

OPINION 6 WHY ARE THE YOUNG NOT JOINING POLITICS?

WORLD 8 ISRAELI OFFICIALS CONCERNED OVER ICC ARREST WARRANTS

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CHANDIGARH, TUESDAY APRIL 30, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹2

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Telangana CM summoned in Shah fake video case

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Day after registering a case on doctored videos of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Delhi Police on Monday asked Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy to join the probe on May 1 and record his statement.



Delhi Police personnel (L) visit to serve a notice under section 91 of CrPC to Congress' Social Media in-charge Manne Satish in connection with a doctored video of Home Minister Amit Shah over reservation, at Gandhi Bhavan, in Hyderabad, on Monday; and Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy (R) PTI

the party. A BJP delegation comprising Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and the party's national media department in-charge Anil Baluni also complained against the Trinamool Congress (TMC), alleging that Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee-led party has been using violence as a weapon, and demanded that the poll panel ensure a free and fair election in the state.

the Congress office in Telangana by Monday evening. Sources said the police have served notices to five people, including Reddy, who posted the video on X. Reddy has been asked to appear with his mobile phone allegedly used for posting the fake video on X.

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

Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) claimed that some doctored videos are being circulated on social media with "the intent of creating disharmony among communities which is likely to affect public tranquility and public order." Singh also shared links of videos with the police. The Intelligence Fusion and Strategic Operations (IFSO) unit of the Special Cell has now approached social media platforms to identify the source of the video and those who have spread it.



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

Congress planning religion based quota, says Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BAGALKOTE (KARNATAKA)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday accused the Congress of planning religion-based reservation in the country for the sake of vote bank politics, but asserted that he will not let it happen. He said this Congress proposal is to appease minorities as the SC/ST and OBC community is now with the BJP.

reservation. There is a similar signal in their manifesto this time. "I want to make my Dalit, SC/ST and OBC brothers and sisters aware about Congress' intentions. These people on the basis of religion, to keep their vote bank safe, are planning to loot your right which was given by Babasaheb Ambedkar and the Constitution," he added.



Congress jolted with Surat replay in Indore

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ INDORE/ NEW DELHI

In a major blow to the Congress in Madhya Pradesh, its Indore Lok Sabha seat candidate Akshay Kanti Bam withdrew his nomination on Monday, a fortnight before polling in the constituency. After withdrawing his nomination, Bam reached BJP office to join the party and later in a photo released on social media, Bam was seen along with MP Deputy Chief Minister Jagdish Devda, State Cabinet Minister Kailash Vijayvargiya and other party leaders.



The Congress offered him the opportunity to contest from Indore at a time when several party workers, including three former MLAs of the party, have switched sides and joined the BJP ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. Indore, the largest constituency in the state in terms of number of voters, has 25.13 lakh electors. The BJP has expressed confidence of winning the seat by a margin of eight lakh votes this time.



Rajnath, Smriti file nominations for LS polls

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Union Ministers Rajnath Singh and Smriti Irani on Monday filed their nomination papers for Lok Sabha elections. Rajnath filed his nomination papers from the Lucknow seat, seeking a third consecutive term from the prestigious Lok Sabha constituency. Accompanied by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and his Uttarakhnd counterpart Pushkar Singh Dhami, the Union Defence Minister reached the collectorate for filing the nomination paper.

Union Minister and prominent BJP leader Irani filed her nomination papers from the Amethi Lok Sabha constituency. Accompanied by Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav and several other leaders, Irani led a spirited roadshow from the BJP office in Gauriganj before formally submitting her papers.

Measures mooted to help zoo animals beat heatwave

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

As temperatures soar and heatwaves become increasingly common and unbearable in various pockets of the country, the Central Zoo Authority (CZA) has issued urgent advisories to State zoos nationwide to help the resident animals beat the heat and stay calm.

various regions in the coming days, the CZA, an autonomous body under the Union Environment Ministry, has already raised alarms, warning that the current heat wave conditions pose a significant threat to zoo inhabitants, putting them at risk of heat stress, dehydration, and other heat-related illnesses.



Telangana among few other States. "It's crucial to prioritise the well-being of zoo inmates during extreme weather conditions like heat waves," emphasized officials. The proactive steps being taken to ensure the safety and comfort of captive animals aim to mitigate any potential harm caused by the heat wave.

An official from Sepahijala Zoological Park in Tripura's Sepahijala district mentioned that they have already initiated several measures to ensure the well-being of their animal residents while an official from the Delhi Zoo said that depending on the species, extreme heat can cause significant stress on animals, from tiny reptiles to large livestock like elephants.

multiple water sources with fresh, cool water in shaded areas and ensuring frequent refills to maintain constant availability. "Handling or manipulation of animals should be restricted to the cooler part of the day. Nocturnal animals should not be disturbed during the daytime. Electrolytes should be added to drinking water, especially for vulnerable animals or those on restricted diets," stated CZA Member Secretary Sanjay Kumar Shukla in the advisory issued to all zoos in the country.

India slams Canada over Khalistan slogans at Trudeau event

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Taking exception to reported Khalistan slogans raised in a rally attended by Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau there on Monday, India summoned the Canadian Deputy High Commissioner here to register its strong protest.

protest was conveyed at such disturbing actions being allowed to continue unchecked at the event. This illustrates once again the political space that has been given in Canada to separatism, extremism and violence.



well as opposition leader Pierre Poilievre. As Trudeau was about to take the stage for his address to mark Khalsa Day, the chants were heard getting louder till he arrived and commenced his speech in the video released by Canada-based CPAC TV.

