2015-23, won a greater percentage of votes in the provincial assemblies.

Live video of man who set himself on fire proves challenging for news organisations

AP ■ NEW YORK

Video cameras stationed outside the Manhattan courthouse where former President Donald Trump is on trial caught the gruesome scene Friday of a man who lit himself on fire and the aftermath as authorities tried to rescue him. CNN, Fox News Channel and MSNBC were all on the air with reporters talking about the seating of a jury when the incident happened and other news agencies, including The Associated Press, were livestreaming from outside the courthouse. The man, who distributed pamphlets before dousing himself in an accelerant and setting himself on fire, was taken to a hospital where he later died. The incident tested how quickly the networks could react, and how they decided what would be too disturbing for their viewers to see. With narration from Laura Coates, CNN had the most extensive view of the scene. Coates, who at first incorrect-



ly said it was a shooting situation, then narrated as the man was visible onscreen, enveloped in flames. “You can smell burning flesh,” Coates, an anchor and CNN’s chief legal analyst, said as she stood at the scene with reporter Evan Perez. The camera switched back and forth between Coates and what was happening in the park. Five minutes after the incident started, CNN posted the onscreen message “Warning: Graphic Content.”

Coates later said she couldn’t “overstate the emotional response of watching a human being engulfed in flames and to watch his body be lifted into a gurney.” She described it as an “emotional and unbelievably disturbing moment here.” Fox’s cameras caught the scene briefly as reporter Eric Shawn talked, then the network switched to a courtroom sketch of Trump on trial. “We deeply apologize for what has happened,” Shawn said. On MSNBC, reporter Yasmin

Vossoughian narrated the scene. The network showed smoke in the park, but no picture where the body was visible. “I could see the outline of his body inside the flames,” Vossoughian said, “which was so terrifying to see. As he went to the ground his knees hit the ground first.” The AP had a camera with an unnarrated live shot stationed outside the courthouse, shown on YouTube and APNews.com. The cameras caught an extensive view, with the man lighting himself afire and later writhing on the ground before a police officer tried to douse the flames with a jacket. The AP later removed its live feed from its YouTube channel and replaced it with a new one because of the graphic nature of the content. The news agency distributed carefully edited clips to its video clients — not showing the moment the man lit himself on fire, for example, said executive producer Tom Williams.

Haitians scramble to survive amidst gang violence

AP ■ PORT AU PRINCE (HAITI)

As the sun sets, a burly man bellows into a megaphone while a curious crowd gathers around him. Next to him is a small cardboard box with several banknotes worth 10 Haitian gourdes — about 7 US cents. “Everyone give whatever they have!” the man shouts as he grabs the arms and hands of people entering a neighbourhood in the capital of Port-au-Prince that has been targeted by violent gangs. The community recently voted to buy a metal barricade and install it themselves to try to protect residents from the unrelenting violence that killed or injured more than 2,500 people in Haiti from January to March. “Every day I wake up and find

a dead body,” said Nounne-Carme Manoune, an immigration officer. Life in Port-au-Prince has become a game of survival, pushing Haitians to new limits as they scramble to stay safe and alive while gangs overwhelm the police and the government remains largely absent. Some are installing metal barricades. Others press hard on the gas while driving near gang-controlled areas. The few who can afford it stockpile water, food, money and medication, supplies of which have dwindled since the main international airport closed in early March. The country’s biggest seaport is largely paralysed by marauding gangs. “People living in the capital are locked in, they have nowhere to go,” Philippe Branchat,

International Organisation for Migration chief in Haiti, said in a recent statement. “The capital is surrounded by armed groups and danger. It is a city under siege.” Phones ping often with alerts reporting gunfire, kidnappings and fatal shootings, and some supermarkets have so many armed guards that they resemble small police stations. Gang attacks used to occur only in certain areas, but now they can happen anywhere, any time. Staying home does not guarantee safety: One man playing with his daughter at home was shot in the back by a stray bullet. Others have been killed. Schools and gas stations are shuttered, with fuel on the black market selling for USD 9 a gallon, roughly three times the official price. Banks have

prohibited customers from withdrawing more than USD 100 a day, and checks that used to take three days to clear now take a month or more. Police officers have to wait weeks to be paid. “Everyone is under stress,” said Isidore Gedeon, a 38-year-old musician. “After the prison break, people don’t trust anyone. The state doesn’t have control.” Gangs that control an estimated 80 per cent of Port-au-Prince launched coordinated attacks on February 29, targeting critical state infrastructure. They set fire to police stations, shot up the airport and stormed into Haiti’s two biggest prisons, releasing more than 4,000 inmates. At the time, Prime Minister Ariel Henry was visiting Kenya to push for the UN-backed

deployment of a police force. Henry remains locked out of Haiti, and a transitional presidential council tasked with selecting the country’s next prime minister and Cabinet could be sworn in as early as this week. Henry has pledged to resign once a new leader is installed. Few believe this will end the crisis. It’s not only the gangs unleashing violence; Haitians have embraced a vigilante movement known as “bwa kale”, that has killed several hundred suspected gang members or their associates. “There are certain communities I can’t go to because everyone is scared of everyone,” Gedeon said. “You could be innocent, and you end up dead.” More than 95,000 people have fled Port-au-Prince in one month alone.

IMF team to visit Pak next month to negotiate new bailout package

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan’s Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb has said that an IMF team is expected to visit Islamabad next month to negotiate a new long-term bailout package to secure a staff-level agreement for the cash-strapped country by mid-July. Speaking to the media after his week-long visit to Washington, the minister said the contours of the new International Monetary Fund programme will shape up later. “We will start getting into the granularity of the programme by mid-May,” Dawn News quoted Aurangzeb as saying on Saturday. Cash-strapped Pakistan has made a formal request to the IMF to seek the next bailout package

in the range of USD 6 to USD 8 billion with the possibility of augmentation through climate financing. Addressing journalists at the Pakistan Embassy in Washington, Aurangzeb expressed the hope that the global lender’s board of governors would convene to consider the last tranche of the current programme by the end of this month, with the final instalment released shortly thereafter. In earlier statements, Aurangzeb had said Pakistan would prefer a long-term, preferably a three-year programme. However, when asked at Saturday’s briefing, Aurangzeb said he would not speculate on the size or the duration of the programme yet. Earlier, Aurangzeb said that

Pakistan can repay its debt to Beijing only after completing the second phase of the multi-million dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The minister’s candid remarks followed discussions with key financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank, alongside senior US officials in Washington this week. Explaining his stance on this sensitive issue, Aurangzeb said: “The CPEC was a champion project for Pakistan and a lot of infrastructure was created during its first phase. Now, what’s supposed to happen was for us to go into CPEC Phase 2, which was and remains the way we monetise that infrastructure because that’s where the special economic zones come in.”

Putin wants to get closer to Afghanistan’s current rulers?

