



OPINION 6
IGNORING NEIGHBOURS TO
EMBRACE THE WORLD

WORLD 8
SUNAK FACES RESISTANCE OVER
SMOKING BAN PLANS

MONEY 10
MARKETS SLUMP
FOR THIRD DAY

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Modi, Mamata faceoff in Bengal



(Left to right): Prime Minister Narendra Modi with BJP candidate Sukanta Majumdar during a public meeting ahead of Lok Sabha elections, in Balurghat and West Bengal on Tuesday; Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during an election campaign rally ahead of Lok Sabha polls, at Hill Cart road in Siiliguri on Tuesday

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Bengal witnessed a virtual duel between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee even as the former accused the Bengal Government of stopping Ram Navami celebrations and honouring those who throw stones at Ram Navami processions while the latter asked the people, particularly the minorities not to walk into the trap of the BJP which is trying to trigger communal riots in Bengal. The Prime Minister, who was addressing election rallies at Balurghat and Raiganj in North Bengal, alleged how the Bengal administration has been doing everything to spike the Ram Navami celebrations.

“Tomorrow the entire nation goes to celebrate the Ram Navami ... but here the Trinamool Congress has always tried to stop it from taking place in Bengal ... they tried many conspiracies. And we were forced to get permission from the High Court and tomorrow, with devotion and faith, we will celebrate Ram Navami,” the Prime Minister said. “It has always been that the TMC stops such religious programmes and promotes and honours those people who throw stones at these processions,” he said.

However, the Chief Minister hit back from a rally at Moinaguri in Jalpaiguri district asking people to remain alert against the “evil designs of the BJP to trigger riots in the name of festivals.” In a statement that most Opposition parties, including the BJP read as a bid to act the messiah of the Muslims before elections, Mamata said, “Bengal is for every religion but here are some people who are trying to play communal politics by triggering riots I ask the people, particularly my minority brothers and

sisters to keep your cool and do not walk into the trap laid by them ... some people are spreading fake videos ... some may raise slogans ... but if you hear such slogans keep your cool and pray to Allah so that things pass off without fuss ... because Ram Navami is a festival of mutual respect and honour.” The BJP sends NIA in Bengal to disturb and victimise the innocent people, she said. Earlier the High Court had allowed Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Anjani Putra Sena to take out processions,

but under certain conditions, the maximum participants should not be more than 200 and that there would be no play of arms or DJs. Tuesday’s development came against the backdrop of weeks’ long riots at Howrah, Serampore and Dalkhola in the days following Ram Navami. The Modi-Mamata spar came at a time when in a major development the Jadavpur University authorities on Tuesday allowed the celebrations of Ram Navami at the campus even as sources said “if Saraswati Puja can be organised why Ram Navami cannot be celebrated here.” This is the first time that such

celebrations would be allowed inside the campus. Elsewhere in North Bengal the Chief Minister warned the people against the Citizenship Amendment Act, comparing it with the head of a big fish which has a tail in the National Register of Citizens. “If it is a big fish then the CAA is the head and NRC is the tail and the Uniform Civil Code is its torso,” Mamata said accusing the BJP government of playing “dirty politics of polarisation.” Attacking the Centre for “defaming Bengal with allegations of corruption,” she demanded a white paper to be released on the issue.

Chhattisgarh encounter leaves 29 Naxals dead

PTI ■ KANKER

At least 29 Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security personnel in Chhattisgarh’s Kanker district on Tuesday, police officials said. Three security personnel suffered injuries in the fierce gun-battle and a large quantity of weapons was also recovered from the spot, they said. The gunfight took place at around 2 pm in Hapatola forest between Binagunda and Koronar villages under Chhotethi police station limits, when a joint team of the Border Security Force (BSF) and the state police’s District Reserve Guard (DRG) was out on an anti-Naxal operation. Inspector General of Police (Bastar Range) Sundarraj P said. The operation was launched based on inputs about the presence of senior cadres of north Bastar division of the outlawed CPI (Maoist) Shankar, Lalita, Raju and others, he said. During patrolling in the area, a fierce gun-battle broke out between the two sides, the senior IPS officer said. “Bodies of 29 Maoists along with a huge cache of weapons, including AK-47, SLR, Insas and .303 rifles, were recovered from the spot,” the IG said. Polling in the Naxalite-hit



Bastar Lok Sabha seat will take place on April 19 in the first phase, while the Kanker constituency, part of the Bastar region, will vote in the second round of general elections on April 26. The search operation was still underway in the area amid intermittent firing between security personnel and Naxalites, said Sundarraj. “Three security personnel sustained injuries in the gunfight and their condition was stated to be out of danger,” he said, adding they were referred to hospital for treatment. After the latest encounter, 79 Naxalites have been killed in separate gun-battles with security forces in the Bastar region, comprising seven districts, including Kanker, so far this year. On April 2, as many as 13 Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security forces in Bijapur district.

MNREGA workers turn into political campaigners

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

In an unexpected turn during the Uttar Pradesh (UP) election season, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) workers are witnessing heightened demand, not for their traditional manual labour, but as foot soldiers for political campaigns. This trend has ignited a discourse on the exploitation of these workers for political purposes, not by a particular party but by parties of all hues. Typically earning around ₹250 per day for their labour, MGNREGA workers are now being tempted into election rallies and canvassing with promises of ₹300 wages, supplemented with three meals a day and even evening liquor. The surge in pay, coupled with additional perks, has resulted in a scarcity of MGNREGA workers willing to partake in their usual tasks, such as pond digging or rural development work, across various regions of UP. Raja Bhैया, head of the Vidya Dham Samiti NGO in Banda, UP, noted that in the Bundelkhand region, these workers are engaged in election campaigns for as low as ₹200-250 per day. “They are attracted by the promise of three meals a day and evening liquor. And this is sufficient incentive for them to work at lower rates,” he told The Pioneer, adding “these workers are doubling up as political karyakarta”. Sukhai Ram, a MGNREGA job card holder, was assigned to work on a pond and culvert construction project in Gram Sabha Karonda, Barabanki, but has declined, citing the allure of higher wages and “shaam ki diwai,” referring to alcohol. The Department of Rural Development



in Lucknow has received complaints from several districts regarding the disruption of MGNREGA work due to elections. “Labour shortages are common during elections. Diversion is inevitable, and the Government has limited control over it,” a senior official informed. These workers are tasked with carrying election materials, waving flags at rallies, and participating in roadshows. The exploitation of MGNREGA workers for political ends has drawn condemnation from various quarters, raising concerns about the moral implications of such practices. Political analyst Dr Rajesh Sharma remarked, “The exploitation of MGNREGA workers for election purposes raises serious ethical questions. These vulnerable workers are being lured with temporary benefits to serve political interests, undermining the essence of the employment guarantee scheme.” This issue has reignited debates about

the efficacy of MGNREGA in combating rural unemployment and poverty, with some arguing that the scheme’s objectives are being compromised for short-term political gains. The ramifications of this trend are evident on the ground, as rural development projects suffer from labour shortages, impacting the pace and quality of work in various UP regions. In response to criticism, political parties have defended their actions, citing the need for manpower during election campaigns and asserting that they are providing job opportunities to MGNREGA workers. “With soaring temperatures exceeding 40 degrees Celsius, people prefer staying indoors. We require foot soldiers and have recruited some from villages,” stated Rupesh Kumar, a BJP leader, although he claimed ignorance about whether these recruits are MGNREGA workers.

