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Published From
DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA

Late City Vol. 18 Issue 107
*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

DEHRADUN, FRIDAY APRIL 19, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹2

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Country gears up for 1st phase of LS polls

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Amid ongoing heatwave conditions in some parts of Southern and Eastern States, the 2024 Lok Sabha elections are set to kick off with polling in 102 constituencies (General- 73; ST- 11; SC-18) across 21 States and Union Territories (UTs). This phase marks the largest of the seven phases of the elections, with 16.63 crore eligible voters. On Thursday, lakhs of polling personnel made their way to their stations in preparation for Friday morning. The Election Commission (EC) announced on Thursday that it is prepared for the polls to open at 7 am on Friday, with polling parties travelling by ship and boat to

reach Lakshadweep's Kiltan Island, officials trekking to remote booths in Arunachal Pradesh' Siang district, and personnel venturing into areas hit by violent insurgencies and crossing rivers to reach millions of voters. Simultaneously, Assembly elections will also be held in Arunachal Pradesh (60 seats) and Sikkim (32 seats). Meanwhile the BJP's ambition to emerge as a force challenging Dravidian parties in Tamil Nadu and determination to retain its strongholds across the country will be put to a stern test on Friday when the seven-phase Lok Sabha elections commence. If a lot is at stake for the ruling party in the 102 constituencies

going to the polls as Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeks a stronger majority, the challenge is even bigger for the Opposition INDIA Bloc, whose several constituents are in a battle of survival and hope for a rebound after facing reverses in the 2014 and 2019 elections. The Prime Minister has visited many temples in the run-up to the elections, especially in the days ahead of the Ram temple consecration ceremony in January. According to the EC, of the total 16.63 crore voters in phase one,



there are 8.4 crore male, 8.23 crore female and 11,371 transgender voters. Over 35 lakh first-time electors are also eligible to cast their votes. As many as 1,625 candidates (1,491 male and 134 female) are in the fray. As many as 18 lakh polling personnel will work at 1.87 lakh polling stations. In order to ensure the smooth movement of security forces, the EC said 41 helicopters, 84 special trains and nearly lakh other vehicles had been deployed. According to the EC, there are 181 polling stations in 21 Lok Sabha seats in Tamil Nadu critical

and six of the 42 Lok Sabha constituencies in West Bengal as 'financially sensitive'. In Bihar, 5,000 polling booths have been marked as 'sensitive', given these districts' long history of naxal violence. Scores of polling officers have been flown to remote areas in the rugged Himalayas and the Central Indian constituency of Gadchiroli-Chimur, beset by Maoist violence, to which 850 polling staff are being sent, the EC said. It said a total of 4,627 Flying Squads, 5,208 Statistics Surveillance Teams, 2,028 Video Surveillance Teams and 1,255

Video Viewing Teams are keeping surveillance round the clock to strictly and swiftly deal with any form of inducement of voters. "A total of 1,374 inter-State and 162 international Border check posts are keeping strict vigil on any illicit flow of liquor, drugs, cash and freebies. Strict surveillance has been kept at sea and air routes," the EC said. Of the 102 Lok Sabha seats, the BJP had won 39 in 2019, with the ruling alliance NDA bagging 12, five and three of them in Rajasthan, Uttarakhand and West Bengal, respectively. The BJP's existing allies hold seven of them.

BJP faces a tough fight in Tamil Nadu

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu and the Union Territory of Puducherry are set to witness one of the toughest electoral battles of recent times as both the State and the UT go to the polls to elect 40 representatives (39 from TN and a lone member from the UT) on Friday. What Tamil Nadu witnessed once the Election Commission of India announced the poll schedule was a gruelling campaign despite the scorching heat of the summer. There are three fronts vying with one another for the top honours. The main contender (at least on paper) is the DMK and its allies that include



the Indian National Congress, CPI(M), CPI, and caste and community outfits like DMDK,

VCK, Muslim League and some fringe elements. The DMK has fielded 22 candidates while the Congress has been allocated nine seats. The AIADMK, which disintegrated into many factions, is leading a front that include MDMK, the Islamic outfit SDPI and Puthiya Tamizhagam. The AIADMK, which consists of Edappadi Palaniswamy and his henchmen, is contesting from 32 constituencies while the MDMK founded by late Vijayakanth is contesting from five seats.

Western UP in the spotlight

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

With the nation on the brink of the first phase of general elections slated for April 19, all eyes are focused on Western Uttar Pradesh (UP) region, where the Jatava community, known for their support of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), and the Muslim electorate wield considerable influence. "The performance of BSP candidates across the eight contested seats and the voting inclinations of minority communities are poised to play a pivotal role in shaping the electoral outcome for both Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) and

Samajwadi Party, BSP candidates in the initial phase," remarks political analyst Rajesh N Bajpai. In the upcoming polls, the spotlight will be on Saharanpur, Kairana, Muzaffarnagar, Bijnor, Nagina (SC), Moradabad, Rampur, and Pilibhit. Reflecting on past electoral trends, the 2014 Lok Sabha elections witnessed a clean sweep by the BJP across all eight seats earmarked for the first phase, significantly bolstering its tally to 71 seats, later rising to 73 in alliance with the Apna Dal. However, the 2019 elections witnessed a notable shift, with the BJP facing setbacks against the grand alliance of SP-RLD and BSP.

BJP fights to retain Vidarbha

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The ruling BJP is battling hard to retain its stronghold over Vidarbha where it had swept the 2019 Lok Sabha polls in alliance with the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena, while the Congress has little to lose but everything to gain, as half of the ten constituencies in the region go to elections in the first phase on Friday. With no apparent wave in the air and not much of enthusiasm witnessed among voters, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is trying to cash in on Ram Mandir temple issue and use its organisational strength to reach out to voters in the five poll-bound constituencies — Nagpur, Ramtek (SC), Chandrapur, Bhandara-Gondiya and Gadchiroli-Chimur (ST) — in the region.

Confusions galore in Bihar ahead of voting



From left to right: Chirag Paswan, Vivek Thakur, Jitan Ram Majhi and Shrawan Kushwaha

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ GAYA/JAMUI

A lot of confusion prevails in the minds of voters of the four Lok Sabha seats going to polls in the first phase on Friday as in these constituencies the cast for caste has been the pattern for decades and development is a non-issue as was put once by Bihar's political stalwart former Chief Minister Lalu Prasad "there is no connection between politics and development". Interestingly Chirag Paswan who leads the LJP now is sitting MP from Jamui and has changed his constituency this time to "safer" LJP's years of dominance to Hajipur near

Patna. Jamui has been now assigned to a family member of the Paswans, Arun Bharti who is heads on with INDIA Bloc's RJD leader Archana Ravidas. Chirag has twice represented Jamui in the Lok Sabha. It's from Jamui where Prime Minister Narendra Modi kicked-off his election campaign in Bihar on April 4 followed by a public meeting in Nawada on April 7 and then at Gaya early this week. This general elections as per the arrangements either the seats have been changed or first timers like Vivek Thakur, son of Bihar BJP's stalwart former Union Minister CP

NDA's seating arrangements. The outgoing Lok Sabha has all four seats from NDA viz Aurangabad (BJP), Gaya (JDU), LJP from both Jamui and Nawada. In the 2024 LS while the BJP had their candidates in Rajput dominated Aurangabad and Bhumihar dominated Nawada constituencies, while two reserved seats Gaya went to its ally HAM and Jamui to another alliance partner, the Chirag Paswan-led LJP. Three-time MP from Aurangabad Sushil Kumar Singh stands against RJD's Abhay Kushwaha. Kushwaha was a JD(U) MLA from the Tekari Assembly constituency in 2015 but recently joined the RJD and was given the party's ticket from the Aurangabad Lok Sabha constituency. The seat is Rajput-dominated though it has a sizeable OBC and EBC voters hence the RJD has fielded an OBC candidate. The poll is to be interesting as four of six Assembly constituencies of Aurangabad — Kutumba, Rafiganj, Aurangabad, and Gurua — are held by Mahagathbandhan MLAs, while the remaining two — Imamganj and Tekari — are held by HAM, an ally of NDA.

Uneasy lull in poll-bound Cooch Behar



SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The police administration on Thursday went on high alert as an uneasy lull descended in parts of Cooch Behar district of North Bengal which will go to first phase of elections along with neighbouring Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar on Friday. Union Home Minister for State Nisith Pramanik of the BJP is pitted against his main contender Jagadish Chandra Basunia of Trinamool Congress in the constituency. Besides intermittent face offs between the TMC and the BJP all these weeks Cooch Behar, an SC seat, has also been in the news because it is one of those few constituencies where the Left and the Congress have failed

to put a joint candidate unlike in other parts of the State. Notwithstanding, all eyes are likely to be on this northern most district of Bengal bordering Assam against the backdrop of four deaths on the opening day of the 2021 Assembly elections when one BJP supporter was allegedly shot dead by the TMC goons and three alleged supporters of the TMC died at booth at Sitalkuchi when the central forces reportedly opened fire to resist booth capture. In view of the four deaths in 2021 the Election Commission has decided not to deploy any CISF personnel in that area. The same Force had been on duty three years ago. There has been repeated flare-ups between the TMC

and the BJP in Cooch Behar constituency in the past one month with on one occasion the saffron workers and their TMC counterparts fighting a pitched battle in presence of Pramanik on one side and local MLA and State Minister Udayan Guha on the other. Known for its sensitive character Cooch Behar during the last Assembly elections saw a scuffle between the TMC and the saffron workers in which Guha received a fractured hand. As late as on Wednesday the TMC men led by the son of Guha staged a dharna at Dinhat Police Station, demanding arrest of BJP men who had allegedly assaulted his supporters. In the other two constituencies neighbouring Cooch Behar the BJP has renominated Jayanta Roy from Jalpaiguri SC seat and Madarihata MLA Manoj Tigga from Alipurduar ST seat. Tigga replaces the outgoing saffron MP John Barla which has led to a small discontent among some workers and may result in some votes getting alienated from the BJP.



Tight security in Manipur today for polls

PTI ■ IMPHAL

Tight security arrangements have been put in place for the first of the two-phased Lok Sabha elections in Manipur, which had been rocked by ethnic violence over the last one year, officials said on Thursday. The Inner Manipur Lok Sabha seat, which comprises 32 of the 60 Assembly segments in the State, and 15 Assembly segments of the Outer Manipur Lok Sabha seat will go to polls in the first phase on Friday. Voting will be held in the remaining 13 segments of Outer Manipur in the second phase on April 26. A total of six candidates, including State Education Minister Thounaojam Basanta Kumar Singh of the BJP and Angomcha Bimol Akoijam of the Congress, are contesting the Inner Manipur seat. Republican Party of India (RPI) has nominated Thounaojam Maheshwar, while there are three other Independent candidates. Voting will commence at 7 am and is likely to continue till 4 pm. A total of 9.91 lakh voters are eligible to exercise their franchise in Inner Manipur, with the highest concentration of 3.81 lakh in Imphal West district, District Election Officer Th Kirankumar said.

ED attaches Shilpa Shetty's assets worth ₹98 crore

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday said it has attached a bungalow and a flat, apart from equity shares, worth about ₹98 crore of actor Shilpa Shetty and her husband Raj Kundra in connection with a money-laundering case linked to the alleged crypto assets Ponzi scheme. The federal agency has issued a provisional order under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) to attach the properties of the couple. The case pertains to alleged duping of investors through the use of crypto currency like Bitcoins. The attached properties include a residential flat in Mumbai's Juhu, presently in the name of Shetty, a



bungalow in Pune and equity shares in the name of Kundra, the federal agency said in a statement. These assets are worth ₹97.79 crore, it said. A lawyer for the couple said no prima facie case has been made out against his clients and that they would cooperate with the authorities. The money-laundering case

stems from FIRs lodged by the Maharashtra Police and the Delhi Police against a company named Variable Tech Private Limited, late Amit Bhardwaj, Ajay Bhardwaj, Vivek Bhardwaj, Simpy Bhardwaj, Mahender Bhardwaj and a number of multi-level marketing agents who are alleged to have collected huge amounts of funds in the form of Bitcoins (worth ₹6,600 crore in 2017) from the public with the "false promise" of 10 per cent monthly return in the form of Bitcoins. It was alleged by the ED that the Bitcoins were supposed to be utilised for mining and investors were supposed to get huge returns in crypto assets, but the promoters "cheated" them and have been concealing the "ill-gotten" Bitcoins in obscure online wallets. Kundra, the agency alleged, received 285 Bitcoins from the "mastermind" and promoter of Gain Bitcoin Ponzi "scam", Amit Bhardwaj, for "setting up a Bitcoin mining farm in Ukraine". These Bitcoins were sourced out of the "proceeds of crime" collected by Amit Bhardwaj from gullible investors, it said. "Since the deal did not

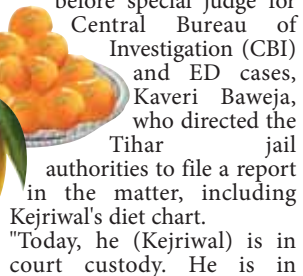
materialise, Kundra is still in possession and enjoyment of 285 Bitcoins which are presently valued at more than ₹150 crore," the ED claimed. The lawyer for Shetty and Kundra said they shall follow the due process of law and take necessary steps, as prescribed under the PMLA, to protect the liberty and property of his clients. "We have complete faith in the judiciary. I believe when we make our fair representation before the Enforcement Directorate, even the investigation agencies may grant justice to us. "We have faith in the fair investigation," advocate Prashant Patil said in a statement. The ED arrested Simpy Bhardwaj, Nitin Gaur and Nikhil Mahajan in the case last year.

