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Modi promises to restore JK Statehood

PM says his Government will work to realise dream of Viksit Bharat 2047

MOHIT KANDHARI ■
UDHAMPUR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday promised early Assembly polls and restoration of Statehood to the people of Jammu and Kashmir at an election rally in Udhampur. The rally was organised to garner support for BJP candidates, Dr Jitendra Singh and Jugal Kishore, seeking reelection for the third consecutive term from the Udhampur-Doda and Jammu-Reasi Lok Sabha seats respectively. Continuing his tirade against the Congress, Modi also roasted the INDIA Bloc partners for allegedly eating mutton during the holy month of Sawan last year. Modi claimed the intentions of “these people” were to tease the people of the country, “just like the Mughals”. Seeking blessings of Maa Vaishno Devi from a distance, Modi, sporting a Dogra turban, said the time is not far when the Assembly polls will be held in Jammu and Kashmir and the Statehood will also be restored. “You have seen the worst, so this looks like a lot to you. You feel good to see development. But Modi thinks bigger. Modi has a great vision. Whatever has happened till now is just a trailer. “I have to get busy creating a new and wonderful picture of the new Jammu and Kashmir. The time is not far when



Prime Minister Narendra Modi poll rally in J&K's Udhampur ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha election on Friday

PTI

Assembly elections will be held in Jammu and Kashmir and it will get the status of Statehood. You will be able to share your dreams with your MLA and your Ministers,” Modi asserted. He said Jammu and Kashmir has completely



changed and the biggest thing is that there has been a change of heart as people have moved from disappointments towards hope. “I have been coming to Jammu and Kashmir for the last five decades. I remember the Ekta Yatra in 1992 to

unfurl the tricolour at the Lal Chowk (in Srinagar). We received a grand welcome. In 2014, after offering prayers at the Vaishno Devi temple, I addressed a gathering at this very venue and gave a guarantee of freeing the people who have suffered for generations (due to terrorism),” the Prime Minister said. He slammed the Congress for

delaying the Shahpur-Kandi dam's completion in Jammu and Kashmir and said “the water of our Ravi river was flowing to Pakistan while our farmers in Samba and Kathua were suffering. Modi fulfilled the guarantee to farmers as thousands of them are going to benefit from the completion of the dam, which will also illuminate the houses here”. The Prime Minister asserted that “all the issues of every section of society” in Jammu and Kashmir will be resolved. He said his Government will work round the clock to realise the dream of “Viksit Bharat 2047”. “This is the guarantee of Modi. In the last 10 years, we have cracked down on terrorism and corruption in the region. In the next five years, we will take this region to new heights of development and progress,” the Prime Minister said. “After decades, this election is taking place without the fear of terrorism, separatism, stone-pelting, strikes, and cross-border terrorism, which are no more election issues. There used to be a concern regarding the security of the Vaishno Devi and Amarnath pilgrimages, but the situation has changed altogether. Jammu and Kashmir is witnessing development and the people's faith in the government is getting strengthened,” Modi said.

AAP claims Delhi to come under President's Rule soon

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi is heading for a crisis like situation with Delhi Minister and senior AAP leader Atishi hinting on Friday about the possibility of imposition of President's rule. However, the BJP has rubbished Atishi's claim pointing out that after Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's arrest in the money-laundering case and internal developments in the party, the AAP is nervous. Delhi BJP said the AAP is scared of losing majority in Delhi following some MLAs leaving the party and said it was therefore alleging that President's rule may be imposed. Atishi claimed that in recent times, several events have taken place that indicate the possibility of the imposition of President's rule in Delhi. “In the last few months, no senior IAS officer has been posted in Delhi. Posts are lying vacant in departments but no postings have taken place. Bureaucrats have stopped attending meetings called by Ministers, citing the Model Code of Conduct. The Lieutenant Governor has been writing letters to the MHA (Ministry of Home Affairs) over the functioning of the Delhi Government,” she said. After Delhi Social Welfare Department Minister Raaj Kumar Anand's resignation, there is no clarity on how about a half a dozen -odd departments he was handling would function as Kejriwal is in Tihar jail and he has not made it



clear whether he would either like to induct a new Minister to replace Anand or would allocate his portfolios to any minister. Atishi said the BJP already knows that it cannot come to power in Delhi. “The AAP defeated the BJP in the Delhi Assembly elections in 2015 and 2020. That is why they want to topple the Delhi Government. However, the imposition of President's rule would be illegal since the Delhi Government enjoys a majority. We proved our majority through a floor test on February 17 this year,” she said. AAP has 62 MLAs in the 70-member Delhi Assembly. After the Enforcement Directorate objected to Kejriwal issuing instructions while in custody, questions are being raised: To whom Anand's portfolio will be reassigned now.



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NARI NYAY

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- 50% reservation for women in government jobs

HISSEDARI NYAY

- Socio-economic caste census
- Settlement of all FRA claims within 1 year

HAATH BADLEGA HALAAT



NGO alleges Delhi CS and SS involved in scams, FIR registered in Almora

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

An FIR has been registered against Delhi chief secretary Naresh Kumar and special secretary of the Service department in Delhi government YVVJ Rajasekhar on the orders of a court in Almora. The FIR was registered following the complaint of an NGO named the Pleasant Valley Foundation, the officials said. They informed that the NGO stated in its complaint that Kumar and Rajasekhar allegedly sent four men to a school run by the NGO in Dadakada village on February 14. The complainant claimed that the men vandalised their office and took away files, pen drives and other documents that reportedly contained evidence of

their involvement in scams. The NGO approached the court seeking action against the culprits. The accused also allegedly threatened to frame the NGO's officials if they did not withdraw corruption complaints filed by the NGO against them with the Vigilance department and other agencies. The complainant claimed that the men had even tried to force them to sign typewritten documents, which they had brought with them. When the NGO representative resisted, the assailants took away Rs 63,000 in cash kept in a drawer, the officials informed. The officials said that the court admitted the NGO's complaint against the said officials on

March 2 and asked the revenue police to register a case against them and investigate the allegations. The police registered the FIR under sections 392 (robbery), 447 (criminal trespass), 120b (criminal conspiracy), 504 (intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of the peace) and 506 (criminal intimidation) of the IPC and the SC/ST Act. The revenue police registered the case against the officials on the orders of Almora's Chief Judicial Magistrate. When this correspondent asked Almora's district magistrate Vinit Tomar about the matter and when exactly the FIR was registered, he refused to share any details regarding the matter.

STF nabs two wanted robbers for daylight robbery at gunpoint

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Uttarakhand Special Task Force (STF) on Friday arrested two robbers wanted on charges of robbing Rs 1.5 lakh from a finance employee at gunpoint under Haridwar's SIIDCUL area on February 15. The senior superintendent of police of STF Ayush Agrawal informed that a man named Rahul Kumar worked for a finance company and collected installments for it from the people of the Hazara Grant village of Bahadradab block on the 15th day of every month. According to him, some men robbed him at gunpoint on February 15 and threw his bike keys far to ensure he could not chase them. The SSP said that six accused were found to be involved in the robbery. The Haridwar police team was able to identify and locate two accused after analysing footage from several CCTV cameras. When the police approached



them to nab them, they opened fire at the team but were eventually caught by the police. The police also arrested the third accused later. The Haridwar SSP announced a reward of Rs 10,000 each on the three absconding accused. Agrawal said that the STF team started investigating the matter and got information about the two accused of hid-

ing in Uttar Pradesh and Haridwar. Following this, an STF team was immediately sent to UP that arrested Ankit Kumar from the Fatehpur area of the Saharanpur district. The second absconding accused Arun alias Raja was arrested in Haridwar's Laksar. The third accused Nakul is still absconding and will be nabbed soon too, the SSP added.

Ramdev and Govind Dev address 4th day of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Katha

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Addressing the fourth day of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Katha being held in University of Patanjali in Haridwar, Yoga Guru Ramdev said on Friday that all the mothers of India must take inspiration from Jijabai, the mother of Shivaji, with this country being lauded as the land of brave mothers. "Shivaji's life is an inspirational tale of overcoming obstacles and struggles to protect the Sanatan Dharma," he said and added that the imperialists,

must be replaced with new laws which would cater to the culture and the needs of the nation. Swami Govind Dev while addressing the gathering spoke on the relevance of Kshatriya Dharma in the present age and said that the true warriors are always ready to make the supreme sacrifice to protect the country's borders and culture. Narrating the saga of valour Shivaji embodied, he said that



capitalist and market forces, out to establish monopoly over the world, must be resisted with nationalistic zeal. He further stressed that the outdated laws that came into effect during the British rule

despite setbacks and challenges, he had never deviated from his Kshatriya Dharma and kept on fighting against the invaders.

U'khand receives hefty revenue from mining sector in 2023-24

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Mining department has earned revenue of Rs 645.42 crore in the financial year 2023-24 which is Rs 173.42 crore more than the previous year. The Mining secretary Brijesh Kumar Sant said that the department has set a new record in revenue collection this year. He said that the department had collected revenue of Rs 472.25 crore in the financial year 2022-23. The department collected Rs 645.42 crore in 2023-24 which is 40 per cent more than the previous year. Sant said that the revenue collection in the year 2023-24 was highest ever since the creation of the State and attributed the suc-

cess to the officers and employees of the mining department. Sant said that the State government had incorporated massive changes in the policies and taken foresighted steps which have helped the department in collecting revenue which is almost equal to the target for the year.

The mining department has taken a target of Rs 1,000 crore revenue in the current financial year. The mining secretary said that the department has prepared a work plan for the year 2024-24 and expressed confidence that the department will achieve the target.

Two-day spell of rain and thunderstorms to start today

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Even as temperatures remain above normal in the plains and normal in the mountains, the weather in the State is set to take a turn for about two days from Saturday. The State meteorological centre has issued a yellow warning (Watch) regarding the possibility of thunderstorms accompanied with lightning and gusty wind (30-40 kmph) likely to occur at isolated places in Uttarkashi, Rudrapur, Chamoli, Bageshwar, Pithoragarh, Dehradun, Tehri, Pauri, Haridwar and Almora districts today. The centre has further forecast that very light to light rain/thunderstorms are likely to occur at a few places in Uttarkashi, Rudrapur, Chamoli, Bageshwar, Pithoragarh district and isolated places in Dehradun, Tehri, Pauri, Haridwar and Almora districts today. Very light to light snowfall is also likely to occur in places situated at altitudes of 4,000 metres and above in the aforementioned districts. Apart from this, dry weather is likely to prevail in the remaining districts of the State. The pro-

visional State capital Dehradun is forecast to witness a partly to generally cloudy sky. Thunder cloud development / very light rain are likely to occur in some areas towards the evening/night. The maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to be about 36 degrees Celsius and 18 degrees Celsius respectively in Dehradun today.

State meteorological centre director Bikram Singh said that rain is likely in most parts of the State on Sunday. The weather will start clearing from Monday. Another weather system is expected on April 19 and 20, about which more will be known later, he added. The maximum and minimum temperatures reported on Friday were 35.9 degrees Celsius and 17.2 degrees Celsius respectively in Dehradun, 36.2 degrees Celsius and 14.1 degrees Celsius in Pantnagar, 24.4 degrees Celsius and 9.8 degrees Celsius in Mukteshwar and 24.6 degrees Celsius and 10.1 degrees Celsius in New Tehri.

Fruit prices rise in Doon as demand rises due to Navratri

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The steep rise in the prices of fruits by an average of 10 to 15 per cent in the city has affected the festive mood of many, particularly those who are fasting during Navratri. Many street vendors selling fruits have claimed that prices of fruits tend to go up as soon as Navratri approaches. They claimed that bananas which were earlier sold at Rs 30 per dozen now cost Rs 50 per dozen, while the price of apples has risen to Rs 150 per kilogramme from Rs 100 per kilogramme. In light of this, the secretary of the Agriculture Produce Market Committee (APMC) Vijay Thapliyal has assured that fruit prices will decrease by the end of April. Expressing her concern over the prices of fruits, a customer Veena Bisht said that during Navratri, people who fast consume mainly fruits. However, this year, the prices of fruits have increased, causing concern among the residents of the city. Normally, they used to purchase fruits in large quantities during Navratri but this year they are buying in less, she said.

Fruit seller Raju Shankar stated that the prices of fruits have increased with the start of Navratri. During Navratri, the demand for fruits goes up, which is the main reason for the hike in prices. He claimed that he has been selling oranges at his stall for the last two months. Earlier, the price of oranges was Rs 80 per kilogramme, which has now gone up to Rs 100 per kilogramme during this Navratri. Thapliyal told this correspondent that the prices of fruits have increased due to Navratri. During Navratri, there is a high demand for fruits in temples, homes and other places, which leads to a direct impact on supply. This imbalance of demand and supply drives up the prices of fruits by an average of 10 per cent. Apart from this, seasonal changes and cultivation also affect the prices of fruits. He added that fruits in summer are in higher demand compared to winter, which increases their prices. However, Thapliyal assured that the prices of fruits will normalise by the end of April.

PNB Doon circle celebrates 130th foundation day

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Dehradun circle of Punjab National Bank (PNB) celebrated its 130th foundation day here on Friday. The senior PNB officials said that the bank, founded by the freedom fighter Lala Lajpat Rai along with several

other leaders in 1894, has over 10,000 branches spread across the country with a customer base of over 180 million. To commemorate



the occasion, the Dehradun circle organised a programme addressed by the circle head, Dehradun, Viraj Dogra. Health check-up camps were organised by the circle office, Dehradun at several locations. The organisers further said that as part of the bank's corporate social responsibility (CSR), school bags were distributed among needy students of several schools, including Rajkiya Purva Madhyamik Vidyalaya, Rajpur Road; Government Primary School, Purkul Gaon and Government Public School Nanoorkhera.

Entrepreneurship training programme concludes at DAV College

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The State government's entrepreneurship training programme concluded on Friday at DAV PG College. The State government conducted such programmes in various places to raise awareness among students about entrepreneurship. During the programme, the deputy director of the Higher Education department, Deepak Kumar Pandey informed about the Gaurav scheme for skill development and training in financial and banking services and insur-



ance sector, which is available to college students and youth. Additionally, he addressed the girl students about the importance of entrepreneurship and its potential benefits for their future. Further, the college principal SK Singh also encouraged students to take advantage of various schemes provided by the government to improve their career prospects. Those participating in the programme also discussed various possibilities related to entrepreneurship.

Stomach infection & typhoid cases increase as summer approaches

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

With the arrival of the summer season, the cases of stomach infection and typhoid have increased slightly in Dehradun, the doctors said. They asserted that consumption of contaminated water is the primary cause of these ailments during this season. Elderly people and children need to be extra cautious about their health as they are more vulnerable to such illnesses during this time, stated by the doctors. Doctors have reported cases of indigestion and typhoid among the public, especially in children and elderly individuals. Senior physician at the district hospital, Dr Praveen Panwar said that with the summer season approaching, waterborne diseases and indigestion problems tend to increase. He noted that elderly people are particularly vulnerable to these ailments due to their weaker immune systems compared to adults. "The symptoms of typhoid and indigestion include fever, weakness, stomach pain and diarrhoea. Any individual facing any of these symptoms, seeks medical attention promptly without delay," Panwar said. He further added that the arrival of the summer season tends to exacerbate these health issues. To prevent such conditions, individuals should ensure that they consume fresh food, maintain good hygiene and opt for boiled water whenever possible, he said. "Stomach infections and instances of typhoid have been observed among children with the onset of the summer season. Additionally, the cases of pollen allergies in children are also common during this season, which leads to breathing difficulties," pediatrician at CMI Hospital Dr Apoorv Jain said. He further added that typhoid symptoms typically include fever, stomach pain and diarrhoea. Considering this he urged individuals experiencing these symptoms to seek medical attention. In severe cases, blood may also appear in the stool, he added. Jain further underscored the importance of early precautions, such as consuming boiled water and fresh food along with maintaining hygiene to prevent such illnesses in children. He advised against consuming stale food during the summer to avoid digestive issues and other stomach-related ailments.

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS

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I, SADHANA W/o Army No. 2808267X NK KHOT DHANANJAY BALU,VILL- Dumdewadi, Post-Bilasi, Teh- Shirala, Dist-Sangli, Maharashtra-415402. I have changed my name SADHANA to SADHANA DHANANJAY KHOT inclusion of middle and last name as per my adhar no. 329737658321 vide affidavit sworn before notary and advocate Sanjeev Kumar dated 12.04.2024 UK.GOI

I, JYOTSANA W/o Army No- 2801562X HAV BONDRE BHOLESHANKAR MANOHAR ,VILL-TUMSAR, POST-TUMSAR,TEH- TUMSAR, DIST BHANDARA, MAHARASHTRA - 441912. I have changed my name JYOTSANA to JYOTSANA BHOLESHANKAR BONDRE inclusion of middle and last names as per Aadhar No. 809844875427vide affidavit sworn before notary and advocate Sanjeev Kumar dated 12.04.2024 UK.GOI.

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The general public is informed that I have changed my name from Jagannath Singh to Jaganath Singh Rawat and in future I should be known as Jaganath Singh Rawat S/o Ranjori Singh Address: 153, Gram-Poolan, Po- Sirwari, Rudraprayag UK

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The general public is informed that I have changed my name from Abhishek to Abhishek Kumar and in future I should be known as Abhishek Kumar S/o Vijendra Kumar Address: Bhagirathi Vihar Phase 1 Radhaswami Satsang Beas Noorpur Panjandhedi Kankhal Haridwar UK

Original sale deed dated 12.09.2018 vide Book No 1 Jld 4569 page 187 to 210, Document No 5957 has been actually lost somewhere. Its use by any other person shall be illegal. Adarsh Garg S/o Subhash Chandra address Raja Garden, Jagjeetpur, Kankhal Haridwar.

मेरी पुत्री के आधार कार्ड नं 478133324356 में उसका घरेलू नाम MADHU KUMARI दर्ज हो गया है जबकि मेरी पुत्री का वास्तविक नाम ADITI KUMARI है, भविष्य में मेरी पुत्री को ADITI KUMARI D/o SHIV KUMAR के नाम से जाना पहचाना व पुकारा जाए। निवासी क्वॉटर नं 325, सी०आई०डब्ल्यू एसटीबी (डी) बी. ई.जी. एंड सेंटर रुडकी।

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SRHU inks MoU with PHDCCI for training programmes

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Swami Rama Himalayan University (SRHU) and the PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PHDCCI) have inked a memorandum of understanding to provide industrial training to the students. Stating this, the president of SRHU Vijay Dhasmana emphasised that the MoU aims to facilitate industrial training and growth prospects for university students. He added that the collaboration will enable students to take advantage of the knowledge and resources available at the PHD Chamber, such as seminars, workshops and industrial training programmes aimed at bridging the gap between academic learning and industry practices. Dhasmana further highlighted that this partnership will

also provide advanced training opportunities for university teachers and students through various industrial units associated with the PHD Chamber. Further, PHDCCI executive director Ranjit Mehta stated that PHDCCI is currently undertaking an Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) awareness campaign nationwide. He also mentioned that comparable initiatives will be implemented at SRHU in alignment with MoU. Notably, SRHU has established collaborations with educational and business entities worldwide which include Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Roorkee, Global Health Alliance (GHA) United Kingdom, Lappeenranta University of Applied Sciences Finland and various other organisations.