THE CONVERSATION ■ NEWCASTLE (UK)

Russia is currently considering taking the Taliban off its list of terrorist organisations, officials have indicated. While no final decision has yet been taken, one sign of their increasingly cordial relationship is the Taliban’s invitation to an international economic forum being held in Kazan, Russia, in May. The Kremlin has opened up discussions with the Taliban before, and Russia was one of the few nations to accredit a diplomat when the organisation took control of Afghanistan. But Afghanistan’s political and economic crisis and western

sanctions on Russia due to the Ukraine war mean both sides have something to gain from a stronger relationship. In 1999, the UN security council adopted resolution 1267, in which the Taliban was found responsible for “the provision of sanctuary and training for international terrorists”. A few months later, Vladimir Putin signed a decree implementing the UN resolution and imposing sanctions against the Taliban. In 2003, the Russian supreme court recognised the Taliban movement as a terrorist organisation, saying it maintained links with illegal armed forces in Chechnya and tried to seize power in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan

and Kyrgyzstan. Russia launched a regional initiative in 2017 to negotiate between the Kabul government and the Taliban as an effort to create a peacemaker role for itself. These negotiations were aimed at offering solutions to the Afghanistan crisis, and were usually held with the participation of China, Iran, Pakistan and central Asian republics. Russia continued to maintain contact with the Taliban, despite labelling them a terrorist group. Since taking over control of Afghanistan, no foreign states have recognised the Taliban government. There are few signs yet that many are close to

doing so, partly because of the Taliban’s continuing erosion of women’s rights and recognition of human rights more generally. The Taliban wants international sanctions to be withdrawn, to take Afghanistan’s UN seat and for frozen assets to be released, which will help the country’s economic development. Afghanistan should benefit economically from developing the important Lapis-Lazuli trade corridor which links Afghanistan to Istanbul and Europe, and the Uzbekistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan railway line, if international sanctions are withdrawn. Russia taking the Taliban off

their terrorism list would be a first step toward international recognition for the current Afghan government. Russia also benefits from its cooperation with the Taliban. It aims to present itself as the region’s security provider, especially compared to the US’s failure to create stability in Afghanistan. Moscow considers central Asia a zone of historical interest (the Soviet Union was involved in an armed conflict within Afghanistan from 1979-89). It is also concerned about the stability of the region, drug trafficking and threats from Islamist terrorism, especially after the recent Isis-K attack on the Crocus City Hall, Moscow.

To increase its geoeconomic and geopolitical presence in the region, Russia can use the alliances it has already built – the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (a military alliance with Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, formed in 2002) and the Eurasian Economic Union (an economic union of five post-Soviet states). Russia’s 2023 foreign policy plan mentions prospects for Afghanistan’s integration into “the Eurasian space for cooperation”. The increasing cooperation between the Taliban and Russia has implications in terms of the ongoing rivalry between Russia and the west. Since the begin-

ning of the Ukraine war, Moscow has tried to get other nations to support its strategic view of why the war is happening. This version of history and policy positions Russia as a protector of traditional religions and values and places it among major world civilisations, contrasting it with the “godless” west. It also details the right of civilisations to exist and develop within their own values, something that should appeal to the Taliban, and that Russia presents as a contrast to the west. In 2022, Putin said: “Real democracy in a multipolar world is primarily about the ability of [...] any civilisation to follow its own path and organ-

ise its own socio-political system. If the United States or the EU countries enjoy this right, then the countries of Asia, the Islamic states, the monarchies of the Persian Gulf [...] certainly have this right as well.” These ideas are popular in the Muslim world because they promise an alternative non-western order and recognise Islamic values as equal and fundamental, with no need to conform to the western interpretations of right and wrong. The potential rapprochement with the Taliban is a sign to the Islamic world in particular, that, unlike the US, Russia is an ally that will not interfere in another country’s internal affairs or dictate its values.

Six of top ten valued firms take ₹1.40 lakh crore hit in mcap

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The combined market valuation of six of the top 10 valued firms eroded by Rs 1,40,478.38 crore in a holiday-shortened week, with IT majors Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) and Infosys taking the maximum hit. Last week, the BSE benchmark declined 1,156.57 points or 1.55 per cent. Stock markets were closed on Wednesday on account of Ram Navami.

While Reliance Industries, HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel and Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC)



were the gainers from the top-10 pack, TCS, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India, Infosys, ITC and Hindustan

Unilever suffered erosion in their valuation. The market valuation of TCS tanked by Rs 62,538.64 crore

to Rs 13,84,804.91 crore, the most among the top 10 firms. Infosys faced an erosion of Rs 30,488.12 crore from its

valuation which stood at Rs 5,85,936.45 crore. Shares of Infosys on Friday ended nearly 1 per cent lower after the company's revenue growth guidance for FY25 failed to meet market expectations. The market capitalisation (mcap) of ICICI Bank diminished by Rs 26,423.74 crore to Rs 7,49,023.89 crore and that of State Bank of India declined by Rs 14,234.76 crore to Rs 6,70,059.86 crore. The valuation of ITC slumped Rs 6,616.9 crore to Rs 5,30,350.97 crore and that of Hindustan Unilever went lower by Rs 176.22 crore to

Rs 5,24,487.51 crore. However, Bharti Airtel's mcap zoomed Rs 37,797.09 crore to Rs 7,30,658.36 crore and that of HDFC Bank climbed Rs 9,420.17 crore to Rs 11,63,314.93 crore. Reliance Industries added Rs 4,397.82 crore taking its valuation to Rs 19,90,195.52 crore and the mcap of LIC advanced Rs 1,201.75 crore to Rs 6,15,453.90 crore. In the ranking of top-10 firms, Reliance Industries remained the most valued company followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Bharti Airtel, State Bank of India, LIC, Infosys, ITC and Hindustan Unilever.

Indian Biogas Association joins hands with HAI to promote hydrogen



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Biogas Association (IBA) has partnered with Hydrogen Association of India (HAI) to promote bio-based energy solutions with a special emphasis on green and blue hydrogen. Talking to PTI, IBA Chairman Gaurav Kedia said, "IBA and HAI have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) aimed at promoting the production of green energy within the nation". This strategic alliance will facilitate comprehensive measures — including training, capacity building, and policy advocacy — directed towards catalysing the promotion and advancement of bio-based energy solutions with a special focus on green and blue hydrogen. The green hydrogen market in India is forecasted to achieve a total worth of USD 8 billion by 2030 and USD 340 billion

by 2050, Kedia informed. With a shared objective of minimising the country's reliance on imported energy sources, the MoU marks commitment to joint efforts in propelling sustainable energy initiatives forward. The agreement is focussing on harnessing synergies from both associations, thereby catalysing the continued growth of the growing bio-based energy sector. While Indian Biogas Association remains dedicated to advancing the biogas industry, Hydrogen Association of India is committed to delivering comprehensive services and seeking optimal solutions for key stakeholders, spanning the entirety of the hydrogen sector's diverse industries. The partnership can also give an extra push to blue hydrogen, whose projections indicate that it is poised to increase to 80 million metric tons by 2050, contingent upon ongoing governmental

endeavours worldwide to enforce more stringent regulations to foster the adoption of emission-free fuel sources, Kedia said. "The discourse surrounding the utilisation of hydrogen within the steel industry has garnered significant attention. However, it is crucial to note that carbon remains indispensable in the process. "By breaking methane molecules, inherent within biogas, we can simultaneously yield both carbon and hydrogen, thereby offering a viable solution to address this requirement," he added. HAI president RK Malhotra stressed the importance of policy advocacy for the bio-hydrogen and biogas ecosystem. This collaborative approach aims to leverage government initiatives within the sector and empower the industry to achieve India's green energy goals, ultimately supporting the nation's sustainable growth, he stated.

Insurance regulator IRDAI abolishes age restriction on health insurance product

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

With a view to widen the market and foster adequate protection from healthcare expenses, insurance regulator IRDAI has removed the age limit of 65 years for individuals buying health insurance policies. This marks a significant departure from the conventional constraints that limited individuals in securing comprehensive coverage. By abolishing the maximum age restriction on purchasing health insurance plans, the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) aims to foster a more inclusive and accessible healthcare ecosystem, ensuring adequate protection against unforeseen medical expenses. As per the earlier guidelines, individuals were allowed to purchase a new insurance policy only till the age of 65. However, with the recent amendment, which has been effective from April 1, anyone, regardless of age, is eligible to buy a new health insurance policy. In a recent gazette notification, IRDAI said, "insurers shall ensure that they offer health insurance products to cater to all age groups. Insurers may design products specifically for senior citizens, students, children, maternity, and any other group as specified by the Competent Authority." Besides, insurers have been mandated to offer health policies to individuals with



pre-existing medical conditions of any kind. Consequently, insurers are prohibited from refusing to issue policies to individuals with severe medical conditions like cancer, heart or renal failure, and AIDS. According to the notification, insurers are allowed to offer premium payment in instalments for the convenience of policyholders. Travel policies can only be offered by general and health insurers, it said. There is no limit on AYUSH treatment coverage. Treatments under systems like Ayurveda, Yoga, Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy will receive coverage up to the sum insured without any cap, it said. Policyholders with benefit-based policies can file multiple claims with various insurers, enhancing flexibility and options, it said. The proposed regulation seeks to handle the complaints and claims of senior citizens via a specialised channel, ensuring a more tailored and responsive approach to their requirements, it added.