Jailed Kejriwal, Sisodia and Jain: AAP’s Star Campaigners

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

On a day the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) took a cue from a Bollywood movie and pronounced “My name is Arvind Kejriwal and I am not a terrorist”, it has named top leaders who are in jail, including the Chief Minister as the star campaigners for the forthcoming Lok Sabha polls, in apparent push to its ‘Jail ka Jawab Vote Se’ campaign. AAP leader and a Rājya Sabha member Sanjay Singh said the AAP convener has shared his message “...Kejriwal...not a terrorist...” from Tihar Jail and slammed the BJP for the treatment being meted out to him in custody. The AAP on Tuesday announced a list of 40 star campaigners in Gujarat which also mentioned the names of Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia, Satyendar Jain all of whom are imprisoned, as the party’s star campaigner in Gujarat ahead of the Lok Sabha elections 2024. The list includes names of Kejriwal’s wife Sunita Kejriwal, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, Raghav Chadha, Isudan Gadhvi, Atishi, Saurabh



Bharadwaj, Pankaj Gupta, Gopal Rai, Kailash Gahlot, Imran Hussain and Alpesh Kathiriya. However, names of Rājya Sabha MPs Harbhajan Singh who is also an ace cricketer and Swati Maliwal are missing from the list. Meanwhile, the Delhi BJP targeted the AAP over the inclusion of Sunita Kejriwal’s name in the list of its star campaigners. “Along with corruption, nepotism is also welcome in the AAP,” said Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva. Notably, Harbhajan Singh is currently busy in IPL 2024. On Tuesday, the party kicked off a mega campaign called Jail ka Jawab vote se Sankalp Sabha.

Congress leads in complaints to EC

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Amid allegations by Opposition parties that the Government is misusing probe agencies to target its leaders, the Election Commission on Tuesday shared a data saying around 200 complaints have been filed by various political parties and candidates across States. The Congress is the top in the list of filing complaints to the EC, followed by the BJP for violation of Model Code of Conduct. According to the EC, the BJP has filed 51 complaints, of them, action has been taken in 38 cases while the Congress filed 59 and action taken on 51 cases. Several political parties from the INDIA Bloc had approached the poll panel seeking its intervention in the alleged misuse of probe agencies by the Government to target their leaders over graft.

Following the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal by the Enforcement Directorate in a money laundering case linked to the alleged excise scam, the Opposition parties had mounted renewed attack on the Government for its alleged bid to silence their leaders ahead of parliamentary elections. According to the EC, suo motu removal of officers holding dual charges as Principal Secretaries to Chief Ministers in six States namely Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand, as they were holding charge of Home/ General Administration department also. This was to distance election related senior officers with control over, DMs/DEOs/ROs and SPs, from Chief Minister’s offices.

Aditya tops UPSC exams, Animesh second, Donuru third

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

The announcement of civil services results 2023 on Tuesday stirred up more excitement than usual. Social media platforms were agog with compliments, best wishes, filmy dialogues, gyan and pravachan on the mother of all examinations conducted by Public Services Commission (UPSC). Led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, his entire Council of Ministers, BJP contestants in the Lok Sabha, other political figures from ruling and Opposition sides were first time on the same page wishing the toppers and successful candidates who cleared the exams held last year.

In fact the UPSC results were trending on various media platforms. Aditya Srivastava, originally selected for the Indian Police Services (IPS) last year, added another feather to his cap as he secured the top rank in the UPSC Civil Services Examination 2023. Hailing from Lucknow, Srivastava’s journey has been remarkable, characterised by his stint in the corporate world before pursuing civil services, reflecting his resilience and dedication. Joining Srivastava in this remarkable achievement are Animesh Pradhan from Odisha, a Bachelor of Technology degree holder in computer science from NIT Rourkela, and Telangana

native Donuru Ananya Reddy, a graduate from Delhi University’s Miranda House College with a degree in geography, securing the second and third ranks respectively. Soon after the results were announced, Modi congratulated those who cleared the examination, emphasising their hard work, perseverance, and dedication. “I congratulate all those who have successfully cleared the Civil Services Examination, 2023. Their hard work, perseverance and dedication has paid off, marking the start of a promising career in public service. Their efforts will shape the future of our nation in the times to come. My best wishes to them,” the



(Left to right): Aditya Srivastava (All India Rank (AIR) 1), Uttar Pradesh; Animesh Pradhan (AIR 2), Odisha’s and Donuru Ananya Reddy (AIR 3), Telangana

Prime Minister wrote on X (previously Twitter). Senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi too joined in congratulating the candidates, “Congratulations to all the candidates who have successfully cleared this year’s UPSC Civil Services Examination. With dedication and commitment, you are now entrusted with the responsibility of serving our great country. My best wishes for your future endeavours.” Among the 1,016 recommended candidates, comprising 664 men and 352 women, the top five positions are evenly distributed, with three men and two women. An IPS trainee from Kerala PK Sidharth Ramkumar

secured the fourth rank with anthropology as his optional subject, while a Gurugram resident Ruhani secured the fifth rank with economics as her optional subject. Among the top 25 candidates, there are 10 women and 15 men, reflecting a diverse range of educational backgrounds, including engineering, humanities, science, commerce, business administration, architecture, and law from premier institutions such as IIT, IIM, NIT, University of Delhi, and National Law University. The selected candidates also include 30 people with benchmark disabilities, reflecting the UPSC’s commitment to inclusivity.

MANDATE 2024

Compare work done by Cong with our work, re-elect Modi to third term: Shah

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Union Home minister Amit Shah came down heavily on the Congress while comparing the work done during 10 years under the UPA government and the work done during 10 years under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Addressing a public gathering in Kotdwar in support of the Bharatiya Janata Party's Garhwal Lok Sabha candidate Anil Baluni on Tuesday, Shah said that if the BJP lets in all the Congress leaders wanting to join it, probably only the party's office will be left.

Targeting the opposition he told the people to ask the Congress why it doesn't give an account of the works it had done. "I am a Baniya, I have an account of the works. During the 10 years under Sonia Gandhi and Manmohan Singh, the Congress at the Centre gave a total of Rs 53,000 crore to Uttarakhand. During the 10 years under PM Modi, Uttarakhand received Rs 1,66,000 crore in grants plus Rs 82,000 crore for infra-structural development. To stop the problem of migration in Uttarakhand, tourism needs to be developed. The Modi government gave Rs 12,000 crore 900 kilometre long Char Dham all-weather road project, the Rs 8,000 crore Delhi-Dehradun economic corridor and recently about 30 national highway projects were unveiled on which Rs 5,000 crore will be spent," he said.

Referring to Ramnavmi to be celebrated on Wednesday Shah said, "This will be the first time in 500 years when Lord Ram's birthday will be celebrated in a grand temple and not in a tent. The Congress stalled the resolution of this case for decades while the Modi government facilitated its solution and construction of the temple in five years." He recalled that since the Jan Sangh days, the implementation of the Uniform Civil Code in the nation has been a major agenda of the BJP, appreciating chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami for implementing the UCC first in Uttarakhand. Stating that every fourth armyman hails from Uttarakhand, Shah said that Indira Gandhi had promised one rank one pension to the servicemen but the Congress failed to implement it in 40 years. The Modi government fulfilled this promise and deposited Rs 70,000 crore in the accounts of army families. Exhorting the public to vote for the BJP candidate he said that every vote to the BJP candidate is a vote for Modi. Re-electing PM Modi to a third term will ensure a Viksit Bharat, enable India to become the world's third largest economy and empower three

Hard working Dhami leading BJP's campaign in U'khand

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami has so far addressed 88 public gatherings and road shows across the State in support of the BJP candidates in all the five Lok Sabha constituencies. Though the ruling BJP has pushed many of its star campaigners including the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home minister Amit Shah, Defence minister Rajnath Singh, BJP national president JP Nadra, Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath and Union MoS general (ret'd) V K Singh in the election campaign of Uttarakhand, it is the State CM Dhami who is actually spearheading the campaign in Uttarakhand.