Kejriwal on a sweet binge to increase blood sugar levels

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Jailed Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's diabetic status has become a bone of contention between him and the Enforcement Directorate (ED). The agency informed the court here on Thursday that Kejriwal, arrested in an excise scam case, is eating food high in sugar like mangoes and sweets every day to create grounds for medical bail. But his Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has expressed concern over his fluctuating blood sugar levels and weight loss. "Kejriwal is eating high sugar content food despite having type 2 diabetes. He is

consuming 'aloo poori', mango, sweets, daily. This is being done to make grounds for medical bail," the ED told the court. The ED made the claim before special judge for Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and ED cases, Kaveri Baweja, who directed the Tihar jail authorities to file a report in the matter, including Kejriwal's diet chart. "Today, he (Kejriwal) is in court custody. He is in custody because of our case. The cause of concern is he was allowed prescribed home cooked food because he claimed he has high diabetes. But he is having mangoes, sweets and sugar with tea.



U'khand to vote today in the Lok Sabha elections- 2024

All polling parties reach destinations; voting to start at 7 AM and end at 5 PM

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Election Commission is all geared up for free and fair conduct of Lok Sabha elections -2024 in all the five seats of the State. The voting on the five seats, Tehri, Haridwar, Garhwal, Nainital-Udhm Singh Nagar and Almora (SC) constituencies will start at 7 AM and end at 5 PM on Friday. The Additional Chief Electoral Officer (ACEO) Uttarakhand Vijay Kumar Jogdande said on Thursday afternoon that all the polling parties of the State will reach their destinations by evening. He said that all the polling parties will conduct a mock poll before the start of voting on Friday. All the polling parties will provide information about the start of voting and status of polling every two hours.



departments associated with essential services such as government hospitals have been asked to function round the clock.

1,365 critical and 809 vulnerable polling booths have been identified in the State. Adequate security measures and force deployment will be done in these booths. He said that 293 flying squads and 252

static surveillance teams are on an alert mode in the State. He said that seizure worth Rs 16.41 crore have been done in the State from the declaration of Model Code of Conduct (MCC) in view of the Lok Sabha elections in the State. The Police department has seized cash worth Rs 8.94 crore while Rs 6.14 and Rs 91 lakh respectively have been seized by Income Tax and excise department respectively.

Jogdande further elaborated that Rs 5.90 crore in cash, Rs 3.06 crore in liquor and Rs 4.03 crore worth narcotics have been seized so far in the State.

CEO directs Health Dept to keep all hospitals open on polling day

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) of Uttarakhand, BVRC Purushottam has directed the Health department that the medical staff should compulsorily remain

arrangements at the polling stations. Purushottam directed the officers of the Public Works Department (PWD) to keep the department on an alert mode till the polling



present in all the hospitals of the State on April 19, the day of voting in the State. He gave this order while presiding over a meeting of the senior officers and agencies associated with essential services at the State secretariat on Thursday. In the meeting the CEO also directed the officers of electricity and drinking water departments to ensure necessary

parties return back from their destinations. The department has been asked to keep the main and link roads clear from landslides and other hindrances. The Additional Chief Electoral Officer (ACEO) Vijay Kumar Jogdande, Joint Chief Electoral Officer Pratap Shah and officers of many departments were present on the occasion.

About 23,734 police personnel vote through postal ballot and EDC

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The additional director general of police (Crime, Law and Order) AP Anshuman said that about 23,734 police personnel have cast their vote through postal ballot and Election Duty Certificate (EDC) in the Lok Sabha election in the State. Out of 23,734 personnel, 16,438 personnel cast their vote through postal ballot and 7,296 through EDC. On polling day on Friday, 673 personnel will cast their vote by visiting polling booths. He said that as part of preventive action, the police identified 809 sensitive areas across the State and identified 3,907 people living there that could potentially influence the elections. The police took action against them under the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC). Besides this, a total of 6,567 cases were also registered under the CrPC out of which, the police challaned a total of 39,946 anti-social elements and banned 33,013 persons from respective areas. The ADG said that a total of 11,729 polling stations are established in the five Lok Sabha constituencies that have



been divided into 274 zones and 1,462 sectors. The police have deployed 293 Flying Squad Teams (FSTs) and 252 Static Surveillance Teams (SSTs) to monitor the polling stations. Out of 11,729 polling stations, the police have put 934 polling stations in the critical booths category. The police will keep a vigilant eye on them using webcasting and videography on the polling day. Besides this, the forces will continue to keep strict security arrangements at all inter-district and inter-state barriers besides the international border areas. The ADG also held a meeting with all the senior officials of the State to ensure the safe conduct of the LS elections on Friday.

Women voters hold key in Garhwal Lok Sabha constituency

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The spirit and grittiness exhibited by the Congress candidate Ganesh Godiyal in Garhwal Lok Sabha constituency where he is locked in direct battle with national media spokesperson of BJP Anil Baluni has made the electoral battle for Garhwal interesting. With experts predicting a close contest in Garhwal, the women voters of the constituency are likely to play an important factor in deciding the outcome of the election. In Garhwal LS constituency there are a total of 13,66,983 voters out of whom 6,68,942 are women. There are many Assembly constituencies in Garhwal LS such as Kedarnath, Rudraprayag, Pauri, Chaubatakhal and Kotdwar where the number of women voters is either more or equal to the male voters. Due to the migration of male population, the turnout of women voters is higher in comparison to their male counterparts in the elections. For instance in Pauri district the voter turnout of women voters was 56.44 per cent in LS elections of 2019 which was 11 per cent higher than men. Similarly the voter turnout of women and men voters in Rudraprayag district in 2019 LS election was 63.29 and 45.16 per cent respectively. The factor of higher voter turnout makes women votes crucial in deciding the outcome of electoral battles in Garhwal.

In the campaign for the LS election of 2024 both BJP and Congress tried to woo the women voters. The BJP candidate Baluni is hoping that women voters will support BJP like they did in the LS elections of 2014 and 2019 and Vidhan Sabha elections of 2017 and 2022. BJP hopes that the free ration scheme and Ujjwala gas connection scheme will continue to cast their spell on the women voters of the State. The Congress on the other hand believes that the Ankita Bhandari murder case and increasing unemployment has affected the women voters and this time they will vote for Congress candidate Ganesh Godiyal.

The State president of BJP Mahila Morcha Asha Nautiyal told The Pioneer that the Prime Minister Narendra Modi has empowered women with self help groups and schemes such as Lakhpati Didi and Ujjwala. The BJP government has also given rights to women in property. She claimed that the women voters will continue to support PM Modi and BJP. The State president of Mahila Congress Jyoti Rautela said that the women have understood the rhetoric of BJP. "The increasing unemployment among youth, Agniphath scheme and Ankita Bhandari murder case has hurt the women and they are determined to teach BJP a lesson. Their anger will get reflected in voting," she said.

Light rain & thunderstorms likely in State on polling day today

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The weather is set to take a turn on polling day with the State meteorological centre issuing a warning regarding the possibility of thunderstorms accompanied with lightning likely to occur at isolated places in all districts of the State today. Surface winds are likely to be strong and gusty (30-40 kmph) at isolated places in all the districts. Further, very light to light rain/thunderstorms are likely to occur at many places in Uttarkashi, Chamoli, Dehradun, Tehri, Haridwar and Pauri districts. Very light to light rain/thunderstorms are likely to occur at a few places in Pithoragarh, Almora, Bageshwar, Champawat, Nainital and Udhm Singh Nagar. The provisional State capital Dehradun is forecast to witness a partly to generally cloudy sky with possibility of thunder cloud development/light rain in some areas towards afternoon or evening. The maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to be about 33 degrees Celsius and 20 degrees Celsius respectively in Dehradun today. The maximum and minimum temperatures recorded on Thursday were 32.9 degrees Celsius and 18.4 degrees Celsius respectively in Dehradun, 35.6 degrees Celsius and 18.6 degrees Celsius in Pantnagar, 22.2 degrees Celsius and 10.5 degrees Celsius in Mukteshwar, 24.8 degrees Celsius and 12.8 degrees Celsius in New Tehri.






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पदाश्री बसन्ती विष्ट
(स्टेट आईकन, निर्वाचन)



पदाश्री डॉ. माधुरी बड़वाल
(स्टेट आईकन, निर्वाचन)



मनीष रावत
(स्टेट आईकन, निर्वाचन)



पदाश्री डॉ. प्रोतम सिंह भरतवाण
(स्टेट आईकन, निर्वाचन)



पदाश्री कल्याण सिंह रावत "मैती"
(स्टेट आईकन, निर्वाचन)

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 मन्रेगा जॉब कार्ड	 आधार कार्ड
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 फोटोयुक्त सेवा पहचान पत्र	 फोटोयुक्त पेंशन दस्तावेज
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कोई भी मतदाता ना छूटे

19 अप्रैल - प्रातः 7 बजे से सायं 5 बजे तक

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WhatsApp चैनल को फॉलो करें



मुख्य निर्वाचन अधिकारी, उत्तराखण्ड
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INDIA Bloc leaders resorting to politics of abuse, intimidation: BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Thursday charged that leaders of the Congress and other INDIA bloc constituents are resorting to politics of "abuse and intimidation," and urged the Election Commission to take suo motu cognisance of their recent remarks and act against them. Shehzad Poonawalla, the party's national spokesperson, said during a press conference at the BJP headquarters that Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) leader Nazrul Islam recently "openly" threatened to "bury" Prime Minister Narendra Modi "400 feet below".

"Nazrul Islam, a leader of the JMM and the 'INDI Alliance', has insulted the country's 'jana shakti (people's power)' by threatening to kill and bury the prime minister, who has been elected by the people of the country," Poonawalla said. The JMM leader's remark shows the "mindset" of the opposition's INDIA (Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance) bloc, he charged. "The Election Commission should take suo motu cognisance of Nazrul Islam's remarks and take action against him immediately," the BJP leader said. "This politics of abuse, insult and intimidation is not a coin-



cidence but a well thought out plan (of the opposition). Two days ago, a Congress candidate had talked about killing Modi by saying that he would come (win the election) and Modi would die," Poonawalla charged. Islam on Wednesday apologised for making a derogatory statement against Modi and said his remark was not intended to hurt anyone. "During a political speech, I was speaking against the prime minister's claim of winning 400 seats. I intended to say that they (BJP-led NDA) would not get 400 seats and they would be out of power," the JMM leader said in a video statement. The BJP's Jharkhand unit on

Tuesday demanded a high-level probe and the arrest of Islam for his remarks against Modi. Taking on the Congress, Poonawalla alleged that Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar recently threatened residents of a housing society that they would not get water supply if they did not vote for his brother D K Suresh. Earlier, Karnataka Minister D Sudhakar had "threatened" that a special grant of Rs 25 crore would not be provided if the people did not vote for the Congress candidate, Poonawalla alleged. "Will people be threatened like this? DK Shivakumar gave an

open threat. It's a clear violation of the model code of conduct, Representation of the People Act," the BJP leader said and added, "The Election Commission should take suo motu cognisance of it and take the strictest action against DK Shivakumar and the other Karnataka minister." The BJP's Karnataka unit on Monday filed a complaint with the Election Commission against Sudhakar for alleged violation of the model code of conduct for his comment during a speech at the Nayakanahatti village of Chitradurga district, promising a special grant of Rs 25 crore from the chief minister.

Mamata responsible for violence on Ram Navami in Bengal: Malviya

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee should be held to account for failing to protect Bengali Hindus, the BJP said on Thursday, holding her responsible for the violence during Ram Navami celebrations in Murshidabad district. The BJP's reaction comes after Banerjee, who heads the Trinamool Congress, claimed that the violence was "pre-planned" and accused the BJP of orchestrating it ahead of polling for the Lok Sabha elections. The seven-phase polls starts on Friday and West Bengal will vote in all the phases -- April 19, April 26, May 7, May 13, May 20, May 25 and June 1. Counting of votes will be taken up on June 4. "Bengal is falling apart and Mamata Banerjee is responsi-

ble for it. Her vituperative and communal speeches are the reason Ram Bhakts have been attacked across Bengal," BJP co-in-charge for West Bengal Amit Malviya said in a post on X. She must be held to account for failing to protect Bengali Hindus, he added. According to the West Bengal Police, a woman was injured in a blast that took place when a procession was taken out in Murshidabad's Shaktipur area on Wednesday. Malviya claimed that "after

widespread rioting in Murshidabad, now devotees of Shri Ram targeted in Egra, Medinipur." "BJP karyakartas (workers) will gherao the Egra police station to protest the brutal attack on the Ramanavami Shobha Yatra," he said. Chief Minister Banerjee on Thursday alleged that the BJP instigated violence during Ram Navami celebrations in the state. "Everything was pre-planned. The DIG (deputy inspector general of police) of Murshidabad was removed a day ahead of Ram Navami so that you (the BJP) can carry out violence," she said at an election rally in Raiganj Lok Sabha constituency. The chief minister also claimed that goons associated with the BJP roughed up police personnel in the district.

Congress standing by Naxals for votes: BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Thursday alleged the Congress is advocating for Naxals for votes as it has sensed its defeat in the Lok Sabha elections. Addressing a press conference at the BJP headquarters here, party national spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla alleged that Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinete on Wednesday described Naxals killed in an encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh as "martyrs" and raised questions over the action against the extremists. Security personnel gunned down 29 Naxals in Kanker, Chhattisgarh on Tuesday, in the biggest encounter ever in the state which has been facing the Naxal menace for the

past three decades. "We have seen a very important operation in Chhattisgarh in which 29 Naxals were eliminated by security personnel. It was indeed a big achievement for the security forces," Poonawalla said. "Instead of welcoming the action by the security forces, the Congress has done what is expected of them. However, it is unthinkable that it claimed that the Naxals were essentially martyrs. It put a question mark on the bravery of our security forces," he charged. "Supriya Shrinete described the Naxals as martyrs and expressed sympathy for them. The Congress leader said that a thorough probe should be conducted into this (operation)," Poonawalla said as he played a video clip of Shrinete's comments. The BJP leader said that Shrinete exposed the real face of the opposition INDIA bloc. "Congress leaders are advocating for Naxals as they are losing in the elections. They are not hesitant to stand by terrorists while opposing (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi," Poonawalla said. The number of fatalities in Tuesday's operation was the highest suffered by Naxals in a single encounter in the history of Chhattisgarh's fight against Left Wing Extremism (LWE).