GRIHUM HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED (formerly known as Poonawalla Housing Finance Limited) REGISTERED OFFICE: 602, 6th FLOOR, ZERO ONE IT PARK, SR. No. 79/1, GHORPADI, MUNDHWA ROAD, PUNE - 411036			
You the below mentioned Borrowers/ Co-borrowers/ Guarantors have availed Home loans/Loans against Property facility (ies) by mortgaging your immovable property/ies from Grihum Housing Finance Limited (formerly known as Poonawalla Housing Finance Limited) as per the name Poonawalla Housing Finance Limited changed to Grihum Housing Finance Limited with effect from 17 Nov 2023 (Previously known as Magma Housing Finance Limited and originally incorporated with name of GE Money Housing Finance Public Limited Company) herein after referred as Secured Creditor'. You defaulted in repayment and therefore, your loan/s was classified as Non-Performing Assets. A Demand Notice under Section 13(2) of Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Asset and Enforcement of Security Interest Act 2002 for the recovery of the outstanding dues sent on last known addresses however the same have returned un-served. Hence the contents of which are being published herewith as per Section 13(2) of the Act read with Rule 3(1) of The Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 and as by way of Alternate Service upon you. Details of the Borrowers, Co-borrowers, Guarantors, Securities, Outstanding Dues, Demand Notice sent under Section 13(2) and Amount claimed there under are given as under			
Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower, Co-Borrower, Guarantor and Loan Amount	Details of the Secured Asset	Demand Notice Date
1.	Khursheed, Sitar Begam, Mohd Suhail Loan Amount: Rs. 24,90,000/- Loan No: HF/0540/H/20/100279	All That Piece & Parcel Of Khata No 28 Kharsa No 665 And 666m Wake Gram Gangoh Majabat Bahar Hadood Pratham Pangana Gangoh Tehsil Nakur Saharanpur Adm. 166.66 Sq.yards. Gangoh Filling Station Pin Code- 247341 Bounded By:- East:- Property Of Neeraj, West:- 30 Feet Wide Road, North:- Lakhnoti Road, South:- Property Of Rakesh.	08/04/2024
2.	Dilip Kumar Biswas, Deepa Rani Biswas Loan Amount: Rs. 20,00,000/- Loan No: HF/0557/H/20/100018	All That Piece & Parcel Of Property Bearing Khata No 030 Khet No 362 Min Gram Lalpur Pangana Rudrapur Tehsil Kichha Dist Udhham Singh Nagar Adm. 110.03 Sq.mtrs. Near Kadri Market Lalpur Pin Code-263148 Bounded By:- East:- Nihar, West:- House Of Nirmala Devi, North:- 11ft Wide Road, South:- House Of Kashinir Singh.	08/04/2024
3.	Abbar Husain, Zoya Khan Loan Amount: Rs. 50,00,000/- Loan No: LAP054020000000500685	All That Piece And Parcel Of House & Shop West And North Facing Nagar Nigam No. 11/2332 Meas. 96.83 Sq. Yards Situated At Mohalla Gotey Shah, Khair Nagar Dist. Saharanpur, Bounded As Below:- East - House Of Mr. Sharafat Ali, West - Way 12 Feet Wide, North - Way 12 Feet Wide, South - House Of Mr. Abrar Husain	08/04/2024
You the Borrower/s and Co-Borrower/s/Guarantors are therefore called upon to make payment of the above-mentioned demanded amount with further interest as mentioned hereinabove in full within 60 Days of this Notice failing which the undersigned shall be constrained to take action under the above mentioned securities. Please Note that as per Section 13(13) of The Said Act, You are in the meanwhile, restrained from transferring the above-referred securities by way of sale, lease or otherwise without our consent. DATE: 13/04/2024, PLACE: UTTARAKHAND Authorised Officer GRIHUM HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED (Formerly Known As Poonawalla Housing Finance Ltd)			
DEMAND NOTICE UNDER SECTION 13(2) OF THE SARFAESI ACT, 2002			Amount Due in Rs.
Rs. 25,30,972/- (Rupees TwentyFive Lakh Thirty Thousand Nine Hundred SeventyTwo Only) together with further interest @ 16% p.a till repayment.			
Rs. 20,58,912/- (Rupees Twenty Lakh FiftyEight Thousand Nine Hundred Twelve Only) together with further interest @ 16.5% p.a till repayment.			
Rs. 25,59,281/- (Rupees TwentyFive Lakh FiftyNine Thousand Two Hundred EightyOne Only) together with further interest @ 16.5% p.a till repayment.			

MANDATE 2024

Priyanka to address rallies in Ramnagar & Roorkee today

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The general secretary of the Congress party, Priyanka Gandhi will address election rallies in Ramnagar and Roorkee on Saturday. She will be the first star campaigner used by the Congress to canvass for the candidates in the State after declaration of the elections. Gandhi will try to woo women voters in Garhwal and Haridwar Lok Sabha constituencies. It is believed that she will raise the issue of murder of Anikta Bhandari and will try to corner the government on failing to identify the VIP involved in the case. In Haridwar she is likely to raise the issue of farmers.

As per the programme, Gandhi will address a public meeting at Pirumadara of Ramnagar at 11.50 am in support of Congress candidate from Garhwal Ganesh Godiyal.

Thereafter she will travel to Roorkee where she will address a public meeting at DAV college ground at 3.00



pm in support of Congress candidate Virendra Singh Rawat.

The vice president of Uttarakhand Congress Mathuradutt Joshi said that the state in- charge of Congress party Kumar Selja, the Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) president Karan Mahara, the leader of opposition (LoP) in State assembly Yashpal Arya, the head of campaign committee Pritam Singh, the co- in-charge Deepika Pandey, MLA, former MLAs and other party leaders will be present in the rallies of

Gandhi in the State.

Joshi said that the PCC has made all the preparations for the success of the rallies of Priyanka Gandhi. The in-charge of the State Congress Kumari Selja and PCC president Mahara visited Roorkee on Saturday to review the preparations for the rally.

Mahara has made an appeal to the Congress workers to attend the rallies of Priyanka Gandhi in large numbers so that the message of five Nyay and 25 guarantees of Congress party reaches to every household.

Congress promotes dynastic politics & corruption: Dhami

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami has accused the Congress party of encouraging corruption and dynastical politics. He also blamed the Congress for engaging in the politics of appeasement. Addressing a public meeting at Danya in Almora in support of BJP candidate Ajay Tamta on Friday, the CM said that Congress wants to come to the power not for the public welfare but for the welfare of the family. Dhami said that the election manifesto of the Congress party resembles the divisive manifesto of Muslim league headed by Jinnah in the year 1936.

Exhorting the people to vote for the BJP candidate Tamta for making Narendra Modi the Prime Minister of the country again, the CM said that PM Modi has special affinity towards Uttarakhand. He said that Jageshwar temple is the centre of the Manaskhand Mandir Mala mission and after the visit of PM Modi the number of pilgrims visiting the temple has increased.

The CM said that Uttarakhand is taking rapid strides on the path of development under the leadership of PM Modi. The number of pilgrims in Char Dhams is increasing. He said that PM



Modi is working on a mission to make India, a developed nation by the year 2047.

He said that the Modi government has taken a series of decisions such implementation of Citizens Amendment Act (CAA) and abrogation of article 370 of constitution in the larger interests of the country. The triple Talaq has also been abolished. Similarly construction of a mega temple of Lord Ram has been completed and the economy of the country is now the fifth biggest economy of the world. The CM said that many developmental projects are going on at a full swing in the State. The State government has implemented a stringent anti- copying act and the recruitment examinations are being held as per the calendar.

Anti riot ordinance has been brought and 30 per cent reservation in government jobs is being given to women.

Dhami said that the PM himself had given a gift of projects worth Rs 4200 crore in Jageshwar for the development of the area.

The CM said that during the coalition government headed by the Congress before 2014, the scams were coming to fore on daily basis. He added that in the governments headed by Congress and other opposition parties in the State, the scams are still coming out. PM Modi has adopted a policy of zero tolerance on corruption due to which the corrupt are either in jail or are out on bail, he said.

Voter slips to all voters to be delivered by April 14: Jogdande

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Additional Chief Electoral Officer (ACEO) Uttarakhand, VK Jogdande has said that the process of delivering voter slips to all the voters of the State is underway. He said that on the orders of the Election Commission of India (ECI), 83.35 lakh voter slips have been provided to the Booth Level Officers (BLO) for distribution. He said that so far the 60.20 lakh voter slips have reached the voters. The

this process by April 14.

The ACEO said that information about booth and serial number can also be obtained by searching on the National Voter Search Portal.

Jogdande said that instructions have been given to complete the distribution of voter slips as well as the remaining EPIC cards in the next two days. "Voter guide is also being provided to



voters get information about their booth number and serial number in the electoral roll through the voter slips. He said that instructions have been given to complete

every voter family. A target has been set to provide voter guides to 19.33 Lakh families. So far, voter guides have been provided to 13.54 lakh families," he said.

Paanch Nyay, 25 guarantees of Congress eliciting tremendous public response: Selja

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Uttarakhand in-charge of the Congress, Kumari Selja has claimed that the Paanch Nyay and 25 guarantees of the Congress party are eliciting good response from the general public. Interacting with the media persons at Jairam Ashram in Haridwar on Saturday she said that the Congress party is contesting the Lok Sabha elections with its full might. She said that the Congress party has made promises to the people of the country in corruption, employment, women empowerment and participation in power. Selja said that on coming to power the Congress party will bring the unemployed, farmers,



youth, dalits and backwards into the national mainstream.

The head of election campaign committee of the State

Congress Pritam Singh exhorted the party workers to work hard to ensure victory of Congress candidates in all the five Lok Sabha constituencies.

He said that the Congress party will not get deterred by the campaign of falsehood unleashed by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Kumari Selja was in Haridwar to oversee the preparation of the party for the rally of Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi in Roorkee on April 13. The Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) president Karan Mahara, AICC secretary Qazi Nizamuddin, former cabinet minister and in charge of Haridwar LS Shoorvir Singh Sajwan, Rajpal Kharola, Dharendra Pratap and other leaders were present on the occasion.



SVEEP nodal officer Jhama Kamthan chairs a meeting with representatives of schools in Dehradun to raise awareness on the importance of voting
Pioneer photo

It's commoners versus 'royalty' in the contest for Tehri Lok Sabha seat

BJP targets Congress for dynastic politics, fields member of erstwhile royal family

PURNIMA BISHT ■ DEHRADUN

The electoral pitch of the Bharatiya Janata Party is focused on aspects like development, national security and the welfare of the common citizens versus the interests of the 'royal family' of the Congress, which Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other BJP leaders accuse the Congress of mainly focussing on. In such a scenario, the Tehri Lok Sabha constituency presents an interesting contest with

as an independent candidate is also doing his bit to make a mark. Tehri is one of the five parliamentary constituencies in Uttarakhand that came into existence in 1957 following the delimitation of Lok Sabha constituencies. It comprises 14 Assembly constituencies of the Dehradun, Tehri and Uttarkashi districts. It includes all three Assembly constituencies of Uttarkashi district- Purola, Gangotri,

Sahaspur, Raipur, Rajpur Road, Dehradun Cantonment and Mussoorie. There are a total of 15.74 lakh voters in the LS constituency at present that include 8.13 lakh male voters, 7.6 lakh female voters and 62 transgenders. The constituency has 2,462 polling stations. The BJP and Congress have won this seat in turn since 1957 but the BJP has successfully maintained dominance in

from Tehri in 1957, 1962 and 1967 as a Congress candidate and as a BJP candidate in 1991, 1996, 1998, 1999 and 2004. Since the past two LS elections, his daughter-in-law Mala Rajya Laxmi Shah has been winning the election there. She is the first woman MP of Uttarakhand. In the 2014 LS elections, she defeated Congress candidate Saket Bahuguna, the son of the then chief minister Vijay Bahuguna. She got 4,46,733 votes with a vote share of 57.5 per cent and won the seat with a margin of 1,92,503 votes. Bahuguna got 2,54,230 votes with 32.72 per cent vote share. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, Shah won the seat with a margin of 3,00,586 votes. She got 5,65,333 votes with a vote share of 64 per cent and defeated Congress candidate and six time MLA from Chakrata Pritam Singh who got 2,64,747 votes with a 30.11 per cent vote share.

The BJP has once again put its faith in Shah from the Tehri seat in the LS elections 2024. She will contest against veteran Congress leader Jot Singh Gungola, a two-time MLA from Mussoorie and the independent candidate Bobby Panwar who claims to

represent the voice of youth in the State. Shah comes from the erstwhile royal family of Tehri and her father-in-law was one of the longest serving members of the BJP. The opposition parties have consistently accused her of being too privileged and disconnected from people to know about common people's struggles. Her rivals and some among the public too say that she is hardly seen interacting with people except during the election. Gungola and Panwar claim to represent the common man and their struggles. Gungola is one of the senior Congress leaders in the State and has served as chairman of Mussoorie municipal council from 1988 to 1994 and 1997 to 2002.

He also won the Assembly election from Mussoorie in 2002 and 2007. It is being said that Congress initially wanted Chakrata MLA Pritam Singh to contest from the Tehri LS constituency but he refused. The party then gave the ticket to Gungola on Singh's recommendation. However, the Congress has been affected badly due to the consistent deflection of its senior leaders like Jot Singh Bisht, Maganlal Shah and

Vijay Pal Sajwan which can possibly affect their potential voters in this constituency. The independent candidate Bobby Panwar is also creating a buzz in the elections, especially among the youths. He is the president of Uttarakhand Berozgar Sangh (UBS) who became popular among the youths after he raised his voice against several scams in the government recruitment examinations in the State in 2023 that came to light about two years ago. He was even sent to jail for seven days in February last year after the agitation against the scams in recruitment examinations turned violent.

He was accused of instigating the violence under the pretext of agitation. This incident made him more popular across the State, especially among the youths belonging to mountainous areas who prepare for years to crack government examinations. Many youngsters consider him their voice and feel connected. Both Gungola and Panwar claim to be connected to their roots and seek a chance to serve the people of the Tehri LS constituency against Shah.

Acquisition of vehicles for LS polls affects wedding plans

PREM PRAKASH UPADHYAY ■ BAGESHWAR

As the authorities work to ensure a free and fair festival of democracy, the acquisition of commercial vehicles for the Lok Sabha elections is affecting the wedding plans of the people in the Kumaon region. The Transport Department has acquired vehicles for transporting personnel on poll duty and necessary items for the polling scheduled for April 19.

In such a situation, it has become difficult for people here to arrange vehicles for wedding processions. Due to most of the vehicles in Kumaon being acquired by the authorities for election duty, the people are in a quandary with weddings starting in the auspicious period from April 14. People who had already made their wedding plans before the vehicles were acquired for election duty are now repeatedly contacting the vehicle owners to check if there is any scope for transporting the wedding party.

For the successful conduct of elections, the Transport department has acquired 5,523 vehicles in the entire Kumaon region. Out of these, 1,507 have been acquired in Nainital district, 1,055 in Udham Singh Nagar, 993 in Almora, 676 in Bageshwar, 836 in Pithoragarh and 465 in

Champawat district. Due to such a large number of public transport vehicles being acquired, it is becoming difficult for people to get vehicles for weddings. The vehicles have also been acquired for the vote-from-home facility being provided for voters aged 85 years and above along with handicapped voters.

The drivers along with the acquired vehicles have to report at the designated place on April 14. The authorities will fix the schedule for the vehicles after this. Accordingly, the vehicles carrying the polling parties will leave on April 17 and 18. The vehicles will be allowed to return to their original place after April 21 following completion of the election duty. Due to this, the vehicle owners are not accepting bookings for wedding programmes. A vehicle owner in Kemu, Pithoragarh, Mahesh Dhariyal said, "Our vehicles have already been acquired from the depot.

The common folks are facing problems due to this, in addition to being deprived of the income one used to make from weddings. However, the election duty is necessary and one of my vehicles is on poll duty in Champawat district too," he said.



the BJP fielding the sitting MP- Mala Rajya Laxmi Shah- a member of the erstwhile royal family of Tehri while the Congress has fielded former MLA Jot Singh Gungola and Bobby Panwar

Yamunotri, four Assembly constituencies of Tehri district- Ghansali, Pratapnagar, Tehri and Dhanaulti and seven Assembly constituencies of Dehradun district- Chakrata, Vikasnagar,

the constituency for the past three LS elections- 2019, 2014 and 2012 (by election). BJP won the Tehri seat for the first time in 1991 under Manavendra Shah who was also a Member of Parliament

Glue of corruption binds Opposition, claims BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The BJP on Friday attacked INDIA Bloc parties over their alleged corruption and attempts to sow division on regional and religious lines, asserting that the ruling alliance-led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi stands for curbing graft.

Ahead of an INDIA Bloc rally in Tamil Nadu, in which DMK leader and Chief Minister M K Stalin and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi are expected to attend, BJP spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia claimed that the “glue of corruption” binds Opposition parties.

Bhatia said the Gandhis are the “most corrupt” family and raised the 2G spectrum case involving the then telecom minister and DMK leader A Raja, as he targeted both opposition parties.

With the opposition referring to the acquittal of all accused, including Raja, in the 2G case



to refute the corruption charge, Bhatia noted that the Supreme Court had cancelled all the 122 licenses allotted due to malpractices and expressed confidence that the Delhi High Court will consider the CBI's appeal and convict the guilty. He alleged that the DMK stands for “deceit, malpractice and kelpomania”, adding that the Dravidian party is a habitual “robber” of public money. He noted that DMK leader V Senthilbalaji continued to be a minister in the Tamil Nadu government for months after his arrest by the Enforcement Directorate in a corruption

case. Bhatia also referred to DMK leader Udhayanidhi Stalin's and Raja's alleged insult of Sanatan Dharma and the silence maintained by the Congress over it, and accused the opposition of “sowing religious discord and division”. Modi on the other hand had dubbed Tamil Nadu as India's pride and visited its temples as part of special rituals in the run up to the Ram temple's consecration ceremony to foster brotherhood as enshrined in the Constitution, the BJP spokesperson said.

Modi assertion on holding Assembly polls in JK razed NC false narrative, says BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The BJP on Friday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's assertion on holding Assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir “demolished” a false narrative “being created” by the National Conference (NC), People's Democratic Parth(PDP)and other opposition parties.

The BJP's reaction came after the prime minister, while addressing a poll rally in Udhampur earlier in the day, asserted that the time was not far when the Assembly polls would be held in Jammu and Kashmir, which would also get its statehood back.

“I would like to congratulate the people of Jammu and Kashmir because the prime minister has reiterated his resolve to hold early elections in Jammu and Kashmir,” BJP leader Ashish Sood, who is the party's co-in charge for the Union Territory, said. He alleged that the top leaders of the National Conference, People's Democratic Party and other opposition parties were cre-



ating a false perception of the issue by claiming that the BJP-led Centre was afraid of holding Assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir. “They were creating a false perception that things are not normal in Jammu and Kashmir, the security situation is normal and that the government of India is afraid of holding elections.. This was the kind of narrative Abdullahs, Muftis and others were creating which has (now) been demolished,”

Sood charged.

Sood said Prime Minister Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah had earlier reiterated that the Centre will hold “early elections in Jammu and Kashmir as and when the security situation and other factors make it compatible”. “It's Modi's guarantee that elections will be held in Jammu and Kashmir, Muftis, Abdullahs and Gandhis should understand that Modi's guarantee never fails,” the BJP leader said.

MEA advises Indian citizens not to travel to Iran, Israel till further notice



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

India on Friday advised its citizens not to travel till further notice to Iran or Israel in view of prevailing situation. This caution comes amid reports that Iran is likely to launch direct attack on Israel with the next 48 hours.

Issuing note of caution, Ministry of External Affairs(MEA)also urged all Indians currently residing in Iran or Israel to get in touch with Indian embassies there and register themselves. The MEA also said Indians residing in Iran, Israel are requested to observe utmost precautions about their safety and restrict movements to minimum.

The ministry's advisory came on a day when reports said Iran would likely launch a direct attack on Israel within the next 48 hours. The report also said Iran was still weighing the political risks of a direct attack on Israel. The advisory comes after Iran threatened reprisals over an Israeli strike on the Iranian consulate in Syria 11 days ago, sparking fears of an escalation of violence in the Middle East. On Wednesday, Israel's foreign minister had threatened that the country's forces would strike Iran directly if it launched an attack from its

territory against Israel. Meanwhile, over 6,000 Indian workers are expected to arrive in Israel during April and May to help the country's construction sector meet a labour shortage following the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas conflict.