It is learnt that all the five candidates of BJP in the State had demanded that CM Dhami should hold public meetings and rallies in their support. His supporters point out that a series of decisions such as Uniform Civil Code (UCC), anti riot law, action against land jihad and anti-conversion law have made Dhami popular not only within the State but also outside it.

It is pertinent to mention here that Dhami was in election mode even before the declaration of Lok Sabha elections. Before the enforcement of model code of conduct (MCC) and announcement of election dates, the Uttarakhand CM had addressed Nari Shakti Vandan programmes and beneficiary conclaves in all the 13 districts of the State.

After the end of campaigning in the State, the CM will head to other states to campaign in support of party candidates.



crore women to become Lakhpati Didis. Shah said, "The Congress ignored the border villages while we rolled out the Vibrant Village programme to develop these villages. It is Modi's guarantee that the villages along the border with China will have more population in five years than they had in 1980. We abrogated Article 370 from Jammu and Kashmir. The Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge asks what do the people in Rajasthan and Uttarakhand have to do with Kashmir. I tell him that brave Garhwali soldiers in large numbers have shed their blood serving the nation in Kashmir. Under the Congress, the terrorists used to explode bombs in J&K and then run back to Pakistan. They carried out the Uri and Pulwama attacks thinking that nothing would be done but within 10 days, surgical and air strikes were carried out and the terrorists were eliminated."

Referring to various developments achieved by the Modi government, he said that more than 80 crore card holders are being provided free ration, more than 12 crore toilets have been built, four crore homes have been built for the poor and three crore more will be built in Modi's third term. Speaking about the free cooking gas connections provided under the Ujjwala Yo-

Maintaining original & historical form of Joshimath government's priority: Dhami

PNS ■ JOSHIMATH

Chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami said that maintaining the original and historical form of Joshimath is a priority of the Central and State governments. With the cooperation of the Centre, the State has received a sum of Rs 1,700 crore for reconstruction and development in Joshimath, he said. Dhami was addressing the public in support of the BJP's Garhwal Lok Sabha candidate Anil Baluni at Joshimath in Chamoli district on Tuesday.



Dhami said that as a Rajya Sabha member, Baluni had facilitated various works for this region. "During the disaster, I had myself camped in Joshimath and talked to the people in all the camps and the hospital. Joshimath is the land of Narsinh Devta and Adi Shankaracharya, in addition to being historically and strategically important. PM Narendra Modi and Home minister Amit Shah are concerned about maintaining the original and historical form of Joshimath and Rs 1,700 crore was received from the Centre for reconstruction, new constructions and development works here.

Whatever work is needed for Joshimath will be undertaken on a priority basis," he said.

Stating that PM Modi had visited Chamoli district on various occasions, he said that reconstruction works are underway in Badrinath while roadworks till Mana are also underway. Dhami said that a considerable difference has been made in the lives of the people due to the developments facilitated by the Modi government. He referred to the tap water, cooking gas connections and free medical treatment costing upto Rs five lakh in a year being facilitated for citizens.

Indo-Nepal border sealed in U'khand ahead of Lok Sabha elections

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The police sealed the Indo-Nepal border in Uttarakhand on Tuesday and closed cross-border movement for people till 6 PM on April 19 ahead of polling in the Lok Sabha elections. Besides this, the police have also deployed about 40,000 police personnel and paramilitary forces for security arrangements across the State, the additional director general of police (Crime, Law and Order) and the State police nodal officer for the election, AP Anshuman said. He said that the Centre has sent 65 companies of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) which have been deployed across the State as per the requirement. However, the police had sought 115 CAPF companies to ensure proper security arrangements during elections. Besides this, the Centre has also sent 14,300 home guards from neighbouring states for security arrangements. The ADG said that about 20,000 police personnel of the State have also been de-

ployed to ensure security, law and order during the elections. He said that the police have also deployed sufficient forces on 809 vulnerable booths and 1,365 critical booths. The category of vulnerable booths includes those booths in which some incidents have taken place during elections in the past that disrupted the election process. The critical booths include those that experienced less than 10 per cent voting in the past elections. Besides this, those booths that witnessed more than 90 per cent of voting out of which more than 75 per cent voting was in favour of a single candidate also fall under critical booths. The police have made all arrangements in such booths as per the guidelines of the Election Commission of India, Anshuman said. Besides this, he added that the police are continuously conducting intensive checking campaigns at about 93 checkpoints while ensuring proper surveillance through drones in many sensitive areas.



चुनाव का पर्व
DESH KA GARV
Lok Sabha Election 2024

मोटर करेगा
उत्तराखण्ड
19 अप्रैल 2024

मेरा और आपका पहला काम

बूथ में जाकर करें मतदान

19 अप्रैल - प्रातः 7 बजे से सायं 5 बजे तक

कोई भी मतदाता ना छूटे

पद्मश्री डॉ. प्रीतम सिंह भरतवाण (स्टेट आर्डिकन, निर्वाचन) | पद्मश्री कल्याण सिंह रावत "मैती" (स्टेट आर्डिकन, निर्वाचन)

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	मनरेगा जॉब कार्ड		आधार कार्ड
	पैन कार्ड		डाईविंग लाइसेंस
	पासपोर्ट		बैंक/डाकघर द्वारा जारी फोटोयुक्त पासबुक
	फोटोयुक्त सेवा पहचान पत्र		फोटोयुक्त पेंशन दस्तावेज
	स्वास्थ्य बीमा स्मार्ट कार्ड (श्रम मंत्रालय)		विशेष विकलांगता आईडी (यूडीआईडी) कार्ड
	एनपीआर के तहत आरजीआई द्वारा जारी स्मार्ट कार्ड		सांसदों/विधायकों/एमएलसी को जारी किये गये आधिकारिक पहचान-पत्र

दिव्यांग, वरिष्ठ नागरिक एवं गर्भवती महिला को लाइन में लगे बिना मतदान की सुविधा



निर्वाचन संबंधी विभिन्न सूचनाओं हेतु
CEO उत्तराखण्ड के ऑफिशियल
WhatsApp चैनल को फॉलो करें

मुख्य निर्वाचन अधिकारी, उत्तराखण्ड
Chief Electoral Officer, Uttarakhand

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Contribute fully in 400 seats goal: PM to Bengal

Prime Minister Narendra Modi resumed his electoral campaign in North Bengal once again giving out a 400-seat-call so as to enable him translate his "trailer" of a performance into a full-fledged act of making India the third largest economic power in the world.



administration ... the corruption in the primary school teachers' recruitment is a big example." Saying that every raid by the central agencies in the houses of ministers and TMC leaders yielded crores of rupees the Prime Minister said how "even the investigating agencies are not spared by the Trinamool Congress goons who attack and injure them when they come in search of operations."