Slogans of "Khalistan Zindabad" were heard at the event in which NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh and Toronto Mayor Olivia Chow were also present. A similar instance also occurred when the leader of the official opposition of Canada, Pierre Poilievre walked up to the stage to begin his address to the people gathered at the event.

Gowda grandson's scandal sparks outcry

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BENGALURU/NEW DELHI

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

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



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

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







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LOST & FOUND I, Nirmal Singh S/o Sh. Babu Ram R/o Vill. Chhapra, P.O. Bitta, Sub Tehsil Sahi, Distt. Ambala do hereby solemnly affirm & declare that I have lost Conveyance Deed No. 593, Dt. 12.09.2003 Sub Tehsil Sahi in the favour of Sh. Mahi Pal S/O Sadhu Ram & Ravinder Kumar S/O Hans Raj on Dt. 26.04.2024 at 10:00 am somewhere at Chhapra. If someone found the above documents please contact to above given address.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

## North by Northeast

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

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



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

### PICTALK



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

# Why are the young not joining politics?



PRAFULL GORADIA

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

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

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

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



public life. The motivation wasn't power, but an idealism-driven desire for the country's freedom. Soon thereafter, there might have been disillusion; the earlier idealism began declining rapidly. With the decline was seen a fall in ethical and social values in the country. Could the disillusionment have been due to disappointment with the quality of politicians? Not all parties indeed have members hailing from the most educated or knowledgeable sections of society. Although the current central Government is not a rough and tumble of the hitherto political dispensations that have ruled the country, it has still not been able to overcome the cynicism about politicians and politics in general, which continues to hold sway in the minds of a large section of the people. This is not to say that good people are disinterested in politics. We have in recent years, seen many academically and professionally qualified people enter politics; some of them have even become ministers. But clearly, there is a long way to go in this regard.



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

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

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

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### PAKISTAN'S AFGHAN DEBACLE

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

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

### ENVIRONMENTAL MANIFESTO

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

### Bihar on progress path



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

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

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

### CULINARY ESCAPEDES

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

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

Send your feedback to: [letterstopioneer@gmail.com](mailto:letterstopioneer@gmail.com)

# Reflections on rituals from around the world

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



SANJAY CHANDRA

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



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

The gracious hostess, her daughter, had prepared a special Parsi-style chicken dish, which had been both a speciality and a favourite of the departed soul. We also have the thirteenth-day ceremony in our Hindu religion which is formally the close of the mourning period. Guests are intimate to join prayers and then partake of our special food prepared for the occasion. Though sometimes teary-eyed, everyone remembers the time spent with the person who has joined the supreme being. Why mourn death, which is only the passing away to another life? When my time comes, I hope my near and dear ones remember me, not for my beliefs, but for the happiness that I gave them. A life led to spreading happiness all around is to be celebrated. Thomas Campbell rightly said, "To live in hearts we leave behind is not to die!" (The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)



## FIRST COLUMN

## THE POWER OF THE HUMAN MIND

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



RAVI VALLURI

Aeons ago lived, Suddhodana, chieftain of the Sakyan republics. He was captivated with the thought of perpetuating the dynasty. However, his battle fatigued son Siddhartha, was not ensnared by the Mara of trappings of power, carnal pleasures and a family life.

Siddhartha eschewed violence, cast away royal clothing and adorned ochre robes in search of the quintessential truth and was to become Buddha after intense tapas. Upon attaining enlightenment, the Compassionate One dissected the bewildering characteristics of the human mind. He was soon to quantify in a plain sailing manner, "We are what we think and our thoughts shape our lives."

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

Once there was a Good Samaritan, Sudhakar. He happened to read the maiden effort of a civil servant called the Magic of the Mind. This gentleman, with trepidation, became a 'Facebook friend' of the mandarin and persuaded him to be interviewed by a few T.V. channels.

However, the thought process of the public functionary- who was a recovered alcoholic- doubted the sincerity of the Facebook friend. In disgust, he 'blocked' and then 'unblocked' the gentleman, perhaps more to quell the pangs of his own conscience. Finally in sheer vexation he gave in to the entreaties of the 'Facebook friend'. Soon an amazing pattern emerged and the administrator was invited by several media houses and estimable institutions to deliver lectures as to how he combated and conquered the battle against the bottle. Only much later did he realise that Sudhakar had lost some close relatives to the perils of alcoholism.



The autarchic mind of the bureaucrat was ossified and looking at life through the prism of tunnel vision. One day, after a series of interviews, the functionary received a distress call from a lady, who had happened to listen to one of his interviews and was also reading the book penned by the bureaucrat, which captured his triumph over alcoholism.

On receiving the call, he could empathise with the woman's husband who was fighting a grim battle against alcoholism. There was a sudden transmutation in the mind of the public servant and went on to guide the husband on how to attain sobriety.

Realisation and awareness are two iconic qualities that shine the light on the amazing power of the human mind. Several centuries ago, Gautama Buddha was travelling with a group of disciples. The Compassionate One felt thirsty and desired some water to quench his thirst. He asked a disciple to fetch some water from a nearby lake. The enthusiastic disciple rushed to the lake but was horrified to find the water turbid as a farmer had just crossed the lake on his bullock cart.