UltraTech Cement acquires grinding unit from India Cements

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Aditya Birla group company UltraTech Cement has announced the acquisition of a grinding unit from India Cements for Rs 315 crore and said it will invest an additional Rs 504 crore to expand capacity of two units. In a stock exchange filing, UltraTech said its board has approved acquisition "of a grinding unit having installed capacity of 1.1 million tonnes per annum in addition to a captive railway siding at Parli, Maharashtra from The India Cements Limited... For a consideration of Rs 315 crores". The company said it has entered into an Asset Purchase Agreement with the seller. "This purchase will help the Company to strengthen its presence in the rapidly growing Maharashtra markets," Making a similar regulatory filing, The India Cements said out of the total consideration of Rs 315 crore (exclusive of taxes and levies), "Rs 307 crore will be received by the company shortly and the balance Rs 8 crore within nine months from the date of the agreement". The unit being sold had a turnover of Rs 250.66 crore in the fiscal year ended March 31 2023 and net asset value of Rs 75.10 crore. In a separate filing, UltraTech said its board has also approved brownfield capacity expansion — 1.2 million tonnes per annum at Parli at a cost of Rs 166.4 crore post acquisition of the grinding unit, and 1.8 million tonnes at Dhule in Maharashtra at a cost of Rs 338 crore.

Direct tax collections exceed estimates in FY24



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's net direct tax collections surged by a massive 17.7 per cent year-on-year to Rs 19.58 crore in the fiscal year ended March 2024, surpassing even revised estimates by a wide margin, the tax department said on Sunday. Net collections of income and corporate taxes, which make up for most of the direct taxes, in 2023-24 financial year exceeded the Budget estimates by Rs 1.35 lakh crore (7.40 per cent) and the revised estimates by Rs 13,000 crore. The government had raised the target for direct tax collection in FY24 (April 2023 to March 2024) to Rs 19.45 lakh crore in the interim Budget presented on February 1. With this, the gross tax collection target as per the revised estimate stood at Rs 34.37 lakh crore for FY24. While gross direct tax collections (provisional) for the FY 2023-24 rose 18.48 per cent to Rs 23.37 lakh crore, net proceeds (after accounting for refunds) surged 17.7 per cent to Rs 19.58 lakh crore, reflecting buoyancy in the economy and rise in income levels of individuals and corporates. Refunds aggregating to Rs 3.79 lakh crore have been issued in FY 2023-24, the CBDT said in a statement. "The provisional figures of Direct Tax collections for the financial year (FY) 2023-24 show that net collections are at Rs 19.58 lakh crore, compared to Rs 16.64 lakh crore in the preceding financial year i.e. FY 2022-23," it said, adding the Budget for 2023-24 fiscal had pegged the collections for the year at Rs 18.23 lakh crore, which were revised to Rs 19.45 lakh crore later. "The provisional Direct Tax collections (net of the refunds) have exceeded the Budget Estimate by 7.40 per cent and Revised Estimates by

0.67 per cent," it said. The gross collection (provisional) of Direct Taxes (before adjusting for refunds) for the FY 2023-24 stood at Rs 23.37 lakh crore, showing a growth of 18.48 per cent over the gross collection of Rs 19.72 lakh crore in FY 2022-23. The gross corporate tax collection (provisional) in FY 2023-24 was up 13.06 per cent to Rs 11.32 lakh crore as compared to the gross corporate tax collection of Rs 10 lakh crore of the preceding year. The Net Corporate Tax collection (provisional) in FY 2023-24 at Rs 9.11 lakh crore showed a growth of 10.26 per cent over the net corporate tax collection of Rs 8.26 lakh crore of the preceding year. The Gross Personal Income Tax collection including Securities Transaction Tax (provisional) in FY 2023-24 at Rs 12.01 lakh crore was up 24.26 per cent over previous year's collection of Rs 9.67 lakh crore. The Net Personal Income Tax collection including STT (provisional) in FY 2023-24 at Rs 10.44 lakh crore showed a growth of 25.23 per cent over preceding fiscal year's figure of Rs 8.33 lakh crore. Refunds of Rs 3.79 lakh crore have been issued in the FY 2023-24 showing an increase of 22.74 per cent over the refunds of Rs 3.09 lakh crore issued in FY 2022-23, the statement added. Even the indirect tax collection for FY24 has exceeded the revised estimates (RE) of Rs 14.84 lakh crore by "a handsome margin", helped by a record GST mop-up, a top government official said. CBIC chairman Sanjay Kumar Agarwal, in a letter to field officials, recently said, "I am happy to inform that the indirect tax collections for the Financial Year 2023-24, including Customs and Union Excise Duty have exceeded the Revised Estimates by a handsome margin."

Majority of top 100 companies making disclosures about carbon emissions: PwC India

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Supplementing the efforts of the Indian government to achieve a net-zero emission target by 2070, as many as 51 per cent of the top-100 companies have started making disclosures on a voluntary basis about carbon emissions, says a PwC India survey. The survey further said that about 31 per cent of the respondent companies have disclosed their net-zero targets. The government and the regulators have introduced

new regulations pertaining to ESG (environmental, social and governance) for businesses. India's transition to BRSR Core positions the nation as a frontrunner in the global transition towards a more credible and transparent sustainability reporting landscape. "51 per cent of India's top 100 listed companies by market capitalisation disclosed their Scope 3 data for FY23 despite it being a voluntary disclosure in Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR)," said the report, 'Navigating India's Transition



to Sustainability'. This, it added, "sheds light on how Indian businesses are

taking a step further in ESG reporting as Scope 3 emissions are crucial to

understand an entity's net zero journey." "With the BRSR becoming a mandatory report for businesses, ESG considerations have become key strategic priorities in boardroom discussions. This is a testimony of the enhanced awareness of the importance of sustainability and responsible business practices," said Sambitosh Mohapatra, Partner & Leader, ESG, PwC India. ESG reporting through the BRSR has ushered in greater transparency and a holistic view of a business's

environmental and societal impact, thus, enabling investors and other stakeholders to form key decisions through an ESG lens, make comparisons across companies and sectors, and track progress over time, PwC India said. The survey further said 44 per cent of the top 100 listed companies conducted the life-cycle assessment of their products or services, 89 per cent of the companies disclosed their information on leadership indicators, 49 per cent have increased their energy consumption from

renewable sources. According to the report, the key initiatives which led to a reduction in emissions included transitioning to energy-efficient technologies such as LEDs, adopting efficient air-conditioning, ventilation, and heating systems, shifting to renewable sources for securing energy needs, purchasing carbon offsets, and entering into off-site power purchase agreements. "As India commits to achieve its net zero vision by 2070, the business sector is being viewed as a critical enabler in

furthering this ambition," it said. India's transition to BRSR Core positions the nation as a frontrunner in the global transition towards a more credible and transparent sustainability reporting landscape, it added. The report has analysed the publicly accessible BRSR reports of top 100 companies (Nifty 50 companies and NEXT 50 listed companies) and their response to the regulatory requirement of mandatory reporting under the BRSR for the financial year ended 31 March 2023.