AAP announces final list of four more candidates in Punjab

The Aam Aadmi Party on Tuesday announced its final list of four more candidates in Punjab for the Lok Sabha polls, fielding three legislators and a turncoat. With this announcement, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has declared its candidates for all 13 parliamentary seats in Punjab.



three party MLAs - ?Jagdeep Singh Kaka Brar from the Ferozepur Lok Sabha seat, Amansher Singh Kalsi from Gurdaspur and Ashok Parashar Pappi from the Ludhiana parliamentary seat. Brar is an MLA from Muktsar. He had defeated SAD nominee Kanwaljit Singh in the 2022 assembly polls. Brar had unsuccessfully contested the 2017 assembly polls.

RLD joining BJP will not impact Muzaffarnagar Lok Sabha elections: INDIA Bloc candidate

Jayant Chaudhary-led Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) switched sides to leave the INDIA bloc and align with the BJP. The move left many in the region surprised. In the 2019 polls, Balyan had defeated Chaudhary's father and former RLD chief Ajit Singh by a close margin of around 5,000 votes.



Muzaffarnagar police during the 2019 elections, including one related to an attack on the convoy of Jayant Chaudhary's wife Charu Chaudhary. He said the villagers who protected the convoy were

may align with anyone he wants to. Now even Farooq Abdullah is praising the BJP. But the truth is that supporters of Chaudhary Charan Singh are with us," Malik claimed.

JD(S) seeks EC action over alleged security lapse at meet attended by Deve Gowda

The JD(S) on Tuesday approached the Election Commission over the alleged security lapse at an event presided by former Prime Minister and party patriarch H D Deve Gowda here and sought the suspension of police officials responsible for it.

EVMs airlifted to four remote polling booths in Arunachal

The first batch of 40 election officials including police personnel were airlifted to four remote polling stations in Arunachal Pradesh's Kra Daadi district to conduct polling for the simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in the north-eastern state on April 19, an official said on Tuesday.

Paper Audit Trails (VVPATs) were airlifted on Monday to the polling stations located at Pip-Sorang Circle in the remote district bordering China, the official said. "They were airlifted in two sorties by an MI-172 chopper operated in the state by Skyone Airways," Toko Babu, officer on special duty (OSD) to the state's Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), said on Tuesday.

BJP had won the seat uncontested this time. Each polling team consists of 10 persons on an average including, a presiding officer, two polling officers, one polling attendant besides, security personnel, the official said, and added that the four polling stations in the Pip-Sorang circle include, Tedung, Pip-Sorang, Kharsang and Korapu. The OSD added that remaining polling stations in the state, which require the polling teams to undertake a foot march, will



BJP candidates in North and South Goa seats file nomination

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidates Shripad Naik and Pallavi Dempo on Tuesday filed their nominations for elections to the North Goa and South Goa seats respectively. Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant, who accompanied Naik and Dempo during the filing of their nominations, expressed confidence that the BJP will win both the seats in the coastal state by huge margins.

Rahul attacks Modi

Senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday lashed out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, accusing him of helping a few rich businessmen in the country. Gandhi also attacked Modi over the electoral bond issue, terming it as a form of extortion where the intimidatory tactics are "much more sophisticated" as central agencies like the CBI, ED and Income Tax Department are deployed against the targeted businessmen.

SP's Dimple files nomination from Mainpuri seat

Samajwadi Party (SP) leader Dimple Yadav filed her nomination papers from the Mainpuri Lok Sabha seat here on Tuesday. The sitting Mainpuri MP was accompanied by SP chief and her husband Akhilesh Yadav, and senior party leaders Shivpal Singh Yadav and Ram Gopal Yadav.

ter also used the occasion to hit out at the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). "BJP is a party which tells lies, all its promises are lies. MPs are not able to tell about their achievements," he said, adding the manner in which inflation is at its peak and there is unemployment, people are fed up of all this and are going to vote against them.

Dempo is pitted against Viriato Fernandes of the Congress

North Goa MP Shripad Naik filed his papers at the collectorate in state capital Panaji in the presence of CM Sawant and Tanavade. Naik said he is getting an overwhelming response from voters and has completed one round of campaigning. The parliamentarian is pitted against Congress candidate Ramakant Khalap.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Shower of blessings

For the first time in a decade, IMD predicts above-normal rainfall across the nation

The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has marked a significant milestone by releasing its long-term forecast. For the first time in a decade, the IMD has predicted above-average rainfall across almost the entire expanse of the country. This forecast carries profound implications for various sectors, ranging from agriculture to water resource management and beyond. Policymakers and farmers will welcome this news, although ordinary individuals may find themselves contending with a more pronounced monsoon season than usual. It would indeed be a sigh of relief for all farmers. The agricultural sector, which forms the backbone of India's economy, is heavily reliant on timely and adequate rainfall. Adequate precipitation is essential for the cultivation of crops and the sustenance of agricultural activities. With an anticipated surplus in rainfall, farmers can expect better soil moisture levels, leading to improved crop yields. Additionally, the forecast offers them an opportunity to plan their cropping patterns and maximise agricultural output. Besides, India's water resources are intricately linked to the monsoon patterns. Above-normal rainfall augurs well for the replenishment of reservoirs, lakes and groundwater aquifers. It provides the much-needed boost to water levels, especially in regions grappling with water scarcity. Adequate rainfall can alleviate the stress on water resources, ensuring better availability for domestic, industrial and agricultural purposes. A bountiful monsoon also facilitates the generation of hydroelectric power, thus contributing to the energy sector.



However, it may be too early to celebrate a normal or above-normal monsoon. Weather forecasts are probabilistic in nature; even a good monsoon across the country is a rare occurrence. While above-normal rainfall brings several benefits, it also presents certain challenges. Excessive precipitation can lead to flooding, particularly in low-lying areas and regions prone to inundation. Flooding not only causes damage to property and infrastructure but also poses risks to human life. Therefore, authorities must undertake pre-emptive measures such as strengthening infrastructure, improving drainage systems and implementing effective flood management strategies. Heavy rainfall increases the risk of soil erosion and landslides, particularly in hilly terrains. Adequate soil conservation measures and afforestation efforts are essential to mitigate these risks and safeguard vulnerable ecosystems. Also, authorities need to ensure efficient water management practices to prevent wastage and optimise the utilisation of water resources. The IMD's forecast heralds promising prospects for farmers to enhance productivity and for authorities to address water scarcity concerns. By adopting a comprehensive approach that combines preparedness, conservation and sustainable practices, India can harness the benefits of abundant rainfall while minimising associated risks, paving the way for socio-economic development and environmental sustainability.

PICTALK



Devotees stand in a queue to offer prayers at Dakshineswar Kali Temple on Bengali New Year, in Kolkata

Ignoring neighbours to embrace the world



ASHOK K MEHTA

The BJP Government has put Neighbourhood First Policy on backburner, leaving it underperforming amid rising anti-India sentiments in the region

BJP government has made foreign policy a key election issue: Prime Minister Modi has stated, 'Neighbour first and Act East second.' Foreign Minister S Jaishankar is campaigning how G20 has enhanced India's image and influence as a global player. Quest for High Table has shifted focus from Neighbourhood First Policy (NFP). S Jaishankar explained that politics can go up and down in neighbourhood but people generally have good feelings for India. That is certainly not the ground reality today when in almost every country, anti-India feeling is prevalent. NFP which was formally launched in 2008, has not performed optimally due to internal and external factors. Act East appended later has also failed to take off. Followed several add-ons: *sab ka saath sab ka vikas*; SAGAR; Vishva Mitra; First Security Responder and so on.