He returned back remorsefully as he could not fulfil the wish of the holy Master. Buddha sent the disciple a couple of times to fetch water to quench his thirst. But to the dismay of the tutee on each occasion the water remained dirty and turbid. While the devotees were fidgety and distraught, Buddha remained patient. Eventually, the devotee animatedly brought fresh water from the lake and offered it.

Buddha smiled and drank the water. He was to say, "You did nothing. The mud settled down and the water was purged of the impurities. Let your mind settle all the dust accumulated over a period of time." This is the amazing power of the human mind. Just let it settle down.

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

## Challenges loom ahead of July Union Budget



SHIVAJI SARKAR

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



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

Even showcasing of Indian economy as the fifth largest economy is not being accepted by a large section as reality. The farmers and citizens wonder while cars and tractors are allowed to run for 40 years like aircraft across the world, why a pro-people Government should be in a hurry to send these to junkyards in India, particularly when household debts are skyrocketing. The rural wisdom calls it weird and tries to locate the linkages of Government functionaries with the car makers. Questions are also raised on the Rs 16.87 lakh crore debt repayment in the 2024-25 budget. This effectively cuts the actual budget of Rs 47.65 lakh crore to about Rs 31 lakh crore. The repayment burden in 2025 is slated to be higher. The opposition's sharp angling on core economic issues is being rebutted by the ruling combine by charging that if the opposition gets to power it would sell "mangalsutras" and delve into divisive politics. The Election Commission has issued warnings to the ruling party for its wry comments.

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



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

many moves by the Election Commission. Is that a reflection on governance?

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

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

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

A new Government has to initiate drastic changes and reorient policies. The major reason for joblessness is attributed to ad hoc decisions. Such constructions erode Government finance and build little assets. Southeast Asia tried it in the late 1990s and got into trouble in 1997. It would be wise on the part of the new Government to revive PSUs and ask the private sector to compete with them. It would create jobs, add to the national economy and create a fair playground. People question the rationale of parting a part of Indian Oil to a private giant or giving out ports to private players. At least one such port has become notorious for being a smugglers' den.

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

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

Lower productivity can result in reduced job creation within the manufacturing sector, leading to unemployment or underemployment. The International Labour Organisation finds low pay and wages as serious challenges.

When productivity declines, the incentives for firms to invest in research and development or adopt new technologies diminish, leading to a slower pace in the manufacturing sector. However, the challenge of rising household debt and falling savings could weigh on long-term growth sustainability.

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

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

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

## Celebrating the universal language of dance

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

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



RAJDEEP PATHAK

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

experience and explore universal themes such as love, loss and identity. Not only this, the 'National Ballet of Cuba' is a dance company that promotes intercultural dialogue through its performances. Founded in 1948 by Alicia Alonso, one of the most famous ballerinas of the 20th century, it is known for its unique style that combines elements of classical ballet with Afro-Cuban and Spanish dance traditions. Back in India, 'The Kalakshetra Foundation', - of the many foundations and institutions that exist to popularize Indian classical dance forms - Chennai-based dance school, founded by Rukmini Devi Arundale in 1936, sought to revive and promote Indian classical dance forms and is

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

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

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

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

# 'Israel must boost more humanitarian aid for Gaza'

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

Speaking to Gulf Cooperation Council foreign ministers in Riyadh, Blinken said best way to ease the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza would be to conclude an elusive cease-fire agreement that would release hostages held by Hamas. But, in the meantime, he said it was critical to improve conditions now. "The most effective way to address the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, to alleviate the suffering of children, women and men, and to create space for a more just and durable solution is to get a cease-fire and the hostages out," he said. "But we're also not waiting on a cease-fire to take the necessary steps to meet the needs of civilians in Gaza," Blinken said. He said that because President Joe Biden has been insisting that Israel do more, including in his phone call with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday, there had been improvements, although not nearly enough. "We have seen measurable progress in the last few weeks, including the opening of new crossings and increased volume of aid delivery to Gaza and within Gaza, and the building of the US maritime corridor, which will open in the coming weeks. But it is not enough. We still need to get more aid in and around Gaza," he said. "We need to improve deconfliction with humanitarian assistance workers. And we have to find greater efficiency and greater safety and



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

deconfliction is at the heart of that. And, finally we have to make sure that we're focusing not just on inputs, but on impact." Scores of relief workers have been killed since the conflict began, and a deadly Israeli attack on a World Central Kitchen aid convoy in Gaza this month only highlighted the dangers and difficulties of protecting them. Israel has said the strike was a mistake and has disciplined officials involved. World Central Kitchen says it would resume operations in Gaza on Monday after a four-week suspension. The war has ground on since Hamas' deadly Oct 7 attacks on Israel with little end in sight: more than 34,000 Palestinians have been killed, hundreds of thousands more are displaced and a humanitarian crisis in Gaza is worsening. The conflict has fuelled mass protests around the world that have spread to American

college campuses. US support for Israel, particularly arms transfers, has come under particular criticism, something the administration is keenly aware poses potential problems for Biden in an election year. Blinken's trip comes amid renewed concerns about the conflict spreading in the Middle East and with once-promising prospects for Israeli-Saudi rapprochement effectively on hold as Israel refuses to consider one of the Saudis' main conditions for normalised relations: the creation of a Palestinian state. Meanwhile, the Biden administration has been warning Israel against a major military operation on the southern Gaza city of Rafah, where more than a million Palestinians have fled to escape fighting further north. Israel has not yet launched such an offensive, but Netanyahu has repeatedly said that one will take place, asserting that it is the

only way to wipe out Hamas. Both topics were discussed during the Biden-Netanyahu phone call on Sunday, according to the White House and US officials. During his trip, Blinken said he would also underscore the absolute importance of not allowing the Israel-Hamas conflict to engulf the region. The danger of conflagration was underscored this month when a suspected Israeli attack on an Iranian consular building in Syria prompted an unprecedented direct missile and drone response by Iran against Israel. An apparent retaliatory Israeli strike on Iran followed. Although the tit-for-tat cycle appears to have ended for now, deep concerns remain that Iran or its proxies in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria or Yemen could act in such a way as to provoke a greater response from Israel or that Israel might take action that Iran feels it must retaliate for.