SRM College of Pharmacy, Scitus Pharma enter pact to promote expertise, innovation

PNS ■ KATTANKULATHUR



SRM College of Pharmacy, Shas signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Scitus Pharma Services, among the pioneers of speed and quality in clinical research, and a leading contract research firm based out of Chennai. The MoU will pave the way for SRM College of Pharmacy (SRMCP), a part of SRM Institute of Science and Technology, to engage in collaborative research projects, including joint research initiatives and knowledge exchange of best practices for continuous improvement and innovation, with focus on social relevance, and healthcare initiatives. Support to Startups: The agreement will also

foster facilitation of technology transfer from Scitus Pharma to SRMCP and vice-versa which including licensing agreement for Intellectual Property, joint development of technology and commercialisation of products. The aspect of skill development is the focal point for both students and faculty by introducing training programmes, workshops, internships, and industrial placements to be conducted by SRMCP and Scitus Pharma together.

Land deals on upswing; 721 acres closed in January, March in FY24, says Anarock

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Builders and other entities have closed at least 29 land deals involving 721 acres during January-March this year to expand their businesses amid surge in demand especially for housing, according to Anarock. During the entire 2023-24 fiscal, property consultant Anarock said that real estate developers and other entities have closed 101 land deals, cumulatively accounting for 2,989 acres. Land deals in terms of acres have increased 61 per cent annually in January-March 2024 and 58 per cent annually in 2023-24. At least 26 land deals for around 449 acres were closed during January-March 2023,

while 88 land deals for 1,886 acres were struck during the full 2022-23 fiscal. These land deals, which were struck across major tier I, tier II and tier III cities, include outright purchase-sale transactions and also partnerships with landlords called Joint Development Agreements (JDAs). Anarock Chairman Anuj Puri said, "Out of the total land deals in 2023-24, over 83 deals for about 1,135 acres were closed in the top 7 cities alone. "The remaining 18 deals, accounting for over 1,853 acres, were sealed in various tier 2 and 3 cities like Ahmedabad, Ayodhya, Jaipur, Nagpur, Mysuru, Ludhiana, and Surat. "Tier 2 & 3 cities have once again emerged as growth

engines, thanks to their rapidly improving infrastructure and growth opportunities," Puri said. Among cities, Anarock highlighted that Delhi-NCR clocked maximum 12 land deals for 160 acres during January-March 2024 and 29 land deals for 313 acres in the entire 2023-24 fiscal. Commenting on the findings, Aakash Ohri, Joint Managing Director of DLF Home Developers Ltd, said, "Land deals in the NCR have peaked due to urbanization, infrastructure development, and investment opportunities. Future developments and potential returns on investment are high contributors to the rise in land transactions." The surge in land deals

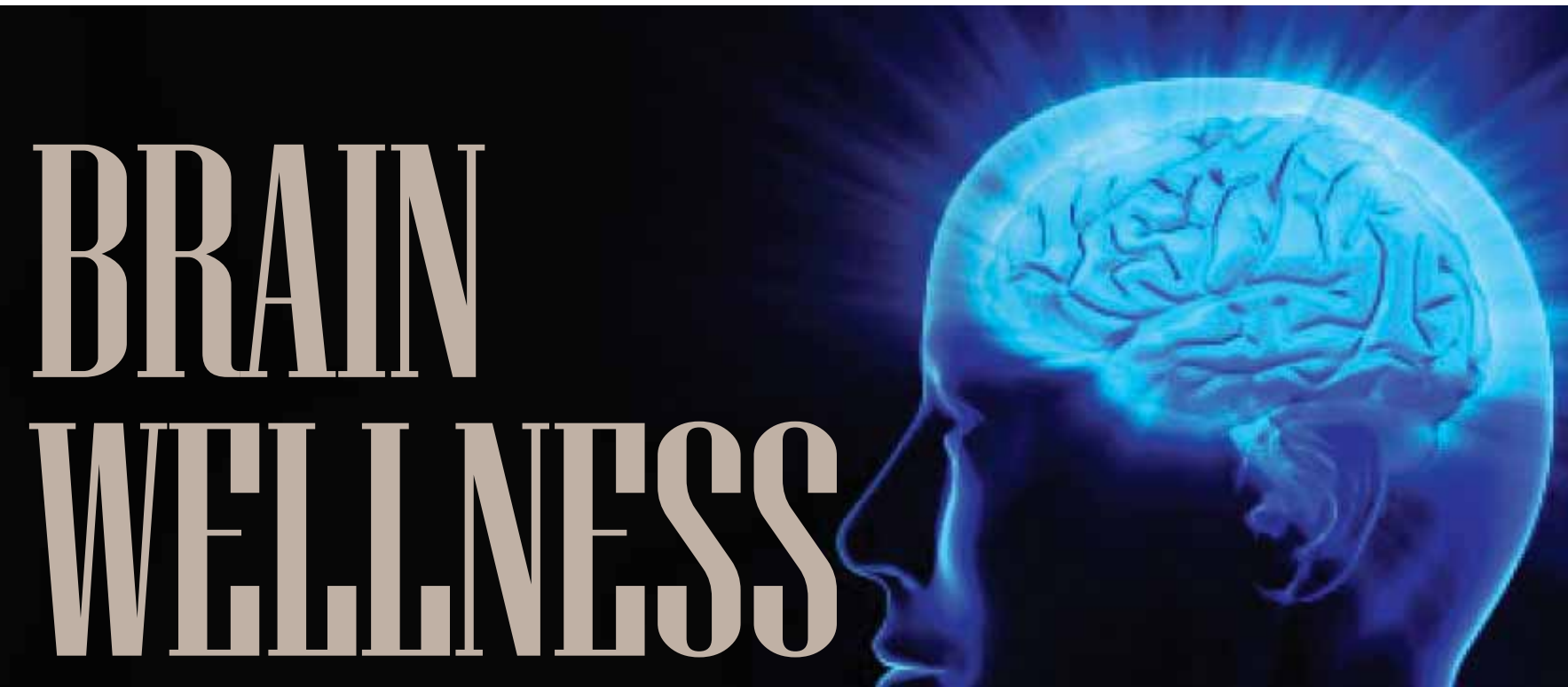
underscores the buoyancy of the housing market, Ohri noted. Signature Global Chairman Pradeep Aggarwal said, "The demand is robust for all kinds of properties from mid-segment to luxury and this is resulting in a significant number of land deals across the country including Delhi-NCR." "This is expected to pave the way for a robust pipeline of new projects in the coming months, which in turn is likely to provide homebuyers a wider range of options to choose from," Aggarwal added. Mohit Malhotra, Founder & CEO of realty firm NeoLiv, said the surge in land deals reflects the enduring demand for housing that has sustained since 2023.

Expect rural sales contribution at record levels this fiscal, says Hyundai

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hyundai Motor India expects contribution from rural areas to remain at record levels in the current fiscal as well on account of various factors including anticipation of a favourable monsoon, according to a senior company executive. The country's second-largest automaker, which sells models like Creta and Venue, reported 11 per cent growth in rural areas last fiscal as compared to 4 per cent in urban centres. "We are confident that the contribution from rural markets to our total sales will grow further to around 20 per cent this financial year,"

Hyundai Motor India COO Tarun Garg told PTI. The automaker plans to further expand its presence in smaller towns as it firmly believes that for the nation to prosper, both rural and urban regions must progress in tandem, he added. Garg noted that rural sales accounted for an all-time high of 19 per cent of the company's total sales in FY23. Hyundai Motor India registered its highest ever total sales of 7,77,876 units in 2023-24 with a year-on-year growth of 8 per cent over the 2022-23 fiscal. The company also reported the highest-ever domestic sales since inception of 6,14,721 units in FY24.