Former Minister Jaswant Singh in his book *Defending India*, has noted that India is strategically confined by Macmahon Line, Durand Line, LAC and LoC. Still it was once the regional hegemon having promulgated the Indira Doctrine and employed military force in national interest. India's geography and asymmetry with neighbours are both asset and liability. Congenital problems with Pakistan and later China have made it the least connected South Asian region. NFP was designed to shape the neighbourhood, especially the periphery, extending the neighbourhood to Mauritius and Iran in the West and Myanmar in the East. Curating friendly regimes, winning the goodwill of people through economic linkages and connectivity, creating strategic assets, minimising liabilities and most of all, being sensitive to genuine concerns of neighbours were some objectives of NFP. Rubbing neighbours the wrong way was not, nor meshing domestic politics with diplomacy. That an aspirational India would create glitches for NFP was not envisioned. China, gate-crashed after hiding its strength and biding its time arriving with deep pockets, BRI, MSR and Wolf Warrior



diplomacy. With ups and downs in politics regional rivalries were in full flow. Nepalese scholars were first to note change. The founding father, King Prithvi Narayan Shah had observed that Nepal is a yam between two boulders: China and India. They corrected that gospel to three boulders, adding US. Till late last year, Maldives followed India First policy, the only country to publicly proclaim the choice. That has changed to India Out with President Muizzu demanding the 88 Indian soldiers leave before elections next month. He even hinted that Delhi tried bullying Male. Its strategic geography is pivotal in the Indian Ocean. Maldives is for now China First but India could have been more gentle with its smallest neighbour. Raking up the Kachhathevu issue that the government admitted it was settled in 2015, was a self goal but both Modi and Jaishankar wished to politically embarrass the ruling DMK in Tamil Nadu and INC. Instead it has infuriated Sri Lankan media and ordinary Lankans, especially fisherfolk among the lakhs of Sri Lankan and Indian Tamils. US Assistance Secretary of State for South Asia and Central Asia, Donald Lu has called Sri Lanka's economic recovery a "comeback story" with concessional loans from India and USAID. That story



MOST, IF NOT ALL, REGIONAL COUNTRIES WANT SAARC TO BE REVIVED, BUT INDIA'S IRON-CLAD POLICY OF NOT DEALING WITH PAKISTAN UNTIL TERRORISM FROM ITS SOIL STOPS HAS BEEN AGGRAVATED BY THE REMOVAL OF ARTICLE 370

will suffer a setback lead to revival of anti-India sentiment and further tilt towards China to whom Lanka owes USD 10 bn. In Bangladesh BNP has started an India Out campaign. China is heavily invested in projects including constructing a submarine port near Cox's Bazar adequate for 8 to 10 submarines. Bhutan was within a whisker of a land swap with China by the previous government. Otherwise Doklam could have been lost to the Chinese which would have endangered Siliguri Corridor, the India-Bhutan-China tri-junction dispute. The new Lotay Tshering government might delay the Doklam swap. In Myanmar, the military is rapidly losing ground in the civil war with Ethnic Armed Organisations and NUG. It has lost border control with China, Bangladesh, India and Thailand to EAOs. Most critical for India is Sittwe Port vital for the multi-modal Kaladan project and also the trilateral highway to Thailand. Reuters reported that junta troops nearby have fled and an attack on Sittwe is imminent. But Sohail Kazan, executive director, Bharat Freight, said last week that Sittwe will be safe following a deal between junta and Rakhine state government. If true, that is good news. Kaladan project was contracted in 2008 and is nowhere near completion dislocating India's two signature Act East pro-

jects.. Delhi has to rethink its relations with the junta. Most if not all regional countries want SAARC to be revived. But India's iron clad policy of not dealing with Pakistan till terrorism from its soil stops has been aggravated by removal of Article 370. Trade potential according to World Bank between Pakistan and India is between USD 15 and 20 bn. India's NFP has not worked because its global ambitions have diluted its zeal for the neighbourhood. Further, it has been unable to compete with China despite geography being on its side. Under NFP and Act East, India has concentrated mainly in the maritime domain resulting in neglect of inland connectivity. The Government brags about North East shining (Manipur is a shame) but little progress is seen over connectivity of BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan India Nepal) or South East Asia. The Bangladesh China India Myanmar (BCIM) is also dead. India's focus on neighbourhood has wavered, failing to secure the periphery. Some diplomats have advocated India setting red lines? Winning over neighbours is now a huge challenge. (The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka and a founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. Views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CONSTITUTIONAL MORALITY

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Constitutional Morality: The Pillar of India's Democracy", published on April 15, this is my response. India's electoral fervour every four years embodies the essence of democracy, echoing the aspirations of its constituent assembly. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's vision of constitutional morality as the cornerstone of governance rings true today. It's a conscious cultivation, not merely a natural sentiment, vital for a vibrant democracy. Justice D.Y. Chandrachud aptly emphasises the judiciary's role in upholding constitutional values like dignity and equality. This jurisprudence, evolving alongside societal dynamics, ensures the Constitution remains a living document. Recent landmark judgments, from LGBTQ+ rights to adultery laws, highlight the judiciary's commitment to constitutional morality over popular sentiment. Yet, navigating societal and religious intersections, as seen in the Sabarimala case, poses ongoing challenges. The court's role in reconciling evolving beliefs, evident in decisions on euthanasia and abortion rights, underscores its pivotal position in shaping India's moral landscape. As we navigate these complexities, constitutional morality stands as a beacon, guiding our journey towards a more just and equitable society.

Sunandna Sharma | Hisar

HISTORICAL REFLECTIONS

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Unravelling the Roy family's legacy", published on April 15, this is my response. The political landscape for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections reveals not just contemporary rivalries but also echoes of Bengal's tumultuous past. Amidst accusations and justifications, the saga of Siraj-ud-Daula's downfall resurfaces, highlighting the intricate web of alliances and betrayals that shaped the region's destiny. Delving into history, one confronts the pivotal Battle of Plassey in 1757, altering the trajectory of Bengal's identity. The

Revitalising railway realms



Apropos the news article, "Desolate railway tracks transformed into a verdant oasis", published on April 15, this is my response. The transformation of a once-ignored stretch of land into the lush oasis of 'Evergreen Nursery' is a testament to human innovation and environmental stewardship. This verdant haven, nestled amidst the bustling railway tracks, not only rejuvenates the landscape but also symbolises a paradigm shift in urban con-

servation efforts. The metamorphosis from a crime-ridden wasteland to a vibrant botanical sanctuary reflects the power of collaborative endeavours between public and private entities. The partnership between the Delhi Division of Northern Railway and Evergreen Nursery exemplifies a shared commitment to sustainable development and beautification. Moreover, the altruistic purpose behind the nursery, where plants are nurtured not for profit but for communal enrichment, resonates deeply with the ethos of community service. It serves as a poignant reminder of the interconnectedness between humanity and nature, where each leaf and bloom embodies a story of renewal and hope. As we traverse through these green corridors, we are reminded not only of the beauty of flora but also of our collective responsibility to safeguard our planet for future generations.