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

**PTI ■ LONDON**  
All internet connected smart devices will be required to meet minimum security standards under what the UK government has dubbed as "world first" laws, effective from Monday to protect consumers and businesses from hacking and cyberattacks. Under the new regime, manufacturers will be banned from having weak, easily guessable default passwords like "admin" or "12345" and if there is a common password, the user will be prompted to change it on start-up. An investigation conducted by the Which? consumer group found that a UK home filled with smart devices could be exposed to more than 12,000 hacking attempts from across the world in a single week, with a total of 2,684 attempts to guess weak default passwords on just five devices. "From today, consumers will have greater peace of mind that

their smart devices are protected from cyber criminals, as we introduce world first laws that will make sure their personal privacy, data and finances are safe," said UK Minister for Cyber Viscount Camrose, Jonathan Berry. The UK's Department for Science, Innovation and Technology said under the new legal requirement, manufacturers must protect consumers from hackers and cyber criminals from accessing devices with internet or network connectivity - from smartphones to games consoles and connected fridges. It said the new laws are part of the British government's GBP 2.6-billion National Cyber Strategy to protect and promote Britain online. "Our pledge to establish the UK as the global standard for online safety takes a big step forward with these regulations, moving us closer to our goal of a digitally secure future," said UK Data and Digital Infrastructure Minister Julia Lopez.

## Yousaf resigns as Scottish First Minister

**PTI ■ LONDON**  
Humza Yousaf, the Pakistani-origin Scottish National Party leader who heads the devolved government in Scotland, announced his resignation on Monday, after days of political turmoil for the devolved SNP-led government. Yousaf, 39, took over as Scotland's first Muslim and also the region's youngest First Minister in March last year. Last week, he ended a power-sharing agreement with the Scottish Green Party amid growing policy differences and plunged his leadership of a minority government into crisis. His former Green Party allies then teamed up with the Opposition Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties to back two non-confidence motions - one in Yousaf's leadership of Scotland and the second regarding the Scottish government as a whole. "While a route through this week's motion of no confi-



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

dence was absolutely possible, I am not willing to trade my values and principles or do deals with whomever simply for retaining power," said Yousaf. "Therefore, after spending the weekend reflecting on what is best for my party, for the government and for the country I lead I have concluded that repairing our relationship across the political divide can only be done with someone else at the helm," he said. In his speech delivered at Bute House in Edinburgh, he noted on an emotional note: "I am sad that my time as First Minister is ending, but I am so grateful, I am so blessed, for having the opportunity that are afforded to so few to lead my country and who could ask for a better country to lead than Scotland." Yousaf, of Pakistani and Kenyan heritage, paid tribute to the UK's diversity and also referenced Rishi Sunak as Britain's first Hindu prime minister in his resignation speech. He added: "People who looked like me were not in positions of political influence, let alone leading governments, when I was younger. We now live in a UK that has a British Hindu Prime Minister (Sunak), a Muslim Mayor of London (Sadiq Khan), a black Welsh First Minister (Vaughan Gething), and for a little while longer a Scottish Asian First Minister

of this country." "So for those who decry that multiculturalism has failed across the UK, I would suggest that the evidence is quite to the contrary and that is something we should all celebrate." Yousaf will remain in his post until a replacement First Minister is chosen in the Scottish Parliament, Holyrood. It marks a time of upheaval for the pro-independence SNP even though the outgoing leader claimed Scottish independence "feels frustratingly close." "The last few miles of the marathon are always the hardest and we have run this race as a team and will now prepare to pass the baton to a successor who I am absolutely certain will lead us over the finish line," he said. The Opposition parties welcomed his resignation, with the Scottish Tories saying Yousaf had averted a "humiliating defeat" at a vote of no confidence later this week and the Labour Party demanding a UK-wide general election soon for a "fresh start" across the country.

## Israeli officials concerned over ICC arrest warrants

**AP ■ JERUSALEM**  
Israeli officials on Monday appeared to be increasingly concerned that the International Criminal Court may issue arrest warrants against the country's leaders, as international pressure mounts over its war with Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Meanwhile, Israeli airstrikes on the southern Gaza city of Rafah overnight and into Monday killed at least 22 people, including six women and five children, one of whom was just 5 days old, according to hospital records and an Associated Press reporter. The ICC launched a probe three years ago into possible war crimes committed by Israel and Palestinian militants going back to the 2014 Israel-Hamas war, but it has given no indication such warrants are imminent. There was no comment from the court on Monday. Israel's Foreign Ministry said late Sunday that it had informed Israeli missions of "rumours" that warrants might be issued against senior political and military officials. It was not clear what sparked the Israeli concerns. "We expect the court to prevent the issuance of arrest warrants against senior Israeli officials," Foreign Minister Israel Katz said, adding that such warrants would "provide a morale boost" to Hamas and other militant groups. A series of Israeli announcements in recent days about allowing more humanitarian aid into Gaza meanwhile appears to be aimed in part at heading off possible ICC action. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Friday that Israel "will never accept any attempt by the ICC to undermine its inherent right of self-defence." "The threat to seize the soldiers and officials of the Middle East's only democracy and the world's only Jewish state is outrageous. We will not bow to it," he posted on X, formerly known as Twitter. It was not clear what prompted the post. The ICC investigation covers allegations going back to the 2014 war in Gaza as well as Israel's construction of Jewish settlements in occupied territory that the Palestinians want for a future state.