As part of the government-to-government (G2G) agreement, about 60 workers from India have already been sent via an “air shuttle” in the first week of April. A series of arrivals is expected in the coming weeks, a total of 850 by mid-April. In another development, India said it has relocated its staff from its consulate in Myanmarese city of Sittwe to Yangon in view of the precarious security situation in that region of Myanmar. MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said India is closely monitoring the security situation in that country. “We are closely monitoring the security situation in Myanmar, particularly in the Rakhine State. Necessary steps have been taken to ensure the safety of our citizens,” he said at his weekly media briefing. “We have temporarily relocated our staff at CGI (Consulate General of India) Sittwe to Yangon. Our Consulate in Mandalay remains fully functional,” Jaiswal said.

Lalu, Rahul exhibiting thoughts from Mughal era: Modi over Navratri videos

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

With Lok Sabha election campaign peaking up, several rounds of controversies oscillating between the BJP and Opposition parties has caught the attention of people across the country amidst other core issues.

The latest is the controversy over a video of RJD leader former Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav eating fish escalated on Friday with Prime Minister Narendra Modi hitting out at Opposition parties, including RJD leader, saying even Tejashwi's father Lalu Prasad and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi are now into exhibiting thoughts from the Mughal era.

Accusing the Opposition of indulging in the politics of appeasement and going after a particular vote bank, the Prime Minister also claimed that such videos are being posted during periods considered auspicious by Hindus to tease and annoy most of India's population.

Tejashwi, who had clarified that the video was shot a day before Navratri began and was uploaded to “test the IQ of the BJP and Godi media followers,” said the BJP's politics is limited to what people



are eating and wearing because its governments have not done anything for the people.

Addressing a rally at Udhampur in Jammu and Kashmir, Modi referred to a video of Rahul Gandhi and Lalu Yadav cooking mutton in September last year and said, “Congress and other members of the INDIA alliance are not bothered about the feelings of most of the country's population. During Sawan (an aus-

picious month in the Hindu calendar), they are going to the house of a convicted man and cooking mutton. Not only that, they are also putting up videos and teasing the people of the country.”

“The law does not stop anyone from eating anything, and neither does Modi, but their intention is different. When the Mughals attacked, they were not satisfied with defeating the king alone. They did not get satisfaction

until they destroyed temples... they enjoyed doing this. In the same way, by uploading the video in the month of Sawan, they (the opposition) are exhibiting the thoughts of the Mughal era, attempting to tease people and fortify their vote bank,” the PM alleged.

Training his guns on Tejashwi Yadav, without naming him, the PM said uploading a video of consuming non-vegetarian food during Navratra

was also an attempt in the same direction.

“Who are you trying to please by hurting the sentiments of people? I know these people will now shower abuses on me for saying this, but it is my duty in a democracy to tell people what is right when lines are crossed, and I am doing my duty. They do this deliberately to attack the country's beliefs, so that a big part of the country watches their videos and gets uncomfortable. They have gone beyond appeasement and are giving evidence of their Mughal-like thinking,” the PM said.

On his part Tejashwi reacted to the PM's remarks without naming him and said that, instead of talking about the issues that matter, the BJP is focusing on what people are eating and wearing.

“They are not talking about the issues of Bihar, how they will stop migration from the state or what they will do in the next five years if they are voted to power. And what will they say?

They have done nothing in 10 years (at the Centre) and 17 years (in Bihar)... They will keep talking about what people are wearing and eating, and centre their politics around it,” he said.

India lost 2.33 million hectares of tree cover since 2000: Global Watch

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India has lost 2.33 million hectares of tree cover since 2000, equivalent to a six per cent decrease in tree cover during this period, according to the latest data from the Global Forest Watch monitoring project.

The Global Forest Watch, which tracks forest changes in near real-time using satellite data and other sources, said the country lost 4,14,000 hectares of humid primary forest (4.1 per cent) from 2002 to 2023, making up 18 per cent of its total tree cover loss in the same period.

UK appoints Lindy as High Commissioner to India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The United Kingdom has appointed Lindy Cameron as its new high commissioner to India. She will succeed incumbent Alex Ellis.

“Lindy Cameron CB OBE has been appointed British High Commissioner to the Republic

of India in succession to Alex Ellis CMG who will be transferring to another diplomatic service appointment,” a British readout said on Thursday. The readout released by the United Kingdom High Commission in New Delhi said Cameron will take up her appointment this month. Cameron has been serving as

the Chief Executive of the UK's National Cyber Security Centre since 2020. She also had a stint as the director general of the UK's Northern Ireland Office. Her appointment comes as the UK and India are engaged in negotiations for a long-pending free trade agreement.

Widening development financing gap posing challenge to achieving SDGs: UN

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The widening development financing gap, now estimated at USD 4.2 trillion annually, exacerbated by the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic poses a formidable challenge to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in the world's poorest nations, according to a new UN report released here.

The ‘2024 Financing for Sustainable Development Report: Financing for Development at a Crossroads (FSDR 2024)’ report underscored the urgent need for a massive surge of financing and a reform of the international financial architecture to rescue the SDGs.

It emphasized the critical importance of mobilizing financing at scale to close the development financing gap, which has ballooned from USD 2.5 trillion before the pandemic.

Furthermore, the report noted that rising geopolitical tensions, climate disasters, and a global cost-of-living crisis have compounded the challenges, impeding progress on crucial development targets such as healthcare and education. UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed stressed the urgency of the situation, emphasizing that without adequate financing, the 2030 targets cannot be met. With only six years remaining to achieve the SDGs, there is a risk of hard-won development gains being reversed, especially in the poorest countries, where almost 600 million people are



projected to continue living in extreme poverty by 2030.

“This report is yet another proof of how far we still need to go and how fast we need to act to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” said UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed. “We are truly at a crossroads and time is running out. Leaders must go beyond mere rhetoric and deliver on their promises. Without adequate financing, the 2030 targets cannot be met.”

“We're experiencing a sustainable development crisis, to which inequalities, inflation, debt, conflicts and climate disasters have all contributed,” added UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs Li Junhua. “Resources are needed to address this, and the money is there. Billions of dollars are lost annually from tax avoidance and evasion, and fossil fuel subsidies are in the trillions. Globally, there is no shortage of money; rather, a shortage of will and commitment.”

According to the report, debt

burdens and rising borrowing costs are large contributors to the crisis. Estimates are that in the least developed countries debt service will be USD 40 billion annually between 2023 and 2025, up more than 50 per cent from USD 26 billion in 2022. Stronger and more frequent climate related disasters account for more than half of the debt upsurge in vulnerable countries.

The poorest countries now spend 12 per cent of their revenues on interest payments — four times more than they spent a decade ago. Roughly 40 per cent of the global population live in countries where governments spend more on interest payments than on education or health.

While investment in SDG sectors had grown steadily in the early 2000s, major sources of development funding are now slowing down. Corporate income tax rates are falling, with global average tax rates down from 28.2 per cent in 2000 to 21.1 per cent in 2023, due to globalization and tax competition.

SC extends stay on former IPS officer sentence on Dhoni contempt plea

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has extended the interim stay on the 15-day simple imprisonment handed to retired IPS officer G Sampath Kumar by the Madras High Court in a contempt of court case filed by former cricketer Mahendra Singh Dhoni.

A bench of Justices A S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan has listed the matter for hearing on May 3.

“Interim order shall continue till further orders,” the bench said on Thursday.

The high court had, on December 15 last year, found Kumar guilty of committing criminal contempt and sentenced him to simple imprisonment for 15 days. In his contempt petition, Dhoni had sought punishment for Kumar for his remarks against the judiciary in a written statement filed in response to a Rs 100-crore defamation suit.

Dhoni had moved the court in 2014 against the former police officer for naming him in the Indian Premier League (IPL) betting scam. In its order, the high court had said Kumar had consciously made an attempt to scandalise and lower the authority of this court and the Supreme Court. It was established that an affidavit or pleading presented by a party before a court was an act of publication.

Kumar, by his specific words, had launched an indecent attack on the judiciary, with an intention to scandalise and undermine the dignity



and majesty of this court as well as the apex court, the high court had said.

It had said when a general statement was made against the court for granting an interim order, describing the order as an abuse of the process of law, it was not a fair comment.

Similarly, accusing the Supreme Court that it failed to focus on the “rule of law” cannot be accepted as a fair expression of grievance of a party to the dispute, the bench had added.

The high court had said Kumar was a responsible police officer who had the occasion to investigate a crime.

The freedom of speech and expression cannot be extended to undermine the statutory limits contained in the Contempt of Courts Act, the court had said, adding that since maintaining the dignity of courts is one of the cardinal principles of the rule of law, any publication or public speech that results in undermining it cannot be allowed, as held by the apex

CIC displeased over EC failure to furnish reply to RTI plea

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Central Information Commission (CIC) has expressed “severe displeasure” over the Election Commission (EC) not furnishing a reply to an RTI plea that had asked the poll panel about the action taken on a “representation” given to it by eminent citizens, raising questions on the credibility of EVMs and VVPAT machines during elections.

Former Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer M G Devasahayam, who was one of the signatories to the representation on the credibility of electronic voting machines (EVMs), voter-verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT) and the vote-counting process, had filed an application with the poll panel under the Right to Information (RTI) Act, seeking details of the action taken on it. The representation was sent to the EC on May 2, 2022.

Through the RTI application filed on November 22, 2022, Devasahayam wanted to know about the persons and public authorities to whom the representation was forwarded, details of any meetings held on the issue and all relevant file notings.

The EC did not give any response to him within the mandatory 30-day period and Devasahayam's first appeal to senior officials was also not heard.

He approached the CIC in the second appeal, citing the lack of response from the poll panel. When quizzed by Chief Information Commissioner Heeralal Samariya, the central public information officer of the EC failed to give a satisfactory reply on why no response was furnished to Devasahayam.

“Commission, after perusal of case records and submissions made during hearing, expresses severe displeasure over the conduct of the then PIO in not having provided any reply to the RTI application within the time-frame stipulated under the RTI Act. Therefore, commission directs the then PIO through the present PIO to furnish a written explanation for the gross violation of the provisions of the RTI,” Samariya said.

He said if others are also responsible for the omission, then the CPIO shall serve a copy of the order on them and ensure that the written submissions of such people are sent to the CIC.

Samariya also directed the EC to provide a point-wise response to the RTI application within 30 days.

Noted technical professionals and academicians, including professors from Indian institutes of technology (IITs) and Indian institutes of management (IIMs), and former civil servants, including retired IAS, IPS and IFS officers, had written to the EC posing serious questions on the credibility of EVMs and VVPAT machines.

Softening stance

China responds positively to Modi’s peace overtures, says it is for stability in relations

In the realm of international relations, the delicate nurturing of ties between nations often involves a mixture of diplomatic rhetoric, strategic manoeuvrings and the occasional statement to assuage tensions. Recently, two of the world’s most populous nations, India and China, indulged in this exercise, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s comments on the border situation drawing a positive response from China. In an interview with Newsweek magazine, Modi underscored the importance of urgently addressing the ongoing border situation; he expressed optimism that through constructive engagement, peace and tranquillity could be restored. In response, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning emphasised the importance of “sound and stable” ties, highlighting mutual interests in regional peace and development. This response underscores China’s commitment to maintaining constructive relations with India despite the border challenge. Mao’s statement also sought to contextualise the border issue within the broader



framework of bilateral relations. Acknowledging the significance of the boundary question, she stressed that it should not overshadow the entirety of India-China relations. This perspective reflects China’s nuanced approach to managing bilateral issues, advocating for dialogue, cooperation and strategic thinking to navigate differences.

The backdrop against which these statements unfold is the protracted border standoff that began in May 2020, following a violent clash near Pangong Tso. A research paper shared at the DGPs’ Conference revealed that India’s access to 26 out of 65 Patrolling Points (PPs) has been compromised. In Ladakh, an estimated 1,000 sq km of territory has reportedly fallen under Chinese control. However, these figures have not been officially acknowledged. Subsequently, in June 2020, India and China withdrew their troops from Patrolling Point 14 in Galwan Valley. This was followed by disengagement from both the north and south banks of Pangong Tso in February 2021 and from Patrolling Point 17A near Gogra Post in August the same year. Despite numerous rounds of talks at the Corps Commander level, significant areas of contention remain unresolved. India’s insistence on disengagement from specific regions, such as Depsang and Demchok, underscores the challenges involved in reaching a comprehensive resolution. The thawing of relations between India and China is not only crucial for both but also carries implications for the broader region and the world at large. As economic powerhouses and nuclear-armed States, their ability to manage their differences and cultivate stable ties is essential for regional peace and stability. Looking ahead, the path to normalised relations between India and China will likely be characterised by continued dialogue, confidence-building measures and pragmatic compromises. While the road may be fraught with obstacles, their shared interests provide a foundation upon which to build a more stable and constructive relationship.



Security personnel during a rehearsal for the Himachal Day Parade, in Shimla

PTI

Honouring the martyrs of Jallianwala Bagh

As the nation commemorates the 105th anniversary of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, it reaffirms its commitment to justice, equality and nonviolence

Somen Sengupta, in his piece “Jallianwala Bagh revisited” published in his paper’s April 10, 2022 edition on its 103rd anniversary, reflected, “This incident alone serves as a damning testament to the collective atrocity of firing upon an unarmed gathering.” The actual number of casualties likely far exceeded the reported count. Somen further notes, “Dyer, facing the Hunter Commission in Lahore, ultimately lost his position with a measure of reprimand.” April 13, 2024, marks the 105th anniversary of this tragic episode. It was amidst the auspicious Baisakhi celebrations on April 13, 1919, that Punjab was engulfed in tragedy, as around 20,000 rural attendees congregated at Jallianwala Bagh, oblivious to the impending horror. Durgadas Vaidya, editor of Waqt newspaper, addressed the peaceful protesters who were voicing opposition to the oppressive Rowlatt Act, passed on March 21, 1919. The non-violent Satyagraha led by Mahatma Gandhi against the Act on April 6, 1919, culminated in his arrest on April 9 near Delhi, along



with Saifuddin Kitchlew and Dr. Satyapal. The unjust repercussions sparked widespread anger, leading to violent clashes, including the tragic killing of nearly 30 Indians on April 10 by police gunfire as they sought to cross Hall Gate Bridge into the civil lines. However, at Jallianwala Bagh, the scene turned chaotic as Brigadier-General Reginald (‘Rex’) Dyer arrived unannounced. Dyer, with meticulous planning, ordered troops to open fire on the unarmed crowd, plunging the gathering into chaos and leaving an indelible mark on history and the land. The bullet-riddled walls and the well, where desperate individuals sought refuge, continue to evoke shudders. The Jallianwala Bagh massacre claimed the lives of 379 individuals, with numerous others sustaining injuries.

The relentless firing of 1,650 rounds by British troops under Dyer’s command resulted in a bloodbath. Moreover, Dyer’s imposition of a curfew post-massacre exacerbated the tragedy, denying grieving families access to their deceased loved ones. The scale of suppression delayed the event’s revelation in the media, only brought to light by courageous journalists like B G Horniman of Bombay Chronicle and later Amrita Bazar Patrika, prompting global leaders like Lenin to express solidarity with the suffering Indian populace. Professor K L Tuteja, a historian at Kurukshetra University, describes the massacre as a pivotal moment that drew sharp criticism both in England and India. Winston Churchill labeled it a ‘monstrous event, an event which stands in singular and sinister isolation,’ while former Prime Minister Herbert Asquith deemed it ‘One of the worst outrages in the whole of history.’ These reactions underscored the profound shock and dismay even among those who believed in the justness of British rule in

India. Within India, the massacre left a deep scar, with many viewing it as an unparalleled atrocity. Mahatma Gandhi’s poignant response encapsulated the sentiment: “We do not seek to punish Dyer. We harbor no thirst for vengeance. We seek to transform the system that bred Dyer.” The massacre significantly influenced the trajectory of the anti-imperialist struggle, bolstering forces that challenged British rule in India. Prominent figures like Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Jawaharlal Nehru and Annie Besant vehemently condemned the massacre, advocating for peaceful resistance against British colonial oppression. Gandhi relinquished the title of ‘Kaiser-i-Hind,’ bestowed by the British, while Tagore renounced his knighthood in protest. Nehru denounced it as a ‘monstrous crime,’ emphasising the nation’s duty to honour those who sacrificed their lives for political freedom.

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



RAJDEEP PATHAK

Amanullah | Hyderabad

YOGI’S DEVELOPMENT PITCH
Madam — Apropos the news article, “Vote for Modi for continued peace, progress: Yogi at JK”, published on April 11, this is my response. In a passionate appeal, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath advocated for the re-election of a Narendra Modi-led Government, highlighting peace and development as its cornerstones. Speaking at a rally in Kathua, he lauded the Government’s efforts in combating terrorism and fostering development nationwide.

Dr Jitendra Singh emphasised regional progress, invoking sentiments among voters. His critique of the Congress Party underscored historical grievances, while

A harbinger of justice and equality

As the principal architect of the Indian Constitution, Dr BR Ambedkar laid down the bedrock of fundamental rights and protections for all citizens

Bharat Ratna Dr BR Ambedkar, born on April 14, 1891, will ever be revered for his contributions towards building a just and inclusive India. He was a guardian angel of social justice, a harbinger of inclusivity, justice and equality. As an eminent jurist, economist and social reformer, he dedicated his life to eradicating caste-based discrimination and uplifting the marginalised communities in our country. As the architect of the Indian Constitution, he ensured fundamental rights and safeguards for all citizens.

As his legacy continues to inspire millions globally even today, standing as a beacon of hope for deprived communities striving for dignity and equality, there is a lot we can learn and inspire ourselves from his vision of social justice, which was profoundly rooted in the principles of equality, liberty and fraternity. He recognised the deep-rooted inequalities entrenched within Indian society, particularly the caste system, which relegated millions to a life of discrimination and oppression. He fought for the abolition of untouchability, which is against the teachings of the Vedas. the Atrocious caste system had jolted him from within. To give shock treatment to Hindu society, he embraced Buddhism, which is so deeply rooted in Indian ethos and value system. He was not inimical to Hindutva. He had resentment against Hinduism but he was not opposed to Hinduism. He did not embrace any other alien religion though Islamic and Christian scholars tried their best to influence him. Coming from a very poor family, Dr Ambedkar suffered multiple social and economic hardships but he did not give up. He fought against the odds bravely. He was the 14th child of his parents. His father gave him good Zanskar and used to share stories and thoughts of great saints like Sant Tukaram, Sant Gyaneshwar, Sant Shiromani Ravidas, teachings of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. He did his matriculation in 1908 from Elphinstone High School. He studied Economics and Political Science at Elphinstone College. In 1912,



he got a degree from Bombay University. With a scholarship from Maharaja of Baroda, he went to Columbia University, New York City from where he got a Master’s degree in June 1915 after completing his thesis on ‘Ancient Indian Commerce.’ In 1916, he went to the London School of Economics. In 1920, received the D Sc by London University! He also went to the University of Bonn, Germany. In June 1927, he was awarded a Doctorate by the University of Columbia. He was a rare Indian politician of his time who studied at Columbia University, LSE and University of Bonn. Dr Ambedkar inspires us to imbibe the principle of ‘Study and Struggle’ to create an incredible niche for himself as an intellectual as well. His vision of social justice emphasised the importance of education and political representation for the oppressed castes, viewing them as essential tools for empowerment and emancipation. He laid the foundation for a more inclusive and just society. He believed in the idea and ideals of dialogue. He was against armed struggle to restore the glory of every human being. He believed in the principle of co-existence, following the teachings of truth, non-violence and

HIS VISION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE EMPHASISED THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION AND POLITICAL REPRESENTATION FOR THE OPPRESSED CASTES, VIEWING THEM AS ESSENTIAL TOOLS FOR EMPOWERMENT AND EMANCIPATION

respect for the people of all castes and religions. Dr Ambedkar viewed education not merely as a means of acquiring academic qualifications but as a catalyst for the liberation of the oppressed and marginalised communities. He emphasised the importance of universal access to education, particularly for those historically denied opportunities due to caste discrimination and social inequality. He was also an ardent champion of the cultivation of values such as empathy, justice and equality. According to him, the cultivation of the mind should be the ultimate aim of human existence. He was also a great champion of women’s empowerment. He famously said: “I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved.” Dr Ambedkar held strong convictions about national unity and integrity, recognising them as fundamental pillars for the progress and stability of any nation. Dr Ambedkar advocated for a society where every individual had equal rights and opportunities, emphasising the need for social harmony and mutual respect. He also played a significant role in shaping India’s

labour laws. His tireless efforts as India’s first Law Minister paved the way for landmark legislation like the Factories Act, the Minimum Wages Act and the Industrial Disputes Act, which continue to serve as cornerstones of labour rights and industrial progress in the country. He stressed the significance of upholding the principles of democracy, secularism and constitutionalism to ensure the protection of the rights of weaker sections of society and the preservation of national unity. His vision for India was one of inclusivity and pluralism, where diversity was celebrated as a source of strength rather than division. He saw untouchability as not just a moral wrong but also a significant impediment to the social progress and unity of India. He advocated for its complete abolition, stressing the need for legislative measures and social reform. As we remember Dr BR Ambedkar on his birth anniversary today, let us express our gratitude to him and commit ourselves to a democratic, secular and inclusive nation.