Neeraj Shah | Delhi

Reflections on class and age discrimination

From a childhood encounter at a political rally to navigating workplace dynamics, an individual's journey unveils lessons in equality and empathy



SANJAY CHANDRA

The then Prime Minister was to address a public rally in Ghaziabad. My father, posted as the head of the electricity department in the city, was responsible for the electrical arrangements at the venue. He took us to listen to her speech from a vantage point. I do not remember the speech. What I do remember is that my father came back immediately after the event ended and rushed us from the venue. He kept looking back surreptitiously, asking us to walk faster. I was to learn that a supervisor working under my father and wanting to make a good impression, was also pursuing us to introduce his family. Much later, at a more mature age, I could understand that this was an incidence of class discrimination prevalent in our society. I was to learn quite a few life-altering lessons a few years later as I joined Indian railway services. During my first posting in Calcutta, I was asked to study an old machine and propose measures to improve its productivity, taking the assistance of an experienced supervisor. The two of us



spent innumerable hours studying the machine. I became an apprentice to a more knowledgeable person, even though he was lower in the hierarchy. Then and even later in my subsequent postings, or even after I quit an active professional life, I learnt a lot about handling work-related issues and even man management, from my junior colleagues, by not dwelling on the so-called finer nuances of a superior status. I also learnt empathy for others. In yet another posting, as a branch head, I was approached by irate union leaders who complained

about the rude language by a junior colleague. His fault was that he had used the term 'tum' to address a worker rather than the more respectable 'aap'. This was Bengal, where everyone is expected to use a respectful salutation when talking to another person, whatever the status. I tried to assuage the hurt sentiments by pointing out that the junior colleague came from north India where it was a common practice to use the more affectionate 'tu' even while addressing parents. The representatives were not done. They pointed out that I was

always respectful even though I was from the same region. This was another lesson learnt, never to be forgotten, about the futility of status discrimination. We were visiting relatives a few days back. My wife's uncle, now nearing 80, narrated a recent experience. He had gone to some office for work, where a much younger person jumped the queue. The uncle objected which was rudely brushed aside by the young man, "How is it material? Have I pointed a gun at you?" This was a status discrimination of another kind - a perceived superiority of the youth against old age. Or was it the gun power? We ought to remember what Nelson Mandela said, "No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite." (The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)

FIRST COLUMN STRIVE TO DEVELOP FAITH

The pursuit of guidance from the Divine holds the promise of revelation



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

Let me start with why we often don't endeavour to develop faith, as is commonly observed. Lord Krishna has aptly stated, "Out of thousands of men, hardly anyone strives for perfection" (The Bhagavad Gita 7.3). The essence of a perfect life lies in becoming a devotee of God, for He is the ultimate controller of the entire world. There exist numerous reasons, or perhaps excuses, for this reluctance. Beginning with a straightforward argument: who has truly seen Him? If God holds such significance, why does He not present Himself so that we may behold Him? In this age of the internet, one might argue that He could easily make His presence felt. Some may argue that God is unmanifest, yet we lack any tangible experience of such an entity. If God is indeed a reality without whom we cannot thrive, then why do some ideologies, such as communism, appear to manage so well, especially in certain countries? Why is there pervasive poverty and suffering in the world? If God possesses omnipotence as described, why does He not rectify these injustices? We encounter many ascetics on the streets, leading some to conclude that only those who have failed turn to God, while they believe they can manage without divine intervention. Perhaps they might consider turning to God later if the need arises. These excuses, however, varied, ultimately lead us to a sense of emptiness. In reality, it is often our ego that serves as the primary hindrance. We struggle to accept an entity so vast and incomprehensible, leaving us feeling insignificant and powerless. Another significant barrier lies in the acceptance of spiritual practices, which may seem unfamiliar and daunting. Yet, all these excuses only serve to deepen our sense of emptiness. Why not begin by praying for what we deeply desire? Even a child can pray and often does. If our prayers are sincere and aligned with righteousness, God may consider them.



The next step involves seeking guidance from God, who is eager to provide it. Given His omniscience, God communicates in various ways; to advanced devotees, He may impart intuition or even speak directly, while beginners may receive guidance through mediums such as family members, friends, or even seemingly random occurrences like messages in newspapers. It should be evident that following God's instructions is a wise course of action, yielding manifold benefits. Let us now explore some basic practices that are both accessible and highly rewarding. My personal favourite is 'darshan' — simply gazing upon an image or idol of God.

Observing God's benevolent countenance, we can feel His attraction towards us. However, it's crucial to remember that adherence to righteousness, or 'dharma,' is of paramount importance to God. While deity forms or images serve as focal points, God's presence transcends physical limitations, permeating all existence. Another simple yet profound practice is offering 'namaskar' — paying homage to God with folded hands. This act serves to humble our egos, which often obstruct our connection with the divine and hinder our interactions with fellow beings. As we persist in these practices, we will gradually experience God's responses, not necessarily through miraculous events, but through subtle yet discernible manifestations. We can liken this experience to connecting to the internet—where there is a network, there is connectivity. Similarly, God, omnipresent as He is, can be experienced in various ways. God's subtle presence is accessible to all. He eagerly awaits our approach, desiring nothing but our well-being. Let us cast aside our doubts and excuses and wholeheartedly commit to forging a deeper connection with the divine.

(The writer is a spiritual guide; views are personal)

Iran strikes threaten regional stability

The assault, though primarily symbolic in nature, highlights the mounting tensions in the region. However, the US endeavours to uphold a balance of power



NILANTHA
ILANGAMUWA



REUTERS

At a time when people in several countries in South Asia and East Asia were celebrating the traditional New Year, Iran, the second-largest country in West Asia, launched a series of missile attacks targeting its arch-enemy Israel. Jordan and Saudi Arabia supported Israel and intercepted most of the missiles fired by Iran. The attack appears to be symbolic, aimed at boosting the morale of organisations such as Hamas in Palestine, Yemen's Houthis, pro-Iranian militias in Iraq and Hezbollah in Lebanon, all of which have declared war against Israel in West Asia, as well as countries like Lebanon and Syria, rather than engaging in an official war against Israel. This attack serves as a morale booster. Shortly after the attack, Hamas rejected the Cairo agreement, a result of discussions between top intelligence agencies, the CIA and Mossad, together with other stakeholders mediated by Egypt, concerning Israeli hostages.

However, many encouraged Israel to respond quickly. However, United States President Biden stated that he would not yield if attacks were made against Iran. It is seen as a matter of prior agreement by both parties rather than a threat. The truth is, that the US administration cannot afford to assist Israel in another war at this point. At a time when the country's reputation has been tarnished at the international level and when Biden's political power is extremely weak if the United States makes such an unwise decision, it will have to face unprecedented consequences shortly, similar to how the United States has caused irreversible damage to world peace and order. Elon Musk's recent statement that the possibility of the United States becoming the victim of a September 11-style surprise attack is very high seems to hold deep truth. The consequences of these conflicts may not only affect Washington or New York but also American military bases around the world. The likelihood of an attack similar to the one on Pearl Harbor is high. The United States cannot always continue to create military conflicts in other countries for its war trade and keep its superpower status as it desires. The superpower, as history has proven, will inevitably crumble at any



THE ATTACK BY IRAN WAS RETALIATION. IT IS A RESPONSE TO THE ISRAELI PROVOCATION AT THE IRANIAN CONSULATE IN SYRIA, A GROSS VIOLATION OF THE VIENNA CONVENTION, WHICH CLAIMED THE LIVES OF THE IRANIAN REVOLUTIONARY GUARD CORPS

given point. Compared to its lifespan, the United States is a relatively young superpower in the grand scheme of civilisation, considering the collapse of great empires.