The Centre has set up a ‘National Task Force on Brain Health’, to address the rising concerns surrounding neurological disorders in India. ARCHANA JYOTI speaks to its Chairman and Director of IHBAS, DR RAJINDER K DHAMIJA, unveiling the task force’s healthcare impact

In low- and middle-income countries, 43 per cent of children under the age of five face challenges in reaching their developmental potential due to factors like extreme poverty and growth stunting. This not only results in financial losses but also predicts a 26 per cent reduction in annual earnings during adulthood. Against such disturbing background, the Government’s top think tank Niti Aayog’s has come forward to set up the high-level panel to formulate policies for primary, secondary, and tertiary level hospitals in the country. Spearheaded by Dr RK Dhamija who is also the Director of the Delhi-based Institute of Human Behaviour and Allied Services (IHBAS), the task force has nine members. These are Dr Manjri Tripathi, HOD Neurology, AIIMS Delhi, Dr Veena Kalra, ex-professor and Head Paediatrics, AIIMS Delhi, Dr Rabinder Singh, Neuro-rehabilitation scientist, ICMR, Rajib Kumar Sen, senior advisor, NITI Aayog, Indrani Kaushal, Economic Advisor, Union Health Ministry, the others are Radhika Chakravarthy B and Rajesh Yadav, Joint Secretaries from Union Ministry of Social and Justice empowerment and Dr Suvarna from NIMHANS, Bangalore.

Excerpt from the interview: Dr Dhamija, kindly tell us more about the establishment of the National Task Force on Brain Health and its objectives? Thank you for having me. The World Health Organisation (WHO) in its 75th General Assembly adopted the Inter-sectoral Global Action Plan on epilepsy and other neurological disorders 2022–2031. This provides the vision, goal, guiding principles and strategic objectives with their action areas and targets for member states. India being major economic power is also signatory to this resolution which suggests a range of proposed actions for member states. The task force is in line with WHO resolution as well as in response to the growing challenges posed by neurological disorders, especially in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. Its primary objective is to address the gaps in brain healthcare accessibility and quality across all levels of healthcare



DR RAJINDER K DHAMIJA
Chairman, National Task Force on Brain Health and Director IHBAS, Delhi

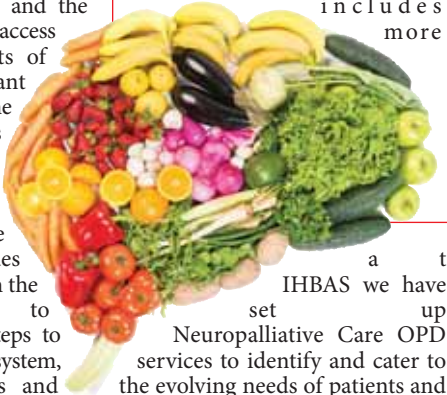
delivery in India, from Aayushman Arogya Mandirs to District Hospitals and tertiary institutions. **How do you envision it making an impact?** As I said, the increasing prevalence of neurological disorders and the disparities in healthcare access across different segments of society were significant motivating factors in the establishment of this central task force. The government recognized the urgent need for a coordinated effort to tackle these issues comprehensively. Through the task force, we aim to recommend actionable steps to strengthen the healthcare system, improve early diagnosis and treatment, and promote neurological health through preventive measures. **Can you elaborate on some of the specific challenges or gaps in brain healthcare that the task force aims to address?** Certainly. One major challenge is the unequal distribution of healthcare resources, particularly in rural and underserved areas. This leads to disparities in access to specialized care and diagnostic facilities for neurological conditions. Additionally, there is a lack of awareness about neurological disorders among the general population, which often results in delayed diagnosis and treatment. The task force will work towards bridging these gaps by recommending strategies to improve healthcare infrastructure, raise awareness, and enhance the capacity of healthcare providers. Here I would like to mention that

Tips to Boost Your Brain

DR JAMES E. GALVIN, a professor of neurology and psychiatry at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine in his study points out

- Yoga can help you relax. It has been found that people who did two weeks of Yoga Nidra—a specific type of yoga that incorporates meditation and mindfulness—had improvements in sleep quality, attention, and memory.
- Good nutrition is key for brain health. The Alzheimer’s association recommends a diet that includes more

veggies and lean meats with fewer fatty and processed foods. Galvin cites a study published in Frontiers in Nutrition which found foods high in fat can negatively impact the brain.- Regular exercise can also help your brain.
- Staying socially engaged can protect the brain. Chronic isolation can increase the risk of premature death as much as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day.
- Sleep is also vital for overall brain health. According to Johns Hopkins, a healthy amount of sleep promotes “brain plasticity” or the brain’s ability to adapt to input.



at IHBAS we have set up a Neuropalliative Care OPD services to identify and cater to the evolving needs of patients and caregivers with aim to improve their quality of life, enhance well-being and overall psychosocial functioning through holistic multidisciplinary approach. **What are some of the key priorities or focus areas for the task force particularly in the coming months?** Your brain allows you to think, feel, communicate, move, coordinate, remember, make decisions, and live a productive life. That’s why keeping it healthy is so important and that’s what will be our panel’s priority. We will conduct a comprehensive assessment of the current state of brain healthcare in India, including an analysis of existing policies, infrastructure, and resources. Based on this assessment, we will develop a set of action, give recommendations to address the identified gaps and challenges. The panel has to submit report by July 15, 2024.

Brain health is the state of brain functioning across cognitive, sensory, social-emotional, behavioural and motor domains, allowing a person to realize their full potential over the life course, irrespective of the presence or absence of disorders.

How do you see the task force contributing to the broader goal of improving brain healthcare in India? Our ultimate aim is to create a more inclusive and effective healthcare system that meets the needs of all individuals affected by neurological disorders. Through

collaboration with government agencies, healthcare providers, and other stakeholders, we aim to build a more resilient and responsive healthcare system that prioritizes brain health for all. Neurological disorders rank as the leading cause of disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) globally, resulting in approximately 9 million deaths annually. The prevalence of neurological disorders underscores their significant impact, with 1 in 3 individuals expected to experience such conditions during their lifetime. These disorders rank as the foremost cause of disability and the second leading cause of death globally. The WHO’s position paper launched on August 9, 2022, provides a detailed framework for understanding brain health and the importance of optimizing brain health for all. **What is the status of brain health in India vis a vis world?** In India, as in many parts of the world, issues related to brain health present significant challenges that require urgent attention. While specific data on the status of brain health in India compared to the rest of the world may vary, neurological disorders are increasingly recognized as a major public health concern in India. Conditions such as stroke, epilepsy, headache disorders, Parkinson’s disease, and dementia impose a substantial burden on individuals, families, and healthcare systems. Moreover, disparities in healthcare access and infrastructure are pervasive in India, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Limited availability of specialized professionals, diagnostic facilities, and trained healthcare paramedics pose significant challenges for individuals seeking diagnosis and treatment. Due to lack of awareness and understanding of neurological disorders among the general population in India, patients are diagnosed late. Also, inadequate treatment, and social stigma further add the burden on affected individuals and their families. Socioeconomic factors such as poverty, limited education, and inadequate access to healthcare services contribute to the burden of neurological disorders in India.

TAILORED SUNSCREEN Matched to Your Skin Type

Majority of dermatologists focus on the important role sunscreen plays in protecting our skin from the harmful UV radiation. But sunscreen selection can be daunting with the plethora of options available in the market. **DR ATULA GUPTA**, senior dermatologist, says and suggests the ideal sunscreen for each skin type to ensure effective protection

THE TWO SUNSCREENS: PHYSICAL VS. CHEMICAL

Physical Sunscreens (Mineral Sunscreens): Physical sunscreens contain minerals like titanium dioxide and zinc oxide. They act as a physical barrier that reflects and scatters UVA and UVB rays. Physical sunscreens offer broad-spectrum protection and are generally well-tolerated even on sensitive skin. But they can leave a white cast on the skin, especially with higher concentrations of minerals. **Chemical Sunscreens:** These sunscreens use organic compounds like oxybenzone, avobenzone, and octinoxate. They absorb UV radiation, converting it into heat that is then released from the skin. Chemical sunscreens are lightweight and cosmetically elegant, offering a clear, non-greasy feel. But some people may experience irritation due to certain chemical ingredients.