(The author is the Governor of Haryana. The views expressed are strictly his personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

KEJRIWAL GAINS WEIGHT IN JAIL

Madam — Apropos the news article, “Kejriwal weight has increased by one kg in jail, say jail authorities”, published on April 11, this is my response. The conflicting reports on Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal’s health and treatment during his judicial custody have ignited a fierce debate. Tihar jail authorities claim a weight gain of 1 kg, contradicting earlier assertions by AAP leaders of a significant weight loss. While Tihar’s report indicates stability in Kejriwal’s weight and fluctuating blood sugar levels, AAP alleges deteriorating health conditions and infringement of basic rights, drawing parallels to historical atrocities. The rhetoric escalates as AAP accuses the Modi Government of employing draconian measures akin to Hitler’s regime, emphasising PM Modi’s suppression of Kejriwal’s rights. Allegations of emotional manipulation and restrictive measures during legal meetings further intensify the political turmoil surrounding Kejriwal’s incarceration. This saga not only reflects the contentious relationship between AAP and the central Government but also raises concerns about the treatment of political detainees and the politicisation of health issues in judicial proceedings.

Amanullah | Hyderabad

YOGI’S DEVELOPMENT PITCH
Madam — Apropos the news article, “Vote for Modi for continued peace, progress: Yogi at JK”, published on April 11, this is my response. In a passionate appeal, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath advocated for the re-election of a Narendra Modi-led Government, highlighting peace and development as its cornerstones. Speaking at a rally in Kathua, he lauded the Government’s efforts in combating terrorism and fostering development nationwide.

Dr Jitendra Singh emphasised regional progress, invoking sentiments among voters. His critique of the Congress Party underscored historical grievances, while

Byju’s crisis

gining 95% drop in valuation. Corporate governance lapses, including financial opacity and delayed audits, have further eroded confidence. The Extraordinary General Meeting’s decision to reconstitute the board signals a necessary step towards accountability. However, legal challenges and interim orders cloud the path forward. Amidst this uncertainty, one solution emerges: allowing investors a larger role in reshaping Byju’s trajectory, akin to successful interventions in other startups. Beyond financial recovery, the focus must remain on Byju’s original mission: democratising education for Indian students. Restoring faith in Byju’s not only revitalises the startup landscape but also sustains aspirations nationwide. Ultimately, the road to redemption demands a return to Byju’s roots as an edtech innovator, guided by transparent governance and investor stewardship.

Swapna Singh | Ranchi

praising the recent construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya as a symbol of faith’s resurgence. The event signals the BJP’s concerted push in the Udhampur constituency, with Prime Minister Modi set to address a rally shortly. However, the opposition, notably Choudhary Lal Singh’s camp, questions the fairness of campaign resources allocation, alleging undue favouritism. With a diverse electorate and a fierce triangular contest, the upcoming polls on April 19 in Udhampur-Doda Lok Sabha seat promise to be closely contested, with each candidate vying for the crucial support of first-time voters.

Pritam Dubey | Gwalior

CHARITY IS A UNIVERSAL VIRTUE

Madam — Apropos the news article, “Essence of Charity: Insights from the Gita”, published on April 11, this is my response. The essence of charity, extending beyond monetary assistance, resonates through various religious and philosophical teachings. The Bhagavad-Geeta delineates charity’s nuances, emphasising its virtue in goodness, devoid of expectation or com-

pulsion. It stresses discernment in selecting worthy recipients, cautioning against enabling dependency. Lord Krishna’s discourse distinguishes charity in passion, highlighting its pitfalls of transactionalism and begrudging giving. In contrast, true charity transcends materiality, manifesting through diverse forms — money, goods, labour, words and emotions — each bearing significance in uplifting others. Across faiths, the ethos of charity endures. Jesus’ exhortation to aid the needy echoes alongside Islam’s emphasis on generosity and compassion. Such teachings underscore that charity isn’t merely an act but a reflection of one’s inner disposition towards humanity. In essence, charity embodies a universal virtue, fostering empathy, kindness and communal upliftment. Beyond religious dogma, it stands as a testament to human solidarity and the intrinsic value of extending a helping hand to those in need.

Sumit Sharma | Bhopal

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

THE SPIRITUAL POWER OF NAVRATRAS

Navratras encapsulate a profound spiritual journey of detoxification and realignment



ASHWINI GURUJII

Navratras come twice a year and mark the transition in seasons, winter-summer and summer-winter. According to Ayurveda, during this time, one should consume nourishing foods in minimal quantities to rid the body of the toxins collected during the rains. The nine nights and ten days of Navratri hold within them the energy of ten forms of shakti— shailaputri, brahmachari, Chandrakanta, kushmanda, skandmata, Katyayani, kaalratri, mahagauri, siddhidatri and paratha thus each Navratri has a specific purpose. In the Navratri weather changes, ie, various energies of this creation move from imbalance towards new normalcy, including our body. In these nine days, the prana shakti inside our body undergoes a process of re-alignment, ie from imbalance to new balance for the new season. For this re-aligning the body has to be kept light. Therefore our ancients prescribed fasting or upvaas in these nine days. Upavaas has a much greater connotation than what it is generally misunderstood as — mere holding back from eating certain foods. At Dhyana Ashram, sadhaks observe Upavaas in their authentic sense, that is, giving up pleasure to observe austerities during sadhana. This is done by celebrating, eating food for energy, not sensual pleasure, following a niyam of the sadhana your Guru has given you — a mantra, dhyana or a tantric practice where senses are kept under strict control and the focus is your ishta deva and all your thoughts and actions during those days are devoted to the ishta-deva. Charity and service are an intrinsic part of such sadhnas.



Apart from fasting, there are certain mantras also which are chanted on these days for a complete body detox. For the beginner, these nine days may be divided into 3 parts of 3 days each for the three parts of the body — the region below the navel, between the navel and shoulders and the upper head region, corresponding to the energies of the goddess Saraswati, goddess Lakshmi and goddess Durga respectively. The 9 devis originate from these 3 devis which in turn have their origin in Adi Shakti. These 3 parts are further divided into 3 parts each, thus the body is divided into 9 parts in all. In the first 3 days, the sadhak stops having spicy food and performs a havan at the morning and evening sandhya with the chants invoking ma durga. The offering of kala til along with ghrith is made and desi cows up and palash samadhi is used. In the next three days, sadhak stops intake of anna and only light foods are ingested to keep the body light. Havan for Ma Lakshmi is done at the two sandhya by making an offering of a sweet along with ghrith. In the last three days, the sadhak only consumes water and juice (not even milk as it is considered an animal product) and havan for Ma Saraswati is performed at the two sandhyas by making offerings of ghrith and guggal. On the 10th day, a complete fast is kept and once more Ma Durga or Ma Kali is invoked as on this day Ravan had invoked Ma Kali and Ram had invoked Ma Durga. This process brings about the required re-alignment. After this, the sadhak performs his sadhana and chants a specific mantra as prescribed by his/her Guru. With yog sadhana, all the energies that are invoked come to the sadhak. Navratras are days to prepare your body to accept the new energies of the coming season. For 9 days you re-align your body and after that on the 10th day accept new energies. Most people lighten their bodies by fasting for 9 days, only to make it heavy on the 10th day by crowding to restaurants and liquor shops. It is something like you clean your room and after that, you bring all the garbage back to the room. Fasting or any such technique will bear fruits only if carried out with a sense of detachment, for evolution. Therefore it is of utmost importance to observe fasts in tandem with yogic practices such as the Sanatan Kriya to reap maximum benefits. *(The writer is a spiritual teacher; views are personal)*

Battle lines drawn in western UP

As the battle intensifies, the BJP faces the formidable challenge of safeguarding its Hindu vote bank amidst the evolving electoral dynamics



SIDHARTH MISHRA

A very unique, a kind of first time, battle is being fought in politically significant 16 Lok Sabha seats of western Uttar Pradesh, which votes in the first phase on April 19 or the second phase on April 26. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's whirlwind tour of the region is largely to counter the not so visible division in the Hindu votes. While the attack has been more direct on the Congress (its manifesto to be more specific) but an eye has also been kept on the moves of the BSP. This part of the state has two dominant communities — the Jats and the Muslims. The two together formed the part of former Prime Minister Chowdhary Charan Singh's electoral calculus. The Dalits, specially the Jatavs, numerically have the third largest presence. Charan Singh last contested a Lok Sabha polls in 1984 and managed to hold ground despite the Rajiv Gandhi juggernaut passing through the country. The Jat leader did not live very long after the polls and his traditional seat came to his son Chowdhary Ajit Singh in 1989. Here started the story of the shrinking of the fortunes of the Charan Singh Kisan politics. Ajit Singh in 1989 committed the grievous error of challenging his father's close lieutenant, Mulayam Singh Yadav's claim to the Chief Minister's chair of Uttar Pradesh. Mulayam Singh enjoyed backing of party veterans like Chowdhary Devi Lal and then Young Turks like Lalu Prasad Yadav and Nitish Kumar. Ajit lost and herein started the erosion in political stature of Charan Singh's family. Mulayam Singh in the 1990s, pushed a combination of the Muslims and non-Jat landholding agricultural communities like the Yadavs, Tyagis and to an extent the Gujjars under the umbrella of Samajwadi Party. This decade also saw rise of Dalit icon Kanshi Ram and Mayawati and their Bahujan Samaj Party. Mulayam Singh initially sought an alliance with them to add large numbers of Jatavs to counter the Jat dominance, it, however, ended in a bitter dispute as Mayawati decided to piggy ride on the BJP support to become chief minister. So by the turn of the millennium west UP had three major political forces Samajwadi Party, BSP and the BJP, correspondingly shrinking the influence of Chowdhary Ajit Singh's Rashtriya Lok Dal and of course the Congress. Entering into the second decade of the 21st century BJP had come to create its own set of Jat leaders. With the rise in the Ram Mandir sentiments and arrival of Narendra Modi on the scene, consolidating the non-Jat, other backward classes (OBC) votes in addition to the upper castes created a Hindu vote bank which was best exemplified in the loss of Chowdhary Ajit Singh



THE REGION SAW A HUGE FARMER UNREST, WHICH WAS EXPECTED TO ADVERSELY AFFECT THE FORTUNES OF THE BJP IN THE 2022 ASSEMBLY POLLS BUT THAT DID NOT HAPPEN

and his son Jayant Chowdhary both in the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections. Since 2019 a lot of developments have taken place. The region saw a huge farmer unrest which was expected to adversely affect the fortunes of the BJP in the 2022 assembly polls but that did not happen. The coming together of Jayant Chowdhary and Mulayam Singh Yadav's son Akhilesh Yadav was not of much consequence as chief minister Yogi Adityanath held on the challenge based largely on an affirmative administration and also much improved law and order situation. This time around another interesting battle is building up. Jayant Chowdhary moving to BJP side initially looked to have a solved a lot of problem for the opposition alliance, which

quickly resolved their seats arrangement issues. However since then the third factor — BSP has entered the fray. The direct fight between the ruling alliance and the opposition block has now a third element to it. The BSP's strategy in the distribution of tickets is to build its core vote bank of Jatavs by using discontentment among specific communities to its advantage and hoping that Muslims would support its candidates wherever they are in position of strength vis-a-vis the opposition alliance. How does that affect the BJP? Playing on the bruised pride of the Thakur and Tyagi communities, on being ignored by the BJP, the BSP has fielded Rajput candidates in Ghaziabad and Gautam Buddh Nagar and a Tyagi from Meerut. In

Muzaffarnagar, it has played the most backward caste (MBC) card by positioning a Prajapti candidate against BJP's sitting MP Sanjeev Balyan. MBCs have remained with the BJP since the 1990s. On such seats where there is huge presence of minority voters and where the opposition SP-Congress alliance is seen to be strong, BSP has another strategy. It has fielded Muslim candidates from seats that have Muslim population to the tune of 40 to 45 percent. The presence of these candidates have made the contests very tight. Given the scenario, the challenge for Modi-led BJP is to not let its Hindu vote bank disintegrate. *(The writer is a political analyst and president, Centre for Reforms, Development & Justice; views are personal)*

Swaminarayan temple: The UAE's monument of harmony

This temple stands tall as a symbol of cultural integration, mutual respect and the evolving relationship between India and the UAE

The legacy of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, born in Ayodhya in the 18th century, continues to reverberate through the annals of history, shaping the spiritual and social fabric of India and beyond. His profound understanding of Hindu scriptures, coupled with a tireless seven-year pilgrimage across the length and breadth of the sub-continent, not only kindled spiritual awakening but also laid the foundation for significant social reforms. The subsequent lineage of Gurus carried forth this sacred mission, disseminating spiritual enlightenment and fostering societal progress among their devotees. It was under the sagacious guidance of Swami Shastriji Maharaj that the Bochasanwasi Shri



HARIVANSH

Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) was established in 1907, dedicated to nurturing individual growth through Hindu values of faith, service and global harmony. From its humble beginnings in the western part of Gujarat, the BAPS Sanstha has blossomed into a global phenomenon, transcending geographical boundaries and cultural divides. Its emblematic

Swaminarayan Temples, with their resplendent architecture and intricate designs, stand as timeless monuments of spiritual grandeur in various corners of the world. However, perhaps one of the most astonishing feats of this spiritual journey is the emergence of a magnificent temple amidst the unforgiving deserts of Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (UAE). Today, this temple stands as a beacon of hope and harmony, welcoming over 60,000 visitors from diverse nationalities on peak days. The inception of the Swaminarayan Temple in the UAE can be traced back to April 5, 1997, when Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj prophesied the construction of a monumental Mandir in Abu Dhabi while seated atop a



dune in Sharjah. Despite initial skepticism and the formidable challenges posed by the region's social and political landscape, this prophecy manifested into reality 27 years later, with the unveiling of the largest temple in the Middle East in the Abu Mureikha area of Abu Dhabi. The journey from prophecy to fruition was fraught with obstacles, requiring unwavering

dedication and steadfast resolve from the BAPS Sanstha, as well as the timely intervention of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In 2015, a historic meeting between Prime Minister Modi and UAE President HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan marked a pivotal moment in the temple's trajectory. Their mutual commitment to realising Pramukh

Swami Maharaj's vision paved the way for the allocation of land for the temple in Abu Dhabi by the UAE Government. Central to the temple's narrative is the unwavering vision of HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, who emphasized the importance of preserving traditional architectural aesthetics. His endorsement of a traditional stone temple design in 2018 marked a significant milestone in the project's development. The temple's inauguration by Prime Minister Modi later that year, based on the approved design, served as a poignant affirmation of the enduring friendship between India and the UAE. The construction of the temple stands as a testament to the UAE's remarkable transfor-

mation from a desert country to a global powerhouse, driven by visionary leadership and unwavering determination. It symbolises the spirit of unity and cooperation that characterizes the nation's journey towards progress and prosperity. The temple's design, with its seven spires representing the seven emirates of the UAE, embodies the essence of harmony and inclusivity, reflected in the Wall of Harmony adorned with symbols from diverse cultures and nations. With meticulous attention to detail, the temple was constructed using a blend of ancient architectural principles and modern innovations. Despite the challenges posed by the scorching desert climate, innovative solutions such as nano tiles for flooring

ensured both functionality and aesthetics. The procurement of materials, including eighteen lakh bricks and seven lakh manhours of labor, underscored the monumental effort invested in realising this architectural marvel. Surrounded by artificial representations of the Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati rivers, the temple evokes a sense of divinity and tranquility, serving as a sanctuary of peace amidst the bustling cityscape of Abu Dhabi. Its serene ambiance and awe-inspiring architecture stand as a testament to the transformative power of faith and the enduring bond between India and the UAE. *(The writer is Deputy Chairman, Rajya Sabha; views are personal)*

‘US defence commitments to Japan, Philippines ironclad’

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The United States’ commitments to the defence of Japan and the Philippines remain “ironclad,” President Joe Biden has said as he launched a new trilateral partnership in the strategic Indo-Pacific with the leaders of the two countries amid their separate territorial disputes with China. Biden’s comments came as he hosted the first-ever trilateral summit between the three countries, welcoming Filipino President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to the White House a day after the official visit of Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida. Japan and the Philippines have separate territorial disputes with China. In Tokyo’s case, the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea and in Manila’s case areas of the South China Sea are disputed with Beijing. Biden also asserted that any attack on Philippine aircraft, vessels or its armed forces in the

South China Sea would invoke “our mutual defence treaty”. The visit to Washington by Marcos comes days after Manila accused a Chinese vessel of “highly dangerous manoeuvres” near the Second Thomas Shoal, a disputed maritime region near the Spratly Islands. The US-Japan-Philippines trilateral comes after the creation of groupings in the Indo-Pacific, starting with the Quad, comprising India, the US, Australia and Japan, and the AUKUS consisting of Australia, the US and the UK, amid increasing concerns over China’s military muscle-flexing in the region. The US president said “a great deal of history in our world will be written in the Indo-Pacific over the coming years”. “Today we commit to writing that story in the future together to build an Indo-Pacific that is free, open, prosperous and secure for all,” Biden said as he described the US, Japan and the Philippines

as “three allies, three steadfast partners and three proud democracies”. Biden said among the key areas where the countries are deepening ties are “first, technology and clean energy for securing our semiconductor supply chain”. “From securing our semiconductor supply chain to expanding trusted telecommunications in the Philippines to building a clean energy workforce, to expanding our cooperation across the entire board,” the US president said. “Second, we are deepening our maritime and security ties. I want to be clear, the United States’ defence commitments to Japan and the Philippines are ironclad. They’re ironclad. As I’ve said before, any attack on Philippine aircraft, vessels or armed forces in the South China Sea would invoke our mutual defence treaty,” he said. Biden also announced launching an economic corridor in the Philippines as part of the G-7’s partnership for global infra-

structure and investment. “This is the first corridor in the Indo-Pacific. It means more jobs for people across the entire region. It means more investment and sectors critical to our future clean energy, ports, railroads, agriculture, and much more,” he said. Japanese Prime Minister Kishida said amid the compound crisis faced by the global community, multi-layered cooperation between allies and like-minded countries is essential if they are to maintain and bolster a free and open international order based on the rule of law. “Today’s meeting will make history as an occasion that significantly pushed forward such an initiative. Japan, the US, and the Philippines are maritime nations connected by the Pacific Ocean and our natural partners. We share fundamental values and principles, and have supported regional economic development,” he said.