Space established domain of warfare, says CDS Chauhan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Underlining the growing importance of space, Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan said here on Thursday he believes that space is already an established domain of warfare and it will "cast its influence" on air, maritime and land domains. Making this assertion in a recorded video address that was played at the inaugural session of the three-day Indian Defence Space Symposium. General Chauhan also said that "space diplomacy" will soon become a reality. Navy Chief Admiral R Hari Kumar, Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) Chairman Samir V Kamat and other senior officers of the armed forces attended the event held at the Manekshaw Centre here. In his address, General Chauhan underlined the role of space evolving in future warfare. "I will touch upon where we are and where we need to go," he said. "Space is called the final frontier. Space is infinite in its expanse and is also expanding. Like all other frontiers, it is difficult to define its edges very clearly. Mankind has a long way to go to unravel the mystery of space. India wants to be part of that journey," the CDS said. He also spoke about the four "cosmonauts under training" as part of India's "Gaganyaan" programme. "Space is also referred to as an emerging domain of warfare. I believe that it is already an established domain of warfare. My belief is premised on the fast-paced development occurring in this particular

domain," he said. General Chauhan said the history of warfare has "taught us that in any war, the initial contest generally occurs in a new domain." The new domain also influences the battles in older domains, he added. "Initially, the naval power was able to influence battles on land. Later, air power influenced war at land and seas. It is my belief that now, space will cast its influence on air, maritime and land domains," General Chauhan said in his video address. "Terming space a 'global commons', he said there can be "no concept of sovereignty in space." The CDS also said "space diplomacy will soon become a reality". One does not have to be a neighbour to extend cooperation in space to friendly nations. Distances and geopolitical separations might be of "advantage in defence space cooperation," he added. Navy Chief Kumar said despite countless challenges and denial of technology, Indian space scientists have shown the world that India has the "will, wisdom and wherewithal" to be an "ace in space". Admiral Kumar also said it is not rocket science to realise that in "Amrit Kaal", India is "leading the charge at escape velocity" in the space sector. Domain experts and senior officials from the armed forces are taking part in the symposium.

All women crew from tri services ends sailing expedition

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A tri-services all-women crew has completed a nearly four-week rigorous sailing expedition under challenging circumstances in the Arabian Sea as a precursor to an arduous blue-water voyage around the world. The crew comprising 12 women officers from the Indian Army, Navy, and the Indian Air Force carried the voyage to prepare for the global circumnavigation competition scheduled to take place in September, officials said on Thursday. The crew embarked on the journey under the banner of the Army Adventure Wing and the Army Aqua Nodal

Centre of the College of Military Engineering, they said. The voyage, which is a precursor to a much more challenging global circumnavigation competition, spanned over 27 days and tested their endurance and skills in some of the most demanding maritime conditions, an Army official said. "The successful completion of this expedition by the all-women crew highlights the capabilities and potential of women officers in leading and executing complex and challenging missions," he said. The training expedition is formally culminating on Friday with a voyage from Mumbai to Lakshadweep and back. The women sailors have



collectively logged more than 6000 nautical miles of training already. The crew is preparing themselves for 'Around the World Sailing Competition' that is set to mark a significant milestone in India's military history, the official said. During their expedition, the women sailors navigated through varying wind condi-

tions, sweltering heat, and choppy waters, showcasing not only their physical prowess but also their mental fortitude and teamwork, said another official. The journey was broken down into four legs, each presenting unique challenges and learning opportunities for the crew, strengthening their capabilities for the upcoming global circumnavigation challenge, he said. "This expedition is not just about marking geographical milestones but also breaking cultural and gender barriers. The initiative celebrates 'Nari Shakti' (women power) and emphasises the importance of inclusivity and diversity," the official said. "As the team prepares for

their global journey in the coming months, their story is already inspiring many across the nation and the world, showing that with resilience and determination, barriers can be broken, and new paths can be forged," he said. The official further adds: "This historic journey not only exemplifies the spirit of adventure but also underscores the significance of fostering inclusivity and diversity within maritime and military endeavours." The flagging-in ceremony, to be held on Friday evening at Marve in Mumbai, will celebrate the achievements of the courageous women sailors, who have collectively logged more than 6,000 nautical miles of training, he said.

DRDO successfully conducts flight test of desi cruise missile

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Giving a fillip to self-reliance in niche missile technology, Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) on Thursday conducted a successful flight-test of Indigenous Technology Cruise Missile (ITCM) from the Integrated Test Range (ITR), Chandipur off the coast of Odisha. Giving details, defence ministry officials said here during the test, all subsystems performed as per expectation. The missile performance was monitored by several Range Sensors like Radar, Electro Optical Tracking System (EOTS) and Telemetry deployed by ITR at different locations to ensure complete coverage of the flight path. The flight of the missile was also monitored from the Su-30-Mk-I aircraft of the Indian Air Force. The missile followed the desired path using way point navigation and demonstrated very low altitude sea-skimming flight. This successful flight test has also established the reliable performance of the indigenous propulsion system developed by Gas Turbine Research

Establishment (GTRE), Bengaluru. The missile is also equipped with advanced avionics and software to ensure better and reliable performance. The missile is developed by Bengaluru-based DRDO laboratory Aeronautical Development Establishment (ADE) along with contribution from other laboratories and Indian industries. The test was witnessed by many senior scientists from various DRDO laboratories along with the representatives from the production partner. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh congratulated the DRDO for the successful flight-test and stated that successful development of indigenous long range subsonic cruise missile powered by indigenous propulsion is a major milestone for Indian defence research and development.

At least 80 Naxals killed, 125 arrested, 150 surrendered since January in Chhattisgarh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

At least 80 Naxals have been killed and more than 125 arrested while 150 have surrendered in this year so far in Chhattisgarh, where 29 ultras were gunned down two days ago in a fierce encounter with security forces, officials said on Thursday. Left Wing Extremism-related violence has declined in the country by 52 per cent and the number of deaths by 69 per cent from 6,035 to 1,868 in 2014-23 compared to 2004-14, according to Union home ministry data. Since the formation of the Vishnu Deo Sai government in Chhattisgarh in December 2023, pro-active operations have been carried out and, as a result, at least 80 Naxals have been eliminated and more than 125 arrested while 150 have surrendered since January, an official said. Late last year, following a detailed review of the security situation in Naxal-affected states, Union Home Minister Amit Shah had directed security forces to carry out operations against Maoists pro-actively. Shah's direction led to the formation of a high-powered committee, the members of which included director generals of police, director gen-



erals of the Central Reserve Police Force, the Border Security Forces, the Indo-Tibetan Border Police and the Intelligence Bureau, and other officials of the anti-Maoist grid. The result of the pro-active action against Naxals is now visible on the ground, the official said. On Tuesday, security personnel gunned down 29 Naxalites, including some senior members, in Chhattisgarh's Kanker district in the biggest ever encounter in the state. This was the highest number of fatalities suffered by Maoists in a single encounter in the history of the state's fight against Left Wing Extremism (LWE). Three security personnel suffered injuries in the fierce gun-battle that also led to a large quantity of weapons being seized. Security forces started setting up camps in Maoist-dominated areas since 2014. More than 250 such camps were set

up after 2019, ending the security vacuum. According to home ministry data, LWE incidents have reduced from 14,862 to 7,128 in 2004-14 compared to 2014-23. The number of deaths of security personnel due to Left Wing Extremism has declined by 72 per cent from 1,750 in 2004-14 to 485 during 2014-23, while the number of civilian deaths has declined by 68 per cent from 4,285 to 1,383. The number of districts with incidents of violence was 96 in 2010. This declined by 53 per cent to 45 in 2022. Along with this, the number of police stations reporting violence decreased from 465 in 2010 to 176 in 2022. In the last five years, more than 5,000 post offices were set up in 90 districts that have Maoist presence or where the ultras were present. As many as 1,298 banks branches were opened and 1,348 ATMs made operational in the 30 most-affected districts, officials said. A total of 4,885 mobile towers were constructed at a cost of Rs 2,690 crore in Naxal-hit areas and 9,356 km roads constructed at a cost of Rs 10,718 crore. The officials said 121 Eklavya residential schools, 43 ITIs and 38 skill development centres were setup to engage the local youth.

Before booking tourist vehicle, check it is not requisitioned by EC for polls

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

If you've eagerly planned your All-India trip through a tour operator during the upcoming Lok Sabha polls slated for Friday, it's prudent to verify in advance whether the vehicle you've booked has been requisitioned by the Election Commission for polling officials. This precautionary step ensures that your travel plans remain uninterrupted amidst the electoral activities. In fact, the tour operators in the country particularly those catering inbound tourists ie foreign travelers are already in a jittery mode as polls kick off from Friday. They feel that deployment of their vehicles such as taxis or cars by the Election Commission (EC) at the centre and the States in the last moment to ferry polling officials to the booths and for ancillary tasks for voting days and consequent shortage causes disruption in the seamless services as they have to arrange alternate vehicles. On their behalf, the All India Tour Operators (IATO), the national body of the tourism industry has appealed to the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar to exempt tourist vehicles with All India Tourism Permits for election-related deployment, emphasising the impact on tourism services and the risk of legal reper-



ussions. "We have written to Rajiv Kumar, Chief Election Commissioner for exemption of All India Tourism Permit Tourist vehicles from deployment of Lok Sabha / State Elections and guidelines to be issued and other suggestions," said Ravi Gosain, Vice President of the IATO. During the election period, on the orders of Election Commissioner/District Collectors/District Magistrates or any other authorized Government officials, all tourist vehicles, having All India Tourist Permit are deployed for election duties across the country. This means that our members who have committed to providing services to the tourists are not able to provide them the services as per the contract, which causes a lot of problems and tarnishes the image of our country. This also may result in legal action against the tour operators by the foreign tourists for not providing the contracted services, Gosain, who also owns ERCO Travels Pvt. Ltd, told The Pioneer.

"We understand that vehicles are required for election-related tasks but indiscriminate requisitioning of vehicles will cause inconvenience to many tourists. This does not bode well for the sector," he added. "Many tourists have already booked accommodations and finalised their itineraries. If a large chunk of vehicles is withdrawn for election purposes, tourists will face inconveniences," added Rajnish Kaistha, Senior Vice President of the IATO. As the tourism industry strives to rebound post-Covid-19, any shortage of vehicles during the peak travel season could pose significant challenges. "Many tourists are now booking and an inflow of tourists has started. If there is a shortage of vehicles for tourists during the forthcoming season, it would be another challenge for the industry. Of course the EC pays for the services," said Kaistha, founder of the Paradise Holidays (I) Pvt. Ltd. Tour operators commonly utilize all kinds of vehicles including SUVs and sedans to ferry travelers to various destinations for sightseeing purposes. The IATO has also appealed to the Union Tourism Ministry to ensure that ASI/State monuments remain accessible to tourists during the election period, recognizing the significance of monument visits in tourist itineraries.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Time bomb

Currently at 1.44 billion, India's population may double in 77 years unless we curb the trend

India stands at a pivotal juncture in its demographic journey; its population already surpassing China's to reach a staggering 1.44 billion. The prospect of this number potentially doubling within 77 years presents a formidable challenge. True, India's burgeoning population holds the promise of a significant demographic dividend: A youthful workforce, if equipped with the right skills and opportunities, can be the driver for economic growth, innovation and productivity. With appropriate investments in education, healthcare and employment opportunities, India has the potential to emerge as an economic powerhouse. But this is easier said than done. Alongside the opportunities, India also grapples with formidable challenges stemming from its rapid population growth. The strain on resources and infrastructure is palpable, with sectors like healthcare, education, housing and transportation already stretched thin. Overpopulation exacerbates the demand for food, water, energy and housing, leading to environmental degradation and perpetuating socio-economic disparities.



Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach. First of all, there must be a concerted effort to invest in human capital. Education and healthcare must be prioritised to empower individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to participate meaningfully in economy. Mercifully, our population growth rate is showing a downward trend. To arrest the spiralling growth, a comprehensive population strategy is urgently needed, but the nation does not have any such plan.

One reason could be that any attempt to control the population would be highly unpopular. Indira Gandhi, along with Sanjay Gandhi, tried it in the 1970s which eventually led to her downfall. All political parties also learnt their lesson. Of course, we are no China and no coercive measures should be taken but the Government can make concerted efforts to reward family planning and penalise large family sizes. Comprehensive programmes aimed at empowering individuals, especially women, about reproductive health and contraception can help stabilise population growth. Furthermore, investments in sectors such as healthcare, sanitation, transportation and housing are necessary to meet the needs of the growing population. Sustainable development practices must be embraced to mitigate environmental degradation. Job creation is also paramount for managing population growth effectively. Policies that promote entrepreneurship, attract investments and support the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises can help generate employment opportunities. Gender equality and women's empowerment initiatives that enhance access to education, healthcare and economic opportunities are essential. Empowered women are more likely to make informed choices about family planning, leading to smaller family sizes and improved maternal and child health outcomes. There is no dearth of solutions but the big question is, who will bell the cat?