## Truce: Biden, Netanyahu hold talks

**Tel Aviv (AP):** The White House on Sunday said US President Joe Biden had again spoken with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as pressure builds on Israel and Hamas to reach a deal that would free some Israeli hostages and bring a cease-fire in the nearly seven-month-long war in Gaza. The White House said that Biden reiterated his "clear position" as Israel plans to invade Gaza's southernmost city of Rafah despite global concern for more than 1 million Palestinians sheltering there. The US opposes the invasion on humanitarian grounds, straining relations between the allies. Israel is among the countries U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken will visit as he returns to the Middle East on Monday. Biden also stressed that progress in delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza be "sustained and enhanced," according to the statement. The call lasted just under an hour, and they agreed the onus remains on Hamas to accept the latest offer in negotiations, according to a U.S. official who spoke on condition of anonymity because the official wasn't authorized to comment publicly. There was no comment from Netanyahu's office. A senior official from key intermediary Qatar, meanwhile, urged Israel and Hamas to show "more commitment and more seriousness" in negotiations. Qatar, which hosts Hamas' headquarters in Doha, was instrumental along with the US and Egypt in helping negotiate a brief halt to the fighting in November that led to the release of dozens of hostages. But in a sign of frustration, Qatar this month said that it was reassessing its role.

## Spain's PM Sánchez to continue in office

**AP ■ MADRID**  
Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez on Monday ended days of speculation about his future by saying he will continue in office "with even more strength." Sánchez shocked his country last Wednesday by taking five days off to think about his future, following the decision by a court to open preliminary proceedings against his wife on corruption allegations. "I have decided to continue on with even more strength at the helm of the government of Spain," he said in a televised speech after informing King Felipe VI of the decision earlier Monday. His resignation would have deprived Europe of a prominent Socialist prime minister ahead of European elections in June and at a time when the center right increasingly holds sway. "It is a decision that does not mean a return to the status quo,

this will mark a before and after, I promise you that," Sánchez said, without detailing what steps he could take to curtail "the smear campaign" he says he and his family is facing. The eurozone's fourth-largest economy had been in suspense since Sánchez, prime minister since 2018, posted an emotional letter on X on Wednesday before he holed up in his Moncloa Palace, the prime minister's residence in Madrid. In it he said the moves against wife were too personal an attack on his family and he needed time to decide on his priorities. In that letter, where he declared himself "deeply in love" with wife Begoña Gómez, he said that he could no longer just stand aside and watch her being targeted by a legal probe brought by allegations by a right-wing platform that accused her of using her position to influence business deals.

The group, Manos Limpias, or "Clean Hands," acknowledged that the complaint was based on newspaper articles. Spanish prosecutors say it should be thrown out. The expectation Monday was such that Spain's state broadcaster had put up a 10-minute countdown clock before his announcement on the screen during their morning news talk show. Speaking from the steps of Moncloa Palace, Sánchez said that he and his wife "know that this campaign to discredit them won't stop" but that he has decided that he couldn't give his adversaries the satisfaction of giving up. Rallies by his supporters over the past few days played a part in his decision, he said. Essentially Sánchez had four options: resign, seek a parliamentary vote of confidence, call a new election or remain in office.

## At least 40 die in Kenya after dam collapses

**AP ■ NAIROBI**  
A dam collapsed in western Kenya early Monday, killing at least 40 people after a wall of water swept through houses and cut off a major road, police said. The Old Kijabe Dam, located in the Mai Mahiu area of the Great Rift Valley region that is prone to flash floods, collapsed and water spilled downstream, carrying with it mud, rocks and uprooted trees, police official Stephen Kirui told The Associated Press. Vehicles were entangled in the debris on one of Kenya's busiest highways and paramedics treated the injured as waters submerged large areas. Ongoing rains in Kenya have caused flooding that has already killed nearly 100 people and postponed the opening of schools. Heavy rains have been pounding the country since mid-March and the Meteorology Department has



A damaged van after a dam collapse in Kenya. Vehicles were entangled in the debris on one of Kenya's busiest highways and paramedics treated the injured as waters submerged large areas.

warned of more rainfall. Kenya's Interior Minister Kithure Kindiki ordered the inspection of all public and private dams and water reservoirs within 24 hours starting Monday afternoon to avert future incidents. The ministry said recommendations for evacuations and resettlement would be done after the inspection. The Kenya National Highways Authority issued an alert warning motorists to brace for heavy traffic and debris that blocked the roads around Naivasha and Narok, west of the capital, Nairobi. The wider East African region is experiencing flooding due to the heavy rains, and 155 people have reportedly died in Tanzania while more than 200,000 people affected in neighbouring Burundi.