Mali’s junta bans media from reporting on political activities

AP ■ BAMAKO

In a deepening crackdown, Mali’s ruling junta on Thursday banned the media from reporting on activities of political parties and associations, a day after suspending all political activities in the country until further notice. The order, issued by Mali’s high authority for communication, was distributed on social media. The notice said it applied to all forms of the media, including television, radio, online and print newspapers. Mali has experienced two coups since 2020, leading a wave of political instability that has swept across West and Central Africa in recent years. Along with its political troubles, the country is also in the grip of a worsening insurgency by militants linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group. The scope of the ban — or how

it would be applied in practice — was not immediately clear. It was also not known if journalists would still be allowed to report on issues such as the economy, which are closely tied to politics and who would monitor their work. The umbrella organisation that represents journalists in Mali responded with an unusually stern rebuttal. The group, known as Maison de le Press, or Press House, said it rejects the order and called on journalists to continue to report on politics in Mali. It also urged them to “stand tall, remain unified and to mobilize to defend the right of citizens to have access to information.” Mali’s national commission for human rights also expressed regret and profound concern over the decision in a statement published late Thursday. It warned the junta the decision could prove harmful. “Instead of calming the social

climate, these restrictions on fundamental rights and freedoms could potentially stir up trouble and tension, which the country does not need,” it said. The clampdown on the media followed a similar action on Wednesday, when the junta ordered the suspension of all activities by political parties until further notice, citing a need to preserve public order. The news was broadcast on state television as the population was celebrating Eid al-Fitr, the holiday marking the end of the holy month of Ramadan during which observant Muslims fast from dawn till dusk. Analysts said the move was likely a backlash against political figures, civil society and students who have expressed frustration with the junta’s failure to return the country to democratic rule as promised. “Recent weeks saw mounting pressure by political parties and figures,” Rida Lyammouri of the Policy

Center for the New South, a Morocco-based think tank, told The Associated Press. “For the first time, the public and politicians have publicly criticized junta leaders and accused them of a lack of seriousness.” Col. Assimi Goita, who took charge after a second coup in 2021, promised to return the country to democracy in early 2024. But in September, the junta cancelled elections scheduled for February 2024 indefinitely, citing the need for further technical preparations. The junta has vowed to end the insurgency that emerged in 2012 after deposing the elected government. It cut military ties with France amid growing frustration with the lack of progress after a decade of assistance, and turned to Russian contractors, mercenaries from the Wagner group, for security support instead. But analysts say the violence has only grown worse.

US, Japan and S Korea hold drills in disputed sea

Aboard The USS Theodore Roosevelt(AP): A US carrier strike group led by the USS Theodore Roosevelt has held a three-day joint exercise with its allies Japan and South Korea as US President Joe Biden met for talks with leaders from Japan and the Philippines at the White House.

The duelling military and diplomatic maneuvers are meant to strengthen the partners’ solidarity in the face of China’s aggressive military actions in the region. A number of US and South Korean guided missile destroyers and a Japanese warship joined the April 10-12 drill in the disputed East China Sea, where worries about China territorial claims are rising. The Associated Press was one of several news organizations allowed a front-row look at the drills.

Rear Adm. Christopher Alexander, commander of Carrier Strike Group Nine, said the three nations conducted undersea warfare exercises, maritime interdiction operations, search and rescue drills and work focused on communication and data sharing. He told journalists Thursday on the Roosevelt that these drills would help improve communication among the United States and its allies and “better prepare us for a crisis in the region.” F/A-18E Super Hornet combat jets took off from the carrier’s flight deck, which also had anti-submarine MH-60R Seahawk helicopters. Journalists were flown more than an hour from Kadena Air Base, the hub of US Pacific air power. Kadena is on Japan’s southern island of Okinawa, which is home to about half of the 50,000 American troops stationed in Japan. “It is a busy time; there is a lot going on in the world,” Alexander said. “The significance of this exercise is we have three like-minded countries, three like-minded navies that believe in peace, security and stability in the western Pacific.” The participation of Japan and South Korea was another sign of improving ties between

the sometimes wary neighbours. The two US allies’ relationship has often been strained by the memory of Japan’s half-century colonization of the Korean Peninsula. Washington has been pressing them to cooperate so the three partners can better deal with threats from China and North Korea. This week’s huge parliamentary election defeat of the governing party of South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, who has sought better relations with Japan, could constrain his Japan-friendly efforts, but experts believe ties will remain stable. The latest naval exercise is part of Biden’s work to deepen security and diplomatic engagement with Indo-Pacific nations. Biden invited Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos to the White House for their first trilateral talks Thursday, and has declared that the US defence commitment to the Pacific allies is “ironclad.” Tensions between China and the Philippines have risen over repeated clashes by the two nations’ coast guard vessels in the disputed South China Sea. Chinese coast guard ships also regularly approach disputed Japanese-controlled East China Sea islands near Taiwan. Beijing has defended its operations in the South China Sea and blamed the United States for creating tensions. China’s President Xi Jinping had a series of talks this week with senior officials from Vietnam, Russia and Taiwan. The US-Japan-South Korea naval exercises follow four-way drills held in the South China Sea, where Japan joined the United States, Australia and the Philippines. Participants carefully avoided mentioning China and said they were holding the exercises to safeguard a peaceful and stable Indo-Pacific. An area of long-simmering disputes, the South China Sea serves a key sea lane for global trade. Concerned governments include Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei and Taiwan. (AP)

Indian mission in Israel issues travel advisory

AP ■ WARSAW/ TEL AVIV

The Indian embassy in Israel on Friday issued an advisory for its nationals in the country, urging them to avoid unnecessary travel, amid fears of a retaliatory attack by Iran. The advisory came soon after the Ministry of External Affairs on Friday asked its citizens not to travel to Iran or Israel amid escalating tensions between the two countries following a strike on the Iranian consulate in Syria days ago. “In view of the prevailing security situation in the region, all Indian nationals in Israel are advised to avoid unnecessary travel, remain calm and follow safety guidelines issued by the local authorities,” an ‘important advisory’ released by the embassy on its social media handles said. “The embassy remains in touch with the Israeli authorities to ensure the safety of all our nationals,” it said. The mission has also asked all its nationals who are not yet registered with it to do so at a given link. The United States has also issued similar advisory to its



Women protest against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government and call for the release of hostages held in the Gaza Strip by the Hamas militant group in Tel Aviv, Israel, Thursday.

nationals telling them to restrict their movement and follow guidelines. Iran has blamed Israel for an attack on its diplomatic building in Damascus on April 1 in which two of its prominent

commanders were killed among others. Iran has vowed revenge to avenge the attack. The threat has led to worldwide diplomatic initiatives to thwart a possible further conflagration

in the region already struggling with Israel’s offensive in Gaza following a terror attack carried out by Hamas in its territory on October 7, and also regular exchange of fire between the Jewish state and Lebanese Shiite faction Hezbollah, which joined the war in solidarity with Hamas. Houthis, considered Iran’s proxy in Yemen, and other factions seen as close to Tehran have also from time to time carried out attacks against Israel and at assets of countries that seem to be supportive of the Jewish state, disrupting international waters and global trade routes. Poland’s government said on Friday the killing of a Polish aid worker by Israeli airstrikes in Gaza was “murder” and demands support from Israel in its own investigation and for the case to be brought before an independent court in Israel. Poland’s deputy foreign minister, Wladyslaw Teofil Bartoszewski, was addressing lawmakers in parliament on the April 1 death of Damian Sobol, 35, and six other workers of the World Central Kitchen charity, who were bringing food

to the needy in Gaza. He called the killings “shocking and disturbing” and said Poland expects Israel’s “full cooperation” in the murder investigation opened by Polish prosecutors in Przemysl, Sobol’s hometown. In the debate in parliament, many lawmakers said the killings should be considered a war crime. Bartoszewski said Poland was working with other countries whose citizens were killed in the shelling — Australia, Britain, Canada and the United States — to jointly press for a detailed investigation into how cars marked as humanitarian convoy could have become targets of repeated shelling by the Israeli army. He stressed that all international rule of defense were violated by that attack. He said that the dismissals and disciplinary measures applied to the officers responsible for the killings were “inadequate” and demanded that the case be tried by an independent court in Israel. He stressed that Poland is also demanding compensation to Sobol’s family. Sobol’s body has been brought to Poland, Bartoszewski said.

Hindu temple demolished in Pak’s Khyber district

Peshawar (PTI): A historical Hindu temple near the Pakistan-Afghanistan border has been demolished and construction for a commercial complex has started at the site in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province that was closed since 1947 when the original occupants migrated to India. The ‘Khyber Temple’ was situated in the border town of Landi Kotal Bazaar in the Khyber district but had been vanishing brick by brick over the years. The construction at the site started about 10-15 days ago. Officials from various administrative departments either denied they were aware of the existence of the Hindu temple or claimed the construction was happening according to the rules. Tribal journalist Ibrahim Shinwari, said: “The temple was located in the centre of the Landi Kotal bazaar, which was closed in 1947 after the local Hindu families migrated to India.

Indian-origin victim of UK’s Post Office scandal rejects apology

AP ■ WAJIMAA

An Indian-origin former manager of a Post Office in England wrongly jailed while pregnant has rejected the apology of a former boss of the government-owned entity during an ongoing public inquiry into the accounting scandal. Seema Misra, now 47, had her conviction quashed in April 2021 as the Court of Appeal ruled that she had been wrongly imprisoned over 12 years ago after being accused of stealing GBP 75,000 from her Post Office branch in Surrey where she was the sub-postmistress. During Thursday’s hearings for the Post Office Horizon IT inquiry in London, former Post Office Managing Director David Smith apologised for a congratulatory email he sent after Misra’s conviction. “It was intended to be a congratulatory email to the team, knowing that they had worked hard on the case,” Smith said in

his written evidence to the inquiry. “However, knowing what I do now, it is evident that my email would have caused Seema Misra and her family substantial distress to read and I would like to apologise for that... Even if this had been a correct conviction, I would never think that it was ‘brilliant news’ for a pregnant woman to go to prison and I am hugely apologetic that my email can be read as such,” he said. “However, seeing this email in the light of what I know now, I understand the anger and the upset that it will have caused and sincerely apologise for that,” he added. But, speaking to reporters later, Misra rejected the apology which comes many years after her ordeal. “I was eight weeks pregnant – they need to apologise to my youngest son. It was terrible. I haven’t accepted the apologies,” Misra told the BBC. “We had my conviction over-

turned, nobody came at that time to apologise. And now they just suddenly realised that when they have to appear in a public inquiry, they have to apologise,” she said. Misra was sent to Bronzefield prison in south-east England and served four-and-a-half months, later giving birth to her second son wearing an electronic tag. Smith told the inquiry that Misra had been used as a “test case” and the success of the case led to more confidence in the faulty Horizon IT accounting system. “How can they do a test on a human being? I’m a living creature. I heard that my case had been used as a test case before. But hearing it again and again, it’s just annoying. It makes me more and more angry, to be honest,” Misra told ‘Sky News’ concerning his evidence. The UK government, which formally owns Post Office Ltd, has paid out millions in compensation to hundreds of sub-

postmasters – many of them of Indian heritage – impacted by the faulty Horizon software. Earlier this year, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak pledged action in the historic scandal which wrongly accused sub-postmasters of fraud. Last month, a new law tabled in Parliament introduced the Post Office (Horizon System) Offences Bill, a blanket exoneration to quash convictions brought about by erroneous Horizon evidence. A public inquiry in the case, underway in a phased manner, is expected to conclude in July. The controversial Horizon system, developed by the Japanese company Fujitsu, was first rolled out in 1999 to some post offices for variable tasks, including accounting and stocktaking. However, it appeared to have significant bugs, which could cause the system to misreport, sometimes involving large sums as in the case of these sub-postmasters.

Pope will travel to Indonesia, PNG and Singapore

Vatican City (AP): Pope Francis will visit Indonesia, East Timor, Papua New Guinea and Singapore in September, the Vatican announced Friday, confirming the longest trip of Francis’ papacy that is sure to test his health, stamina and mobility. The Vatican confirmed the September 2-13 visit, saying the 87-year-old pope would visit Jakarta, Indonesia; Port Moresby and Vanimo, Papua New Guinea; Dili, East Timor; and Singapore. Further details will be announced later. Francis’ health has become a source of increasing concern and speculation, even though the pontiff is able to carry on with a rigorous schedule of meetings at the Vatican and even excursions to local parishes. Francis, who had part of one lung removed as a young man, had to cancel a planned visit to Dubai late last year after he came down with a bad case of bronchitis. He suffered from respiratory

problems all winter and had to curtail his participation in Holy Week events to save his energy for Easter. Francis has also been using a wheelchair for nearly two years because of bad knee ligaments, and has said that travelling has become increasingly more difficult. And yet at 11 days, the trip would be the longest of Francis’ papacy, outpacing by a few days some of his long trips to the Americas early on in his 11-year papacy. It will bring the Argentine Jesuit to the world’s most populous Muslim nation, Indonesia, as well as the former Portuguese colony of East Timor, where the Catholic Church wields enormous influence. There is also a chance of another leg to the trip being added later: This week, the Vatican foreign minister, Archbishop Paul Gallagher, was in Vietnam and discussed a papal visit, Vatican News reported, without providing details.

Sexual assaults rise in Central African Republic

Bangui (AP): It was too late for the mother to shield her children when the two masked and armed Russian fighters burst into her home, held her at gunpoint and took turns raping her. Her five children were forced to watch in the dark.

Seated in a restaurant in Central African Republic’s capital, where she has since fled, she wiped away tears. Two years on, the assault has “stayed with me in my core,” she said.

The Associated Press does not identify survivors of sexual assault. She blamed the Russians who are part of the Wagner mercenary group that operates alongside Central African Republic’s army and has been accused by locals and rights groups of abuses. She

had seen them patrolling in her town of Bambari before. On the day of the assault, they were fighting rebels there. Gender-based violence is rising in Central African Republic amid ongoing conflict, weak legal and care systems and the stigma of speaking up, locals and aid groups say. Since 2020, incidents have jumped from about 9,200 reported cases to 25,500, according to cases tracked by the UN and partners. But international funding for the country has dropped, with gender-based violence receiving some of the least support. The humanitarian request for about USD 14 million received less than 15 per cent of that, according to the UN. Central African Republic has been in conflict since

2013, when predominantly Muslim rebels seized power and forced the president from office. Mostly Christian militias fought back. A 2019 peace deal only lessened the fighting, and six of the 14 armed groups that signed later left the agreement. Wagner, a UN peace-keeping mission and Rwandan troops are all on the ground to try to quell the violence. “More than 10 years on since this crisis unfolded, many people are still displaced, vulnerable and live at the mercy of armed groups,” said Lewis Mudge, Central Africa director for Human Rights Watch. A new dynamic has emerged as well whereby mercenaries aligned with the government are also, at times, preying on the local population.”

Gang gets 122-year prison term for murdering Indian

PTI ■ LONDON

Four Indian-origin men in their 20s, who were found guilty of the murder of a 23-year-old delivery driver, also of Indian heritage, were on Friday sentenced to a total of 122 years’ imprisonment. Aurman Singh was pronounced dead at the scene when the local West Mercia Police attended reports of an attack in the Berwick Avenue area of Shrewsbury, western England, in August last year and went on to arrest four men on suspicion of murder. Arshdeep Singh, 24, Jagdeep Singh, 23, Shivdeep Singh, 27, and Manjot Singh, 24, were found guilty of murder with weapons including an axe, hockey stick and shovel. They were each sentenced to life imprisonment, with a minimum term of 28 years behind bars.



A fifth Indian-origin man, Sukhmandeep Singh, 24, believed to be the “inside man” who sent information about Aurman’s deliveries on the day he was murdered and found guilty of manslaughter was handed a 10-year sentence. “I am pleased that significant sentences have been handed to

these men for the brutal murder of Aurman Singh. These five men are dangerous individuals who will now serve a considerable sentence in prison where they cannot cause further harm to the wider public,” said Detective Chief Inspector (DCI) Mark Bellamy of West Mercia Police, who led the

murder investigation. “Aurman’s family have understandably been left shattered when he was tragically killed in a planned and brutal attack in Shrewsbury, and my thoughts and condolences remain with them. Today’s sentence should send a strong message to those who think they can come into our towns and cities to commit violent crime that we will not stop in our efforts to find them and put them before the courts,” he said. The sentencing hearing at Stafford Crown Court was presided over by Judge Kristina Montgomery, who described the case as “a very public execution,” in which Aurman had been left to die at the side of the road. It followed the five men’s conviction last month at the end of a six-week trial at the same court. Aurman’s family stated that there are no words that could

ever explain the impact the tragedy has had on their lives. The statement issued through the police reads: “Today a mother will grow old without her son. A sister will grow up without her brother. We don’t want what has happened to us to happen to another family. “It is an unbearable loss for us which has changed our lives. My daughter and myself will be living our lives for the sake of it but our happiness and the will to live is not there. “We would like to thank the police for conducting their investigation diligently and supporting us through this tough time.” West Mercia Police described it as a complex investigation, which involved forces across the country. Earlier, the police said that no evidence emerged that would clearly explain a motive behind the brutal attack on Aurman Singh throughout the trial.

One of Ukraine’s largest power plants destroyed

AP ■ KYIV

A massive missile and drone attack destroyed one of Ukraine’s largest power plants and damaged others, officials said on Thursday, part of a renewed Russian campaign targeting energy infrastructure.

The Trypilska plant, which was the biggest energy supplier for the Kyiv, Cherkasy and Zhytomyr regions, was struck numerous times, destroying the transformer, turbines and generators and leaving the plant ablaze. As the first drone approached, workers hid in a shelter, saving their lives, said Andrii Gota, chairman of the supervisory board of the state company that runs the plant, Centrenergy.

They watched the plant burn, surrounded by dense smoke and engulfed in flames. “It’s terrifying,” said Gota. Hours later, rescuers were still dismantling the rubble.

Speaking in Moscow, Russian President Vladimir Putin cast the attacks on Ukrainian energy facilities as a response to Ukrainian strikes that targeted Russian oil refineries.

The Trypilska plant supplied electricity to 3 million customers — but none lost power because the grid was able to compensate since demands are low at this time of year. Still, the consequences of the strikes could be felt in the coming months, as air conditioning use ramps up with summer. At least 10 other strikes overnight damaged energy infrastructure in Kharkiv, Ukraine’s second-largest city. Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said more than 200,000 people in the region, which has been struck repeatedly, were without power.

Ukraine’s largest private energy operator, DTEK, described the slew of strikes as one of the most powerful attacks this year, while Energy Minister Herman Halushchenko told reporters it was a “large scale, enormous, missile attack that affected our energy sector very badly.” Russia has recently renewed strikes on Ukrainian energy facilities, and attacks last month blacked out large parts of the country — a level of darkness not seen since the first days of the full-scale invasion in 2022. The volume and accuracy of the attacks have alarmed the



country’s defenders and left officials scrambling for better ways to protect energy assets. The strikes have also tested Ukraine’s ability to make quick repairs. Ukraine’s leaders have pleaded

for more air defence systems to ward off such attacks, but those supplies have been slow in coming. “Today’s situation demonstrates that there’s nothing left to shoot down” the missiles, Gota said.

Putin mocks planned Ukraine conference

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russia’s President Vladimir Putin on Thursday mocked a scheduled round of Ukraine peace talks in Switzerland, warning that Moscow will not accept any enforced plans that ignore its interests.

Switzerland’s government said Wednesday it will host a high-level international conference in June to help chart a path toward peace in Ukraine after more than two years of fighting, and expressed hope that Russia might join in the peace process someday. Putin charged that Russia hadn’t been invited to join June’s talks, while pointing at Swiss recognition that a peace process can’t happen without Russia.

“They aren’t inviting us there,” Putin said. “Moreover, they think there is nothing for us to do there, but at the same time they say that it’s impossible to decide anything without us. It would have been funny if it weren’t so sad.”

Russia has dismissed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s peace formula requiring Moscow to pull back its troops, pay compensation to Ukraine and face

an international tribunal for its action.

Speaking during Thursday’s meeting with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko in Moscow, Putin said that Russia is open for negotiations, but will never accept “any schemes that have nothing to do with reality.”

Putin has repeatedly said that he sent troops into Ukraine in February 2022 to protect Russian interests and prevent Ukraine from posing a major security threat to Russia by joining NATO. Kyiv and its allies have denounced Russia’s military campaign as an unprovoked act of aggression. Putin has claimed that Russian forces have the upper hand after the failure of Ukraine’s counteroffensive last year, arguing that Ukraine and the West will “sooner or later” have to accept a settlement on Moscow’s terms.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov warned last week that prospective negotiations to end the fighting in Ukraine could be successful only if they take Moscow’s interests into account, dismissing a planned round of peace talks as a Western ruse to rally broader international support for Kyiv.