PICTALK



Foreign tourists during celebrations of World Heritage Day at the Agra Fort, in Agra

The enduring ties between India and Iran



BHOPINDER SINGH

Amid geopolitical complexities, India finds itself navigating a delicate balance between Iran, Israel and its domestic constituencies

Persians have had a civilisational connection with Hindustan (Persian for India) since antiquity. There is a powerful India connect, even for the most epochal person defining the politics of the post-Iran Revolution (1979) i.e., Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. His paternal grandfather, Seyed Ahmad Musavi 'Hindi', was born in Kintoor, near Lucknow. Musavi was to leave Awadh and settle in Khomein but was popularly known as 'Hindi' in Persia! Later, 'Hindi' was to be the pen name for Ruhollah Khomeini's poetry. In India itself, Shiite dynasties flourished as refugees escaping persecution from Arab-Sunni strains settled and thrived in Deccan, Rampur, Awadh, Bengal etc., with Lucknow emerging as the epicentre of Indian Shi'ism. Unlike the Middle East, the sectarian tensions were relatively less as the Gazetteer of Gilgit Agency noted, "Wherever Sunnis and Shias are found living together, they seem to practice a mutual tolerance rare in other Muhammadan communities. Except in Chilas and the Indus valley below or, there is, generally speaking, a complete absence of fanaticism". But, times changed and polemical writings of supremacist and sectarian assertions increased, causing bloody rift and polarisation. Soon, even in India the numerically lesser Shias were harassed by the substantially larger Sunni populace, leaving only pockets of Lucknow and Kargil area to have Shias in majority, as other enclaves were predominantly Sunni dominated. 'Shiaphobia' acquired even more sinister propulsion in neighbouring Pakistan and the air of the Sunni-Shia divide soon acquired political/sovereign overtones with Iran emerging as the transnational voice of Shiite sensibilities. The Ummah (Muslim world) got divided into two broad 'blobs' on sectarian lines and the shadows of Iran-versus-Arab Sheikhdoms undercurrents played out violently in areas with mixed populations e.g., Lebanon, Yemen, Syria, Bahrain, Pakistan and even so in India, though the sectarian tensions were not so pronounced here. This unique phenomenon of the relative security, freedom



and thriving of Shias in India (where their percentage was in a similar minority to many other Islamic countries with the Sunni majority) did not go unnoticed in Tehran. India was a rare haven for Shias in modern times and Iran reciprocated the same by occasionally taking a pro-India stand on platforms like the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). That the fate of minority Shias in Pakistan was particularly beleaguered, made Tehran adopt pro-Delhi postures as geopolitical quid pro quo. As the Arab Sheikhdoms were particularly close to the Pakistanis during the Cold War, Iran acted on the rebound by deepening relations with India. But the inevitable consequences of the Iranian Revolution and the need for it to take more puritanical stances and aspire to take over Ummah leadership from Saudi-led Sheikhdoms led to it occasionally striking contradictory postures on issues like Kashmir et al. But situational and sectarian angularity ensured that both Iran and India were on the same side in sensitive theatres like Afghanistan, opposing the Pakistan-led Taliban forces. However, at the same time, India was recalibrating its relations by cosyng up to both the United States of America and Israel, strategically. The cost of Delhi's engagement with Washington and Tel Aviv led



INTERESTINGLY, BOTH ISRAEL AND IRAN HAVE STRONG CONSTITUENCIES WITHIN THEIR NARRATIVES THAT CAN CONVINC THEIR POWERS-THAT-BE OF INDIA'S 'LARGER COMPULSIONS'

to sticky situations like India stopping oil purchases from Iran owing to US-imposed sanctions, as well as stuttering on strategic projects like Chabahar Port. Yet all along there was always an unsaid understanding between Delhi and Tehran of the other's compulsions leading it to be forced into certain decisions — the bilateral trust and intent were rarely questioned. While India's drift towards 'majoritarian' politics led to natural concerns within the Ummah (even though Sheikhdoms were officially bonding frenetically owing to India's emergence on the global highway), the local dynamism for Shias remained protected with the ruling political persuasion co-opting the Shias, actively. Both during the 2014 and 2019 General Elections, prominent Shia leaders in Lucknow actively supported the winning dispensation. Again, it didn't go unnoticed in Iran which remains hypersensitive to the fate of Shias across the world. India was an honourable exception in terms of its treatment of the minority Shias. This undeniable reality helped nuance the parallel (and unprecedented) outreach of Delhi with the capitals of Sheikhdoms and Tel Aviv. Today, when the Israel-Palestine war has metastasised into dragging Iran into the conflict, picking sides for Delhi becomes tricky. The

template of 'strategic independence' (used in the Russia-Ukraine conflict) could be afforded to this conflict which conjoins morality with practicality to take a deliberately mealy-mouthed position that offends none and yet genuinely beseeches peace. Delhi would know about the latent and conflated emotions of the Indian Muslims on the conflict, especially for the Shias when it comes to Iran. From the electoral lens, the dispensation recognises its investment in the Shias and Pasmenda (a backward caste) but the situation does get complex with Israel in the admixture, as that has a similar resonance in the 'majoritarian' calculus as a valorised counterweight to Pan-Islamism. Israel often gets lionised disproportionately and morality becomes increasingly irrelevant. Interestingly both Israel and Iran have strong constituencies within their narrative that can convince their powers-that-be of India's 'larger compulsions'. It is these powerful backdoor channels, civilisational bonhomie and calibrated diplomates that must be deployed as both countries are vital to India's future. India needs to prioritise peace over binary choices. (The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Chhattisgarh encounter aftermath



propos the news article, "Chhattisgarh encounter leaves 29 Naxals dead", published on April 17, this is my response. In the dense forests of Chhattisgarh, where at least 29 Naxals were neutralised, including the top leaders, Shankar Rao and Lalita, divisional committee members of the CPI (Maoist)'s North Bastar Division. This clash, occurring just days before the Lok Sabha polls in Bastar, signifies the ongoing battle against insurgency in the region. More than 60,000 security personnel have been deployed in the district to oversee the electoral

process. This is the highest casualty suffered by the Maoists in a single incident since 2018 when 37 of them were killed in Maharashtra's Gadchiroli district. The Maoist rebels may have had reasons to hold a grudge against the government, but their romantic notion of revolution is misplaced because they'll never succeed in displacing the Government or creating their own Communist paradise in Bastar, or any other region of the country. So yes, they'll probably try to continue their usual attacks, but with the continued, concerted push by the security forces into their strongholds, those attacks will become fewer and far between. We have lacs of military and other security personnel but still, activity is not controlled. Adivasi have their livelihood in the jungle. Government cannot replace them in the name of development. However, I think Maoists' best bet would be to put down their arms and try to effect change through the ballot box. Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

quences in the region and the world. West Asia is often termed as the energy basket of the globe due to its potential to produce oils. Many important sea trade routes connecting Asia to other parts of the world also go through this region. Any direct war between Tehran and Tel Aviv can pause oil supply and disrupt the sea routes. The war can also pull other regional powers into it. Global organisations and leaders should mediate between the countries and convince them to avoid future intensifications of conflict. The leaders of both Iran and Israel should also stop provoking each other. The humanitarian crisis in Gaza also needs to be stopped immediately as it is the root cause behind the conflict in the region. Deba Prasad Nayak | Dhenkanal

TOO MUCH IS TOO BAD

Madam — Apropos the news article, "RCB Maxwell takes a mental and physical break from IPL 2024", published on April 17, this is my response. Many players from

the ongoing IPL have been playing all three game formats almost continuously throughout the year, so their endurance limit, patience and love for the game must be appreciated. The saying, "Eat cricket, talk cricket, sleep cricket" is highly suitable in their case. But too much of anything is too bad in many ways. It wrecks their physical and mental health, playing becomes mechanical & casual, keeps them away for longer periods from their family, spectators will be bored to see the same faces again and again etc. Further cricket became a profession and business, no more a gentleman's game played leisurely and IPL affected the way test cricket is played and reduced its popularity and the number of spectators in the stadiums watching it. No other game has reached such a situation as that of cricket. It is time to restrict the amount of cricket played for its good. O Prasad Rao | Hyderabad

How justified is abusive language on OTT?

The impact of abusive language on societal norms is profound; content creators must deliver realistic but responsible content



KAJLEEN KAUR

The Over-the-Top (OTT) platform has revolutionised India's entertainment landscape and has created a niche for itself among audiences. It is considered to be progressive, realistic, has variety and also caters to the needs of all age groups. However, there has been a lot of noise about the proliferation of abusive language in many of the web series that have raised a lot of general and even legal objections. Recently the Supreme Court (March 2024) has given its verdict that the use of abusive language on OTT cannot be regarded as a criminal offence, as it would lead to an infringement of free speech and violate artistic creativity. This leaves us with an open debate about whether under the guise of freedom of speech, we can use foul language that may be affecting the cultural values of people.



The use of abusive language in OTT content shapes how audiences perceive the characters, themes and overall tenor of the content. It may add authenticity to certain narratives or characters. If nothing else, it has become a fashion Statement and is more

saleable. It can be categorised as a demerit good with a high order of negative externality. Undoubtedly, the onus of the use of such language in society does not lie on OTT, it reflects something already present, but it has certainly contributed to making it more prominent. Some viewers avoid using such foul language, as they consider it to be morally incorrect and undignified. After all, what is the use of good education, if it does not teach us to differentiate between decent and indecent? With the explosion of cuss words on OTT, even this section of society is affected. The young generation, at tender ages, is exposed to such language and easily gets influenced by it. It can become pervasive in everyday usage, hindering effective articulation of thoughts and ideas and challenging the professional and academic standards. It can be detrimental to social interactions and emotional well-being, hampering overall personality development. Simply providing a statutory warning of the content not suitable for a certain age, does not complete the responsibility of the makers. With the availability of the internet and its easy access via gadgets in every home, it is practically not possible to refrain kids from watching such content every time. With the nuclear family setups and working parents' culture gaining strength, it becomes even more difficult. We in India have reformed the education system with the introduction of the National Education Policy and Indian Knowledge System. It thrives on providing a high-quality education system rooted in Indian ethos contributing to transforming India into a value-based superpower. So, while at one place when we are trying to imbibe and revive our rich heritage, at the

same time, we are defending, if not promoting, the use of indecent language. We have a zero-tolerance policy against abuse in educational institutes, but a child tends to learn from the overall environment of which OTT is presently an unavoidable part. Besides, another aspect of the foul language on OTT incorporates gender-specific derogatory terms, predominantly objectifying women. Indian society has always given a special place to women and their role is spread across the cultural, economic and spiritual fabric of our society. The worship of goddesses reflects the deep-rooted respect and reverence for women in our culture. Undeniably, women are behind building the strong-rooted edifice of values and ethics, the society does not feel any responsibility to uphold their dignity. A good and progressive social environment is one where individuals feel respected, secure and valued. (The author is an assistant professor at Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce, University of Delhi; views are personal)

POLITICAL CHARADE

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Contribute fully in 400 seats goal: PM to Bengal", published on April 17, this is my response. If Sandeshkhali has indeed "sent shivers down the entire nation"; surely it must be asked whether the country had been "immersed in a coma" revolving around spine-chilling gangrapes /murder/forced cremation /naked parade of women folks in Uttar Pradesh Gujarat Kathua or Manipur! So the TMC Government of West Bengal is "allowing infiltration" to "boost" its "vote bank"! So who mans the Indo-Bangladesh international border? West Bengal police under the TMC-led West Bengal Government or Border security forces under the BJP-led Centre! Period. And "TMC Government opposes Ram Navami celebration in West Bengal" should feature as "joke of the century"! If announcing a State Government holiday for a purely North Indian festival, absolutely alien to Bengali culture, gets "credited" as "Opposition" to Ram Navami with the Who's Who of the TMC, zealously participating in such processions; then the word "Opposition" itself must be urgently amended in the dictionary! Lastly, it must be answered why despite winning as many as unprecedented 18 Lok Sabha seats from West Bengal in 2019, not a single Bengali was allowed to lead a ministry in the Union Cabinet in the last 5 years! Kajal Chatterjee | Kolkata

TENSION IN WEST ASIA

Madam — The tension in the West Asia region has escalated since Iran has directly launched missile attacks on Israel. The area is already facing challenges due to Israel's war operation in Gaza after the October 7 attack by Hamas. More than thirty thousand people have already died due to this out of which the majority are women and children. USA and other regional players like Hezbollah and Houthis have also been involved in the conflict in these six months. Further escalation of war can lead to serious conse-

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FIRST COLUMN

A VISION FOR INDIA'S GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

The BJP manifesto focuses on strategy to make India a champion of Global South



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) unveiled its election manifesto earlier this week, opting for a departure from the conventional strategy of enticing voters with freebies and subsidies. Instead, the manifesto takes on the guise of a policy document, delineating the achievements of the PM Modi administration over the past decade and pledging to propel India into a developed economy within the next 25 years. Notably absent from the document is any significant mention of Pakistan, a focal point of India's foreign policy for years, in either the BJP manifesto or the Prime Minister's interviews.

The manifesto underscores the government's emphasis on foreign policy, echoing the strategic vision cultivated during India's G20 presidency. It celebrates India's emergence onto the global stage, exemplified by the unanimous consensus achieved for the New Delhi Declaration, a feat accomplished amidst doubts about US-Russia concordance. Prime Minister Modi elucidated his approach in an interview, emphasising the imperative of working towards global good without personal reservations, a principle that guided India's diplomatic endeavours.

In delineating the government's foreign policy outlook, Prime Minister Modi reiterated the cornerstone principles of "Neighbour First" and "Act East" since assuming office. The Act East policy has extended India's influence into the ASEAN region, fostering positive perceptions even among nations geographically distant. India's proactive assistance to neighbours during crises, such as earthquake relief in Nepal and aiding Sri Lanka during times of turmoil, exemplifies its commitment to regional solidarity.



The manifesto boasts of the safe repatriation of 1.5 crore distressed Indian citizens and positions India as a vocal advocate for the Global South, a central tenet of its foreign policy stance. Technological innovations like the Digital India stack, including UPI, have amplified India's presence on global platforms, albeit challenges persist in enhancing the acceptability of the Indian rupee in international trade. The document briefly touches upon India's burgeoning focus on the Indo-Pacific, a region of strategic interest for major global players and pledges to safeguard navigation rights and maritime security.

Under Modi's leadership, the manifesto pledges to bolster India's standing as a champion of the Global South, leveraging the Prime Minister's 5S approach of respect, dialogue, cooperation, peace and prosperity. It articulates aspirations for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council and vows to enhance collaboration within the Indo-Pacific region to foster mutual growth and security.

Furthermore, the manifesto underscores the importance of securing critical minerals essential for the digital age, signalling intentions to forge partnerships with friendly nations to integrate India more deeply into global supply chains. In sum, the BJP's manifesto serves as a testament to continuity in India's foreign policy objectives, underlining a commitment to advancing the nation's interests on the global stage.