DR ATULA GUPTA

SUNSCREEN SELECTION FOR SKIN TYPE

Normal Skin: Choose a broad-spectrum sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher. Look for lightweight, non-greasy formulas and sunscreens with added antioxidants for extra skin nourishment. **Dry Skin:** Choose fragrance-free, moisturizing sunscreens. Lotions or creams containing hyaluronic acid or ceramides can provide added hydration. Seek sunscreens labelled as “hydrating” or “moisturizing” for more benefit. **Oily Skin:** Look for oil-free, non-comedogenic (won’t clog pores) sunscreens. Lotions with a matte finish or lightweight gels are ideal for oily skin. Gel-based or matte-finish sunscreens control the extrashine. Ingredients like niacinamide or zinc oxide can also help regulate oil production. **Sensitive Skin:** The gentlest option for sensitive skin are mineral based sunscreens. Opt for fragrance-free products with calming ingredients like aloe vera or colloidal oatmeal. Opt for hypoallergenic sunscreens to minimize irritation. Perform a patch test before full application to ensure safety. **Combination Skin:** Sunscreens labelled for combination skin often have a balanced, lightweight formula. Gel-creams or lotions can provide sun protection without excess

oiliness. Consider lightweight, gel-based sunscreens that provide hydration without greasiness. Choose products that balance oil production in the T-zone while moisturizing drier areas. Sunscreens labelled as “for all skin types” or “balancing” are often suitable. **Aging/Mature Skin:** Opt for sunscreens with added anti-aging ingredients like peptides or retinoids. Broad-spectrum sunscreens with SPF 30 or higher help prevent premature aging. Look for formulations targeting fine lines, wrinkles, and age spots for holistic care.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

When selecting a sunscreen, factors beyond skin type should be considered: **Sun Protection Factor (SPF):** This rating indicates protection against UVB rays, the primary cause of sunburn. The American Academy of Dermatology recommends an SPF of 30 for daily use, with higher SPFs needed for extended sun exposure or people with fairer skin. **Broad-Spectrum Protection:** Ensure the sunscreen protects against both UVA and UVB rays. UVA rays penetrate deeper into the skin and contribute to premature aging and skin cancer. **Water Resistance:** For activities involving water or sweat, choose a water-resistant sunscreen. Reapplication is crucial after swimming or excessive sweating. Remember, regardless of your skin type, reapply sunscreen every two hours, especially when outdoors or after swimming or sweating. Additionally, complement your sunscreen with other sun protection measures such as wearing protective clothing, seeking shade, and avoiding peak sun hours. Consult with your dermatologist to address any specific skin concerns. With the right sunscreen regimen, you can safeguard your skin against sun damage and maintain a healthy, radiant complexion for years to come.





10,000 STEPS FOR BETTER HEALTH

Walking 10,000 steps a day has emerged as a widely acknowledged benchmark for daily physical activity, endorsed by health professionals worldwide. Neuro and Spine Surgeon, **DR VIKAS KUMAR**, at Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS), Ranchi, Jharkhand, underscores the significance of this goal. Let’s delve into the key benefits, as guided by Dr Kumar

- The capacity of the lungs increases
- Mood improves (increases serotonin and dopamine - good hormones).
- Improvement in the venous system.
- Enhances immune function.
- Speeds up digestion.
- Works against disabilities in old age (strengthens joints).
- Helps in weight loss.
- Improves heart health.
- Reduces the risk of stroke.
- Corrects diabetes (forms new insulin receptors).
- Reduces blood pressure



NUTRITIOUS DELIGHT

Chef **RAJIV KUMAR MALHOTRA**, known for his culinary expertise at Habitat World, India Habitat Centre, shares with **SHARMILA CHAND** the essence of summer embodied in their latest creation: the Kodo Millet & Fresh Mango Salad. The delectable blend has the wholesome goodness of kodo millet intertwines with the sweet succulence of fresh mango, creating a symphony of taste and health in every delightful bite

RECIPE

Kodo Millet & Fresh Mango Salad



Ingredients:

- 40g Kodo millet
- 1 ripe Mango
- 30gm Pomegranate Seeds
- 15g Bell Pepper (any color), diced
- 15g Rocket Lettuce
- 10g Peeled Almonds
- 10g Raisins
- 150g Corn Kernels
- 15g Hung Curd/Feta Cheese

For the dressing:

- 5ml Olive Oil
- 2ml Lemon Juice
- 1gm Fennel Seed Powder
- Salt & Pepper to taste

METHOD

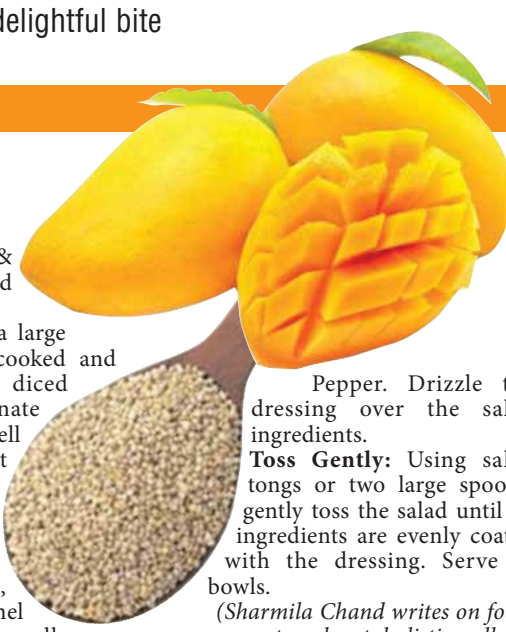
Cook Kodo Millet: Rinse the kodo millet under cold water. In a pot, add 1 part kodo millet to 2 parts water. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to low and simmer, covered, for 20-25 minutes, or until the millet is tender and the water is absorbed. Once cooked, let it cool & squeeze extra water.

Prepare Ingredients: Peel the mango and dice it into bite-sized pieces. Dice the bell pepper into small pieces. Wash the rocket

lettuce in cold water & tear it into bite-sized pieces.

Assemble Salad: In a large bowl, combine the cooked and cooled kodo millet, diced mango, pomegranate seeds, corn diced bell pepper, torn rocket lettuce, sliced almonds, and raisins.

Prepare Dressing: In a small bowl, whisk together the olive oil, lemon juice, and fennel seed powder until well combined. Season with Salt &



Pepper. Drizzle the dressing over the salad ingredients.

Toss Gently: Using salad tongs or two large spoons, gently toss the salad until all ingredients are evenly coated with the dressing. Serve in bowls.

(Sharmila Chand writes on food, travel, art, holistic wellness and lifestyle)



Mi eye revenge against RR in reverse fixture

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Resurgent Mumbai Indians will need to address their bowling woes as they look to exact revenge on table-toppers Rajasthan Royals in their reverse fixture of the Indian Premier League here on Monday.

With three wins in last four games, MI have hit the recovery road to reach sixth spot in the points table after a poor start this season, while RR are on a rampaging run as they occupy the top spot with 12 points.

The five-time champions survived a late onslaught from Ashutosh Sharma to eke out a nine-run win over Punjab Kings in the last game.

It was once again Jasprit Bumrah, who was left to do the heavy lifting as he stood out with his three wickets. The star India pacer shone with the new ball and then returned to produce a breakthrough, and he did all

this without conceding much. With 13 scalps, Bumrah tops the list of the most wickets this IPL. He also has the second-best economy of just under six runs but while he has been on the mark, his bowling colleagues have struggled.