Throughout history, mighty empires have risen and fallen, leaving lasting legacies. The Roman Empire, spanning from 27 BC to AD 476, peaked in the 2nd century AD, but internal strife, economic instability and external invasions, such as by the Visigoths and Vandals, led to its fragmentation. The Ottoman Empire, dominant in the 16th and 17th centuries across the Eastern Mediterranean, North Africa and Western Asia, declined due to internal conflicts and challenges from European powers like Russia and Austria. The Mongol Empire, founded by Genghis Khan in the 13th century, stretched from Eastern Europe to the Pacific Ocean, but internal divisions and the death of key leaders led to its fragmentation by the late 14th century. Lastly, the British Empire, spanning from the 16th to the 20th century, faced economic strain and nationalist movements, ultimately dissolving due to internal weakness and external pressures. These collapses, driven by political, military and socioeconomic factors, reshaped the world, underscoring the transient nature of power and the enduring impact of history on modern geopolitics and civilisation.

However, the deep state of the United States has certainly studied and comprehended global history better than many other countries. That is why the basic strategy of the United States has been to create new wars while talking about peace and turn those wars into long-term tragedies to keep uncertainties. This strategy can weaken its rivals and maintain its power continuously. These issues become clear when many conflicts are understood in their political and economic context. The ideology that Israel has contin-

uously pursued against Iran in national and international forums is not a single opinion or rivalry of Israel, but it is a long-term propagation through carefully selected facts and objectives together with the United States. On one hand, the West fuels wars against hostile countries. On the other, it manufactures internal crises in those nations by imposing international sanctions. This remains a persistent behaviour of the West.

The thing that should not be forgotten here is that the attack by Iran was a retaliation. It is a response to the Israeli provocation on the Iranian consulate in Syria, a gross violation of the Vienna Convention, which claimed the lives of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. Iran's calculation, as some analysts pointed out, was that if it did not respond, Israel would seek to push back and degrade the axis of resistance across the region. However, it is unreasonable to think that Israel miscalculated its attack on the Iranian diplomatic site in Syria as Israel continues to keep deep intelligence penetration of IRGC and Hezbollah networks in Syria, making those networks highly vulnerable to Israeli attacks. Iran must uphold its reputation among its allies and address internal political crises effectively. Therefore, prioritising attacks conducted through proxies is advisable, while occasional skirmishes from both sides should be acknowledged.

Moreover, it is very important to consider the government's domestic policies and openly mention Iran's inherent weaknesses amid escalating tensions among some politicians and officials in Iran. They highlighted the many crises facing the Iranian government and warned against engaging in direct conflict with Israel without first addressing these pressing issues, which they argued would only worsen the situation. They emphasised the impor-

ance of prudent governance and effective crisis management and the need to mitigate ongoing crises to prevent system collapse.

Economic challenges and psychological instability in society are urgent issues that need to be addressed as they are now breeding grounds for enemy penetrations. They advocated the adoption of conciliatory policies to reduce tensions and promote harmony and empathy in Iranian society. The regime's repressive domestic policies, particularly regarding the mandatory hijab enforcement campaign, have fuelled widespread discontent and delegitimised the government. Recent anti-Israel actions, like seizing a cargo ship, have caused Iran's markets to react negatively. The national currency's value has hit a record low. President Ibrahim Raisi faces criticism and calls for a cabinet reshuffle to address economic hardships affecting many Iranians.

Over the years, Israel has demonstrated its capability in targeting Iranian nuclear scientists and infrastructure. Notably, the Stuxnet cyber-attack, jointly orchestrated by the United States and Israel, delivered a significant blow to Iran's nuclear ambitions. This proves that national interests are never compromised for domestic political issues, except for former President Trump. Stuxnet marked a pivotal moment, ushering in the era of cyberwarfare, where lines of code wielded the power to reshape geopolitical landscapes. Its impact reverberated globally, highlighting the evolving nature of warfare and the formidable role of technology in modern conflicts. In this situation, Iran cannot continue to be silent. It must prove its power numerically. Therefore, the recent attack was more a reputational-preservation move than a declaration of war.

(The writer is a Sri Lankan Journalist. Views are personal)

Uttarakhand women: Agents of change in State politics

From leading environmental crusades to confronting social injustices head-on, they embody the spirit of the region, epitomising resilience and fortitude

Women in Uttarakhand are renowned for their extraordinary resilience and hard work, characteristics deeply rooted in their Himalayan heritage. Despite grappling with the challenges of life in this rugged terrain, Uttarakhand's women have consistently been at the forefront of social and environmental movements, epitomized by figures like Gaura Devi of the Chipko movement and Tinchari Mai (Deepa Nautiyal), who spearheaded the Anti-Liquor movement. These women have fearlessly confronted injustice, embodying the spirit of Uttarakhand. This article seeks to underscore the political engagement of women in Uttarakhand, shedding light on their role in bol-



SHEETAL ARYA

stering democracy.

The political participation of women in Uttarakhand can be delineated into two primary spheres: first, women assuming leadership positions within the political domain and second, women exercising their electoral rights as voters. Since the inception of the state, the representation of women in the legislative assembly has seen a significant

albeit gradual rise. From four women members in the first assembly, the number has increased by 50% in the 2022 elections, marking a commendable stride. However, despite this progress, women remain a minority in the assembly, constituting a mere fraction of the total members. Presently, the legislative assembly boasts eight women members, including three Dalit women, the highest number in Uttarakhand's history. Notably, Smt. Ritu Khanduri serves as the speaker, while Smt. Rekha Arya is the lone female minister in the cabinet. Despite these advancements, the disparity in political representation persists, underscoring the challenges women face in accessing political power. While women's representa-

tion in the parliamentary arena remains scant, with only two female MPs out of eight, the discrepancy between the female population (49%) and their political representation is stark. Despite their active participation in grassroots movements, women's presence in formal politics remains disproportionately low. Women in Uttarakhand constitute the backbone of the rural economy, grappling with issues like migration, environmental degradation and inadequate healthcare services. However, societal norms and economic constraints often deter their political involvement. Moreover, political parties' reluctance to field female candidates exacerbates this disparity. For instance, in the upcoming 2024 Lok Sabha



elections, the Congress has not nominated any female candidates, while the BJP has nominated only one, Mrs. Mala Rajya Laxmi Shah. Nevertheless, women voters in Uttarakhand have emerged as a formidable force, outnumbering men in recent elections. Their increasing political awareness, fueled by issues directly affecting their lives,

coupled with higher literacy rates and government initiatives like reservation quotas, has galvanized their participation. Policies such as 30% horizontal reservation in government jobs and 50% reservation in Panchayats have bolstered women's political agency, enabling them to assume leadership roles at the grassroots level. In the run-up to the 2024 Parliamentary elections, both major parties are vying for women's support, employing diverse strategies. Congress has pledged financial assistance and job reservations for women, emphasizing women's security and justice. Conversely, the BJP highlights its implementation of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) as a milestone for women's rights,

coupled with grassroots mobilization efforts. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal among women voters, attributed to his grassroots connect and initiatives like the Women Reservation Bill, further consolidates BJP's electoral prospects. The "Modi factor" has resonated with Uttarakhand's women, contributing to BJP's continued dominance since 2017. To bolster women's empowerment, the state government has allocated a substantial gender budget for 2024-25, earmarked for bridging gender disparities and promoting equality. Additionally, measures like deploying women employees to oversee polling booths and facilitating pregnant women's access to voting booths underscore the commitment to

inclusive governance. In conclusion, Dr Ambedkar's assertion that a community's progress is contingent upon women's advancement holds for Uttarakhand. While women have historically been instrumental in social movements, their underrepresentation in formal politics remains a pressing concern. Addressing these challenges is imperative for ensuring women's political representation and expediting the state's development. As Uttarakhand gears up for the upcoming Chunav Kauthig, with women comprising 48.1 per cent of the electorate, their increased participation promises to be a harbinger of democracy's triumph in the state.