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

Sustainability through global collaboration



RAJDEEP PATHAK

President Dennis Francis, at the helm of the 78th UN General Assembly session, champions sustainability as pivotal to economic advancement

While the news of increasing temperatures in the Capital City of Delhi in the coming weeks and months hit the headlines, in a resounding affirmation of the symbiotic relationship between sustainability and economic progress, President Dennis Francis (heading the 78th session of the UN General Assembly), recently in an exclusive interview with PTI, unequivocally asserted that the pursuit of sustainability stands as the cornerstone of 21st-century development endeavours. He also emphasised the imperative of integrating sustainability into the fabric of global advancement. Dennis Francis is all set to inaugurate the "Sustainability Week" at the United Nations headquarters scheduled from April 15-19, 2024. Under the overarching theme of "Paving the Way for a Sustainable Future," this landmark event will spotlight pivotal sectors such as tourism, infrastructure connectivity, transportation, energy and debt, dedicating its discourse to the multifaceted dimensions of sustainability in each domain.

In this PTI exclusive, President Francis outlines a strategic focus on key economic sectors — tourism, transportation, infrastructure, energy and debt management — to drive transformative sustainability. He highlights challenges like climate change, energy security and debt entrapment, emphasising their nexus with poverty, education, housing and national security. Francis further underscores sustainability as both a moral imperative and a catalyst for equitable global progress, envisioning judicious decisions in these realms as key to profound shifts towards a sustainable future.

During the upcoming 'Sustainability Week', Dennis will host a series of high-level events including debates on 'debt sustainability' and 'socio-economic equality'; discussions on 'tourism and sustainable transport', an informal dialogue on 'global resilience through infrastructure connectivity' and a stocktaking session for the completion of the 'UN Decade of Sustainable Energy for All' - all aimed at advancing the implementation of SDG 7 for sustainable development.

Dennis (in the interview) fervently promotes the fusion of sustainability and economic advancement, underscoring their intrinsic interdependence for societal well-being. He advocates for a transformative approach toward sustainable lifestyles, condemning antiquated resource exploitation methods exacerbating climate instability. He envisions a future where profitability harmonises with environmental stewardship, fostering equity and resilience. 'Sustainability Week' precedes the 'Summit of the Future', to instil sustainability as a collective imperative for safeguarding resources for posterity. He further emphasised the pressing requirement to refocus endeavours on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which saw a setback in target achievement because of the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing conflicts. 'Sustainability Week' aims to revive dedication to impactful measures, crucial for reorienting the SDGs towards their intended trajectory.

Through collective action, the aim should be to uplift communities, inspire hope and advance the global agenda for sustainability and equity. The need is to empower communities, foster optimism and promote sustainability and equity worldwide.



Governments, communities and organisations per se are uniting to tackle environmental challenges like climate change, biodiversity loss and renewable energy promotion. For example, in Scandinavia, countries like Denmark have been leaders in wind energy production, investing heavily in offshore wind farms and renewable energy infrastructure. Denmark's commitment to sustainability has led to a significant reduction in carbon emissions and reliance on fossil fuels. Moreover, in Southeast Asia, Singapore pioneers innovative strategies to address river and ocean waste, utilising advanced wastewater treatment and strict plastic regulations, effectively curbing marine pollution. Meanwhile, Africa's 'Great Green Wall' initiative fights desertification in the bio-geographical Sahel region by planting trees and promoting sustainable land management, revitalising degraded landscapes and fostering biodiversity.

Across Latin America, Costa Rica exemplifies biodiversity conservation through national parks and eco-tourism, fostering sustainable development while preserving its rich natural heritage, resulting in both environmental protection and economic prosperity. Some of these diverse efforts demonstrate global commitment to environmental management, enhancing resilience and also safeguarding ecosystems for future generations. India's proactive stance towards achieving the SDGs is evident through multifaceted commitments across sectors. Initiatives like the 'National Solar Mission' and 'Jal Jeevan Mission', 'National Health Mission', etc., highlight the resolve to tackle environmental challenges. India further aims to generate great renewable energy capacity, emphasising reduced reliance on fossil fuels. Water conservation programs such as rainwater harvesting and the

'Jal Jeevan Mission' underscore India's dedication to ensuring water security, aiming to provide piped water supply to all households by 2024. This commitment is reinforced by experts like waterman, Rajendra Singh and CEO of Centre for Science and Environment, Sunita Narain, who stress the importance of renewable energy and community-driven water conservation efforts. Additionally, India's sustainability efforts extend to biodiversity conservation, rural development, healthcare, education, waste management and gender equality, exemplified by schemes like MGNREGA and Ayushman Bharat. Dr. Vandana Shiva emphasises that sustainability encompasses socio-economic factors, with India's inclusive policies striving to create a more equitable and resilient society through integrated policymaking.

It may be noted that India initiated its climate action journey in 2009 by pledging to decrease emissions intensity by 20-25 per cent by 2020, achieving a commendable 24 per cent reduction. Subsequently aligning with the Paris Agreement, India outlined its 'Nationally Determined Contributions' in 2015, aiming for a 33-35 per cent emissions intensity reduction by 2030. Additional goals include enhancing non-fossil fuel energy generation, expanding carbon sinks and targeting 'NET ZERO' emissions by 2070. National efforts are reinforced by initiatives such as the 'National Action Plan on Climate Change' and the 'National Adaptation Fund for Climate Change', focusing on renewable energy, sustainable habitat and adaptation strategies. As per media reports, by April 2023, India had made substantial progress toward 14 of the 33 SDGs, with improvements in neonatal and under-five mortality; sanitation

and electricity access. Challenges like adolescent pregnancy, clean cooking fuel and water facilities persist. Legislative amendments promoting renewable energy and carbon credit trading, along with initiatives such as the 'Green Hydrogen Mission', highlight India's commitment to sustainability. "Business Today" report of August 25, 2023, suggests that these efforts, coupled with the implementation of the 'Sustainable Development Goals National Indicator Framework', positioned India as a global leader in sustainability, as reflected in its ranking in the 'Climate Change Performance Index', indicating promising future progress.

India has implemented various environmental conservation initiatives like the 'Swachh Bharat Mission' 'Namami Gange', etc., along with legislative measures such as the 'Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act' and so on. The introduction of the 'Sustainable Development Goals National Indicator Framework' by the National Statistics Office in 2023 signifies efforts to monitor progress. However, despite advancements in climate action, financing SDGs remains a challenge. Proactive measures, integrating sustainability into policymaking and engaging communities are essential for achieving the ambitious 2030 SDG targets globally, ensuring equity and resilience. The imperative for proactive engagement by dedicated and committed citizens, not only within India but globally, underscores the urgency of collective action. Such involvement is paramount in addressing contemporary challenges, necessitating concerted efforts on a global scale. The choice is ours — perish or preserve.

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



INDIA'S SUSTAINABILITY EFFORTS EXTEND TO BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION, RURAL DEVELOPMENT, HEALTHCARE, EDUCATION, WASTE MANAGEMENT AND GENDER EQUALITY, EXEMPLIFIED BY SCHEMES LIKE MGNREGA AND AYUSHMAN BHARAT

Corruption and political defections: A telltale sign of democratic decay

The electoral arithmetic, rather than the principles of righteousness, often dictates the trajectory of political decisions

Last week, while flitting through the contents of a leading daily newspaper in India, an interesting article caught hold of my attention and it made a compulsive reading throughout. The article was captioned — 'Since 2014, 25 Opposition leaders facing corruption probe crossed over to BJP, 23 of them got reprieve'. The article was, undoubtedly, a telltale commentary on the holes in the prevalent political system in our country. It was an embarrassing account of the glaringly apparent fact that political parties of all hues and shades are compelled to flow with the tides produced by the fault lines in our political system and that too sometimes for sheer political survival.



ATUL SEHGAL

It may not be worthwhile to go deep into the finer nuances of the above account and be brazenly judgemental of hallowed political parties and personalities. It appears to be proper to dwell on the deficiencies of the current system in Bharat and regretfully State that the electoral arithmetic is the biggest bane of our political system. To build up the numbers for gathering the elusive major-

ity, political parties, under a legal system that is speckled with loopholes, have to resort to such shenanigans to assemble numbers to make stable governments and even make strong governments that can govern smoothly. Our democracy has definite deficiencies. Rather it is anything but perfect. A multi-party democracy is better described as a non-ideal, diluted form of democracy, especially so in a culturally variegated society like ours. The purest form of democracy is outlined in our ancient scripture Manusmriti. While making a mention of Manusmriti, it needs to be clarified that this observation is not to be taken lightly even if there is controversy associated with this ancient scrip-

ture. That controversy sprang from its distorted version, due to historical extrapolations by unscrupulous persons. The original, uncorrupted version of Manusmriti is a divine blueprint of an ideal governance system. The scripture talks of democracy indicating the following three characteristic features of democracy (prajatantra) 1. Partyless system of elections and governance 2. Right to recall the elected representatives by the voters 3. Congruous with the principles of righteousness or Dharma It would also be relevant to State here that the above primaeva, divine scripture also provides a structural frame for the democratic governance system. It talks of



three assemblies — Rajaryasabha (executive assembly), Vidyaryasabha (subject specialist assembly) and Dharmaryasabha (assembly of religious experts). The last-mentioned assembly or council is composed of persons of distinguished moral standing and impeccable character who

act collectively as some kind of moral authority on the functioning of the executive council. It is easy to see how far the existing polity and governance structure are away from the above-mentioned ideal polity and governance system in a democratic set-up. In a party less democratic polity, all problems of electoral arithmetic and the evils that they engender are bound to vanish. There are going to be no big election rallies, no stupendous spending on elections, no horse-trading, no party switching, no turn-coats, no go slow on prosecuting the corrupt and criminal politicians and no silly concepts of majoritarianism or minorityism. There is going to be no

minority-centred governance. It is also not difficult to understand how many secondary evils of the extant political system in our country will get eliminated if we were to incorporate the tenets of the sacred scripture Manusmriti in our polity and governance. It may be farfetched to expect that we can carve out from the present system something exactly conforming to the above utopian structure but even if we incorporate therein one or two important features like party less democratic system in our country, great benefit can accrue to our governance. In light of what is Stated above, we certainly need to reform our democratic system which does not deliver

too well. Accordingly, we look forward to the expectedly third term Modi Government bringing about wide constitutional, electoral and bureaucratic reforms to enable our nation to progress by kangaroo leaps, which it is capable of. Bharat is divinely destined to become the leading global nation-State of the world while maintaining its pristine stature as the moral and spiritual trailblazer of the world. This is so because Bharat is the land of saints, sages and seers who have been the beacons for humanity through the course of its long and chequered historical existence on this planet. (The author is a management consultant; views are personal)

US, UK impose new curbs on Iran

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The US and UK on Thursday imposed a new round of sanctions on Iran as concern grows that Tehran's unprecedented attack on Israel could fuel a wider war in the Middle East. Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control targeted 16 people and two entities in Iran that produce engines that power the drones used in the April 13 attack on Israel. Additionally, the UK is targeting several Iranian military organizations, individuals and entities involved in Iran's drone and ballistic missile industries. "We will continue to deploy our sanctions authority to counter Iran with further actions in the days and weeks ahead," Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said in a statement. The action comes after US officials earlier this week warned that they were readying new sanctions in response to Iran's activity in the region and to prevent future attacks. Lawmakers on Capitol Hill also have been quickly pushing forward legislation that would financially punish the Islamic Republic and its leaders. Iran's attack on Israel early Sunday came in response to what it says was an Israeli strike on Iran's consulate in Syria earlier this month. Israel's military chief said Monday that his country will respond to the Iranian attack, while world leaders caution against retaliation, trying to avoid a spiral of violence. European Union leaders also vowed on Wednesday to ramp up sanctions on Iran, targeting its drone and missile deliveries to proxies in Gaza, Yemen and Lebanon. EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said the existing EU sanctions regime would be strengthened and expanded to punish Tehran and help prevent future attacks on Israel. At the same time, he said, Israel needed to exercise restraint. "I don't want to exaggerate, but we are on the edge of a war, a regional war in the Middle East, which will be sending shockwaves to the rest of the world, and in particular to Europe," he warned. "So stop it."

EU official urges G7 to expand Iran sanctions

Capri (AP): The European Union's top diplomat urged Group of Seven foreign ministers on Thursday to take quick, concrete steps to provide more air defence systems to Ukraine, warning that continued delays could tilt the war in Moscow's favour. Without more Patriot air defence missile systems to guard against incoming Russian strikes, "the electricity system of Ukraine will be destroyed. And no country can fight without having electricity at home, in the factories, in the front line," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell warned. He was speaking on the sidelines of a G7 foreign ministers meeting on the Italian resort island of Capri, where Russia's war in Ukraine and surging tensions in the Middle East over Iran's unpre-

cedented attack on Israel were topping the agenda. Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani opened the first working session of the meeting by calling for new sanctions against Iran for its weekend attack and concrete help for Ukraine to defend itself from Moscow's invasion. "If Ukraine loses, Putin will never sit at the peace table," Tajani warned. Russia's war in Ukraine and the Israel-Hamas war were taking centre stage at the Capri meeting, which dovetailed with other regional diplomatic efforts sending the same messages. On Wednesday, EU leaders meeting in Brussels vowed to ramp up sanctions on Iran to target its drone and missile deliveries to proxies in Gaza, Yemen and Lebanon. Borrell

said the existing EU sanctions regime on Iran would be strengthened and expanded to punish Tehran for its attack and help prevent future ones on Israel. At the same time, he said, Israel needed to exercise restraint. "I don't want to exaggerate but we are on the edge of a war, a regional war in the Middle East, which will be sending shockwaves to the rest of the world, and in particular to Europe," he warned. "So stop it." Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba and NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg were attending the Capri meeting as guests. Kuleba underlined his country's need for essential military support, including artillery, ammunition, and air defence systems to bolster its capacity as Russia pushes along the front line.