Chinese official talks with North Korean counterpart meeting

Seoul (AP): A top Chinese official arrived in North Korea and held talks on how to boost their cooperation, North Korea’s state media reported on Friday, in the counties’ highest-level meeting in about five years.

Zhao Leji, who is chairman of China’s National People’s Congress and considered the No. 3 official in the ruling Communist Party, arrived in North Korea on Thursday. China’s government earlier said he will stay in North Korea until Saturday.

Zhao met his North Korean counterpart Choe Ryong Hae later on Thursday and discussed how to promote exchanges and cooperation on all areas such as politics, economy and culture, the North’s official Korean Central News Agency reported.

The two also exchanged views on unspecified regional and international issues of mutual concerns, KCNA said.

Zhao is one of the seven members of the Politburo Standing Committee, the Communist Party’s top leadership body headed by Chinese leader Xi Jinping.

Zhao’s visit to North Korea marked the first bilateral exchange involving a Chinese Politburo Standing Committee member since the coronavirus pandemic started. In 2019, the two countries held two summit meetings between Xi and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

Observers say North Korea and China are expected to hold a number of exchanges this year to mark the 75th year since they established diplomatic ties. North Korea has been seeking to boost its cooperation with China and Russia in the face of a standoff with the United States and South Korea over the North’s advancing nuclear program. China, North Korea’s biggest aid benefactor, is believed to have long provided clandestine assistance to North Korea in violation of international sanctions.

Kim travelled to Russia in September for a summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin. The US, South Korea and others accuse North Korea of supplying conventional weapons for Russia’s war in Ukraine in return for advanced weapons technologies and other support.

Polish lawmakers vote to move forward with work on lifting abortion ban

AP ■ WARSAW

Polish lawmakers voted Friday to continue work on proposals to lift a near-total ban on abortion, a highly divisive issue in the traditionally Roman Catholic country, which has one of the most restrictive laws in Europe.

Members of the lower house of parliament, the Sejm, voted to work on four separate bills. Two of them propose legalizing abortion through the 12th week of pregnancy, in line with European norms.

One plan proposes decriminalizing assistance for a woman who terminates a pregnancy. And a fourth would keep a ban in most cases but allows abortions in cases of fetal defects — a right that was eliminated by a 2020 court ruling. The party of centrist Prime Minister

Donald Tusk is seeking to change the law to allow women to terminate pregnancies up to the 12th week of pregnancy. Abortion rights advocates said the decision to continue work on the bills, and not reject them outright, was a step in the right direction. But they also say that no real change in the law is likely to come soon.

And any liberalisation bill would likely be vetoed by President Andrzej Duda, a conservative who last month vetoed a bill making the morning-after pill, which is not an abortion pill but emergency contraception, available over-the-counter to women and girls 15 and older. Duda’s second and final term runs until the summer of 2025.

Abortion opponents are also mobilised in a country that has long considered Catholic faith

to be a bedrock of national identity but which is also in the process of fast secularisation. The Catholic church called on the faithful to make Sunday a day of prayer “in defence of conceived life”, in a statement carried by the state news agency PAP.

Currently abortions are only allowed in the cases of rape or incest or if the woman’s life or health is at risk. Reproductive rights advocates say that even in such cases, doctors and hospitals turn away women, fearing legal consequences for themselves or citing their moral objections.

According to Health Ministry statistics, only 161 abortions were performed in Polish hospitals in 2022.

The reality is that many Polish women already have abortions, often with pills mailed

from abroad. Groups that help provide the pills estimate that some 120,000 abortions are carried out each year by women living in Poland.

It is not a crime for a woman to perform her own abortion. But assisting a woman in such a case is a crime punishable by up to three years in prison. One of the four bills that passed for further work is a proposal by the Left that would decriminalise assisting a woman who has an abortion. The European Parliament adopted a resolution Thursday demanding the inclusion of the right to abortion in the European Union’s Charter of Fundamental Rights. Lawmakers called on Poland and Malta, the two countries with the toughest limitations on abortion, to lift restrictions on the issue.

Ex-Prez Alvi advises Pakistanis to reset to change their destiny

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

The people of Pakistan must “reset, alt-del and restart” to change their destiny, former president Arif Alvi has said, asserting that the “poor but hardworking” nation, polarised by political differences, deserves better.

Alvi, Pakistan’s president from 2018 to March 2024, took to social media platform X on Thursday to criticise the cash-strapped country’s current state of affairs.

“The argument by some that it has happened before and others have also done the same is no justification to continue on this path, as it is retrogressive thinking with no way forward,” the 74-year-old leader said. “To change our destiny is to Re-Think, Reset, Alt-Del, Clean the slate, Re-Start,” he said. “Who will do it? Who can do it? Is it even possible? I think it is, as we have the potential, and this poor but hardworking nation certainly deserves better,” the dentist-turned-politician said.

Bashing the deterioration of Pakistan’s economy, politics and judiciary, he said that there is severe stress on the country’s institutions, which are being



forced to take partisan positions. Asserting that the country’s economy needs political stability, which the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and other global institutions have pointed out, he said, “FDI (foreign direct investment) without local investment will also be an elusive dream.”

Alvi, who is a close aide of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan and a senior leader of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party before becoming the president in 2018, said that a “total political farce is being perpetrated in the Parliament with a stolen mandate.”

Khan and his party have repeatedly said that the outcome of the February 8 general elections was rigged and that

Russian military trainers arrive in Niger as relations deteriorate with US

Dakar (AP): State television in Niger has broadcast footage of Russian military trainers arriving in the country aboard a plane equipped with military supplies to boost its air defences amid deteriorating relations between Niger and the US. Two Russian trainers were filmed in front of the plane wearing military uniforms, caps and face coverings. The plane arrived Wednesday night, the report said, and carried military supplies to help Niger improve its air defences. “We are here to train the Nigerian army to use the military equipment that is here,” one of the Russian trainers said in French in Thursday’s broadcast. “We are here to develop military cooperation between Russia and Niger.”

Until recently, Washington considered Niger a key partner and ally in a region swept by

attempted coups in recent years. A US airbase was established as the heart of Niger’s counter insurgency operations in the sub-Saharan region known as the Sahel. Since 2012, the region has been gripped by a worsening insurgency fought by groups linked to Al Qaeda and the Islamic State group.

The US invested heavily in training Niger’s forces to beat back the insurgency that has ravaged the country and its neighbours. But last summer, some of those elite US-trained forces took part in a coup that ousted the elected president.

US relations with Niger took a further downturn last month when the junta announced on state television the flights from its airbase were illegal and that it no longer recognised the American military presence in the country.

Uncertainty over elections could risk Sri Lanka’s economic recovery: ADB

Colombo (PTI): The “uncertainty” over the impending elections in Sri Lanka will cause a possible downward trend in the country’s economic outlook, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has said. The island nation is set to face a presidential election in the last quarter of this year, while the parliamentary election is due mid-next year.

However, political uncertainty prevails in the country as opposition parties have pledged to reverse the current IMF-linked reforms, which have proved to be unpopular with the masses. President

Ranil Wickremesinghe, who has steered the recovery programme by going into a bailout deal with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a USD 2.9 billion facility, maintains that the island could once again face economic collapse if

the IMF programme reforms are not adhered to.

Outlining the economic risks Sri Lanka is facing, the ADB in its South Asian chapter’s economic trends report released yesterday said, “Among them the most important is uncertainty associated with the upcoming elections, including any possible impact on fiscal policy and reform implementation.” The ADB noted that there are signs of economic recovery in Lanka and emerging growth had revived in the second half of 2023 and is expected to continue in 2024 and 2025. “Inflation decelerated in single digits last year following a peak in 2022 and will remain below 10 per cent in 2024 and 2025. Challenges remain and the upcoming elections cycle must not delay the reforms required to address the recent economic crisis.

Nearly 12,000 homes flooded in Russian region bordering Kazakhstan as water levels rise

Moscow (AP): Nearly 12,000 houses have been flooded in a Russian region bordering Kazakhstan as water levels in the Ural River keep rising and threatening more deluge, authorities said on Thursday. The floods sparked evacuations of thousands in the Orenburg region, located some 1,200 kilometres (745 miles), south-east of the capital of Moscow after a dam on the river burst last week under the pressure of surging waters. Local authorities have declared a state of emergency in the region.

In a televised video conference with President Vladimir Putin, Orenburg governor Denis Pasler reported that a total of 11,972 houses are flooded, as well as 16 state medical facilities. Additionally, 3,600 houses — home to some 20,000 people — are in danger of

imminent flooding as water levels continue to rise. The situation is most dire in the city of Orenburg, the administrative capital of the region, Pasler said, where the water level in the Ural River reached a historical peak of 10.87 metres (about 36 feet). A total of 7,800 people have been evacuated from the flooded areas so far, he added. The overall damage from the floods is estimated to exceed 40 billion rubles (USD 428 million). Further east along the Kazakhstan border, authorities in the regions of Kurgan and Tyumen are also preparing for possible floods as water levels rise in local rivers. Floods have also hit Kazakhstan, where authorities have declared a state of emergency in 10 out of 17 regions of the country, according to Russia’s state news agency Tass.

Sudan war: Children among most fragile survivors

AP ■ METCHE CAMP (CHAD)

The war in Sudan began a year ago. Here in a remote camp for tens of thousands of people who have fled into neighbouring Chad, the anniversary is marked by near starvation.

Assadig Abubaker Salih is a 42-year old mother of six. The family survived the hot, dusty journey from their home to this sprawling camp of wind-whipped blue tents stretching in rows toward the horizon.

“We are in a very bad situation. We have suffered since we left our country. My husband died,” she said. “There is nothing here. We need the essentials. We don’t even have sugar.” Back home, Sudan’s military, led by Gen Abdel Fattah Burhan, is fighting the paramilitary group known as Rapid Support Forces, commanded by Gen Mohammed Hamdan

Dagalo, for immensely greater resources — including power over the country’s more than 45 million people.

Close to 9 million people have fled their homes, according to the United Nations, and more than 1 million have left the country. Thousands have been killed in a conflict overshadowed by the ones in Gaza and Ukraine. The UN says it has asked for USD 2.7 billion in funding to respond to humanitarian needs but has received USD 155 million — or 6 per cent.

“It has been everyday Sudanese who have — often at great personal risk — stepped up to support each other,” Eatizaz Yousif, country director with the International Rescue Committee, said in a joint statement by aid groups urging the world to give more. The UN has warned of an impending generational cata-

strophe. An estimated 3 million Sudanese children are malnourished. About 19 million children are out of school. A quarter of Sudan’s hospitals are no longer functioning. Aid organisations say women and children are bearing the worst of the conflict. Even here, across the border, resources are stretched thin after more than 570,000 Sudanese arrived over the past year. Aid workers warn they are set to run out of some supplies within weeks. Shortages of water and ways to keep clean mean a growing risk of disease. A growing number of children are arriving at the pediatric unit run by the Doctors Without Borders charity with pulmonary complications, a result of the harsh environment. The organization has also documented rising cases of hepatitis E, which can be deadly for pregnant women. “Many, many

of our babies are severely malnourished,” said Cordula Hafner, the Doctors Without Borders hospital coordinator at the camp. “The reason is hygiene, not enough food, not enough water. This is a crisis that will continue. We will see even more children like this.” More than 16,000 children younger than 5 arriving in Chad from Sudan have had severe acute malnutrition, according to the UN — a stage where the effects of hunger are clearly visible. Many people in this camp fled some of the conflict’s worst fighting in Sudan’s vast western region of Darfur. But the most desperate are trapped behind the front lines.

“We are seeing a catastrophe unfolding in North Darfur, where our teams have estimated that 13 children are dying each day of malnutrition and related health conditions at a

camp for displaced people,” Avril Benoît, executive director of Doctors Without Borders in the US, said in a statement. She urged Sudanese authorities to stop blocking aid.

Some Sudanese manage to get help in time. One mother of six, Rachid Yaya Mohammed, said she came to the hospital at this camp in Chad because she is six months pregnant. Two of her smallest children — twins — slept beside her. Conditions are expected to worsen in the coming lean season between harvests, when food reserves are depleted and rains drive up rates of malaria. Sudan plunged into chaos a year ago when clashes erupted in the capital, Khartoum, and spread.

In Darfur, brutal attacks by the Arab-dominated Rapid Support Forces on ethnic African civilians have revived memories of genocide.

Two decades ago, as many as 300,000 people were killed and 2.7 million were driven from their homes largely by government-backed Arab militias. The paramilitary Rapid Support Forces grew out of those militias known as the Janjaweed who were accused of widespread killings, rapes and other atrocities.

Now, prosecutors at the International Criminal Court say there are grounds to believe both sides in the current conflict are committing war crimes. West Darfur, especially its capital city of Geneina, has witnessed some of the worst atrocities including mass killings and rampant sexual violence against the African Masalit tribe, according to UN experts. The AP has reported that militias launched waves of attacks on Geneina and other towns, taking men away and burning their homes.

Resolution in US Cong condemns Hinduphobia

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Celebrating the contributions of Hindus and Hinduism to the US, a prominent Indian-American Congressman has introduced a resolution in the House of Representatives condemning Hinduphobia, anti-Hindu bigotry, hate and intolerance.

The resolution that was introduced by Congressman Shri Thanedar on Wednesday has been referred to the House Committee on Oversight and Accountability.

The resolution reads that despite their positive contributions to the United States, Hindu Americans face stereotypes and disinformation about their heritage and symbols, and have been the targets of bullying in schools and on college campuses, as well as discrimination, hate speech, and bias-motivated crimes.

According to the FBI’s Hate Crimes Statistics Report, anti-Hindu hate crimes targeting mandirs and persons are annually on the rise while in parallel Hinduphobia in

American society is unfortunately rising, the resolution said. Noting that the United States has welcomed more than four million Hindus from all corners of the world since the 1900s, representing diverse racial, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds, the resolution asserts that the country has greatly benefited from contributions by Hindu Americans in every aspect of the nation’s economy and every industry. About a fortnight ago, Indian-American Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi, Ro Khanna, Thanedar, Ami Bera and Pramila Jayapal had written to the Department of Justice to request a briefing from them on the status of investigations concerning an alarming

increase in incidents of vandalism at houses of worship across the country including at Hindu temples to better understand existing law enforcement coordination between local agencies, the FBI, and the Civil Rights Division.

“Attacks at mandirs from New York to California have contributed to increased collective anxiety among Hindu Americans. Leaders from these impacted communities have expressed there are unfortunately “no leads” on suspects, leaving many to continue to live in fear and intimidation. Our communities remain concerned about law enforcement coordination regarding these bias-motivated crimes, and they are left wondering if there is appropriate federal oversight to ensure equal protection under the law,” said the letter dated March 29.

“The number of incidents and the closeness of the timing of incidents raise troubling questions about linkages and the intent behind them. It takes relatively few coordinated acts of hate to create fear nationally within a community that has often been marginalised or neglected, and we must work collaboratively to combat hate against all religious, ethnic, racial, and cultural minorities in America.

“We therefore request that you provide us with an understanding of what the Department’s strategy is specifically concerning hate crimes targeting Hindus in the United States,” said the letter. Khanderao Rand, Chief of Policy and Strategy from the Foundation for India and Indian Diaspora Studies said that in the first quarter of this year, there has been a sudden spike in vandalism as well as thefts in temples in America intimidating devotees.

Markets fall make investors poorer by ₹2.52 lakh crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Investors' wealth on Friday plunged by Rs 2.52 lakh crore as the benchmark Sensex tanked 793.25 points due to heavy selling after a recent record-breaking rally. The 30-share BSE benchmark tanked 793.25 points or 1.06 per cent to settle at 74,244.90. The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies declined by Rs 2,52,301.16 crore to Rs 3,99,67,051.91 crore (USD 4.79 trillion). "The market had been building up hope of three rate cuts by the US Fed this fiscal year, but the recent higher inflation reading has mellowed the expectations, which would mean that the

wait for rate cut would be longer than expected. Hence, the sell-off in the Indian markets was a knee-jerk reaction to the rising inflation and fading hopes of a rate cut in the near future," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said. A sharp rise in crude oil prices and rupee's downward spiral also dampened the sentiment and contributed to the overall slump. "While the Indian economy is on a firm footing, the spate of negative news, especially from the global front, would at times halt the Indian equities upward march," Tapse said. Among the Sensex firms, Sun Pharma, Maruti, Power Grid, Titan, JSW Steel, Tech



Mahindra, Larsen & Toubro and State Bank of India were the major laggards. Tata Motors, Tata Consultancy Services and Nestle were the gainers.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge declined 0.60 per cent and midcap index dipped 0.49 per cent. All the indices ended lower, with oil & gas falling by 1.28

per cent, utilities (1.02 per cent), realty (0.96 per cent), bankex (0.91 per cent) commodities (0.84 per cent), IT (0.84 per cent) and financial services (0.81 per cent). A total of 2,373 stocks declined while 1,466 advanced and 104 remained unchanged. "US inflation soared by 0.4% MoM, surpassing expectations and triggering a spike in US Treasury yields. Investors are questioning the feasibility of the US Fed's anticipated 3 rate cuts this year, leading to underperformance in EMs. "Meanwhile, European markets excelled as the ECB maintained policy rates but hinted at a potential rate cut

soon. Indian markets consolidated amidst worries over delayed US rate cuts, escalating Middle East tensions driving oil prices up, and subdued Q4 earnings projections," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. The BSE benchmark climbed 354.45 points or 0.47 per cent to settle at an all-time high of 75,038.15 on Wednesday. The Nifty advanced by 111.05 points or 0.49 per cent to reach a record closing peak of 22,753.80. During the day, it jumped 132.95 points or 0.58 per cent to hit a lifetime intraday peak of 22,775.70. Stock markets were closed on Thursday on account of Eid-Ul-Fitr.

Rupee falls 7 paise against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee depreciated 7 paise to close at 83.38 against the US dollar on Friday, weighed down by a massive sell-off in domestic equities and a strong greenback against major crosses overseas. Forex traders said elevated crude oil prices also dented investor sentiments. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.36 and touched an intraday low of 83.44 against the greenback. The local unit finally settled at 83.38, registering a loss of 7 paise against its previous close. On Wednesday, the rupee closed flat at 83.31 against the US dollar. Forex markets were closed on Thursday on account of Eid-Ul-Fitr. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.51 per cent higher at 105.82. The US dollar rose to a five-month high on hot inflation. Headline and core inflation topped the forecast, leading to diminishing expectations of a rate cut by the US Federal Reserve in June. Hawkish FOMC meeting minutes supported the greenback. Forex traders said rising crude oil prices will have a negative impact on the rupee as it will threaten the current account dynamics of the country. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, advanced 0.97 per cent to

USD 90.61 per barrel. "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on weak global equities amid hawkish US data and surge in global crude oil prices. A positive tone in the US dollar may further pressurise the rupee. "However, FII inflows may support the rupee at lower levels. Traders may take cues from India's inflation and IIP data. Traders may also take cues from Michigan consumer sentiment and inflation expectations data from the US. USD/INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 83.10 to Rs 83.70," said Anuj Choudhary Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. On the domestic equity market front, Sensex declined 793.25 points, or 1.06 per cent, to settle at 74,244.90 points. The Nifty fell 234.40 points, or 1.03 per cent, to close at 22,519.40 points. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Friday as they sold shares worth Rs 8,027 crore, according to exchange data. "The dollar index rose to 105.35, leading to weakness in all currencies, including the rupee. Despite this, the strength of the Indian economy is expected to support the rupee. As a result, the rupee is likely to experience sideways movement with increased volatility, maintaining a range between 83.15-83.55," said Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst - Commodity and Currency, LKP Securities.