(The writer is a research scholar; views are personal)

'Pak needs years to implement IMF-advised structural reforms'

Cash-strapped Pakistan would need two or three years to implement structural reforms prescribed by the IMF, Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb has said, warning that the country would be looking for another bailout programme if it fails to go through these measures.

— doesn't go through the structural reforms, the country would still be looking for another programme, the report said. "We have known the what and why not for years but for decades," he was quoted as saying in the report.

reforming the Bretton Woods twins — the IMF and the World Bank. "We are dealing with adaptation and financing and to the extent that these institutions come in to help countries like Pakistan from inclusive growth perspective and climate change perspective. Our interests are going to be very well aligned," he said.

Inquiry commission gives clean chit to ex-ISI chief Gen Hamid

Pakistan's former Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) director general Lieutenant General (ret'd) Faiz Hamid has been exonerated by the inquiry commission established to investigate the 2017 sit-in by a hardline religious group here and Rawalpindi, it emerged on Tuesday.



Syed Akhtar Ali Shah, a former civil servant, who also served as Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa's police chief and included Tahir Alam Khan, a former Islamabad police chief and Khushal Khan, an additional secretary at the Ministry of Interior. It was tasked to identify those

who planned, financed, and supported the protest and also recommended legal action against its planners and executives which disrupted life in Rawalpindi and Islamabad between November 6 and November 27, 2017. The commission in the report of 149 pages, 57 annexures & sub-annexures and one appendix claimed to have examined all relevant evidence but described it to be an elaborate case study on the style of governance in Pakistan.

'Russia's invasion of Ukraine threatens global security'

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz told Chinese leader Xi Jinping who hosted him in Beijing on Tuesday that Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine threatens global security, in an apparent call for China to apply greater pressure on its neighbor and close strategic partner to resolve the conflict.

which has threatened to spread into a regional conflict and has disrupted energy and global food supplies and other trade. Russia's actions "violate a principle of the United Nations Charter and the principle of the inviolability of national borders," Scholz was quoted as saying by German media.

community. Despite that, China continues to insist that the United Nations charter should prevail in international affairs and that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations be respected, in apparent contradiction with Russia's military agenda.

as saying. Scholz on Monday called for fair competition in trade relations while warning about dumping and overproduction during a talk to college students in the financial hub of Shanghai, where German companies have major investments.

ministers and business executives visited a partially German-funded company and other sites in the vast city, which is a production base for China's auto and other industries.

Shanghai that borders "must not be moved by force." "We should not be afraid of our neighbors," he said, emphasizing the importance of international institutions such as the World Trade Organization.

'Pak sustained its N-programme despite economic turmoil'

Pakistan sustained its nuclear modernisation efforts last year despite its economic turmoil as its contentious relationship with India continues to drive its defence policy, the top US intelligence official has told Congress.

However, cross-border violence between the countries has decreased since their February 2021 recommitment to a ceasefire, he said. "Islamabad is modernising its nuclear arsenal and improving the security of its nuclear materials and nuclear C2 (command and control)."

China's GDP grew by 5.3% in 1st quarter of 2024

China's economy grew at 5.3 per cent in the first quarter, making a stronger-than-expected start to the year even as the downturn of its property market continued while the domestic demand remained subdued.

tum and got off to a good start," Sheng Laiyun, Deputy Head of the NBS, said at a press conference. Sheng mentioned positive factors during this period, such as rising production demand, stable employment and prices, and growing market confidence.

property investment fell 9.5 per cent, highlighting the challenges faced by China's real estate firms. "You cannot manufacture growth forever, so we really need to see households come to the party if China wants to hit that around five per cent growth target," Harry Murphy Cruise from Moody's Analytics told the BBC.

from stable to negative a week after it cut its projection for the country's sovereign credit rating, reflecting pessimism in the world's second-largest economy and concerns over Beijing's capacity to support its biggest lenders.

More homes flooded in Kazakhstan

Nearly 14,500 homes have been flooded in a Russian region bordering Kazakhstan after water levels spiked in a local river, local authorities said Tuesday. The floods sparked evacuations of thousands in the Orenburg region, located some 1,200 kilometers (745 miles), southeast of the capital of Moscow after a dam on the Ural River burst last week under the pressure of surging waters.

according to officials. The situation is more dire in the southwest of the region near the Kazakh border, where authorities said the river there has risen to a dangerous level in the town of Ilek. Further east along the border, floods also hit the regions of Kurgan and Tyumen after water levels rose in local rivers.

'Singapore PM Lee to continue to be part of govt after stepping down next month'

Singapore (PTI): Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong will stay in the Cabinet as Senior Minister after stepping down as the leader of the government on May 15, Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong, who will succeed him, said on Tuesday. "There won't be many changes to the rest of the line-up for now," Wong, who would be the fourth prime minister of the economically prosperous city-state of Singapore, said.

Ukrainian pres signs law to boost conscription to fend off Russia's aggression

Kyiv (AP): Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed a controversial law Tuesday, days after it was passed by parliament, potentially helping Kyiv to boost conscription to replenish depleted forces to fend off Russia's continued aggression. The mobilisation law, published on Ukraine's Parliamentary website, is expected to take effect in a month and make it easier to identify every draft-eligible man in the country.



bat. Authorities said a separate bill on demobilisation and rotation would be prepared in the coming months. But the delay caused public outrage among Ukrainians whose relatives have been fighting without breaks for two years. Exhausted soldiers have no means of taking a break from front-line work because of the current scale and intensity of the war.

Heavy rains lash UAE, death toll in Oman flooding rises to 18

Dubai (AP): Heavy rains lashed the United Arab Emirates on Tuesday, flooding out portions of major highways and leaving vehicles abandoned on roadways across Dubai. Meanwhile, the death toll in separate heavy flooding in neighboring Oman rose to 18 with others still missing as the sultanate prepared for the storm.

over 120 millimeters (4.75 inches) of rainfall had soaked the city-state — the typical average for a year in the desert nation — with more expected in the coming hours. Police and emergency personnel drove slowly through the flooded streets, their emergency lights flashing across the darkened morning.

largely working remotely if able. Many workers stayed home as well, though some ventured out, with the unfortunate stalling out their vehicles in deeper-than-expected water covering some roads. Authorities sent tanker trucks out into the streets and highways to pump away the water. Water poured into some homes, forcing people to bail out their houses.

UK criminalises creation of 'deepfake' images without consent

London (PTI): Despicable people who create sexually explicit "deepfakes" will face prosecution under a new law going through its parliamentary journey, the British government said on Tuesday. Deepfake refers to images and videos made to look hyper-realistic, with the victim usually unaware and unable to give their consent.

is then shared more widely, offenders could be sent to jail. "The creation of deepfake sexual images is despicable and completely unacceptable irrespective of whether the image is shared," said Laura Farris, UK Minister for Victims and Safeguarding. "It is another example of ways in which certain people seek to degrade and dehumanise others — especially women. And it has the capacity to cause catastrophic consequences if the material is shared more widely. This government will not tolerate it. This new offence sends a crystal-clear message that making this material is immoral, often misogynistic, and a crime," she said.

Under the new offence, those who create such images without consent face a criminal record and an unlimited fine. If the deepfake content

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