Croatia's PM optimistic of new govt after inconclusive vote

AP ■ ZAGREB

Croatia's ruling conservatives said Thursday that talks have already started about the formation of a new governing majority following a highly contested parliamentary election that saw a far-right party emerge as a potential kingmaker. Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic, who is the leader of the Croatian Democratic Union party, or HDZ, said that the party has contacted some of the potential future partners and more talks will take place on Thursday. Preliminary results of the vote on Wednesday showed that Plenkovic's HDZ won 61 seats in the 151-seat parliament, which means the party has to form a coalition government to stay in power. The main opponent, center-left Social Democratic Party, backed by President Zoran Milanovic, got 42 seats while the far-right Homeland Movement was third, with 14 seats, according to the



Prime Minister incumbent Andrej Plenkovic waves after claiming victory in a parliamentary election in Zagreb, Croatia on Thursday

tally released by the State Election Commission. Plenkovic offered no details about the potential future alliance. If he remains the prime minister, that would mark his third consecutive term at the post. "Everything is going well," he wrote on Facebook. "You will

soon know with whom we will form the new majority." Plenkovic has faced accusations of corruption as Croatia, a European Union and NATO member, struggles with the highest inflation rate in the eurozone, a labor shortage and a surge in migration.

EU leaders mull tougher sanctions against Iran

AP ■ BRUSSELS

European Union leaders debated ways to ramp up sanctions against Iran at a summit on Wednesday as concern grows that Tehran's unprecedented attack on Israel could fuel a wider war in the Middle East. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy reminded the gathering that his country still badly needs support to combat Russia's invasion. French President Emmanuel Macron urged his EU counterparts in Brussels to "adapt" and "expand" sanctions against Iran. The EU has already slapped sanctions on the Islamic Republic but Macron said new measures should target "those who are helping to produce the missiles and drones that were used" in the weekend attack. According to a draft statement prepared for the meeting also focusing on the war in Ukraine and ways to boost the bloc's economic competitiveness, the leaders are to warn that "the EU is ready to take further restrictive measures

against Iran, notably in relation to unmanned aerial vehicles and missiles." The statement also calls "on Iran and its proxies to cease all attacks" and urges all sides to exercise "utmost restraint and to refrain from any action that may increase tensions in the region." EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell has tasked his staff with drawing up new measures but expanding sanctions, however, is not a simple step — the EU has already targeted those responsible for making drones that Iran has sold to Russia for use in its war against Ukraine. The idea is to expand that list to include missiles, although there is no evidence that Iran has sold missiles to Russia. Borrell said that proxy forces backed by Iran in Lebanon, Iraq and Syria could also be targeted with sanctions. Some seek sanctions on those providing Iran with the components to make drones, measures already approved in July 2023. Borrell said his team would look at whether to expand the list of components, or develop ways to stop the

sanctions from being circumvented. Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo, whose country currently holds the EU's rotating presidency, said his position is that the "Iranian Revolutionary Guard should be put on the sanctions list" and that this "would be a very important signal." But that would pose legal challenges. Borrell said an EU member country would have to provide evidence that the Revolutionary Guard has been involved in acts of terrorism against it — something that none have so far claimed. The United States is also preparing new sanctions targeting Iran's missile and drone program and entities supporting the Revolutionary Guard and Iran's Defence Ministry, according to White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan. EU leaders in Brussels are also expected to renew their call for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza and the release of hostages, "as well as increasing humanitarian aid at scale to Palestinians in need."

Regional tensions have mounted since the Oct. 7 start of the latest Israel-Hamas war, when Palestinian militant Hamas and Islamic Jihad groups, backed by Iran, carried out a devastating cross-border attack that killed 1,200 people in Israel and seized 250 as hostages. Israel responded with an offensive in Gaza that has caused widespread devastation and killed over 33,800 people, according to Gaza's health officials. Russia's two-year war in Ukraine was also on the agenda, with Zelenskyy addressing the Brussels meeting remotely and repeating his pleas for more air defence systems, including Patriot missile systems. "They are needed in Ukraine right now, needed to stop (Russian President Vladimir) Putin from relying on terrorist methods," he said, according to a transcript provided by the EU. Zelenskyy also asked for more "weapons for our soldiers" and "shells for artillery. Vehicles. Drones. Everything that helps to hold the front line."

Since launched the February 2022 full-scale invasion, Russia has captured nearly a quarter of Ukraine. Ukrainian soldiers are outnumbered, outgunned and in desperate need of more troops and ammunition while doubt is increasing about Western military aid. Zelenskyy said repeatedly Ukraine must bolster its air defenses and replenish its ammunition supplies amid Russian pushes along the front line. "Putin now hopes that he will succeed in his counteroffensive, and the only root of this hope is the shortage of weapons among our soldiers," Zelenskyy said. Talks on Thursday will focus on how to bolster the EU's competitiveness and improve the single market. The leaders will discuss a proposal by former Italian Prime Minister Enrico Letta for an EU-wide effort to subsidise industry in response to the Biden administration's support for investment in environmentally friendly technology, and China's subsidies for electric cars and solar panels.

UN agency in Gaza battles Israel's dissolution demand

AP ■ UNITED NATIONS

The head of the UN agency that has helped millions of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank for decades urged the Security Council on Wednesday to ensure its survival as Israel again demanded its dissolution, accusing the agency of becoming part of Hamas' "terror war machine." Philippe Lazzarini told the council that dismantling the agency known as UNRWA would deepen Gaza's humanitarian crisis and speed up the onset of famine. International experts have warned of imminent famine in northern Gaza and said half the territory's 2.3 million people could be pushed to the brink of starvation if the six-month Israeli-Hamas war intensifies. Lazzarini said ending the agency's operations also would have other "lasting repercussions" on Gaza, leaving a half million children without education and "fuelling anger, resentment and endless

cycles of violence." In addition, it would jeopardise the transition when the war ends by depriving Gaza's population of essential services, including health care, food and other humanitarian aid, he said. Israeli Ambassador Gilad Erdan claimed, without providing evidence, that UNRWA has been totally infiltrated by Hamas, which controlled Gaza before the war. He also accused UNRWA of being part of a Palestinian plot to annihilate Israel and becoming "the world's biggest advocate for a one-state solution" run by Palestinians. "Today in Gaza, UNRWA is Hamas and Hamas is UNRWA," Erdan said. "Israel cannot and will not allow UNRWA to continue in Gaza as it did in the past," he said, telling the council there are alternative aid organizations and U.N. agencies that can help Palestinians in the territory. "The time has come to defund UNRWA," he said.

UAE struggles to recover after heaviest rainfall

Dubai (AP): The United Arab Emirates struggled on Thursday to recover from the heaviest recorded rainfall ever to hit the desert nation, as its main airport worked to restore normal operations even as floodwater still covered portions of major highways and roads. Dubai International Airport, the world's busiest for international travel, allowed global carriers on Thursday morning to again fly into Terminal 1 at the airfield. "Flights continue to be delayed and disrupted, so we urge you to only come to Terminal 1 if you have a confirmed booking," the airport said on the social platform X. "The long-haul carrier Emirates, whose operations had been struggling since the storm Tuesday, had stopped travellers flying out of the UAE from checking into their flights as they tried to move out connecting passengers. Pilots and flight crews had been struggling to reach the airport given the water on roadways. But on Thursday, they lifted that order to allow customers into the airport. Others who arrived at the airport described hours-long waits to get their baggage, with some just giving up to head home or to whatever hotel would have them. The UAE, a hereditarily ruled, autocratic nation on the Arabian Peninsula, typically sees little rainfall in its arid desert climate. However, a massive storm forecasters had been warning about for days blew through the country's seven sheikhdoms. By the end of Tuesday, more than 142 millimeters (5.59 inches) of rainfall had soaked Dubai over 24 hours. An average year sees 94.7 millimeters (3.73 inches) of rain at Dubai International Airport. Other areas of the country saw even more precipitation. The UAE's drainage systems quickly became overwhelmed, flooding out neighborhoods, business districts and even portions of the 12-lane Sheikh Zayed Road highway running through Dubai. The state-run WAM news agency called the rain "a historic weather event" that surpassed "anything documented since the start of data collection in 1949."

Sydney shopping mall reopens after stabbings

Sydney (AP): A Sydney shopping mall opened to the public on Thursday for the first time since a mass stabbing in which six people died, while the Australian prime minister raised giving citizenship to an immigrant security guard who was wounded while confronting the knife-wielding attacker. The deadly rampage through Westfield Bondi Junction on Saturday was the earlier of two knife attacks by lone assailants over three days that have traumatized Sydney. The man who stabbed 18 people in Saturday's attack was shot dead by police. A 16-year-old boy is in police custody after he allegedly stabbed a Christian bishop and priest during a church service on Monday. Police allege the boy had a religious or ideological motivation and attacked during the streamed service to cause intimidation.

Juror dismissed from Trump hush money trial as prosecutors seek to hold ex-Prez in contempt

AP ■ NEW YORK

A juror in Donald Trump's hush money trial was dismissed Thursday after expressing doubt about her ability to be fair and impartial, and the status of a second New Yorker picked for the panel was in limbo amid concerns that some of his answers in court may not have been accurate. The setbacks in the selection process emerged during a frenetic morning in which prosecutors also asked for Trump to be held in contempt and fined over a series of social media posts this week, while the judge in the case barred reporters from identifying jurors' employers. The seating of the full jury — whenever it comes — will be a seminal moment in the case, setting the stage for a trial that will place the former president's legal jeopardy at the heart of the campaign against Democrat Joe Biden. The trial will also feature potentially

unflattering testimony about Trump's private life in the years before he became president. The jury selection process picked up momentum Tuesday with the selection of seven jurors. But on Thursday, Judge Juan Merchan revealed in court that one of the seven, a cancer nurse, had "conveyed that after sleeping on it overnight she had concerns about her ability to be fair and impartial in this case." And though jurors' names are being kept confidential, the woman said her family members and friends questioned her about being a juror. Prosecutors also raised questions about a second juror, a man who works in information technology, saying they had located an article from the 1990s about a man with the same name as the juror being arrested for tearing down political advertisements in suburban Westchester County. The posters were on the political

right, prosecutors said. The man said under questioning this week that he had not been convicted of a crime. Merchan asked the juror to come to court Thursday morning for additional questioning. Twelve jurors and six alternates must be seated to hear the trial. Merchan said Tuesday that opening statements could begin as soon as Monday. The process of picking a jury is a critical phase of any criminal trial but especially so when the defendant is a former president and the presumptive Republican nominee. Prospective jurors have been grilled on their social media posts, personal lives and political views as the lawyers and judge search for biases that would prevent them from being impartial. Inside the court, there's broad acknowledgment of the futility in trying to find jurors without knowledge of Trump. A prosecutor this week said that lawyers were not looking

for people who had been "living under a rock for the past eight years." But Thursday's events laid bare the inherent challenges of selecting a jury for such a landmark, high-publicity case. After dismissing the nurse from the jury, Merchan ordered journalists in court not to report prospective jurors' answers to questions about their current and former employers. He said that "as evidenced by what's happened already, it's become a problem." The answers also will be redacted from court transcripts. Prosecutors had asked that the employer inquiries be axed from the jury questionnaire. Defence lawyer Todd Blanche responded that "depriving us of the information because of what the press is doing isn't the answer". The district attorney's office on Monday sought a \$3,000 fine for Trump for three Truth Social posts they said violated the order.

'Israeli agents likely killed Hezbollah-linked currency exchanger'

Beit Meri (AP): Lebanon's interior minister alleged Wednesday that the mysterious abduction and killing of a Hezbollah-linked Lebanese currency exchanger in a villa on the edge of a quiet mountain resort town earlier this month was likely the work of Israeli operatives. The killing of Mohammad Srour, 57, who was sanctioned by the U.S., was like something out of an international spy thriller. Pistols equipped with silencers and gloves were found in a bucket of water and chemicals at the scene, apparently intended to remove fingerprints and other evidence, Interior Minister Bassam Mawlawi said in an interview with The Associated Press. Thousand of dollars in cash were left scattered around Srour's body, as if to dispel any speculation that robbery was the motive. "Lebanese security

agencies have suspicion or accusations that Mossad was behind this operation," Mawlawi said, referring to the Israeli spy agency. "The way the crime was carried out led to this suspicion." He provided no specific evidence for his allegations. Mawlawi said the investigation is still ongoing and once it's over the results will be made public and referred to judicial authorities. The Israeli prime minister's office, which oversees Mossad, did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The suspicion by Lebanon's security agencies that the crime could be the work of Israeli agents comes at a time when Lebanon's southern border region has been rocked by ongoing clashes between militants of the Hamas-allied Hezbollah group and Israeli troops.

Indonesians leave homes near erupting volcano, airport closes

AP ■ MANADO

Indonesian authorities closed an airport and residents left homes near an erupting volcano Thursday due to the dangers of spreading ash, falling rocks, hot volcanic clouds and the possibility of a tsunami. Mount Ruang on the northern side of Sulawesi Island had at least five large eruptions Wednesday, causing the Centre for Volcanology and Geological Disaster Mitigation to issue its highest level alert, indicating an active eruption. The crater emitted white-gray smoke continuously during the day Thursday, reaching more than 500 metres (1,640 feet) above the peak. People have been ordered to stay at least 6 kilometres (3.7



miles) from the 725-metre (2,378 foot) mountain. More than 11,000 people live in the affected area and were told to leave. At least 800 have done so.