Amended India, Mauritius tax treaty protocol yet to be ratified, notified: IT Department

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Income Tax Department on Friday said the amended India-Mauritius protocol on double taxation avoidance agreement is yet to be ratified and notified by the department. India and Mauritius on March 7, 2024, signed an amendment to the DTAA and included a principal purpose test (PPT) in the pact which aims to curtail tax avoidance by ensuring that treaty benefits are only granted for transactions with a bona fide purpose. There were concerns that foreign portfolio investments coming via Mauritius would face increased scrutiny by tax authorities. Also, there were apprehensions that past investments could be covered by the amended protocol. In a post on X (formerly Twitter), the I-T department said some concerns have been raised on the India Mauritius DTAA amended recently. "In this context, it is clarified that the concerns /queries are premature at the moment since the Protocol is yet to be ratified and notified u/s 90 of the Income-tax Act, 1961. "As and when the Protocol comes into force, queries, if any, will be addressed, wherever necessary," the I-T department said. Historically, Mauritius has been a preferred jurisdiction for engaging in investments in India due to the non-taxability of capital gains from the sale of shares in Indian companies until 2016.

In 2016, India and Mauritius signed a revised tax agreement, which gave India the right to tax capital gains in India on transactions in shares routed through the island nation beginning April 1, 2017. However, investments made before April 2017 were grandfathered. IndusLaw Partner Lokesh Shah said with PPT test now introduced in the India-Mauritius tax treaty, tax authorities in India are likely to look beyond TRC (tax residency certificate by Mauritius tax authorities) and will have the ability to deny the benefit of India-Mauritius tax treaty if it is reasonable to conclude, having regard to all relevant facts and circumstances, that obtaining the treaty benefits was one of the principal purposes of any arrangement or transaction that resulted directly or indirectly such tax benefit. "The tax authorities will have the ability to take a closer look at the structure and assess the intent and commercial rationale, before granting treaty benefits. Existing structures / investments from Mauritius will now need to pass through the PPT test," Shah said. India's benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty plunged by 1 per cent on Friday due to across-the-board profit taking by investors. The 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 793.25 points or 1.06 per cent to settle at 74,244.90 with 27 of its components ending in the red. During the day, it dropped 848.84 points or 1.13 per cent to 74,189.31.

RBI rejects two applications for small finance bank

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India has rejected two more applications, including that of Dvara Kshetriya Gramin Financial Services, for setting up small finance banks. Earlier in July 2023, it had rejected three applications. RBI had received about a dozen applications to set up banks under the guidelines for 'on tap' Licensing of Universal Banks and Small Finance Banks (SFBs). The guidelines for 'on tap' licensing of Universal Banks and SFBs in the private sector were issued on August 1, 2016, and December 5, 2019, respectively. In a statement on Friday, the RBI said the examination of two more applications for setting up a small finance bank has been completed as per the procedure laid down under extant guidelines. Based on the assessment of the applications, the central bank said it did not find applicants -- Dvara Kshetriya Gramin Financial Services Private Limited and Tally Solutions Private Limited -- suitable for granting of in-principle approval to set up a small finance bank. However, two remaining applications are still "under examination".



In May 2022, it announced the decisions on six applications. In July last year, the RBI had rejected applications of Akhil Kumar Gupta, Cosmea

Financial Holdings Pvt Ltd and West End Housing Finance Ltd. As per the guidelines, the initial minimum paid-up voting equity capital for a universal bank should be Rs 500 crore. Thereafter, the bank should have a minimum net worth of Rs 500 crore at all times. The minimum paid-up voting capital/net worth for SFBs should be Rs 200 crore. In case of urban co-operative banks desirous of voluntarily transiting into SFBs, the initial requirement of net worth is Rs 100 crore, which will have to be increased to Rs 200 crore within five years.

Allow only Indian entities to participate in regulatory sandbox: Trai



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Only Indian nationals or entities should be eligible to participate in telecom regulatory sandboxes that can provide real-time but regulated access to networks and customer resources during product or technology tests, sector regulator Trai recommended on Friday. The Telecommunications Act, 2023, has introduced the provision of setting up multiple regulatory sandboxes. The regulatory sandbox (RS) will emphasise on testing of new products, services, processes, and business models in a live testing environment on a limited set of users for a specified period of time after obtaining certain regulatory relaxations. The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) recommended that

the Department of Telecom shall put in place an end-to-end digital process to handle RS applications and all related activities, including intimations, approvals, sharing of information, monitoring, reporting requirements etc. "Only Indian nationals or entities will be eligible," Trai said in its recommendation on "Encouraging Innovative Technologies, Services, Use Cases, and Business Models through Regulatory Sandbox in Digital Communication Sector". The regulator has recommended a non-refundable processing fee of Rs 10,000 for the applications. During the testing period, the applicants will need to demonstrate in application ways to prioritise the protection of consumer interests and prevent any harm to consumers. The regulator has recommended

that only such customers will be allowed to be on boarded who have given specific consent voluntarily. "Customer onboarding and private/public data processing should align with the provisions of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, and any applicable rules, regulations, or orders issued under this Act," Trai suggested. The regulator has recommended that applicants should share details of licensing or regulatory relaxations that are sought for testing purposes and submit a clear exit strategy that outlines the process for exiting the testing phase. Trai has recommended that the oversight and governance of the RS shall be done by the National Telecommunications Institute for Policy Research, Innovation, and Training (NTIPRIT). Further, NTIPRIT should rope in representatives from the Telecom Engineering Centre (TEC) and academic institutions, as required. Trai has recommended funding support for entities conducting trials for new technologies from "Digital Bharat Nidhi", erstwhile Universal Services Obligation Fund, for innovative products that may have significant potential to bridge the digital divide and bring socio-economic advancement to underprivileged sections but may not be able to get sufficient funding from market sources.

Number of devices hit by data stealing malware rises over 600 per cent in three years: Kaspersky

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The number of devices compromised with data-stealing malware has increased more than 600 per cent in the past three years, according to cybersecurity firm Kaspersky. Kaspersky's Digital Footprint Intelligence data showed the number of personal and corporate devices compromised with data-stealing malware reached 10 million in 2023, registering a 643 per cent increase over the past three years. "According to Kaspersky's assessment, the number of infections that occurred in 2023 is projected to reach roughly 16,000,000," it said, noting an increase in the threat posed by data-stealers for both consumers and businesses. Cyber criminals steal an average of 50.9 log-in credentials per infected device, it said, adding that these credentials may encompass log-ins for social media, online banking services, crypto wallets, and various online services including email. The data, which drew insights from infostealer malware log files traded on underground markets, showed the actual number of infections is likely to be even higher than 10 million. "The dark-web value of log files with login credentials varies depending on the data's appeal and the way it's sold there. Credentials may be sold



through a subscription service with regular uploads, a so called 'aggregator' for specific requests, or via a 'shop' selling recently acquired login credentials exclusively to selected buyers. Prices typically begin at USD 10 per log file in these shops," said Sergey Schcherbel, a cybersecurity expert at Kaspersky Digital Footprint Intelligence. According to Kaspersky's data, 443,000 websites worldwide have experienced compromised credentials in the past five years. The .Com (dot com) domain led the list of compromised accounts, followed by Brazil (.Br), India (.In), Colombia (.Co), and Vietnam (.Vn). "In the .In domain, associated with India, compromised accounts reached over 8 million in 2023," it said.

Retail inflation eases to five months low in March

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Retail inflation declined to a five-month low of 4.85 per cent in March mainly due to cooling food prices, inching towards the Reserve Bank's target of 4 per cent, according to official data released on Friday. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) based retail inflation was 5.09 per cent in February and 5.66 per cent in March 2023. Previously, CPI-based inflation was the lowest at 4.87 per cent in October 2023. The inflation in the food basket was at 8.52 per cent in March, down from 8.66 per cent in February, according to the data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO). According to the data, inflation in eggs, spices, and pulses, among others, eased on a month-on-month basis. However, there was an uptick



in fruits and vegetables segments in March compared to February. The retail inflation was also lower in the 'fuel and light' segment. The government has tasked the Reserve Bank to ensure inflation remains at 4 per cent, with a margin of 2 per cent on either side. According to the Reserve Bank, which factors in consumer inflation while

arriving at its bi-monthly monetary policy, food price uncertainties continue to weigh on the inflation trajectory going forward. The central bank has projected retail inflation at 4.5 per cent for the current fiscal assuming a normal monsoon. Continuing geopolitical tensions also pose an upside risk to commodity prices and supply chains. The RBI projected inflation at 4.9 per cent for the April-June quarter and at 3.8 per cent for the September quarter. Commenting on the CPI data, Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist, ICRA said an intensification of the impending heatwave may worsen the seasonal uptick in prices of perishables, heightening the criticality of a favourable monsoon in 2024 to keep food inflation in check and inflationary expectations well-anchored.

Builders must file complaints against customers not paying on time: Delhi RERA Chief

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Builders should file complaints with regulatory authorities if customers do not pay due amount payable on residential or commercial properties purchased by them, Delhi-RERA Chairman Anand Kumar said. Addressing an event on the real estate sector, Kumar, who is the chairman of Real Estate Regulatory Authority, Delhi, cautioned real estate developers against falling in "trap of investors" as this could affect their cash flow and result into projects getting stalled. "There is a trap of investors, which happens," he said, adding that there are many high net worth individuals who purchase many flats in hope of abnormal profit. These investors pay at most 30 per cent of the total cost of the apartments and after that they stop paying their instalments, Kumar said, adding that such investors do not respond to



reminders given by builders. Real estate developers are then forced to cancel the units, which leads to disputes with customers, he said. "In case, you (builder) find any problem that somebody is not paying on time, you go to RERA first, before he comes to RERA. Because, RERA is meant not only for allottee but also for you," Kumar told developers. He noted that there are provisions in the RERA law where if somebody does not

pay on time, builders can cancel the allotment of units and move forward. Kumar cautioned that if builders do not act against such investors, their "financial cycle will be disrupted" and there will be stalled projects. The Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, known as RERA, was passed by Parliament in March 2016 and the legislation came into force on May 1, 2016, with 69 of 92 sections notified. The Real Estate Regulatory Authority

for the National Capital Territory of Delhi (Delhi-RERA) was established through a notification in November 2018. Kumar asked builders to comply with the provisions of the RERA law. He also spoke about the paucity of skilled and semi-skilled workforce in the real estate sector and said there is a need to provide training. "If we curb unauthorised development, then we can have 5,000 houses in the same land where we have 1,000 houses," Kumar said, adding that unauthorised colonies are a pain point in areas like Delhi, Noida, Gurugram. Sanjay Kulshrestha, Chairman and Managing Director of HUDCO, said around 3 per cent of country's land contributes to 60 per cent of GDP and stressed on the need for real estate developers to venture to non-metro and smaller centres.

Real-estate is the second largest employer after agriculture and is also one of the fastest growing sector, said Neel C Raheja, Chairman of CII National Committee on Real Estate and Housing and Group President of K Raheja Corp. "We are at the forefront of hiring people, training them and creating better livelihoods for them, he added. The real estate sector is pegged to be around 7.5 per cent of GDP, which is expected to grow to 15.5 per cent of GDP by 2047, Raheja said. In 2023, India has emerged as the office to the world, Sriram Khattar, Vice Chairman & Managing Director of DLF Rental Business, said. Khattar said the leasing of office space crossed 60 million square feet in 2023. "A milestone has been achieved. This firmly establishes the country's credentials as an office to the world," he added.

AN OASIS OF PEACE AND TRANQUILLITY

Discover the authentic rural life at Courtyard by Marriott Aravali Resort in the vicinity of Delhi



Nestled in the heart of the picturesque Aravali region in Haryana, Courtyard by Marriott Aravali Resort stands as a testament to the harmonious blend of modern comfort and natural beauty coupled with local flavours. This newly inaugurated haven offers an unparalleled experience for both business and leisure travelers seeking a respite from the bustling city life of nearby New Delhi. What is more it gives an authentic local experience. Spread across a unique 360-degree design layout, the resort boasts 158 spacious guest rooms, each offering breathtaking views of the panoramic Aravali ranges, verdant gardens, or the tranquil swimming pool. Whether it's a weekend escape or a brief stopover, guests are enveloped in luxury and tranquillity from the moment they arrive. For those seeking the perfect venue for weddings, social gatherings, or corporate events, the resort's expansive indoor and outdoor banquet spaces provide an ideal setting. With state-of-the-art technology and lush outdoor lawns spanning over 11,000 sq. ft., the possibilities are endless for creating memorable



moments amidst serene surroundings. Indulgence takes center stage at Courtyard by Marriott Aravali Resort, with an array of culinary delights awaiting guests at its four dining venues. From the lively ambiance of The Aravali Kitchen, offering a diverse selection of regional and international cuisines, to the exotic flavors of Huang, the Pan-Asian specialty restaurant, every dining experience is a journey of culinary discovery. Beyond gastronomic pleasures, guests

can rejuvenate their senses at the Levo Spa, featuring six treatment rooms and a range of holistic therapies administered by expert practitioners. Meanwhile, the three-tier swimming pool provides a refreshing oasis for relaxation and leisure. In addition to its luxurious accommodations and amenities, the resort offers an array of services tailored to enhance the guest experience. From pet-friendly offerings and collaborative lobby spaces to morning wellness activities and express laundry services, every aspect of the stay is designed to ensure comfort and convenience. Conveniently located less than an hour's drive from the Indira Gandhi International Airport, Courtyard by Marriott Aravali Resort is also in close proximity to several local attractions, including Damdama Lake, Sultanpur Bird Sanctuary, and Sariska Wildlife Sanctuary, inviting guests to explore the natural wonders of the region. Whether seeking a peaceful retreat, a memorable event venue, or a culinary adventure, Courtyard by Marriott Aravali Resort promises an unforgettable experience that epitomizes the essence of tranquillity, luxury, and hospitality.

“WE THINK GLOBAL BUT ACT LOCAL”

RAJNEESH KUMAR General Manager of Courtyard Marriott talked to **THE PIONEER** about the resort's USP and why it is a no-miss destination for people looking for an enjoyable retreat

Can you tell us what makes your resort stand out?
Absolutely. Firstly, our resort boasts a unique design and is considered an architectural marvel, attracting guests right from the start. Secondly, we prioritize providing our guests with an unforgettable experience, whether it's through our accommodations, dining options, or attentive service. At Courtyard Marriott, every individual is treated as a cherished guest, not just a customer, and we adhere to global standards of hygiene, service quality, and food offerings.

Who is your target clientele?
Typically, our guests come from the Delhi NCR region, although we do receive occasional bookings from abroad. Our resort seamlessly blends Marriott's expertise with local flavours, offering guests a glimpse into rural India while maintaining international standards. We work on the maxim of 'think global, act local.'

What kind of experience can guests expect during their stay at your resort?
Guests can anticipate an



How well-equipped are you to host conferences and large events like weddings?

Corporate gatherings and weddings are both within our expertise. We have extensive facilities for hosting conferences and seminars, and for weddings, we can accommodate large numbers of guests. In fact, we often reserve the entire resort for wedding parties to ensure an exclusive experience for the participants.

What types of cuisine do you offer to guests?

Our culinary offerings focus on authentic local cuisine that is both delicious and nutritious. Guests particularly enjoy our variety of parathas and other regional specialties.

Lastly, what message would you like to convey to our readers?

I would like to extend a heartfelt invitation to everyone to come and experience firsthand what our resort has to offer. We're confident that once you visit, you'll understand the unique charm and hospitality that sets us apart.

authentic rural experience. We meticulously plan their itineraries to include immersive rural activities such as pottery-making, rural trails, and traditional tasks like butter-making or milking cows. We have 'chaupal' where guests can intermingle, sit on charpais or cots. Our goal is to provide guests with a unique and memorable stay that reflects the charm of rural India.

BHUTAN ON MY PLATE

CHEF MICHAEL SWAMY was recently in the national capital to bring us a unique culinary extravaganza from Bhutan. **SHOBORI GANGULI** recounts her experience of the royal tastes from this remote Himalayan kingdom



Bhutan has been sitting in my travel bucket list for years. Unfortunate not to have found the time to soak in one of the world's most bountiful wonderland, on top of the Himalayas, I was naturally excited to settle for the next best option — Honk at the Pullman, Aerocity, Delhi, when they decided to celebrate a wholesome culinary journey through Bhutan with itinerant Chef Michael Swamy of Cottage Chef Culinaire. The incredibly gifted Chef, fondly known as “The Historian Chef”, has an impressive repertoire of cuisines. From Indo-Portugese to Bhutanese, right down to the remotest of India's wildlife reserves and sanctuaries, he keeps travelling from his base in Mumbai across the length and breadth of this country to bring the secret kitchens of India and its neighbourhood to mainstream fine dining tables. Chef Swamy is associated with the Bhutan based VEEN natural mineral water company. Although originating in Finnish Lapland, it was in the Kingdom of Bhutan in 2014 that the company found the purest waters in the world in the region's natural water springs located in the upper reaches of the Khana Bharti River in the foothills of the Himalayan district of Samtse. Chef Swamy had especially curated a seven course Royal Bhutanese meal for us though he admitted that he had to tone down the spicy accent of authentic Bhutanese cuisine to suit the north Indian palate. I was a wee bit disappointed because we in the South or the East of India love our spices. Anyway, what unfolded was a delectable culinary journey across the Himalayan kingdom. Unfortunately, for reasons I shall detail later, the first on the Chef's menu, a beverage called Top of the Mountain, a concoction of orange, fragrant mint leaves spicy jalapenos, herby coriander with lime and VEEN sparkling water never really reached my table.



Anyway the soup, Ema Datshi, Chef Swamy's version of Bhutan's national dish, served in a fresh baked bun, and topped with native red rice crisps was absolute heaven. This certainly would be one of the rarest soups I have ever tasted. The oven fresh bun sat dry in the centre of the soup dish, with a generous filling of finely chopped fresh vegetable in a creamy sauce. Then a delicately flavoured steaming hot creamy soup was gently poured over the bun as it flowed out into the soup dish, like lava erupting from a volcano. Awesome is too weak a word for Chef's Ema Datshi.



For Appetizers we had Chapale, fried flour and buckwheat pastries filled with lamb. Served with a spicy chilly relish, the lamb was just adequately spiced to make it a light starter. Then came the Momos, spicy yak milk cheese stuffed dumplings, steamed and drizzled with freshly made Himalayan morel oil. While all of us here in the north think of momos merely as stuffed and steamed dumplings, vegetarian or non vegetarian, Chef Swamy's momos were a work of art, the cheese and chicken stuffing simply melting in one's mouth. Then there were Chicken wings, crispy chicken tossed in a selection of North Eastern peppers and Himalayan honey. Although served again with a spicy relish, this tilted towards the sweeter side, courtesy the honey. Among the appetizers, Chef Swamy's momos were the clear winners. Yet again, unfortunately, the next on the Chef's menu, a Palate

Cleanser of Gondhoraj Sorbet never arrived on my table. Then there was an inordinate silence from the Chef's kitchen for about 25 minutes, reasons for which I shall detail soon. The main course followed shortly. There was Bak Thuk noodles with warm cherry tomato, potato beans and radish salad. Alongside came Butter Poached Himalayan Trout, the tender mountain fish poached with butter and spiced with mustard and Bhutanese podi. The butter and spices made this Himalayan delicacy really stand out. This was accompanied by Doh Siyar Nei-long, a chicken curry with ginger, garlic, chilli and black sesame paste served with short-grain black and white rice. The woodiness of the sesame stood out, embracing the succulent chicken with an outstanding flavour. Chef Swamy played the perfect host, pacing from one table to another through the evening, serving one royal Bhutanese dish after another.

As someone closely following the F&B industry's journey of innovative ideas to increase footfalls, I felt an airport hotel does not quite have the ambience required to curate a Roving Chef yet. At Pullman for, instance, while we were treated to a unique dining experience, there was a constant rush of passengers, national and international, jet lagged individuals dragging themselves to the coffee shop. Then there were conferences and events all over the place. Although the staff at Pullman's Honk was extremely polite, courteous and responsive, taking care of each and every guest, Chef Swamy's Bhutanese fare did get overwhelmed by some regular orders being thrown into the kitchen like egg fried rice and dimsums at some tables. As mentioned at the outset this explained the oversight on the Chef's VEEN sparkling water concoction of orange and lime as also the Palate Cleanser Gondhoraj Sorbet.