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

## Top Chinese scientist expelled over corruption allegations

**AP ■ BEIJING**  
China's top scientist, who developed the first inactivated COVID-19 vaccine at the height of the pandemic in the country in 2020, has been dismissed from Parliament for alleged corruption. Yang Xiaoming, the chairman of China National Pharmaceutical Group's vaccine subsidiary China National Biotec Group (CNBG), has been stripped of his membership in the National People's Congress (NPC) due to serious discipline and law violations, official media reported here on Monday. The charge of serious discipline and law violations is a common euphemism for corruption under the ruling Communist Party of China

(CPC) disciplinary practice. Yang, 62, is a veteran researcher who headed the CNBG - a vaccine subsidiary of state-owned Sinopharm - and led a team that developed Sinopharm's BBIBP-CorV vaccine, China's first coronavirus shot approved for general use. Coronavirus first surfaced in the Chinese city of Wuhan in March 2020 and later spread to the world, becoming the pandemic of the century and claiming millions of lives. According to a statement by NPC, Yang is already being investigated by the party disciplinary body - the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection. The Sinopharm shot and Sinovac Biotech's CoronaVac were the most widely used in China and the leading

COVID-19 vaccines exported by the country. Yang's dismissal comes amid the biggest crackdown on China's healthcare system, expanding a sweeping anti-corruption drive launched by President Xi Jinping in the last few years. The crackdown aims to root out widespread corruption in a system plagued by kickbacks. It targets hospitals, drug companies and insurance funds, with dozens of hospital chiefs detained since last year, Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported. Another former Sinopharm senior executive, Zhou Bin, who once served as the company's deputy general manager, was placed under investigation by the CCDI in January.

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

**AP ■ MELBOURNE**  
Solomon Islands pro-Beijing Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare on Monday withdrew from the contest to remain head of the strategically important South Pacific island nation's government following general elections two weeks ago that are central to the US-China rivalry in the region. Sogavare has been re-elected to the parliament. But he told a press conference in the capital Honiara on Monday he would not be nominated as a candidate when the 50 newly elected lawmakers vote on Thursday for the prime minister, Australian Broadcasting Corp reported. Sogavare had hoped to become the first

Solomons prime minister to maintain power in consecutive four-year terms following the April 17 election. During his previous term, China's influence increased more in the Solomons than anywhere else in the South Pacific. Sogavare switched diplomatic allegiances from Taiwan to Beijing and struck a secret security pact that has raised fears of the Chinese navy gaining a foothold in the region. Sogavare said in his press conference he had been "vilified by media" and his family had been subjected to "unprecedented abuse," the ABC reported. Sogavare's Ownership, Unity and Responsibility Party, known as the Our Party, won 15 seats in the election, more than any other party. The

party's candidate to become prime minister will be Foreign Minister Jeremiah Manele. A prime minister needs the support of at least 26 lawmakers in the 50-seat chamber. Observers expect China to have secretly backed more candidates than Sogavare at the election in a bid to ensure the government change does not diminish Beijing's influence. Sogavare could again return to power during the current four-year term. He was elected prime minister after the last election in 2019. But he has served as prime minister three times before 2019 because his predecessors had quit or were ousted by fellow lawmakers in a precarious political system.



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

AP ■ SEOUL

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



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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

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

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



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

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

4 suspects involved in Chinese engineers' killings arrested

Islamabad (PTI): Pakistan authorities claimed on Monday that they have arrested four suspects involved in the killing of Chinese engineers in a deadly terrorist attack last month.

Pak Sharif discusses new loan programme with IMF chief

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

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

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

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

Indonesian, Singaporean leaders hold annual talks, joined by successors

AP ■ BOGOR

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

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

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

AP ■ KYIV

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

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

AP ■ KYIV

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

Ukraine's army chief said Sunday. The Russian Defense Ministry claimed Monday its forces had also taken the village of Semenivka. "The lack of ammunition has allowed the Russians to push forward along the front line. Lack of air defense has made it possible for more Russian missiles to hit their targets, and the lack of deep strike capabilities has made it possible for the Russians to concentrate more forces," Stoltenberg said.

recent weeks edged forward, especially in the Donetsk region, by sheer weight of numbers and massive firepower used to bludgeon defensive positions. Kyiv's Western partners have repeatedly vowed to stand with Ukraine "for as long as it takes."

Thailand FM resigns after being dropped as deputy prime minister

Bangkok (AP): Thailand's foreign minister abruptly resigned in dissatisfaction over a Cabinet reshuffle that removed him as one of the country's deputy prime ministers. Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin on Monday confirmed the report of the resignation of Parnpree Bahiddha-Nugara, saying that he respected the decision, and that he has already started looking for a replacement.

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

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

PTI ■ BEIJING

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

intelligent connected vehicles that meet the country's auto data security requirements, including those from Tesla. The list was released after security tests jointly conducted by the two organisations clearing models of local Chinese electric vehicles, including Li Auto, Lotus, Hozon New Energy Automobile, and NIO besides BYD and Tesla, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

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

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

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

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





## THOMAS CUP

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

**PTI ■ CHENGDU (CHINA)**

Defending champions India sailed to the knockout stage of the Thomas Cup with a 5-0 rout of England in a Group C contest here on Monday.

India, who defeated Thailand 4-1 in their opening tie, notched up a second consecutive win to qualify for the quarterfinals.

HS Prannoy returned to winning ways, defeating Harry Huang 21-15 21-15 to give India a 1-0 lead.