An international airport in Manado city was temporarily closed Thursday as volcanic ash was spewed into the air. "We have to close flight operations at Sam Ratulangi Airport due to the spread of volcanic ash, which could endanger flight safety," said Ambar Suryoko, head of the regional airport authority. The volcanology centre noted the risks from the volcanic eruption include the possibility that part of the volcano could collapse into the sea and cause a tsunami. Tagulandang Island, east of the volcano, could be at risk if that occurred, and its residents were among those being told to evacuate. "People who live in the Tagulandang Island area and

are within a 6-kilometre radius must be immediately evacuated to a safe place outside the 6-kilometre radius, and especially those who live near the coast should be aware of the potential for incandescent rocks to erupt, hot clouds and tsunami waves that could be triggered by the collapse of a volcanic body into the sea," Abdul Muhari, spokesperson of the National Disaster Mitigation Agency, said on Thursday. The agency said residents will be relocated to Manado, the nearest city, on Sulawesi island, a journey of six hours by boat. Volcanic eruptions have triggered past tsunamis in Indonesia, including an 1871 eruption at Mount Ruang and the 2018 eruption of the Anak Krakatau volcano.

Reuters photographer wins top photo award

AP ■ PARIS

Reuters photographer Mohammed Salem captured this year's prestigious World Press Photo of the Year award Thursday with a depiction of loss and sorrow in Gaza, a heartrending photo of a Palestinian woman cradling the body of her young niece. The photograph, taken in Khan Younis just days after Salem's own child was born, shows 36-year-old Inas Abu Maamar holding five-year-old Saly, who was killed along with her mother and sister when an Israeli missile struck their home. Salem, who is Palestinian, described this photo filed Nov. 2 last year, as a "powerful and sad moment that sums up the broader sense of what was happening in the Gaza Strip." The image "truly encapsulates this sense of impact," said global jury chair Fiona Shields, The



This image provided by World Press Photo and taken by Lee-Ann Olwage for GEO is part of a series titled Valim-babena which won the World Press Photo Story of the Year Award and shows Joeline (Fara) Rafaraniriana (41) and her daughter, Olliatemix Rafaraniriana (5), lie together on the bed they share with Dada Paul Rakotazandrimy (91) in their home in Mandrosoa Ivato, Antananarivo, Madagascar. Fara is the sole provider for the family of three and struggles to balance her time between caring for her father, work and spending time with her daughter. AP/PTI

Guardian newspaper's head of photography. "It is incredibly moving to view and at the same time an argument for peace, which is extremely powerful when peace can sometimes feel like an unlikely fantasy," she added. The World Press Photo jury praised the shot's sense of care and respect and its offering of a "metaphorical and literal glimpse into unimaginable loss." This is not the first time Salem has been recognized for his work on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; he received a World Press Photo award more than a decade ago for another depiction of the human toll of conflict in the Gaza strip. In the three other global categories announced Thursday, South Africa's Lee-Ann Olwage won Photo Story of the Year for her touching series "Valim-babena," featured in GEO magazine.

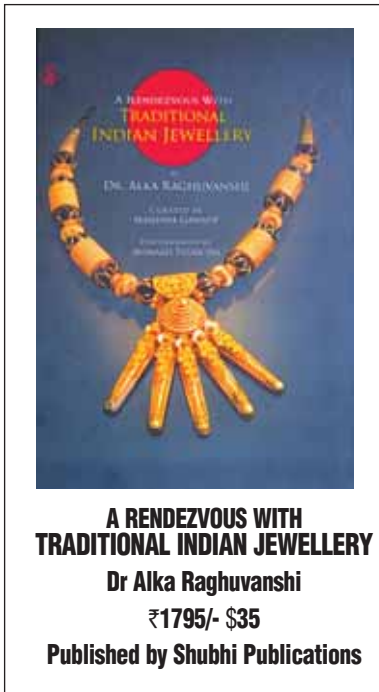


HERITAGE INDIAN JEWELLERY DAZZLES THE WORLD

DR ALKA RAGHUVANSHI'S passion for Indian jewelry shines through every page of her book, attracting not just jewelry enthusiasts and historians, but also the layman who simply admires beauty, writes SAKSHI PRIYA



Published posthumously, Dr Alka Raghuvanshi's *Rendezvous with Traditional Indian Jewellery* is a mesmerizing exploration of this exquisite Indian art form. This is not just another book. It is a soulful journey into the heart of India's rich cultural heritage, where intricate artistry meets profound symbolism. While it explores the intricate world of traditional Indian jewelry, the book is lavishly illustrated with pictures that provide a comprehensive overview of the history, craftsmanship, and significance of Indian jewelry, nudging its readers to appreciate this ancient and vibrant art form. Ehaaa and Shubhi Publications recently launched Dr Raghuvanshi's last written book on the occasion of her 63rd birth anniversary. The book is curated by Manisha Gawade and contains stunning photographs by Avinash Pasricha. One of the most striking aspects of the book is its meticulous attention to detail. Dr. Raghuvanshi delves into the origins of Indian jewelry, tracing its evolution from ancient times to the present day. She explores the diverse influences that have shaped



Indian jewelry, from the intricate designs of the Mughal era to the vibrant colours and motifs visible in South Indian jewelry. The book is divided into several thematic chapters, each focusing on a specific aspect. From the exquisite craftsmanship of the Nizam's word-acclaimed jewelry treasure trove to the intricate designs of silver accessories, each chapter offers a fascinating glimpse into the world of Indian jewelry. The photographs accompanying the text are stunning, showcasing the beauty and intricacy of each piece. One of the book's most captivating sections is its exploration of the symbolism behind this traditional Indian art form. Dr. Raghuvanshi explains how each piece of jewelry is imbued with deep meaning, reflecting the wearer's social status, religious



beliefs, and cultural identity. For example, the *mangaimala*, (necklace of mangoes), symbolises fertility and abundance, while the *vanki*, (upper arm ornament), is a symbol of protection and strength. The book also sheds light on the craftsmanship and techniques used in creating jewelry by gold and silversmiths way back in recorded history. The author describes the painstaking process of creating *Jadau* jewels from Avadh, highlighting the skill and artistry of the craftsmen involved in blending precious stones with gold. She also explains the painstaking process of reconditioning old jewelry, where creations from decades ago are transformed into modern works of art while retaining their traditional charm. In addition to, the book also examines the cultural and historical significance of jewelry in India. Dr Raghuvanshi discusses how jewelry has been used as a form of adornment, protection, and status symbol throughout India's history. This includes the role of these masterpieces played in rituals and ceremonies, where each article of adornment served as an expression of identity and spirituality. Furthermore, the book provides a comprehensive look at the different styles and techniques of jewelry making across the length



and breadth of India. The author delves into the varied materials used in jewelry making, from precious metals like gold and silver to gemstones like diamonds and emeralds. She also discusses the different techniques used in jewelry making, such as *Kundan* and *Meenakari* work, that Indian artisans proudly boast of. One of the most compelling features in the book is its focus on regional variations in Indian jewelry. This section, accompanied by stunning visuals, deals with how different regions of India have carved a niche for themselves through their individual, and therefore signature, styles and techniques of jewelry making, that reflect the diverse cultural heritage of the country. From the intricate designs of Rajasthan to the vibrant colors of Gujarat, each region has its distinct aesthetics that is beautifully brought out in the book. Arguably, *Rendezvous with Traditional Indian Jewellery* is a captivating exploration of one of India's most cherished art forms, their legacy and their evolution over the years. Dr. Alka Raghuvanshi's passion for Indian jewelry shines through in every page, making this book a must-have in the libraries of those genuinely interested in the art, culture, and heritage of India. From a jewelry enthusiast to a historian, or for the layman who simply admires beauty, this book is a delight and inspiration.

The flag of Sanatan Dharma flies high

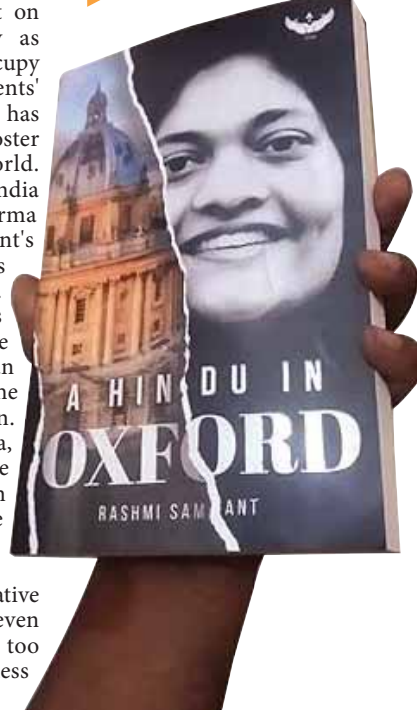
RASHMI SAMANT takes on her rivals head on through a scintillating narrative of a small town Indian girl fighting against all odds at Oxford to survive and expose the ugly face of self-styled secularists and their anti-India rants, says KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

The year 2016 saw US based Indologist Rajiv Malhotra come out with *Academic Hinduphobia*, a sequel to his celebrated work *Breaking India* (Co-authored with Aravindan Neelakantan). This was published in 2011 and observations made by the author in the book actually came true in 2015 when anti-India forces held demonstrations in New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University raising the infamous slogan "Bharat teri tukde honge." (India will be severed into pieces). Following this, there was no going back for anti-India forces to propagate their one-point agenda to balkanise India. However, this anti-India call exposed these forces, underlining the fact that despite their attempts to conceal their real intent, the truth would eventually be out. I remember a conversation I had with a US security expert at IIT Madras in 2009 wherein he pointed out that the 1992 demolition of the Babri Masjid was an act of terrorism. That abruptly ended our chat. Back then, the term Hinduphobia was yet to find space in the national narrative. In 2016, Malhotra, through his book, guided readers to the glaring realities of the times with his scholarly and erudite research, at a time when our own citizens promoted anti-Hindu

feelings across the world with writers of eminence, and self-styled historians and sociologists para-dropping into India. Gradually, a bunch of disgruntled and discontented judges as well as academics joined the chorus, churning out half truths and outright lies against Sanatan Dharma. Their interpretation of Sanatan Dharma was more lethal than the deadly Covid-19, widely spread by the DMK through a relentless campaign by a select group of so-called "intellectuals". It is at this juncture that a young graduate from Oxford University decided to chronicle her bitter experiences in the Holy Grail of modern education. Rashmi Samant, an Udupi-born engineering graduate, got admission for her a post-graduation programme at Oxford University purely based on merit. This young lady, through her book *A Hindu in Oxford*, decided to tell us about her trials and tribulations at the reputed University when she became the president of the Oxford Students Union. One must admire this young lady's courage and determination to awaken the world to the "real" Oxford which, as I understand, today survives only on a historical past. The British excelled in marketing their educational institutions, giving

Indians an academic inferiority complex vis-a-vis their British counterparts that unfortunately pushed them to pursue their higher studies study in these very institutions. I do not include author Samant in this category. But for her intellectual honesty, she would not have penned this path-breaking book. Rashmi Samant, a young girl from the small time temple town of Udupi in Karnataka went on to create a tremendous impact on the international community as the first Hindu woman to occupy the post of Oxford's students' union as its president. This has served as a major morale booster for Hindus across the world. However, forces inimical to India in general and Sanatan Dharma in particular, found Sawant's views unpalatable and thus began the author's sufferings. As mentioned earlier, there is a media blitzkrieg across the globe tarnishing Sanatan Dharma and questioning the heritage of Indian tradition. Ramayana and Mahabharata, two great Indian epics are portrayed as myth and fiction by this section of people. The sustained campaign against Sanatan Dharma was successful in creating a negative impact in western countries even as Indians themselves were too diffident to fight the baseless charges and allegations.

A HINDU IN OXFORD
Rashmi Samant
₹399
Published by GARUD



To begin with, Samant too was a victim of Hinduphobia. Her troubles began when she decided to run for the presidency of Oxford Students Union. The list of Asians who have occupied the presidency of OSU include Lalith Athulathmudali, a former Sri Lankan minister for internal security, and Benazir Bhutto, the assassinated former Prime Minister of Pakistan, who was also the president of the Oxford Debating Union. The main weapon in the hands of anti-India forces operating primarily in Europe and the US are our very own citizens whose round-the-trip airfare and accommodation in deluxe hotels and hefty pay packets are bankrolled by the West in return for their tirade against India. Unfortunately, a news-starved western media is only too willing to report whatever anti-India statements come from these Indian quarters. Our *desi* (local) intellectuals label Sanatan Dharma as the embodiment of all that is evil and bad. The present generation of Europeans and Americans have grown up absorbing these lies unthinkingly. Several Indian so-called activists have been detained and arrested by the police in connection with charges of conspiracies; they continue to toil behind bars. This, not because of a weak

Indian judiciary that cannot grant them bail but the fact the charges filed against them are grave and true. India is ridiculed and criticised for legislations enacted by the Central Government which are only measures to strengthen the country's internal security, not an attempt to discriminate against people based on their religion and community. When the Citizens Amendment Act (CAA) was passed by the Indian Parliament, opposition to the same by a particular religious community came down like an avalanche. Instead of reading and understanding the legislation, sectarian groups took to the streets, holding the citizenry to ransom. India perhaps is the only country which allows roads and public places for people to offer their Friday prayers. Any attempt or enactment of any law to restrict anti-nationals is therefore termed by the Government's critics as saffronisation. For this "intellectual" group it is almost a sin to learn Sanskrit. This group and even our modern generation are unaware of the fact that the world's greatest literary works have been penned in Sanskrit. So much so that learning Hindi and Sanskrit is a taboo in Dravida Nadu. The world needs to know about these ground realities, as also the fact that the protagonists of

Hinduphobia have amassed untold and undisclosed wealth in India and abroad. Even as I write this review, a social media message reports about Communist leader Binoy Viswam's opposition to allow foreign universities to open their campuses in India. His aversion is inexplicable considering his wife, daughter and son-in-law have all been educated in foreign universities. Viswam is the leader of a cynical political outfit which continues to deny that India's Chandrayaan mission was indeed a success. In this anarchist world peopled by the likes of Viswam, anything against Hinduism "will sell, sell well". Rashmi Samant has taken on her rivals head on through a scintillating narrative of how a small town Indian girl fought against all odds in the civilised world of Oxford, where there were countless people baying for her blood. For this grit and determination Samant deserves a salute for pouring out her heart in the public domain. *A Hindu In Oxford* is a wonderful work and a beacon of hope that truth alone shall prevail in the end. Udupi is well-known for its Lord Krishna Temple and the delicacies served by the master chefs from this coastal area. In a nutshell, Samant has immortalised Udupi and her personal journey in her book, making it an absolute must read.