Gerald Coetzee, too, has made an impact with 12 wickets but has gone for runs. But Akash Madhwal and skipper Hardik Pandya have been inconsistent.

While Shreyas Gopal has taken a wicket each in the three games he has played so far, MI also need to use the experience of veteran Afghanistan all-rounder Mohammed Nabi as a bowler. In batting, former skipper Rohit Sharma's scintillating century, albeit in a losing cause, has been the highlight, while Ishan Kishan has been inconsistent. Hardik, too, hasn't made much of an impact so far, while Tilak Verma has done moderately well.



A huge positive for MI is Suryakumar Yadav's return to form. His 53-ball 78 against PBKS was the cornerstone of MI innings and on his day he can destroy any attack.

The last time MI faced the RR bowling unit, they looked like a rabbit caught in the headlights, as Trent Boult removed three of their top-order batters for naught and

the veteran left-arm pacer will again be a massive threat. Avesh Khan has been entrusted with the responsibility of bowling at the death and he has done

well. Kuldeep Sen, too, showed his skills but he needs to work on his economy. With 12 wickets, leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal has been

RR's most valuable player in the bowling department, though off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin has struggled.

For RR, Riyan Parag has been the batter of the season. The young Assam batter has reinvented himself and his 318 runs is one of the reasons why RR find themselves at the top of the pecking order.

While the batting has revolved around him, skipper Sanju Samson too has produced some fine knocks for the team, aggregating 276 runs so far.

England's Jos Buttler single-handedly chased down a 200-plus total to win RR their last match against Kolkata Knight Riders but the form of fellow opener Yashviji Jaiswal has been a matter of concern as he has failed to capitalise on his starts.

Shimron Hetmyer has also hit top gear when needed, rescuing the team against PBKS the other day.

TEAMS

Rajasthan Royals: Sanju Samson (c), Jos Buttler, Shimron Hetmyer, Yashviji Jaiswal, Dhruv Jurel, Riyan Parag, Donovan Ferreira, Kunal Rathore, Ravichandran Ashwin, Kuldeep Sen, Navdeep Saini, Sandeep Sharma, Trent Boult, Yuzvendra Chahal, Avesh Khan, Rovman Powell, Shubham Dubey, Tom Kohler-Cadmore, Abid Mushtaq, Nandre Burger, Tanush Kotian, Keshav Maharaj.

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, Kwena Maphaka, Mohammad Nabi, Shams Mulani, Naman Dhir, Shivalik Sharma, Romario Shepherd, Arjun Tendulkar, Nuwan Thushara, Tilak Varma, Harvik Desai, Nehal Wadhwa, Luke Wood.

You cannot always rely on Kohli: Varun to RCB

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

It's high time India's domestic players step up for Royal Challengers Bengaluru this IPL season and reduce the dependence on Virat Kohli, former India pacer Varun Aaron said on Sunday.

Kohli has been the standout performer for RCB this IPL season and is the current Orange Cap holder with 361 runs in 7 innings. His strike rate is 147.34, with the highest score being 113 not out.

Speaking to Star Sports, Aaron said, "It's just that RCB are not finding the rhythm, the domestic players are just not stepping up."

The 34-year-old Aaron, who announced his retirement from first-class cricket earlier this year, added, "If you have to be anywhere at the top of the table or the middle of the table at this point of the table, you have to have domestic players who are firing and you cannot always rely on Virat Kohli."

"The other guys have to step up and also all their money, is sitting in the dug-out. You can't spend that much cash on players and not have them play."

In 2014, Aaron was bought by Royal Challengers Bangalore for Rs 2 crore, and was retained by the franchise ahead of the 2016 auction. Australia's former skipper in



the limited overs formats, Aaron Finch feels RCB needs an explosive middle-order batter who can complement Kohli.

"He's (Kohli) scored a lot of runs everywhere. He's a modern day great. And I think the fact that he's getting runs and RCB are still not making it is a positive sign in one degree."

"It's that when Virat is playing well, that genuinely carries the rest of the players with him."

"They just need to find a partnership with him, they need to find an explosive middle order player who is in form, Lomror has been in and out, so it's got all the makings of an epic game," Finch said.

RCB are playing Kolkata

Knight Riders at Eden Gardens on Sunday.

Speaking of Travis Head's blazing 89-run knock for Sunrisers Hyderabad against Delhi Capitals in Delhi on Saturday, Finch said the left-handed opener has taken the "fear of failure out of his mind."

"It's always been in him, the ability to play like this. I guess the freedom to express himself and be able to deal with the ups and downs of playing such an aggressive and high-risk brand of cricket, I think has just released him to a new level."

"And I think if you look back at the World Cup final, he kept playing his shots even when there were wickets falling around him, the ball was moving. Because he's

taken the fear of failure out of his mind.

"If he misses out five or six times in a row, it doesn't bother him because he knows he's one shot away. He's the type of player that needs one ball in the middle. And that's all it will take for him to get going again," Finch said.

In a match that saw over 460 runs being scored, seamer T Natarajan finished with excellent figures of 4/19, and Finch believed the bowler getting all his wickets in the death when the game was as good as over, prevented him from getting the Man-of-the-Match Award.

"When 460 runs are scored in a game and a guy gets 4 for 19, that's a special performance, I think the thing that didn't give him the man of the match is the 4 wickets were right at the death when the game was done and dusted."

Set an imposing target of 267, DC were stopped at 199. "I think the ability of Delhi to get that run rate under 12 an over was extraordinary and at that stage of the innings, they were in the box seat to win it."

"The wicket slowed up a bit just like Pat Cummins talked about it and the ball got a little softer and made it easier for the slower bowlers to grip. It was just one of those things where they couldn't sustain it," Finch said.

Watched a lot of Kuldeep videos, did simulation: Abhishek

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Thoroughly dissecting Kuldeep Yadav's bowling videos and doing match simulation by facing left-arm wrist spinners in the nets went a long way in helping Abhishek Sharma annihilate the India international during Sunrisers Hyderabad's 67-run victory over Delhi Capitals in an IPL game here.

Abhishek smashed 46 off just 12 balls with half a dozen of sixes and four of them came off Kuldeep's deliveries.

Kuldeep has been DC's most consistent bowler with his guile and variations troubling the batters, but Abhishek

went back and forth to disturb his length and forced him to go flatter.

So what was his preparation like for Kuldeep?

"Personally, I always try to plan really well for the spinners and the main bowlers of the other team and this year... This match also, I was very careful with Kuldeep because I know he is their main bowler and I've been watching his videos," the Punjab state team skipper said after the match.

"I try to play similar bowlers a day before, net bowlers and local bowlers, and that helps me a lot. I try to just make sure that they are pretty much



similar to the bowlers that I'm going to face. So that helps me a lot," Abhishek explained.

Not bowling because of Impact Player Rule

While he is primarily a batter, Abhishek also bowls handy left-arm spin but hasn't been summoned a lot to bowl in

this edition, thanks to the Impact Player rule.

Does he think it can affect his selection or chances of showcasing his other facet of the game?

"No, I think everybody knows that I can bowl, but obviously, there's because of this impact player, there's always an extra bowler or a better, so probably with every all-rounders, this is going to happen. Even this happened last year."

"For me, especially, I believe that I should be ready whenever I'm called. Just get the chance because I know somehow I will get the chance and I should be ready for that."

We are not getting too far ahead of ourselves: Head

NEW DELHI, APR 21 (PTI)

Riding on explosive starts, Sunrisers Hyderabad may have won four games on the bounce this IPL season, but their swashbuckling opener Travis Head says "we are not getting too far ahead of ourselves."