"To give a start to the team is really important, it gives a good boost to the team to go ahead. It is really important to finish off the matches clinically, you saw against Thailand one match was bad

for us. So it's important to finish off the matches clinically," Prannoy said after his match.

The star pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty was stretched to three games by Ben Lane and Sean Vandy in the first doubles fixtures before 2022 world champions bronze medallist picked up a 21-17 19-21 21-15 win in one hour five minutes.

Former world number one Kidambi Srikanth recorded a 21-16 21-11 victory over Nadeem Dalvi to give India an unassailable 3-0 lead.

"Happy with the way both the matches have gone for me (in the tournament). There is a lot of pressure on players to win games. I feel I have played little easier opponents so far. But

from now we will face better opponents and I have to be my best," Srikanth said.

On his recent form, Srikanth said "I'm playing well but not able to pull off the matches. Obviously people will compare how I was playing from 2021-2022. I was in my 20s then."

The second doubles pair of MR Arjun and Dhruv Kapila then brushed aside Rory Easton and Alex Green 21-17 21-19.

In the final match, 24-year-old Kiran George prevailed 21-18 21-12 over Cholan Kayan to wrap up the fixture.

India will take on group toppers and record 14-time champions Indonesia in their final group fixture on Wednesday.

hitting the forehand as much relaxed as I can. I'm really happy to be competitive without pain."

No. 3-ranked Alcaraz is trying to become the first player to win three straight Madrid Open titles. He will next face Jan-Lennard Struff, his opponent in last year's final in Madrid.

Andrey Rublev continued his return to form with a 7-6 (10), 6-4 win against Alejandro Davidovich Fokina. The world No. 8 arrived in Madrid coming off a four-match losing streak before defeating Facundo Bagnis in his opening match.

Tallon Griekspoor got his

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

**AP ■ LONDON**

Arsenal survived a late scare at Tottenham to stay narrowly ahead in the race for the Premier League title.

A 3-2 win at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium ensured Mikel Arteta's team remained at the top of the standings, ahead of defending champion Manchester City, which won 2-0 at Nottingham Forest.

But Arsenal had to endure a nervous finish despite powering to 3-0 lead in a London derby that was supposed to be one of its biggest tests in the title chase.

"The last 20 minutes wasn't nice, but it was worth it," Arsenal forward Bukayo Saka said afterward. "We know it is a big derby and they don't want to lose 3-0 at home. Momentum shifted their way, but I am proud of the boys - we managed to get the three points."

An own-goal from Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg and further strikes from Saka and Kai Havertz put Arsenal into a commanding position at the break. But in the face of a potential rout, Tottenham responded in the second half through Cristian Romero and a penalty from Son Heung-min in the 87th minute.

Under pressure, Arsenal held on and remains one point clear at the top, having played a game more than City.

The advantage is still with Pep Guardiola's team, which will clinch a fourth-straight title if it wins its remaining games this season and responded to Arsenal's win with victory of its own at relegation-fighting Forest.

With Liverpool's title hopes



further diminishing after dropping five points in two games this week, it is down to Arsenal to challenge City's domestic dominance.

Having collapsed late on in last season's title race, Arteta's players look more capable of going the distance this time around.

An away fixture against its fiercest rival, Tottenham, was a major test of its credentials at this stage of the campaign. And while Arsenal was guilty of letting Spurs back into a game that should have been killed off much earlier, victory when tension was high was a test of character.

"Maybe last season that could have ended in a draw and we showed we have the experience," Saka said. "We know City are an amazing team, but they are not perfect, we just need to do our job."

**MAN CITY WINS:** Arsenal's win meant the pressure was on City to keep the heat on its title rival.

It was always favorite to beat a Forest team that is desperately fighting for survival but without Phil Foden, who was



## PSG wins record extending 12th French league title

**AP ■ PARIS**

Paris Saint-Germain has won the French league in Kylian Mbappé's last season at the club after Monaco lost 3-2 at Lyon.

PSG has an unassailable 12-point lead over second-place Monaco, which has three games left.

The Ligue 1 triumph is PSG's third in a row and a record-extending 12th overall.

Mbappé has been involved in six of them, but comes off contract at the end of the season. He's expected to be signed by Real Madrid.

PSG is on course for a potential historic treble as it will play at Borussia Dortmund in the first leg of the Champions League semifinals on Wednesday and face Lyon in the French Cup final on May 25.

In coach Luis Enrique's first season at the club, PSG produced one of the most dominant seasons in league history with just one loss in 31 games so far.

PSG could have secured the title a day earlier but was held 3-3 by Le Havre on Saturday.

"Our fans are incredible. We were losing 1-0, 3-1, and they kept supporting us," Luis Enrique said after the draw.

"We managed to draw later on and effectively win the league thanks to the supporters, thanks to their positive attitude."

That was quite a contrast with the past couple of seasons.

Last season, PSG supporters were booing Lionel Messi even though the soccer great was the player who helped the club clinch an 11th league title by scoring in a 1-1 draw with Strasbourg.

Two years ago, there was a similar disconnect between the supporters and the club. PSG supporters kept protesting at Parc des Princes by giving their team the silent treatment.

## Alcaraz earns another comfortable win in Madrid

**AP ■ MADRID**

Carlos Alcaraz continues to make a successful return from injury at the Madrid Open. The two-time defending champion cruised past Thiago Seyboth Wild in the third round on Sunday to earn another comfortable win.

Alcaraz won 6-3, 6-3 for his second straight victory in his first tournament after skipping Monte Carlo and Barcelona because of an arm injury.