RAJASTHAN ROYALS NEED BETTER EXECUTION OF PLANS

PTI ■ MULLANPUR

A disappointed Rajasthan Royals will have to focus on better execution of their strategies for a swift turnaround when they face a highly inconsistent yet capable Punjab Kings in their Indian Premier League match here on Saturday. The Royals had an excellent chance to register their fifth win on the trot and consolidate their totem pole position, but Rashid Khan's daring assault helped Gujarat Titans snatch a last-ball victory on Wednesday. It might have come as a rude shock for the Royals at Fort Jaipur, and as such, they would want to treat it as an aberration and dish out a more refined outing against the Punjab side. But it also highlighted some muddled thinking. The Sanju Samson-led Rajasthan

outfit lost to the Titans because of the below-par effort from Kuldip Sen (19th over) and Avesh Khan (20th over) at a vital passage, when they conceded 35 runs across 12 balls. Here, the Royals made a slight tactical error by not letting Trent Boult complete his quota in that match as the veteran left-arm pacer ended the match at 2-0-8-0. There is no gainsaying that Boult could have made a change in the script, but Samson leaving that option unused was a tad perplexing. Of course, Boult has been largely used with the new ball in this iteration of the IPL, but in crunch situations nothing counts more than experience. So, the Royals will be looking for an improvement in the strategising and execution part against the Kings. The Shikhar Dhawan-captained



side has blown hot and cold so far in the tournament, winning two and losing three out of five matches. The primary reason for their middling run this year is the

patchy form of their fancied batsmen as Punjab relied on cameos by uncapped Shashank Singh and Ashutosh Sharma to boost their batting. Opener Jonny Bairstow (5

matches, 81 runs) and middle-order batter Jitesh Sharma (5 matches, 77 runs) are the most underwhelming of the lot, and it has robbed them of momentum upfront and in the business end of their innings. The absence of injured Liam Livingstone from the middle-order too has reduced their firepower, and Kings will hope to have the Englishman back in their ranks at the earliest. On the contrary, the Punjab bowlers have done marginally better, but their propensity to concede big runs while bowling first will be a concern. A group consisting of bowlers

such as Kagiso Rabada and Arshdeep Singh has given away 199, 199 and 182 runs in their last three matches and they will have to break the pattern against the Royals. It's easier said than done as the Royals' batting unit has been in good shape as 185 is the lowest total it posted while batting first. Outside the match calculations, the Royals will have another bigger worry to nullify. Over the last few editions of the IPL, the Royals had begun strongly, just as they did this year, before tapering off after the mid-season. As a result, they have managed to qualify for the play-offs only twice across the last six seasons. Royals would dearly hope that the defeat against GT was not the beginning of another meltdown. The Teams (from): Punjab Kings: Shikhar Dhawan (c), Matthew Short, Prabhsimran

Singh, Jitesh Sharma, Sikandar Raza, Rishi Dhawan, Liam Livingstone, Atharva Taide, Arshdeep Singh, Nathan Ellis, Sam Curran, Kagiso Rabada, Harpreet Brar, Rahul Chahar, Harpreet Bhatia, Vidwath Kaverappa, Shivam Singh, Harshal Patel, Chris Woakes, Ashutosh Sharma, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, Shashank Singh, Tanay Thyagarajann, Prince Choudhary, Rilee Rossouw. Rajasthan Royals: Sanju Samson (c), Jos Buttler, Shimron Hetmyer, Yashasvi 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.

Hardik enjoys challenges, fans will start loving him: Kishan

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Hardik Pandya might have been at the receiving end of fans' ire in this IPL, but Ishan Kishan has little doubt that the Mumbai Indians skipper is "enjoying the challenge" of winning them over. Pandya, who replaced Rohit

Sharma as the regular skipper of Mumbai before the start of this IPL, has been consistently getting booed by the spectators inside the stadium and the situation was no different on Thursday night when MI faced Royal Challengers Bengaluru. But he also found a small corner of supporters at the

Wankhede Stadium as MI registered a big win over RCB, and they were encouraged by star batter Virat Kohli. "He (Pandya) loves challenges, he has been in this situation before and he is in that situation right now. He is not someone who will come out and talk about it and say let's stop this or

that," Kishan told the media here after MI defeated RCB by seven wickets. "I know that he must be enjoying it. I know him personally. I have spent a lot of time with him. He is ready for the challenges because you cannot complain to the fans, they will come up with their explanations and their point of views," Kishan added.

It is in my muscle memory: Suryakumar on his audacious shots

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The world's number one T20 batter, Suryakumar Yadav attributed the audacious array of shots he played against Royal Challengers Bengaluru to "muscle memory" and constant practice at nets. Suryakumar dazzled with a 19-ball 52 studded with four sixes and five fours to help Mumbai Indians chase down RCB's 197-run target in just 15.3

overs. "I just try to play the field. I practice these shots. It is in my muscle memory," Suryakumar said after MI's seven-wicket win in the IPL on Thursday night. Asked about his favourite shot in the match against RCB, he said, "I think all the shots. The slice over point was my favourite." Suryakumar was playing in his second match of this IPL after recovering from a sports hernia surgery.

"It is always good to be back in Wankhede. Joining the squad was great. Mentally I was here, just physically in Bangalore (for recovery at NCA). "Coming at Wankhede, chasing 200, if there is dew it is important to take a chance. We wanted to finish early for the net run rate," said the 33-year-old. Asked about Jasprit Bumrah's five-wicket haul, Suryakumar said, "It is always good to have Jasprit by your side. It has been

2 to 3 years, have never batted Jasprit in the nets. Either he breaks my bat or my foot." On Ishan Kishan who make 69 off just 34 balls, he said, "That's what we have told him. Just go out and enjoy. His intent has been great. He is enjoying the fruits." Later in an interview with 'JioCinema', Suryakumar said whenever he came out to bat he would try to see how he could change the course of the game.

MORE SUMMER SPECIAL TRAINS-2024								
In addition to already announced Summer Special Trains, Railways will run following additional Summer Special Trains as per following details :-								
Spl. Train No.	Station From	Dept. Time	Station to	Arr. Time	Days of Run	Period	Trips	Accommodation
04075	New Delhi	23:45	Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra	11:40	Wednesday, Sunday	28.04.2024 to 30.06.2024	19	3 Tier AC (Economy) & Sleeper
04076	Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra	21:20	New Delhi	09:30	Thursday, Monday	29.04.2024 to 01.07.2024	19	
04080	Delhi Jn.	19:30	Varanasi	09:45	Monday, Thursday, Saturday	27.04.2024 to 29.06.2024	28	2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
04079	Varanasi	18:20	Delhi Jn.	08:50	Tuesday, Friday, Sunday	28.04.2024 to 30.06.2024	28	
04624	Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra	23:45	Varanasi	23:55	Sunday	21.04.2024 to 30.06.2024	11	2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC (Economy), Sleeper & General
04623	Varanasi	05:30	Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra	11:25	Tuesday	23.04.2024 to 02.07.2024	11	
04530	Bhatinda	20:50	Varanasi	17:30	Monday, Friday	26.04.2024 to 28.06.2024	19	3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
04529	Varanasi	20:40	Bhatinda	17:00	Tuesday, Saturday	27.04.2024 to 29.06.2024	19	
04553	Saharanpur	04:40	Ambala Cantt.	06:45	Daily	20.04.2024 to 30.06.2024	72	General
04554	Ambala Cantt.	20:20	Saharanpur	22:30	Daily	20.04.2024 to 30.06.2024	72	
04518	Chandigarh	23:15	Goarakhpur	18:20	Thursday	25.04.2024 to 27.06.2024	10	1st AC, 2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
04517	Goarakhpur	22:05	Chandigarh	14:10	Friday	26.04.2024 to 28.06.2024	10	
04068	Delhi	19:30	Darbhanga	16:30	Tuesday, Friday	26.04.2024 to 28.06.2024	19	3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
04067	Darbhanga	18:00	Delhi	16:40	Wednesday & Saturday	27.04.2024 to 29.06.2024	19	
04062	Delhi	08:50	Barauni	06:30	Sunday	28.04.2024 to 30.06.2024	10	3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
04061	Barauni	08:00	Delhi	07:35	Monday	29.04.2024 to 01.07.2024	10	
04028	Anand Vihar T.	11:10	Saharsa Jn.	11:20	Monday	29.04.2024 to 24.06.2024	09	3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
04027	Saharsa Jn.	09:30	Anand Vihar T.	13:55	Wednesday	01.05.2024 to 26.06.2024	09	
04060	Anand Vihar T.	10:30	Jaynagar	15:15	Tuesday, Friday	26.04.2024 to 28.06.2024	19	3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
04059	Jaynagar	17:00	Anand Vihar T.	19:55	Wednesday, Saturday	27.04.2024 to 29.06.2024	19	
04010	Anand Vihar T.	23:45	Jogbani	05:20	Tuesday	30.04.2024 to 25.06.2024	09	Sleeper & General
04009	Jogbani	09:00	Anand Vihar T.	16:05	Thursday	02.05.2024 to 27.06.2024	09	
04004	New Delhi	00:10	Sitamahi	22:00	Tuesday, Friday	26.04.2024 to 28.06.2024	19	Sleeper & General
04003	Sitamahi	23:30	New Delhi	01:30	Tuesday, Friday	26.04.2024 to 28.06.2024	19	
04656	Jammu Tawi	05:20	Udaipur	07:30	Thursday	25.04.2024 to 27.06.2024	10	3 Tier AC & AC Chair Car
04655	Udaipur	13:45	Jammu Tawi	15:10	Friday	26.04.2024 to 28.06.2024	10	
04058	Anand Vihar T.	23:15	Muzaffarpur	21:15	Monday, Thursday	29.04.2024 to 27.06.2024	18	Sleeper & General
04057	Muzaffarpur	23:00	Anand Vihar T.	23:30	Tuesday, Friday	30.04.2024 to 28.06.2024	18	
04310	Dehradun	11:00	Goarakhpur	01:30	Tuesday	23.04.2024 to 25.06.2024	10	2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
04309	Goarakhpur	14:55	Dehradun	08:30	Wednesday	24.04.2024 to 26.06.2024	10	
04312	Dehradun	11:00	Howrah	15:15	Thursday	25.04.2024 to 27.06.2024	10	2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
04311	Howrah	18:00	Dehradun	01:30	Friday	26.04.2024 to 28.06.2024	10	
04314	Dehradun	11:00	Muzaffarpur Jn.	07:00	Friday	26.04.2024 to 28.06.2024	10	2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
04313	Muzaffarpur Jn.	09:00	Dehradun	08:30	Saturday	27.04.2024 to 29.06.2024	10	
04680	Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra	21:30	Guwahati	19:10	Friday	26.04.2024 to 28.06.2024	10	3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
04679	Guwahati	23:20	Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra	20:45	Monday	29.04.2024 to 01.07.2024	10	
04682	Jammu Tawi	23:20	Kolkata	13:00	Tuesday	23.04.2024 to 25.06.2024	10	3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
04681	Kolkata	23:45	Jammu Tawi	12:30	Thursday	25.04.2024 to 27.06.2024	10	
05005	Goarakhpur Jn.	14:40	Amritsar	09:30	Wednesday	24.04.2024 to 26.06.2024	10	2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
05006	Amritsar	12:45	Goarakhpur Jn.	08:50	Thursday	25.04.2024 to 27.06.2024	10	
05049	Chhapra	09:55	Amritsar	09:30	Friday	26.04.2024 to 28.06.2024	10	2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
05050	Amritsar	12:45	Chhapra	14:00	Saturday	27.04.2024 to 29.06.2024	10	
05097	Tanakpur	18:25	Daurai	13:40	Monday, Wednesday, Friday	22.04.2024 to 28.06.2024	30	2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
05098	Daurai	16:05	Tanakpur	09:35	Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday	23.04.2024 to 29.06.2024	30	
05053	Goarakhpur Jn.	09:30	Bandra Terminus	18:00	Friday	19.04.2024 to 28.06.2024	11	General
05054	Bandra Terminus	21:15	Goarakhpur Jn.	06:25	Saturday	20.04.2024 to 29.06.2024	11	
05045	Lalkuan	13:10	Rajkot	18:10	Sunday	21.04.2024 to 30.06.2024	11	2 Tier AC 3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
05046	Rajkot	22:30	Lalkuan	04:05	Monday	22.04.2024 to 01.07.2024	11	
05303	Goarakhpur Jn.	08:30	Mahbubnagar	19:30	Saturday	20.04.2024 to 29.06.2024	11	3 Tier AC (Economy), Sleeper & General
05304	Mahbubnagar	18:00	Goarakhpur Jn.	09:00	Monday	22.04.2024 to 01.07.2024	11	
05636	Guwahati	18:15	Sri Ganganagar	03:30	Wednesday	01.05.2024 to 26.06.2024	09	2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper
05635	Sri Ganganagar	12:30	Guwahati	00:25	Sunday	05.05.2024 to 30.06.2024	09	

Spl. Train No.	Station From	Dept. Time	Station to	Arr. Time	Days of Run	Period	Trips	Accommodation
06071	Ernakulam Jn	19:10	New Delhi	19:00	Friday	19.04.2024 to 31.05.2024	07	2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
06072	New Delhi	05:10	Ernakulam Jn	03:10	Monday	22.04.2024 to 03.06.2024	07	
02191	Jabalpur	18:55	Haridwar	13:20	Wednesday	17.04.2024 to 31.07.2024	16	2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper
02192	Haridwar	16:20	Jabalpur	11:15	Thursday	18.04.2024 to 01.08.2024	16	
09097	Bandra Terminus	21:50	Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra	10:00	Sunday	21.04.2024 to 30.06.2024	11	3 Tier AC, AC Chair Car
09098	Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra	21:40	Bandra Terminus	10:10	Tuesday	23.04.2024 to 02.07.2024	11	
09525	Hapa	00:40	Naharlagun	16:00	Wednesday	17.04.2024 to 26.06.2024	11	2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
09526	Naharlagun	10:00	Hapa	00:30	Saturday	20.04.2024 to 29.06.2024	11	
09183	Mumbai Central	22:50	Banaras	10:30	Wednesday	17.04.2024 to 26.06.2024	11	1st AC, 2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC (Economy)
09184	Banaras	14:30	Mumbai Central	04:20	Friday	19.04.2024 to 28.06.2024	11	
09111	Vadodara	19:00	Gorakhpur	23:30	Monday	15.04.2024 to 24.06.2024	11	1st AC, 2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
09112	Gorakhpur	05:00	Vadodara	08:35	Wednesday	17.04.2024 to 26.06.2024	11	
09195	Vadodara	19:00	Mau	20:45	Saturday	20.04.2024 to 29.06.2024	11	1st AC, 2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
09196	Mau	23:15	Vadodara	00:45	Sunday	21.04.2024 to 30.06.2024	11	
09417	Ahmedabad	09:10	Danapur	20:30	Monday	15.04.2024 to 24.06.2024	11	2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
09418	Danapur	23:50	Ahmedabad	11:10	Tuesday	16.04.2024 to 25.06.2024	11	
09309	Indore	17:00	New Delhi	04:30	Friday, Sunday	19.04.2024 to 30.06.2024	22	2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
09310	New Delhi	07:30	Indore	20:15	Saturday, Monday	20.04.2024 to 01.07.2024	22	
09075	Mumbai Central	11:00	Kathgodam	14:30	Wednesday	24.04.2024 to 26.06.2024	10	2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
09076	Kathgodam	17:30	Mumbai Central	20:55	Thursday	25.04.2024 to 27.06.2024	10	
09189	Mumbai Central	10:30	Katihar	07:30	Saturday	20.04.2024 to 29.06.2024	11	2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
09190	Katihar	00:15	Mumbai Central	18:40	Tuesday	23.04.2024 to 02.07.2024	11	
09407	Bhuj	17:00	Delhi Sarai Rohilla	12:20	Tuesday, Friday	30.04.2024 to 28.06.2024	17	2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
09408	Delhi Sarai Rohilla	15:00	Bhuj	11:30	Wednesday, Saturday	01.05.2024 to 29.06.2024	17	
05115	Chhapra	17:45	Anand Vihar T.	11:50	Wednesday	01.05.2024 to 26.06.2024	09	1st AC, 2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
05116	Anand Vihar T.	14:45	Chhapra	09:30	Thursday	02.05.2024 to 27.06.2024	09	
05023	Gorakhpur	21:15	Anand Vihar T.	13:15	Sunday	28.04.2024 to 30.06.2024	10	2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
05024	Anand Vihar T.	15:15	Gorakhpur	07:30	Monday	29.04.2024 to 01.07.2024	10	
05047	Banaras	19:20	Anand Vihar T.	09:30	Tuesday	30.04.2024 to 25.06.2024	09	3 Tier AC
05048	Anand Vihar T.	18:15	Banaras	08:10	Wednesday	01.05.2024 to 26.06.2024	09	
05193	Chhapra	15:20	Panvel	20:30	Thursday	18.04.2024 to 27.06.2024	11	3 Tier AC (Economy), Sleeper & General
05194	Panvel	21:40	Chhapra	08:50	Friday	19.04.2024 to 28.06.2024	11	
03255	Patna Jn.	22:20	Anand Vihar T.	15:00	Sunday, Thursday	14.04.2024 to 30.06.2024	21	2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC (Economy), Sleeper
03256	Anand Vihar T.	23:20	Patna Jn.	17:20	Monday, Friday	15.04.2024 to 01.07.2024	21	
02391	Patna Jn.	22:20	Anand Vihar T.	15:00	Saturday	13.04.2024 to 29.06.2024	11	2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
02392	Anand Vihar T.	23:20	Patna Jn.	17:20	Sunday	14.04.2024 to 30.06.2024	11	
03257	Danapur	07:30	Anand Vihar T.	00:30	Sunday	14.04.2024 to 30.06.2024	11	2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
03258	Anand Vihar T.	05:00	Danapur	20:45	Monday	15.04.2024 to 01.07.2024	11	
03227	Ara Jn.	15:45	Anand Vihar T.	07:15	Monday, Wednesday, Friday	15.04.2024 to 28.06.2024	30	Sleeper & General
03228	Anand Vihar T.	09:30	Ara Jn.	04:00	Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday	16.04.2024 to 29.06.2024	30	
05565	Saharsa Jn.	19:30	Sirhind Jn.	00:05	Thursday	18.04.2024 to 27.06.2024	11	General
05566	Sirhind Jn.	02:00	Saharsa Jn.	09:45	Saturday	20.04.2024 to 29.06.2024	11	
05531	Raxaul Jn.	22:25	Anand Vihar T.	18:20	Sunday	14.04.2024 to 30.06.2024	11	2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
05532	Anand Vihar T.	20:00	Raxaul Jn.	14:30	Monday	15.04.2024 to 01.07.2024	11	
07651	Jalna	23:30	Chhapra	05:30	Wednesday	Upto 26.06.2024	11	2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
07652	Chhapra	22:15	Jalna	04:00	Friday	Upto 28.06.2024	11	
03575	Asansol	10:15	Anand Vihar T.	08:05	Friday	19.04.2024 to 28.06.2024	11	2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
03576	Anand Vihar T.	10:15	Asansol	10:20	Saturday	20.04.2024 to 29.06.2024	11	
03435	Malda Town	09:30	Anand Vihar T.	14:10	Monday	15.04.2024 to 24.06.2024	11	2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
03436	Anand Vihar T.	15:45	Malda Town	23:30	Tuesday	16.04.2024 to 25.06.2024	11	
03107	Sealdah	00:10	Lucknow	00:10	Saturday	20.04.2024 to 29.06.2024	11	1st AC, 2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC
03108	Lucknow	01:40	Sealdah	23:50	Sunday	21.04.2024 to 30.06.2024	11	
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