SRH crushed Delhi Capitals by 67 runs in their most recent match here on Saturday, following sensational knocks from their in-form openers Travis Head (89) and Abhishek Sharma (46).

SRH have made a habit of posting big totals this season, going past 260 for the third time on Saturday.



"It is very enjoyable. It is nice to be here and play well, and it is hard not to smile and enjoy yourself with the batting order that we have got, and the order is working well through the first seven, so it is very enjoyable," Head told JioCinema.

Batting first, Hyderabad

scored their fourth 200+ innings this edition by scoring 266 runs, while Delhi were bowled out for 199 runs at the Arun Jaitley Stadium.

This was SRH's fifth win of the season.

Head also spoke on SRH's momentum and positive energy around the team.

"We will take it easy for a minute. I think it was Murali's (Muttiah Muralitharan) birthday a couple of days ago, so we have a party for him tomorrow night, so that will be enjoyable."

"I think it's a nice group, we are not getting too far ahead of ourselves. Obviously, we are excited. We have got four wins on the bounce now, we

are playing well, and the energy is always better when you are winning."

"The environment is really good. That's what Dan (Daniel Vettori) and Pat Cummins are going to bring. If there is a loss here or there, a couple of poor performances, that's okay. We are showing how good we can be."

"As long as we can keep instilling that confidence around how well we are playing, I guess the ceiling is as high as it wants to be," Head said.

Former India pacer Zaheer Khan praised Jake Fraser-McGurk (65 runs) and T Natarajan (4/19).

HI names 28 members core probable group for men camp ahead of Olympics

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hockey India on Sunday announced a 28-member core probable group for the men's national coaching camp to iron out the flaws ahead of the Paris Olympics.

The camp commenced on Sunday and will last till May 13 at the SAI Centre in Bengaluru.

The team returns to camp after suffering a 0-5 loss in a five-match Test series in Australia.

After this camp, the team will travel to Belgium and London for their next two legs of the FIH Pro League, where they will be up against Argentina, Belgium, Germany and Great Britain.

"We are looking to begin an important block of training in this camp, and we need to make sure that we are in the best shape possible ahead of the Paris 2024 Olympics. We have an exciting group of experienced players along with some young players," chief coach Craig Fulton said in a HI release.

"The tour to Australia has helped us in realising where we need to work on and I always believe that we can work on our shortcomings and look to set things straight well before



the final leg of the Pro League and the Paris 2024 Olympics."

The core group of the national coaching camp includes goalkeepers Krishan Bahadur Pathak, PR Sreejesh, Suraj Karkera and defenders Harmanpreet Singh, Jarmanpreet Singh, Amit Rohidas, Jugraj Singh, Sanjay Sumit, and Amir Ali.

The midfielders called up to the camp include Manpreet Singh, Hardik Singh, Vivek Sagar Prasad, Rabichandra Singh Moirangthem, Shamsher Singh, Nilakanta Sharma, Rajkumar Pal, Vishnukant Singh.

While the list of forwards comprises Akashdeep Singh, Mandep Singh, Lalit Kumar Upadhyay, Abhishek, Dilpreet Singh, Sukhjesh Singh, Gurjant Singh, Mohammed Raheel Mousen, Bobby Singh Dhami, and Arajjeet Singh Hundal.

El Gouna squash Ramit stuns world number 11 Crouin

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's Ramit Tandon notched up a stunning 3-1 win over French world No 11 Victor Crouin in the second round of the El Gouna International Open, a USD 198,000 prize money PSA Platinum squash event, in El Gouna, Egypt.

The world No 40 Tandon, who has a direct entry to the World Championships to be played in Egypt next month, won 11-9, 12-10, 8-11, 11-5 in 52 minutes for his second victory in five meetings over the Frenchman. Tandon will meet Peruvian World No 3 Diego Elias in the third round.

Elias has won both his previous meetings against the Indian.

Tandon had beaten Egyptian world No 62 Aly Hussein 11-6, 11-9, 11-5 in the first round of the 48-player draw.

Messi scores twice, Inter Miami beats Nashville SC 3-1

Fort Lauderdale (US), Apr 21 (AP) Lionel Messi scored twice to increase his Major League Soccer-leading total to seven and also had an assist to lead Inter Miami over Nashville SC 3-1.

Messi had his second two-goal game in MLS after scoring two against Orlando on March 2. He has a goal or assist in each



of the six league matches he's played, missing four because of injury.

Sergio Busquets scored his first goal with Miami since joining former Barcelona teammate Messi last summer.

Luis Suárez, another ex-Barcelona teammate, assisted on Messi's first goal.

"Very happy that the goal helped the team win the match," Busquets said in Spanish.

"What matters is the team and the victory. Today, I managed to score but the ultimate accomplishments are the positive results for our team."

Miami (5-2-3, 21 points) is unbeaten in five matches against Nashville since Messi's arrival. Miami also remained in first place in the Eastern Conference.

"We became very familiar with their style of play and that helped us today," Miami defender Tomás Avilés said.

For the second consecutive week, Miami allowed a goal in the opening minutes when an own goal by Miami defender Franco Neri put Nashville ahead.

Neri deflected Daniel Lovitz's corner kick into the Miami net in the second minute. That was the only goal for Nashville (1-6-1, 4).

Miami erased the early deficit with goals from Messi and Busquets in the 11th and 39th minutes.

Nashville goalkeeper Elliot Panico deflected Messi's 12-yard shot to an open Suárez, who immediately tapped it to Messi. With Panico out of position, Messi converted a

sliding shot inside the 6-yard box for the equalizer.

"We didn't play good football during the first 10 minutes but that changed after Leo's goal," Inter Miami coach Gerardo "Tata" Martino said.

"We started finding our space and created opportunities."

Busquets scored the tiebreaker as he headed Messi's corner kick to the near post past Panico. It was Busquets' first goal since 2022, when he was with Barcelona.

Goalkeeper Drake Callender kept Miami ahead when he made a diving deflection of Hany Mukhtar's 35-yard blast in the 55th minute.

Messi gave Miami a two-goal cushion, converting on a penalty kick in the 81st minute.

Nashville's Josh Bauer fouled Leo Alfonso on the edge of the penalty area then Messi beat reserve goalkeeper Joe Willis inside the right post.

Messi's former Barcelona teammate Jordi Alba didn't play because of a hamstring injury.

Diego Gomez also exited after he sustained an ankle injury late in the first half.

Martino said Gomez will undergo additional tests to determine the severity of the injury.

Miami will visit New England next Saturday, while Nashville hosts San Jose.



Garbiñe retires from tennis

AP ■ MADRID

Two-time major champion Garbiñe Muguruza announced she's retiring from professional tennis at age 30 after an extended time away from the court.

"I feel that it is time to retire and open up a new chapter in my life," the former world No. 1 told a news conference in Madrid on Saturday.

Muguruza beat Serena Williams in the 2016 French Open final and Venus Williams in the 2017 Wimbledon final, making her the only player to defeat each Williams sister in a Grand Slam title match.

The Spanish player earned 10 career titles and was also the runner-up at 2015 Wimbledon and the 2020 Australian Open. She earned nearly \$25 million in prize money - 13th on the all-time list - and finished with a win-loss record of 449-238.

Her last important victory was the 2021 ATP Finals.

"The word retirement' sounds very harsh to be because I am only 30 years old, but I have achieved so much since I started playing 25 years ago," she said.

"I am proud of what I have achieved, for having stuck to reaching my goals even through the tough times."

Muguruza has not played since January 2023. In April that year, she announced she was extending her hiatus from playing and said, "Spending time with my family and friends (has) really been healthy and amazing."

Born in Caracas to a Spanish father and Venezuelan mother, Muguruza moved to Barcelona when she was a child to continue her tennis training. She became the first Spanish woman to lift a Grand Slam trophy since Arantxa Sánchez Vicario at the 1998 French Open.