"I think I played at a really good level," Alcaraz said. "Coming into this match I was nervous a little bit because I didn't know how my forearm was going to be. Thiago has big shots. He is really strong. I am really happy with the performance. It was difficult a little bit at

## Alcaraz earns another comfortable win in Madrid



the end, at 5-0 and then serving at 5-3. I am really happy to get it at the end."

The second-seeded Alcaraz had made his debut at the tournament with a 6-2, 6-1 win over Alexander Shevchenko.

Alcaraz had been scheduled to play at the Monte Carlo Masters and he also missed Barcelona to try to fully recover ahead of the French Open next month.

"I think I'm in a good shape right now. I'm not feeling anything in the forearm, and I played good tennis," the 20-year-old Alcaraz said. "Obviously I'm not hitting my forehand on my 100% ... But I'm just focused to

## Bayern, Dortmund seek Champions League glory



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

It's shaping up to be quite the few weeks for German soccer. The country is preparing to stage the European Championship over June and July, with Germany's national team taking a nicely timed upturn in form.

Before that, Germany might yet be celebrating having a European champion once again, with Bayern Munich and Borussia Dortmund making up half of the lineup for the Champions League semifinals beginning this week.

The last time Bayern and Dortmund both reached the Champions League semifinals was in 2013 and they went on to meet in the title match at Wembley Stadium, with Bayern winning 2-1. As fate would have it, Wembley will be hosting the final this year, too.

Setting up a repeat of that 2013 final would mean upsetting the odds. Bayern is up against another European heavyweight in Real Madrid, the record 14-time champion and king of the competition.

Dortmund faces Paris Saint-Germain, whose star striker Kylian Mbappé is looking to lead the French team to its first ever Champions League title in his last season there before a likely move to Madrid.

Germany didn't have a single semifinalist in each of the last three seasons. In the 2019-20 competition, it had two - Bayern and Leipzig - and Bayern was the eventual champion.

This season, Bayern and Dortmund have mounted impressive European campaigns while underperforming on the domestic front.

Bayern has relinquished its Bundesliga title to Bayer Leverkusen after an 11-year hold on the biggest prize in German soccer, and needs to win the Champions League to avoid a first trophy-less season since

## Archer Deepika Kumari reinducted into TOPS



**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

Another archer, Mrinal Chauhan, has been added to the TOPS Development group, while Pravin Jadhav has been moved from Development to Core group and para-powerlifter Ashok has been inducted into TOPS Core group, the sports ministry said in a statement.

The Mission Olympic Cell (MOC), during its 133rd meeting, also inducted squash players Anahat Singh, Abhay Singh and Velavan Senthilkumar to the TOPS Development group, to help them prepare for the Los Angeles Olympics, that will take place in the year 2028.

In October 2023, the LA organising committee had included squash in the 2028 edition of the Games.

"Looking at India's performance in Squash in the past two decades, especially at Commonwealth Games and Asian Games, MOC decided to induct three squash players in their TOPS Development group, with the aim to help them provide all required assistance to prepare for the global event," the ministry release stated.

## Bayern, Dortmund seek Champions League glory

and are expected to be back in the starting lineup against Bayern.

Bayern coach Thomas Tuchel is leaving at the end of the season, and the Champions League - which he won with Chelsea in 2021 - offers him the chance to go out on a high.

Two months on from Bayern's announcement that Tuchel would depart, he seems more popular than ever among sections of the Bayern support. Part of that is down to the calm, controlled way Bayern knocked out Arsenal in the second leg of their quarterfinal. Partly it's a reaction to Bayern's failure to hire top coaching targets like Bayer Leverkusen's Xabi Alonso or Germany's Julian Nagelsmann.

As Tuchel nears the end of a troubled tenure at Bayern, he's often seemed more upbeat than ever.

"If people want me to stay, it is still an issue that has no priority," Tuchel

## Bayern, Dortmund seek Champions League glory

soccer's elite competition.

The club is already planning for life without its superstar striker, who is set to walk away as a free agent, with players like Randal Kolo Muani, Ousmane Dembele and Goncalo Ramos expected to help fill the void in his absence. But Mbappé could still have a big say in the Champions League and he scored two goals in PSG's 4-1 comeback win against Barcelona in the quarterfinals.

PSG drew 3-3 at home to Le Havre on Saturday after coming back from 3-1 down and needing an equalizer from Ramos in the fifth minute of stoppage time.

It's been a strange season for Dortmund and that was underlined by Saturday's 4-1 loss against top four rival RB Leipzig.

Dortmund has certainly saved its best performances for the Champions League, none better than the comeback win over Atletico Madrid in the quarterfinals.

Striker Sebastian Haller scored in the first leg against Atletico but injured his ankle in Dortmund's next game and hasn't played since.

Forward Donyell Malen has been struggling with pain, too. Much could depend on which version of Jadon Sancho turns up to face PSG.

Sancho, who scored against Leipzig, has shown glimpses of his obvious talent since returning to Dortmund in January on loan from Manchester United. The issue is whether the former England forward can consistently play at his best.

"Both I and Jadon have noticed he isn't at the peak of his performance yet, but that's totally OK. That's something we were aware of when we decided to bring him back, but we know that he's able to reach that maximum very quickly," Dortmund coach Edin Terzic said Friday.

"Every training session, Jadon has a moment that shows his incredible talent and we see how hard-working he is with the team."