LUCKNOW SUPER GIANTS FACE STERN HOME TEST AGAINST QUALITY CSK BOWLING

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

As questionnaires await the Lucknow Super Giants on their home turf as Chennai Super Kings' cerebral bowling unit will look to use its variation to the fullest on a two-paced Ekana Stadium track during their IPL clash here on Friday.

The two teams endured contrasting fortunes in their previous couple of matches. While Rituraj Gaikwad's team, still 'marshalled' by the peerless Mahendra Singh Dhoni, is coming into the game with back-to-back victories, LSG under KL Rahul have endured a mini-slump with successive defeats.

With LSG's batting unit not exactly inspiring the highest level of confidence despite its firepower, it remains to be seen how it tackles an attack where each bowler brings something different to the table.

Matheesha Pathirana, with his yorkers, is literally unplayable at the death, while Mustafizur Rahman has at least three variations of cutters, including one with scrambled seam. Ravindra Jadeja, on tracks where the ball grips like it often happens at the Ekana, could be more than a handful. At Lucknow, it could be an option to play the extra spinner in Maheesh Theekshana to make full use of the conditions. The average first innings score in Lucknow this season has been 175, which is at least 15 sub-par compared to some of the other grounds, and this is exactly the kind of total where Dhoni, like the seasoned 'Concert Master' of an orchestra team, controls the 'pitch and tune'.

Lucknow, on the other hand, have had issues with injuries. Their young pace sensation Mayank Yadav had to sit out of the last two games after suffering lower abdominal

strain after playing just two and a quarter games. The 21-year-old has resumed training on Wednesday and his blistering pace could seriously have an impact on the match as most of the other bowlers playing this game are either medium-fast or fast medium. But there is still no clarity if Mayank will be playing on Friday.

In the spin department, Ravi Bishnoi has been bowling tight spells, but his one dimensional skill of bowling one googly after another has been found out as he got only four wickets in the six game so far. Bishnoi vs a rampaging Shivam Dube will be a mouth-watering contest and will add a spicy sub-plot to the main battle.

The batting is a bigger issue for LSG as one of their mainstays — Quinton de Kock, after consecutive half-tons, has hit a rough patch in the previous three games. The contentious 'Impact Player' rule has also



meant that Krunal Pandya, a more than capable left-hander, has been batting as low as No. 7 and faced 41 deliveries cumulatively in six games — an average seven balls per game. Krunal isn't exactly a finisher, and not using him at optimum level has also been a problem.

Even skipper KL Rahul (204 runs at 138 SR) hasn't been at his best and his safe starts have been more damaging than beneficial. Young Ayush Badoni too seems to be playing for his place in the side. Only Nicholas Pooran, with 19 sixes in six games, have looked dangerous.

While CSK will look to consolidate their place in the points table with what could be their fifth win, a defeat would further push LSG southwards.

SQUAD:

Chennai Super Giants: KL Rahul (c), Quinton de Kock, Nicholas Pooran, Ayush Badoni, Kyle Mayers, Marcus Stoinis, Deepak Hooda, Devdutt Padikkal, Ravi Bishnoi, Naveen-ul-Haq, Krunal Pandya, Yuvraj Singh, Prerak Mankad, Yash Thakur, Amit Mishra, Shamar Joseph, Mayank Yadav, Mohsin Khan, K. Gowtham, Shivam Mavi, Arshin Kulkarni, M. Siddharth, Ashton Turner, Matt Henry, Mohd. Arshad Khan.

Started preparing for freight train called SRH: DC bowling coach James Hopes

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Delhi Capitals bowling coach James Hopes said his team is looking forward to beginning its home stretch against the "freight train" called Sunrisers Hyderabad as it aims for a resurgent run after some early setbacks in the ongoing IPL.

Delhi defeated Gujarat Titans by six wickets after bowling them out for 89 runs in a clash on Wednesday. The team will now play three back-to-back home games, starting with the contest against SRH on Saturday. SRH have been flying high and have twice posted record-breaking IPL totals in this edition. They registered the highest ever in the tournament history — 287/3 — in their last game against Royal Challengers Bengaluru.

"We're running into the freight train next game, which is SRH. We've already started preparing for that. So we're hopeful if we have a good week and a half we would be top-four," Hopes said in a media interaction here on Wednesday night.

DC are currently placed sixth on the points table.

Hopes said DC skipper Rishabh Pant seems to be hitting his stride at just the right time, with his batting showing improvement and his leadership inspiring those around him.

"It's pretty good. Last year, we tried really hard to cover that gap. It's very hard to cover a world-class keeper, if not the best keeper but batsman in the world.

"Now he's back, you can just see everything about his game. His keeping, his captaincy is becoming very sharp. His batting has been pretty good from the start of the tournament actually," Hopes said.

"He's rounding in some pretty good form at back half of the tournament, and he's leading really well as well," Hopes said.

Hopes was confident that Wednesday's win would negate the 106-run defeat against Kolkata Knight Riders on April 3



that hurt the team's net run rate. "Hopefully that negates the 270 game and the net run rate. So, yeah, it's been a good night, but we've got a pretty quick turnaround to our next game," he said.

GILL NOT UNDER PRESSURE: MILLER: Gujarat Titans batter David Miller defended skipper Shubman Gill, who had a rare bad day. Gill got out for eight as four of GT's top-six failed to reach double-digit scores and the 2022 champions folded for their lowest IPL total of 89 in 17.3 overs.

"I don't think it affected the result. We have got seven-eight batters and everyone is capable of winning games," the veteran South African batter said at the post-match interaction.

Asked whether the burden of captaincy is weighing Gill down, the South African said: "No, not at all. He has scored 250-plus runs (267) from seven games, so he's batting superbly.

"It was just a bit sticky tonight, he played a bit early and got caught to cover another day he would hit it for four. He's batting

superbly. He's got a lot of runs so far and a lot still to come."

"A couple of wickets were really unlucky and strange dismissals. I thought the wicket was a bit sticky. But it was certainly not a 89 all out wicket... Definitely below par tonight. We can make all the excuses in the world but at the end of the day we didn't play good cricket."

He further backed their head coach Ashish Nehra who was widely credited for GT's historic triumph in their IPL debut season in 2022.

"No, there's nothing wrong with him at all. We really enjoy his enthusiasm, his passion for the game. Off the field, he's got a gift for really making a lot of time for every single player, getting around and making sure that guys are in a good space, whether they're not playing or if they're playing."

"He's so passionate. He really wants the guys to do well and very supportive at the same breath. So, there's nothing wrong with him at all, just a lot of passion," Miller said.

Pant mobility will give him and Team India management encouragement: Pietersen

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Former England captain Kevin Pietersen feels Rishabh Pant and the Indian team management should feel very encouraged by the comeback-man's mobility in the IPL game against Gujarat Titans here as the T20 World Cup draws closer.

Pant grabbed two catches, effected a stumping and then played a 16-run cameo in Delhi Capitals' six-wicket triumph over Gujarat Titans here on Wednesday. He was adjudged 'Player of the Match' based purely on his keeping skills, a first in IPL since Dinesh Karthik won one in



2009 edition in South Africa. Pant is the top contender for the wicketkeeper's slot in the Indian squad that will be chosen for the showpiece in June. "His mobility was

something that will give him great encouragement, which will also encourage Team India. Of course, he needs game time, as everyone does when coming back from an injury," Pietersen said on 'Star Sports Cricket Live'.

"He's returning from a horrific injury, so game time is crucial for him. To prepare for the T20 World Cup, he should play these 14-15 IPL games because it's significant leading into a T20 World Cup. If he plays that much cricket, he will be ready," he added referring to the life-threatening car crash in which Pant suffered multiple injuries in 2022.

Pietersen was also impressed by Pant's captaincy during the game, saying he used his resources quite tactfully. DC dismissed GT for 89 runs in 17.3 overs before overhauling the target in 8.5 overs.

OTHER SPORTS

Zhou will be a star regardless of who wins the Chinese Formula 1 race in Shanghai

AP ■ SHANGHAI

Formula 1 returns to China this weekend after a five-year absence. And, no matter who wins on Sunday, the star locally will be China-born driver Zhou Guanyu.

Despite his so-so results, Zhou is being promoted as a celebrity in China. He's the subject of a new film as the first Chinese driver to compete in F1. And he's, of course, a favourite of sponsors who want a Chinese connection.

Ahead of the first Grand Prix weekend in Shanghai since 2019, Zhou described it as more than a race for him, saying "with a Chinese driver on the grid, we will write history."

By the time he got to the driver's news conference on Thursday, where the questions to him ranged from China's economy and politics to its burgeoning auto industry's future potential in F1, Zhou had spent more than a week doing promotional work and meetings with sponsors, backers and fans.

"I've been extremely busy, you know - the busiest man, probably, in Shanghai over the last week and a half," he said. "A lot of activities done. It's great to see the support from the country already."

Zhou has never won a



Formula 1 race. In 48 races since 2022, he's yet to even reach the podium — meaning a finish in the first three places. In the last F1 race almost two weeks ago in Japan, his Sauber retired with a gearbox failure and he placed 18th out of 20.

In the season standings in 2023, he was also 18th with only six points from 22 races. But, the numbers don't matter much in the search for a hometown hero in F1.

"The pressure, of course, this race is a little bit higher, but I don't think it gets much more than for me than my debut in Formula 1," he said.

"Because by now everything feels a lot more familiar than back in the day. First day here is completely different... Now's third season. So, I'm just going to use that."

Zhou was born in Shanghai

and, though he's spent many of his formative years in England, Sunday's Chinese GP is a homecoming for him - and the race. The last F1 in China was run contested in 2019, and the next four were cancelled during the COVID-19 pandemic.

He noted that tickets sold out quicker than ever for the Chinese GP, with interest in the sport growing exponentially since he watched his first F1 race.

"For me, of course, it's been 20 years waiting until this Grand Prix," Zhou said. "Coming back here being an F1 driver... Yeah, I can't wait.

"A lot of mixed emotion, of course, but I want to treat it as much as the normal race weekend."

A film about Zhou's life will be released Friday by the Shanghai Media Group, a state-owned company and one of China's largest media conglomerates.

Seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton of Mercedes — he's moving next season to Ferrari — won the 2019 race in China amid his era of dominance when he won four straight season titles between 2017 and 2020.

However, the race two weeks ago in Japan was the 49th straight that Hamilton has failed to win. His last victory was in 2021.



Juventus ordered to pay Ronaldo more than USD 10 million in salary dispute

AP ■ TURIN (ITALY)

Juventus has been ordered to pay Cristiano Ronaldo more than USD 10 million by an arbitration board following a salary dispute. The dispute regarded a move by Juventus players to defer part of their salaries during the coronavirus pandemic.

The 9.8 million euros (USD 10.5 million) that Juventus was ordered to pay Ronaldo is half the amount that the five-time Ballon d'Or winner had been seeking from the Turin club in back wages. Juventus said in a statement late Wednesday that "with the support of its

legal counsel" it's "reviewing the decision made by the arbitration board, reserving all assessments and initiatives to preserve its rights."

Ronaldo played for Juventus from 2018-21, helping the club to two Serie A titles.

Former Juventus president Andrea Agnelli and the entire club board resigned in 2023 amid an investigation into false accounting - which then resulted in a 10-point penalty for Juventus in Serie A and a ban by the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) from Europe for this season.

Real Madrid beats Man City 4-3 on penalties to advance to the Champions League semifinals

AP ■ MANCHESTER (ENGLAND)

Real Madrid weathered the storm, silenced the crowd and ultimately ended Manchester City's brief hold on the Champions League.

The all-time kings of Europe moved a step closer to a record-extending 15th title in the competition they have dominated after a 4-3 win Wednesday on penalties at Etihad Stadium. But not before being pushed to the limit by defending champion City.

"I was pretty much dead on my feet at the end," Madrid midfielder Jude Bellingham said. "It's so difficult. They are continuously probing with the ball and move you around. Most teams would fall apart when City get on top of you, but we stood up really well."

The game had gone to the uncertainty of a shootout after ending 1-1 on the night and 4-4 on aggregate.

City dominated the chances after going behind to Rodrygo's goal in the 12th minute, but only had Kevin de Bruyne's leveler in the 76th to show for its superiority, which included 64% of possession and 18 corners to Madrid's one through extra time.

That counted for little as Antonio Rudiger struck the decisive spot kick after Bernardo Silva and Mateo Kovacic both saw their



penalties saved. "In this competition, that's the way football happens," City manager Pep Guardiola said. "In other sports, for (these) statistics, we would have won." Guardiola had few complaints. He accepted his team had failed to capitalize against a Madrid team that was forced to defend deep against wave after wave of attack.

Erling Haaland hit the bar with one header in the first half De Bruyne sent an effort sailing over from inside the box in the second. Madrid dug deep, held on and now faces Bayern Munich in the semifinals after the Germans beat Arsenal 1-0 on Wednesday and 3-2 on aggregate.

"Today it came down to mentality," Bellingham said. The defeat ended City's bid to become the first English team to win back-to-back Champions League titles and its pursuit of successive trebles. It is still challenging for the Premier League title and FA Cup. Victory for Madrid saw the Spanish giant advance to the semifinals for the fourth year in row — denying City the chance to emulate that feat.

"This was about survival," Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said. "Madrid is a club based on always fighting to stay in situations where there seems to be no way out — but we always find a way. By the time the penalty shoot-out came, we were totally convinced we'd go through."

Ancelotti has already won the Champions League a record four times as a coach — one more than Guardiola — and could extend that record by lifting the trophy for a third time with Madrid.

For Guardiola it is back to the drawing board after watching his team to relinquish the trophy it won for the first time last year and ending his own 12-year wait to triumph again in European club soccer's most demanding competition.